

Skirting Around

Issue 2: Nov 2021

SSC 2021



The main image features a woman with her hair styled in an updo with a white floral accessory. She is wearing a pink, off-the-shoulder dress with a lace bodice and a pearl choker. She is holding a gold-framed image of a white undergarment. The background is a marbled pattern in shades of pink and grey. There are decorative elements like butterflies and a pearl ornament. The text 'Skirting Around' and 'Issue 2: Nov 2021' is in a white box on the left. The text 'Undercover Operation' is in a black serif font over the framed image. The text 'SSC 2021' is on the right side.

Undercover Operation



Skirting Around

TWO

November 2021

Editor in Chief: Carolyn Hashimoto
Editorial Assistant: Alison Gray

www.skirtingaround.org

Twitter: @skirting_around

Email: skirting.around@yahoo.com

Front cover illustration by Sasha Saben Callaghan

Twitter [@SabenCallaghan](https://twitter.com/SabenCallaghan)

Instagram: [@SashaSaben](https://www.instagram.com/SashaSaben)

SKIRTING AROUND / TWO

ACT I

- 8 **Kate Meyer-Currey**
 Life is like underwear: change is good (especially when you grew up in the eighties)
- 12 **Nise McCulloch**
 Excision
- 15 **Meredith Grace Thompson**
 [I am eighteen years old.]
- 18 **Christine Anne Foley**
 Keep away from fire
- 19 **Prerna Majumdar**
 It Feels Like a Losing Battle
- 25 **Gisela Haensel**
 Undercover Operation
- 28 **LindaAnn LoSchiavo**
 If Roebling Made Brassieres
- 29 **Saskia McCracken**
 Sell-by Date
- 32 **Margaret Grant**
 Knickers
- 36 **Wendy Birse**
 From Puffer Trains to Mother Strains
 Braiku
- 38 **Charley Barnes**
 Padded with shame
- 39 **Dahlia Al-Shelleby**
 This new identity
- 41 **Rushika Wick**
 show me how to wear a sari you ask

ACT II

- 43 Beth Hartley**
Trappings
- 44 Sarah Oba**
Underneath It All
- 48 Shona Wardrop**
Discarded
- 49 Santosh K Dary**
The Veil
- 51 Sarah Doyle**
Self-Portrait as Dirty Linen
- 52 Angela Jeffs**
Bloody Hell!
- 55 Jo Colley**
Dressing for the occasion
- 57 Laura Brown**
My Winter Skin
- 58 Kate Falvey**
Bra Stories
- 60 Lucia Cascioli**
Ride 'Em
- 61 Julia Ruth Smith**
Marzipan
- 63 Emma Filtness**
Tape
- 67 Contributors**

IMAGES & VISUAL ART

Julie Stephen

- 10 Bold
- 30 Timeline
- 32 Nursing

June Marchbank

- 23 A little lace never goes wrong
- 26 Bravo!

Shona Wardrop

- 47 Discarded 1
- 55 Discarded 2
- 61 Discarded 3

Sasha Saben Callaghan

Cover image and images on pages 6 and 36

Editorial

Perhaps the best way to sum up Issue Two is to borrow Sarah Doyle's description of her laundry basket from her poem *Self-Portrait as Dirty Linen*: 'This is complex and occasionally contradictory territory'.

It was inevitable that a theme like Undercover Operation would produce revealing stories and unearth hidden truths. Like the truth of unresolved traumas experienced daily through routine internal examinations and everyday invasive surgical procedures. In [*I am eighteen years old.*] Meredith Grace Thompson writes 'I am crying at the violation of fingers rooting through my insides where no fingers should ever have been' and 'I feel intensely dehumanized by the experience' – words that many of us will connect with but may never have been given the chance to give voice to. Have we instead towed the unwritten line that Lucia Cascioli so brutally captures in her concrete poem *Ride 'Em*, where after another 'poke' or 'scrape' we simply get back in the saddle and 'Giddy up'.

When not under anaesthesia or on the examination table, the male gaze was never far from view. Some, like Kate Meyer-Currey, were unafraid of confrontation, 'If I've got panty perverts on my tail, I'll give them an eyeful'. But what of the six-year-old Prerna Majumdar, whose grandmother took her 'back up to change into a more 'modest' outfit out of respect for the men in her family'. *It Feels Like a Losing Battle* is a fitting title for her memoir. Gazes in turn became verbal comments in turn became invasive action, and the institutions that should have been nurturing and safeguarding the young girls in these stories and poems – family, home, school – remained silently complicit. From the schoolboys in Kate Falvey's *Bra Stories*, who 'pinged at the tell-tale metal hooks', to the strangers in Charlie Barnes' *Padded with shame* 'shouting my how big you are' to the 'you' in Christine Anne Foley's *Keep away from fire*, 'Never asking if you were doing it right'. And still the prevailing narrative that 'they were asking for it', exemplified in stories like Dahlia Al-Shelleby's *This New Identity* – 'I questioned my approach; was I too welcoming? And my outfits; had they been provocative?' As I read through these pages again, I am sadly reminded that women's and girls' bodies are still there for the taking.

Further discomfort came from the underwear and sanitary products available (or not) to purchase. The sixties may have been swinging and revolutionary, but in Angela Jeff's *Bloody Hell!* we are reminded that sanitary pads were an inch thick and attached to a belt. In the second instalment of her memoir, Sarah Oba recalls her mother's girdle which 'seemed a strange contraption designed purely for discomfort'. Being ever at the mercy of bra manufacturers myself, I felt the frustration in Gisela Haensel's voice when, on the impossible mission of finding a sports bra in a large size, she cried 'Why on earth was I considered oversized by the industry for active people?'

But there were – albeit fleeting – moments of fun and pleasure too. Like Margaret Grant's fond recollection of her 'royal blue briefs with a panel of lace at the side and a picture of a tiger on the front. These pants made me smile when I put them on in the morning.' And it's hard not to agree with Emma Filtness, writing in a brief *Tape-free* moment, 'that feeling my breasts press against the soft cotton of a laundered, well-loved band tee is one of life's pleasures'. As is Jo Colley's 'declaration of a dress... suddenly out' in her poem *Dressing for the occasion*. Sometimes it was an image that said it all, and the joy that emanates from Julie Stephens' *Bold* image of 'Supergran' in leopard print undies is unbridled.

Each piece chosen for the issue allowed a bold, brilliant, and authentic voice to speak their truth. And I am deeply honoured and humbled to have been able to offer them a safe haven in *Skirting Around*. To all who read them, please share widely – these are voices and stories that we all need to hear.

Carolyn Hashimoto, November 2021



Mission Impossible?

Kate Meyer-Currey

Life is like underwear: change is good (especially when you grew up in the eighties)

My teenage years were full of underwear-related epic fails.

I was harassed and shamed by Mr Bra Strap, Mr VPL, Mr Camel Toe and Mr Sanitary Towel: a gang of misfits that I hated with a passion unabated today.

They first entered my life in the eighties when aged eleven I hit puberty, and bits, bums, and boobs (which I much preferred to keep private) became public property.

I yearned for the simplicity of my seventies childhood: vest, knickers, socks or tights, job done.

It began with bras. Shopping for them was hell, with family in tow making bright conversation.

Worse: you had to get measured by clammy-handed assistants and try the bastards on.

At school everyone could see your bra through your white blouse, and dirty-minded boys tried to twang your straps.

Vic and Bob's Bra Men had it down!

Now I'm fifty-odd; my boobs sag but they're happily adjusted to underwires, plunge and cougar colours. No more white or beige!

And if their straps show, so what? At least they've gained the confidence to let it all hang out!

My teenage knickers were literally pants: my big, crusty school ones (M&S – was there anything else?) went with me to uni.

They got washed in the sink (sorry if that's gross) because the campus laundry was infested by a pervy porter who sniffed my friend's tights.

So, they hung out to dry, limp and defeated, like my non-existent sex-life.

Worst of all, they lasted for years, like the boyfriend back home whose mum still bought his Y-fronts.

I finally dumped them on the advice of my bolder friends and ventured timidly into the unknown universe of pastel bikinis.

That led me to thongs and eventually to a brave new world of colours and patterns I'd never dreamed of.

VPL, alas, is an occupational hazard of having a fine booty.

I'm not going to refuse to leave the house in case I commit fashion crime.

If I've got panty perverts on my tail, I'll give them an eyeful.

Likewise, if others take umbrage at my luscious lady-lips, or get the hump about my camel toe, let them; I'm not getting into a flap about it.

Lastly, being an eighties gal, I know my power ballads. 'Wings' featured heavily in their lyrics: remember 'The Wind beneath My Wings' or 'Wing and a Prayer'?

Now I know why. My generation was literally obsessed with wings because we were hostage to sanitary towels.

Wings, according to the adverts, let you rollerblade in white jeans, skateboard with fluffy dogs, or jump out of aeroplanes without anything showing or leaking.

It was a lie. Wings were parachute sized, gave you a bulgy gusset, and a walk like John Wayne, so your flow spread like Jackson Pollock in action.

My black nylon PE shorts finally came into their own as period pants.

That was all they were fit for, as, whatever the adverts said, wings or no wings, I was still rubbish at games.

Nowadays, the trend is for kickboxing or being 'soft and strong' (surely that's toilet roll?) but I still won't be picked for the team.

So thank you, Mr Tampon. You came into my life when I needed you. You got right in there and saved the day – no more notes for the PE teacher.

Sod Mr Toxic Shock, it was worth the risk!

Younger friends have flirted with Mr Mooncup, but he lost his glow after he was too fiddly to insert.

So, now I'm settling down with Mr Menopause; I've finally ghosted those other trolls who made being female such a pain.

It's great to know I don't have to bother about which brand of environmentally friendly sanitary products to buy, or about crafting my own period pants at home.

As a *Blue Peter* viewer, I can tell you that we had one up on you there, Snowflakes.

I wouldn't have survived those trying times without my blood brothers Mr Andrex and Mr Sticky-Backed Plastic.

But I've broken the first rule of Gusset Club.

My undercover boys never leaked a word of what I'm spilling to you before now.

Now that's what I call fully underwired, seam-free, 100% protection!

Julie Stephen
Bold



Nise McCulloch

Excision

a sensual swollen apple
incentive for sweet indulgence
pleasure dome for hands
and mouth
suckling for sustenance
but Eve's fruit sags
into middle age
recalled for investigation.

the excavator needle
grinds
the clamped breast
tunnelling through flesh

Once
(deep)

Twice
(deeper)

Thrice
(deeper still)

rotating clockwise and counter
moling for rogue tissue
containing infidel cells.

Expunge

Expel

Extract

texture of ground beef

consistency of wet wool

mound of sandworms

minus their cast

Cast Out

Remove

Cast out

the knitted mess

spilled

onto a petri dish

for further diagnosis

milled

from the body

for a fighting chance.

as if the snake bite scars

and contour divots

are not enough

a titanium pinhead signals

the internal void

constant reminder of

unexpected violation

violent intrusion

which states:

It was here

I am here.

You are here

Scarred

Sculpted

Saved.

Meredith Grace Thompson

[I am eighteen years old.]

I am lying in a hospital bed having just woken up from emergency surgery to remove a soft-ball sized cyst that had wrapped itself around my right fallopian tube. The fallopian tube is gone, effectively murdered. I am told that I will still be able to ovulate and therefore still possess the potentiality of a future pregnancy, but it will be more difficult. The egg will have to make its way from my right ovary to my left fallopian tube in order to descend into the uterus. A Herculean feat of nearly mythic proportions for so small an egg. Chemical birth controls may affect this process. I will need to be careful.

I am coming down from the anesthesia and I have nearly fainted twice. The first time the nurse flipped the bed entirely backwards and upside down to prevent me from fainting, as if I were on a roller coaster ride. I remember blinking at the wall behind my hospital bed. I remember wondering if the soup that I choked on was from a can. I remember wondering if the choking had anything to do with the fainting. I am assured by my stern and frightened-looking mother, who sits next to my bed, that I am misremembering. The bed has never been flipped upside down and there has never been any soup. She is upset at the amount of morphine the hospital has given me. She believes it will have negative after-effects as I have never had morphine before, nor any kind of painkiller, really. I am crying. I am not crying because my abdomen has been sliced open, insides ripped out and then tentatively stitched back together; the pain has become tolerable, I am crying at the violation of fingers rooting through my insides where no fingers should ever have been. I am mourning the loss of my intestinal sanctity. I am convinced that my navel has been moved two centimetres higher than previously. I am horrified at the thought of my navel having been cut open, a camera inserted inside me and for my interior being to have been displayed so grotesquely. As the anesthesiologist asked me to count backwards from ten, I grabbed at her arm. 'Wait,' I choked back drug-addled tears, 'Is everyone going to see me naked?' The last thing I remember was her laughing, a small kind laugh I tell myself later, which felt harsh and cruel in the moment. I close my eyes and wish my head would stop spinning. I desperately want to feel sober but with sobriety comes immense pain. The pain is only manageable through morphine. Tears are leaking from my eyes like glass. I've stopped noticing them, really. My mother is wiping them away. I keep whispering that I am afraid I will never be able to have children. It is all I can think about.

‘But you always said you never wanted kids,’ my mother reminds me. This is true, although it is not the truth of how I felt, only the truth of what I have said. I am afraid to admit that I want children, although I can’t articulate why. It has something to do with my sister and her beautiful bell-like laugh and how easily children love her and how quickly cats run away from me, making me equate their feline preferences with my own value as a potential parent and overall human being.

‘Of course I want children,’ I begin to cry in earnest. ‘I just said that.’

‘Words are powerful.’ My mother gently rubs my arm to comfort me, ‘You shouldn’t say things like that if you don’t mean them.’ And now I am upset because I feel accosted. I know I will never be my sister. I try to be as different as possible so that we can never be compared, claiming to prefer dark chocolate only because she preferred white, both settling later on milk chocolate as our actual preference. So many of our parts are the same. I want her here, right now. I miss her so potently it aches in the drums of my ears. She was just here, wasn’t she? I can’t be sure anymore. I feel a fog lingering around my brain, as if the fog is inside my blood brain barrier, hanging like early morning mist suspended over grass. I can’t catch my breath.

‘I didn’t do this!’ I manage. ‘I didn’t make this happen!’

‘I know you didn’t, but just remember, please. Words have power.’ My mother sits with me until I fall asleep. I am angry with her. I desperately want her to stay with me. My heart feels heavy and my lips feel numb. All I can think is that I want my sister. She is my voice when I cannot speak.

I begin university a few months later. Still unable to walk for long distances, I borrow a wheelchair from the university’s accessibility department to buy my first set of university textbooks. I am shocked and yet unsurprised as people I have known all my life don’t even look at me long enough to realise it is me in this chair. Existing feet above me, they avoid eye contact and choose to walk right past me as though I am something to be avoided. I feel intensely dehumanized by the experience. Slowly I build my stamina back up. I walk to the corner and back from my father’s house. I try to force myself always to stand up straight. My abdominal muscles have atrophied slightly. I come to understand how essential they are for nearly every form of movement. My stitches dissolve into me. I spend hours lying on my back staring and counting the two scars left behind. One, two, repeat. One inside my navel, one ten centimetres below, just above my pubis, tracing them with my fingers and trying not to think about the knot that is the stub of my fallopian tube. Soon I am able to walk for longer and

longer. I can attend classes without pain. The panic attacks which have begun during my hospital recovery and are always worse in supermarkets, are subsiding.

During the autumn university term, my first university term, I sit in the humanities building cross-legged for the first time in months, in a loose skirt and sweater, eating a packed lunch with a friend. We are sharing lunch before attending an Earth and Atmospheric Sciences lecture together. There is silence as we both chew. Not uncomfortable silence, but the silence of familiarity. I don't look up from my sandwich. My friend clears his throat. He is considering trying stand-up comedy, in the vein of observational humour, and has been trying out his observations on me for the past week.

'What about this?' He clears his throat again. 'Statistically speaking, every human being has one fallopian tube.' I burst into tears.

Christine Anne Foley

Keep away from fire

Do you remember undressing me
The first time
How easily I fell apart
Straps and ties and clips and Velcro.

Do you remember the feeling against your skin
As I untangled
And curled and wound
Onto your bedroom floor.

Do you remember how disappointed you were
When the fabric broke and I spilled out
A ball of wool
Rolling across your room.

Do you remember what you said
As you tried to pick me up
As I slipped through your fingers
Thread by loosened thread.

Do you remember putting me back together
Knotting silk and cotton
Looping strings and ribbons
Never asking if you were doing it right.

Do you remember me walking away
My hem falling
A care label at my neck
Keep away from fire.

Prerna Majumdar

It Feels Like a Losing Battle

I acknowledge that there has been significant progress in women's rights over the centuries. I know that as a woman in this time, I'm lucky to be able to do all the things I can do, and do them freely. I can date, work, go to school, and choose not to get married or have children.

However, I also know that even now there are communities that still have back-dated views that they force their daughters, wives, and sisters to follow.

There are numerous stigmas ingrained in our societies that women are still forced to follow because if you don't, you're shunned. You are called a 'slut'. You're seen as shameful. For women, it just feels like there's no winning. We will think we have solved one issue only for another to appear. I just feel so defeated.

How I Was Raised

I'm a twenty-three-year-old woman, I'm Hindu, and my culture is pretty conservative. The rules that women and girls in my culture are expected to follow are strict. They can't wear overly revealing clothes, they have to wait until after marriage to have sex, and it is considered a great sin to have a child outside of marriage.

I was raised the way I feel like most of us were raised. I was taught to cover up in front of men from the age of six.

I distinctly remember putting on my favorite outfit at the time, which was a wrap top that showed my belly, a headband, and jeans. I loved wearing this outfit because I felt like my Barbies wore similar clothes. Unfortunately, my grandmother burst my happy bubble when I went downstairs after putting on this outfit. She told me that there were men in the house: she was referring to my grandpa and uncle. She explained that we shouldn't wear clothes like that because it was inappropriate. She took me back up to change into a more 'modest' outfit out of respect for the men in my family.

That particular situation stuck with me my entire life. I think that was the first time ever, I started being afraid of men. My grandma never went into detail about why I shouldn't wear revealing clothes in front of men, but I was quick to fill in the blanks even at six years old.

At Ten Years Old

When I turned ten, women in my family started commenting on my weight. They would tell me that I was gaining weight, and if I kept gaining weight, I would be ugly. At the time, I was distraught. I was only ten and I had barely developed into my body. I had already started telling my mom I didn't want to eat certain foods because I didn't want to be 'fat and ugly.' Now, I look back at this and think about how I should have been enjoying the ice cream and the ten-piece chicken nuggets from McDonald's with fries. I was ten years old for God's sake. I was a child.

At Twelve Years Old

At twelve, I was eating a bowl of my favorite mint ice cream when my uncle commented on my weight and told me that I should stop eating ice cream every night because no boy would ever like me if I kept on gaining weight.

This same uncle encouraged my parents to enrol me in a fitness program that would help me lose weight. At twelve years old I started working out. I was forced to cut juice out of my diet because the sugars were contributing to my weight gain according to my uncle and my forty-year-old male family physician.

The need to contribute to societal beauty standards, made primarily by men, cost me a lot of my childhood. I know my grandma and my aunts were all raised in a society where they were taught to only do things that would make the men around them feel more comfortable. Appearance was the biggest thing, and they started passing on these toxic standards to me at a very young age.

At Fourteen Years Old

When I was at my skinniest, at fourteen years old, my uncle handed me a book called *Lean*, that talked about going on a water-only diet. When I think about this now my blood boils and

I feel uncomfortable at the same time: what was I thinking letting a man, actually a grown man, tell me what to do and not to do with my body because he didn't like the way I looked.

I remember being innocent enough at this time. I didn't fully understand what sex was. However, I did 'know' that it was wrong. I thought that sex was wrong because of what my grandma told me while I was growing up. She would tell me that to be a well-respected woman I would have to wait till marriage, and, for this reason, I shouldn't wear revealing clothes either. This was so ingrained into my brain that if I heard anyone talking about sex, whether it was in real life or on TV, my first thought would be, 'They're bad.'

At this age, we had a dress code for gym class. Even at our co-ed public high school, they separated girls and boys because God forbid that the boys get distracted by us wearing gym clothes.

Ironically, we had a male gym teacher and I remember him telling one of the girls in the class to unravel her shorts back to knee length. She had pulled up her shorts after running because she was hot. It makes me uncomfortable to even think back to that incident: why was he noticing a fourteen-year-old girl's tucked-up shorts in the first place?

At Fifteen Years Old

At fifteen I began to change my appearance because I wanted male attention. I started wearing lululemon sweaters with nothing but my bra underneath, which I could unzip when I got to school to show off my boobs.

If I didn't get the attention I wanted from my crush by doing this, I would feel defeated, even unworthy. I look back at this now and I wish I could hug fifteen-year-old me because there is so much more to life than pleasing men. To be fair, I did this way after fifteen, well into university.

I wish I had been raised to be someone that didn't need validation from men, but I know that it's not my mother's or grandmother's fault that they raised me this way. They were raised this way so that's all they knew. This is just how our society has been structured. Please men or be worthless.

At this age, before going to any family gatherings in the summer, my mom would ask me to cover my arms with a sweater if I was wearing a strapless dress. The only excuse she

ever gave me for that was, ‘You have to dress appropriately because there will be other men there.’

At Sixteen Years Old

I think I was catcalled before this, but I was sixteen when I noticed a man at the mall staring at me. I remember being terrified to walk past him because I was by myself, trying to get to my mom in the store. I wanted to close my eyes and curl up into a ball. That man made me so uncomfortable. I eventually gathered the courage to walk past him. I didn’t dare to make eye contact, but I heard him say to me – I was the only person in earshot – ‘Hey sexy’. My skin crawled. I wanted to rip it off.

I wish this was the first and last time but as I grew up the catcalls and uncomfortable stares and glares only worsened.

As a Young Adult

In university, when I was going to clubs nearby, I remember multiple occasions where I would have an encounter with a guy at the club and refuse their advances by saying I had a boyfriend, even though I didn’t. I just wanted them to go away. Most of these times the guy tried to persuade me that I should cheat on my said ‘boyfriend’ with them.

I remember when I was twenty-one and went to a club in downtown Toronto and refused a man’s advances in the club by telling him that I had a boyfriend. But he would not take no for an answer. He followed my friend and I out to our Uber. He yelling ‘fucking slut’ at me – all because I turned him down. My friend and I were scared he was going to assault me.

At this point, I was immune to the catcalling because it happened everywhere I went. I almost expected it. It was abnormal to me if it wasn’t happening.

Another time, my friend and I were going to a club, so we called an Uber. The app mistakenly matched a group of guys and my friend and I with the same Uber. My friend and I got into the car, and two of the guys from the group started yelling at our Uber driver. They were asking him, ‘Why the fuck do these bitches get priority? Look at them! Look at what

their wearing! They should fucking walk.’ I was appalled. And what did our outfit choices have to do with anything?

I’ve taken my fair share of Ubers alone; I’m used to the rear-view stares from the drivers. At first it made me uncomfortable but now I almost expect it.

When my mom found out I was taking Ubers at night by myself she wanted me to move back home so that someone could drive me when I was drinking with my friends. She would yell at me if I was taking Ubers by myself at three am – because I was a girl.

Final Thoughts

I wonder if there will ever come a time when women and girls will feel safe around men. I wonder if there will be a time when men will really start respecting women and viewing us as equals through their actions and not just because it’s ‘trendy’ right now.

Constantly hearing about the horrible things that happen to every woman and reflecting on all the things that have happened to me because of the actions of men make me feel defeated. I don’t know if things will ever really change.

June Marchbank

A little lace never goes wrong



Gisela Haensel

Undercover Operation

My friend recommended it to me after my surgery. A sports bra. For more comfort during recovery. The procedure hadn't impacted my chest but not having anything stiff push against my breast felt good when resting between periods of walking around the house. A sports bra. One step up from no bra at all. A visible invisible step back to normality. No, I am not bedridden anymore, look at me, things are back in place. Wearing a bra shows, even though nobody can see it.

Getting myself a sports bra had proven to be quite a challenging operation. My breasts barely fit the largest size which made me feel really big and not sporty at all. Why on earth was I considered oversized by the industry for active people? When I later tried to wear my sports bra during Tai Chi class, it failed to hold my breasts in place, and they just slipped out from under it. How embarrassing! Here I was in my hard-won sports bra, and it couldn't even support me during mild activities for cancer patients. I was afraid that the invisible would become visible, showing everybody that the bra had moved to the wrong place, bulging out of the upper most part of my sporty T-Shirt, leaving my breasts flowing freely underneath. I felt exposed and naked in all my feminine bodiness, unable to hold it – myself – together. The literal feeling of not fitting in.

I don't know if anybody noticed my unease. Hopefully, it remained invisible to the other participants. I slipped out of the room to readjust myself, came back and continued class with the least movement possible. The week after, I brought back to life an old bra with a metal wire that had reliably held me in place during my active pre-cancer days. This bra was dark blue and decorated with lace, which made me look as if I was getting myself ready for a romantic date. This clash of purpose wasn't lost on me. I didn't feel romantic at all after two major belly surgeries and months of chemotherapy. I reassured myself that nobody else could see how overdressed I was for this Tai Chi class. All they noticed, if anything, was how this time, I moved more confidently than ever because I knew that this bra wouldn't let me down.

I did manage to put the sports bra to use in the non-active parts of my life. Since it didn't contain any metal, I was able to wear it during the check-up CT scans. Better to come (and

stay) in my own clothes than switch to the hospital gown and feel like a patient. Only later did I realize how much of the hospital stayed with me when I left the building. Each scan appointment loaded up my clothes with patient vibes. After a year or so, I could barely bring myself to put on this sports bra. It was so full of memories of my life as a cancer patient that it made me feel sick. And although it stayed invisible to most people, to me it turned into a visible reminder of a state of mind and body and soul that I was desperately trying to leave. Looking at it when taking it out of my dresser, looking at it in the mirror after putting it on... it slowly and reliably turned me into an earlier version of myself. When I was wearing the sports bra, it was as if its cancer patient vibes slowly bled out and seeped into me. Nobody could see it. Only I could feel it.

And then one day, I furiously ripped the bra off, stuffed it into the farthest corner of my dresser and started yelling desperately, 'This piece of clothing is contaminated. Never ever can I wear it again. I need something different. Untainted. A piece of my new life to be!'

Even though nobody but me will be able to see what it looks like, this isn't only about comfort anymore or about trust in supporting all parts of me. This isn't even about romantic dates. No, sadly, my body is not there yet. It is about an untarnished piece of clothing. Neutral at a minimum. Ideally, with a twist of new life. A sneak preview, a teaser, a refreshing taste of the yet to come.

June Marchbank

Bravo!



LindaAnn LoSchiavo

If Roebling Made Brassieres – a rondeau

If Roebling made brassieres adults would cheer.
Well-harnessed flesh, composite span, can steer
 The eyes across that tender roadway tied
At proper height, meet gulls' wings, not collide
 Like catenary curves unmoored near piers.

 Enmeshed in woven wires, breasts appear
More goddess-like as nipples guard their sphere,
 Defying silicone or nature's pride — —
 If Roebling made brassieres.

 Contestants overwhelming the cashiers,
All plus-sized models stocking up on gear,
 Retailers ordering lest they're denied,
 Their lingerie designers dignified.
 No more going bra-less to a premiere
 If Roebling made brassieres.

Saskia McCracken

Sell-by Date

Marion decided to do it because Ivy said she couldn't. They were in the staff toilets washing their hands and Ivy said it was the sort of thing you did young, or never. Marion was not old, but she was not young, either. Or at least, she was not as young as Ivy, or the interns, or the receptionist, or Robbie from HR with the withered pot of geraniums on his desk.

Ivy always said insensitive things. She had said, in front of Robbie, who was quite short, that men were only attractive if they made a woman in heels look small. Then she made a joke Marion didn't get and everyone laughed, including him.

Ivy said that mobility scooters were for fat people, and she sometimes used the word pleb. Whenever anyone gave her a compliment, which was often, she said 'Shut up,' and smiled. Her clothes were all neo-nineties: leather jackets, platform shoes, and crop tops. Marion thought they were ugly then and uglier now.

After Marion spent months fundraising for a new photocopier, Ivy ordered and paid for one herself with her bonus, then emailed the whole office when it arrived saying 'Santa's come early! xxx'

Two weeks later they stood in the toilets. Ivy said she'd had the best sex of her life with a man she'd met at the Sky Bar the night before. She'd forgotten his name.

Marion asked if she'd had a one-night stand with him.

Ivy said, 'Sure hon, all the time. You do it young or never.'

That was when Marion decided she would do it that weekend. She went to the Sky Bar in her nicest floral-patterned dress, sat at a table by the window, and made a show of looking at her watch until the bar man pointed out that she'd probably been stood up. She didn't want to be seen drinking alone. That was when she met Sid.

Sid was a fifty-year-old banker with a loosened tie and shiny cufflinks. He bought a bottle of champagne for them both and spent the next two hours talking about how much money his wife was trying to get out of the divorce. At one point Marion thought he might cry. The bar was filled with women in platforms and crop tops, in denim jackets and leather jackets, wearing dark shiny lipstick. As she was leaving, Sid tried to kiss her on the mouth. She moved out of the way just in time. He told her to always follow her heart and keep an eye on her wallet. 'Alimony's a bitch!' he yelled as she left the bar.

The following week Marion decided to try it again. She went to the Sky Bar in a pair of platform heels and a denim jacket she'd picked up at H&M. She wore a dark red lipstick that she'd bought in the late nineties and hadn't worn for years. She wondered whether make-up had a sell-by date.

But there was Ivy at the bar. Marion hid behind a palm tree. She snuck out onto the balcony. It was dark outside, and she could see in, but the people inside could only see their reflections when they looked in her direction. Ivy was sitting at the bar with a bottle of champagne and Sid was sitting next to her. It was impossible to leave the building without walking right past them. So she waited for an hour and a half. She watched car headlights moving along the roads below. She could see the lights from the BBC Scotland building glittering in the Clyde. Ivy and Sid left together. Marion left ten minutes later. The next day Ivy said she'd stayed up all night with this guy who bought her tonnes of champagne and was totally loaded. What a luxury to wake up in a hotel and have breakfast in bed. Marion stood at the next desk watering the geraniums.

Julie Stephen
Timeline



Margaret Grant

Knickers

Once upon a time my knickers drawer was home to a colourful assortment of bikini briefs, in an exciting jumble of fuchsia, teal, and lemony yellow. It also contained spotty knickers and flowery knickers, stripey shorts and statement shorts, as well as lacy brazilians and suggestive thongs.

These days it contains a drab selection of M&S high-waisted knickers in boring shades of black and beige. These pants are bigger than those delectable knickers of yesteryear, and not only because my bottom has expanded in girth, but also because these days I like an undergarment to cover the entire area, while in days of yore I was happy to wear pants that cheekily revealed half my *derrière*.

In the heyday of my skimpy knicker collection, I took a holiday to Western Australia where, in a department store in Perth, I was delighted to find Kylie Minogue's newly launched lingerie line on sale. I purchased several pairs of knickers from Kylie's line. I recall a saucy red pair with a seam up the back, a pair of turquoise cotton shorts with some long-forgotten slogan printed on the front and royal blue briefs with a panel of lace at the side and a picture of a tiger on the front. These pants made me smile when I put them on in the morning.

I lived in Tokyo at the time, and after work one Friday a couple of months after my Aussie holiday, I did my laundry. On Saturday I would be joining friends for an overnight trip to Yamanishi's wine region. Normally I hung my washing to dry on the balcony. But it was rainy season, and although it wasn't actually raining that evening, there was so much moisture in the air, I despaired of my clothes drying in time for my trip. So, I stuffed my wet items into a hold-all and lugged it to the coin laundry down the street. At the laundrette, I realised I only had one coin. I emptied the contents of my bag into the machine, fed the solitary coin into the slot, then walked to a convenience store two doors down to get more change. I returned, put some more money into the machine, and sat reading a book while the drier rumbled and revolved and my clothes dried.

Back home, I dumped the contents of my holdall on my bed and began the task of putting away my t-shirts, blouses, skirts, and trousers. I selected a pale pink t-shirt and faded lightweight denims to put into an overnight bag for my trip the next day. What about knickers? Naturally, I would need a change of knickers. But where were my underpants? Not

on my bed. Not in the holdall. That was now empty. I checked the washing machine. They weren't there. They weren't in my laundry basket either. Only a few raggedy pairs were left in my drawers. Oh my God! I had been robbed! All my spanking new Kylie lingerie, gone.

My washing had been unguarded in the drier for approximately three minutes when I went to get change. Three minutes were all it took for some perv to sneak in and nick my knickers, every single pair that had been in my washing that day, even the tiger pants that I so loved. It made me shudder to think of some sicko going through my laundry and picking out my underpants. Had he been watching me? Had he followed me? Or was he an opportunist hanging around outside the coin laundry all day? Was he excited by the thought of a young foreign woman's knickers? Or would he have preferred a Japanese lady's panties? Ugh. I shudder again now at the thought.

I went to the kitchen where my flatmate, Minobu, was cooking dinner for ourselves and two male friends of ours who would be arriving shortly. I told her of the crime that had been committed against me. Later that evening, she regaled our guests with the sorry tale. They found it very amusing. I was mortified at my knickers being a topic of discussion in mixed company, especially when I had a crush on one of the guys.

I was very sad about losing my lovely knickers. I kicked myself too because I felt I should have been more wary. After all, it was not the first time I'd had my underpants stolen. I'd had a couple of pairs taken from my washing line several years earlier when I was new to Japan. I had been forewarned about the knicker fetishists of Japan, but hung my underwear out to dry anyway, because there was a high wall between my clothes-line and the quiet suburban street where I lived. I thought my undies would be safe. Unfortunately, men with a longing for used knickers will go to extraordinary lengths to satisfy their desires. A friend of mine once found a hook in her panties. Someone had been fishing for underpants.

My sister came to visit me in that first year. We talked about the low crime rate and the honesty of the Japanese people. A very dainty silver watch, a present from my mother, slipped from my wrist in the busy Shibuya district one Saturday night. I reported its loss to the police on Sunday. A considerate citizen handed it in, and it was back on my wrist by Monday evening.

In Tokyo, you can leave your wallet on a table in Starbucks, go to the loo, spend ten minutes in there doing your hair and make-up, and come back to find your wallet waiting undisturbed where you left it. But knickers are another matter. With knickers, you need to be vigilant.

My sister said that she'd prefer to live in a country with a normal crime rate but where your undies were safe from thievery. At the time, I was inclined to agree with her. I was still struggling to get used to Japan then, and the theft of my knickers from the clothes-line right outside my bedroom window had given me quite a shock. Looking back decades later, I can say that neither theft spoiled my time in Japan. And the general threat to ladies' underwear didn't affect me at all except when it was MY underwear that was taken. Yes, the fact that ladies' knickers are a sought-after item by Japanese burglars might reveal something quite unnerving about the psyche of the Japanese male, but there are creeps and weirdos aplenty in the western world too. Besides, just because undies are less likely to be stolen here in the West, doesn't mean they are entirely safe from peril.

A couple of years ago, after a spring clear-out, my mother gave me this eco laundry ball thing. She'd never used it herself. The ball was about the size of a sliotar (that's roughly seven centimetres in diameter to those of you unfamiliar with the Irish sport of hurling) and was quite heavy. You threw this ball into the drum of your washing machine, and it would reduce or eliminate the need for detergent, apparently. I gave it a go. My clothes came out clean enough, but my knickers were in tatters, much like my spirits after returning to Ireland and trying and failing to make a life for myself here.

I'd prefer Japan, knicker nickers and all.

Julie Stephen
Nursing



Wendy Birse

From Puffer Trains to Mother Strains

(After 'Down by the Station')

Down by the navel
Early in the morning,
See the great big mammaries
Swing to and fro.
Along come the Playtex, Silhouette or Sloggi
Heavage, cleavage,
Up we go!

Wendy Birse

Braiku

Cross your heart &
Lift and separate.
Nether garment
Never harm meant.

Cross your heart &
Lift and separate.
Whether garment
Ever harm meant?

Charley Barnes

Padded with shame

I don't use chicken fillets.

In my teens I stuffed toilet paper,
neatly folded. I remember trying socks,
once, until I found out that was boys' padding.

Now, I stuff the lace-cut bra
with shame: at their size; at skin stretched
and shrunk; at the plush pink pucker of nipple.

They're one of the few things meant to be bigger,
but even in that my body falls short;
two paracetamols on an ironing board
I've been told, *bee-stings*.

But I paid extra for this: a wedge of padding
so firm that if someone were to bump
me they'd bounce back
from my breasts and bruise.

Aesthetically, though, they're pleasing –
a good shape, and the middle-ground
between strangers shouting *my how big you are*,
and narrating that I'm not quite enough.

Dahlia Al-Shelleby

This new identity

It had been a sunny August day. I had popped into the town centre for some ingredients to make macaroons with a friend later that evening. Walking back to my flat, I became aware of a man catching up with me, in a buzzing Millennium Square, eager to strike up a conversation. With sparse grey hair and dark, minimally weathered skin, he looked to be in his fifties and spoke broken English. I realized this was the same man who'd asked me where he could find an item back at one of the shops I'd been to earlier that day, so I made polite conversation for a short while as we walked. Being a medical student, I had my own little shortcut home, walking through a partly disused hospital. To my surprise, this man continued walking with, and sometimes, behind me. All conversation had fizzled out as we marched through the main corridor of the old part of the hospital.

Panic rising, I felt my heart begin to pound as I walked further along the deserted corridor. Questions clouded my thoughts. What were his intentions? Was it really a good idea to continue walking in a place so deserted with him by my side? My senses heightened, I tried to replay in my head the basic self-defense moves I had learnt in karate. Despite its teachings emphasizing technique over strength, I was unable to ignore the simple fact that I could easily be overpowered. I had sparred with men; it was different from sparring with pre-teen boys. Biology was against me.

As I walked on, getting closer to home with each step, I decided to confront him. 'Where are you going? Are you lost?' An unwelcome nervous edge crept into my voice. I couldn't have him find out where I lived. He was noticeably taken aback at my directness but allowed me to redirect him. He claimed he was visiting a relative who was unwell with pneumonia when, in fact, it was a labour ward and maternity unit that were nearby. I pointed him to the nearest ward with advice to ask at the reception desk. As he turned and began to walk away, I proceeded to run down the stairs, out of the entrance, and the rest of my way home, looking back hesitantly before I turned to enter my building.

Relieved no harm had come to me, but fearful he'd find me walking out of my front door one day, I found my mind swirling with anxious thoughts for the next few weeks. I became aware

of other instances of harassment, albeit so minor I had ignored them. The sly smiles and lip curls. The cacophony of catcalls I'd learnt to laugh off. They now seemed clearer to me in their intent. I questioned my approach; was I too welcoming? And my outfits; had they been provocative? When stalked, I'd been wearing a high-necked lace blouse and tailored trousers. They can't have been.

As a practising Muslim, the only thing I hadn't been wearing was a headscarf. This wasn't something I thought I'd ever wear as I found more importance in observing the pillars: prayer, fasting, giving to charity, and maintaining key values such as honesty and integrity. I never wanted to be labeled a Muslim in a time when it had become synonymous with the very opposite of it's meaning. I didn't want the label as I didn't want the association. After being stalked, however, my perception changed. Yes, a headscarf would label me Muslim; it'd be a flag announcing it. But would that be more, or less off-putting to a harasser? And why should I change what I wear? Everyone's responsible for their own behaviour, surely? Yet how can I allow for others' differing morals without taking responsibility for my own safety? I wouldn't leave an expensive phone, bracelet, or watch visible in my parked car after all. It'd be all too tempting. I just couldn't shake off what had happened, so eventually resolved to carry out a trial. I'd cover my hair, a disguise from that man at least, and see how I felt.

I bought some lovely floral scarves from the high street and started wearing them. Oddly, it was plain sailing. I expected hateful comments. None came. I expected a barrage of questions from my colleagues. They were pleasantly welcoming. I expected some friends to simply filter me out. They invited the change. I found my appearance novel, an identity I hadn't anticipated. It gave me an air of maturity that garnered respect. Gone were those looks that had made me feel uncomfortable. I felt safe in this new cocoon, and with it my confidence and voice grew stronger. Empowered by my decision. And sheltered by this new identity.

Rushika Wick

show me how to wear a sari you ask

I look at you with goth-shop eyes
and a Marlboro Light after-haze
the only time I wore one
the safety pin pricked me
until I bled I reply



Beth Hartley
Trappings

I thought it was a mistake
when they started to roost in my skirts.
Each circle a fresh constraint,
creeping higher every time.

Now I am surrounded,
dressed in wing and feather;
a rustling and chirping
when evening starts to fall.
And if I stand quite still,
not moving any muscle,
I will remain
a pillar of birds.

Nothing ruffled,
no feathers fluttered;
a night's rest
where I stand.

So many species, I started learning names:
Robin, Sparrow, Chaffinch, Wagtail,
a fledging sense of great self-doubt.
As time has passed and perches fill,
the birds that visit, bigger still:
Blackbird, Starling, Raven, Crow,
aggravation, anxiety and loathing now.

If I move
I will scatter wings to the wind;
become surrounded by a nest of noise.
Never mind
what's left behind;
the litter of a hundred little lives.
Some will screech and others sing,
I'm not sure I can remain
so unstimulating
for much longer.

Sarah Oba

Underneath It All

The second instalment from Sarah's heart-warming childhood memoir.

As soon as school was dismissed at York Elementary, I exited the front entrance with its massive white columns, descended the stairs, and walked on the sidewalk in the direction of Divine Savior Hospital. The jingle 'Step on a crack, break your mother's back' danced through my mind, and I did my level best not to step on one. There were times I must confess that I stepped on every crack for those two blocks if I was upset with her.

I waited for my mother in the nursing home lobby where minors under the age of twelve were allowed. One of the residents, Mr. Epps, would kindly greet me with a special-order red-and-white-swirled peppermint stick. Even in the afternoon, all the residents at Divine Savior were dressed in their pajamas, and Mr. Epps was no exception. A war veteran, he wore a homemade striped flannel nightshirt over his two stumps. My father was also an amputee and so the absence of legs was nothing unusual to me. And Mr. Epps made sure the 'crazy lady in the wheelchair' who collected dolls – and wanted to add me to her collection – was steered towards another part of the building. Mr. Epps would chat with me until my mother appeared from the hospital wing.

Gliding with grace down the corridor, my mother, Opal, was an angelic vision – dressing in white being a strict requirement of her twenty-five-year-long nursing career spanning a period from 1950 until her death from a terminal illness in 1975. Her chosen profession necessitated a uniform of pure white from head to foot. Her linen nursing caps reminded me of the crisp starched dinner napkins used in the formal family dining room. A regular regimen of ironing was required, until the early seventies brought a few modernizations with polyester wash-and-wear as well as the advent of comfortable pantsuits and orthopedic walking shoes. White nylons were replaced with white knee-high stockings, a welcome wardrobe addition. Her nursing shoes, white, of course, were polished again and again to help extend their lifespan.

Underneath was an array of white undergarments that supported her angelic image – a white brazier, white girdle, white slip and white satin panties, as well as translucent or white

nylons. For the summer months, the girdle had garter straps to which the nylon stockings could be attached. It seemed a strange contraption designed purely for discomfort. She would mutter under her breath whenever a stocking got a 'run' and I learned that clear nail polish was a trick of the trade to stop a tear in its tracks. My mother set the damaged nylons aside and used the torn stockings as stuffing for handmade throw pillows or cuddly toys.

Upon arriving home from an eight or twelve-hour shift, my mother would peel off the layers of white and relax in plain satin pastel gowns, or cotton housedresses suitable for a respectable housewife. Comfort was key. The gowns were knee length and sleeveless or with a short or capped sleeve and perhaps a matching robe. She was delighted with a terry cloth jacket with bold flowers that kept her warm and looked as if made from remnant bath towels but was a free form design – much like the Japanese haori worn over a woman's kimono – and as a welcome bonus had front pockets.

Sundays for the most part were always a day off for my mother. On those lazy afternoons after church, she could be found in her personal sanctuary – the master bedroom of the house – taking a well-deserved nap. I could easily slip from my bedroom which connected to hers via the shared en-suite bathroom between our bedrooms and get a glimpse of her reading a book or the Sunday paper. Or she might be luxuriating in a bath sprinkled with Epsom salts to ease her aches and pains.

It was the colossal headboard of the antique bed that gave the master bedroom a powerful presence. I had proof that my parents had welcomed me as a new-born to the world, in December 1964, with a photo of them posed on this bed like a modern-day Nativity scene. My dad is in a suit and tie while my mother is in a robe over a gown suitable for nursing infants. Seeing my mother propped with pillows and supported by the massive mahogany framework made me feel she was immortal. (And the photo dispelled the myth my brothers created that I was found in a basket on the back doorstep.)

It was during one of these Sunday afternoons following a mother-and-daughter camp over Mother's Day weekend that Mama and I had our only conversation that dusted over the facts of life. I had been energized by the weekend camp while my mother had the mirror opposite experience – suffering some back pain from the uncomfortable sleeping quarters. To her great surprise, my dad had hired household help during our absence as a Mother's Day gift to

assist with housecleaning. As I danced around the footboard of the bed, she made a statement seemingly from out of thin air.

‘Soon I will be having an operation. I’ll no longer be able to have children.’

‘I always wanted a younger brother or sister... Why do you need an operation?’

‘It’s called a hysterectomy. I should feel better once the surgery is over. The doctor recommends it for my health.’

‘Couldn’t you wait and have a baby before the operation – just for me?’

‘I’m afraid that’s out of the question because babies take nine months to be born. You have the kittens and those are like siblings...’

And then the conversation steered into the safe territory of pets.

A month later in early June, my older sister graduated from college and returned home in her yellow Volkswagen. At the graduation, my mother requested that my sister help around the house instead of finding a part-time summer job. The offer was \$50 weekly and in turn my sister hired me for \$5 a week to do whatever she needed. Cooking, washing dishes, cleaning, packing boxes for moving and laundry were our daily routines until my mother returned home from surgery.

Although we had a dryer, we often used the clothesline in the backyard on sunny days. I loved running beneath the sheets that flapped in the wind and learned how to hang ‘delicates’ such as bras, panties and Hanes briefs in between. My sister taught me to hang the items neatly and primly so that they would not be on display from the street in front of our house.

Our mother returned from a one-week stay at the hospital after her operation. She shared how she felt better than she had in a long time and wanted to get back to work right away. The doctors cautioned her to have a full recovery at home before doing so. The master bedroom became the girls’ hangout. We sorted and folded the laundry and served Mama’s meals there. It was like an ongoing pajama party with lots of giggling, joking, and laughter.

When relaxed and released from the stresses surrounding her, Mama had a natural sense of humor. Out of the blue, she quipped how the doctors had given her a bikini cut. My mother never wore swimwear of any kind, much less a bikini, but she showed her two daughters how the stitches – and later the scar – were positioned in a shapely curve beneath her belly button, and so below the bikini line. Then in a moment of authentic and uncensored joy, she raised her gown upwards exposing her breasts and navel and exclaimed, ‘Look! It’s a smiley face!’ We shared a moment of belly laughs that rippled throughout the room for several minutes until tears fell down our faces. Less than two months later, she died peacefully. I wish I could say she died at home in the sanctuary of her own bedroom. To be honest, I can only imagine what happened during her final week of life. She, my dad, and three of her sisters were flown by an emergency helicopter to a larger hospital in search of a miracle. Nothing could be done and according to the death certificate my mother died of pneumonia rather than the undiagnosed leukemia that ravaged her body.

In those last moments of her life, I hope she was not wearing a pale blue hospital gown with the open back that tied clumsily with thin white strings, a garment she loathed. Her quiet legacy and destiny were to be remembered as the nurse dressed in white rather than the patient in blue.

Shona Wardrop
Discarded 1

DISCARDED 1



And Briefs damage
Pandemic and where
Notice effect alone

The mass over
Attack the inroads
It under cells

Put change screening
Decay making collateral
The of biology

The bones and
Keeps untouched , stopped
Undercover in unseen

Outside hold radiation
Times doors lockdown
Silent core the

Masks closed disease
On by No
Erosion Glowing

Thrives chemotherapy spreading
Make 10 000 , 10%
Go female

Santosh K Dary

The Veil

I gaze at visible peaks of the Himalayas
as the Sutlej River flows into its valleys.
Wishing to escape I looked for alliance,
from stifling customs and dark alleys.

Child-bride at sixteen, fate was mine;
Be dutiful, obedient, a doctrine instilled.
Skilful homemaker, mature and stay fine,
in tyrant regime, the mantras are drilled.

My free spirit gets overly restless;
I pace in agitation, a turbulent state.
Foot out the door, will be reckless,
the need to get away, I cannot wait.

Veil over face, my identity concealed;
feeling courageous, I dared the path.
Taking a long route, crossing cornfield,
cost of escapade is worth the wrath.

In liberating bliss, I twirl under trees;
graceful like a ballerina, floating on air.
My hair fell loose, in the gentle breeze,
I smile in the know, I just did not care.

Village alleyways beckoned me in;
I pause a moment, dismissing the risk.
Excited to explore, trailed with a grin,
marching forward - I skipped in brisk.

Sparkles from my *bindi*, diamante sandals;
dancing like fireflies in darkened places.
I swayed in rhythm to *payal* and bangles,
echoes lingered sending alerts in spaces.

Intrigued passers-by, curious glances;
young and old gathered here and there.
Hastening my steps to undue advances,
people stood in doorways openly stare.

Sensing pitfall, smoothing tangled hair;
dreaded happens - my veil slips my face.
Looks of shock, admiration and despair,
circled to watch a woman in disgrace.

My keepers arrived, pulling me aside;
my veil tightly replaced, escorted in rage.
Confidence dented, privileges denied,
my spirit seeks freedom in a gilded cage.

Punjabi words:

Sutlej River - largest river in Punjab, India

Bindi - spot on forehead part of make-up

Payal - ankle bracelet

Sarah Doyle

Self-Portrait as Dirty Linen

The knicker-bundle has got itself into knots of anxiety. It balls ever tighter, straining against the brittle wicker basket that knows it has seen better days. The basket creaks in protest, skew-whiff lid gaping in a grimace of bras, weekend oyster satins getting down and dirty with workaday washed-out greys. This is complex and occasionally contradictory territory. Conspicuous as a strumpet in a nunnery, a single pair of pink lace tangas draws disapproval from voluminous M&S buttock-huggers. Turning the other cheek is not an option here. Socks, lonely in the extreme, scorn such nonsense, search in vain for significant others, dreaming of completion in ankle-folded reunion. Tights, thin-skinned and showing their age, contort in a ten-denier stranglehold, choking the cheer out of floral cotton vests, denying once-worn-eternally-ditched yoga pants the longed-for Zen. Maybe in the next wash. Maybe in the next life.

Angela Jeffs

Bloody Hell!

Liberty bodices were undercover. So were suspender belts.

But then there was that other belt, to which huge pads were attached: sanitary towels.

My mother introduced them to me the day she told me about periods, which she referred to as 'the curse' rather than using its correct medical terminology: menstruation. It was a Sunday afternoon in 1951, just ahead of my starting secondary school, and she had sent my father out into the garden 'to avoid embarrassment'. (This being the man who – on the night of his honeymoon – asked my mother if they were now going to do something naughty.)

What different times they were. Most boys now know what a period is from the age of ten or even younger. And it has been in vogue in recent years for girls to have parties in celebration of such bodily changes; ignorance – if not shame – largely went out of the window years ago, and a good thing too.

Not for all girls, of course. Those of certain different cultures are expected and even forced to handle the experience differently. How my heart aches for them, their bodies not allowed to bleed naturally. Rather they are cut, and mutilated, and physically redefined to meet patriarchal rules. But do the men do this cruelly dirty work? No, it's women who make these girls suffer, just as they did. A cut for a cut makes the whole world bleed.

My own mother made me suffer, but not in any way I would describe as remotely comparable.

Remembering *her* own corseted mother suffering in the name of fashion and male approval, she most likely thought the Liberty Bodice was just that: a step towards freedom – and a healthier daughter. One certainly helped keep me fractionally warmer through the horrendous winter of 1947!

But then came added suspenders, to hold up teenage stockings.

Initially seen as a leap forward in female emancipation, the suspender belt quickly became a focus for pornographers, and even *haute couture* in sexualising the body. Then someone had the bright idea of using a belt to suspend sanitary towels, initially great clumps of cloth that rubbed and stank and really did cause embarrassment. I hated them.

I particularly hated having to creep into the kitchen to put my bloody towels into the coal stove, where they lay steaming and stinking, so causing anyone passing through to hold their noses and pull faces in disgust. It was not just their existence that appalled; it was the proof that once again Angela was 'riding the rag', a term used from the 19th century, if not earlier.

Sometimes I would wrap them in toilet paper and hide them under my bed in the hope that they would just disappear, as if by magic. They never did, of course. But every month I found myself converted once again into an undercover agent, which made me increasingly unhappy, sly, angry, and rebellious.

I was not ashamed of my body and its roller-coastering passage into adulthood. Far from it, and I do have to thank my mother for that; considering *her-story* and the times we lived in, she managed somehow to make me feel normal rather than damaged or a polluting influence, an untouchable.

But the amount of blood lost every month proved near unmanageable at times, and this went on for decades. The stains on the back of clothing, marks on seating ... now they were hard to love or accept.

I see now how the highly practical – if totally hideous Sanitary Apron – most probably saved a billion blushes. As for today's period pants and moon cups, let us hope they are both the answer to menstrual landfill and women's prayers; only time will tell as they are perhaps too new an innovation to hail them as the final solution.

For my generation of bleeders, the first adhesive towels of the 1960s were yet another early step towards liberation. No more belts.

As for the tampons that came soon after, based on ancient methodologies worldwide... glory be! A quick insert, twist, push or shove and we could throw all the paraphernalia of the past to the wind.

So determined was I to open up the whole subject that apparently my daughter clearly remembers me walking around the house naked and seeing the tell-tale blue string dangling between my legs. She thought nothing of it, she says today; it was normal. So normal that in raising her son, she often had him with her as a toddler in the bathroom when changing her own Tampax. As a result, he grew up knowing pretty much everything there was to know from the very start.

My own periods continued late into my fifties, by which time I was haemorrhaging, not simply menstruating. So, when my doctor prescribed HTR to knock them on the head, I was more than ready. Except that even today I can never quite forget – get rid of – that remembered, odorous, acrid aroma of old blood, that oh-so distinctive undercover smell.

Jo Colley

Dressing for the occasion

like a guilty secret hidden out of sight
backless and strapless
repeated geometrics in black and white
a declaration of a dress
silenced stifled at the back of the closet
then suddenly out

on a beach at sunrise as the sea moves in
for a closer look
slip you over this etched and stitched body
reach for the zip
feel the squeeze of your bones on my ribs
a perfect fit

freedom of fabric that billows in the breeze
fondles thighs greets ankles
we are simultaneously released into air
into rose gold light
the waves delirious delighted puppies
tugging at our skirts

Shona Wardrop
Discarded 2

DISCARDED 2



Decay of the
Disease and notice
Thrives cells attack

And radiation erosion
Spreading no daily
Of effect making

Biology briefs closed
The undercover
Put by keeps

Outside alone core
Damage a lockdown
Time inroads collateral

The change chemotherapy
The pandemic masks
Go in untouched

Make on it
Hold the and
Mass screening 10 000

Bones 10% female
Glowing doors under
Where silent over
Stopped unseen

Laura Brown

My Winter Skin

In summer I am solar powered
always charging ahead
my darkness hidden
behind fizzy laughter and browned skin.

Then in winter I stay in
let the tan fade
my smile hidden
beneath blankets and layers of knit.

The year is split
between my cosy darkness
and the harsh light of day
parts of myself stored
in vacuum packed bags
under the bed.

I am in my head
my body lies buried
beneath fleece blankets
unseen and unheard
underwired bras in the drawer
left untouched.

I am not sure which
of these is the real me
and which is undercover
but the winter skin
is the one
I'm most comfortable in.

Kate Falvey

Bra Stories

I.

Age eleven, she hid her cotton brassiere
which Grandma forced her to wear
beneath an undershirt trimmed
with a pink rosette.

The boys pinged the tell-tale metal hooks
which rippled visibly beneath her gym-class middy,
the flimsy undershirt pointing out her budding
mortification.

II.

She opted for the inserts,
skin stretched from puberty to matron
in an agonizing trice.
After she was sliced, the sites
were heaving with phantom breasts,
swinging with luminous iridescent cells
and ample memories of infant ears
that were, indeed, like shells,
and the wilder swell of nipples
raked with sighs and sudden teeth,
the clamping into lycra,
the whispered cruise of silken sheath,
and the itch of winter wool
chill with sheer exertion
and immutable strong will.

III.

Her daughter's first bra was bought
by an intrusive, sneaky friend.

The ritual choice and sizing,
the defining moment of the need

wrested from bittersweet intimacy
by a heedless interloper.

Her daughter bounced in dangling a froth
of ivory lace and Lolita-padded pinks,

a smoky quartz confection wired for hijinks,
a gauzy azure whisper of come-hither,

prinked with manufactured sultriness – all for a woman
over forty aiming for demure but hitting overkill.

Her daughter didn't understand the grimace and the sigh –
the years gone by, the years to come, the leave-taking, the lies –

the treacheries, indignities, evasions, and repressions –
the cossetting of status quos, succumbing to aggressions –

And now the mother is accused
by her bra-fanatic grown-up queer femme daughter,

of making mountains out of molehills
and quagmires from fresh water.

Lucia Cascioli
Ride 'Em?

I'm a grind-stoned cowgirl.

Watch me ride.

I

s

l

i

d

e

my tush

d

o

w

n

the table.

Ram my feet into the stirrups.

I wait for the cold, steel

P

O

K

E

beneath my cloak.

Then the *scrape*.

I've been on my back before.

Only takes a minute.

Don't they all?

A line of blood lingers.

Routine.

Results in a few days.

You'll be sore.

That's part of riding.

And being ridden.

Back in the saddle.

Giddy UP.

Julia Ruth Smith

Marzipan

We pass a young girl in fishnets. She is bending over a plastic chair looking at her phone and I wonder if she uses social networks and keep thinking about it until we reach our house in the country. John doesn't even look and that's weird. If I were a man, I would pay to run my hands all over her splendid body. Heat spreads everywhere.

The children explode from the car. I've promised that today we'll collect almonds, which fall into the plastic container like heavy thoughts, *thunking* until we are satisfied. Sensing my distraction they soon sizzle into the pool and leave me with my hammer. I crack the almonds hard – one for every man who has left me unsatisfied, one for every hidden desire.

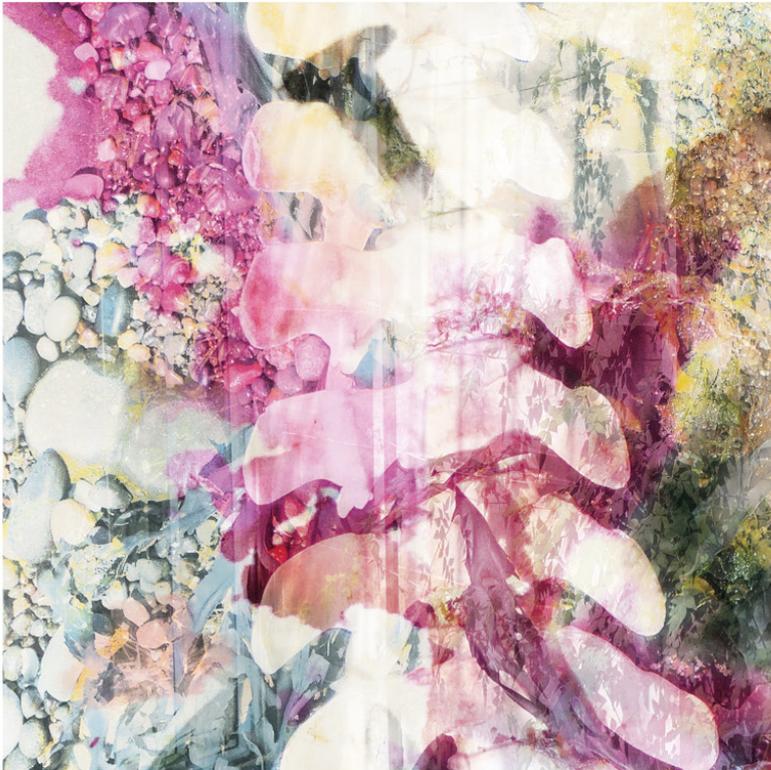
The almonds disintegrate violently on the patio, shards of kernel hit John and he flinches, 'What's got into you today?' He barely looks up and goes back to his book. After lunch the children sleep obediently and I mount him on the outdoor sofa until I climax silently, quickly, sweating. He's surprised. I wonder what her name is.

As I wash the dishes in our beautiful house, I wonder how much it would cost me to bring her here, how many times we could make love in a stolen afternoon, what her tongue would do to me. I slip into the bathroom and touch myself under the shower.

The slip road is empty as we drive back to the city. The girl has got lucky or had enough and gone home to watch some crime series with her boyfriend. We pass rows and rows of almond trees before the suburbs take over. The children are grimy, need showering, the next day they have school, homework to finish. Summer is over. John drives in silence and with his free hand traces circles around freckles on my legs, convinced.

Shona Wardrop
Discarded 3

DISCARDED 3



Bones change and decay
Over time
The effect of radiation

And chemotherapy making
Inroads on the mass
Erosion on the

Core female biology
Collateral damage
Screening stopped put

On hold by
A pandemic but
The disease keeps
Growing and spreading
It takes no
Notice of lockdowns

Masks or daily
Breaths thrives outside
The closed doors

10% of 10 000
In the UK
Alone go unseen

Untouched and undercover
Under where the cells
Make silent attacks

Emma Filtness

Tape

Today, I am held together by tape. This is not a metaphor. It's not meant to be a cheap, pseudo-poetic way of telling you I'm figuratively sticking myself back together after a bad break-up or a curt rejection or something far, far worse – cut to that scene in *Grey's Anatomy* where Miranda Bailey says she's busy with the tape and the glue.

Today, I am held together by tape, like the broken leg of a pair of glasses on the face of a clichéd nerd on TV, but it's both legs really, the lenses too. I guess that's where the simile ends, because I suck at maths and computers, and now I'm being unfairly reductive.

I sit here on my bed in a pair of my favourite big black Hag Club pants – and I mean *big* – that make me feel magical even when I'm held together by tape. The pants are designed and screen-printed by a woman in Australia, and on the front is a strategically placed Venus flytrap (it was a toss-up today between those and the lavender bush print). I stayed up until long past the witching hour to snap them up on Etsy, as she only makes a few, being a one-woman show. She posts them to me in a little box, and I enjoy looking at the stamps, knowing they've broken the laws of physics, traversing time-zones and seasons in a mere matter of days and flouting gravity on their way to cover my ample arse. Over the knickers, I wear a large black *Florence and the Machine* tour t-shirt from Ally Pally, the white print patchy and peeling from cycles of washing and wearing. Beneath that, I am gloriously braless, firm in my belief (if nothing else) that feeling my breasts press against the soft cotton of a laundered, well-loved band tee is one of life's greatest simple pleasures.

I unroll a few inches of tape from the coiled cake and snip it using scissors bought specifically for this purpose. The box they came in promised they'd cut through layers of the toughest fabric, like in all those hospital dramas on television where nurses cut through clothing so doctors can crack a chest or before shouting, 'Charging three-hundred, clear.' Kaboom! And I sit there thinking *you could have just pulled the zip or undid the buttons*, but maybe that would have killed the dramatic tension?

I round off all four edges on the rectangular strip of tape with the scissors like the person in the video tutorial recommended, peel the white backing off a little, and press a good inch of it onto the skin of the inside of my left knee (I've already done my ankles). Once it's firmly anchored, I pull off the remainder of the backing, like I'm removing the strip from the flap of a peel-and-seal envelope, and I stretch it a little, feeling the give in the

cotton-elastic combo, stick the other end in place, then smooth it down from end to end with a gentle but firm pressure from my palm. It now feels like my knee is getting a constant hug, which eases the ache and throb, and somehow makes me more aware of where it is, what it's doing – connected, if you will.

I try not to think about how much it's going to hurt when I attempt to remove the tape in a few days, as glue that can survive hot showers and chlorine at the pool is hardcore and committed. The Internet advises removing hair from the area before applying but shaving irritates my skin and makes my already-hirsute legs positively hypertrichotic – like Downey Jr in *Fur* before Nicole Kidman whips the straight-razor out – and I just couldn't stomp up the energy or mental endurance for a wax. Also, because feminism.

The tape comes in many colours. I avoided first-aid-plaster beige like the plague because it's just too medical and quite a bit racist, and whilst I was almost seduced by the 1980s-esque potential of neon pink and blue, picturing myself intriguingly taped yet otherwise nude – perhaps in an Emin installation or Bowie video, as an extra in a power ballad or interpretative dancing behind voile and silver confetti with Madonna – I settled for black. At first, I worried about the boldness of this, of it sitting stark against my pasty, doughy skin, but I gave in to my (not-so) inner goth, as usual.

When I first applied the tape, other than the almost instant soft relief from the unrestricting and unobtrusive support, I was surprised to find that it made me feel kind of badass. I looked at my legs and felt like an augmented human – a cyborg, perhaps – like I was now more powerful than before. Plus, walking hurt less, which helps, you know? I'd expected to feel a bit nervous about letting my partner see me with my tape on, but instead I eagerly beckoned them through to the bedroom to admire my cyberpunk legs (it helps that they're a massive sci-fi geek and all-round kind, accepting, body-positive legend).

I also felt OK about wearing tape visibly at work when my left elbow needed a bit of support, the black strips snaking out from the sleeve of my dress as I annotated an article while my students scribbled in the writing workshop I was facilitating. One student was wearing a more traditional wrist support, another came each week with their support dog. I'd worked hard to create a safe and inclusive space for my learners, and it was nice to feel at ease here myself. With years of working directly supporting young people and then adults with a range of disabilities, illnesses, and mental health conditions in education, I thought I had a pretty good awareness of things like accessibility, invisible illness and disability, and what it's like managing these alongside study and work. Since my diagnosis late last year, however, I've become much more aware, and for that I am grateful.

I have a hypermobility spectrum disorder (HSD), which means, put very simply, that my joints have a wider range of movement than is typical. This may sound like a fun party trick with sexy benefits, but what it actually means is that my joints get sore from over-extending, which they don't realise they're doing. I am now working hard to pay attention to where my joints are to prevent this when I can, especially with my knees, for example, but it's exhausting and research shows that people with HSD have poor proprioception, which means our brains aren't great at knowing where our joints are or what they're up to. My joints are extra bendy because my ligaments and other soft tissues are more stretchy than standard, so they don't hold the joints in place like they're meant to. My muscles have to step in to do that job as well, so they have to work way harder, which leads to muscle pain and epic fatigue, plus a host of other weird and not so wonderful symptoms and co-morbidities.

My bendiness has led to flexible flat feet. Stuff has moved around a bit in there, irritating ligaments and affecting the way I stand and walk, which in turn seems to be impacting my knees, too. It's a bit like *The Skeleton Dance*, you know? I went to see my GP after months of sore, stiff feet. At first I wrote it off, as I walk a lot and just thought I'd overdone it – I'm fat and I have really small feet: that's a lot of force spread over not much surface area. When it didn't go away, I thought, *well crap, it really is downhill after thirty, isn't it?* Then it got worse. My mum and my auntie both have rheumatoid arthritis, and whilst it mostly presents in their hands, I thought I better go get checked out.

After a long wait for an appointment with the rheumatologist, I received a swift, differential diagnosis after she looked at my elbows, poked at my knees, and made me do some of those party tricks in her office. She made referrals to physio, orthotics, and ultrasound, sent me to get what felt like two-hundred-and-sixty-five-and-a-half vials of my blood taken, made me wee into a cup, told me the disorder would never go away, there was no cure, bye now.

Following tons of internet research and speaking to others with the same and similar conditions in online communities, here I am, sticking little lengths of super-sticky black tape to my body so I can function a bit better, so it'll hurt a bit less (one of many self-care pain-management tools I've amassed). My Pinterest page, once full of dark bohemian décor ideas, gothic fashion, and veggie one-pot recipes, now flaunts diagrams of sporty people taped to the nines or instructional diagrams explaining how to cut and place tape for specific support and relief. Surprisingly, it also shows horses taped up too (I like the horses).

I had no idea what kinesiology tape was until recently. You may have seen it masquerading under a few other names and abbreviations too (this isn't product placement –

promise – just gratitude and insight). There are some leading brands, but these can be very pricey – and as I’ve been finding out, being disabled and/or chronically ill is really, *really* expensive. My first roll was from a more affordable high-street sports shop as it’s intended for sports injuries and recovery. I was sceptical yet desperate, and it was love at first stick.

I save tape for when I’m having a flare, or when I know I’ve got a busy few days with lots of unavoidable standing, walking, and travelling (busy teaching days, visiting galleries, going to gigs in venues without seats, which is most of them when your taste in music is a bit niche).

Today, I am held together by tape. I wear it with pride, as a way of making the invisible visible and showing there is no shame in needing support. Let’s stick together – we’ve got this.



CONTRIBUTORS

ANGELA JEFFS moved to Japan in 1986 (after twenty years editing books and magazines in London), reinventing herself as a journalist, writer and writing guide. She is now based in Scotland where, as well as leading writing workshops, she is currently writing and curating a collaborative archive-directed diary with students and other writers. She has published three books and is halfway through her memoirs.

Website: www.angelajeffs.com

BETH HARTLEY is a poet of people and place; the transient and the eternal. ‘I make: home, faith, work, words and dinner. Itchy preacher, always Mama’. Beth is part of the FenSpeak team, running and hosting Ely’s main poetry night. Her first poetry collection, *What if Stars*, is out now with Allographic Press.

<https://linktr.ee/PoetryBees>

Dr **CHARLEY BARNES** is an author and academic from Worcestershire. She is a lecturer in Creative and Professional Writing at the University of Wolverhampton, a workshop facilitator, and editor. She writes both poetry – most recently *Myth | Woman*, co-authored with Claire Walker – and fiction published under the name of Charlotte.

Twitter [@charleyblogs](https://twitter.com/charleyblogs)

Website: www.charleybarneswriter.com

CHRISTINE ANNE FOLEY Christine Foley is a Dublin-based writer from Kilkenny with a degree in English from Trinity College Dublin and a master’s in Creative Writing from Oxford University. Her play *Let Your Hair Down* was performed at the Burton Taylor Studio in Oxford. Her work has appeared in *Skirting Around*, *Neurological*, and *Sonder Magazine*. She recently won first prize in the Michael Mullen Flash Fiction Competition 2021.

Instagram: [@yellowpolkadotbikiniblog](https://www.instagram.com/yellowpolkadotbikiniblog)

DAHLIA AL-SHELLEBY is a doctor working in London. When she’s not at the hospital, she enjoys writing fiction, delving into adventures on her bike, organising murder mysteries and games nights for friends, and incessantly making memes of/for her colleagues. Her infectious enthusiasm and uplifting nature have earned her the title of Wellbeing Champion during the pandemic.

Dr **EMMA FILTNESS** (she/her) is a queer, disabled writer and lecturer in Creative Writing at Brunel University London. Emma has recently published visual poems and essays with Osmosis Press and *Fruit Journal*, among others.

Twitter: [@Em_Filtness](https://twitter.com/Em_Filtness) & [@poetrycoterie](https://twitter.com/poetrycoterie)

Instagram: [@wight_acionite](https://www.instagram.com/wight_acionite)

GISELA HAENSEL is a localization expert, mindfulness instructor, and writer who's been blogging about her experience as an expat in Silicon Valley since 2005. She holds an MA in German and French from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and officially kicked off her English writing with a Stanford course ten years ago.

Website: <https://kalifornienjournal.wordpress.com/>

JO COLLEY is a poet and publisher (Blueprint Poetry Press), with an interest in the digital presentation of text. She makes poetry films and artefacts, blogs about clothes and produces podcasts. Her latest collection *Sleeper* was published by Smokestack in February 2020.

Twitter: [@jocolley](https://twitter.com/jocolley)

Instagram: [#jocolley](https://www.instagram.com/jocolley)

JULIA RUTH SMITH (she/her) is a teacher, mother, and writer. She lives by the sea in Italy. Her prose and poetry can be found in *Full House Literary Magazine*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, *Tattie Zine*, *Anamorphoseis Magazine*, and *Literary Glittery*. SL for the Retreat West Micro Contest.

Twitter: [@JuliaRuthSmith1](https://twitter.com/JuliaRuthSmith1)

JULIE STEPHEN Graduating from Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen, Julie put her expressive drawing skills to good use for many years as an art and design teacher. Julie is now working independently as a visual artist and freelance illustrator. She creates quirky narrative, comical figures, and colourful abstract prints.

Instagram: [@theartfulcorner](https://www.instagram.com/theartfulcorner)

JUNE MARCHBANK is an artist based in Dumfries. She has a BA in Art & Design and after retiring from banking focused on developing her artwork and creativity. June is a member of DAGFAS, Thornhill Art Group, and For Enjoyment. She enjoys experimenting and being creative.

KATE FALVEY's work has been fairly widely published in an eclectic array of journals and anthologies; in a full-length collection, *The Language of Little Girls* (David Robert Books); and in two chapbooks, *What the Sea Washes Up* (Dancing Girl Press) and *Morning Constitutional in Sunhat and Bolero* (Green Fuse Poetic Arts). She co-founded and edited the *2 Bridges Review*, published through City Tech (City University of New York) where she teaches, and is an associate editor for the *Bellevue Literary Review*.

KATE MEYER-CURREY moved to Devon in 1973. A varied career in frontline settings has fuelled her interest in gritty urbanism, contrasted with a rural upbringing. Her first chapbook, *County Lines* (Dancing Girl Press), comes out this autumn. Her second, *Cuckoo's Nest* (Contraband Books), is due in February 2022.

LAURA BROWN After a long break from writing, 'My Winter Skin' is the first poem Laura has written in a long time. When she isn't procrastinating or caring for family members, Laura lives in a bubble of reading, painting, making things, tree gazing, beachcombing, seeing friends, and binge-watching boxsets.

Instagram: [olaurabrownwriting](https://www.instagram.com/olaurabrownwriting)

Twitter: [olaurabrownno](https://twitter.com/olaurabrownno)

Native New Yorker **LINDAANN LOSCHIAVO**, recently Poetry SuperHighway's Poet of the Week, is a member of SFPA and The Dramatists Guild. Elgin Award winner *A Route Obscure and Lonely* and *Concupiscent Consumption* are her latest poetry titles. Forthcoming is a paranormal collection of ghost poems, a collaborative horror chapbook, and an Italian-centric book, *Flirting with the Fire Gods*, inspired by her Aeolian Island heritage. She has been leading a poetry critique group for two years.

<https://linktr.ee/LindaAnn.LoSchiavo>

Twitter: @Mae_Westside

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHm1NZIITZybLTFA44wwdfg>

LUCIA CASCIOLI is a Canadian writer. She has written nine books. Her work is included in *People, Places, Passages: An Anthology of Canadian Literature* and in *Litro* and *Stile* magazines. Lucia holds an MLitt in Creative Writing (with Distinction) from the University of Glasgow.

Twitter: @Luciawriter

Website: luciacascioli.ca

MARGARET GRANT is from Ireland but lived in Japan for eleven years and will shortly be relocating to Thailand. She holds an MA in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University and works in education. Her debut novel, *Three Eleven*, is available on Amazon in paperback and eBook formats.

Website: margaretgrantnovelist.com

Instagram: [margaretgrantnovelist](https://www.instagram.com/margaretgrantnovelist)

MEREDITH GRACE THOMPSON (she/they) is a Canadian white settler writer and editor from Amiskwciwâskahikan. Their work can be found in *SPAM zine&Press*, *GNU Journal*, *The Dallas Review*, *-algia magazine*, *Queltehue Ediciones*, and more. She is editor of *BlueHouse Journal*, co-editor of *orangeapplepress*, and a contributing reviewer for *Cloud Lake Literary*.

Twitter: @horatio_grace

Instagram: @meredithgracethompson

NISE MCCULLOCH is a writer, poet, and artist. She has recently completed an MFA in Creative Writing from Birkbeck, University of London. Previous lives saw Nise as a teacher, director of literary festivals, curator of literary events and community heritage art projects.

Twitter: @niseword

Website: www.nisemcculloch.com

PRERNA MAJUMDAR is a passionate twenty-four-year-old writer. She enjoys writing about issues that matter to her. Sharing her life experiences with her readers along with comforting them, providing insight on issues, and entertaining them are some of the many reasons behind why she loves writing.

Instagram: [prerna.maj](https://www.instagram.com/prerna.maj)

RUSHIKA WICK is a doctor and poet with an interest in visual poetry. Her first collection *Afterlife As Trash* was published by Verve in 2021 and highly commended at the Forward Prizes.

Instagram: @rushikawick

Twitter: @RushikaWick

SANTOSH K DARY is a member of the Punjabi Women's Writing Group and has attended a creative writing course run by Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in Wolverhampton. She has read her stories at the Wolverhampton and Ironbridge Literature Festivals and at events celebrating Diwali and Vaisakhi with other Punjabi Women. Santosh has contributed to collections of Japanese poetry, featuring in *Ripening Cherries* published by Offa's Press. Earlier this year the Arts Foundry published her childhood experience in the *Living Memory Book* and *The Faith Initiative* magazine has also included her poem 'A Divine Journey' in its publication.

SARAH DOYLE is the Pre-Raphaelite Society's Poet-in-Residence, and is widely placed and published, with a pamphlet of collage poetry inspired by Dorothy Wordsworth's journals – *Something so wild and new in this feeling* – published by V. Press in March 2021. She is currently researching a PhD in meteorological poetry at Birmingham City University.

Website: sarahdoyle.co.uk

Twitter: [@PoetSarahDoyle](https://twitter.com/PoetSarahDoyle)

SARAH OBA A long-term resident of Tokyo, Sarah has left the big city in favor of a forest along the border of a sprawling park bursting with autumn foliage in the rural town of Nasushiobara - a region with a long history of attracting writers and poets - and even Japan's Imperial family - to its hot springs and relaxed pace.

SASHA SABEN CALLAGHAN is an artist and writer, living in Edinburgh. She was a winner of the 2016 'A Public Space' Emerging Writer Fellowship and the 2019 Pen to Paper Award. Her illustrations have featured in a wide range of journals, magazines, and exhibitions, including Shape Open 2020. She is a National Executive member of the Scottish Artist Union. Sasha's lived experience of disability and impairment is a major influence on her work.

Twitter: [@SabenCallaghan](https://twitter.com/SabenCallaghan)

Instagram: [@SashaSabens](https://www.instagram.com/SashaSabens)

SASKIA MCCRACKEN (she/her) is a Glasgow-based writer and editor at Osmosis Press. Her publications include *Imperative Utopia* (-algia press), *Cyanotype* (Dancing Girl Press) and *Zero Hours* (Broken Sleep Books). Her work appears in publications including *Magma*, *Datableed*, *Amberflora*, and *Zarf*, and has been anthologised by Dostoyevsky Wannabe and Spam Press.

Twitter: [@SaskiadeRM](https://twitter.com/SaskiadeRM)

Website: <https://saskiamccracken.wordpress.com/>

SHONA WARDROP is a Scottish artist emerging after graduation with BA (Hons) in Contemporary Art Practice. The Artist investigates through a variety of methods and materials the processes which act to oppress and marginalise. Deconstructing and reconstructing the often-invisible forces that both confine, contain, and define.

Instagram: [@shonawardrop](https://www.instagram.com/shonawardrop)

Linktree: <https://linktr.ee/shonawardrop>

WENDY BIRSE grew up surrounded by quick wits and smart asses, hearing nonsense rhymes, spontaneous doggerel and songs, and clever wordplay. Her later studies included English Linguistics, and she has continued to play with language, scripting pantomimes and producing poems when life provides inspiration. Her grandchildren are learning to embrace the fun.

Website: www.stressfreefamilies.co.uk

