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Letter from the Editors

a haiku, by Kate Tough

Celosia, by Patricia Ace

Bray Burial, by Fiona Rintoul

Coming to Terms, by Kate Tough

A Short Bath in Shallow Water, by Kate Tough

Deer Tick, by Joyce Henderson

Rites of Spring, by Sue Wilson

Dick, by Patricia Ace

The Lord, the Lady and the Bronze Penis, by Daniel Spencer

Dolly, by Patricia Ace

Letter from the Editors

For the month of April, the From Glasgow to Saturn editorial staff decided to have its first “themed” issue. Given that the issue will post on the first of April, or April Fool’s Day, we decided, amongst snickering and chagrin, to focus on what underlies most, if not all, human folly:

SEX.

However, since sex is so widely connected with most other facets of the human condition, we decided against limiting our selections to depictions of the physical act. Besides, it would make a boring issue. You can only read about the old in-out so many times before thinking of something (or someone) better to do.

We were more interested in the emotional peaks and valleys related to sex, as well as the long somber lulls one experiences during a lack of lust or fallen libido. And of course we were deeply interested in the way love, or lost love, shapes a writer’s relationship to his or her sexuality.

Overall, we selected ten different pieces and arranged them so that a larger narrative could be read into the sequencing of stories and poems. Think mix CD without all that bothersome music.

Gay or straight, celibate or slut, hardly a day passes by without us giving sex at least a passing thought. Even if one is less inclined to spend time fantasizing, the act is hard to escape. It’s everywhere: on the covers of magazines, on your favorite TV shows, in song lyrics and in shampoo commercials. Marketers understood long ago, sex sells. It can even sell a houseplant, as Trish Ace observes in “Celosia.”

Sometimes sex in literature is as brazen as ripping your partner’s clothes off and doing it on the kitchen table. Sometimes, it’s more subtle and sensual, as Fiona Rintoul shows us with “Bray Burial.”

Sex so easily shapes how we see ourselves, in ways we can’t always predict. Who are we when we have sexual partners in our lives, and who are we when we find ourselves suddenly without? Kate Tough tackles both these questions from very different angles in “Coming to Terms” and “Short Bath in Shallow Water.”

Some sexual relationships can be poisonous, and one encounter can wreak havoc for months afterward, as Joyce Henderson aptly tells it in her poem, “Deer Tick.” Meanwhile other sexual experiences can help us blossom and grow. Sue Wilson shows us how in “Rites of Spring.”

The next two pieces make us consider age and sex – what it means to the very young and the very old. Coincidentally, both pieces fixate on genitals. Trish Ace and Dan Spencer take us back to basics with “Dick” and “The Lord, the Lady and the Bronze Penis.”

Finally, Trish Ace laments today’s sexual expectations and discusses what sex can be with the “perfect” partner.

a haiku

by Kate Tough

lying awake
extracting what you meant
from what you said

Celosia

by Patricia Ace

Care: If you place this sexy indoor / outdoor plant in a well-lit, protected location and keep the soil sufficiently damp, the plant will bloom even more beautifully. (Not for consumption).

Oooh love me, love me
my god of green fingers,
all I need is some TLC.
I don't ask for much,
I'm low-maintenance.
Less a trophy wife, more
like a bit on the side
without the effort or expense.
More like the woman across
the road who doesn't have
any curtains. Pretty, free.

Plonk me on your well-lit sill
out of the chill of wintry draughts.
Slake me with your dripping spout,
just a bitty, not a lot, I like my soil
moist, not sopping.

Run your digits up my fuchsia
feathered blooms, like catkins
gone girly, while I bask in the sunlight
until I flush bright pink.
I'll look so hot, you'll want to eat me.

Indoors, outdoors, wherever you want me
I'm sexy, sexy, sexy.
I'm a hottie, your top tottie.
Oooh love me, love me, love me.
All I need is some TLC.
Watch me bloom more beautifully.

Bray burial

by Fiona Rintoul

her head

swivels south
and she's sitting in the flask
with a new hat and a new year
and the ground on the heath
has been fresh and crunchy white
and he is fondling
a pint of steaming bitter
and she has just collected for herself
a golden jamesons
and one for him too
and when she lifts

her skirt
to sit down
the cool lacquered wood
sears the skin
above her black
stocking tops
and as she sits
her cool cream thighs not touching
she feels alternately
the hot blast of the fire
and a snowy winter draught

licking her cunt
and later at home
they have another jamesons
and maybe another
and then she bends
over the nut
brown leather armchair
with the silken sea green cushions
and now her head

zings north
and he is gone
most completely
she has been to bray to bury him
in pearls of soft irish rain

Coming to Terms

by Kate Tough

Wake to small, pointy-beaked bird pecking on my un-fleshed sternum bone. Beep, beep, beep. Alarm clock. Beep, beep, beep. Resent it to my core. Not conscious enough to reach out to it. Just conscious enough to hate it. Its shrillness sickens me. Know now how husband felt about mother. Piece of brain that is awake begs it to stop. It stops. Thank Jesus.

Muscles still unaware anything has happened. Bit of brain that is awake is too awake to sleep again. Too bitter. Umbrage taken at sleep being yanked so prematurely from it. Not ready to move. Not ready to move on.

Woke to pee at what must've been 4am. Only about half hour since fell asleep again. Now clock says it's new day. Phfaaaw. Just supposed to accept that. Too soon. A nap. Today cannot go by without a nap. Don't care what's in diary. There's an hour after lunch, an hour late afternoon, an hour somewhere. Will lie down and snatch back some of what's mine.

Try to visualise diary page; view today's appointments through several walls and leather cover. Fail. Tune into gut for any sense of urgency. Gut always recalls pressing appointments. Much better than memory. Too good. Can walk around for days with cactus in abdomen about something brain can't quite put its finger on, or would rather not. Don't feel spindly needles of a deadline in belly. Phew. No hurry to get up.

Body still needs wee minute to come to. Zone out. Zone back in. Decide to improve mood before getting out of bed. Get better start to the day. Think about nice things. Go blank. Try again. What's nice thing? Remain blank. Worry it should be easier than this to think of something nice. Make mental note to make list of favourite

things. Standby list for occasions such as this. Will borrow some of Julie Andrews' if have to.

Body still leaden. Brain still bothered by inability to conjure upbeat thought. Some people probably only think nice thoughts. Don't appear to be one of those people. Seem to be other type. Type who needs to record them in advance. Like recipe list in kitchen drawer to remind me what am able to cook when people come for dinner. Don't cook often enough to just rustle something up. Need reliable reminders.

Husband would dispute validity of list. Would suggest that I couldn't cook even that. Hear his usual rant. The memory months old but, in semi-conscious state, his voice swims up in one complete chunk.

"Darling, you decimate every meat you cook. Chicken, whole or fillets; fish, skin on or skin off; lamb, leg, shanks whatever. You prod and poke and tear away at it, right inside, because 'How else will I know if it's done?', and then serve up a mess on the plate. And THEN, just when I'm so hungry I don't care what it looks like and pick up my cutlery to eat it anyway, you pluck the plate from under me! Putting it back in the pan / oven / pot, saying you 'Just want to give it another five minutes, to be doubly sure'."

He didn't mind really. Thought it was endearing. Course he did.

Wonder again what falls into category of nice thought? Presume it's something that makes me feel good. Unless that's too selfish. Maybe nice thought has to involve being nice to another person. Or sharing beautiful moment with another.

Visualise being a lottery official, handing over a cheque for a million pounds. Feel jealous. See me helping someone to carry their shopping home. Feel twinge in shoulder. Imagine Christmas day with my nieces. Feel barren. Remember sex that takes ages to get to the point. Feel lost.

Mental attempts to uplift self leading wholly nowhere. Possibly not yet ready for instant boost of happy thoughts. Must get easier with practice. Like meditation. Or grief.

Body knows it's my only route out of this. Sit upright. Take long pause to adjust to vertical plane. Pull curtain open. Lay back down because it's bright and want to bask in it. Nothing equals the prize of opening the curtain to a clear sky. December sun is catching only the tops of the trees. Two plump magpies (thank God it's not just one) perch in the highest bare branch that will hold their weight. Their bellies have a golden hue. Anthropomorphise wildly about the cute way they are snuggled together, these two lovers, warming themselves in the late sunrise. Feel something close to happy. Dip only when I picture husband warming himself on lonely branch for one, because I'm not there yet.

A Short Bath in Shallow Water

by Kate Tough

Were I to run the taps
long enough to phone a friend
hot enough to scald a baby

hang a Tyson-sized towel on the heater
drop my Christmas bath cubes in the water
not one but two

lock the door
burn sweet candles
flick off the light

carelessly pin up my hair
remove my clothes
admire my shadowy figure in the tiles

slip into the water
vain in the hope
my tears might cool it

lie there
sponging, soaping, shaving, dozing
eventually crinkling

all this
then you would say
I was the type who enjoyed a good bath

if only.

Deer Tick

by Joyce Henderson

Alone for years, you swayed,
A microscopic speck atop
A blade of fine, long grass.
One pinpoint of longing,
Seeking soft, white flesh.

And when it came you plunged
Head-first without a sound,
Penetrating deep,
My skin responded to the tip
Of your poisonous tongue
With a histamine mound.

Advice sought, procedures applied-
Surgical spirits, tweezers, gin.
When all's said and done, you lie
Like the deer tick,
Under my skin.

Rites of Spring

by Sue Wilson

It was on May Day, early in the morning after Beltane Night, so Ella couldn't help thinking there'd been a touch of magic involved, even if she normally rubbished that kind of hippy nonsense. Not that she was a total sceptic, obviously, or she wouldn't have been there in the first place. She was all for celebrating the end of winter - especially in Scotland, let's face it. And even if she didn't buy into the whole pagan bit, she enjoyed the spectacle of the midnight widdershins procession around the hill, the Green Man's ritual death and the May Queen's coronation, as the drumming reached its frenzied climax, and she loved the atavistic thrill of the huge, blazing bonfire, the spirit of misrule among the crowd.

It was on a Wednesday that year, and most of the friends she'd come with left fairly soon once the fire was lit. Ella wasn't working till the next night, though, and planned to stay up for the sunrise, if the weather held. She knew plenty of other folk there, and had come well-supplied: a flask of whisky-laced coffee, a six-pack of beer, a Twix and a flapjack.

As the clouds cleared away to reveal the stars, her night took on a sweet, felicitous momentum. She'd be sitting by the fire talking to someone, get up to go for a pee, and meet someone else she hadn't seen for ages in the queue. Someone would be needing a bottle opener, or a lighter, and she'd lend them hers, end up chatting away with them, too. One such woman gave her half a pill, just enough for an extra beatific lift, and to banish any threat of tiredness. Sometimes she wandered alone through the crowd, checking out the action - the knots of diehard drummers, the fire-jugglers, the red and blue body-painted satyrs from the procession, still gleefully in character - confident of finding company when she fancied it again.

As the sun rose into a pink and golden sky over Salisbury Crags, she was sitting with her friend Louise, who'd been a torch-bearer earlier on, Louise's boyfriend Daniel and a cousin of his, Jonathan, up from London. Jonathan was a bit of a bumptious pain in the backside, but had thankfully fallen asleep by that stage. Ella and Louise wet their hands in the dew and rubbed it over their faces, and Daniel produced a bottle of fizz. He was lovely that way, Daniel. He'd even remembered plastic cups.

After that, it seemed time to head home, so Louise shook Jonathan awake and they said their goodbyes, Ella declining the offer of sharing a cab. She'd be as easy walking from there, and it was such a beautiful morning.

Actually, she decided, she wasn't quite ready to go yet. She was too happy, not sleepy at all. She walked a little further down the hill, still facing the Crags but out of sight from the last of the crowd around the fire. She thought she'd roll herself one more joint, smoke it with her last beer, and bask in the new spring day just a wee while longer.

His name was Paul. He'd been walking past behind her, spotted her sitting down there, thought he'd come and say hello. Did she mind if he joined her for a minute? She gauged him in his mid-20s, probably ten years younger than her, tall and thin with untidy, shoulder-length dark hair and an open smiling face, denim jacket over a red fleece and black jeans. He sat down and took in the view appreciatively for a minute, then turned to

her, his eyes reflecting gold. "Well, what a fantastic night that was. Did you have a good one?"

They finished her spliff and he rolled another, as they shared the last of the whisky from his hip-flask. It took her a while to realise he was coming on to her, he was doing it so gently and uncontrivedly, just that extra brightness in his smile when he made her laugh, that extra keenness catching her eye, his fingers sliding warm over hers as she passed him a light " plus the fact that an hour had now passed, and there he was still sitting there.

She'd never been much of a one for casual sex. To be honest, she didn't really understand the concept. What could possibly be casual about getting naked with someone you barely knew, giving and receiving that kind of pleasure, striving together towards orgasm? Surely it could only ever be casual - "relaxed and unconcerned," said her dictionary, "without formality of style, manner, or procedure" - in a proper relationship, when sex became an ordinary occurrence, rather than a rare and chronically unfamiliar conundrum.

But when she yawned for the fifth time in quick succession and said she'd need to go, and he got up too and fell into step beside her, she made no move to demur, content simply to wonder what was going to happen, letting the butterflies tingle. Not like her at all. The path down brought them out at the top of London Road, into the sudden uproar of rush-hour, making them laugh at how far away they'd seemed. Then they looked at each other.

"Well," she said, nodding towards Meadowbank, "I'm down this way."

"I'm right across the other side of town. Completely the opposite direction."

"Are you now?" The thrill of certainty coursing warm through her belly, breath suddenly shallow as she studied his face afresh, now she knew she'd be kissing it soon. "Well, I guess you'd better come back to mine, then, hadn't you?"

And so spring began for Ella with a boy in her bed, who seemed just delighted to be there. The sex itself wasn't the greatest, but far from the worst, and he made sure she came. Mostly, though, she luxuriated in their happy companionability, her own unselfconsciousness in the presence of each other's flesh, the delicious surrender to sleep with him spooned warm behind her.

She woke alone, with a start, into late, slanting sunshine through the gap in her curtains; saw she still had a couple of hours before work, and lay back against the pillows. Even before she looked for his clothes among hers on the floor, she sensed he was gone, then saw his note on her bedside table.

It was a total pleasure meeting you. Happy May Day!

No phone number, she was glad to see, but glad too that he'd left her something. Otherwise, she might have thought she'd dreamt him.

Dick

by Patricia Ace

The first time I tasted dick, I was six years old.
His name was Daniel, not Richard, he was a
Mummy's boy, already I suspected his orientation
but he had courage enough or something to prove
and gamely entered the garish playhouse constructed
of a multi-coloured stripy wind-break, ceilinged
with an old yellow blanket " a stately pleasure-dome,
in a garden of earthly delights, the Lion's den.
We soon pulled down our underpants and sat
for a while in golden light just looking, trepidatory, aroused.
What does it taste like? You go first.
I'll do it to you if you do it to me. Already the rules
of sexual congress laid out like times tables
on the blackboard. Two things I remember;
the acrid, salty taste of unwashed school-boy,
barely toilet-trained and the gorgeous, glorious
ache hidden deep inside my hairless gash.
Ah well, some things never change.
I went to tell my mother with my pants around my ankles.

The Lord, the Lady and the Bronze Penis

by Daniel Spencer

'Could you describe the statue, sir?' the policeman says.

The Lord glances at him, from where he stands at the fireplace.

When, a few minutes earlier, the policeman arrived at the Old Rectory, the Lord had led him through to the living room and offered him the most comfortable of the armchairs. Sitting, the man had requested another cushion. The Lord brought it and also brought him tea and as many biscuits as were required. That is the way it's done. The Law must be made comfortable. Now, though, the policeman lays his cup and saucer aside and begins to 'ask a few questions, if you don't mind, sir.'

'Is "sir" correct, sir?' the policeman continues, 'Or is it "your Lordship"? Or "your Honour"? Or "Grace"?''

With his elbows on the mantelpiece, the Lord holds his head in his hands. "'Sir" will suffice, officer.'

'Yes, sir,' says the policeman. 'The statue, then?'

The statue. The Lord thinks of how he might have described it in one of his novels: a shepherd stepping forth, staff in hand. Terse, might be a word he would use. Taut, perhaps. He would be sure to write of the certainty of purpose in the long-legged stride, or in the clasp of the uncrooked staff, or in the resolute, cast expression of the face. He might evoke how the limbs were green and poised and hard, and how the figure was as much a part of the meadow as the ancient oak whose passing shadows sometimes dappled the cold skin's subtle patina. And he would say that the figure was naked, of course, like pastoral men of old. The nakedness could not pass without note.

But now the Lord says none of that. He lifts an open hand, opens his mouth, shakes his head.

'Perhaps the measurements?' says the policeman.

'Six feet,' says the Lord.

'That's the height, sir?'

'The height, yes.'

'Right,' says the policeman. 'A bronze shepherd, approximately six feet in height, sawn at the feet from the base. Removed " the CCTV records " between the hours of one and three last night by two hooded men, medium builds. At two forty-eight AM a white van reverses into the meadow through the lower gate and the statue is loaded into the back. I understand, sir, that there were also some statues of lambs.'

'Yes.'

'How many in the flock, sir?'

'Four, I think.'

'Five,' says the Lady. The Lord looks at her. His wife stands by the bay window, her arms folded. She gazes out across the Old Rectory's frozen garden in the direction of the shepherd's meadow, which can't be seen from here, only imagined. Without turning, she says, 'There were five, husband. You remember?'

She was at the house alone last night, the Lord having worked late and stayed in the city. The Lady rang his flat early in the morning. His secretary, Miss Ramsden, answered the phone " 'Good morning, Ma'am' " then rolled over to wake him with the news. 'It's your wife,' she had said in that pronounced, unhurt way that girls always loved to use when mentioning their suitor's partners. What the Lord's wife told him over the phone troubled him. He made love to Miss Ramsden only briefly before catching the first available train home. He had arrived at the village and walked up the leafy, not-yet-woken lane. As he pushed through the gate in the picket fence, the Old Rectory looked different to him, no longer his idyll.

Watching his wife now, the Lord sighs.

'I'm sorry,' he says. 'We're rather shocked.'

'Of course, sir,' says the policeman. 'Naturally, you will take it as a physical invasion.'

The Lord nods. What a perceptive chap your average village bobby was. It was reassuring. When, earlier, the policeman had arrived at the door it was as if he were restoring for the Lord the England that the night's violation had lost him.

'Another tea, officer?'

'I normally confine myself to one cup per hour when on duty,' the policeman says, 'but if your Lordship insists then yes, thank you.'

The Lord goes through to the kitchen, touching his wife's shoulder as he passes.

'Tea?' he says.

She doesn't reply.

He boils the kettle and brings the policeman a second cup.

'If we were to offer a reward,' the Lord enquires, as the man drowns another biscuit, 'might they return the statue?'

'I'm afraid,' the policeman replies with his mouth full, 'that it's probably on its way to the East by now. It's scrap metal to them, you see, sir? They'll melt it down.'

At the bay window, the Lady weeps.

The Lord remembers the summer's day the shepherd statue was delivered. It was years ago and seems even longer away now. Mr Noble, the sculptor, visited them for the morning to see that his creation was set properly in place. Once it was there, the Lord and Mr Noble brought wicker chairs down the slope and sat for a few hours, in the sunshine, enjoying the Lord's new acquisition. It seemed to the Lord, from the very beginning, that the shepherd had always been there, forever strolling across the grasses. He said so and Mr Noble praised his patron's poetry. The Lady mixed summer drinks for them. She came to stand with them for a while and sounded no less appreciative than her husband. But whilst she was there the Lord noticed that she kept averting her eyes. He assumed that she found the sun too bright, and she soon hurried back up to the Old Rectory.

Later, the Lady's mood changed. It was after the Lord had sent Mr Noble off, with a swig of brandy and a handshake and a fifty pound note as tip. He had waved him to the end of the garden and then turned inside. Once she heard that the sculptor had gone, his wife came into the hall.

'It's too large,' she said to him.

'The shepherd?' he said.

'It,' she said.

She uttered little more. That night she went to bed before him and when he joined her she feigned sleep and shrugged away his hands. This attitude of hers was to continue for months. The Lord would long to be with her, but always she would avoid him. He spent more nights away in his city flat, lying beside his secretary of that time, dreaming of his wife.

Eventually he admitted to himself that the Lady would only become receptive once the issue of the statue's dimensions was resolved. The troubling object would have to be reduced. Therefore, after a respectful period of time had passed, he telephoned Mr Noble at his workshop. Apologising all the while, he explained the delicate matter. The sculptor protested at first, evoking ideas such as "Art" and "Principle", but the Lord persisted. Would Mr Noble consent, he asked, to return to the Old Rectory to make ever so slight alterations, for an additional fee, of course? A week later, whilst the Lady was away, Mr Noble came to remove the item, replacing it with a newly-cast, smaller version.

Not long after the sculptor left, the Lady arrived back at the house. It was late summer now, almost autumn and the sun was soon to set as the Lord took his wife to the meadow. There, at the bottom, he revealed to her a more modest shepherd. She gazed for a while, still silent, then she turned to him and kissed him and, taking him by the shoulders, she sank with him, down onto the open ground. They made love amongst the lambs, stiffly at first because of their age, but like children, unlike ever before.

Later, he would depict the event, exactly as it happened, in one of his novels, *The Lamb of God*, writing of how the hero, Buck Shepherd, in the act of sex lifted the heroine, Ava, by her ruddy buttocks and sat her roughly against a sheep's cool flank. He would write of how Buck's knees dug into the earth as he butted with a hardy sensuality, like a ram. He would write of how Ava gave up entirely to Buck's bucolic, starved yearnings, of her bleats and of how, when she came, she gripped the herdsman's staff. Finally, after the event, he would describe hero and heroine lying together, propped at the statue's feet, watching the Old Rectory's chimney, from which smoke rose into a pink sky. That the fiction had really taken place was the Lord and his wife's most intimate secret.

After the policeman, his notebook filled, sets off back to the station, the Lord tries to comfort his wife, but she will not discuss her grief with him. It is like the day the statue came. That night, just as before, she turns her back to him in bed and flinches at his touch. The Lord knows already what he must do. He must contact Mr

Noble once more.

The next morning, he goes to see him in his workshop.

'I heard the news,' the sculptor says.

'Then you'll know why I've come?' says the Lord.

Mr Noble goes over to a wall and reaches something down from a shelf. With puckered lips, he blows the dust from it. He buffs it up with a cloth.

'I hadn't the heart to melt it,' he explains.

That very afternoon, the Lord takes it to a jewellers in the city. It is the establishment he uses when purchasing presents for mistresses or for secretaries. For his wedding anniversaries he shops on the other side of town. This jewellers, though, he has always favoured. They are discrete. He has the sales girl box the little sculpture up and wrap it with a bow. The girl asks no questions and goes to search in the stockroom for a container of sufficient capacity.

In the evening, the Lord places the box on the table in the living room and waits in an armchair for his wife to come home. When she sees it she appears nervous, probably because it is not their anniversary and the giving of gifts has become predictable at their age. She approaches him and sits down in the chair opposite. He nods at the box with what he hopes is a reassuring expression. She leans forward and, pinching the end of the ribbon between finger and thumb, she draws the bow undone then lifts the lid. Reaching in, she takes out the thing. In cupped hands, like a priest's offering, she raises it, as if a dissected heart, still throbbing.

She rises. Holding it to her breast with one hand, she extends the other to her husband. He takes it and she leads him into the hall of the Old Rectory, opening the door. He follows her. The Lord follows his Lady into the garden, into the night, through the gate in the picket fence and down, down to the vacant meadow with his maid.

Dolly

by Patricia Ace

Cobwebbed in the wardrobe,
deflated and forlorn,
I'm at the beck and call of lust
a puckered, plastic pawn.

Come put your lips upon me
and fill me to the brim,
kiss my mouth and touch my breasts
and stroke my perfect

limbs as smooth as butter,
cool as PVC,
lock your lips around my spout
and pump sweet breath in me.

I'm never too tired or moody or cross,
I'm rubbery and fun.
My bee-stung pout is nice and soft
around my toothless gums...

come put your lips upon me
and fill me to the brim,
kiss my mouth and touch my breasts
and poke me with some

vim and vigour's what I need
to bring me back to life;
I won't burp or fart or breed,
I'll make the perfect wife.

I won't talk back or nag or whine
I'm ever-young and willing;
no need to woo me, wine and dine,
just cut straight to the drilling.

I'll look surprised but never frown
and you'll be free to roam...
I'll even let you pot the brown
when Arsenal play at home.

Come, put your lips upon me
and fill me to the brim,
kiss my mouth and touch my breasts,
indulge your every whim.