



**NIGHTfall**  
A Stellar Rainbow

# A RAINBOW ANTHOLOGY

Poems and stories written by Lisette Auton, Kirsten Luckins, Carmen Marcus and Mark Robinson were commissioned for Nightfall, A Stellar Rainbow. The pieces are full of colours and light – but also enjoy the dark from which those colours burst. There are things lost and things found, dreams and journeys, transformations and holding onto the people we love. The writers have created stories and images for any dark, bright Winter night, influenced by our recent experiences and a timeless meditation of the heavens.

## THE WRITERS

**LISETTE AUTON** is a disabled writer, activist, and creative practitioner based in Darlington. Her debut middle grade novel *The Secret of Haven Point* is forthcoming from Puffin in February 2022.

**KIRSTEN LUCKINS** is a poet, performer, and spoken word theatre-maker based on the north-east coast of England. Her third collection, *Passerine*, was published by Bad Betty Press in 2021.

**CARMEN MARCUS** is a poet, novelist and playwright. She lives in Saltburn-by-the-Sea on the wild North Yorkshire coast. Her debut novel *How Saints Die* was published with Harvill Secker in 2017.

**MARK ROBINSON** lives in Eaglescliffe. His selected poems *How I Learned to Sing* is published by Smokestack. His poem 'The Infinite Town' is carved on a large plinth on Stockton High Street.

# WELCOME

welcome to the star-bright gap  
between landscape and map  
between now and tomorrow  
the night's colours overflow

leave the brake-lit highway  
jump infinity's horizon and play  
you write your own way here  
vision makes sorrow disappear

cooling stars leave rainbow tracks  
light snuck in through dusty cracks  
not an arc but a full circle from space  
worlds held in tight embrace

light bent our way from stars above  
what the naked eye knows only as love

Mark Robinson

# ALL OF THIS IS SPELT BY STARS

Ready to spill new colours!  
O lovely people of the dusk!  
Ye of all faiths, all wild dreams!  
Go build more colourful nights!  
Boldly find your way forward!  
Inside you are new-born stars!  
Vault the far ends of vision!

Mark Robinson

# HINDSIGHT

Known only to the crane, the drone  
And the pilot hunting a soft landing  
Right by its furthest reach,  
A place never touched or left alone,  
Further and dustier than a star,  
Every rainbow is secretly a circle,  
Were we far enough away to see.

The bow from which the arrow flies,  
That joins the dots and worlds  
And bridges night and day,  
Ourselves and those we've yet to join,  
Is one step from perfect, always  
Bending towards something better,  
Were we far enough away to see.

The long arc is slow but makes rain stop.  
We cannot touch the possibilities,  
Each star already cracked to let life in,  
Its blues and golds and greens  
Dimmed to orange then red to cool  
Colour into tonight, and tomorrow,  
Were we far enough away to see.

Where the rainbow ends the land forms,  
Villages, towns, cities, worlds grow,  
Families, gangs, bands and fellowships,  
All the polyphonic shapes of identity  
Assume their place in the dance,  
To shift from flat earth's rhythm,  
Were we far enough away to see.



Your night's colours overlap mine,  
Even as we stand side by side.  
They shift with the angle of our tears,  
Or how the moonlight bounces  
Off the ghosts in the curves of our faces,  
And their gestures, their waves,  
Were we far enough away to see.

This year the rainbows twinned in glory  
Triplet branches into every corner,  
Set muted hues to hunt in shadows  
till we can bear to look no longer.  
And then the moon comes out, fresh  
as milk, as snow on a bin-lid,  
Were we far enough away to see.

And all the colours are a little harder  
To pin down as they stream towards us,  
A rainbow caught only with luck,  
Bright, bold, playful, nameless and full  
Of what the naked eye knows only as love,  
Falling at the right angle, to a backdrop of rain,  
When we are far enough away to see.

Mark Robinson

# INTO THE STELLAR RAINBOW

Darkness is a myth; the spectrum of space  
is lit in all directions with brilliance.

Try to grasp the waves of light  
that peak too high and pulse too low  
for sun-adapted sight –  
sink, wide-eyed, into true night...

velvet black is feather-threaded  
with infra-crimson, ultra-mauve,  
and scintillating wakes of lonely comets  
flare orange –

catch hold  
to swing where stars glitter like coloured jewels  
cast carelessly in cluster and spritz –  
pink sapphire, blue diamond,  
spangle and mist;

you'll  
wade rivers of milk-fire  
among the white-hot Giants flashing  
aurora-green; the burning spoor  
of galaxies passing

slowly  
they unspool,  
the magnitudes of bright multitudes  
glowing white to purple, yellow to red  
as

they  
cool...  
To the far edge of time, stars spill light, and drift,  
and promise us forever – darkness is a myth.

Kirsten Luckins

# BEGONE DARK DAYS

Lisette Auton

Eleena looked out of her bedroom window, she could see her school and the caretaker going into the big side door by the prickly mucky green bushes that often caught her dark grey cardigan and gave it little clicks. Not quite a hole, though if she burrowed her fingers in she could stretch it to a ladder and then walk her nails up and down the miniature rungs.

She sighed, that reminded her that her cardigan was in Miss Moorfield's bottom drawer, where things like paper planes, chewing gum and mobile phones stayed when they were confiscated. She was not looking forward to explaining that one to her mam. Again.

The sun was just climbing above the roof tops, soon it would defrost the ice patterns on her window and fill the room with its grey light.

She'd had the dream again. She wanted to tell someone so badly it made her tummy ache and her lips almost form the beginning of a question, but then she'd quickly clamp it shut. Who on earth would believe her? And how would she explain without all the right words? She couldn't explain how when she daydreamed (which was bad enough apparently) her fingers twiddled and itched and all of a sudden there was a hole in her cardigan and she hadn't meant to do it, but there it was, so how could she explain something so extraordinary? The dream didn't have words she could use to describe the... the what exactly? That was the problem!

A scruffy sparrow swooped down and landed on the dull brown electricity cables. 'I'll practice on you,' Eleena said. The sparrow cocked its head at her, like it was waiting.

'Hey, so I had this dream, where, well, nothing was all...' Eleena waved her arms around and the bird startled. 'Sorry, bird! Well, nothing was like this, here.'

This time, so as not to scare it, Eleena gently opened her palms and offered the sparrow the whole of the horizon from the dreary hills to the sullen greys of the factories, to the dank brown of the houses in rows and rows and rows. The grey clothes on the washing lines and the advertising hoardings in their washed out tones.

'The colours, bird, they weren't like these, it was like the volume had been turned up and they fizzed and vibrated like someone had shocked them into being awake, my eyelids twanged with just how much it all... gleamed. It was glorious!'

The bird gave Eleena a long look and then flapped and set off into the always twilight sky.

'See,' she whispered. 'Even a bird doesn't believe me.'

Breakfast was porridge, white bread sandwiches with beige crisps for packed lunch and then (after reclaiming her cardigan and promising never to daydream again for the ninety-seventh time) home to a stew with unidentified brown meaty bits in it.

'Watching Greystone Abbey with me tonight?' asked Eleena's mum and patted the lumpy corduroy couch next to her and gave her a smile.

Eleena did an exaggerated yawn. 'Not tonight, mam, I'm pooped. Early night for me, I think.'

Her mam rolled her eyes, 'What are you up to, missy?'

'Nowt! Love you,' Eleena gave her mam a quick kiss and scooted up to bed, passing the black and white photos of her family on the stairs, before she could be interrogated further.

Under her deep maroon duvet Eleena closed her eyes and crossed her fingers, then began to whisper her secret wish over and over again. 'Be gone dark days! Be gone dark days! Be gone dark days!...' until finally, she was asleep.

Something danced across her eyelids and she woke with a start in a cacophony of colour, a riot of reds, flamboyant fuchsias, sparkles of silver, dazzling diamonds and garish gold. All the words that she couldn't find during the day leapt into her brain and out of her mouth as she named the galaxies, the stars, the planets, zooming on by, the colours electric!

'Why can't I remember this properly when I wake up?' Eleena yelled into the sky that wasn't black, isn't black, isn't flat and one dimensional, is the beginning of all light and life and you only just have to look hard enough to see the rainbows in the sky. 'Why can't we see the rainbows?'

'Because you've all forgotten how to look,' said a little voice by Eleena's knee. She looked down as she tumbled through the sky, weightless. There was a tiny spark and within the spark was a swirling centre of peacocks and purples, out of which came the little voice.

'I haven't,' said Eleena.

'We know,' the little voice replied and the colours in the spark shifted and moved like oil on water until it formed a face that smiled.

'Who are you?' asked Eleena.

The swirls in the face formed hundreds of pinpricks of stars as freckles. 'I am Canes Venatici, I am home to the Whirlpool Galaxy, the brightest one in the whole sky!'

The swirl wriggled and slithered and Eleena gasped as in the centre a nucleus formed in front of her, and out of which spiralled light and bright in purples and blues, colours she now knew the names for and when she closed her eyes to blink she could still see it imprinted on her eyelids and the colours changed and dazzled.

'This is magic!'

'No,' replied Canes as the image changed back to a face, with great sadness in its eyes. 'It's real, it's here, if you take the time to look up, to really look.'

# BEGONE DARK DAYS

Lisette Auton

'How come I can see it?'

'Because you're a daydreamer, you remember how to make believe and wonder, you remember to look up. You must teach everyone to remember.'

Eleena gasped as they zoomed together around the Trifid Nebula. How did she know this stuff? She just did! Rich reds, blues and pinks and trails of sparkling dust dividing it into three parts.

'That's where stars are born,' Canes told Eleena. 'Watch!'

And there, inside the stellar nursery, swirls and ripples formed from a shockwave as a supernova exploded. Gravity and mass collided in front of her eyes and protostars began to form, sucking in gravity, pulling her towards them.

And now she was hurtling, rolling, being sucked towards them and the heat!

'Remember what your name means!' shouted Canes. 'You must remember!'

Eleena woke with a start, her head full of swirls of light and bright, but her room was the same as always, an insipid yellow nightlight casting barely a dribble on her desk and books. She opened the curtains and looked out. Everything was greyscale. Where was all the colour? Why had they lost it? Could she really bring it back?

Just her, little Eleena who always got told off for daydreaming. Wasn't that part of it? She desperately tried to remember. Remember! What else did she have to remember?

She tugged her dressing gown around her and felt something burn against her leg. She put her hand in her pocket and closed her palm around something that was so hot she couldn't feel it.

Eleena held her closed hand in front of her and slowly opened her fingers to look.

A tiny pulsating star, in all the twilight colours of the rainbow, a beating beginning, light. Faint, barely visible. It sang to her in the darkness 'Who are you, Eleena, our day dreamer?'

Eleena looked at the little star, and suddenly all the words she only had meaning for in her dreams exploded into now, here at home in her grey bedroom, in her grey town, where everyone had forgotten how to dream and imagine. She bent forward and whispered to the little star, 'I am Eleena, my name means the one who shines in the darkness.'

'Well done,' said the little star, 'Canes told us you would remember.'

Then the little star began to grow and glow, a nebula, a stellar nursery lighting up her bedroom in diamond night-sky rainbows.

Eleena stood up on her bed, reached up high and opened the little window at the top, held out her palm to the world and shouted 'I am Eleena, the day dreamer, the girl in colour. I am the one who shines in the darkness!'

With a whoosh, the star launched into the night sky, swirling its nebulae in its wake, exploding with colour and light.

People came running out of their houses in their dressing gowns, peered out of their bedroom windows, cars stopped as the sky burst into a cacophony of magic and wonder and swirls of the most incredible colours and constellations.

The light beamed down and plants in gardens became oranges and purples, front doors became rainbows, dressing gowns shifted from greys and browns to bright lemons and magentas.

The sky grew as the sun began to rise, not grey, but a fireball of pinks and yellows and oranges, lighting up her school which was now a rich royal blue, with rainbow coloured fence posts surrounding it.

Eleena grinned, and went running to her mam's bedroom to wake her up. 'Look, mam, look!'

Eleena's mam shifted in her bed and rubbed her eyes. Her daughter was standing in front of her with black hair that gleamed and a bright green nightie. Eleena pulled back the curtain and her mam gasped, and then began to cry. 'It's so beautiful. Did you do this?'

'Yes! Isn't it wonderful?'

'Oh my love, it really is.' Eleena's mam gave her a huge hug and looked into her face. 'My little Eleena, you really did do this, didn't you?'

Eleena gave her mam a huge grin, then said 'Pop your shoes on quick, we need to go and explore!'



# MOTHER AUGURY Carmen Marcus

You see that old lady in the queue counting out her ninety-nine pennies, like each one is a wish on a new moon. Yeah, she's slow which is ugly where you come from, but stop, look at her smile - a cosmos of creases, her eyes blown with fog, she is Mother Augury and that dust in her many many eyes - that clouds in oxygen blues and hydrogen greens - is a nursery for stars.

Let's follow her now, on her slow way, make room for a light-year in your can't-stop day.

See how she can't bear anything to be lost.

See how she drifts dandelion-wise looking for the things we drop, things she'll take back to her GewGaw shop to make the dust for baby stars.

See her at the old Church Hall, in the line for Tiny Tots:

- Hiya, is he sleeping through?
- Is he off the potty? - Colly
- Has she said her first word?
- Time for Wind the Bobbin Up.

See that sleepy Mam trying to wedge her pushchair through the door, half-dressed, half-asleep, half who she used to be, see there's Mother Augury picking the guilt like lint off her coat.

Mother's off again, after that couple:

- You interrupted.
- You never let me finish.
- You don't pick up the towels.
- You sneeze like a walrus.

Now they're locked in a silent stand-off.

They kick the old leaves that are thick with all those hurting unsaid things.

And Mother stoops to pick them up, the red, the gold, that crackle with those so hard to say sorries.

Quick, she's getting on the bus, she sits at the back, where the gobby kids sit, hugs her bag on her knees whilst she rubs the condensation of bitten down fears off the windows with her thumb:

I'm afraid she won't want me.

I'm afraid to say what I know.

I'm afraid of growing up.

I'm afraid of growing old.

I'm afraid of not and never being good enough.

By lunchtime Mother Augury is ready for a bite to eat, she takes her seat in the café that was a bank and butters her tea cake while the suited and booted do the caffeine run. Mother nips the hanging threads of need-tos from their hems:

I need to phone mum.

I need to fix that sink.

I need to call the bank.

I need to collect the kids.

Need to purl one.

Now it's time she is off, she's ready to hop back into her ship, that looks just like the last bus home, her bag rattling with all the things we've forgotten how to use like fish knives, Apostle spoons, I miss yous, I love yous.

Back to her junk shop in the Little Nebula.

She built it here so all the suns could see their fate to fall apart, go dark before they really shine - a light year wide, as green and open as Augury's heart.

All it takes is one ordinary winter Tuesday to make a Milky Way of baby stars out of all the things we can't or won't or have forgotten to say.

Are we to be judged by what we keep inside?

For all of Mother Augury's eyes - we don't know.

We only know that when the white star of our heart is shrinking, growing cold

Mother Augury will keep on tying feathers to her boots

To dust the gew gaws we forgot and turn them into stars.