



[www.fromglasgowtosaturn.co.uk](http://www.fromglasgowtosaturn.co.uk)

Issue 5 – Summer 2007

The Haunting, by E.J. Patience  
Suicide, by Mary Paulson-Ellis  
Dolls, by Steven Petchey  
Three Poems, by Matt Leavey  
January 22, 2006, by Laura Muetzelfeldt  
water taxi, by fiona rintoul  
Sonnet, by Marjorie A.M. Ferry  
Sisters, by Steven Petchey

**The Haunting**

by E.J. Patience

I first noticed her by the rocks at the farthest end of the bay. Solid in appearance yet liquid in movement, wildly vivid but without colour. She turned her pebble washed eyes towards me, showing that she was sentient, aware of my gaze, and desirous of a connection. I shied away, uneasy that none could see. Uneasy that she had fixed her opaque, mother of pearl eyes upon my soul.

I am not a man of imagination.

On the second day she was at the dunes where the hard, spiked reeds thrust from the sand. I could see the slight green tinge to her skin and the muddy residue caught in the folds of her gown. She held her cupped hand towards me in an offering, but I could not tell what lay upon that white, contoured palm.

You came and stood beside me at the window, standing close, and resting your head on my shoulder. Your wind scented hair catching upon my chin as you followed my gaze, but she will not reveal herself to you.

By the third day she had reached the path, a few yards from the house. Her hair, crusted with sea salt, flattened against that slender neck. She held something small to her chest, raising white eyes towards my window, smiling with an angered grimace. She lifts her other arm and claws wildly at the matted strands.

I gather you into my arms and send you away. Tomorrow she will have reached the house.

She stands in the porch, watching me through saturated tissue and bloated skin. I can smell the watery decay, and hear the constant drip of sea water from her clothes. Down in the bay, the ebb and flow of life crashes onto the pebbles with a shingled sigh that sounds too far away from me now for it to matter.

I try to ignore her, but she stands pressed against the glass door, watching each time I cross the hall. She wants to enter. She must not. I can now see what she cradles in her arms, but then, I have always known. Eighteen weeks, formed and recognisable, obviously human, though alien to both of us. She told me as much in the note, slipped under the windscreen wiper that last day, when her lungs still breathed air and her flesh was warm and responsive.

A storm has gathered and wind rattles the glass in the porch door. Guilt overwhelms me and I draw the latch. Down in the bay gulls rise and rise, then tumble and fall where the grey waves reach, and the ebb and flow of life still clammers up the beach, but it is all, now, definitely, far too far away from me to matter.

**Suicide**

by Mary Paulson-Ellis

They say she did it in the wardrobe, with a piece of electrical wire - an extension cord perhaps - closing the door on the past, crossing over to the other side. What is it about the unknown that's so alluring? I've never understood.

They say she did it in the evening so no-one would know. No knocking on her door. No entry into her room. Sixteen. You don't intrude. Besides they thought she was studying. Exams coming up in a week. A big deal was made about that.

They say she was strung up 'til morning, then all of the day, her mother calling, Abby, time to get up, then, Goodbye Abby, see you later, as she left for work. Well she did that alright. Comes home at 5.51pm, shouts hello, gets annoyed about the breakfast things left out, takes the pile of fresh ironing at the foot of the stairs as her excuse. Sixteen, don't intrude. Sod that.

She goes into her daughter's room and it's all as it should be. Posters on the wall, books on the table. She goes to the drawer and it's all as it should be. Socks rolled, T-shirts folded. She resists the urge to search. Sixteen. You don't intrude. She stops for a moment at the desk, checking out whatever she can see without moving anything, without touching anything, without appearing to have been there at all. It seems her daughter is still out, taking the long route home.

Then she looks in the wardrobe - to put away a skirt you understand.

The thing is, you can't buy pills anymore, not enough that's for sure, sixteen to a packet now, no more and no less. And the mother is careful, every little bottle with its anti-child lid safe in the pharmacy, never in the home. The girl will have checked - no doubt about that - bathroom cabinet, behind the toilet cleaner, bedside drawer. After all it's the easy way, listen to some music, think hard about what is to come.

There are razors perhaps, long vertical cuts to make sure, but the girl's father went just six months before (a big deal was made of that too) and all that's left are for legs and for underarms. Nothing to do with throats or attempts on life.

So she's got it from the cupboard under the stairs, left over from the speakers perhaps, or when they rewired her granny's old lamp. She'll have looked for rope maybe, but who has rope these days. And they don't have a washing line. She'll have thought, Sheet, perhaps, but that will require tearing and ripping and organisation. She'll have thought, Fuse wire, there on it's spool, but worried that it will cut first, deep into her skin, without the aid of warm water to numb the pain.

No, electrical cord, that's the thing.

It will have been dark in the wardrobe. Smelling of fresh laundry and her night out last Tuesday. That was fun. Also the earthiness of old wood. It's good quality this piece of furniture. Very solid pole.

She'll have been surrounded by all her things " her new denim skirt, her three sets of trainers, her school shirts - rustling as she moved in amongst them. A friendly sound. With the doors closed behind she'll have been in her own little world, nice and quiet and above everything else, calm.

It should be a comfort to think that her last sight might have been that jumper she got for Christmas or her lovely studded belt. It should be a comfort to think that she would have felt warm and at home, hiding in her own little closet, waiting for someone to find her like a tiny, childhood sardine.

The mother screams. She throws her hands up to her mouth. Drops ironing all over the floor. Between fingers, she's saying it, No. No. No. There isn't any other word.

She tries to hold her daughter. She puts her arms around the girl's waist, around her hips, feeling her daughter's weight, the size of her, the shape, for the first time in years. She strains to keep those loose ankles higher than the wooden floor. But it's no use. Her daughter is heavy, face all purple and black, cheeks puffy. There's no doubt she won't be coming back.

They take the girl away on a stretcher, folding her body out through the double doors of the wardrobe and onto the canvas. Then they cover her in a red blanket. They even strap her in, as though the noise of the engine or the journey might wake her and she'll rise like a Lazarus saying in a confused voice, It was only a game. She won't of course, but they can't rule this out " the game that is. Suicide. It's always hard to explain. She didn't leave a note.

There's none there when I pass by. There never is when they take their own. But I bring freesias and leave them under the hedge. They can ignore them if they wish. Sometimes it doesn't do to remind. They might take it as blame, or accusation. They might take it the wrong way, but that isn't how it's meant. It's just a reminder, that the girl existed, that's all. Just wanting to say, she was here and somebody knew.

In town, if you look closely, you'll see they've written her name on a wall by the bus station. To my best friend, Abby, see you in heaven. She was well liked this girl. She had a whole future ahead of her. That's what they say. And it's true. Everyone has a future. It's just sometimes people don't get there soon enough.

## **Dolls**

by Steven Petchey

...and then she turned on the light.

"That's... that's some doll collection you've got there."

She was sitting on the edge of the bed, legs apart. She pulled him towards her, tugging at his belt, smiling at his crotch. "Yes it is. And that's some bulge."

He looked round the room. "There's hundreds."

"Yes..." She noticed a timbre in his voice and a resistance in his body. He seemed to be at once stiffening and flagging. She looked round her room, then up at him. "What's wrong?"

"Well..." He did not take his eyes off the collection. "It's like performing in the middle of a Cecil B. DeMille crowd scene."

"A what?"

“Crowd, a large crowd.”

She looked round the room. “They’re only dolls.”

“Yes, they might only be dolls to you, but to me... It’s 130 pairs of eyes, watching whilst you...”

“417.”

“Don’t tell me how badly I’ve underestimated. Are you trying to put me off? This just isn’t the room of a sexually active adult.”

“Yes it is. Not tonight, though.” She pushed him away, then sat back on the bed, legs together, knees into her chest. “I think you’d better leave.”

“I’m sorry.” He looked down at her. “You OK?” She didn’t move. He sat towards the other end of the bed. “I would try to think of them as hundreds of women all wanting me, but some are too young and one or two... well, they’re downright ugly.”

She laughed. “I’ve had Gemima for over twenty years now.”

“You should turn her to face the wall.”

There was a soft warmth in her laugh. “Don’t. She’s all right.”

“Perhaps a bag on her head.”

She hit him with the pillow.

“Look I’m sorry,” he said. “I just find it off putting. I’ll go. Catch the last train.” He stood to leave. “I am sorry.”

“Listen,” she said, “my flatmate’s away this weekend; we could...” She raised her eyebrows and looked sharp right.

“She doesn’t collect dolls?”

“God, no. She thinks I’m mad.”

“She might have a point.”

She laughed. “She thinks my dolls are stupid but she’s into other things.”

“Other things? Sounds interesting.”

She walked up to him and pushed him backwards out of her room, kissing him all the time. She shut the door behind them and there they stood until she rolled him along the wall and they turned slowly along the wall towards the other door, a slow, passionate tumble of lips and tongues and hands and breathe and spit. They reached the next bedroom. She sunk against the door, used her backside to turn the handle, and she pulled him into the room. She lowered her head. “I’m so up for this.”

And then she turned on the light.

“That’s... some collection of teddy bears.”

**wildemess crow**  
by matt leavey

weathered moorland sheep,  
tough and small,  
stray between the crags.  
last year's bracken  
broken shards  
                    bone-brittle ochre  
this year's fractal spears  
push through the snow

a last late blizzard  
a billion frozen needles  
howling over the fell  
                    last night  
by dawn  
the old ewe's bleating  
ended hours ago  
a silent spray of blood  
                    and more  
easy pickings

haggard black tatter  
on the wind  
                    you are  
famine rag  
ink soaked  
iron shard  
obsidian  
your well-tempered beak  
had shred its fill of carrion  
a thousand thousand times

before ever we  
tried to tame     you

**January 22, 2006**

by Laura Muetzelfeldt

Hannah wakes up first, rolls over to look at her husband and, as his eyelids twitch, realises she doesn't want him to wake up. Not that she wants him dead, nothing that dramatic. Just that she doesn't want to have to listen to him tell her about the dream he's just had, which is what will happen.

Every detailed account always seems to last for hours, the descriptions littered with countless false conclusions, like a million dead ends in a maze she is worried she'll never get out of. Then, always, just as she's about to give up hope of the dream ever coming to an end, all the while knowing she's a bad wife for not being interested - worrying not that she might not love him enough, but that she might not love him at all - it ends. Abruptly and business-like. He then picks up her plate with his and she thinks: this, this silence, this is why I like him. She follows him to the sink and waits for his eyes to look up from the dishes and meet hers in the reflection in the window. She snakes her arms around his waist and buries her face in the dip between his shoulder blades which move as if they are in conversation with each other, conspiring to locate an itch which is just out of reach. She thinks: *this*, this is what I would miss.

Her husband is still washing dishes. She thinks about the confused whale from yesterday's news swimming the wrong way up the Thames. She'd switched off because it showed lines of people taking photos and it didn't seem right. She presses herself flat against him and traces from his right hipbone along the place where his tummy turns into the top of his leg and, as she sneaks under his pyjama bottoms he says: 'cut it out'. It was nothing really, but she feels like she's been slapped. Wounded, she curls up on the couch and turns on the news. A few minutes later he sits down beside her and leans back and motions for her to lie on him. But now she's cross. The moment has passed. Married only eleven months, she worries: this can't be it: two hands holding her coffee cup, eyes straight ahead, fixed on the telly. The TV presenter announces that the whale in the Thames died yesterday and " when she starts to cry " it feels more like a sneeze than crying, it's that sudden and urgent. He doesn't understand. He tries to be kind and do things for her: he cooks and buys her flowers for no reason but, she knows now, it's not enough. And so, the day after the Thames whale died, Hannah admits that she doesn't ever want to hear another of her husband's dreams.

She tells him in the evening when she gets home from work and he asks obvious questions and she gives answers you can imagine or guess. He leaves the flat at eleven and inside she gradually begins to admit a creeping calm. In the quiet that he leaves behind she feels something. She thinks she feels relieved. Together they were all wrong: she'd stopped painting and he'd stopped writing songs, like they were drowning the best

parts of each other. For months now, they'd kept slightly missing the point of what the other person was saying in small but significant ways. She is glad she now doesn't have to have his children or hear him talk at length about a new jazz record he'd bought when he could have just played her the record and let her make up her own mind. Hannah bites her lip and doesn't let herself remember the good times or what she likes about him (and there is a lot she likes about him) because this is the most certain she's been and she knows this is what has to happen.

She climbs into bed, lonely and exhausted, blows her nose and curls her knees in tight. She turns over and the gap where he used to be makes her sad. Her feet are so cold she doesn't think she'll ever fall asleep. But she does.

**water taxi**

by fiona rintoul

she leaves in a varnished  
water taxi that scuds  
along the city's waterways  
then surges out  
into the flat and still lagoon

and when they are both back  
they speak on the phone  
and he tells her:  
he stood on the city's edge  
watching her boat  
power across the water  
in the washed winter sun  
until it merged  
into the horizon's pale blue haze

and she remembers turning back  
to see the city shimmering  
lemony in the lagoon  
the snow-capped mountains behind  
and taking that picture  
home with her to keep

**Sonnet**

by Marjorie A. M. Ferry

Pour forth true love's song, for mine ears would win  
my glad destiny from no other's lips  
Neither palm nor rune, nor heav'ns prediction  
nor court magician would mine faith equip  
My fevered head with proofs doth soar anew  
Like full glorious moon in astral sky  
then courage quenched by fall of morning dew  
lest braver knight should catch my lady's eye  
But from favour should I untimely fall  
from warm crimson lips and sweet scented breath  
for Caledonia I would troth my all  
and honour thee true love with hero's death  
So speak now your vows in God's chapel holy  
And our union crown with heaven's glories.

**Sisters**

by Steven Petchey

I am not going to give my father the help that I promised him. I had decided against doing so before agreeing. I made the promise to shut him up. He won't be alone, in some DIY nightmare. His latest woman will be there, helping with the finishing touches to his "lovenest".

As ever, he is keen for me to meet his latest conquest. That's why he kept going on about it. Fortunately, I can't make it now. I have to go to France. It's something that I can't cancel, as I bought the ticket specifically to avoid the happy couple.

She has a sister, apparently. He tells me this sister is even more attractive than his girlfriend, who is, he maintains, a stunner. But he told me the last one was "pretty, but not conventionally pretty, pretty in a quirky

way, prettily unpretty, unprettily pretty” and a year later I still wake up in a cold sweat, the image of their kiss screaming at me. My father is something of a bigot, so when I met “Sharon” I was rather taken aback by how big her hands were and how hairy her arms. When she went to the toilet I stared at the door, wondering whether she was standing, sitting or swinging from the light fittings. “Lovely, aint she?” he said. “She ’as a sister.” This came without the usual knowing smile, which left me unusually intrigued.

Loads of people have sisters. Why does he keep telling me about the sisters of the women he’s shagging? Or the hermaphrodite ladyboy cross-dressing monkey in a womansuit he’s shagging. He could tell me about the sisters of women he’s not shagging. Or men’s sisters. Or women without sisters. Or, best of all, not tell me anything about women. Especially his women. And while he’s at it, he could stop talking about himself. I know more than I need to know about him from Mum.

Mum also tells me people have sisters. Were it not for the chronological impossibility, I would say that their interest in introducing me to someone’s sister was what brought Mum and Dad together. Appropriately, my father’s interest in people’s sisters drove them apart. Mum works with three women who have sisters. Melanie is a very attractive, slim, lithe, dark-haired woman with a hint of the orient about her and a boyfriend who could place my head in the crook of his arm and crack it like a nut. Her sister looks like she’s walked into a door and she has nothing to say. Deirdre, the second of Mum’s trio, is all too fond of the sound of her own voice for my liking. I have never met her sister and hope never to do so. When my Mum pointedly told her of my eligibility, she said, “I should introduce you to my sister. You might not get a word in edgeways, but you might get something else in!” This was said with a girlish chuckle, doubtless one of her weapons of charm, but even Mum admitted she might have made a mistake with that one. And then there’s Helen.

Quite why Mum told me Helen has a sister I don’t know. Helen was unattached. Helen was, is lovely. Her sister was equally unattached and is equally lovely, but somehow these advantages highlight the fact that she is not Helen. I am unclear as to how it happened, but I ended up on a double date with: Helen; some spanner monkey called Mad     " real name Kevin Madley, madness none, interesting things to say, none, knowledge of cars, all too bleeding comprehensive; and Helen’s sister, Christine. I spent the entire evening trying not to look at Helen, but every time I did I caught her eye; we would smile shyly. The evening ended with me in bed with Christine, which I cannot explain. After this, I could never look Helen in the eye. If I hadn’t caught something nasty off her, I would probably still be dating Christine, the pair of us spending nights on the sofa watching TV, me pretending she’s her sister, she contemplating a life without the need for penicillin. Who would have thought the sentence “I have gonorrhoea” could ever be a good thing?

I told Mum that I had met Christine. I didn’t tell her the rest; I simply said she was not my type. Her response to this was to tell me about some bloke called Richard who had installed a network in her office. She was talking about the inconvenience of it all, then suddenly started going on about how handsome he was, how polite, finishing, tentatively, with, “He has a brother.”

“So?” I said.

“Just saying,” she said.

The week following this my father said, “Your mother tells me you don’t want to meet some fella’s brother. This true?”

All I could say was, “What?”

“My Shirley...” His “squeeze” at the time, a sturdy stripper from Streatham who performed under the name Sintilla. They met in a pub one lunchtime. He followed her into the ladies once she’d finished, offered her a hand getting dressed, then did no such thing. “...she ’as a brother, cabaret artiste. Sings and what ’ave you.”

“I don’t want to meet him either.”

“Good,” he said. “She ’as two sisters. The youngest one ’as just started stripping. Tasty piece.”

I love travelling to France by train. A short absence from the world and then, bonjour language difficulties. There’s nothing quite like struggling to say anything to stop you moaning about your family. I had the window to my left and a smartly dressed brunette to my right. We exchanged brief smiles when she got on and then nothing. Until the tunnel.

The minute we were in darkness she grabbed my hand and began to squeeze. I looked at her, but her focus was straight ahead, her long, lightly tanned neck rigid, her eyes wide.

When we reached France she let go of my hand and exhaled loudly. Her shoulders relaxed. “Excusé moi,” she said.

“It’s OK.”

“I don’t like...” She pointed back. I nodded and smiled. “I don’t normally... Usually I travel with my sister.”