

The Manchester Writing School and Manchester School of Theatre
at Manchester Metropolitan University present:

The QuietManDave Prize 2022

Flash Fiction Shortlist

2022 Flash Fiction Finalists

Kathryn Aldridge-Morris

Kathryn Aldridge-Morris is an emerging flash fiction writer living in Bristol. Her flash narratives have been published in many literary journals and anthologies, including *New Flash Fiction Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Bending Genres*, *Janus Literary*, and *Ellipsis Zine*. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and she was a finalist in *Flash Frog's* international award and *New Flash Fiction Review's* annual Flash Fiction contest. She has been shortlisted and highly commended in the prestigious Bath Flash Fiction Award, shortlisted for the Aesthetica Creative Writing Award, and she won the flash fiction contest organised by Welsh publisher *Lucent Dreaming*.

Sorrel Briggs

Sorrel Briggs is a recent English graduate from West Yorkshire. Her work has appeared at Tate Britain and in various publications. Winner of the Walter Swan Poetry Prize, she writes poetry as well as fiction and is interested in the possibilities offered by bridging the two.

Stuart Cavet

Stuart was formerly an international lawyer, but has taken what he hopes to be a permanent career break to pursue writing full-time. He has had short stories and flash fiction published in *Makarelle* and *Tigershark*, and has been shortlisted by *Writers' Forum* in one of its monthly competitions and been a finalist in one of *Globe Soup's* regular competitions. He has also written a novel for which he is currently seeking representation.

Pauline Clooney

Pauline Clooney was born in Manchester, raised in Ireland, and currently lives there in County Kildare. With a BA in History, Sociology and English, an MLitt on Charlotte Brontë, and an MA in Creative Writing, in 2017 she left a teaching career to concentrate on writing. Her debut novel, *Charlotte & Arthur* (Merdog Books) was published in 2021. Awards include winner of the 2015 Penguin Ireland/RTE Guide short story, 2021 recipient of the Denis O'Driscoll literary bursary, and 2022 recipient of an Irish Arts Council Agility award. Her current works in progress are a W. B. Yeats bio fiction and a short story collection.

Ian Humphreys

Ian Humphreys lives in West Yorkshire. His debut poetry collection *Zebra* (Nine Arches Press) was nominated for the Portico Prize. He is the editor of *Why I Write Poetry* (Nine Arches), and the producer and co-editor of *After Sylvia: Poems and Essays in Celebration of Sylvia Plath* (Nine Arches). Ian's work has been highly commended in the Forward Prizes for Poetry and won first prize in the Hamish Canham Prize. His poems are widely published in journals, including *The Poetry Review* and *Poetry London*, and he has written for the BBC. Ian is a fellow of The Complete Works.
ianhumphreypoet.com

Jo Lygo

Jo Lygo lives with her husband and their Schnauzer, Poppy, in the village where she was born. Before moving back to Staffordshire, she taught French and English in France and the East End of London. She has an MSt in Creative Writing from the University of Cambridge and has enjoyed a wide range of shorter courses. She has won or been placed in various competitions for flash fiction and short stories with her flash fiction appearing in two anthologies. She is currently reworking a dual timeline novel set in rural France to include elements of flash fiction alongside longer chapters.

Rosaleen Lynch

Rosaleen Lynch, is an Irish youth and community worker and writer in the East End of London with words in a number of journals, including *New Flash Fiction Review*, *HAD*, *Fractured Lit*, *Craft*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Jellyfish Review*, *EllipsisZine*, *Mslexia*, *Litro* and *Fish*, and has been shortlisted by Bath and the Bridport Prize, is a winner of the HISSAC Flash Fiction Competition and the Oxford Flash Fiction Prize, and has a collection/workbook coming out in 2023 with *Ad Hoc Fiction* and can be found on Twitter @quotes_52 and 52Quotes.blogspot.com.

Niamh Mac Cabe

Niamh Mac Cabe is published in many journals, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Southword*, *Mslexia*, *Wasafiri*, *No Alibis Press*, *The London Magazine*, *The Irish Independent*, *Aesthetica*, *Structo*, *The Forge Literary Magazine*, *Bare Fiction*, *The Lonely Crowd*, and *The Lighthouse*. She's been nominated thrice for the Pushcart Prize, twice for the Best Small Fictions Award, and selected for the Best British & Irish Flash Fiction list. She's won First Place in many competitions, including The Wasafiri Prize, John McGahern Award, and Molly Keane Award, and Runner-Up in The Costa Short Story Award, Galley Beggar Press Prize, and many others.

<http://niamhmaccabe.com/>

Leeor Ohayon

Leeor Ohayon is a writer from London based in Norwich, where he has recently begun a PhD in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of East Anglia. His short fiction has appeared in the *White Review*, *Prospect Magazine*, and the *RSL Review*. Leeor is the 2021 winner of the Royal Society of Literature's V.S Pritchett Short Story Prize, and is part of the 2022-2023 cohort of the London Library's Emerging Writers Programme.

Double Lives

Kathryn Aldridge-Morris

I see Gwen at the school gates and she does this thing where she's looking but not seeing and I'm not in the mood so I wave my hands in her face and she says sorry, but she's still got this unseeing expression and I ask is everything ok? and she says yeah, if finding out your husband's living with another woman in the arse end of Wales is ok, and I say what, you mean your husband Rhys? and she nods, and says yes, my husband Rhys, and it's a crazy way for us to be carrying on because she only has one husband, but I'm not getting it, so I say Rhys Rhys? and she says, Rhys Rhys, and I feel a kind of vertigo because it was only last March when I noticed how he'd started hanging back after dropping the kids off, how easy it was to talk to him about all the stuff no one else ever wants to talk about, like how we all create our own prisons and how we'll bring our kids up to know there are more choices out there, how I was the only mother he spoke to, the only mother whose jokes he laughed at, and how good it felt to crack a crooked smile in the face Gwen always described as being like a slapped backside—and I think they've been together since they were fifteen, to be honest, I had thought a lot about that, about getting to your forties and only sleeping with one other person and if Rhys had ever thought about sleeping with other women before—before that first crazy time—and Gwen says she's going to get a test from the pharmacy because how many other women has he been sleeping with, and I'm like, you think there could have been *more*? and she shrugs, and I'm getting this weird double vision thing where the canopies on the horse chestnuts in front of us aren't lined up with the trunks and my left arm starts going numb, and I say, I'm not feeling too good and she says, Rhys told me you got migraines, and says, bye then, so I say, bye then, and watch her go; double-Gwen surrounded by an aura of fucked electrical impulses only I can see.

You Were Seven

Sorrel Briggs

You were seven, so the main exit was the imagination. You were seven so you sat in Maths and ground the minutes between your teeth till you could taste them, like sherbet dust snuck from your pocket when the teachers weren't looking.

You were seven and knew seven had something to do with the Bible, but to you the Bible was a book with too many pages plus a story about an ark. You liked the idea of the ark, that huge wooden boat snug in the huger blue. You were ready for a flood.

You were seven and this had its own significance for you. Seven was jumping off the higher wall in the playground, bonus points for cut knees. Seven was getting the buses – two – back from school by yourself, no more clammy hand-holding, no more cold classrooms to sit and click your tongue in after the bell went. Seven was running a plucked tooth under the tap, blood down the drain, blood in your grin in the mirror: ace.

You were seven stones skittering along pavements, seven space invaders armed for attack, seven days stretched out on laundry lines in other people's gardens.

You'd been five when you moved into the hotel. No explanation, but you knew it'd had something to do with your dad wearing pyjamas in the daytime and all the letters piled up on the kitchen side. You'd asked for the envelopes and stuck them into planes and spaceships, even an ark of your own: the see-through bits made great windows. You brought them to the hotel and lined them up on the sill. They were still there when you turned seven.

Your mates thought it sounded wicked, living in a hotel: basically one long holiday. Being seven, you played along. You played up the chocolate-spread-sandwich dinners, the bannisters you tried sliding down like in films – and left out the long corridors, the sea of strange faces. The wet clothes you dumped from bath to sink when you went to get a shower, back again to brush your teeth. How your dad's snoring got in the way of sleep most nights. Quieter hours, the staff let you sit up on the reception desk and borrow their badges: your favourite was NIGHT PORTER, gold-lettered.

You were nearly eight when your dad said they've found us a place, it's not massive but we've got one. You were nearly eight and you could have your mates round for the first time in ages. You spent a week planning it. And they came and you showed them your room and the badge they'd let you keep, as a souvenir, and you were plugging the PS3 someone'd brought in a carrier bag into your TV when they said it's not a proper house really, there's no upstairs. Or garden. And something like upset swelled inside you but then you burst out laughing instead. Because what did you care. It was your home. And you were seven.

What Happened

Stuart Cavet

And the two of them talking, one of this, and the other – now changing the subject – of that, after the long week, after the day's work, after the long walk and dinner and more talk and drink, of course drink, loosener of minds and tongues, yes the two of them sitting and talking in the lamplit room, the expectant room.

He, on the sofa, leafing through a book, stopping now to read something while listening, something written in the margin, something personal, something private, something not intended for an audience, reads it aloud, expresses mild surprise and smiles at it, approves of it, takes it and embroiders it into the conversation.

He, in the armchair, lightly shaded with embarrassment, with self-consciousness, and their words now, in some fanciful way, like music, not quite intelligible yet completely understood, but then the music stops, and something is said – with a look, such a look – that in any other context would be obscene.

The words are extraordinarily frank and come from who knows where, though he on the sofa has long been willing them, waiting for them, or something like them, to come and is shocked only by the fact that they have been said now, right now, that this is the moment, the very moment, that they are now a fact and that they have taken this particular form.

They have been said, and the act of their saying is over, but the words themselves now exist and go on existing, hanging in the air, filling the room, affecting everything, changing everything, though that is not yet fully grasped, not yet.

Without calculation or forethought, without intention or any specificity of purpose, lightly, freely, unburdened and unbidden – not expressly bidden that is – one rises from the armchair, stands and approaches the other, and the other ... has already done or is simultaneously doing likewise, or, taking his lead from the one now standing, does likewise. Anyway, the other, he, too, is now standing.

What follows next is awkward, can never be forgotten, can never quite be accounted for, can never quite be explained the same way twice.

So, one is now racing downstairs; the other is now bewildered. One wishes to forget, wishes to run away, wishes to regain the street and the outside world, is somehow opening the door and is away, is outside, is gone. The other is alone, is, in fact, more alone than that word signifies, stands on his own in silence in an empty room, empty but for those words still hanging there, is left to become an embarrassing anecdote, half-forgotten, looked up, from time to time, and never to be found.

My Mr Shakespeare

Pauline Clooney

He looked like Art Garfunkel because he had the same afro thing going on, and I had this fantasy of him sitting opposite me on the floor of my dingy flat, his back pressed against the couch, his guitar tucked into the hollow of his yogic legs as he sang to me, soft songs with intelligent lyrics. He had an accent that was hard to place, was it an English one or just a posh Irish one? I wanted it to be the former; Irish men would be too laden with Catholic upbringing, guiltily impervious to the advances of a student—not saying that I was ever going to be that student.

Our tutorial group was small, six of us, and we met every Tuesday at eleven in room 6. We discussed Shakespeare's portrayal of women in his tragedies. When I say 'we', I mean 'they'. I was a mute in front of Barry. That was his Christian name. We were allowed, encouraged even, to call him Barry in this intimate setting. I never could, but the American students made up for my reticence. 'Barry, isn't it the men who are the weak ones, I mean, Barry, take Hamlet himself. Jeez, Barry, he's a mess. Barry, Barry, Barry.' I resented their self-assured ways and the way he smiled at them. There were three of them in the group; Kathleen, Mary, and Patrick, on an exchange thing from a Catholic university which was why they ended up in Maynooth where priests were made or whatever the expression is. The other two students were almost as mute as me but that was because they thought they were too cool to contribute. Jamsie and Micko, were from Monaghan and Kerry, and another time those far-flung places would have been exotic to my Midlands boredom, but in the presence of my Mr Shakespeare, they were just little schoolboys.

The assignment this particular week was not difficult. I had it done two hours after the class. *Have Shakespeare's tragic females any lessons to teach the contemporary woman?* I argued along the lines of the universality of women always falling for the wrong man. I quoted Yeats, '*it's certain that fine women eat a crazy salad with their meat...*' and concluded with William Shakespeare's own words, "*...the course of true love never did run smooth...*' I wanted to include some lines from the novel, *Notes on a Scandal*, for obvious reasons, but I couldn't work them in.

When you finished your assignment, handwritten in those days, you submitted it to the tutor by putting it in an envelope and sliding it under his office door.

As I slipped the white envelope under, I was aware of an invisible hand pulling it in. Receiving it. It meant that there was only two inches or so of wood between our crouching figures. I held the envelope with a rigid finger, forcing him to tug it from me. It was something. A moment. Enough for now.

Whose story?

When I was a boy, my mum would tell me the tale of her great-grandfather: *The First Black Man to Ride a Horse in Hong Kong*. He was from Mozambique – a lone soldier who rode up and down Pottinger Street as if leading a military procession. He was decorated. This was back in the 1880s. Children flung open the shutters of pastel-stained shophouses to stare and point. As he trotted past, amahs threw buckets of laundry slops in his wake, washing away the sin. Men spat. *Hak Gwai*. Only white people were meant to take the air up on the hill (in later years, the Chinese were forbidden to live there), so my great-great-grandfather navigated the muggy lowlands, silent and straight-backed on his Arabian steed. He thought he might make friends with the Chinese, but they had found someone they could look down on. *Even though he drips with medals*, the elders said, *you can bet his heart is blacker than his skin*. Or perhaps their words had been sweetened that day by lychees and longans: *This foreigner is a warrior like Yasuke – the legendary Black Sumarai. We must treat him with respect*. Nobody knows where he met my great-great-grandmother, or how they eloped to Macau. To be honest, no one knows very much at all. I've dreamt up most of this story because my people's history is spun on whispers. And that one curious image of *The First Black Man to Ride a Horse in Hong Kong*. It's awful to admit, but things might be easier if my great-great-grandfather had been *The First White Man to Ride a Horse in Hong Kong*. At least then we'd have some answers, official documents of his life gathering dust in a museum. And, of course, a fine statue to commemorate the occasion. Man and horse. On a pedestal.

Ian Humphreys

All We Wanted

Jo Lygo

We wanted to be horse riders, jockeys, trainers. We wanted to be equestrians. We liked that word best - practised saying it, spelling it out, until we got it right. We loved everything about horses: the velvet of their muzzles as they snuggled into our sugar-cubed hands; the clop-clop of hooves on tarmac, the stealthy walks in fields, the rhythmic thuds against the dried mud on the gallops; their firm smooth flanks, their strong straight backs, the thick trails of hair in manes and tails.

We made reins out of old belts and string and strapped them across our chests in turns. We'd trot and canter, whoop as we just made it over the final winning horse of the year jump, and flick our identically tied ponytails to keep off the flies. We wore plastic jelly sandals with ridges and indents in the soles - ideal traps for pebbles. We'd bend back a leg, extract the embedded stones from our pink horse hooves with the old penknife we'd nicked from a drawer at home. One of us cut ourselves and the other one neighed in sympathy.

When Apollo arrived at the stables, the day we turned teenage, we fell in love - dark-eyed, dapple-grey, broad-backed. Mum *wouldn't normally accept a non-racer, Mr Brash*, but she'd *make an exception this one time*. Belonged to Oliver - blue-eyed, blonde, thickset - given to him by his father, Jimmy Brash. *Award-winning actor*, Mum said. *Brash by name and nature* our Grandma said but our Mum didn't seem to mind that in a man.

We soon twigged Ollie was no natural horseman and, despite our many tips, he still couldn't find the joy in it. We thought he might fear disappointing his dad so we played on this and struck a deal - if he gave us a tenner a week, we'd ride Apollo for him. He got to do whatever he wanted. We got to have Apollo to ourselves. He'd ride Apollo into Copse Wood, sit himself down on the fallen tree trunk, get out his cigs. One of us rode Apollo up to the top field and the other ran on behind.

Then one day one of us said her ankle hurt so she wouldn't be running up behind Apollo and she'd wait with Ollie instead. And one of us was glad because she'd have Apollo all to herself for a change. And one of us smelt of smoke when we took Apollo back to the stables and looked full of smugness when Ollie said goodbye and winked.

One of us said she was *absolutely forever heartbroken* when the summer holidays ended and Ollie went back to boarding school. The same one of us said *you'll never know what real love is*. The same one of us cut off her ponytail as *an outward sign of inner despair*. And the other one of us rode Apollo whenever, wherever she liked, long hair flowing free behind her, not giving a flying fetlock.

Free-diving Five Hundred Million Years Ago

Rosaleen Lynch

One single breath and at maximum depth her body is compressed by four times the pressure than on dry land, was what it first felt like, but now it's as if Mama is tucking her in at night, snug as that bug, as she drifts down into dark, the air in her body squeezed like toothpaste from the tube, she can still taste, though she should be more interested in that bubble of air, in a recess of her lung, she can suck from, soak into her cells, diffuse into blood to circulate and in respiration, feel oxygen and glucose play, in her mitochondria, floating in the water of the cytoplasm, releasing energy, to keep her in dream-time, but not lose consciousness, if her brain shuts down to protect, so she meditates, like counting sheep, but they're fish, the extinct haikouichthys, swimming across the wallpaper, in circles on the mobile over her cot, fossils printed on her blanket, as she lays, baby-like with the half-mermaid night-light on, not a decompression chamber, with gas gangrene in the abdomen, or pulmonary barotrauma, or whatever happens to a body when bubbles of air get caught in the circulatory system, like an embolism, like her mama holding her, after feeding, waiting for the burp to come up, or maybe it's the reverse of the Cambrian explosion on earth, an implosion of the big biological bang, five hundred million years ago and to turn the tide, because surfacing was too fast, evolutionarily speaking, the only answer is in-water recompression, to wait for the flood, where she's held, almost baptismal, but inverted fully, weighted, to drop back down, into the black hole of the sea, to make the bubbles small again, small enough to escape, small enough to shrink into nothing.

A Marram Grass Cradling

Niamh Mac Cabe

This sand, softest pearl. Yet out towards the sea, where the tide has been and gone, its colour changes to dark-gold ripples, so hard, so cold underfoot.

Scattering the sand, a terrier pup bolts from the dunes, yipping out towards a group of terns alighting on the shoreline. Two boys stay huddled in the dune's marram grass, watching, waiting for the right time to chase, when their pup will be so beguiled by the coiling waves, it'll not run back towards them, it'll not even remember they're there.

The boys' mother is stretched at the base of the dunes, bare back turned to the evening sun. Her hair, damp from a swim, is salt-hard against her head. The marram's coarse stalks sway, the bottles of water stashed somewhere in their tall shadow. No one is going to die of thirst on her watch. No one is going to die.

They are alone on this beach. She sits up, faces shore, splays her toes, digging into the warm down. The pup and the boys have found each other at the water's edge. The sun lies low in the west; the light seems a tender blue, for now.

*

When I was a child, I got lost in these dunes with my brother. We weren't found 'til nightfall.

So small, we were younger than my boys are now. I forget why we'd decided to run and hide. The marram stalks had flailed us, their heavy seeded heads had whipped at our eyes as we raced wild through them. We fled until we were so far away, we didn't know how to get back. We said then maybe we'd never go back.

Nestling in the marram, we'd waited, hearts slowing, breath returning. We'd exhausted our tiny bodies. Curling up together, we fell asleep, the marram closing slow over us.

And inside that velvet cradle, did I dream a hooded crow perched by us, watching? That I stretched out my hand to its grey-black? Wings open wide like a cormorant's.

*

It's not true that you forgot why you ran.

Your brother had gotten a bad hiding, his nose was bleeding. Maybe his brain was leaking out, you'd thought, maybe he'll die, here.

It was the summer your dad rented a caravan at the beach for the three of you, the first summer after your parents split. It rained, you were too noisy, you didn't like the baby jigsaws your dad bought.

About the bird with wings outstretched like arms, you didn't dream this, you saw it. Scared, you woke your brother. The cormorant perched beside you, looking out towards the sea, beak open like it was about to speak. After a while, it took off into the air, screeching. Night was falling. Your brother's nose had stopped bleeding but one ear was red.

And, at last, your dad found you. His eyes were streaming-sore from the marram. He said you hadn't been lost, you'd all been playing hide-and-seek and he'd found you, yes, at last.

Prayers

Leeor Ohayon

And he'll make his way down from his room, hover at the entrance to the kitchen. Tug at his string bag so she'll see that he's on his way out.

She'll cluck her tongue, gesture upwards with the palms of her hands.

Again? she'll say. Why do you need to go out now, right before shabbat?

I'll be back before kiddush, Mum. Swear to God.

She'll huff and she'll oof.

He'll wait a minute or two, let her tut one last time and say: You make sure you're in your room before your dad gets back from prayers.

He'll wait until she says, Yallah shimdurah or calls him kaparah, that'll be his cue to go.

He'll repeat his promise to be back on time, check for wallet, keys, and phone.

Outside, he'll wait until he's turned the corner to smoke a quick cigarette before the high-street.

He'll weave in and out.

Mothers with strollers.

Commuters with Oysters.

All headed for the bus stop by Morrison's.

He'll stand there waiting, face bowed to the pavement, pacing, swaying. Praying that he doesn't run into a family friend.

He'll breathe a sigh of relief when the 254 comes into view from the bend.

Watch the main road blur from the window.

Black hats.

Friday's traffic.

He'll relax only when they pass the estates.

The borderlands.

Where he's safe from recognition.

At Manor House station, he'll send a text that he's en route, disappear down the stairs to the Tube.

Headphones on. Ja Rule, Ashanti on loop.

He'll count twelve stops to Hyde Park Corner.

Clammy hands.

Dry mouth.

He'll fidget with his Livestrong band, say a short prayer in his head.

Please God make everything go okay.

Please God don't let there be any nasty surprises.

When he gets off, he'll walk slowly to the statue with the six-pack. That way he might be able to spot deceit from afar.

There'll be sheepish hellos.

An unsure hug.

A pally hi-five.

A split second to decide if he looks like his pics.

They'll enter the park, trade notes.

Have you met with anyone else from online?

Do your mates know?

Would you ever tell your parents?

They'll sit under a tree, or on an empty bench, talk about music and school and hot celebs.

Brush pinkies, press knees closer together.

Bulging denim.

Until one of them will say: Wanna go somewhere else?

They'll find a bush or a bigger tree.

Or the rose garden where the older guys meet.

They'll unbutton, unzip.

Moan quietly.

Ears pricked up.

Alert.

Even while they're cuming.

Then it'll be boxers up, belts buckled. Sticky fingers wiped on leaves.

A quick cigarette on the walk to the station. An embarrassed goodbye at the entrance.

He'll race down the stairs, get back on the Tube.

Headphones on, iPod on shuffle.

Count twelve stops back.

All the while, he'll say a little prayer in his head.

Please God don't let them find out.

Please God don't let them ask any questions.

The QuietManDave Prize celebrates short-form writing and the life of someone who loved to experience new places, art and events and write about them. The Prize offers awards of £1,000 for Flash Fiction and £1,000 Flash Non-Fiction as well as runner-up prizes.

Both Prizes are open to writers aged 16 or over – and we are particularly keen to encourage, discover and celebrate new writers. Sponsored entry is available for those who might not otherwise be able to participate.

About QuietManDave: Dave Murray entertained and informed many through his blog www.quietmandave.co.uk. He was a keen theatre critic, performed poetry at open mic sessions and loved flash fiction. He embraced writing relatively late in life but did so with a passion. The QuietManDave Prize, named in honour of his memory and achievements, will seek to enable and promote new writing. The QuietManDave Prize has been supported through the generosity of family and friends of Dave.

This year's QuietManDave Prize was judged by Dima Alyaz, Kate Feld and Shane Kinghorn.

The copyright in each piece of writing submitted remains with its author. Views represented are those of the individual writers and not Manchester Metropolitan University.

If you have any queries, or would like any further information, about the QuietManDave Prize, please contact writingschool@mmu.ac.uk.

Press enquiries: Laura Deveney: l.deveney@mmu.ac.uk. The judges and finalists are available for interview by request.

The QuietManDave Prize will return in 2024.