

# WELCOME TO THE GOATSHED

Goats are strong-willed and unpredictable. They chew through armoured cables, slip under fences and, inexplicably, end up on rooftops. Nonetheless, goats uphold their own definition of grace. They can stand for many hours on the side of a mountain, sure-footed amongst the boulders and scree, their gaze trained on the sun setting behind some distant hill. Goats are loyal, yet fiercely independent. You can tell each goat apart by the way it lifts its chin to face the oncoming wind.

The Goatshed is shelter and communion. It is for people who believe in Art as Play, as the domain of the trickster, a space not defined by duty, but the crackle of possibility. At Goatshed Press we aim to deliver exciting, unpretentious content while discovering and uplifting a new generation of writers and artists.

This collection is made possible due to the dedication and hard work of a lot of people; writers, editors, sculptors, designers, painters, printers and proofreaders, who have come together to form a kind of emergent collective, a Goatshed Family, each living a different life in a different place, yet united by attitude, each stood atop their own mountain, chins braced against the oncoming wind.

Remember, this is only the beginning.

# CONTENTS

## Goatshed One

Published by Goatshed Press, Great Britain, 2023

Work published with permission from the writers, who retain the right to be identified as the authors of their work

Art is, either, published with permission from the artist or taken from the public domain

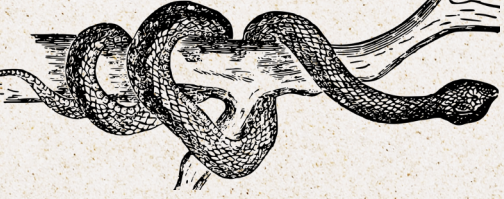
Designed by Jack Jenkins and David Humphries

Printed by KOPA

[www.goatshedpress.co.uk](http://www.goatshedpress.co.uk)



Julian Harvard — Fiction .....	4
Michael Ndubuisi Agugom — Poetry .....	18
Alex Kanevsky — Art .....	22
Maddy Docherty — Fiction .....	30
Duncan Richardson — Poetry .....	52
John Sweet — Poetry .....	54
Leonard Baggs — Fiction .....	58
Werner Galow — Art .....	78
Douglas Colston — Poetry .....	84
Ryan J.M. Tan — Poetry .....	90
Chloe Utting — Poetry .....	92
Eduard Tolos Palau — Art .....	94
Abuchi Modilim — Fiction .....	100
Colleen Anderson — Poetry .....	122
Gabriel Awuah Mainoo — Poetry .....	124
Philip Webb Gregg — Fiction .....	128
Naadia A. Hussein — Poetry .....	142
Philip Davison — Poetry .....	144
Ed Ahern — Poetry .....	145
Isabel Álvarez — In Conversation .....	146
Mirri Glasson-Darling — Fiction .....	168
Suzanna Lundale — Poetry .....	174



# A Nearby Town

*Julian Harvard*

They'd taken a villa in a dead olive grove looking over a town of white cubes that burned orange whenever the sun came down. They were close enough to hear its church bells and the teenagers who drank in the piazza, the Vespas that grumbled up and down its worn cobbles. Close enough to touch, far enough to feel apart.

Alice and Tom had been in Italy a week and the sun hadn't relented. It battered the stone walls and shrivelled the grapes on the vines. Dark cracks had formed in the earth between the dead trees, across the sea of baked clay that surrounded them, and there was a fine red dust that hung in the air and powdered the surfaces. They could feel it on their teeth and between their toes. It settled on the sweaty soft flesh behind their knees. The land was suffering and, when a maestrale howled, the trees and earth seemed to scream in reply.

'Forty-four fucking degrees,' Tom said, jabbing his phone excitedly.

Officially the hottest he had been in his thirty-eight years. 'How about that?'

Alice rolled away from him and took a long, lazy sip from her negroni. She looked out over the pool as the sparrows dive-bombed for water.

'Global warming is a tragedy beyond anything humanity has ever known,' she said as if she didn't mean it.

'It's weather, Alice. And we're in a hot country. Everything here is designed for heat.'

Alice noticed a black snake, half as long as her lounge, emerge from the pool's pump, bask for a second in the sun, then disappear into a gap in the stone wall that separated them from the olive grove.

'What about the dead trees? They don't seem designed for it,' she said.

'It's a virus, baby. Not sure you can put that on Big Oil or Ryanair.'

Every olive tree for miles around had died, withered by Xylella disease. Graveyards of gnarled trunks and bare branches stretched endlessly in every direction. It could have been winter were it not for the heat and the mosquitoes. Disquieting at first, Alice and Tom had quickly grown used to it. Eventually, the world beyond

their villa had dissolved out of focus, along with the names of days and the gnawing anxieties of home.

They were now well settled into the holiday rhythm. Hangovers had ceased and in their place came a constant coddling fog that clouded their thoughts and maintained good tempers. The days had taken on a metronome beat: pool, drink, lounge, lunch, drink, bed, pool, lounge, drink. They would welcome the night with a Prosecco and a bowl of olives. Then sloppy pasta and Primitivo by the cafe.

At the start of the holiday, as she did every year, Alice had protested at Tom's enthusiasm for the foreign liquor aisle. She had blushed in the supermarket as he trailed the auxiliary drinks trolley behind the food trolley, as he slapped the first gallon bottle onto the belt with a grin and a cry of 'Grande festa!' Whether the girl had really curled her lip and raised her eyebrows hardly mattered; Alice still felt an intense shame at their indulgence. Sorry, she had wanted to say. Sorry we are such rich, greedy locusts, such grotesque aliens, linen-clad and pale-skinned and red-cheeked. Sorry for his boat shoes, sorry for the absurd brim of my hat, my seven-hundred pound hemp handbag. Sorry, so very sorry. But instead she had smiled demurely and busied herself with packing. Eventually, as ever, she would settle into Tom's slipstream and keep pace.



Tom rolled onto his back and burped. Alice sensed his weight behind her, the struggle to lift the belly up and over, the creak of slats. Sometimes he revolted her. When they'd met it had seemed impossible that he would ever be anything other than beautiful. His angularity, those sharp cheeks, that tousled hair; his looks had been so strong as to seem eternal, and he possessed something in his spirit that diluted his acerbity, a kindness almost, even if only she could see it. But now she could find that beauty nowhere, not even in his eyes, within which something had extinguished. People degraded, she knew that; her sense of entropy was as strong as her sense of temperature, of pain. And yet, where Tom had succumbed happily to age soon after their marriage, she had committed to staying exactly as she was. Her regime punished her. The early mornings, her vile personal trainer, the endless, excruciating denial of pleasure. She envied Tom's capitulation but so wished he had fought alongside her for longer. Instead, he had bolted from their trench to be gunned down just beyond it. His corpse was peaceful, its stench constant.

'Christ, he's here again. Il contadino.' Tom was peering over his Ray-Bans into the olive grove where a small man stepped between the trees. His skin was brown and wrinkled, tough and craggy, as if he had absorbed and retained all the sun that had ever shone on him. He tapped a trunk with his fingers and put his ear against the bark as if listening for signs of life.

'They're dead. Give it up mate,' Tom muttered.

'Let him be. There's probably never been a day in his life where he hasn't tended these olives. And now there's nothing left.'

'He should retrain. We need fewer olive farmers, more computer repairmen and Bitcoin miners.'

Alice let herself laugh. Tom, satisfied, hauled himself up and launched into the pool, his swallow dive aborting mid-flight into a belly flop. He proceeded to clamber onto a lilo and float face down, singing Sinatra.

Alice ignored him and watched the farmer as he walked between the trees, tapping and listening. From a bag at his side he pulled out a small olive branch, thick with leaves, their greenness loud as a foghorn in the grey grove. With a chisel he carved notches into a sawn trunk and, by the time he had finished, five new branches had been inserted into the old tree. To Alice it looked utterly futile, a child's solution to a problem without one. Pity overwhelmed her and she felt like crying. To be so committed to a life that would not return. What a way to live, she thought.

Tom roused her with a splash from the pool and exhorted her to join him. She relented. The heat had become too much to bear and as she jumped in and the water took her she felt, for the briefest moment, born anew.

“Alice!”

‘Alice!’

Tom called from somewhere.