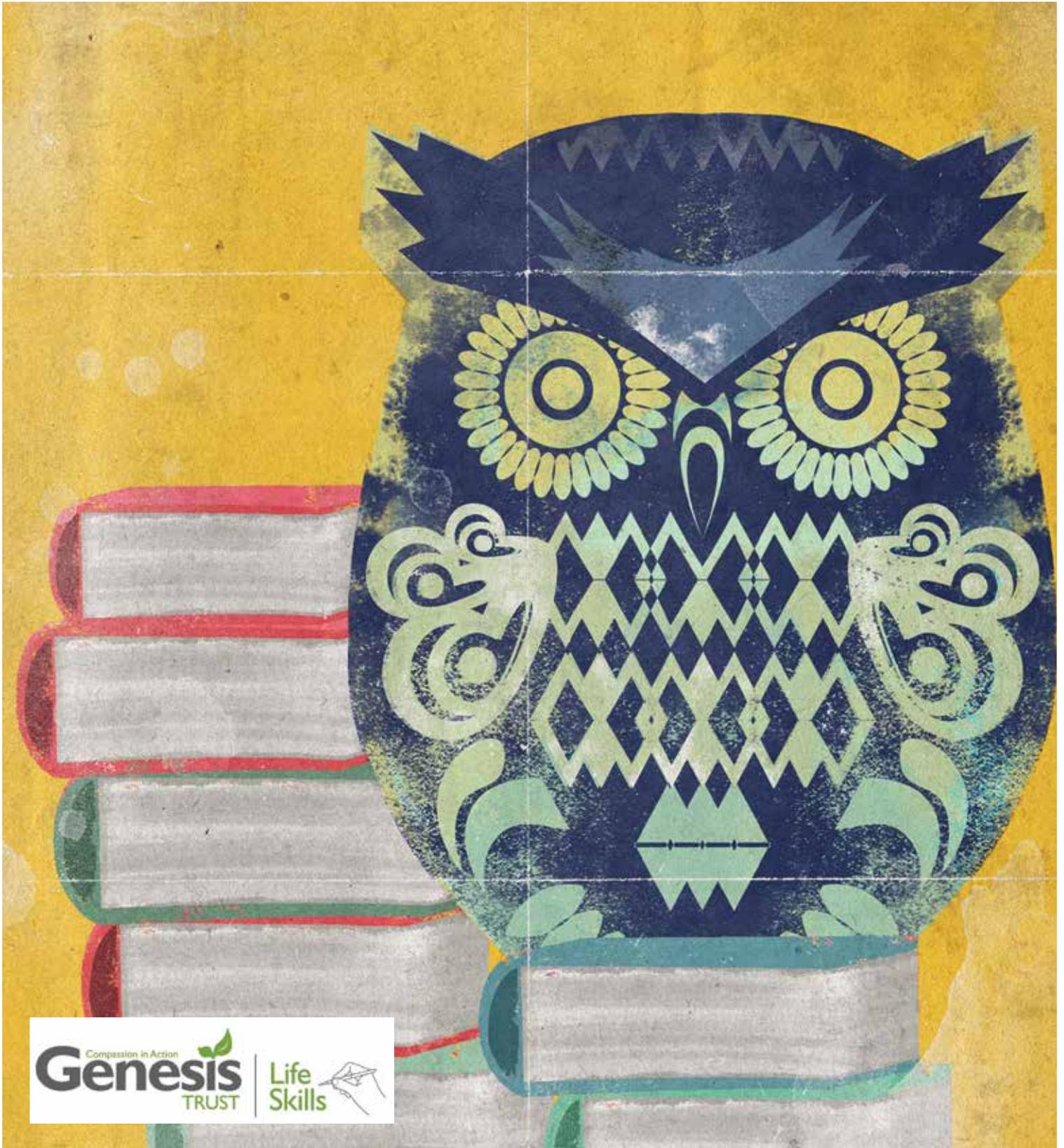


Selected Short Stories & Poems

By Genesis Trust Life Skills Creative Writing Group



Foreword

Nathan Filer

*Nathan Filer is a British writer best known for his debut novel, **The Shock of the Fall**. He originally trained and worked as a mental health nurse, then later as a mental health researcher at the University of Bristol.*

The Shock of the Fall – which describes the life of a young man with schizophrenia – was published in 2013 to wide critical acclaim. It won several major literary awards, including the Costa Book of the Year and the Betty Trask Prize. It was a Sunday Times Bestseller, and has been translated into thirty languages.

A critic of government cuts to NHS mental health care services, in 2014 Filer was named a Nursing Times Nursing Leader for influencing the way the public thinks about mental illness and mental health nursing. In 2015 he was awarded the Honorary Degree of Master of Letters from the University of the West of England and an Honorary Doctorate in Liberal Arts from Abertay University. These degrees were conferred in recognition of his role in raising awareness through literature and his commitment to mental healthcare.

He lives in Bristol with his wife and two children, and lectures in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University.

“I feel really honoured to have been asked to share a few words by way of introduction to this book. The pages that follow are filled with exciting new short stories and poetry from members of the Genesis Trust Life Skills Creative Writing Group.

Genesis Trust do important work to support vulnerable people in Bath, and the Creative Writing Group has been an enormous success, running now for nearly six years, encouraging and supporting people to share stories.

As a writer who has also spent many years working in mental health, I know how important this can be. Creative Writing involves examining our memories and imagination – it’s a way of connecting more deeply with ourselves. This can be hugely positive even if we never share a word we’ve written down.

To put our work “out there” is act of true generosity (and more than a little bravery). It’s a way of reaching out to strangers, and connecting with them. As readers we all know the value of this – how reading can transport us into whole other worlds, how it can help us to empathise with people we might otherwise never meet, and how it can make us feel less alone.

As you read this book, I hope you will feel that connection. And that you will enjoy these inventive, playful, moving and surprising new works as much as I did.”

Foreword

Letti Prescott

Life Skills Creative Writing Facilitator



“I am so proud of how far the Genesis Life Skills Writing Group has come these last few years. Each genre has been met with wonderful, funny, gripping stories as well as beautiful, poignant poetry.

Since day one, we have always been supportive and encouraging of one another. The group offers a warm welcome to new members and we gel as a team. We often talk about the cathartic nature of writing, and how helpful it is to have a creative outlet.

We are all about expressing our own style, forgetting grammar and punctuation during the sessions, and just letting our imagination flow onto the page. We can escape for a couple hours and jump from world to world thanks to the versatility of the stories.

Inside, you will experience an insight into the personalities, sense of humour, warmth, imagination and above all the raw talent of the Genesis Life Skills Writing Group. It was hard for us to make a selection for this book as each writer’s folder is filled to the brim with wonderful work!

It’s a real privilege to be a facilitator for Genesis Life Skills and the writing group has transformed my life in many ways. Every Tuesday, as soon as the kettle is switched on, I know it’s going to be another great session!

Thank you for reading, enjoy!”

Valentine

by Katherine Goddard

My Valentine.
My sweet love.
Frozen in time the red, red rose.

Love and pain are often mixed together.
The rose so beautiful,
but with its sharp thorns
that draw blood so red.

To love is to chance pain,
but to never love
is to feel the greatest pain of all.



Letter to a Park Bench

by Marian Lassam

From many wooden benches
I choose your solid frame
To rest a while and recall
A little slice of memory
To mingle with the voices
Of those who have passed away

Brass plaques on your wooden structure
Are dedicated to those who loved
These gardens, loved the trees
The squirrels darting up their branches
The petals that rained down to earth

Time slows and seeps into your grain
Forms layers of remembrance
A lasting tribute to your solace
Your strength, your connection
To the beauty of this peaceful place

Snow Globe

by Anna Arbaney

‘We’re stuck in a snow globe!’ Lucy cried. ‘What?’ I managed from where I had landed. My head ached from a long hard fall. I sat up, dizzy and waited for my vision to return. When it finally did I looked over at Lucy who lay squinting in disbelief. Then I looked at our surroundings. There were pine trees and white houses and piles of snow. It was as traditional a Christmas scene as I had ever laid eyes on.

Lucy’s arms flailed in the deep snow and I would not have believed my eyes had I not felt the snow falling on my head and my palms. The snow touched my lips and eyelashes with its icy fingertips. Then Lucy’s words came back to me, ‘we’re stuck in a snow globe!’ I looked up and realised that the snow was not falling from the sky but from a massive glass dome. I surveyed the landscape but I could not make out glass walls. The scenery went on for miles. I was able to relax feeling slightly less hemmed in although I was in shock and my head still hurt. The snow suddenly ceased.

‘At least it’s stopped snowing,’ I said. Lucy groaned in frustration, ‘Yes, until someone decides to shake us up again!’ ‘Oh,’ I thought, I hadn’t realised this. Should I panic? What sort of a blizzard would we be caught up in? ‘Well we can’t just sit here!’ Lucy almost screamed, ‘Why not?’ I said, ‘because we’re in the middle of nowhere,’ said Lucy, ‘we need to find someone who can get us out of here, even if it means travelling to the walls of the globe.’

This last remark frightened me. Imagine going as far as you could go. What would happen then? Would we be stuck forever and how long is forever? Until we took another fall? We got to our feet and just about managing to walk through the deep snow, we made to press on. Lucy put her arms out to the side to balance herself and said, ‘which way should we go?’ I looked around quite literally and judging by our situation I said, ‘It doesn’t matter.’ Lucy’s face dropped and I took the lead while she shrugged in exasperation and then followed me.

We had not gone far; a few steps in fact when another creature hove into view. It was a rabbit and luckily for us rabbits in snow globes speak. He stopped when he reached us and sitting up on his hind legs, ears pricked up, he addressed us, ‘hello, you must be the two we have been waiting for. The two who will free us all from this gold fish bowl.’ ‘Oh?’ We both answered together. ‘You need to find the white fairy. She will give you instructions on how to do this but be warned, you hold responsibility for the whole globe.’ ‘I would go to the ends of the earth to get out,’ I said, ‘will you travel with us?’ I asked the rabbit. ‘I will,’ he said, ‘but the route you take is up to you.’

I chose any direction to walk in and the others followed. At least we had a goal in mind although the white fairy could be anywhere in this circular world. We could walk right back to where we had started without covering the circumference of this globe.

It must be Autumn again!

by Alex Reid

The gnarled leaf says to the large native Holme oak.

In the dark, dense and deciduous woodland, the mature tree lingers for 900 years

With a feverish ‘tap root’ diplomacy with Nature, an urgent message is received by the Holme oak: ‘our red caps and edible fungi are ready to be eaten.’ The ground is covered in mushrooms and wild garlic. They’re protected by the cleft of a basalt and granite rock, which faces the oak’s encamped roots.

It must be Autumn again!

The leaf-pointed exclamation to the Holme oak is as real as reality, as rhyme is to reason, as old as time. Nature hugs Mother Earth with the Equinox moon tidal surges

It must be Autumn again!

A mantle of deciduous tree canopies fill the landscape, with flaming harlequin leaves; they descend to the ground lazily when the first frost and the chilled breeze of Autumn sets in.

It must be Autumn again!



The scent of roasted chestnuts. The freshly cooked wayfarer’s pie topped with glazed berries as the mulled wine is beckoning. The autumnal surprises are worth recommending just after picking and pickling.

It must be Autumn again!

A Brother's Secret

by Marian Lassam

When the man fell in the lake,
the mass of reeds clasped his body to its tendrils
and squeezed out his last breath.
He sank to his watery grave.

They had been searching for days.
People on foot with dogs,
then a helicopter and searchlights.

The lake was in a remote spot.
Deep in the woods,
a long way from the nearest settlement.

Although they'd heard of it,
some of the locals had never seen it.
They were about to call off the search
as most of the party had gone home.

Old Jack, determined and stubborn,
thought the lake should be dredged;
He had seen it in a dream and regarded
it as his quest to find the missing man.

Moreover, he felt sure it was his brother Ambrose
with whom he'd had a fight.
It was a matter of brotherly honour to find him.

Yet later, when he stared into the still water,
aware of fish and dragon flies,
he felt an overwhelming sense of peace.
He could not disturb his brother's resting place.

One day, perhaps, this would claim him, too.
Now only the trees knew his secret.

St. Cecilia

by Matt Prescott

Boy:

It was time for Grandad to leave again. E'd been stayin' for the week. As usual, 'e was packin' up 'is fings for that trip. 'E always laid every'fing out, all tidy like. 'is clothes were in a sharp folded pile like a new book. 'E 'ad 'is compass 'Ole Faithful' as 'e called it. A tin of chewin' baccy and 'is multi tool knife.

Every li'l fing was perfectly slotted into 'is 'ole army rocket bag. The last 'fing to go in was 'is favorite photo of me 'n Muvver and our dog Jasper, wiv 'imself lookin' all dapper like, an' 'is Cap'in 'at on

'E 'ugged us an' stepped out into the night. The cold air rushed into our cosy room, an' a shiver ran down me back. 'See ya boy', 'e said as 'e scuffed me 'air. 'See ya Grandad', I said lookin' down at me shoes so 'e didn't see me sad face. 'Don't worry boy, I'll be back in no time at all.'

Grandad was still standin' beside me when we 'eard the chug, chug of a 'uge steam engine comin' over the 'ill, all noisey like. A sound I knew all too well now. The 'uge flyin' ship slowly drifted over the trees outside our 'ouse.

We lived on a big 'ole plot of land between Landan and Brigh'on. The place was called Ash Green 'cause it was popular to make charcoal. It weren't like livin' in Landan town, it was all leafy.

All me mates f'ought Grandad was a sea cap'in...



Grandad:

'Okay li'l man, I'm off now' I scuffed the li'l chap's 'air an' noticed 'is face looked sad. It made me sad too but I 'ad to get goin' 'cause the St Cecilia was comin' to pull me up. She was an awful lady. 'Er engine was all gasps and coughs as she swam through the air like a great black whale navigatin' the sea. She came up over the fir trees and me daugh'er and grandson's 'ouse. Just like a muvver elephant pushing her calf aside, her powerful frame 'id the landscape from view. Finally, she touched dan precisely on the front lawn.

The sound of 'er engine was now deafenin' as I embarked. 'Dont forget me 'ole fruit', I shouted as we waved goodbye. With a great surge of power, Cecilia launched into the night sky. The wind batting against me cheeks, I shouted 'Off we go, 'ole girl!'

All me mates f'ought I was a sea cap'in...

Frog Lane Nights

by Letti Prescott

Car light hit the ground in pelts
And blazed the blue dusk pools
A swirl of rain our summer dealt
Meteo moods of ruleless rule

Dad changed gear, tense like an arrow
We shot up, neck hairs bristled
Backseat babes huddled in row
Ear by window, wind a whistle

A corner of corn caused a curve
I held my brother's baby finger
Dad swore, scared of second swerve
The window sung in cracks and trickle

All at once the sky dropped dead
And the snap lightning lightened
And blue dusk bled orange red
And the meteo moods tightened

Yet Dad still swayed and swerved
Now by choice and not arrowed
Streaming frogs on lane merged
Old ones puddled and harrowed

Baby brother released his finger
As we watched the frogs flee
Saved by our clement driver
And his innate integrity

Little Boat

by Adam

Little boat bobbing on the water by the jetty
Resting in the haven of the harbour wall
Sky starts to darken as the storm approaches
Cloud starts to gather from the seaward squall

Waves start to swell as the sea gets choppy
Gloop gloop splosh on the pier and the buoy
Tink tink of rigging as the wind increases
Salt in the air and the seagulls cry

Suddenly a crash and a bang from the north east
Silhouettes the boat in a flash of light
Storm blows on raging raging
further on into the night

Sunrise now the storm is over
Seagulls soar in a clear blue sky
Tied to the jetty little red row boat
Stalwart survivor of the day gone by



Falling Through Water

by Anna Arbaney

'Falling, falling through water. That's how it felt seeing my wife with another man. A colleague from work, an acquaintance perhaps, someone from her book group which she attended every Wednesday without exception. They sat opposite each other in the restaurant, holding hands on the table.'

'Go on' said the therapist quietly, 'what was it like, this sensation of falling through water?'
'Well I was standing there watching them, my feet firmly on the ground. After a bit I tried to swallow but saliva got stuck in my throat. This triggered the sensation. The lovers continued to sit there un-noticing, talking; engrossed in conversation while I started to fall. It was a slow process. My arms floated upwards and my legs felt like they were too. My breath escaped slowly, sharply and steadily, leaving bubbles in its wake. I was in darkness until I saw a light. It was a small thing, a faint glimmer of hope.'

To my surprise I drifted towards the light which turned out to be a chandelier. It seemed I had entered a room with windows and shutters and furniture. The walls were white washed with framed pictures. There was a fireplace and a mantelpiece. There was a table set for tea. I wondered if I would land in the armchair but instead I carried on my journey straight down towards the floor. I hit the marble quite gently. So gently that it didn't feel like reality.'

'Did you recognise the room? Did it look familiar?' interrupted the therapist. 'Yes', I replied after some thought, 'It was my wife's room'. There I paused for a few moments, unsure of what to say next. The therapist looked at me and nodded. I continued, 'so there I was in my wife's room looking about at her stuff. As a separate entity from the man with his feet firmly on the ground in a well-to-do suburb of London, watching his wife in a restaurant with another man.'

'What did you do next?' asked the therapist. 'I tried to stand up. My legs surrounding me awkwardly. Finally I made it and floating over to the chair, I started to pour tea. It was cold and one of the cups was dirty. Nevertheless, I continued to pour. Then something happened. My wife got up suddenly and I heard raised voices. At that moment, the man with his feet firmly on the ground watching them felt something unstuck in his throat. My wife stormed out of the restaurant and I celebrated a silent victory. The only problem was I was split; I was standing there on the ground and pouring the tea in water.'

Summer Synesthesia

by Adam

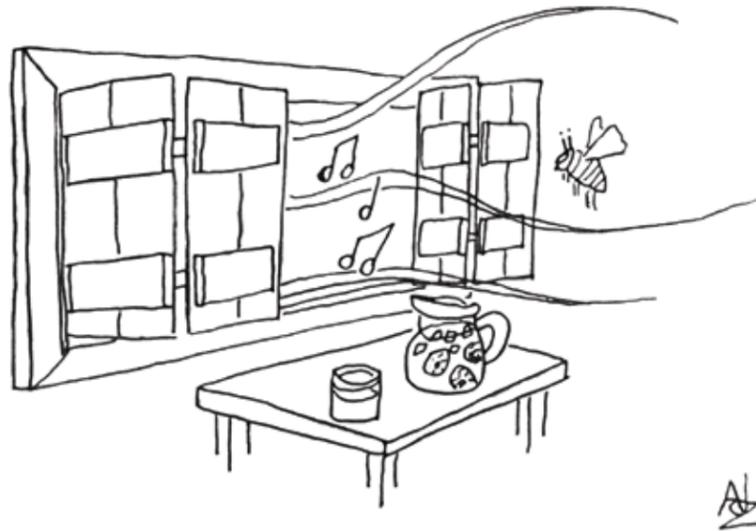
I could see the rainbow of music
Floating through the window
Blue notes of sadness, chosen by
Red notes of passion

I could taste the warm summer breeze
That the music drifted on
As sweet as honey on my tongue

I listened intently to a bee flying around the room
Hearing its black and yellow jersey
Stifling it in the summer heat

I needed to cool down
And reached out for my lemonade
Dipping my fingers into the glass, touching the liquid
Feeling the drink's spikiness
Immediately refresh me

Between dreaming and waking
Siesta Synesthesia again



The Wedding That Never Happened

by Katherine Goddard

The church was ready, full of guests.
Decorated with flowers and bows.

People in their best new clothes, sat waiting.
The groom looked around nervously playing with his tie.

The vicar stood at the altar, his eyes on the double doors.
The organist was going through the songs he would have to play,
with one eye on his watch.

The church was ready.

I stood in a beautiful white dress, that had been chosen with such care.
I stood in my bedroom looking in a full length mirror, at me looking back.

I stood for what seemed a lifetime.
The church was ready, but I was not.



The Treasure Chest

by Marian Lassam

Life, which had until this time been uneventful, apart from a few winter ailments and minor squabbles among the queen's household, chiefly starting in the servants' quarters, began to show signs of unrest.

The young prince rode in one morning with news from abroad. At first, no-one believed him, for he was fond of telling tall tales, chiefly to alleviate the boredom of being the heir-in-waiting to a throne he did not want to inhabit.

A foreign army was gathering force on the border with their lands, deep in the forest where a massacre had killed thousands of innocent country dwellers in the last great war. The prince had seen the encampment with his own eyes and was afraid for his life. Riding away, he was certain they would be ambushed that very night. Something about his behavior alerted the family. The queen took her son aside and heard what he had to say. Then she called an assembly of her closest advisers. 'Is there nothing to be done to resist this army', she spoke in a trembling voice 'If not, we must haste away to a place of safety.' She ordered her ladies-in-waiting to start packing, while she gazed anxiously from the library windows, pacing the floor and wringing her hands in despair.

Prince William was busy in his own quarters. He put his personal diaries and heavy gold locket in a small carved chest, along with his favorite waistcoat and breeches. He hummed as he prepared his departure. Although he felt sad, a sense of purpose was welcome. He locked his treasures away and put the key into the pouch attached to his leather belt.

A sudden impulse to retrieve his precious locket found him grappling with the key. In mounting fury, he raced from his rooms onto the battlements. He paused, looking out over the castle moat and tried again to unlock the chest. What was wrong with the key? He threw the box to the floor.

Aware that he had been followed, William spun round to face his attacker. In the ensuing fight, the intruder grabbed the key and tried to open the chest. The lid flew open, spilling its contents far below and into the muddy depths of the castle moat.

With a roar of frustration, the soldier leapt in, oblivious to the folly of what he was doing. By some miracle, the box floated to the surface. William spotted his locket, wrapped round a shard of wood jutting from the broken lid. But of his adversary, there was no trace.

The Leaf Spoke

by Alex Reid

The leaf spoke to the Holme oak, 'I have had a symbiotic relationship with you for the past 1000 years. Please can you clarify our present situation with Father Time and Mother Earth, by urgently sending out an S.O.S message through your elaborate 25-mile root system?

Will you be standing erect in 2000 years time resolute and proud with your vivid, vibrant and colourful canopy still hanging on? Without suffering from raging black beetle infestation, or being turned into hearts of oak deck ship planking at Portsmouth, Chatham or Harwich Docks?

Please can you put me down on your birthday banquet wish list because I have your own personal DNA? I want to splash out by having many truffles to celebrate our special day. This will be a momentous day to Harlech's deeply dark ancient green woodlands.

Please can you clarify the situation with King Neptune off the Gower Peninsular, that you will still be here? That you have not been cross-cut into planking for HMS War spite, HMS Victory or possibly HMS Revenge.

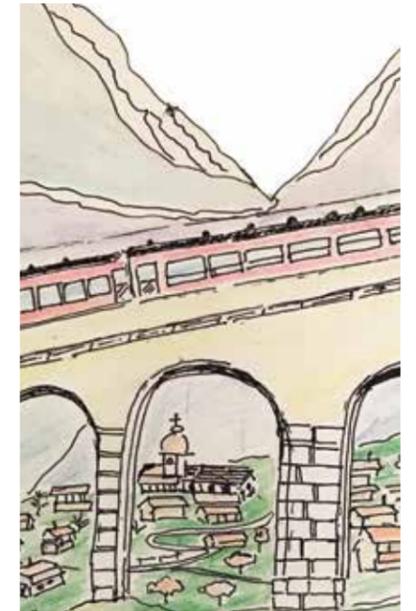
Can we expect from King Neptune the usual autumn equinox weather? Otherwise our beloved ancient Harlech green woods would die of draught, caused by too many dry summers and the regular chilling Siberian wind over many winters.

With God's blessing of mild bountiful rain, we will survive autumn with style. 'Without water we would die!' By withering away completely, we would be a shadow of our former glory. We unfortunately could not all change into cacti or prickly pears.

With the hazard of constant fluctuating draught conditions, we could be like a withered gnarled grumpy old oak tree cleaved in half by the winter storm of 1792. A fierce lightning could have struck and cut deep into the tree's marrow bone and lingered on for centuries.' As a focal point in a large 25 acre field; the large magnificent, highly damaged standard tree acts as a boundary wall. On the other side, a magnificent panoramic valley views of the rolling agricultural and mountainous hinterland that leads directly to the sea.

The tree is situated against the distant skyline as you leave Harlech woods. As you cross the many adjoining wild flower meadows to get there, you have a sudden déjà vu moment experience. Have you been this way before?

On a beautiful day, the gnarled tree provides sanctuary to a life of rocks, ravens, song birds, kestrels, barn owls, bats and five hundred and fifty insects that man is just learning about. On a sublime, long warm Welsh summer day, you feel totally alive. You feel that you have escaped life to find complete peace and tranquillity.



The Library

by Matt Prescott

Thursday morning, Southfields public Library. My usual table in the corner. I choose this spot because it is fortified with the larger shelves holding the oversized books and encyclopaedias.

I like the library on Thursdays because it isn't busy. I've noticed a familiar crowd; the guy sneakily eating crisps by the science books, the lady who loudly rummages through the CDs and the small groups of students. I think they are medical students; they look serious, pensively staring at their reading material and intermittently slapping neon coloured post-its on pages as if they are on a factory production line.

Today is the day I will venture out of my knowledge fortress and discover new realms. Natural History, or Genealogy perhaps? As the song goes: 'Don't know much about History, don't know much about Biology!'

I find myself intrigued at the idea of Ancient History, like really ancient. Right in the opposite corner by the photocopier, is the History section. I take my time scanning along the shelf. I pull out a couple of books on tool making. 'Stone Age Society – A Concise History.' What's this tatty old book? A dog-eared leather bound relic. It has ridges on the spine and the remnants of its original turquoise colour.

I return triumphantly to my 'book castle.' I've got to take a look inside this fossil of a book. I thumb over the index:

1. Stone Age Customs
2. Stone Age Food
3. The Life Cycle of a Piece Of Flint
4. Stone Age Tools and Carpentry etc.

As my enthusiasm wanes, I turn a page and notice a small scarlet envelope crushed into the spine of the book.' Ah, this is more like it' I say out loud to the disdain of CD smashing lady. The entire group of students look up like a pack of hyenas disturbed from gorging themselves on a gazelle carcass. Sshh!

My attention goes back to the letter. I pull the envelope out and look it over. It is completely flat like a pressed leaf. It must been inside a long time. I open it, being careful not to rip it. It opens easily as the glue holding it together is ancient.



It contains a small, neat card which is covered in tiny script style writing. I can barely make out what it says...

Dear Mrs Braithwaite,

I pray you and your kin are well,

It is with great joy that I send you the first copy of my book 'Stone Age Society – A Concise History.' Within these pages you will discover the fruit of my life's work. Stone Age society is very interesting to an old fossil like myself. But I do think you will find its contents agreeable due to your own extensive research into ancient society.

This brings me to a more pressing matter. I must admit the context of my correspondence is not entirely about my love of the Stone Age man. It is my warmest affection for you, Mrs Braithwaite, that I must confess wholeheartedly. The truth is that I wish to court you ma'am. The one occasion we met at our local library, I found you a charming counterpart of intellectual conversation.

I do not wish to embarrass you dear Mrs Braithwaite. You are the..., if I may be so bold to express: 'The apple of mine eyes!'

I look forward to your correspondence in return, with great trepidation

Yours Forever,

Mr A.H. Stones

Mr A.H. Stones

Afterword

Leonard Pearcey

The last time I wrote an Afterword was for a 1920s book which I turned into a current bestseller by reading it on BBC Radio 4. I ended that Afterword with a mule smiling. If you've got to this final few words you must have read all that went before and you too must be feeling with a smile the way that Peter Child and I felt when asked to sponsor the printing of this book: that it has all been so very much worthwhile.

Contributors

Adam

Alex Reid

Anna Arbaney

Katherine Goddard

Letti Prescott

Marian Lassam

Matt Prescott (book design & cover art)

About Genesis Trust Life Skills project

The Life Skills project works with people who are vulnerable – this may be due to loneliness, mental health issues, addictions or problems with confidence. Courses are free and in the last year we worked with 156 people on 30 different courses. There's lots of different opportunities on offer, both creative and practical – our hope is that those who engage with our courses see positive benefits on their health and wellbeing and that the new skills acquired can be used as a step towards further training and employment.

We also work individually with people depending on need.

Courses include creative writing, art, an IT drop-in, money management, a book group, cooking, food hygiene, music therapy, gardening, photography and occasional retreats.

If you are interested in finding out more about Lifeskills Call Denise or Matt on **01225 463549** for more information.



**Leonard Pearcey
&
Peter Child**

Kindly sponsored the printing of this book.
Thank you for your generosity!