

Xi (expectations)

Pauline Rogue

Crowded corridors full of hurrying strangers, odd comfort, she falls back into scowl. Fast-paced irritation, even fully-formed anger, or articulated annoyance, can't raise their manicured hands or snickering whispers, there is just no time as the train races their tight schedules along tracks to success, unless...Friendlier faces in the streets chiller house so full of creaks, she knows she doesn't have to stay, [couldn't afford to, really], keeps herself busy with outings and how do you do, run-ins before she's ran through by the insects creeping out of that rotten room, looming at the top of the carpeted stairs that couldn't cushion her fall if she fled. She's rushed past it more times than she can count, found refuge in yet another bathroom, and she runs the water over the wounds, bleeds out into the sink, wishes she could follow the tainted swirls into a world of order and corners that don't grab at you to hold you back. But she stays solid and stuck, death-gripping the counter top around the wash-basin until her chuckles sound less like white noise, less empty with pretence than the reflection she refuses to stare back at. Home is where the heart is and hers feels full at the minute, busy enough to ignore the aches and bruises. She used to dissimulate so well. She could learn how again. Recall mechanisms like a slightly rusty clock, oil the coils and scrunch them up until they bounce around, protect the secret snakes hissing across her bodymind. But she promised and it holds her at bay [for now], reigns her in, no side-way crown will fall today she pushes away the snickers and the sirens, the sly suggestions the worms that want to wrestle their way in. She built walls and her full heart keeps them up, she has been sucked into this performance. This wonderland was designed for another Alice, and she isn't the right one, she knows, but for just another act she plays the role, it comes easier by the day [there aren't many left]. The respite was enough, [a break from breaking]. No definite full stop to the running lines that plague her inner monologue, but brackets to breathe. It was better than she could have asked for, better than her record, tracking a roller-coaster across years of rustling rails, no really this is...it did well... succeeded expectations.

Poetry

Section Editors:
Ágnes Lehóczky
A. J. Moore

Editorial Team:
Pia Dela Cruz
Mark Lindsey

Mina Miller
Asha Pacey
Milly Winston-Jacques

*The University of Sheffield's
Creative Writing Journal*