

THE
RAINBOW
LIBRARY

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Manchester

A **PATHWAYS** Project



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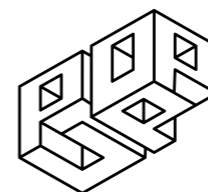
Manchester

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“It’s the Queen. She has come for me.” Snow warned the others as she leapt up to grab her sword and armour. Prepared for battle, she stepped out into the night.

Princess Snow and the Icy Queen

Nancy Eves

Read now

A spectrum of LGBTQ+ stories from Manchester

Throughout 2022, Pop Up delivered creative workshops across the UK and Ireland as part of The Rainbow Library – a groundbreaking LGBTQ+ inclusive children’s literature creation and publishing project. Sixty young people attended workshops across seven cities led by established LGBTQ+ writers and illustrators to develop their storytelling and illustration skills.

In Manchester, aspiring writers delved into myths, legends, fairy tales and traditional stories from around the world. With illustrator David Roberts and writer Jay Hulme, they considered how to relate these age-old tales to the modern world and transform them into a queer retelling that spoke to their own lived experiences.

Through the workshops David and Jay developed an illustrated poetry book exploring queer medieval lives, whilst the aspiring writers received one-to-one mentoring in order to strengthen their own creative practice.

This anthology showcases their work and highlights some of the very best writing in the young LGBTQ+ community across Manchester. We hope you enjoy their work!

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Jack and the Beanstalk

Ellie Andrews

There was once a girl named Jack,
Who longed for all life's treats.

But when the school bell rang,
She walked home and dragged her feet.

Jack's flat was warm and comfy,
She and Mum were the best of friends.

But when Mum shouted, 'Stew for tea!'
Jack groaned, 'Not that again!'

'Oh Mum, why can't things be different?
With iPhones and riches galore.

I want to shine like the kids at school,
but these clothes are such a bore.'

Mum took Jack in her arms
Hugged her tighter than ever before

And said, 'As long as there's kindness in your heart
There's no need to want more and more.'

The next day Jack jumped on the bus to school,
Where she met a strange old man.

'Young one, why do you seem so blue?
Let's turn that frown upside down.'

Out of his rucksack he drew
Something that Jack had never seen

And said, 'If luxury is what you adore,
Then take these magic beans.'
Later that day, Jack went home
And showed her Mum the enchanted glow.

But Mum was unimpressed at best
And threw them out the window.

When Jack awoke the next morning,
'My Goodness!' is what she thought.

For outside the parted curtains
Was a giant green beanstalk.

From her bed she planned a jump,
Well-timed

And up its trunk.
She climbed and climbed and

Atop the cloud, were sparkling coins
That sprouted like golden flowers.

Jack gasped and looked up before her
At a humungous ivory tower.

Inside, there was a golden throne,
and all the sweets she could dream of!

But just as she sat down to tuck in,
She was interrupted by a THUD, THUD, THUD.

'Fe, Fi, Fo, Fum!
I smell the blood of an Englishman.'

And upon seeing the Giant before her,
Jack ran and ran and ran.

Through the corridor with
No time to wallow,
Swiftly did the Giant follow.

And just as Jack reached the door,
The Giant pleaded
'Won't you stay just a moment more?'

At that Jack paused and faced the Giant
and listened as he said:

'Although I may have treasures
And all the money I could ever spend,
It gets lonely in this castle
and what I'd really like is a friend!'

So down the beanstalk together they climbed,
Through the birds and skies of blue.

Jack invited the Giant in for tea,
To try Mum's delicious homemade stew.

Pinocchio

Finch Murphy

Chapter 1

Once upon a time, Pinocchio wasn't alive. And then they were.

There's not much else I can say.

I strongly doubt you remember the moment that you were born, reader. Nor do I expect you to. Nobody really remembers that. When you are an infant, all you care about is eating, sleeping and crying. There's little else to worry about, and thus you just... lie around.

I would wager that there isn't a single infant on this planet who truly realises that they are alive. They simply exist, don't they? Eating, sleeping, crying, over and over again until they finally grow up and learn how to stay quiet, and live.

Pinocchio's case was different, and this was because they were the creation of two wonderful men – his parents.

There was Gepetto. He was kind, the sort of man who enjoyed the little things in life. Things like birds, his garden, and trees. Ironically, the trees in his garden were the very same trees which Pinocchio themselves were made of. It was Gepetto's idea, after all, to create a child with his husband – Jeremy. He had wanted one for as long as they had loved each other.

You see, Jeremy was a magician. A wizard. Not like the magicians you may see in your world, no. Jeremy didn't need to rely on card tricks and slight of hand. What he did was magic. Real magic; potions, cauldrons, wands. He even had a toad, who served as his chief familiar and best friend. He called the creature 'Frog', which he thought was hilarious since it was actually a toad. Gepetto still hadn't gotten the joke much to Jeremy's annoyance.

Still, Gepetto supported his husband's magic in any way he could, keeping Jeremy well fed and comfortable. Their love fuelled so much of Jeremy's magic, and Gepetto was more than happy to oblige. In his free time, he spent the rest of his time as a carpenter. His furniture sold across the world, and every house in the neighbourhood would be guaranteed to at least have a Gepetto-made chair, if not an entire house of his furniture.

All of his creations had helped everyone around him, but it had been so long since Gepetto had created something for himself. For himself and his husband.

Now, to Pinocchio. The puppet was built out of oak wood from the forest, lovingly crafted in the image of a child. They didn't want a teenager, not a chance. What they both wanted was a child who knew their own mind and knew how to live. One who would go to school, do their homework, go to the theatre even. A child who would read, dance, play with others. Gepetto had spent over a year creating the puppet, making sure he could move just like everyone else. And then... he waited.

Jeremy was more than a little bit nervous. Of course, creating a child with magic and carpentry raised a tonne of questions. Ethical ones, legal ones. Would Pinocchio be bullied? Taken away for scientific experimentation? Jeremy knew his spells could keep them safe, if he casted them right. Pinocchio needed to be a real person, eventually – at least. Otherwise, they would be stuck as a twelve year old puppet forever, and that was no way to raise a child.

The wood would have to eventually turn to flesh, and Jeremy had insisted that Gepetto created wooden organs and bones for the inside of the creation in order to ease the transformation. The gap between human and object had to be as small as possible. Pinnocchio would have to live.

A fun fact, just for you. A gift from your narrator, if you will. The name Pinnocchio is a mix of two Italian words; pino and occhio. Pino means pine, the wood that Pinocchio was made of. Occhio is a verb – to see. This magic would give the wood the ability to see the world around them, to be their child, and be loved unconditionally.

The spell was surprisingly simple. A flick of the wand, a circle of candles and crystals, and Frog jumping around, eagerly wanting to help out. Jeremy was a little nervous. The spell felt easy. Something this big should never feel easy. Perhaps that was because of Gepetto and Jeremy's love and devotion to this creation. Perhaps the love that sang from their hearts was unknowingly casting this spell over and over again for years. Jeremy held his wand in one hand, and Geppeto's hand in his other. They shared one more look, before turning to Pinnocchio, hoping that everything they had ever wanted would finally come true.

When most people are born, they cry. Of course they do. Imagine it, you are safe and comfy in the womb, lazily kicking and rocking around. All your food is provided to you; there is absolutely nothing to worry about. And then, all of a sudden, you see the world for the first time. It's a little too bright and a little too loud, and even worse is that you're expected to breathe for yourself. You take your first breath, and then you cry. Of course you cry! Look at this world! It's loud, bright and busy. There's some strange woman poking you and everyone is congratulating them, and all of a sudden, you exist. Poof. It really is as simple as that.

I mention this because Pinocchio's case was different. They woke up with wide, excited eyes, as if from a dream. They didn't understand this world, but were not scared, either. They saw the world with wonder and fascination, and an unwavering desire to live. As their wooden bones creaked to life, and the child stood in front of the two men they knew were their parents. Pinocchio smiled, running into Jeremy's arms.

Needless to say, his parents were thrilled. Geppetto had tears in his eyes, scooping up the puppet-child from his husband and holding them close to his chest. Jeremy comforted him, his arm on the small of his back as they watched Pinnocchio step into the life that was always made for them.

However, once the perfection of the moment dulled slightly, Gepetto looked behind him at Jeremy. There were still questions to be answered, after all.

'What was it you said? About how the wood would turn to flesh, and they'd become a real human being?'

Jeremy blushed slightly, looking at Pinnocchio's face and tapping on their cheek.

'Ah. The spell said they would become a human once they know who they are. Perhaps they're just confused. I'm sure it will all work out in the end. Once we send them to school, at least.'

Unfortunately, Jeremy was, to put it bluntly, naive.

Naive, yes, and perhaps a little bit stupid too. They were a genius when it came to magic, I will grant him that. But nobody could deny that Jeremy was naive to think that they could bring a child into this world, and have them know who they were that same day.

I mean, the idea is simply preposterous. I'm going to assume that you, the reader, know who you are. But that takes time, no? You've met friends, you've talked to people, found your hobbies and interests. You know what you believe, you know what you like. You have aspirations, places to go and things to achieve.

On that subject, I suppose that from the fact you are reading this book, perhaps you enjoy things a little more dark and macabre than the average person. A little freakish, maybe?

I mean, judging by the cover of this book, and the title, perhaps you already know that this opening chapter exists solely to lure you into a false sense of security, because eventually Pinnocchio will somehow end up in a freak show and I know you're dying to see that happen. You know this is a scary story. Maybe you've skipped the first chapter already, and you can't even see this. If so – rude.

But all good stories have a beginning and this is where Pinnocchio's began. I cannot change how this story began, or how it will end, and I wouldn't dare to try. I can only tell it, because I am your narrator and

that is how stories work.

As we have established, Pinnocchio was alive. However, as we have also established – they were significantly less alive than their parents – whatever that meant. Maybe this was because of the fact their skin was wooden, and no heart beat within their chest – or maybe this was because of the fact that Pinnocchio had been moving and existing for under an hour, and their parents had set their expectations of a fully-formed child way too high, and now found themselves quietly frightened for the future the wooden human would have to endure.

Love, Gepetto realised, gave way to fear. Gepetto loved his child so much, too much, perhaps. And as he held the wooden body close to his chest, he could feel his own heart beating, and only stillness where Pinnocchio's was. He wanted to protect Pinnocchio. Badly. He wanted to hide them away from the world, protect them in the way that only a parent could. This child was built from love and magic, and to lose them would mean losing everything.

Jeremy's love, however, was tainted with shame. Shame that the spell wasn't good enough. Shame that he had made his husband worry so much. They knew they had to work twice as hard to keep this child, to bring twice as much magic into their life as they had promised.

This is what it takes to bring a child into the world. Love and fear. Magic and humanity.

'They need to know who they are. Somehow.' Jeremy reassured his husband.

Gepetto looked up, meeting his lover's eyes. 'When did you know who you were? What can we do for them?'

Jeremy shrugged. 'I suppose through meeting others. Through learning about humanity. We can send them to the school tomorrow

'Tomorrow?' Gepetto raised a brow. 'Seriously?'

Jeremy nodded. 'We can't wait too long. Tomorrow.'

Gepetto nodded.

Jeremy nodded.

And just like that, Pinnocchio was doomed.

Chapter 2

The next day, Pinocchio went to school. Their parents had given them a map and had reassured them time and time again that it was nothing more than a long walk straight ahead. As long as Pinocchio stayed on the path, and didn't get distracted – they would make it to school easily. It was important, Jeremy had reassured them, that they learnt to be independent as soon as possible. They had to trust his magic, after all. Pinocchio was smart. All of their magic was crafted to give Pinocchio the mannerisms, the desires and the life of an older child. They were smart, but not too smart. They were alive. They could love, they could fear. But they lacked memory.

How could you live without memory? Everything we learn is from past experiences. We learn to read from practice. We learn not to talk to strangers from people who we trust. We learn how to cross the road, how to eat and drink, and take care of ourselves. These things come from memory. From experience. And Pinocchio had nothing of the sort.

Perhaps Jeremy and Gepetto could have sat Pinocchio down and talked them through all of the human norms - but there is no way to teach life. Not like that. The only way to learn life is to live it.

It's not my place to sit around and criticise Gepetto and his husband, however. They were blinded by love, by desire, and the unshakable knowledge that Pinocchio needed to be around other people their age. This was the natural way forward. To live, to grow, to move through this world and figure out all there was to know about it.

The path to school was fairly pleasant. Cobbled streets dotted with market sellers – shouting out proudly about their fruits and veg, their fish and poultry or their knick knacks and candle making. Pinocchio found themselves excited by one fruit stall, running up to it and pointing at a large red apple.

'What is that?' They asked, practically jumping up and down with excitement.

The greengrocer looked at Pinocchio, raising her eyebrow slightly in confusion. 'That's an apple, love.' 'A what?'

'An apple. Do you want one? Just twenty pence,' she offered,

Pinocchio was clueless. 'What's twenty pence?'

'Money, coins. Like these-' She pulled out some silver coins and Pinocchio waved at their reflection.

'You not got any?'

Pinocchio stuck their hands in their pockets, feeling around as if some coins could have miraculously appeared. They frowned and shook their head. 'No, sorry,' they muttered. 'Nobody told me I needed any money.'

The woman was thoroughly confused, shaking her head. 'I'm sorry. I tell you what, if you find just ten pence, I'll let you have it. Don't be late now,' she reassured, putting the apple back amongst the rest of them.

Twenty pence sounded like a lot of money – but ten pence seemed just as hard. Right now, as far as Pinocchio knew, they had zero pence. But first, they had to get to school, otherwise their parents would get worried, and then what?

They took one last look at the fruit cart and turned back to the road. Keep going forward, keep moving, and eventually he could make it. School was a place made for asking questions, according to their parents at least. They made a mental note to ask about what twenty pence was, and what to do with the apple once they finally got it.

That was when everything went wrong. We've already established that Pinocchio was doomed. Naive towards the world, unsure of right and wrong, missing their parents who had not prepared them properly for the world. They had so much to learn, and so little time to try and figure it all out.

Unfortunately, poor Pinocchio didn't know that bad people existed. That the world, whilst beautiful, had the potential to be a dangerous place to be in if you hadn't been sufficiently prepared. Pinocchio wasn't sufficiently prepared. As I said, doomed.

That's why, when a tall, flamboyant man with a large top hat and an equally eccentric mustache asked Pinocchio if they would like to know how they could make some money, the wooden child stopped in their tracks.

Let me tell you about Mr Big Show.

Baldovino Santorelli believed that all the world was a stage, and he would do anything to put on a good show. He was born into a circus, but left when his father died, and his brother became the ring leader instead of him. Baldovino didn't care much for family and always felt like he was destined for something greater than the circus' legacy. And he had a point, in a way.

Not that Baldo should have been jealous of his brother. Nor do I condone any of the acts you are about to witness him do. But the one thing he got right was his dislike of his family. They were horrid people, and Baldovino certainly didn't have the same love and care in his upbringing as Pinocchio did. Furthermore, just because your family are all circus people, doesn't mean you have to be. Legacy is just another form of peer pressure.

I mean, look at me. I'm an author. My parents were certainly not authors.

However, Baldo's desire to be more than the Santorelli legacy was less about wanting to escape the chains of circus life, and more because he disagreed with the sort of acts his parents passed off as 'entertainment'. Jugglers, trapeze artists, clowns? Maybe he was just getting bored, but Baldo hated each and every one of the imbeciles who his parents decided to put on his stage. He wanted the stage to himself – and so the Freak Show, and Mr Big Show, was born.

In a Freak Show he had the power. He wasn't a freak. He owned each and every one of his performers, and he was certainly in charge, because he had the power, and they didn't. Because he was tall, and rich, and looked like the stereotypical human man. People would look at Baldovino Santorelli and think 'Yes, that is a normal person. That person has power in the society I live in.'

Mr Big Show looked at Pinocchio with hunger in his eyes. A wooden child was surely a freak. Magic this powerful deserved to be shown off, exploited. He could see the posters now – 'COME AND WITNESS THE LIVING PUPPET!' in bold letters, underlined, with a picture of the boy underneath.

Anyways, now you understand why this man stopped Pinocchio.

'Excuse me, child? I couldn't help but overhear you were short of money, and I would be honoured to help you,' they grinned, tipping their hat towards them.

Pinocchio blinked, looking up at the man. 'Uh, hello. I'm meant to be going to school, I'm afraid. I'm sorry.'

'Nonsense!' Mr Big Show cried, eyes widening. He didn't seem to blink, and his toothy grin never seemed to disappear. 'Who needs school, especially someone as special as you!'

'My fathers said'

'They won't mind! Look at you. You don't need to be going to school. I can teach you everything you need to know. Why, my show is the best school you could ask for!' he grinned, holding out his gloved hand. 'Come on, I can do so much more than that pathetic school'

'Really?' they asked, looking uneasily over their shoulder at the pathway. 'But father said-'

'I'm sure that your father said that you need to go to school to grow up, and find answers to all the questions you have about the world, no?'

'How did you know?'

'I know a lot of things-' he winked, pulling off his top hat and holding it out to the child, a bright red apple shining inside of it. 'Go on, take it!'

'My name is Mr. Big Show. I run a circus nearby. I think you could learn a lot there. What's your name?' He watched as Pinocchio took a bite of the apple.

'Pinocchio'

'Well, Pinocchio,' he held out a gloved hand, the puppet taking it, 'let's go, hm?'

The Princess and her Father

Nikita Lawal

Princesses are supposed to be poised, prim, and proper.
Not a hair out of place and not one step should falter.
So, why did eleven of the King's lovely daughters
Snore well past noon and eat lunch in pyjamas?
Eleven heads still in bed when the morning bells ring,
Not one stirs or wakes even as the red robins sing.
The King couldn't figure out why the girls were so tired,
He even hired private investigators who were all promptly fired!
Only the twelfth bed in the far-left corner,
Is where you will hear from no sound, not even a murmur.
The eldest, Samara, the King's first child,
Is up by dawn each morning, picking fresh berries in the wild.
She visited the villagers to give out food for free,
'Sharing is caring,' said the future Queen to be.
She was well-mannered, well-dressed and the perfect age for marriage,
Which was just perfect timing because the King needed a new carriage!
Sat on his throne, he stroked his beard as he thought,
'There are so many things that will need to be bought.
I need new clothes, new carpets, new curtains, and drapes,
I want imported mangoes, melons, apples, and grapes!
Maybe some meat and chicken to be fried!'
The King wanted more than what his country could provide.
He had already spent the kingdom's yearly funds,
But he would get more coins if Samara married someone's son!
So, he sent out invitations to the most powerful nations,
To come court his daughter in a steady rotation.
The richer, the merrier, money was all they would need,
His patient daughter would see them all, she was a proper princess indeed.
Week after week, the sons showed Samara their love,
Someone even gifted her with a gold tinted dove!

But Samara didn't want any of the sons to come visit.
So when each of them proposed, she said 'No' in the same minute.
Who cares about the diamonds, the money, and the crowns,
When her eleven sisters were finding true love in other towns?
At the stroke of midnight when the castle was asleep,
The girls finally woke up and rolled out of their bedsheets.
Nightgowns were swapped for satin and silk dresses,
They sat at their eleven mirrors to brush out their soft tresses.
Hidden underneath their beds were tons of ballet shoes,
Which ones would they wear tonight, which ones would they choose?
Of course it was the night that brought them alive,
And their constant tiredness waited behind mirror number five.
Pushed aside, it revealed the secret door,
Hiding steep cobbled steps leading down to so much more.
Winding and turning, the sisters didn't break their stride,
Candles lit up all the way so each girl would have a guide.
The closer they were, the louder they got –
When princesses giggle and cackle, they become a rowdy lot!
At the end of the staircase, there were beams of starlight.
So, like always, the King's daughters skipped towards it with delight.
Finally, they came out onto a garden of rainbow roses.
There were camellias and violets, the sweet smells filled their noses!
Vines wrapped around a grand stone pavilion,
With so many surrounding trees, there was probably a million.
Butterflies glittered under the bright silver moon,
Gleaming at this time and rarely ever seen at noon.
No sons from far-away lands to be prim and proper for,
Just eleven dancing partners waiting for them on the floor.
Joyful were her sisters, they rejoiced while they danced,
Flowing dresses fluttered around as they twirled and pranced.
Alive with colour, the garden welcomed the young daughters,
Though, Samara kept hearing the sound of trickling water...

Was it a drip or a dribble? No wait, that wasn't a drop.
It was a stream like a river that flowed and didn't stop!
Tiptoeing away from the side-lines of the ball
Samara went deep into the forest, entranced by the river's call.
Bright, beady eyes beamed out from the towering trees
As she quietly passed by the homes of tired, busy bees.
Fireflies zipped around and lit her journey aglow.
They led her to a small cottage where lilacs began to grow.
All the lights were off and she thought no one was home,
But then 'Who are you' a voice said, so it seemed she wasn't alone!
Standing behind her was a girl who was quite pretty,
She held a basket of fruit that definitely wasn't from her city.

'I'm Samara,' she said, 'the King is my father.
I was trying to find a lake or a river, I don't mean to be a bother.'

Shaking her head, the other girl let out a giggle,
'You didn't bother me at all, not even a little!
I'm Alyssa, this is my home I'm sure you would have guessed,
If you're looking for some water, I can help you on that quest.'

Her smile was soft as she held out her hand
And Samara grabbed it tightly so she could lead her through the land.
Travelling down a well-worn pathway,
Alyssa told her, 'I was down here earlier catching some fish today'
The princess was shocked, 'Oh I can only pick berries,
All of our fish is brought in on loud, stinky ferries!'
The girls laughed as they passed by the night scenery.
Samara loved the quietness, the clean air, and all of the greenery.
'I don't know what a ferry is,' Alyssa said, 'but I hope you like my home
My family moved here years ago, it's the only place I've ever known.'
As they travelled through the lush fields and meadows,
Owls hooted to each other, and creatures followed in their shadows.

The sound Samara sought was soon in her sight,
Not only was it a river, but a waterfall that glistened in the night.
Unlike her kingdom full of roads and machines,
This place was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen!
Swans floated by, whistling down the gentle stream,
And Samara began to sway, entranced in a sweet dream.
'Your home is so peaceful,' the princess told her new friend.
'Up in my father's kingdom I have to be proper, prim, and pretend.'
'You can stay here,' Alyssa said, 'and relax from all the stress.
We can just dance for a moment and breathe air that's clean and fresh!'

So the girls twirled together and skipped around for hours,
Even after Samara's sisters crept back to their father's towers.
The sun had risen and it was time to go to sleep,
And for once in her life, Samara had no duties to keep.
As she snored through the morning in the cottage underground,
The poor King was perplexed – his daughter was nowhere to be found!
Royalty was left waiting, with their riches and rings.
The red robins searched the kingdom, flapping their tiny wings.
Villagers became detectives and looked high and low,
But by the end of the day, the princess was still a no-show.
The King was upset – there was money to receive.
And with Samara missing, all the princes decided to leave!
'That's it!' he shouted, 'I'm figuring this out
Where my daughters go tonight is where Samara will be, no doubt!'
So he hid outside the girls' room to catch them this time,
He knew they went somewhere after the midnight bells chime.
The King waited and waited, but the doorknob never jiggled.
So he opened it himself to hear his daughter's fading giggles.
To his surprise, there was a secret door leading to his answer,
And he finally found out that each of his daughters was a dancer!
Tiptoeing around the garden, he still couldn't see his heir,
So he bravely went into the forest and hoped he didn't find a bear.

The King had never once visited a place like this before
Where the air was so quiet you could hear the squirrels snore.
His journey was lit by the glow of kind fireflies,
And he could see the moon and stars high up in the sky.
He came upon a stone cottage that was small and modest,
It was tinier than his room if he was being honest!
He didn't even knock because he couldn't believe his ears:
'There's no way,' he whispered, 'is that a river I can hear?'
So he left the little home and went in search of the water.

The King knew now for sure that's where he'll find his daughter.
Following a paved pathway, he ran through the countryside.
He couldn't deny the beauty of the floral fields even if he tried.
At the riverbank is where he saw her dancing with a girl.
Their dresses flowed around them as they did a spin and a twirl.
She caught her father's eye and came to a halt.
The King hated how her sad face was now his fault.
Riches were his focus but now he would rather see her smile.
'My dear daughter,' he said, 'do you want to stay here for a while?'
The princess grinned wide, brighter than you would imagine,
'It would be a dream come true, I never thought this could happen!
This place means more to me than any silly jewel,
So, I would rather stay here than become Queen and rule.'
Gazing at the sparkling waterfall, the King began to understand,
Why his prim and proper daughter would rather remain in this land.
Tiny rabbits and red foxes played around together.
They were gentle too as if they were of the same feather.
Safe and sound, his daughter would have her freedom.
'You can stay,' he said, 'but I'll miss you, so please visit the kingdom.'
Embracing his daughter, he held her tight
Before leaving the two girls to dance through the night.
Strolling through the meadows, the King softly sighed,
'My daughter is all grown up now, she finally has some pride.'

Taliesin

Jennifer Roberts

Did I ever tell you the story of a girl called Wyn?
She woke up one morning and said with a grin:
'I'm leaving today with Lucas the cat
To go to the city in search of a flat.'

So off she went, to look at the houses,
One, Lucas hoped, was full of mice.
They searched high and low, and try as they might
Wherever she looked, none seemed to be right.

They walked until they found an unfamiliar street
Ignoring the pain in Wyn's back and Wyn's feet
They wandered down an alley, lost, and frightened, and
Came across a building that seemed to be abandoned.
They both knew that they could lose no more
So Wyn built up the courage to knock on the door.

All of a sudden, the door swung open wide
And a group of people were standing inside.
Wyn looked at them all, and they all looked at Wyn,
Until the one at the front said with a grin:
'Come in, come in! You must be freezing out there,
We have a spare room we'd be happy to share.'

'I'll get you a blanket!'

 'You must need a brew!

'Wait, I'll introduce us all to you:

We've got Reya Sunshine and Dinah Might,

Bertha Venus and Marianne Bright.

There's Mable Syrup, and their pet cat Nettle,

And me, of course, Ms Phillipa Kettle!'

Wyn's new room was up in the attic

But anything they'd offer would have made her ecstatic.

Her new friends helped to unpack her bags

And to their horror, they only pulled out rags!

'These are so boring!'

 'And ugly!'

 'And drab!'

'You can have some of mine, in this you'll look fab!'

'Now that you mention it,' Phillipa thought,

'We've been missing something that cannot be bought.

We were fine as we were, but this is the thing:

In a house full of Queens, we've been missing our King.'

They gasped, and ran off, and came back with more clothes

And dressed Wyn up from her head to her toes

Long coats, bow ties and shirts patterned bright

But try as they might, none seemed to feel right.

At the back of a cupboard, Mabel found a top hat,

And an outfit that impressed Lucas the cat.

In a tie and trousers and tails from her kin,

Wyn announced: 'My name is Taliesin.'

The very next night, in borrowed clothes,

Wyn took to the stage as Taliesin.

With Lucas and her friends watching her song,

She felt at last that she belonged.

Mei and the Giant Bamboo Stalk

Weng-U Pun

Gentle Mei awakes to the morning of lunar new year
to a house swept clean and decorated with love.
She shivers with excitement, she is filled with cheer!
But when Mei reaches for her curtains
her heart drops like a thrown stone in a pond.

A timid knock at the door rouses Mei from bed
She answers the door with worry and dread
and beholds a tiny human, a boy it seems,
Scrawny and scruffy with clothes unravelling at the seams

They both gasp and gulp,
Until at last the tiny human spoke,
'Hi, my name is Jack, please don't hurt me, don't smash me into pulp.'
'My goodness,' Mei exclaims, 'I never would!'

That was true, for Mei was the kindest woman one could meet
and she accepted everyone for who they were.
She did not question Jack's size
nor did she suspect him of lies
for all she saw was a person to befriend.

With a smile, Mei kneels to lower her hand by his feet
'Today is lunar new year,
come in, for there is plenty to eat.'

Mei transports Jack to a city of food,
There are spring rolls the size of bathtubs,
dumplings the size of pillows
and soup in bowls the size of pools
Jack cannot help but drool.

Jack stares at the mattress-sized radish cakes
and the pillow-sized dumplings
when suddenly, the doorbell rings!
Mei places Jack on a chopstick rest and says,
'Wait here, Jack, for I won't be long.'

'Welcome, everyone, it's so good to see you all.
I hope you've all been well, healthy and prosperous.
We are very lucky today to have a special guest who is very small!'

However, to Mei's surprise, Jack is nowhere to be seen.
She looks behind the tangerines, the chopstick rest,
and everything inbetween
but her promising words are soon lost as her guests streamed in
with compliments on the room, the food and the big bamboo!

The children begin to line up, eager and shy,
to recite good wishes that they have prepared
the adults praise and thank the polite children
and shower them with red pockets filled with gold coins paired.

Around the table they begin to gather,
The room bathed in the aroma of food and excitable chatter
Amidst the festive chaos, Mei's tiny guest dashes off the table in quiet pitter-patter...

Curious Jack approaches a big red envelope, the size of his door,
amongst the giants' voices he is as quiet as a mouse.
He rips carefully around the corner to reveal what is inside
and there, he sees the wheel of gold that could buy him a house.

The giant's niece discovers her ripped red pocket with a devastating wail.
'It must be a mouse,' someone says, and everyone agrees
but Mei and her loyal cat are unconvinced
for there is another suspect on the loose without a tail.

The clever cat spies sly little Jack
who weaves amongst the clutter,
lurks under ladles,
and shimmies around spices.

With a snarl and a mighty yowl,
the cat begins to chase the tailless mouse!

Jack runs! Runs as fast as he can with the gold on his back,
his heart a drum in his chest—
He runs from the beast
with fangs and claws like elephant tusks
and races towards the looming big bamboo...

Jack is plucked from the air
and with his legs dangling above a hissing red cave
he can no longer afford to be brave.
With vertigo-raised hairs,
he lets out a desperate cry: 'Please don't hurt me!'

Gentle Mei puts Jack in a jar
and pushes it far
from the window.
'Listen, Jack, I'm very upset,
I welcomed you into my home,
to share my food and friendship
but you have taken our gold and disrupted our meal!
You can stay in the jar to reflect on your actions
Until you can apologise to us for what you have done.'

'I'm sorry, Mei, I really am,
my mum and I are struggling
and it's mostly my fault
My mum was away and she left the plant shop to me
but I was lazy and left the poor plants to wilt
and when my mum asked me to sell our TV
I traded it for bamboo cos I thought it looked cool!
The bamboo grew through our roof and into the sky,
so up I climbed to try and make this right,
and when I saw the gold, it was like a dream come true
For all our troubles would vanish and my mum won't be blue
And we will celebrate the lunar new year as we should!
I am so sorry, Mei.
I hope you can forgive me.'

For a moment, Mei was speechless.
It was clear to see, the child was frightened.
'Jack, your story breaks my heart.
It is, after all, lunar new year,
a time for love, family and new beginnings.
Even if you had been honest from the start,
I still would have welcomed you into my house.
Times can be hard,

but I don't think your mum will like a mountain of gold
that her son stole!

'After all, I was meaning to give you one of these.
We give this to all the children, so please,
take this.'

In the hours that followed, Mei's house is joyful, comforting and warm
The house is full of loved ones that are well-fed and content.
Mei is happy to have welcomed new friends into her home
for there Jack and his mum are, sitting on the chopstick rests
spreading gratitude and cheer on this happy new year.

Princess Snow and the Icy Queen

Nancy Eves

Chapter 1

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, two neighbouring kingdoms towered over a dense, dark forest. No one dared to enter the forest but the brave and the naïve, for it was where quarrels between the two kingdoms were settled in battle, the losers being left to the monsters that lurked in the shadows. On one side, the kingdom of Mayoral sat tall and grand, its silver castle shimmering like a throne above endless, rolling hills. On the other side, the kingdom of Strigheld loomed darkly above the rocky coast, where the waves crashed against the imposing cliffs.

Atop the tallest cliff, inside a modest, crumbling castle, lived Queen Elenwen. As the only child of the previous king and queen, she had been first in line for the throne and was crowned as soon as she became of age. But on one condition: she must find a wealthy partner to marry. Being dazzlingly beautiful and possessing magical powers, the townspeople were confident that she would be wed in no time, and bring more money to their struggling kingdom. Alas, the Queen turned away every suitor that came to visit. Slowly but surely, the townspeople became frustrated. More and more businesses closed, and farmers took their flocks elsewhere. Rumours spread that the Queen's heart was as cold as ice, that she was incapable of love, so she stayed locked away in her tower in shame.

Meanwhile, the ferocious princess of Mayoral darted through the forest and across luscious green fields on horseback, leading a group of equally courageous warriors behind her. She called herself Princess Snow for as she whirled by, one might mistake her for a mighty blizzard, wearing a flowing cape of white silk and riding her pure white stallion. Raised as a prince and, therefore, taught the ways of a soldier, this princess was the first of her kind. She wore a suit of armour by day and elegant gowns by night, gliding across ballroom floors with the grace of a swan, all the while a sword tucked beneath her petticoats. She was loved by all, and yet, burdened by her duty to marry by her next birthday. Her daily exploits of chasing bandits and fighting off monsters were all to keep her mind away from this worrisome responsibility.

Chapter 2

One day, in a desperate attempt to find a suitable ruling partner, Queen Elenwen of Strigheld turned to her magic mirror and declared

‘Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?’

The mirror’s surface warped and waned until the image of an elegant figure clothed in white silk and shining armour appeared before her.

‘A princess in armour? How strange!’ she gasped in confusion. The Queen did not know how to feel about the mirror’s answer, but knew that if this princess was indeed wealthy and successful, she must find her.

‘Theremin! Theremin, come here at once, I say!’ she bellowed down the stone steps of her tower.

The sound of her cry bounced off the flagstone until it reached the workshop of the humble carpenter. Theremin was one of the few remaining townspeople still loyal to the Queen and unwilling to take their craft elsewhere.

They scrambled up the stairs, breathlessly panting ‘On my way, your highness!’

‘I must find Princess Snow,’ said the Queen. ‘Search for her, Theremin. I must have her heart, or else the kingdom is doomed.’

‘Her heart?’ asked Theremin, puzzled.

‘You know what I mean!’ barked the Queen, before turning away haughtily.

Theremin knew the Queen could be bitter and blunt, but they had never considered she would go to such violent lengths to save her kingdom. That very day, Theremin set out into the woods, all manner of tools and blades at the ready. They would bring back Princess Snow’s heart if that was what the Queen wished.

Chapter 3

Theremin marched on down the forest path that wended through the tree trunks, the light of day becoming dimmer and dimmer as the bushes grew wilder, and wilder. The sight of hoof prints ahead was a sign they were drawing close to where the soldiers of Mayoral had last rode.

SWOOSH! Out of the gloom a silver flash burst forward and knocked Theremin, face first, into the brambled undergrowth.

‘It is very foolish for a bandit to wander these woods alone. Who are you?’ demanded a soft voice from above Theremin.

They felt the tip of a sword brush the back of their neck.

‘I am Theremin, carpenter of Strigheld! I’m not a bandit! I have been sent by Queen Elenwen to bring back the heart of Princess Snow,’ they whimpered.

‘Ha!’ said the mysterious voice. ‘Surely a Queen can do much better than sending one person to conquer me.’

Theremin quivered at the realisation of who this was. There was no way they would succeed in their quest if she was this strong. But before they could reply, she was gone with another swoosh of her blade and soon the sound of hooves were galloping away into the darkness.

Princess Snow had been adventuring alone and knew that if the Queen did intend to kill her, for whatever reason, she would likely send more attackers following the person she had already subdued.

Deeper and deeper into the forest she ventured, her horse flying effortlessly over fallen trees and trickling streams. Suddenly, the darkness melted away onto a cosy meadow Princess Snow had never discovered before. A pool of sunlight illuminated a neatly ploughed vegetable patch, stretching out before a large, thatch-roofed cottage.

‘How curious!’ said Snow, in awe. ‘Maybe I should seek shelter here until the morning’.

She dismounted her horse and walked gingerly over to the cottage. Drawing closer, she noticed a stocky figure in overalls tending to the cabbages.

‘Greetings, stranger! I am Princess Snow of Mayoral and I require shelter until tomorrow. I will pay you well if you allow me to stay!’ declared the princess cheerfully.

The gardener looked up with a frown and said nothing. Snow was about to apologise for startling them, when another person bounded out of the cottage door.

‘Princess Snow, of course! Of course, you can stay with us! Oscar wasn’t being rude, he just doesn’t talk very much. My name is Demure.’

Demure was smiling bashfully through cat-eyed spectacles, dusting flour from her chequered apron.

‘Come inside dear, I’ll introduce you to the rest of the Dweller family.’

Chapter 4

Snow ducked her head beneath the small wooden door, becoming enveloped in the scent of fresh bread, and entered a glowing, terracotta kitchen. Five other people sat around an impressive oak dining table.

'Greetings! I'm Jones,' the smartest one spoke.

'Hiya! I'm Daze,' the flamboyant one cheered.

'Hello! I'm Jubilee,' the cheeriest one chirped.

'Hey, I'm Lavender,' the dozy one murmured.

'Aaaaachoo! Sorry, I'm Al,' the sneezy one muttered.

'Pleased to meet you! But how are you all a family?' asked Snow, puzzled.

'We are all different people with different minds and different skills,' Jones explained.

'But on our own we would struggle, because no one can do everything alone,' said Demure.

'Together we can share our minds and share our skills, look after each other and feel loved!' chimed Jubilee.

'Each person brings something the rest do not have, so all needs are met and no one is left behind,' continued Al.

'We chose our own family,' concluded Oscar, in a hushed voice from the door.

Snow learnt so much from them that afternoon. Not only did they teach her to bake, to garden, to fix, and to heal wounds, but she also learned how they came to live in the forest.

The Dwellers had grown up in each of the two kingdoms, but had disliked the strict rules for how one should live and how one should create a family. By coming together with their shared views, they built their cottage in the forest and began to grow their own food. They had remained there ever since and named themselves the Dwellers, revelling in the freedom that their individuality had granted them.

Chapter 5

Back in Strigheld, Queen Elenwen paced from her throne room to the kitchen, from the bathroom to the tower, keeping a wary eye out for the return of Theremin, and, hopefully, Princess Snow. A scuffling sound echoed up the stone tower steps, causing the Queen's magic to fizzle wildly from her hands in panic.

'Your majesty! Help!' It was Theremin, galumphing up the stone steps with a heavy pant in their voice.

'I found Princess Snow, your highness, or rather, she found me! She's like a whirlwind!'

'What did she say?' asked the Queen. 'Will she meet me? Is there a chance she could ever like me?'

'Like you?' Theremin was extremely befuddled. 'You asked me to bring her heart! Do you not want to kill her and take her power and wealth for yourself?'

The Queen gasped in horror. 'Theremin, no! Do you really believe me to be as cruel as the townspeople say? I wish to form a bond with her that might save the kingdom from ruin and dispel the rumours about my inability to love!'

Theremin tried to apologise for the misunderstanding, but the Queen shot off down the steps and out of the castle. She burned and blazed through the forest like a hurricane, her magic blasting ahead of her to form a path through the trees, in pursuit of the Princess.

Chapter 6

It was nearing midnight. Princess Snow had been telling the stories of her wild adventures to her seven new friends around the fireplace, a mug of hot chocolate in each of their hands and an expression of awe on their faces.

At long last, Lavender let out an almighty yawn and drooped her sleepy head onto Jones' shoulder. They all decided it was time for bed. Daze was just showing Snow to the guest room, pointing out the exquisitely detailed quilt he had embroidered himself, when FLASH! A bolt of light, brighter than the moon, zapped across the clearing outside jolting everyone wide awake.

'That had to be magic!' Demure yelped in fear.

'It's the Queen. She has come for me.' Snow warned the others as she leapt up to grab her sword and armour. Prepared for battle, she stepped out into the night.

Unbeknown to those inside the cottage, that blast of magic that had torn through the final layer of trees, had merely been for Queen Elenwen to light up her way out of the darkness. Upon seeing the cottage, she had stopped completely, not wanting to startle anyone living there. A glint of silver caught her eye up ahead, and there she saw Princess Snow upon her white stallion, fiercely clad in platinum armour, sword drawn.

'Princess Snow' the Queen declared, 'I am here to-'

'I know why you're here!' Snow interrupted boldly, 'You'll never defeat me, my armour is strong enough to block your magic. My sword will pierce your heart before you can ever reach mine!'

She charged.

The Dwellers clung to each other in terror from the safety of their cottage, hoping desperately that their friend would be okay, and that their vegetable patch would not suffer from the fight. Through the windows, the clashing of sword and sparks was a raging storm that swooped and swerved about the clearing in a tornado of silver. The Queen, unable to speak between the swiftness of Snow's movements, was becoming fatigued as nearly all of her magic had been depleted. As the final breath of light wisped away from her fingertips, she fell to the ground with a thud.

'Why don't you fight back? Are you as cowardly as you are evil?' Snow shouted in confusion, sword directed at the Queen's heart. However, Queen Elenwen had fallen into a deep sleep, drained of energy and power.

Princess Snow, noble at heart, withdrew her sword into her sheath and called to the cottage for help. Although a ferocious warrior, she would never harm another soul without good reason.

Jones and Oscar heaved the Queen onto a makeshift bed inside the barn, covering her with heavy woollen blankets to prevent her from using magic should she awaken. Snow sat by her side the whole night wondering why the Queen would ever come after her in the first place. After all, in sleep, she did not look evil, but peaceful and pretty.

Chapter 7

As the morning's sunrise crept its golden fingers through the gaps in the barn door, Snow snapped herself awake, ever cautious that the Queen might have awoken before her. Nevertheless, Queen Elenwen slept on silently.

CREAAAK. The barn door pushed open and Snow jumped to her feet, only to find the traveller she had come across in the woods the day before, standing before her.

'Theremin?' she asked cautiously.

'Princess Snow! Please don't attack, I followed the Queen here after I told her about our misunderstanding' they explained, feeling ever more fearful now that they could see just how spectacularly fierce Princess Snow was.

'Misunderstanding?' Snow asked. 'The Queen came here to kill me, just like you tried to.'

'You are mistaken, Princess, but it is all my fault,' they explained. 'The Queen simply told me to find you because she wanted your heart to save the kingdom. Silly me, I thought she meant it literally!'

Snow was even more puzzled than before, so she invited Theremin to sit with her and tell her about what the Queen was really like. Demure brought them tea and toast as they chatted away, the Queen still no closer to awakening.

Theremin told Snow all about how the townspeople of Strigheld had turned on the Queen for being unable to find a suitable person to marry, how all she wanted was to help her people, and how she did indeed want to love someone. All of this new information swirled around Snow's mind like a whirlpool, shocked and amazed that the Queen was under just as much pressure as she was to marry, but more interested in serving her people first. The anger that had burned within her that previous night was melting away like the last of Winter's frost, revealing the softness of Spring in its wake.

'Thank you for telling me about her, Theremin. I no longer fear her, but instead I fear that she may never wake!' Snow announced as Theremin finished their story.

'If her magic has burned out, she will require a spell to wake up... a spell that requires a magical fruit from the deepest part of the forest' Theremin replied. 'If we cannot cast this spell before midnight tonight... she will sleep forever.'

'I will gather my boldest warriors from Mayoral and find this fruit at once,' Snow declared. 'The people of Strigheld cannot be left without a Queen!'

'There is no time!' came a voice from the edge of the barn. It was Jones, stood with Oscar, Jubilee and Al.

'We know the forest best and we want to help you. Let us find the fruit with you instead,' said Jubilee, beaming.

'Demure, Lavender and Daze can look after the Queen while we are gone' said Al, reassuringly.

Knowing there wasn't another moment to lose, Snow, Theremin, and the four Dwellers galloped away into the forest, each of them using their particular knowledge and skills to guide them.

Chapter 8

The usual lushness of the trees and bushes slowly unravelled into a sea of thorns, poisonous toadstools and the beady eyes of goblins, watching the group's every move. The only light came from a large tree up ahead, with bright golden orbs floating amongst the branches like a choir of angels. Unluckily, by the tree's trunk sat a pack of growling wolves with curved daggers for claws and eyes that glowed like hot coals in a furnace.

'Well, we've found the magical fruit tree, but how shall we get past those monsters?' whispered Theremin, trembling.

'We need to work together using our unique skills. For example, I have a plan,' said Jones with confidence.

They huddled together behind a particularly spiky thorn bush as Jones quietly divulged their cunning plan to snatch the fruit. With one unanimous nod they got into position.

Theremin, Jones, Jubilee, and Oscar sat in silence as Al and Snow crept away from the tree, towards a flowering bush with a repugnant odour. As soon as Al was close enough to breathe in the smelly pollen from the flowers, he let out an almighty AAAAAACHOOOOO!

As Jones predicted, the wolves heard the sneeze and darted off in the direction of Al and Snow. Al hurriedly hid behind a tree as Snow brandished her sword at the wolves and fought them off with vigour. This distraction allowed Theremin to approach the tree and start cutting away the remaining thorns and branches with their carpeting tools, clearing the way for Oscar and Jubilee to climb the tree and carefully harvest the fruit with practiced hands.

Once they could carry no more, the team made a daring escape away from the tree, Snow bravely facing off the last of the wolves before turning to run after the others. They ran and ran and ran; terrified, but triumphant.

What is The Rainbow Library?

The Rainbow Library is a pioneering publishing initiative to create more LGBTQ+ inclusive books for young readers. Through workshops, talent development, events and publications, The Rainbow Library aims to celebrate queer-representation in children's literature and increase the visibility of LGBTQ+ people in children's books.

Who was the programme delivered by?

The Rainbow Library is produced and presented by **Pop Up Projects CIC**.

Pop Up Projects CIC is non-profit social enterprise with a mission to transform lives through literature and publishing.

Through our work we aim to:

- 1 Provide literary experiences and publishing opportunities for writers and illustrators of all ages, including children and young people
- 2 Engage and inspire, nurture and invest in writers and illustrators from under-represented, marginalised and excluded backgrounds
- 3 Contribute to a more inclusive canon of children's books, so that more young readers can find themselves and discover others in the books they read

We achieve these aims by:

- Providing courses which offer routes into children's literature and publishing for illustrators and writers of all ages, including children and young people
- Publishing inclusive children's books by the illustrators and writers we discover through our courses

Find out more about us and our work at pop-up.org.uk

Meet the Authors



Ellie Andrews

Ellie is a butch writer and theatre-maker based in Manchester. In her creative practice, she aims to embrace lyricism and accessibility to tell stories that resonate with other working-class audiences. Her favourite book is *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg.



Finch Murphy

Finch Murphy is a drag performer and author who writes on the strange, fantastical and horrifying. Currently a drama student in Manchester, they write across age ranges and genres with a focus on overcoming hardship, celebrating life, queerness and radical hope for the future. Their favourite book is *Dracula*.



Nikita Lawal

Nikita is a twenty-three year old Nigerian-Irish writer with a BA in English from Manchester Metropolitan University. Her favourite novel is *Lagoon* by Nnedi Okorafor, and she loves Greek mythology, film, anime and travelling. Nikita writes poetry and short fiction, and is currently working on a novel.



Jennifer Roberts

Jennifer Roberts (she/they) is an actor and writer from Rochdale, currently based in Manchester city centre. Jen trained as an actor with the National Youth Theatre and CASPA Arts (now Savi Arts) in London, and has performed in The Lowry Studios and The Empty Space in Salford and at The Bunker and The Phoenix Artist Club in London. For The Rainbow Library project, Jen has written the text for a picture book loosely based on the story of *Dick Whittington*: celebrating drag, found family, Welshness, and cats. Jen is currently studying Creative Writing at The University of Salford.



Weng-U Pun

Weng-U Pun is a writer from Macau and is currently working on a cyberpunk novel that follows the life of a Chinese climate refugee in Manchester. Her favourite book is *Sleep Has His House* by Anna Kavan, and she loves listening to women in rock, crocheting, and thrifting gems in charity shops.



Nancy Eves

Nancy Victoria Eves (they/them) is a creative and committed youth worker with a love for literature. As a passionate advocate of LGBTQ+ and Disability rights, they are determined to keep the arts accessible. With too many favourite books to choose from, they are drawn to any book with magic and mystery in it. Nancy loves to write fantastical and fun children's fiction, and thought-provoking political commentary for adults on the queer neurodivergent experience.

For more information, please contact projects@pop-up.org.uk.

Meet the Course Authors



L. D. Lapinski **Writer for Basildon**

L. D. Lapinski is the author of *The Strangeworlds Travel Agency* trilogy, published by Orion Children's (UK), by Aladdin, Simon & Schuster (USA), and is published around the world in fifteen other languages. Each book in the trilogy has been awarded a Kirkus star - one of the most coveted designations in the book industry, marking books of exceptional merit.

L. D. Lapinski lives just outside Sherwood Forest with their family, a lot of books, and a cat called Hector.



Fredde Lanka **Illustrator for Basildon**

Fredrik Andersson (They/He) is originally from Sweden. For the last eight years has been based in London, working as an independent artist and educator. He works in a bold, colourful style across illustration, comics and ceramics. His work is humorous and strongly narrative and addresses topics ranging from queer culture, family dynamics and sex.



Bex Glendining **Comic Author for Nottingham**

Bex Glendining (she/they) is a biracial queer, UK based illustrator, comic artist and colourist. Bex has worked as a cover artist, colourist and interior artist on projects such as *Seen: Edmonia Lewis*, *Penultimate Quest*, *Rolled & Told*, *Lupina* and multiple covers for Penguin Random House.

When not working they can usually be found building gundams, playing video games with friends or buying new plants.



Jay Hulme **Poet for Manchester**

Jay Hulme is an award winning transgender performance poet, speaker, educator and teacher, whose books include *Clouds Cannot Cover Us*, *Rising Stars: New Young Voice in Poetry* and *Here Be Monsters*. He also performs sensitivity reads, and consults and speaks at events and conferences on the importance of diversity in the media, and more specifically transgender inclusion and rights. In recent years Jay has worked alongside and/or consulted with Amnesty International, Stop Funding Hate, The Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Awards, among other groups, on inclusion and diversity in literature, especially YA and children's literature, and has performed confidential inclusion and sensitivity reads for numerous publishers, improving the quality and accuracy of transgender representation in a number of books.



David Roberts **Illustrator for Manchester**

David Roberts is a multi award-winning and New York Times best-selling illustrator who has earned great acclaim for his distinctive style. He was born in Liverpool and studied fashion design at university in Manchester. After university he worked as a milliner and began to get work as a fashion illustrator but always felt his true calling was in children's book illustration. His illustrated books include the New York Times number 1 bestsellers *Sofia Valdez*, *Future Prez* and *Ada Twist, Scientist* as well as *Dirty Bertie*, *The Cook and the King* (with Julia Donaldson) and *The Bolds* (with Julian Clary).



Leyla Josephine **Writer for Inverness**

Leyla Josephine is an artist originally from Glasgow, now residing in Prestwick. She is a performance poet, theatre maker, screenwriter, director and project leader.

A documentation of her show *Hopeless* is published by Speculative Books. She has been included in an American anthology called *Choice Words: Writers On Abortions* alongside the likes Margaret Atwood, Audre Lorde and Gloria Steinem. Two of her poems have been published in The Centenary Collection for Edwin Morgan. She is featured in *Neu! Reekies!* anthology *Untitled 3*.

She has had poems featured in The National, The Scotsman, The Guardian, Huffington Post, Upworthy, BBC Scotland, BBC Radio 4, BBC Social and Gutter magazine.

Leyla won The UK National Slam at The Royal Albert Hall run by Hammer and Tongue. She has since then won The Commonwealth Slam 2014 and The Loud Poets Grand Slam 2016. She was a finalist in the Roundhouse Slam 2017 and runner up for The Scottish Championships 2018.



Clive McFarland **Picture Book Author for Glasgow**

Clive McFarland was raised in County Tyrone before studying art in Derry and Liverpool. His first and second picture-books were both shortlisted for the AOI World Illustration Awards. 'A Bed for Bear' was a Kids' Indie Next List Top Ten, and 'One Leaf, Two Leaves, Count with Me!' was chosen for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Clive uses paint, crayon, cut paper and low-fi printmaking techniques to create his textured digital illustrations.

Selected clients include HarperCollins, Penguin US, Templar, Froebel South Korea, and Marks & Spencer. Clive lives in Northern Ireland.



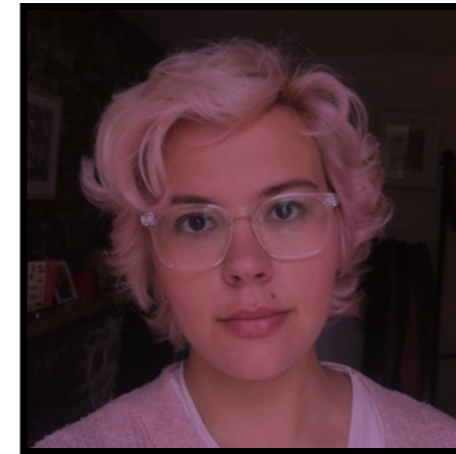
Kel Menton **Writer for Cork**

Kel Menton (they/them) is a non-binary writer from Cork. They were selected as a Young Writer Delegate for the 2021 Dublin Book Festival. They currently work as an assistant youth theatre facilitator at Graffiti Theatre Company, and as the assistant coordinator for Fighting Words Cork. You can find some of their work published in the *Irish Examiner*, *Good Day Cork*, and the *ROPES* literary journal.



Kip Alizadeh **Illustrator for Cork**

Kip Alizadeh is a visual artist, illustrator and hand-letterer based in Belfast. They have a BA (Hons) in Illustration from Falmouth University. Their illustrated books include *What Will You Be?* (written by Yamile Saied Méndez), *Unboxed* (written by Non Pratt), *Plenty of Hugs* and *World So Wide*.



Betsy Cornwell **Writer for Belfast**

Betsy Cornwell is a New York Times bestselling author, writing teacher, private mentor, and retreat leader.

Betsy holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Notre Dame and a BA from Smith College, and she currently teaches at the National University of Ireland Galway. She lives in a historic knitting factory on the west coast of Ireland, which she is working to turn into a funded, childcare-inclusive arts retreat space for single mothers.

Her books include *Reader, I Murdered Him* (with HarperCollins), *The Forest Queen* and *The Circus Rose*.



Jamie Beard **Illustrator for Belfast**

Jamie 'Beard' Baird is a Northern Irish illustrator. His work, primarily centred around portraiture, is perpetually fuelled by a fascination with people and their stories, and notions of individuals and collective identity.

Much of his noted work to date has been rooted in issues of social justice and Belfast's luminous LGBTQ+ community, aiming in some sense to convey a portrait of a community through the people and stories making it up. His work is featured in *Encounter* (a collaboration with Outburst Arts, al-Jumhuriya, and the British Council), *The Little Crayon* (with Amelia Kai) and *Mistaken for a Bear* (with Philip Ardagh).

Jamie's clients to date include Belfast Pride, Outburst Arts, Queen's University Belfast, SPAR, The Naughton Gallery, Lambert Smith Hampton, and Ulster Museum.

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