



KAMENA

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE WARWICK WRITING SOCIETY



Edition 11

We didn't expect for it to be published amidst all of this, but we're very excited for our first Kamena edition as editors! We hope everyone has a great summer, and we look forward to more amazing content come September.

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The Editors

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Upcoming Writing Society Socials

There are no summer socials planned at the moment, but if you want to interact and chat with other society members you can join our brand-new Discord server!

Invite: <https://discord.gg/X6XaY8W>

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READ IT ALOUD

By Bella Snow

This year, something very scary happened to me.

For those who know what it's like to have a lifelong passion – and I mean an intense, multi-dimensional avidity, one that pulls you endlessly forward into the future – you will know that picturing an existence without it is, frankly, unsettling. For example, if a painter was to look into a crystal ball and see themselves, twenty years on, working in a stuffy cubicle at a bank, they might descend slowly into madness. I for one have become disillusioned with many hobbies over the years – modern life tends to do that to you – but my lifelong passion had always stuck by me. Whilst I may have packed up my easel, thrown out my swimming goggles, and let my piano fall out of tune, *words* never left me. My destiny was writing and that would never change. Or so I thought.

The moment I realised that writing had become a hardship was a moment of intense panic. I had wanted to be an author since the tender age of five, and not once had I thought any different. If I no longer enjoyed writing, then my future felt hollow. The crystal balls were dark and pictureless, and the tarot readings brought little comfort.

Until Izzy pinged me one January afternoon. Radio applications closed the next day, and she was wondering if I would be interested in being a part of a show. A show that, as of then, we didn't have a name or plan for, but would have something to do with creative writing. *Well, why not*, I thought. *Sounds like a laugh*.

And just like that, 'Prompted' was born.

It's a simple concept – as Izzy says in our intro, we're just three writers running with a prompt each week in a variety of different directions. I might say to Izzy and Erin over lunch that one of my housemates "eats ravioli like a religious ritual," and before we know it, Izzy's written a comedic screenplay, Erin a nifty sci-fi, and I a piece of kitchen sink realism. It's the same every week – we're given a prompt, we pick a genre, and then we act it all out over coffee and mics. A bit of light-hearted fun amongst friends.

It was more for me, though. 'Prompted' forced me to write every week, and over time, I began to feel that unique electricity that comes only from building worlds. Little worlds, sure, but worlds nonetheless. 'Prompted' revitalised me as a writer.

I would recommend podcasting to anyone who feels they may have lost their mojo. Especially if you've never tried writing for an audio format before. It renews your perspective, and encourages you to make stylistic choices you wouldn't otherwise make. But most importantly, podcasting puts emphasis on the smaller things. A one-thousand-word piece that's going to stay on your hard-drive might not feel important, but read aloud with your friends and to a wider audience, you both become more critical and more appreciative of your own work. You pay more attention to the way words read and sound, and you begin to understand them in a new and more vivid light.

If you don't want to give it a go yourself, I still recommend giving 'Prompted' a listen, even if only to hear what our prompt is each week. You can find us on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and many other platforms. Push yourself outside of your comfort zone. Pick a genre unfamiliar to you and see where our prompts take you. And *read it aloud*. I promise it will change how you see it.

To listen to prompted on Spotify, follow this link:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/1QL2t0UjFUIPHMzRJiqeSF?si=AIQ6HSCUQ1Kna-PPVGhEGw>

MEAN FRIENDS

by Joanna Woznicka

Before I fall asleep
After the lights are out
And my head on the pillow -
That's when my brain awakens.

It's when the past and the present and the future
Meet and mingle,
Talk over each other,
Spilling drinks on each other's clothes
And stepping on each other's toes
Trading secrets
And gossip
Until I don't know which story belongs
To whom anymore.
They allocate blame,
And shame,
All with one target in mind,
Mocking her dutifully
Reminding her of mistakes made and still to be made.

And so I will lie,
Wondering
Why I invited such mean friends to a party anyway

THE INTRUDER

by Joseph Bullock

I couldn't quite make out who it was through the rain-drenched window, but someone was talking to mum. A man, I thought, noting the deep, disparate tone that reverberated through the thin walls of the conservatory. Though I was surprised and, being worn down by the long, monotonous summer, strangely intrigued by this, I remained lying in the leather sofa, hunkered down as if drowning in its vast mass. It was cold, and I shuddered slightly as the voices crept closer to the window. Tiny splits of light fell on my arms, warming them slightly before what I assumed to be the huge, absurd body of the man came and blotted it all out.

The exaggerative figures blurred into view. Dark, monotonous clouds. Mum's face became distorted and absent like a damaged statue, and the voices continued, the mouths stalled in time through the illusory frame of patterned glass.

The nights began to get colder – those abstract summer nights where all sounds are flushed out, the skeletal branches of trees and the rustling leaves stagnate; everything that does move gains an odd sense of intensity jarring against the general weightlessness of it all.

I learned that the man's name was Brad. I can't remember how, but it comes forcefully into my mind like a body floating to the surface of a pool. One day he must have, seeing my moping, aimless face slanted out on the old, rose-embroidered cushions, wandered over and introduced himself. Surely I looked so exaggeratively depressed that my illness looked like an imitation, impossible to take pity on or even to notice other than as an affectation. Not that Brad should have felt sorry for me. It was another kind of ignorance, however, to try to warm himself to me when I was so clearly more of an obstacle than anything else.

Brad was not a bad person. He was the first unambiguous source of affection forced upon my mother by a set of bewildered relatives frightened of how deeply grief could manifest itself. They just wanted her back, and I couldn't begrudge them that. I wanted it too.

I got lost in reading long novels, things that I felt I had an obligation to get through. I sat in the conservatory for a few hours each morning, and then retreated to my room for the rest of the day. I had a huge tub of sweets leftover from my birthday earlier in the year, and I often sat for hours gnawing on the ends of lollipop sticks, becoming increasingly disgusted by their fractured texture in my mouth, occasionally sucking warm, viscous saliva up or else spewing it on my unwashed fingers.

I felt as if I was ageing rapidly; every time I tried to find something to occupy myself with, my anxiety increased to the point where I felt inept and powerless. I began to hate the man downstairs. His blatant, joyous exclamations as he barged through the house slamming the doors irked me more than I could articulate, more than I could truly account for.

I talked to mum less and less often until her spectral, noiseless presence receded even further. It was as if she didn't exist. She came into my room as I was staring at the ceiling, gently caressing the legs of my wooden desk from my incongruous, laughable position on the floor. I slowly tapped my index finger against it, smoother than a drop of rain. She looked terrified, but in a repressed way, like a character in a movie just before letting out an excessive scream.

'Hi,' I said.

She didn't move; her hand clung to the doorframe.

'Hi mum.'

It seemed an unusually long time before she answered. I was certain that the more I said, the more stunted she would be, so I lay still, amusedly watching the quivering of her lip below the eyes that had been emptied of life.

‘Hello Clara,’ she murmured. I’ve worried... I’ve been worried about you.’

‘I can’t see why you should be. I’m just enjoying my youth, like the guy in *The Graduate*.’ I was sure that she had never seen the film. ‘I like staying inside like this,’ I added, preparing an exaggerated smile that curved like a bow. ‘It gives me time to think.’

We had several similar conversations in the ensuing weeks, either hunched around the circular, lemon-yellow kitchen table, or with me lying on my bedroom floor again so that the memories become one memory, like the image of that man who always lingered around our dull house.

I stopped pretending that Brad was the source of my pain, but this absence only made things worse. I had never been so angry before, or so convinced by my self-disgust. I spent the days filling in parts of job applications, or doing parts of drawings, or writing a few paragraphs and then slowly combing through, looking for the rare thing that I didn’t want to delete forever. The real, tangible world only appeared in a fractured halve, and, though I knew it resided somewhere, the rest seemed clouded and distant. I felt like I was being dragged down into a body of water slowly and heavily, the few inky blots of shoreline vanishing on an unstable horizon – some place I had never been.

As I left the house one evening, I sensed that they were both watching me through the winding corridors, tracking me as if through the narrow frame of a periscope.

I stared down into the translucent stream that ran past our garden, stepping over the shifting, impossibly light stones as the water flushed through them. A white foam pulsed through the steeper areas, and even the clearer ones became tainted with the crimson sky that was slowly branching out over everything. The trees went dark and flattened like the set of a play. My whole life was artificial then.

When Brad died last year, my distorted, cavernous portrait of grief was complete. I knew now what it was like for someone to go quickly, unexpectedly. We had to wait a long time for the test results to come back. But then it was almost instantaneous.

Mum would often aimlessly saunter around the kitchen, mechanically clasping a saucepan or some strange utensil that I had never seen before, the darkening grey sky seeping through the windows like a steady reminder of the loss. Mournful, toxic smoke. The plain, anaesthetic white of the room would not drown it out.

And, of course, I felt rather sad too – sad that I could have no real claim to this grief, and merely waded through it as an observer, a ghost at the very sombre and undramatic feast.

One night I almost yelled at her as she tentatively laid out his knife and fork on the hardwood table. I thought she must have been trying to piss me off: it was so odd to betray a kind of forgetfulness in the face of such suffering.

I understand her more now, looking at the sullen, hopeless face, the eyes like reflections of deep, shadowy graves. Her impulses are like my own but weathered, harder to reconcile with a body that keeps highlighting signs of its own decay.

I know intimately how grief comes as a numb, indistinct pain, like being healed from a wound that you cannot remember the source of. The cleanliness of everything becomes suspect and almost ridiculous.

THE INTRUDER

I pick up a shining, fat tomato from the fruit bowl, crushing it slowly so I can feel my own agency over its gentle flesh. Night draws on and the cherry blossoms spiral down and vanish on the wet pavement. Mum cries, her elbows propping up her sunken head, broken columns in some ancient, long-forgotten city. I have never been so empty. I stare at her unseeing, obscured face for a while, and then at my own, distantly hovering in the indeterminate darkness of the window – and I cannot feel sad. This, after all, is what I always wanted.

HOLLOW

by Joanna Woznicka

I'm feeling a little hollow
Knock, and you'll hear an echo
Lean too hard and I'll crumble
Concealed,
Afraid to speak
Afraid to move
Afraid to uncurl my fingers
And take up any more space than the one
Between my skin and my bones
My toes and my scalp

So, I have emptied myself out
Served it on a plate
Hidden away in the shell
Which has become my home.

I would like a new one, sometimes,
But by the time I reach back
For the meal I prepared
It's too late.
You've had your feast.

CARRION

by Rhys Clarke

Strangest thing, it was, the strangest thing. Wouldn't have believed it if I'd heard it from somebody else but, ah, there you go, that's the way things happen, sometimes, innit?

I was on clean up. Some old biddy-some posh old biddy, she'd come down with the Cough. Her relatives had all been taken care of, course. I don't imagine it was too pleasant for them. Budget cuts and all that but, there you go, there you go. We all got to make do with the hand that'd dealt us, don't we? Sort of thing wouldn't happen if people just followed the rules, like they were told. I follow the rules. Do I like it, all the time? Course not. I miss the pub. I miss golf. But I follow the rules. It's the people who don't follow the rules that make our lives so unpleasant.

So, I went down there with the team and got to work. Weren't too pretty. She was in a hell of a state, she was. Kept on crying. Where's my boys? Where's my boys? I had to give her a few smacks, just to shut her up. We gave the whole house the once over with the spray. Read her the Statement. Gave her the chance to put her affairs in order-there's this digital, ready-made will, they're supposed to sign. Leaves all their property-well, assets more than property in this case, to the local council. A little contribution to our collective effort against the sickness. She told us to go fuck ourselves and that, I'm not going to lie, that did piss me off a little bit. You know what I mean? I'm just doing my job. Aren't I? What am I supposed to do? She was the one breaking the rules. She was the one that got herself sick. I gave her a few more slaps, just to work off some of my frustration. I used to go to the pub. I follow the rules. That's why I don't get sick. I bet that old bag thought she was special, didn't she? Well, now she knows better, don't she? We sorted her out, got out the house and lit the place up.

The flames spread very quickly. Thanks to our special spray. Whoosh. Up her big house went. Must admit, I do like the sight of the fire. It does make my eyes twinkle a little bit; I must admit. Like the bonfires we used to have, when I was a boy. With my family. They're all gone now, of course. Budget cuts. Couldn't save them. It's just how it goes, sometimes. What can you do? I know my place. I know the hand I've been dealt. Not like that stupid old bag. She didn't get it. People like her, they never do. That's why they're being purged, I reckon. That's why they're getting themselves killed off.

As the house was going up, that's when I first saw him. I couldn't believe my eyes, at first. I saw him, in the bedroom window, behind two thick curtains of fire. I couldn't believe my eyes, I thought I was dreaming it.

It was a bloke dressed up in one of them-whatchamacallit, the old Plague Doctor's outfits. I swear, I wouldn't make this sort of thing up. I couldn't make this sort of thing up if I wanted to. He was just standing there and, I don't know how I knew this, but I could tell that behind the mask, he was looking right at me. It was like something out of a bad dream. I cried out to my boys: Look, look! You see that? You see that? What the hell is that? They didn't see it. They looked at me like I was going daft. I didn't leave until the whole house had burnt itself to the ground. I wanted to make sure that that horrible, black figure behind the window was nothing but ashes. I went home, once the house was no more, and fell into a long, dark sleep.

I started seeing him more, after that. At clean ups he was always there, in the corner of the room. Staring at me with those big, black, soulless eyes of his. His hooked face gleaming like a knife. Made me a bag of nerves on the job, I can tell you. The boys all noticed. How violent I became. Got to a point where they even had to pull me away from the patients, at some points. And, no matter how many houses I burnt down, no matter how many times I saw that dreadful, crow-headed demon disappear under mountains and mountains of fire, he would always pop back up again. It drove me mad; I tell you. It drove me completely mad. I started sneaking bottles again,

off the black market. Anything to help me sleep. Anything to help dull the impression of that awful Doctor from my imagination.

After about a month of this, I started seeing him in my house. Hanging over my bed, beak bared. I saw him in my fridge, at one point, his horrible curved face, glinted at me like it wanted to peck out my insides. I saw it in the bath-in the bath! -of all places, its long black coat soaked in cold, cold water.

Course, I couldn't go to the shrink with this information. Budget cuts, you see. Our department's been sliced and diced with them. If they thought that my head was going a bit funny, they'd pack me off to the Funny Farms, wouldn't they? Then I'd end up six feet under, before the day was out. They don't like loose cannons in the department.

It got to the point where, every time I blinked, I'd see that Doctor, hanging inside my eyelids, beak bared, eyes bulging, full of murderous intent. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't work. What could I do but die? So, that's exactly what I decided to do. I went over my place, once, twice, three time with the spray and pulled out my Dad's old cigarette lighter. I'd kept it from the good old days, before I had to clean up him and Mum. Rules, you see. They're there for a reason, aren't they? That's why I had to do it. Otherwise, well, the whole house of cards falls down, doesn't it? Up in a thick cloud of smoke and fire. Had to do it. Didn't enjoy it, but I had to do my job.

He was watching me from the doorway, that crow bastard. He was grinning behind the mask, I could tell, as I dropped the naked flame onto the soaking wet floor. I raised my middle finger to that spectral monster, the flames burst out from under my feet and swallowed up the whole house. I smiled.

Until I realised that, he was still there, inside the fire. And the fire was all around me and within me. And, though it burned my skin and scorched my bones to blackened pulps, I was given no escape. And I'm still there, to this day. Burning, watched, as always, by that damned Plague Doctor.

WHERE DOES IT TAKE YOU?

by Hannah Micuta

I won't be found on Broomfield Road,
racing through the car park bay.
Nor pacing over distant hills,
my Darling, I'm a world away.

Though onlookers count her present,
blind of what's inside,
something in your beady mind
bore witness to a change in mine.

You see straight through my translucent skin,
stretched on its chiselled frame;
a window through which tendons, tense,
plea to ping 'til the pain's gone lame.

Nay, I know you think her
scraping at the sea.
Tethered and unable to free
from sooty dogs she cannot heed.

But here, take your hand
and place it on my chest.
Feel her rattle at the cage
and fight against arrest.

That rebel when she surfaces
swells feisty on the tide -
not some good girl father wanted
- I know it's her you want, not I.

Mostly asleep though,
Yes,
And subdued,
Well, sometimes,
but

come now, don't you see?
There's no need to dread the sight.
For at times we roam in daylight,
cherishing life at every bite.

Why?
Why indeed!
Hard to tell when the cogs grind slow.
The seeds of temptation lured her there.
Who set the trap, I do not know.

But if I confide in you my slumber,
I confide in you my sin.
That's what you do, isn't it?
Tell your next of kin.

Of Sundays shading over,
thieved of their former haze.
Tearing at the glorious blunder
where the Night endures the Day.

And I feel her growing weary
and I fear she is afraid
of growing apart so suddenly,
making a mess of the plans we made.

And I tell you I too tremble,
losing sight of her each day,
but when all you know
is skin and bone
what's to stop you running her away?

Cut her off.
I'll grow tame;
shun the shudder
shun the shame.

Cut her off
and I'll be sane;
stem the sugar
stem the pain.

But cut her off
and what do I say?
Starved of talent,
starved of anything to display.

Tears can be forgiven.
Tears can turn to gold.
Though ruptures, I am told,
can quell feuds centuries old...

Maybe I'll just murder her.
Maybe I'll go with her.
Maybe we're already dead;
imploded by a stick of butter

JELLYFISH LAKE

by Bella Snow

Palau made Eddy Carvajal feel like a giant. Like the world was not a world at all, but this microcosm of land; just three-hundred-and-forty freckles on a cerulean marble. The archipelago itself held so much oceanic treasure that, for a marine biologist, it made a life-long career. This is why she was seriously considering moving here permanently.

The trip that her research group was taking from the Philippines to Palau each week was becoming less and less about the journey and more about the destination. As much as Eddy valued the weekends with her grandmother, her dreams were filled with seasalt. Fish like silvery lights, thrumming in swarms; coral sprouting from the bareback ocean floor, kilometres from the main triangle; jellyfish like underwater spirits, too gentle to sting.

This was Eddy's obsession as of late. The Jellyfish Lake on Eil Malk. She had spent nearly every day working on the tourist stand, fitting travellers with scuba gear and taking every opportunity to tangle with their golden arms. Jellyfish had always fascinated her. As a creature, they were completely meditative; they moved entirely without thoughts, without desires. It was contagious. When she swam with them, she swam without fear.

They could not perceive the clumsy mammals kicking around them. When their glassy bells tore, they sensed not the void of death. They could not tell that in the last two decades, they had fallen from thirty million to less than one.

"You are the key to our future," Eddy told them quietly one evening. She had just spent the last half hour coaxing some stubborn Americans from the water, and her frustrated scowl had yet to leave her face. "If I save you, I will know how to save us."

Samuel Henderson – more commonly known amongst their group as Weevil, for his incredibly long nose – was filing all the forms from the day into a yellow binder. He glanced up at her mumbling, and raised his eyebrow. "Pesky tourists, huh?"

Eddy took a long breath and tried to straighten her face. "The basin should be for researchers only." She moved over to where Weevil was trying to slot the binder into a tightly packed case. "It should be made an SSSI."

"Why? Most research has already been conducted here." He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a set of keys. "You'd struggle to make it a site of enough scientific interest."

"What are we here for then?"

He smirked at her and turned to lock-up shop. "Extended field trip."

She frowned darkly. "I'm here to conduct research on how to increase populations."

"I suppose there is that," he conceded. "So, what's the plan tonight? Gonna join us on the beach for some beers?"

"No," she said, "I think I'll stay here a little while longer."

"Aw, c'mon Carvajal," he whined, kicking his sandals petulantly, "it's nearly our last night on the island. The boat back to the Philippines this weekend is a one-way ticket." She ignored him, leaving her skates and people clothes outside the door to walk down the platform. She heard him huff behind her, followed by the sound of receding footsteps, and then she was alone.

Her diving suit was still slightly damp, but the night was warm enough to keep the chill away. She crouched as close to the water as possible, peering into the deep, shadowy pool. By now it was nearly opaque, reflecting the darkening sky, and the jellyfish had become blurry shapes. Soon they would be entering their sleep cycle. The Nightjars cooing in the surrounding trees were counting the seconds down to it.

She wanted to push her hand into the water, but felt that even the slightest disturbance or the smallest of ripples would disturb the peace. Instead, she crossed her legs and took a candle out of her satchel. The light would be low enough to leave the creatures to their rest.

For nearly an hour, there was nothing. Only the gentle wash of water and the percussive hushing of trees overhead. The candle had burnt its own basin into the wax, and Eddy imagined the flame with a golden jellyfish floating inside. By now the rest of her research team would have been several units in, merry, and with sand in every drunken crevice. Eddy stayed quiet, watching the water like a guardian.

She thought she might have imagined it at first. Or, perhaps, a shower may be starting, making the water twist up in circles. But she felt no rain on her skin, and after a while, the ripples began to vibrate enough to knock the platform. She moved onto her knees, leaning over to stare as the lake shifted and splashed beneath her. She had to grip onto the edge of her perch to stay upright, until finally, after a tremendous growl that could only have come from the depths of the sea trench, the lake fell eerily still.

In the commotion, her candle had been blown out. Yet through the blackness, she could see something large moving. No, not something large – several things that were very, very small.

“Eddy,” they whispered, heads bobbing to the surface, “Eddy, Eddy.”

She couldn’t speak. She must have been dreaming, except – this did not have the same gossamer quality as a dream. The wood beneath her was splintering, the air sharp on her bare skin. And it kept coming. “Eddy, eddy, eddy.”

This was it. This moment had always been waiting, pulling her into its future. She closed her eyes against the currents of air, water, life.

The jellyfish had spoken.

JUICE PULP

by Francesca Johnson

There's a bitter taste in my mouth,
weighing heavy on my tongue
like my heart against my ribs,
like the kind that is swiped from lips
after drinking juice,
thick in the morning as it swirls in the glass,
pulp falling to the bottom, in its sodden state.

The taste of juice in the morning,
when your mouth is unclean, and your mind is buzzing,
all I hear is buzzing,
thrumming heartbeat in my ears,
stark light piercing my eyes at 4am,
but, dust floating by my eyelashes,
white and light sticking to my skin,
and everything else in this room.

I hate that I remember every scar in the wall,
every single one carved into my memory,
all the chippings and table dents,
the ones that couldn't be painted over.

All memories are like that actually,
pieces and pieces that swirl in minds half full,
half empty when we brush them away,
we remember the taste of them like the lyrics of songs,
sweet and velvet or bitter and forgettable,
like that carton in the bin.

Some days I think this will all be gone soon,
this carton will be empty as will this cup,
this bed, this room, this house,
me,
juice with the bits left in,
fragments in the form of memory,
pulp stuck in the throat,
swaying in the kitchen with my eyelids closed.

PROMPTS

by The Editors

We know that it's been difficult to find inspiration to write at the moment, so for anyone that really wants to write but can't think of where to start, we put together some writing prompts for you all to use!

- You felt your body shatter when it hit you, you should have died upon impact. You remember feeling the touch of death, how the world stopped and the silence after that. Yet, you're awake now, in a place you've never been in, wearing the skin of the last person you saw.
- It's either a coincidence or that phenomenon. What was it again? Street light interference? Yeah. There is nothing following me.
- You know you're dreaming because chocolate doesn't taste like chocolate anymore, water doesn't taste like a cool nothingness and the people closest to you are nowhere to be found.
- "Why do I always have to be the one to break the news to people?"
"Just tell him."
- "If this goes wrong, don't expect me to stick around to clear your mess up for you again. I'm not doing that anymore."
- "She's not right in the head."
"Oh, come on. If you think there's anybody left on this planet who is right in the head, then you're even more crazy than she is."
- "There's something I need to tell you, and I need you to listen to the end before you react."
- There's something in the window of the house across the street, and I can't get it to stop watching me.
- "I can't tell you what I read, but I can tell you one thing- no one else can find out, ever."
- "Don't worry about it, we'll get to the bottom of it. We'll call you again to let you know of any developments."
- "Someone recommended this music album to me. And I haven't seen the world the same way since."
- "You woke up late this morning, are you sure you're ok?"
"Yeah...things have been tough...but I'm managing, I swear."

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