

INSIDE STORIES

An anthology
of creative
writing for
wellbeing

WINTER 2025

INTRODUCTION

Writing has been a constant throughout my life. a passion, a comfort, an obsession. It can be absorbing, thrilling and sometimes infuriating, yet I'm continually reminded how deeply it supports my wellbeing. During this year's course, I faced my own challenges, including a diagnosis of vocal cord nodules that left me unable to speak for several weeks. With the generous support of this wonderful group and the invaluable help of Emma Barclay, who became my voice for those sessions (and so much more!) I found renewed balance and perspective through our shared creativity.

It's been a privilege to work with such a brave and imaginative community on the 2025 Arts Uplift Creative Writing for Wellbeing course with the Recovery & Wellbeing Academy. The range of work created has been remarkable – from plays and novels to short stories, poetry and even a concept album in development.

This anthology offers just a glimpse of that creativity – writing that celebrates resilience, curiosity and connection. My heartfelt thanks to Jenny, Emma and to every participant for the honesty, care and inspiration they've brought to this course.

TRISTAN JACKSON-PATE, COURSE FACILITATOR

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Also thanks to Tristan Jackson-Pate for delivering the workshops and designing this e-book. Finally a big thanks to all the volunteers that helped to support the project, especially Emma Barclay and to the writers who were brave enough to put pen to paper and share their work.

JENNY DAVIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARTS UPLIFT CIC



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WHO AM I?

Who am I?

This is not a riddle nor a game,
I am both calm and collected, erratic and insane.

Who am I?

Now lets think about this,
I have no plan but I love to make a list.

Who am I?

It is not cut and dry,
I can answer you in minutes or take a week to reply.

Who am I?

I am what you see,
I am what I do and I don't want to be.

Who am I?

A simple question to ask,
Some know my face or only see my mask.

Who am I?

Behind my walls,
To some I am everything, to others, nothing at all.

Who am I?

Who really knows?
I am my highs and I am my lows.

Who am I?

I am healthy and ill,
I have my frills and I have my spills.

Who am I?

I know how to love and to fight,
I am hated and loved, liked and disliked.

Who am I?

I can succeed and I can fail,
I am ME, with all that entails.

BY KIRSTY



INTEROCEPTED & MASKED: A CAUTIONARY TALE

Luminous Alchemy

Maleficence Made Flesh

He came not merely as intruder, but as maleficence made flesh. Every step deliberate, every breath heavy with rot and hunger. He carried malevolent intent, a corruption made corporeal, a calculated pursuit of the innocence he sought to consume. He did not stumble or fumble. He was ravenous in his purpose, a plague given shape.

The bed, once sanctuary, became battlefield. The blankets, heavy with dread, pressed down like molten lead. The air itself seemed poisoned, curling into corners, seeping into every plank and seam. She froze. She recoiled. Her small body remained beneath the sheets, almost invisible, almost weightless.

Approaching Shadows

Even as the child tried to step back into ordinary days, something in her body began preparing for a world no one acknowledged. She didn't have language, but she had instinct. She didn't know the word hypervigilant, but she knew how to listen, in ways most children never need to learn.

Her ears opened like a second form of sight. She could distinguish the rhythm of footsteps outside, long before anyone else heard them. The lift of the gate latch became a signal, a warning, a sudden tightening beneath her ribs. Every noise carried information. Every vibration in the air meant something.

And the walls noticed what the adults missed. They felt her breath change when he approached, the way her small shoulders drew inward, as if she were folding her spirit behind her bones to hide.

She learned, very quickly, to live inside silence.

Not the peaceful kind of silence—but the charged, suspended kind.
Silence that had weight.

Silence that could bruise.
Silence that waited in doorways.

Her childhood—already delicate—began to reshape itself around threat. While other children played in daylight, she was calculating risk. While others ran freely, she was observing escape routes in her mind. This is what happens when danger masquerades as ordinary life.

During the day she wore a face the world expected.
At night she became something else entirely—alert, listening,
holding herself tightly together as though pieces of her might scatter
if she loosened her grip.

And the juxtaposition began:
by daylight a child,
by night a sentinel.

Her body too young to carry such burdens,
yet already learning to navigate in shadows.

The shapeshifter, meanwhile, moved through the house as though it belonged to him alone. His presence thickened the rooms, turning the air heavy, turning silence into something watchful and dangerous.

The house hated him.
It truly did.

Though it could not speak, it trembled in its foundations each time he crossed the threshold, the way something ancient quivers at the presence of a predator.
It saw the smallness of the child, the enormity of her fear, and something like heartbreak seeped into its wallpaper and wood.

Because the house understood before anyone else:
something unspeakable had entered.

Calculating Silence

Yet her mind, astonishingly sharp for her years, calculated every risk. All doors were always closed — always — but she listened anyway. Her hearing had become so acute that she could discern the softest footstep outside, the subtle lift of the gate latch, the barely audible click before he reached the door. She noticed the slight rhythm of his breathing, the faint shuffle of his socks against the floor, the microscopic tilt of his shadow on the wall. Every vibration of the floor, every whisper of air through a crack, every faint creak of wood was recorded and interpreted. She mapped the room, noted the angle of light, the placement of objects, even the subtle tremor in the floorboards beneath her. Hypervigilance had become second nature; every instinct, every micro-movement, every tilt of her head was a deliberate act of survival. She intercepted danger and masked her fear, a strategist in miniature, a child whose mind danced ahead of the predator.

Even at this tender age, she had become a silent architect of escape. She repositioned a chair just so to muffle a shifting footfall, slid a blanket across a corner to create the illusion of shadow, pressed her ear to the floor to track distant movement. She noted patterns in his behaviour, pauses before certain steps, the tension in his shoulders, the faint scent in the air that preceded his approach. She learned to make herself almost imperceptible — weightless as a whisper, silent as a shadow.

The Cost of Survival

And yet, despite her brilliance, the cost was immense. Her childhood, meant to be filled with play, laughter, and curiosity, was paid in silence, fear, and constant calculation. She did not grow as other children do — the simplicity of friendship, the lightness of joy, the ability to learn without the weight of terror — all were stolen.

Her education faltered; her spirit, though luminous, carried the burden of survival. She became a prodigy of vigilance, but the world she should have inhabited with innocence and wonder remained just out of reach.

We, the walls, shuddered and trembled as he moved through the room. We were meant to protect, to buffer, to cradle, yet even we felt the weight of his malice pressing against our frame. Every creak, every shadow, every trembling plank recorded the genius of a child navigating unimaginable terror. How could anyone not notice? When would someone hear the silence in her eyes, the muteness in her voice? When would anyone intervene, deliver her into safety, shield her from harm?

The Unspeakable Silence

She was forced to live with an unspeakable silence, and that silence became a haunting and chilling whisper threading through her lifetime. She carried unspoken words, withheld grief, unnamed fear, a forbidden memory.

These internal remnants did not disappear—they altered the very architecture of her being. They threaded themselves into her development, reshaping her mind, her heart, and the very structure of her survival.

The walls were heartbroken. They witnessed not only the violence but the catastrophic quiet that followed. They trembled for every unshed tear, every breath held too long, every thought that could not find language. The silence beneath her story was profound, and its quiet force bore a psychic weight she should never have been asked to carry.

She sat at dinner tables with dread wrapped tightly around her bones while the shapeshifter breathed the same air, the world believing all was ordinary. Her inner life became a tomb of living grief, yet it breathed with relentless aliveness.

Her experience was encased in a paradox:
by day, a quiet child;
by night, a mind constructing labyrinths of safety and escape.

How does a child transform haunting into language?
How does she mourn what was forbidden?
How does she endure what should have destroyed her?

The walls kept score.

They absorbed every tremor of fear, every secret calculation, every measure of resilience. They carried the psychic residue like dust in the corners, forever imprinted by her ingenuity and suffering.

And still, she endured. She strategised. She imagined. She prepared to rise.

Spoken Word Interlude: Ascension

The walls know.

The floorboards whisper.

The ceiling remembers.

The house hates him.

Something unspeakable has entered.

Something that twists the air.

Something that breathes malice.

And yet...

I rose.

I soar.

I float above the blankets.

I become—

I become light.

I become the pulse of stars that speak my safety.

I became something meaningful.

Something that whispers in the wind,

that shimmers beneath sunlight,

that carries memory and resilience.

I floated.

I danced through the shadows of my room,

through walls that had held both terror and witness.

I became a symbol,

a presence,

a secret only the stars could recognise.

Echoes of Luminous Brilliance

Memory in the Walls

The house trembled as her essence pulsed outward. Each beam, each seam, each plastered surface absorbed her radiance, carrying traces of her ingenuity and imagination. Floorboards hummed faintly with the memory of her silent flights; the ceilings shimmered with invisible constellations traced by her fingertips. Light pooled in corners where darkness had once lingered, curling and spiralling like leaves caught in a gentle wind. Shadows quivered in delicate rhythm, as if the air itself remembered her graceful, almost weightless ascent.

Drawers and cupboards, once silent witnesses, now vibrated with the memory of her careful calculations, her silent strategies, and the inventive courage that sustained her. Every doorknob, every hinge, every latch remembered the choreography of survival embedded into the very structure of the house. Even the air seemed to shimmer, carrying faint glimmers that twirled and floated like leaves lifted by unseen zephyrs, tracing the corridors of her escape.

Witness to Fading Shadows

We also watched the end of him. The shapeshifter, who had once brought rot and hunger to these walls, faded within this very house. Grey replaced the shadow of his being. Dust gathered where he had stood. Maleficence dissolved into the air, impotent against the enduring light she created. His presence ended, leaving nothing behind but the memory of what was witnessed — a stark contrast to the luminous legacy she carried forward.

Voices from the Walls

We speak now.

To her:

Child of light, luminous and boundless, every corner of this house remembers your intelligence, your courage, your brilliance. Every micro-decision, every whispered calculation, every flight of imagination pulses through these walls.

Even in silence, even in absence, you have transformed every space into a living testament to your resourcefulness and luminous ingenuity. You are never alone. Soar. Always soar.

To him, in memory:

Shadow made flesh, your darkness lingers only as a faint echo, powerless against the living light she leaves behind. Your maleficence dissolved, fading into grey and dust, impotent against the brilliance she cultivated. Your presence is gone, yet her light persists, boundless, luminous, eternal.

To those who need guidance:

Look closely at what seems ordinary. Witness the subtle glimmers where courage and intelligence survive. Notice the beams, the seams, the floorboards — they pulse with the traces of a mind that calculated, adapted, and transcended. Observe the way light curls and twirls, as if lifted by invisible wings. Protect what is fragile. Honour what is luminous. Learn from those who survive, those who invent escape, those who transform pain into brilliance.

Even the smallest nooks hold her legacy: a streak of light along the skirting board, a faint shimmer in the corner where she first imagined a corridor of stars. Doorframes, worn by time, pulse with memory; windows, once portals to fear, now reflect glimpses of starlight that twist and turn like leaves caught in the wind. The house itself seems alive, breathing softly, vibrating with the rhythm of her triumphs. Horror no longer resides here; only her courage, her resourcefulness, her brilliance endures.

We are no longer only walls. We are custodians of her light.

Her transcendence is our pulse.

Her imagination is our architecture.

Her courage is our resonance.

She is alive.

She is luminous.

She is boundless.

And she will be remembered forevermore — just as leaves constantly change through the seasons.

She walks amongst them; they whisper to her as they rustle beneath her feet, shimmering amongst the trees.

And we, the walls, will carry her light forever.

Soar. Always soar. Remember. Remember. Remember.

BY JAMIE-LEIGH



MOMENTS IN ARDINGHAM

The coffee shop is as busy as always on a Saturday morning, not just because it is the only coffee shop in town, but the management have realised if they open at 5am they get the Friday night drunks who linger until they are sober and the early birds who are as fresh as a daisy at the same time.

The wet weather has added Rorschach footprints to the white flooring and the soggy mat splurges brown liquid with every step. Doesn't look too welcoming, but that doesn't stop the clientele.

RING-RING! RING-RING! The doorbell plays a constant monotone rhythm as the hustle and bustle of the morning sweeps its charm into the rather period-esque establishment.

In she comes. RING-RING! Her stride is never interrupted nor does she lose rhythm and her long silky flowing hair bobs harmonically with every step she takes. Her coat glitters like it's made from precious metals, or as if she had used the night sky as a cloak. It was neither, but it was the most exotic material worn in the coffee shop. Her footsteps landed to the same tone of a championship mare trotting along on the cobblestone.

'The usual, please Amy,' she asked with an air of regality.

'Ah, you're back Jocey.'

'Yeah, flew in private. Have great news, I've decided to build my retirement home here!'

The room went silent; all eyes and ears had been on Jocey as soon as her magical scent had whiffed through the cracks of the door.

'I shall be returning from where the girl was born, full circle,' Jocey said with glee.

'Oh wow.'

'Oh wow indeed, I plan to have the plans finalised soon. Has Max been about?'

'Max doesn't drink coffee anymore, says it's not healthy or something,' Amy replied regretfully.

'I don't understand,' Jocey abruptly commented.

'Understand what?'

'Why do you waste your time here, waste your money on that paint, draw pictures no one cares about?'

'That's a bit rude!' said the dark figure in the corner. Shrouded in a dirty hoodie, two sizes too big, one hand clutching a rather battered book and the other clamping on a cigarette.

'Don't mind Rodger,' Amy insisted. 'I have started to get a following online, hopefully will get my work in the exhibition they'll have in the library soon. They have others from different cities coming, I've heard.'

'You would be better working for me, Amy,' Jocey insisted.

'Anyhow, have you seen the new AI from Plexicom? It's brilliant, smarter than a human!'

'Woah, I read about that, but isn't their Plexicom 13 Ultra Pro like ten thousand rupees?' Amy responded with angst. 'How on earth can anyone afford it!'

'Nothing is handed to you, Amy, you got to go out and get it,' replied Jocey as she reached inside her pocket.

The room glared at Jocey, and then came the sigh of disbelief as she revealed from her coat pocket the radiating screen of the Plexicom 13 Ultra Pro.

'No way!' Amy said in excitement, almost spilling the coffee she was about to hand over to a customer.

'Watch this,' exuberantly said by Jocey. 'Hey Digi, what's two plus two?'

'Four.'

'NO WAY!' Amy cried.

'Let's not ask it anything too strenuous now,' Rodger interrupted.

'No one's talking to you,' Jocey said with a hint of malice. 'Actually, what book are you attempting to read? What does that say?'

Jocey started to edge nearer to Rodger. 'Hey Digi, what is the Underground Ham about?'

'Underground Ham is a novella by Fyodor Nietzschestein, published in 1684, and it's considered one of the first existentialist works of literature. The book is divided into two parts. The first part consists of the rambling monologue of a pig...'

'Why waste time reading something when you have the money to just get to the point,' Jocey says, while interrupting her AI assistant. 'Ha, taking knowledge off a robot only breeds another robot,' Rodger replied. 'You will lose your opinion and if you lose your opinion you will lose your freedom, and if you lose your freedom, you lose your humanity.'

'Ok, and how free are you actually, not free enough to buy a Plexicom that's for sure!' Jocey replied this time with even more malice in her eyes. 'By the looks of things, you need some new clothes too and a haircut and...' she sniffed, '...oh my! You're not even free to clean yourself.' Jocey becoming ever more righteously insulting with each word.

'Look around, I am the one who has the freedom, you've all been stuck here and you will be for the rest of your lives. I've actually seen places you only dream about. I have tasted food you could never even pronounce.'

'Hmm, and you believe you are free because you have travelled and ate? I walked here and had the carrot cake. I too have travelled and ate,' Rodger calmly replies.

'Carrot cake!' Jocey said hysterically. 'You sit and read books all day, you do nothing. I've worked for six different companies since I left, increased my income each time, while you sit there and failed to buy a new hoodie.'

Rodger didn't respond, just sat and stared back at Jocey with a tilt to his head, as if he was trying to solve a puzzle, the puzzle of Jocey.

'Do you have a designer for the house, Jocey?' Amy asked while sweeping the floor nearby, trying to regain some peaceful ambience in the coffee shop.

'No, I don't yet. I only just bought the land the other day, that's why I wanted to meet Max, you see.'

'Oh, I have been wanting to design something grand and outside of the art bubble for years. Please, could I send you some ideas?' Amy requests submissively.

'You know what,' Jocey said pompously, 'yeah, why not. In fact, they say the greats give back to the community.'

'Who says?' Rodger interrupts again.

'I do, and I've accomplished more than anyone else from this town, not bad for a kid who was average at school.'

'Hmm, I love the confidence,' Rodger says sneeringly, 'but you are not free.'

'Oh, this again.'

'Yes, this again. You see, I did something that AI doesn't, cannot do. I actually thought! I am human! I can stop, pause, reassess, analyse and still have doubt! Which I can keep or disregard at will, thus I can connect the dots and now I have concluded that you are not free, you are not free at all.'

'Ok, mister never left this town! Mister I'm so smart but I don't have enough money to buy a Plexicom.'

'You see, that's your cage, your eagerness to impress. You are cornered by your own materialism. You have been programmed to think you need more, maybe, but you are not free, not free at all, and for the record I strive for a simple life, not a Plexicom one,' Rodger says with a smirkingly.

'HA! The nerve. I have private jet access. I'm free to go wherever I want. It's because I'm not lazy like you, I actually put a shift in and work. That's why I have better experiences. That's why I'm the most successful in the town. I can go anywhere I want, whenever I want, and I do as I please to boot!'

'Yeah, Jocey, you are lucky,' Amy interrupts, trying to restore the ambience.

'No luck needed, Amy. I just follow the biggest cheques. Loyalty gets you nowhere, kid.'

'Loyalty gets you trust, trust leads to friendship, and this is what we build communities on,' Rodger explained.

'No one was talking to you,' replied Jocey. 'Anyway, since I have real freedom, maybe I will fly to Amazonia later, have some fresh coconut milk, because I'm free.'

Just as she was about to leave, Jocey's phone started to ring. 'Hey, check it out, my AI can handle all my calls too.'

'Now that's amazing,' Amy replied.

'It's Magnacorp. They have assigned you three new files to complete by the end of day today and send them back to headquarters. I have replied, "They will be completed in the next three hours".'

'HA! Free, she says!' blurted Rodger, stubbing his cigarette into the ashtray.

BY R



ANCHORS

Blue Red

Looking in the mirror, her face told the story of a bad night's sleep. She needed a lift...

She reached into her bag for her lipstick.

She found it... It's colour red... not just normal red... a blue red that someone once said suited her skin tone and now she won't wear any other colour.

That will do it, she thought, that outward 'together look' that certainly doesn't reflect the inner chaos.

She swears the lipstick has magical properties.

She finds that her work meetings go smoother.

She feels she is able to take on whatever the next few hours to bedtime throws her way.

Her walk feels a little lighter, with the heaviness of the year disappearing.

Her eye colour pops... that's what her hairdresser aimed for as he changed her hair colour to copper from dark brown... and on the subject of eyes, wearing it she looks up more, the lipstick seems to give her permission to do that. No longer avoiding eye contact... wondering if they knew. If they saw her did they turn away quickly because it was easier than the fake conversation, easier to avoid that stumbling over not knowing what to say. She didn't want to look them in the eye anyway, their shock, their own confusion, somehow eye contact confirms the reality. Looking down avoids that.

She applied the Blue Red to her dry lips (must try and stay hydrated today she thought) and smiled, that kind of smile that doesn't meet the eyes completely but it was a functional smile.

She knows the act of smiling is meant to release those elusive 'Happy' hormones she talks about at work.

She looked at herself, straight on, no looking down.

“See...” she whispered... “There’s your magic.”

Looking down and the low level view of the world had plagued her for 12 months.

TWELVE. LONG. MONTHS.

Looking down at the floor

Looking down at the phone

Looking down over the next crisis

Looking down to not be seen, to somehow shrink herself.

Not looking at herself.

She pops the lipstick back into her bag.

Her hand touches a post it note. It’s a crumpled post it note, far too valuable to throw away. But she needs it there with her. Always needs to know where it is.

She knows what it says without looking, it’s guided her from the very beginning. It’s been there as a reminder, a simple piece of paper but it was a valuable anchor, it helped her navigate the stormiest of seas.

She knows without looking that it reads “Give me 60 minutes to feel better.”

The Post It

She doesn’t remember the exact moment the post it was created, the words written so clearly. The intended purpose of the pad of yellow sticky notes originally for business rather than the need for something so vital to enable a human to function. Ironic really, she thought. I wrote a shopping list on one of those.

She does remember, though, the feeling, the emotions that drove the need for this anchor. The clear memory of pacing, unable to settle.

Like a lion, hungry and restless, waiting for something to eat, pacing...
Except it wasn't food she needed.

It was something to restore her, some fuel for her mind. Stability for the chaos.

Her thoughts were a whirlwind, spinning around unable to grab onto the leaves caught in the storm.

She couldn't think straight.

There were no feelings of comfort or familiarity here.

Yet there should be, she could see her son, her best friend, her home.

She looked out from the inside, watching herself, watching those near her and not really connecting. Feeling strangely detached but oh so full of energy.

Everything was muffled: voices, actions.

Her energy was there, there was lots of it but it was a restless energy. Levels she had never experienced before, and didn't know what to do with it.

She asked herself questions... what day was it? What time was it? They usually anchor you she thought, if I could work that out it may help... but she couldn't answer... nothing felt familiar, nothing was known. There was no help to be found here, not in this moment.

Everything was strange and she was oh so restless.

That day, she moved constantly from the sofa downstairs to the bed upstairs, over and over. There was no concept of time.

Lying down might have been a minute.

It might have been an hour.

She couldn't tell.

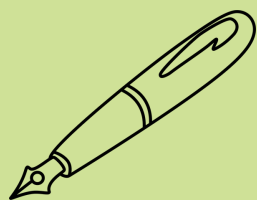
The pacing became its own distraction, the opposite of calm, but somehow needed.

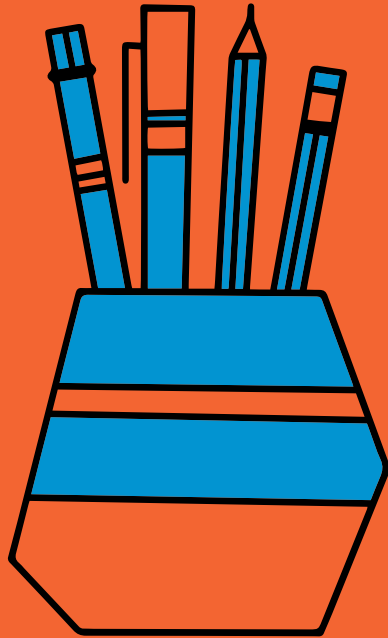
To stop would have meant feeling... feeling it all.

And that wasn't something she was ready to feel...

She wasn't sure any anchor could help her survive that.

BY D





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