

## **Frist Prize: Emilie Holmes (Nottingham Trent University), “Summer Gardening”**

The song thrush wakes me up on time. I lie in bed wide-eyed to the ceiling and tear the covers from my body. The sun blinds me as I make my morning coffee, no milk, no sugar. I sit at a table set for two and eat dry cereal from a bowl older than I. The sun follows me so I move my chair to face the wall.

I escape outside to tend to my garden. I grow rosemary and thyme, carrots, potatoes, and mange tout in the summer. I collect my favourite iris to mark the pages in books I can't quite finish. I feed the birds and water the plants; there has been no rain in weeks. I retrieve inside when the clouds cast over the light. I boil the kettle to make chamomile tea, placing my last tea bag into the only mug I own. The telephone rings but I won't answer.

I go to my bedroom and lie on top of a bed, made by me. The glass displays on either side of my walls offer me a view of my garden. The roses brush up against the windows, that I leave open just a crack. When I sleep bugs try to get inside my home. I often find the corpses of spiders and woodlouse on the ledge. One must've been successful, there's a curtain of webs draping from the railing that's accompanied by a patch of deep emerald mould tracing the left wall.

I sit on my porch in the late afternoon. I used to listen to music but now I find myself skipping every song I choose to play. I listen to the hum of the cricket instead and share flowers with the bees, there's lavender beside me that I rub between my fingertips. Later, the postman disturbs my reading. I thank him and immediately place the mail on the patio table; it is from the city. Tomorrow I will return to sender.

In the evening I like to tend to myself. I lie in the bathtub playing with my breath. I open the windows for ventilation and the hope of listening to the passing of cars. However, it's so remote here I wouldn't be able to catch an engine even if I closed my eyes. I think about returning as I sink deeper into the water. But it's warm here and summer is almost over. I wasn't built for the winter. I wrap myself in a bath sheet and wipe the condensation off the mirror and look up. What if they find out I am made of glass. I could spend hours in here playing with my complexion and brushing my hair. But only I can walk myself over that threshold. Sometimes no white horse is coming for you and you have to go on foot. How many more baths can I have? As I leave the bathroom, I remember that I have run out of tea.