

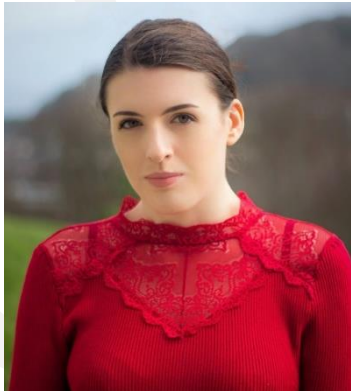


# ***AFTERFEATHER***



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## ***Black Bough Poetry, Summer 2022***



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## **Contents**

- 5:** The Sky Road Home, *Rhona Greene*
- 5:** self contained, *Lynn Valentine*
- 6:** June, *Letitia Jiju*
- 6:** Sleep, *Jamie Woods*
- 7:** Scree, *Marta Bílková*
- 8:** Strawberries, *Louise Machen*
- 8:** Expectation, *Helen Laycock*
- 9:** Barren, *Thea Otípková*
- 9:** The Chill, *Elizabeth Barton*
- 10:** I haven't marked my days the right way, *Lee Potts*
- 11:** And still..., *Alison Lock*
- 11:** The neocortex has a lot to answer for, *Ankh Spice*
- 12:** Maiden Voyage, *Briony Collins*
- 13:** How Gold they are, Before they Fall, *Anna Saunders*
- 14:** there is no colour without light, *Gerry Stewart*
- 14:** Slowworm, *Louise Longson*
- 14:** Sundial, *Vikki C.*
- 15:** The Growl, *Roger Hare*
- 16:** Horses, *John McCullough*
- 16:** Hand and Hairpins, *Zoë Brigley*
- 17:** Wellspring, *Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahla*
- 18:** Aurora Magic, *Matthew M.C. Smith*
- 18:** In Hollow Copse, *Laura Hemmington*
- 18:** On a Summer Morning, *Merril D. Smith*
- 19:** Biographies
- 22:** Recommended Reading

# ***AFTERFEATHER***

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## **Content Warning:**

**Please be aware that some of the poems in *Afterfeather* discuss sensitive topics, such as miscarriage, stillbirth, infertility, death, and grief.**

## The Sky Road Home

Walked up the long gone  
avenue to my old gone  
long-ago school. Found myself – there – under  
the chestnut tree, behind the bicycle shed – rusty, skeletal remains  
fallen horse chestnut brown time-forgotten deep buried  
relics. Resurrected a little russet-red conker-headbanger girl.  
‘Whose child is this?’ wheezed the unsettled  
breeze that rattled and shook the shivering leaves still  
clinging to an imperceptible line of invisible  
trees uncast at last from their long dark shadows.  
‘She’s mine!’ I exclaimed and reclaimed myself. Light  
as a feather unfalling to bird, we took the sky  
road home - together. Feather, afterfeather.

– *Rhona Greene*

## self

## contained

an unsettling	in the hawthorn bush
a winter wind	rips at spring
white petals	violated
grass too long	in the churned up lawn
roses clenched	anxious in their own heads
by the wall	another dead rabbit
lost to a virus	or fall of poison
body slack	eyes locked on sky
rooks arrive	a bicker of wings
pick over	gristle veins
a line of pines lean	on hills unmoving

– *Lynn Valentine*

## June\*

*Meenachil* scintillates  
a cricket-sung silence.  
I sing back.

We ashen  
into rain,  
*ividey* —

here  
we refract,  
here  
strewn in the lone dimple  
of god's smile,  
*avidey* —  
we meet again.  
Everywhere.

– *Letitia Jiju*

## Sleep

Just boys stabbing at buzzing guitars, wielded semi-automatic,  
cigarette smoke shimmers, auraed with lava-lamp desperation,  
until daylight breaks, enters through summoning curtains, dust  
mote beacons,  
white chrysanthemums and murderous birdsong weaponized,  
a broadsword swipes flatly, sharp rays poison and pollinate,  
prising apart the shielding fingers, expose my naked streaming  
eyes, and grief chisels my cindered heart again:  
he was alive in my dream.

– *Jamie Woods*

**\*Malayalam word translations:**

Meenachil: *the arterial river of the district of Kottayam in Kerala*

Ividey: 'here'

Avidey: *'there'*

## Scree

The dry crunch of  
granite fracturing,

The sparkling outrage  
in marmot's scream,

After hours  
of climbing up stones  
unturned,

Have you heard it too?  
Sun ravened the world and  
I have lost

to your silence.

Below this one last rock restrained  
with steel cables, iron rungs,

Seeing you grasp at it,  
Seeing how

terribly  
it holds.

– *Marta Bílková*



*i wish there was nothing i could do*

## Strawberries

The strawberry plants that flowered in spring  
have been wiped out in this morning's storm

along with the garden fence and the tiny  
cloche they were housed in.

I can't help thinking they'll be nothing for breakfast  
and I don't want to go home.

This coffee tastes cheap and the concern  
of strangers is unsettling.

I have my clothing in a sealed bag but no reply  
to my messages. They tell me I'm free to leave

when all I'm left with are bloodstained jeans  
and this lonely bus ride.

– *Louise Machen*

## Expectation

Curled in a seashell  
sunk in my skin,  
you hear my heart surge.

Away from the swell,  
you dwell,  
a membrane away

from the salt-lash,  
the splintered wrist-pull  
into soft wreckage.

You pale,  
unfurled  
in the wash of the waiting world;

frail waves splash:  
cool you  
blue.

– *Helen Laycock*



## Barren

In the end the winter always  
moves inside, tired of its own cold.  
It settles on chrome and glass,  
in porcelain bowls. Behind mirrors.  
Not often now but still,  
she grows unexpectant,  
which is when she tightropes  
mothers' watchful stares in parks,  
and falls and lands  
on children's voices.  
At home she lights a fire,  
its glow eating through the dark,  
swallowing  
the chill.

– *Radka Thea Otípková*

## The Chill

An icepick cleaves my back  
breaking my bones of ice;  
chill fire-flash reverberates  
in every pondered movement,  
every step a blow in the ancient  
guarded snowpacked wasteland  
that has become my body;  
I am a snowdrift today, slow  
as the world's turning, a cold sphere  
holding a core burning in veins  
hot tipped to my skin, fevered ice  
jarring nerves like lava seeking  
the cool surface of snows,  
inching defiant, hacked chill  
to the precipice of muffled blows  
hurtling in the thunder of my head.

– *Elizabeth Barton*



*minimum viable product 3*

## **I haven't marked my days the right way**

It's like I only managed to twist together bits  
of yarn and thread picked out of my old clothes  
and blankets, scorched and acrid, into cords  
just to knot off each full moon. I counted months  
and years of those fat, pitted stones cast over  
the ocean's edge and all I have are numbers.  
I know how many full moons, Masses skipped,  
bottles of red wine, lawns cut, broken locks,  
borrowed beds but I have no sketch books  
or photos and the words I said and heard were tossed  
into the compost like the bitter skin of an orange.  
But I can't stop looking back and my fingers  
are nicked and raw and sting from trying to hold on.

**– Lee Potts**

### **And still...**

by sea-spewn waste  
a reek of salt

bright glow buoys  
watch surfers

ride the outlet  
slack-sheet boats

wait by bleached jetties  
empty creels

piled on neon-waves  
litter rattles

a slipway as we yawn  
the deepest blues

lace-petals  
on a porcelain sky.

**– Alison Lock**

### **The neocortex has a lot to answer for**

Sun halfway through her dizzy life—

only yesterday the great hoot

expanded to cradle a notion

waxed so giant. By treadle and by jaw

each bone box creaks awake, echoing

with terror at its own capacity.

And through canopy's dapple, the sun just nods

and continues to palm-and-drop the same soft,

bright leaves. *Ah, look up.*

*This for you, baffled little ape. And this.*

Mobile light, entranced pupil, once beneath this

we were branch-sway. Once she was the only watchfire

we had, once her estranged mother-dark rocked us kindly

and we nested dumb and unalone and ripe stars fell

freely into our unworded mouths

and we thought nothing—

not one thing of it.

**– Ankh Spice**



## Maiden Voyage *(excerpt)*

The longboat shudders its keel  
    rears itself to cut the wave  
        A raven sits on the bow

*Hrafn?*

        with its oil-spill feathers  
    beak hooked to fish directions  
from a night as thin as wind

*Hrafn?*

        blinks cut into salt dark  
    rheum gathering in corners  
eclipsed by a membrane

*Hrafn?*

I steer this vessel  
    moon-starched epidermis and fatty tissue  
    But these waters are new

        what am I

                what          are          I

                        our eyes black as beaches  
                    a creature calling  
oh gods                      *define me*

– *Briony Collins*

## How Gold they are, Before they Fall

In the last days of his life  
my father lay on his bed, slender as a sapling.

All through his illness, he was rooted to home,  
his energy slowly seeping out.

How luminous he was, in his late season,  
his eyes beatific.

The leaves look radiant  
as they hang above the dark earth.

How gold they are, before they fall.

– *Anna Saunders*



*minimum viable product 2*

## there is no colour without light

*falling light - painting by jenny mclaren*

smirr  
straight shiver of silver  
down the spine pine-threaded  
a mountain cup  
filled with the hush rushing stand-still  
sparks of rain  
break the thrall shawl of gray  
thrown over the loch  
smudged pale exhale

– *Gerry Stewart*

## Slowworm

finding you  
under the sun-  
weighted stone; molten-bright  
gold and patinated bronze scales-  
the unalloyed  
wonder

– *Louise Longson*

## Sundial

We planted light in late summer  
the kind that falls unannounced  
a pale blossom on bare shoulders  
rain sliding off the statues of a lost era

how the sky took us to seed, fists unfurling  
as if fearless of a sundial antiquated with shadows  
my collarbone collecting it all for the tiny birds  
your eyes perfecting the art of Elysium

a flood spilling over, as it must  
bright peonies protesting all my wars  
marigolds as peace signs on every corner  
the scent of mercy, in the garden

the bouquet I saved for the end  
when fields were fallow, doors bolted,  
watching from the annex, windows misted  
your distant body, a god shaped cloud

along the arched spine of Polzeath bay,  
gloaming, a plum, bruised in your palm  
to have it all, stained with the injuries of a full life  
oh...how the storm keeps coming.

– *Vikki C.*





*Arrange your life in order to attract predators*

## **The Growl**

prises apart the muscles and mucosa  
of livid vocal cords, rakes the air  
into migraines that wrack a resting grin  
into a rictus to release it,  
to pluck its claws on my malleus,  
incus and stapes, to trace  
blood's flow beneath  
the thin skin of my civility.

The growl burns behind the hound's eyes, deep  
in a cave in a cliff in a company of fur  
that learned to be heard  
by rock and wraith alike.  
My shadow rises  
but cannot withstand the dark song,  
retreats and slips from the edge to leave me  
clinging to the lip of a precipice  
by the untutored fingertips of my longing.

*– Roger Hare*

## Horses

Now I'm a cricket, I hide in Gertrude Stein's cuckoo clock,  
waiting to sing.

I'm a deviant falling from the roof of a car park.

Lonely, I get bladdered with Sappho and dance.

I'm the plumber who leaves a floater in Thatcher's toilet.

Clubbed in a police cell, my sandcastle face crumbles.

A handkerchief in Claude McKay's breast pocket, I thrill  
beside his riotous heart.

I can never express all of myself at once, the hole of me.

I hunt my scattered names but the past wears ice skates,  
keeps curving about.

When I die on Brighton Pier, the carousel organ will stop,  
the gilded horse I'm slumped on will vanish.

Secretly, I'll still be riding full pelt.

*– John McCullough*

## Hand and Hairpins

Dear Stieglitz –

Remember the photograph  
you took from behind –

my  
hand pinning hair for the  
flash of neck  
and shoulders bare – the white  
tips of my fairy  
ears – & you even caught  
the Pleiades on  
the side of my face. There –  
the view you saw each day

& here your own fingers  
– twisting the hair to a stump.

*– Zoë Brigley*



## Wellspring

Songbirds ricochet off  
the midday firmament.

sand tempests snuff breath—  
sacs of shriveled alveoli.

She levitates into the ether,  
mellow mother-goddess

smoothing the foil  
of inclement skies.

Vengeful suns dwindle—  
oases open in her palms,

as aviaries of finches stir,  
beaks agape, thirsting for

her emerald waters  
amniotic wellspring—

maternal mercy.

– *Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad*



*the sex and diet of dead things*



## **Aurora Magic**

Only once we caught fluorescent  
flashes of the Northern lights,  
beyond the bite of the Great Bear's  
diamonds; a ghoulish spectre under  
hailing starlight. We were there.  
Our fingers tangled, smooth flesh  
over bones crossed. We looked on,  
eyes wide, glimpsing aurora; our souls  
as spectres in brief brilliance. And there,  
the mountains fell to the east, to dawn's  
far region where fields of frost  
blind the eyes of the waking god.  
We were there, alive and one.

*– Matthew M.C. Smith*

## **In Hollow Copse**

Late solstice sun —  
day descending soft  
to needle peppered gorge  
where comet tails make  
double helix  
burnished coppers  
click and burr

*– Laura Hemmington*

## **On a Summer Morning**

I watch the osprey fly, bobble-winged  
she dives beak first through reflected clouds,  
white sheets hanging on the river's surface,

plunging like joy, to rise in hope  
with iridescent-scaled prize, a rainbow carried  
into a sky of blueberries and cream,

now crow-chatter, robin trill, and a cardinal's red flash,  
remind me of the hour, I walk toward the sun and you, home.

*– Merril D. Smith*

# Biographies

## The Afterfeather Team

**Briony Collins** is the author of *Blame it on Me* and *All That Glisters*, both published by Broken Sleep Books. Her next instalment of poetry – *The Birds, The Rabbits, The Trees* – is forthcoming with them in April 2023. Currently, Briony manages her time between running *Cape Magazine* and working on her PhD. Website: [www.brionycollins.co.uk](http://www.brionycollins.co.uk) / Twitter: @ri\_collins

**Alex Stevens** is a mixed-media artist living in Cardiff. Using references from anatomy, zoology, and biology, he attempts to make images that shred the veil between magic and science, dream and nightmare, the mundane and the uncanny. His work has appeared in a variety of publications, including *Steel Incisors*, *Penteract Press*, *The Ghastling*, and *WyrDaze*. Twitter: @abjectobjects / Instagram: @abject\_objects

**Matthew M.C. Smith** is a 'Best of the Net' nominated writer from Swansea with work in *Poetry Wales*, *The Lonely Crowd* and *Broken Spine*. He is editor on Twitter of @TopTweetTuesday and @blackboughpoems. Twitter: @MatthewMCSmith

**Rhona Greene** is an avid poetry fan and accidental emerging writer from Dublin delighted to be published with Black Bough Poetry in their *Freedom-Rapture* anthology and Christmas / Winter editions Vol. 2 & 3 and online @sacosw Advent Poems 2021. She's thrilled to be in this special Summer edition. Twitter: @Rhona\_Greene

**Lynn Valentine** lives in the Scottish Highlands. Her debut collection, *Life's Stink and Honey*, was published by Cinnamon Press in 2022, after winning the Cinnamon Literature Award. Her Scots language pamphlet, *A Glimmer o Stars*, was published by Hedgehog Poetry Press in 2021, after winning their dialect competition. Twitter: @dizzylynn

**Letitia Jiju** has a penchant for imagist poems and retelling the divine & the mythological. Her poems have appeared/are forthcoming in *Zero Readers*, *Amethyst Review*, *Moist Poetry Journal*, *Acropolis Journal* and *Emirates Literature Festival*. She serves as Poetry Editor at *Mag 20/20*. You can find her on Instagram/Twitter @eaturlettuce

**Jamie Woods** is a writer from Swansea, with poems in *Poetry Wales*, *Ink Sweat & Tears* and *Spoonie Journal*, and fiction in *Evergreen Review* and *The Lonely Crowd*. He is poet-in-residence at the charity *Leukaemia Care*, and was commended in the *Hippocrates International Prize for Poetry and Medicine 2021*. Website: [www.jamiewoods77.com](http://www.jamiewoods77.com) / Twitter: @JamieWoods77

**Marta Bílková** is a logician and poet from Prague, Czechia, writing in Czech and English. She has been a finalist of Básně SK/CZ 2021, with her collection of twelve poems published in the competition volume. Occasional photographer and graphic arts lover, she aims to make it all work together eventually. Twitter: @MartaBilkova

**Louise Machen** is a Mancunian poet and a graduate of The Centre for New Writing at The University of Manchester. Her poetry likes to explore relationships through narrative and visual detail and has most recently appeared in *Grand Little Things*, *The Olney Magazine*, *Forge Zine* and *Full House Literary*. Twitter: @LouLouMach

**Helen Laycock** is a poet and storyteller. Her writing has appeared at *Reflex Fiction*, the *Ekephrastic Review*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Visual Verse*, *Paragraph Planet*, *Serious Flash Fiction*, *Flash Flood*, *Popshot*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Full Moon and Foxglove*, *The Caterpillar*, et al. She is currently compiling themed poetry collections and a second volume of microfiction. Twitter: @helen\_laycock

**Radka Thea Otípková**'s first language is Czech, but she writes poetry exclusively in English. In 2019 she won the *Waltham Forest Poetry Competition*. Her poems have appeared online in *B O D Y* and *Moria* and in print in *The North* and *Tears in the Fence*. Twitter: @thea\_otipkova

**Elizabeth Barton** is a poet and artist from New Zealand with work featured in various online journals including Fevers of the Mind, Amphora, The Hyacinth Review, as well as the anthologies Vita Brevis Press: Nothing Divine Dies, Black Bough Poetry's Rapture: Dark Confessions and Winter/Christmas Edition 2021. A winner of the White Label Cinq poetry competition in 2020, she has a collection soon to be published with Hedgehog Poetry Press. Twitter: @DestinyAngel25

**Lee Potts**, author of the chapbook *And Drought Will Follow* (Frosted Fire, 2021), is poetry editor at *Barren Magazine*. His work has appeared in *The Night Heron Barks*, *Rust + Moth*, *Whale Road Review*, *UCity Review*, *Firmament*, *Moist Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. He lives just outside of Philadelphia. Twitter: @LeePottsPoet

**Alison Lock's** poetry, fiction, and non-fiction has been published widely. Her poetry collections are: *A Slither of Air* (2011), *Beyond Wings* (2015), *Revealing the Odour of Earth* (2017), *Lure* (2020), broadcast on Radio 3, and, most recently, *Unfurling* (2022) – a sequence written as a response to the lockdown. Website: [www.alisonlock.com](http://www.alisonlock.com) / Twitter: @alilock4

**Ankh Spice** is an Aotearoa New Zealand poet, author of *The Water Engine* (Femme Salvé Books, 2021). His prize-winning poetry is widely published, eight times nominated for Pushcart Prize/Best of the Net. He's a poetry contributing editor at Barren Magazine and co-edits at IceFloe Press. Website: [www.ankhspice-seagoatscreamspetry.com](http://www.ankhspice-seagoatscreamspetry.com) / Twitter: @SeaGoatScreamsPoetry / Facebook: @AnkhSpiceSeaGoatScreamsPoetry

**Anna Saunders** is the author of *Communion*, (Wild Conversations Press), *Struck*, (Pindrop Press) *Kissing the She Bear*, (Wild Conversations Press), *Burne Jones and the Fox* (Indigo Dreams) *Ghosting for Beginners* (Indigo Dreams), and *Feverfew* (Indigo Dreams). Anna is the CEO and founder of Cheltenham Poetry Festival. Twitter: @AnnaSaund1

**Gerry Stewart** is a poet, creative writing tutor and editor based in Finland. Her poetry collection Post-Holiday Blues was published by Flambard Press, UK. Caledonian Antisyzygy is to be published by Hedgehog Poetry Press in 2022. Writing blog: <http://thistlewren.blogspot.fi/> / Twitter: @grimalkingerry

**Louise Longson** started writing in her late 50s, during isolation in lockdown 2020 and has since been widely published in print and online. She is the author of chapbooks *Hanging Fire* (Dreich Publications, 2021) and *Songs from the Witch Bottle: cytoplasmic variations* (Alien Buddha Press, 2022). Twitter: @LouisePoetical

**Vikki C.** is a British born poet and fiction writer whose work features vivid imagery inspired by the themes of existentialism, science and nature. Her writing has been published in several anthologies. She is also a spoken word artist, pianist and composer. Twitter: @VWC\_Writes

**Roger Hare** writes from a love of being diverted by an idea, something overheard, an observation, insight or emotion and the stimulation offered by works of art. He's published in several online/in-print magazines and anthologies, is a two-time competition prizewinner and Pushcart nominated in 2021. Twitter: @RogerHare6

**John McCullough's** book of poems, *Reckless Paper Birds* (Penned in the Margins) won the 2020 Hawthornden Prize for Literature and was shortlisted for the Costa Poetry Award. His new collection, *Panic Response*, includes 'Flower of Sulphur', shortlisted for the 2021 Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. He lives in Hove. Twitter: @JohnMcCullough\_

**Zoë Brigley** is a Welsh-American writer with three award winning collections of poetry from Bloodaxe and a book of nonfiction essays. She is editor of *Poetry Wales*, a poetry editor at Seren Books, and works at the Ohio State University. She edited *100 Poems to Save the Earth* (Seren 2021). Website: [www.zoebigley.com](http://www.zoebigley.com) / Twitter: @ZoeBrigley

**Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad** is an Indian-Australian artist, poet, and improv pianist. Her art and poetry have been published in various journals and anthologies including *Eunoia Review*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Bracken Magazine*, and *Black Bough Poetry*. Twitter: @oormilaprahlad / Instagram: @oormila\_paintings



**Laura Hemmington** is a writer and freelance copywriter who recently left London for the Isle of Wight. Her poems have appeared in Crab Creek Review, Visual Verse, Emerge, and No Contact. Twitter: @laurahemmington

**Merril D. Smith** lives and writes in southern New Jersey near the Delaware River. Her poetry has been published in previous issues of Black Bough Poetry as well as in other journals. Her full-length collection, *River Ghosts*, was published by Nightingale and Sparrow Press. Twitter: @merril\_mds

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## Recommended Reading

Community is the lifeblood of poetry. Continue your support by checking out some of Black Bough's friends.

### **Books:**

*Blame it on Me* – Briony Collins (Broken Sleep, 2021)

*All That Glisters* – Briony Collins (Broken Sleep, 2022)

*Origin: 21 Poems* – Matthew M.C. Smith (Amazon, 2018)

*Under Photon Crowns* – Dai Fry (Black Bough, 2021)

*Deep Time Vol. 1* (Black Bough, 2020)

*Deep Time Vol. 2* (Black Bough, 2020)

*Christmas & Winter Vol. 1* (Black Bough, 2020)

*Christmas & Winter Vol. 2* (Black Bough, 2021)

*Dark Confessions* (Black Bough, 2021)

*Freedom-Rapture* (Black Bough, 2021)

### **Forthcoming:**

*The Birds, The Rabbits, The Trees* – Briony Collins (Broken Sleep, 2023)

*Nights on the Line* – M.S. Evans (Black Bough, 2022)

*The Keeper of Aeons* – Matthew M.C. Smith (The Broken Spine, 2022)

*Christmas & Winter Vol. 3* (Black Bough, 2022)

*(Tutankhamun Centenary Anthology – Title TBA)* (Black Bough, 2023)

*(T.S. Eliot's The Wasteland Centenary Anthology – Title TBA)* (Black Bough, 2023)

### **Presses:**

**Cape Magazine**

<https://capemagazineteam.wixsite.com/mysite>

**Poetry Wales**

<https://poetrywales.co.uk/>

**Broken Sleep Books**

<https://www.brokensleepbooks.com/>

**The Broken Spine**

<https://thebrokenspine.co.uk/>

**Barren Magazine**

<https://barrenmagazine.com/>