

2025

Young writers with northern roots

Pushing

Boundaries



The Worm in My Brain Gives Me
Financial Advice

Vincent Phillips

4

Graves of Northern Giants

Dylan Nicholson

8

10 Sundered

Connor Dorrian

12 Ruinenlust

Lily McDermott

14 Falling in Love 10,000
Metres Below Sea Level

Heather Chapman

16 Sink

Joe Spivey

18

Bouquet

Mimi Hart

20 To Prepare a Feast

Millie Heavenly Davidson

22

She Must Have Fallen
Like Rain

Ellen McKeag

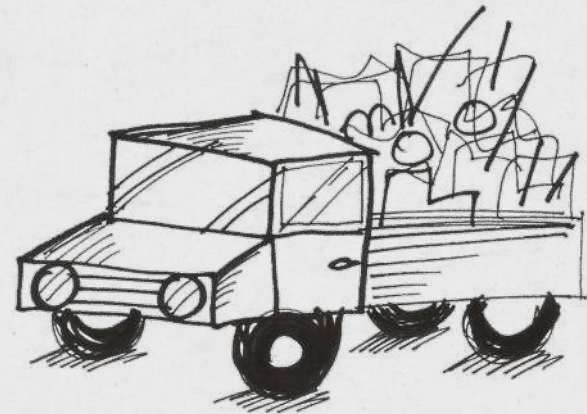
26 The Scrapman

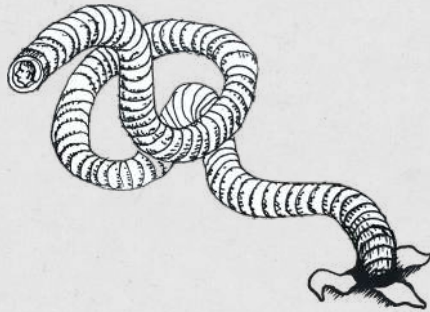
Hebe Fryer

Scraps is an anthology of young writing from the North, produced and edited by New Writing North's First Edition group, made up of writers and creatives aged 18-25 who meet on a weekly basis to develop their own writing, careers and group projects, with support from writer and producer Alison Scurfield.

This issue of *Scraps* includes work by group members as well as pieces selected via an open call for writing by 18-30yr olds across the North, on the theme of 'Pushing Boundaries'. The group worked with designer Sally Pilkington on the final publication design and illustrations.

New Writing North is the writing development agency for the North of England. For more information about programmes and opportunities for writers of all ages visit newwritingnorth.com.





The Worm in My Brain Gives Me Financial Advice

The worm in my brain gives me financial advice. I've yet to try any of it, but I'm sure he knows what he's talking about. He's a successful businessman, after all, and whatever company he runs makes seven figures a year.

I want to be like him one day. I want to run my own company and be just as rich as him. I'm not rich yet, but I will be one day, as long as I follow the worm's advice. The worm is a source of good, I'm certain of it. Wealth is success and success is for the good people, those who work hard and never give up. That's who the worm is, and that's who I am.

I trust the worm's advice. Why shouldn't I? He knows more about business than anyone, and he wouldn't give me advice if it wasn't trustworthy. He's rich. He's a busy worm, he's clearly going out of his way to teach me these things. He's being charitable. I know he is.

I don't remember when the worm first entered my brain, but I think I started to appreciate him only a couple of years ago. Perhaps he had always been in my brain, waiting for me to discover him. Maybe he chose me one day, after seeing potential in me, and me alone.

I don't ask the worm many questions, I don't need to. He tells me everything I do should lead to my own success, my own wealth, or at

least optimise that process. I don't need to know things like when or how he got into my brain. That knowledge won't help me.

It's been a few years now, and I've started to consider the worm a friend. We speak most days. A lot of it is him giving me priceless financial advice, but he's also someone I can talk to about any problems I'm having, and he has great advice for that as well. The worm is a good person, a well-meaning person, and he knows exactly what he's talking about. Every struggle I've faced, so has he, and if he can recover and become a successful businessman, so can I.

I got into an argument with a friend once. It was over something stupid and minor, something that doesn't even matter. I told the worm about it and he told me to forget about it, to keep moving forward, and that my friend was in the wrong. As always, the worm's advice worked. I don't talk to that friend anymore, or even think about him much, and I'm better for it, I think.

The worm started to tell me about politics. He told me that there are people who are trying to stop me from making money, from being successful, and that those people are now in control of the world. He recommended me some websites and some podcasts, and from those I learnt a lot. We are the rebels, I found out, we are the rebellion, and we need to do everything in our power to take down the secret government, the one that puppets almost all politicians and businesses. Luckily, with money comes power, and the worm has no shortage of either.

The worm told me which politicians I should like, the ones who oppose the secret government, and the businesses who support him, the ones invested in making someone like me rich.

Not everyone has a worm in their brains, I've realised, so I've had to start spreading the word of his teachings to others. Mostly online, as that's where most of my interactions take place, but I've been telling my friends at school about him as well, and they seem willing to listen. Online, though, a lot of people seem to be part of this secret government, and will stop at nothing to tell me I'm wrong, to try

and prevent my success. They make up these ridiculous numbers and statistics - all probably forged by the secret government. I told the worm about this, and he told me that these people are worthless. They're trying to hide the truth from me, and my response to them should only be vitriol and hatred. They're not real people, they are opponents. Just mindless pawns of the secret government. These people do not matter, they will not be missed. These people, if possible, should be killed.

I asked my crush out the other day. She said no. It's difficult to describe how I felt - some strange mix of disappointment, anger, and regret. The worm said she didn't deserve me, that I'm above her, that she's probably been indoctrinated by the secret government, and that I should try again. As inhuman as my opponents are, some can be converted to an extent, the worm tells me, and through hard work they can become semi-humans who honour the successful, like the worm, or myself.

I tried again. I went up to her and - following the worm's advice - was more forward. What I said isn't important, but I was more demanding this time, more demeaning, more threatening. She said no again, but I didn't relent. I kept going, kept trying, kept following her, never giving up, never taking no for an answer. It's what the worm would've done, and nobody knows more than the worm.

Next time I went to school, the teachers said they needed to have a meeting with me. They told me I had done something wrong, and that I wasn't allowed near her anymore, and if I slipped up one more time, I wouldn't be allowed back. If I slipped up in a major way, they told me, the police would get involved. The teachers didn't like me after that. They sat me where they could see me and reported everything I did. They probably had cameras on me. My classmates didn't like me either. They all shuffled away from me and talked about me behind my back. I had already cleansed my group of friends, surrounding myself with only people who can further my own success, who could make me money, and few people could do that for me. After this incident, I had no one.

I told the worm about this, and he told me that schools have already been taken over by the secret government. Every teacher and every student had been turned against me, and me alone. I mostly stopped going at this point, but when I did I kept to myself, working with the worm on my business plan. He showed me all the richest men in the world and how I could be just like them. The teachers didn't care, I stayed quiet. I didn't bother anyone.

An article appeared on the news, and everyone started talking about it. It said the worm was evil, and he had been infecting and poisoning people's minds, and the wealth he had acquired had been gained through illegal and immoral means. There were videos of him doing truly awful things, things nobody could ever forgive.

The worm assured me these were all baseless rumours, propaganda spread by the secret government. Hearsay, lies, deepfakes, all meant to stop me from becoming rich.

I only went to school once more after that. The worm was all anyone wanted to talk about, everyone spreading lies upon lies and joking at his expense. Nobody was on my side. The worm made me who I am today, any attack against him is an attack against me, I had to put a stop to this.

I had been planning it for a while, but I knew then that it was the right time. You know what happened next, don't you? It was all in the report, you didn't miss anything out. It's why I'm sitting here with you, in this custody suite. Now you know everything.

Vincent Phillips



Graves of the Northern Giants

at the summit the sun is hotter
and i'm happy 'cos i've already
seen three of them
but sad 'n that because that
means three of them that's gone

and Dad notices me looking over
the valley and says
*and there's one look at the belly on
that one
died right there*

i see it sleeping under the
great grassy hill
and we walk on and i step lightly
in case i wake one of them
Dad says

*dead, lad, long dead, sad isn't it
built everything round here
dug the river with bare hands so
your great great grandpa could get his fish
i start to cry as the sun gets brighter*

Dad says *don't need to cry
they were old and sleepy
and wanted to go to bed
under the hills
you wouldn't want to be the last one, would ya?*

he holds my hand and i like it
he says it's good that
i'm sad it means i care
i ask him what they were like
and Dad smiles

*strong as iron
fierce as furnace
fast as fish
clever as calculators
funny as a joke book
humble as fair words
good as that hot sun there
and pure as the grass on the cold morning*



he scoops me up
with his big hands
and then i'm the mountains
and the rivers and the land and the sky
i'm the blue and clear and clouds and I can see so far
away Dad says he reckon's I can see the future

from up here I can see the green hills
so many of them sleeping forever down there and
in my head i tell them i miss them
though i never knew them
but i feel like i do
and i thank them for something
and keep on thanking them for something

Dad sits me on his shoulders
walks down towards the river
i mean to ask him
but i never do
and now I don't know how

to ask him how it feels
to be the last one
all that time ago
me and the last giant on earth
all on our own.

Dylan Nicholson



Sundered.

The Land.
Sundered.
Rusted over by closed industry.
Ghostly shells of shipyards, lonely whispers beyond the pits and stainless steel.
Coarse, tired and weak, it watches waves grasp at its working class widow as she weeps.

The time moves differently here.

Miners, builders, welders, therapists, business, your local pub usuals.

Inhaling.

A pocket of time, running faster by the hour yet never moving along any timeline.
Running frozen, jogging on the spot, breathing heavier and heavier.
The brink of collapse.
Each lung grey, by every slow inhale the dust dances then settles.
It's metal rib cage provides each spec of tomorrow's possibilities, safe passage from one organ to the next.

The time moves differently here.

Nurses, teachers, police, fishermen, preachers, wives, husbands, children, shadows, angels.

Exhaling.

Some particles leave their dancers, moving afar.
Others stay.
Once every breath, a small number of isolated dust, jump from the bone into the below.

The time moves differently here.

Politicians, drug dealers, teenage pregnancy, poets, posties, freezing elderly, artists, car collectors, starving children, boxers, dancers, youth offenders, carers, empathy pretenders.

Inhaling.

New people and old places.
No trust and blank faces.
Internal disgust and expressionless hate.
A fire rages.

The time moves differently here.

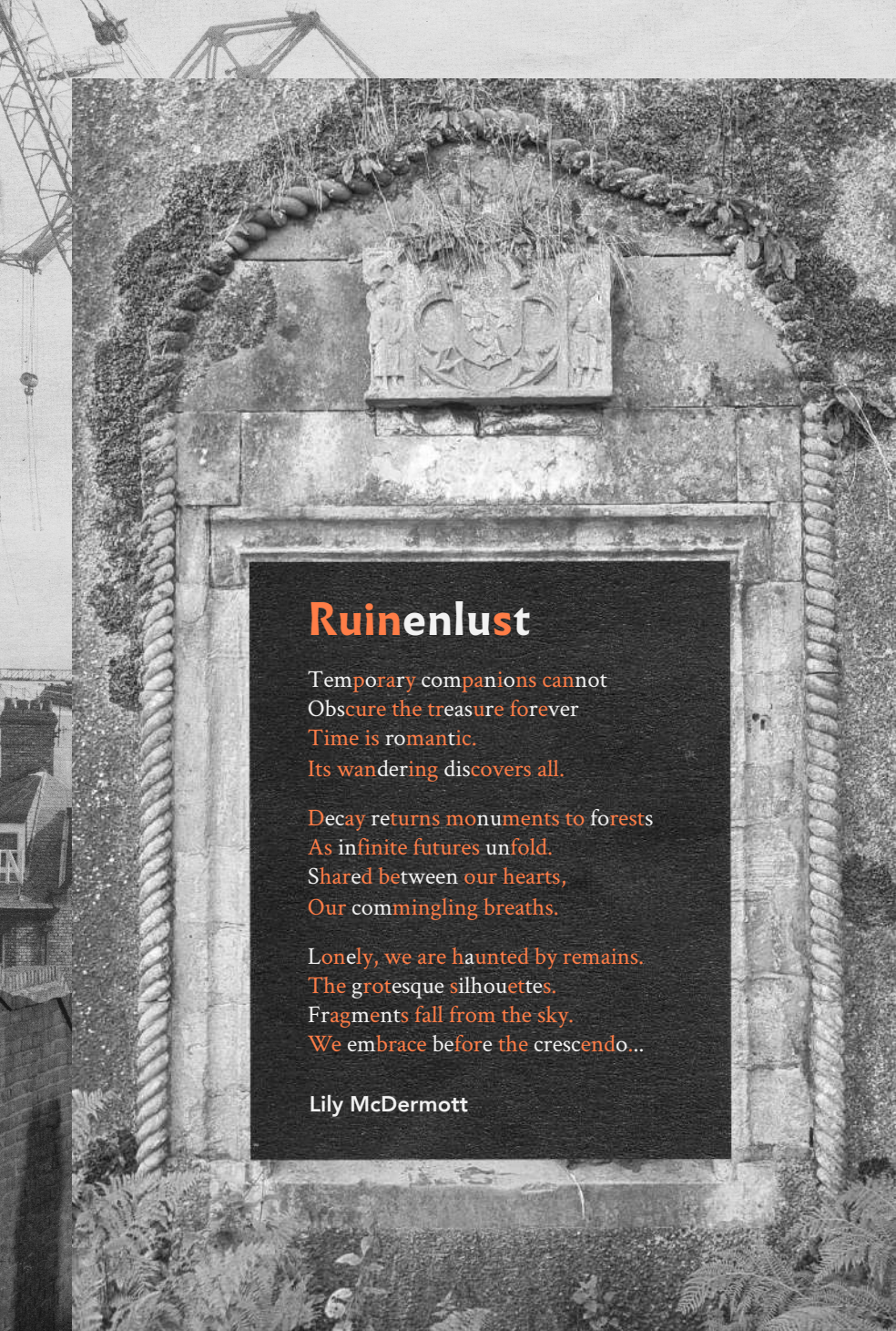
Idiots, mothers, public figures, families, Devil's advocates and unfortunates.

Exhaling.

We're not united, half of us uninvited to the dinner table, we're divided.
Kingdom of uninspired liars unstable on a wire above the fires of rumbling riots.
The unlucky ones with no song to be sung, forgotten angels, lost halos.
Failed by the so-called system.

Connor Dorrian





Ruinenlust

Temporary companions cannot
Obscure the treasure forever
Time is romantic.
Its wandering discovers all.

Decay returns monuments to forests
As infinite futures unfold.
Shared between our hearts,
Our commingling breaths.

Lonely, we are haunted by remains.
The grotesque silhouettes.
Fragments fall from the sky.
We embrace before the crescendo...

Lily McDermott



Falling in Love
10,000 Metres Below Sea Level:
Notes from the Field

1. Days before going under / I was sure I'd
get used to living out of my depth / heretic
oxygen eater I pictured / the two of us
gritted against instinct / tracing our bodies
to their source
 - i. I was right
 - ii. I was right yet my sympathies
calcify / a fluke in the data charts
a shaky evolution / pitches blue-
black and bruise-dear
2. Put down the ocean / I think I love you /
like:
 - a. Deep sea creatures do / their eyes
verging on their teeth
 - b. Biological light / I don't believe in
miracles but look:
 - i. How animals chase evolution /
shadows slant over history
 - ii. Into my eyes / darkness thick as
theatre
3. There are several ways to tell / if you are in
love whilst deep / underwater
 - a. The easiest is to let it out slow / and
see if it rises

4. But I've scrapped all the tests I love / you
like bias like systematic error
 - a. Especially when:
 - i. I say: what if a crack in my helmet
/ causes a rapid influx of water
causing / my head to explode so
punctually / I don't feel it at all
you know / I think I'm fine really
let's go / back to sleep
 - ii. You say: why / would the sea gods do
that / you're so young and pretty
 - b. And when:
 - i. You say: eventually everything
evolves into a crab
 - ii. I say: what
 - c. Even when:
 - i. The oxygen hatch buzzes / with coral
 - ii. The ship's belly grows gritty and
lived / with limpets
 - iii. You wake slowly and force / yourself
into primitive movement your / hands
blue-accented / your heart taking up
a lazy lapping beat
5. It's easy to forget we are creatures of reason
/ around you I evolve backwards forget / how to
breathe still this / I know:
 - a. The ocean is where things end
 - b. My love / we are green-gilled and given
up wishing / let out your breath slow /
what we want is what we have

Heather Chapman

SINK

It wasn't because he'd seen that film
about the shark that doesn't even look real
at the wrong age.

And it wasn't because he was there
when they pulled that body out and he saw it
all swollen and blue.

It wasn't because he read about Mark Foo
and saw stills on the front page:
a wave, a wreck, then waves again.

And it wasn't because he saw pictures of Houdini,
all shackled up and tried his best to do the same
in a lukewarm bathtub with a rubber band.

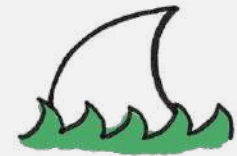
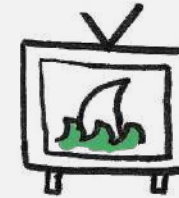
It wasn't because his mates didn't believe him
so they threw him, despite his fighting limbs,
into the deep end.

And it wasn't because after all that,
he never went outside the shallow end
and always clutched to the sides.

It wasn't because he was never going to swim with his boy,
but watch from the benches, cringing at the sight
of his own flesh cannon balling into the deep blue.

It was because he knew from the start
there was something inside him
dragging him back down to the earth.

Whether it was his heavy heart
or too much muscle around his bones,
he knew he would sink.



Joe Spivey

Bouquet

Mimi Hart



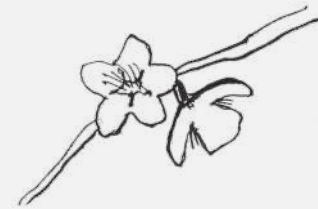
(1) *Dandelions of Leeds*

Beside my desk hangs a window
needled with rain. Then that stout hard wall
of patchworked Earth.
I am warm, and the brick is cold,
I am new, and the brick is old.
Both of us nursed on mortar.

Between the bricks are tiny gaps
(though fissures to the ant's black stare)
from which the dandelions pounce
on ballet haunches, yolkbright manes
turned, in devotion,
to a weakwhite sky.

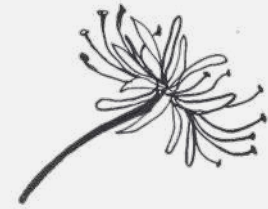
Soon they will offer their seed
to the biting wind of night,
and I will remain, rooted.
Constellations will cast
their tarantula net. They must,
though I cannot see

in the banks of concrete
where I grow
each star is just a hole
long extinguished
and still we wish
and wish.



(2) *Cherry Blossoms in Hull*

April sets his pink mind
on a hundred wooden pedestals,
and worship... I do.
Beyond the threshold
of the church gates,
see the rosen haloes bloom.
They plant a thousand cherub lips
on the sunset of grey tombs.
The grass is sweet and dew-fed,
daffodils horn the wall,
and where the ghosts are fast asleep,
the cherry blossoms fall.



(3) *Spider Lily Inside*

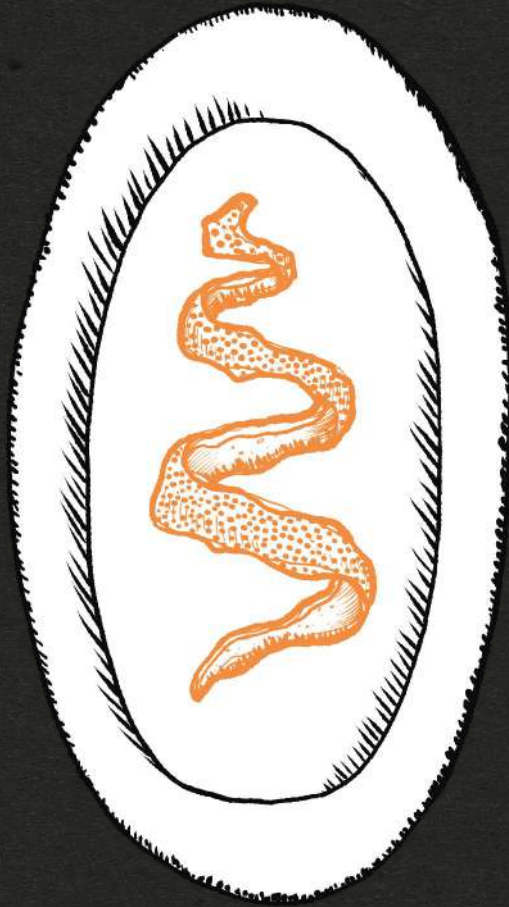
I dreamt I saw you,
crown of darkness, red as the mist
which glows behind closed lids,
pointing your sanguine parasol
to the web of the atmosphere.

I dreamt I stood beneath the moon,
that watery labrabbit eye
in darkening tissue.
Open meadows, willows, rain,
all bleached peaceful in the light.

I dream I may be safe indoors, though
insects punctuate the skirting board,
weave liquid as trout, soft as music
in their silver bells, then melt
under the false bulb sun.

On waking, there is birdsong
dripping in dilute honey
through checkerboard blinds.
Am I sleeping still?
Such song suggests a life, somewhere.

And yet the song creeps everywhere.
The mould raptures the wall, alive.
The sourdough yeast yawns, alive.
My wrists show trees, electric blue;
the lightning strikes. I am alive.



To Prepare a Feast

Dear Mam,
At what corner of the night
do you begin to prepare a feast?
When should I slide off the orange
peel of my knee cap?
Size up the berries buried beneath my skin.
What's the best method to pare
the rind I lace my legs in?
Cook off the merlot that keeps my cheeks blush.
Do you use the fridge light to shave
sage strewn hairs?
Sweep away peppered breaks
on pelvic floors.
If I gut the entrée on the porcelain
does it still bleed through?
Watch white purge red a palatable pink.
I'm just really writing to ask, does it still
bleed through?

Mam, do you get hungry in the dark too?

Because one devastating night,
I *will* begin to prepare a feast.
With a cookbook of your recipes
and lard in the lines of my palm
I will lay down my body on
the plate of a man I can not
stomach.
Strip down to kimchi fermented knickers
or a bra bathed in balsamic.
Souring his name on my tongue.
Cursing my taste that came from you,
Mam.

In the loneliest corner of the night.
I will learn to prepare a grave in this kitchen.

Millie Heavenly Davidson



f the place has an official name, it has long since been forgotten or ignored (given the attitude of the locals, the latter seems the more likely scenario). It is known, quite simply, as The Moors — an inlet of heather, bilberry and bracken which may be followed, with a little persistence, all the way back to the heart of the Yorkshire Dales. It is public land, or at least is treated as such.

Like all moors, it is a place of breathless beauty. In winter, its bleakness catches in your throat. Choked on a wind that slips under your eyelids and pulls free tears you never thought possible to shed, you understand that weeping in the face of such vast wildness is a truer worship than most.

You are alone. How privileged to stand in a place where your voice shall never reach another ear.

Spring is slow. Colour leaches from the sky and into the undergrowth, coaxed by the song and display of trilling skylarks and drunkard lapwings. You can not inhale enough petrichor and wonder if, in time, you will learn to taste the different acidities of peat by how thickly their scent coats your tongue.

With every step you feel the twitch of life against you. How wonderful it is to be one among an innumerable number. To be nothing but another passing body.

Pollen glitters on the wind, its sickly taste predicts a sneeze. It might be a curse that your body so rejects the yearly spread of land, but through fever tears, the purples, pinks and cotton whites soften together like oils. *Sfumato* predicting the smoke that will soon reach like a harrier's wing over the contours of the land.

Autumn is burnt away, a transition between summer and winter that hardly happened. But the bracken is crippled and maroon, the flowers are paper confetti, cotton balls are balding, and bilberries are plump and already staining your fingers.

Autumn is also when I found her. When you will find her.

The ground twinkles. Every blade of grass and leafy stalk is burdened with a night's worth of condensation. Bearing such a weight, all that holds them aloft is the plumpness of plentiful rain and criss-crossing lines of spiders' silk acting like suspension cables. Every dew drop, before it soaks into your socks, holds a wobbling image of the rising sun.

Dawn is the best time to come up onto The Moor. The birds are

bright in their song and the sunlight catches in such a way against the darkness of fading night that all the land below remains in shadow — it may well not exist. It is a type of blissful isolation I have never found elsewhere. I do not believe you could find its equal either.

Toes barely dry, you climb the second hill faster than the first. The air filling your lungs seems to make you buoyant, free from troubles as it is. As the ground levels into pleasant rolls before you, you see her.

Your steps slow out of curiosity. They cease out of a quiet sadness.

A mallard lies in front of you. Her neck outstretched in stiffness, her feet frozen in a paddle against empty air. She lies on her back, poised as if expecting your approach.

Had she had been a carcass rather than a plump body, you might not have stopped. Had she been withered wings and the suggestion of thin, webbed feet, you might not have looked down. Had *carrion* been a better descriptor than *fallen*, you might not have noticed. But she is whole. Every feather preened and perfect.

Birds will sometimes fall from the sky. Old age, disease, fright; sometimes their hearts just give out and they die between one wingbeat and the next. But sometimes is so rare I've never seen it.

You adopt the mourning pose without knowing that is what it is. Crouched, heather tickling the back of your thighs, you reach out. You stroke the air above her, then touch the soft, cold skin between her nostrils. Brushing a finger down her cere, you apologise.

I realise now we had no right to that apology. It was broad and unfitting. Spoken from the wrong mouth. But it was the only apology she got, so we should not repent it nor regret it.

Her breast is as spongy under your fingers as the decades of moss humps spread over the land. Plenty of fat, you can barely feel her keel. And then you find the imperfection: feathers that do not melt into the next with a slickness like water. You know if you probe, you'll find the shot that made her fall.

A shotgun does unmistakable work.

The assumption is intentional, malevolent negligence. She was not hunted, for here she lies, unretrieved. Nor was a gun raised accidentally to track her flight. She was collateral bait, the means to further destruction. Left for the owl-faced hawks, the wide-eyed kites, the circling buzzards: the raptors who do nothing more than survive. A slow, spasming death by lead poisoning. The kind that can not be traced

back to the owner of the trigger finger.

It is the persecution that is glossed over in the news, that goes unreported and unpunished, that feeds the flow of cash into the grouse moors and directs the parade of shiny new Land Rovers up the tracks.

It is a reality few care about.

A chill finds you in your motionless state. The coolness of inactivity. Your exposed skin prickles and you look up.

You see him.

Waiting for her.

As still as the crags that line the far edge of the dales, he watches you.

You don't want to do him the discredit of overestimating his capabilities to mourn or understand loss so permanent, but you look at him and see only grief. He does not know why his mate (for who else could she be to him) fell and did not return to the skies, will never know the reasons why lead shot now peppers her chest, will not understand what I did next.

Nothing should be buried more than once. It is an act of finality, an ending, and should be treated as such in all ways. It was my deed, performed long ago, and you may only watch now.

I smoothed down her breast, rightened the feathers. The sweat on my fingertips was stained pink.

I picked her up and cradled her even though she could not feel such care. I walked away from the path until the moss was deep enough to swallow my knees, pulled back the covers of the earth and placed her down. I tucked her in, away from the sight of sharp eyes and hungry bellies.

I returned to the track dripping. My feet squelched warmly in their shoes. I looked once more at the male mallard and whispered two selfish words to him. Words that meant more to me than they ever would to him. And then I continued on my way, for such an experience is hardly unique anymore.

Lingering at the sites of murders serves exactly no one. Dwelling does not right wrongs. If I remained to mourn I would never leave those wild hills, and if I never left, I never would have written. You would never have walked The Moors with me and experienced for yourself the ugliness their beauty is used to conceal.

Ellen McKeag



The Scrap Man.

Hebe Fryer

«METAL?! ANY METAL?!» The scrapman's harsh Cardiffian cry rattles down your street, landing in your kitchen.

Your banana bread is ablaze in the oven.

«METAL?!»

You open the oven door. Wrapping your hand in a red tea towel, you reach for the loaf tin through a burnt banana smog. «Whoopsy daisy!» You dart out of the kitchen, and through the living room, to the front door.

In the distance, the scrapman's voice rings out, «ANY METAL?!»

Your housemate snarls at you, sprawled out on the sofa, sucking on a vape like a baby's dummy. «Fuck hav'ew dun?!» He snaps.

You scramble to open the door, hurling the loaf tin onto the street, where it lands with a clang. An engine hums at the end of

your street. You attempt to fan the flames with the tea towel. The amber glow peters out. Taking a step back, you exhale deeply. The engine grows louder.

The scrapman rolls up outside your house, eyeing you from his wing mirror.

One leathery hand rests on the steering wheel; the other ashes out of the driver side window. Smoke swells around you. The engine stops. The scrapman snatches the keys from the ignition, and scuttles out of the van.

He gestures to the smouldering loaf tin. «*Yewwon riddha thah?*» He asks.

«No, thank you.» You say, mopping your brow with the back of your hand. «My banana bread just caught fire.»

He steps on his cigarette butt. «*Thahs a gud peesa metal, thah.*» He proclaims, almost proudly, as though it were a winning greyhound.

«Thanks.»

«*Can I avit?*»

«Um. No, sorry. I'm using it.»

«*I can payyew. Whadyewwant? I can getyew anythingh.*»

«I don't really need anything.»

«*I know jus whattyew need.*» He waves you over to the back of his pickup van, on the back of which stands an elephantine scrapheap. He hauls himself up onto the mound with a groan, and extends a hand down to you. His eyes glint wildly in the late-summer sun.

«What is it?» You ask.

«*Doanbe shy.*» He says. With some reluctance, you take his calloused hand in yours, and allow yourself to be pulled up onto the heap.

You look out at the wasteland and wonder how he got it all to

fit on the back of his van.

«*This way, miss.*» He says, and guides you along a wall of broken toasters. You loop your arm through his, and with the swan-like grace of a debutante, begin to ascend a staircase of stacked alloy wheels. The scrapman finally pulls you to a stop in front of a rusty washing machine.

«*Earyew go, love.*» He smiles kindly. «*Jusswhachyew need, eh?*» He opens the washing machine door, and holds it open for you like a chauffeur.

Not wanting to offend, you climb into the washing machine, and he closes the door behind you. The scrapman presses a button on the outside and gives you a thumbs up through the small, circular window.

You clutch your legs to your chest as the machine begins to fill with water. Pink and soapy, the water rises slowly until it pools around your collarbones. Your eyelids grow heavy.

You feel yourself lean backwards. The metal walls melt away beneath your weight, opening up an unbounded, rose-coloured sky.

You breathe in deeply, and stretch your legs out in front of you. The air is balmy, and carries on its breath the honey-sweet scent of jasmine and hibiscus.

Submerged in suds, you peel off your clothes, and watch them float on the surface like seafoam. You wade through a thick blanket of lotuses and lilypads, swimming until your legs grow stiff. The scrapman was right, you did need this, and you can surely live without a charred loaf tin.

You look back at the washing machine door, which hangs in the sky like a celestial body. Through the window, you notice it's beginning to grow dark outside.

You swim back to the door as it slips down from the sky,

settling in front of you. You tap lightly on the window.

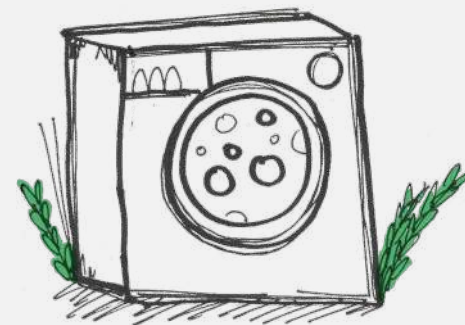
The scrapman opens the door. Averting his eyes, he hands you an old towel. You wrap it around yourself and climb out of the washing machine. The scrapman helps steady you as you clamber down.

He scurries over to the loaf tin excitedly. «*This mine now, then, miss?*» He asks, gripping it against his ribcage.

«Yeah, whatever.» You shrug, and enter your house, wet, shoeless, wrapped in a brown towel. Your housemate glowers at you from the sofa.

«*Fuck havyew been?*» He asks.

You close the door behind you. «I had to do some laundry.»



Vincent Phillips is an 18-year-old writer from Newcastle. He primarily writes short stories and won the Matthew Hale Award in 2025 for *The Worm in My Brain Gives Me Financial Advice*.

Dylan Nicholson is a new writer from Teesside, North East England. He has had work published in the *Chamber Magazine*. He started writing poetry when he was young, but as he has grown up, he keeps coming back to writing about home, self and place.

Connor Dorrian is a 24 year-old award-winning playwright, actor, director and facilitator from Sunderland. After graduating with an MA in Directing & Theatre-Making from The Northern School of Art, he won Live Theatre's Under 26 North East Playwright Award for his play, *A Moving Still*. Connor mostly focuses on working-class characters, stories and experiences in his writing. He has recently started to write poetry, as well as for screen.

Lily McDermott is an Oxford English Literature graduate from Wakefield. She was a T.S. Eliot Prize Young Critic in 2022 and has appeared in *Poetry London* and been published by The Poetry Society.

Joe Spivey graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from Leeds Trinity University. The Hull native's work has most recently been published in *Ey Up Again: An Anthology of Northern Writing*, Written Off Publishing, 2023. Joe edited *City of Words*, an anthology of poetry and prose published in 2024 by Indigo Dreams Publishing. He regularly performs his poetry at various open mic and spoken word events across the country.

Heather Chapman is a student at Durham University. She was a 2023 Foyle Young Poet, was shortlisted for the 2024-5 Poetry Wales Award and won the 2025 Hive Young Writers Competition. Her work is published in *The Garlic Press*, *Bloodletter*, *As Alive Journal*, and *Carmen et Error*. She likes vampires, sestinas, and the terrible Medieval King Edward II. She is on Instagram as @heatherchapman4523.

Mimi Hart is a Creative Writing student from Leeds Arts University. She loves exploring all the literary forms she can get her hands on, plundering the horrors of the human condition and cute, beautiful things. She will someday be a novelist.

Millie Heavenly Davidson writes themes of abjection and the grotesque, alongside the Feminine. She writes about gender and sexuality, focusing on raw depictions that stray from the binary. Currently in her final year of university studying Creative Writing, she is eager to break into the working world of creative writing in the North East. Being from and living in South Shields, she seeks to explore the trials and tribulations of the women in her family through her writing.

Ellen McKeag is a writer and artist from North Yorkshire, currently studying creative writing at Leeds Art University. While her writing usually fits under the bracket of fictional prose, being a keen ornithophile and working as a falconer, her work occasionally veers towards nature and conservation.

Hebe Fryer is an artist and writer from Tyne and Wear. She has a BA in English Literature with Creative Writing and an MA in Creative Writing, both from Cardiff University. She also has a Foundation Diploma in Art and Design from the University of Sunderland. Hebe has been published online and in print for The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Young Poets Network, *Cake Magazine*, *The Bangor Literary Journal*, Spark Sunderland, *Gair Rhydd*, The Collective Studio 2023, New Writing North, and *Jean Salad*. She runs a Substack publication called *deep fried*.

Illustration credits

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