## Indigo Spring Poetry Prize 2025: Results

Ithaka – Bex Hainsworth – 1st PrizeI wasn’t waiting.

When men sail off to war,
there’s a kind of relief
left behind. Soft, hushed,
like the dust from their sandals
settling on paths to the harbour.

I inherited our island home:
rugged, salt-bitten rock,
nettles and pillars of cypress,
everything in the landscape came
to a quick point – unlike him.

In his absence, I lived.

I followed the goats in their grazing
on craggy hillsides. They were
their own herder, I learned
to wander with purpose.

The fishermen and merchants
seemed to be expecting grief,
were surprised at my light step
on dock planks, around market stalls.

I never felt the need to weep.

I crumbled white cheese and popped
olives polished like agate stones
into the mouths of temple maids,
drizzled honey, sprinkled mint from
my garden. Life was simple, delicious.

A plague of men proved harbinger
for his return. Nature’s oldest pests,
I let them loaf and consume.
Sails on the horizon, a hunt,
his humming at my ear, my neck.

Only then did I mourn.

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**Judge’s Report**

This original take on a Greek myth drew me in with the rich sensuality of its language. Instead of a faithful wife, patiently awaiting a hero’s return, we find a woman enjoying delicious freedoms - popping *‘olives polished like agate stones / into the mouths of temple* *maids’* and learning from the mountain goats *‘to wander with purpose’*. Elegantly structured and perfectly paced, the penultimate stanza brings us back to reality with a hint of menace - *‘his humming at my ear, my neck.’* A beautifully crafted and memorable poem with a strong and consistent voice.

## Chrism – Caroline Smith – 2nd Prize

Her back has shrunk away from her bra

like dried out soil from the sides of a pot.

The ancient cups hang free from her shoulders.

The wonky row of bra extenders

she’s added over time

to help her reach to the clasp behind, are like

the overlapping green shield stamps

stuck together in rows

in the buckled, tea-stained Co-op book

that we filled up and took in to exchange

for the luxury we couldn’t afford.

With one hand, my father is rubbing precious oil

into my mother’s stiff, stooped shoulder.

The other balances unsteadily on his stick.

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**Judge’s Report**

There isn’t a word out of place in this gem of a poem. The language is domestic, yet surprising - *‘dried out soil from the sides of a pot’* and bra extenders like *‘overlapping green shield stamps*.’ The simple, yet impactful, final line left me feeling as *‘unsteady’* as the poet’s father. Without sliding into sentimentality, this poem offers an astonishing tenderness, a sacred moment of connection and love.

## Wallers – Kerry Darbishire – 3rd Prize

Beyond meadowsweet and eglantine

under a map of stars – the milky way – the whites

of eyes on screes, they bivvied month after month

building the *ring garth* – the divide between wild

and cultivated land. Men and boys hefted to the fell,

heaving beck boulders, heartings, throughs and cams

to keep flocks out and in. Their backs bent as bracken,

against the yowl of the northerly that gathered in

the first snows. Fingers thistle-sharp, stubborn as ice,

on they laboured through gale and rain, following rise

and fall, cobble and slip through thicket and dyke,

each burrow and lair in the Helm-wind air until

skylarks broke silence and summer-green slopes

sprang wick with gorse and foxgloves and the hollow-stem

claim of owls and vixen-hunger ran fast as becks

through their veins.

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**Judge’s Report**

This poem gives a real sense of heft, weather, and toil, packed with the language of the wallers working *‘against the yowl of the northerly’* to create a boundary between ‘*wild/and cultivated land.*’ Not a word (or a stone) out of place, this poem grounded me with its solid construction, surprised me with its metaphor, and then took my breath in the stunning final stanza - *‘vixen hunger’* running ‘*fast as becks/through their veins.*’