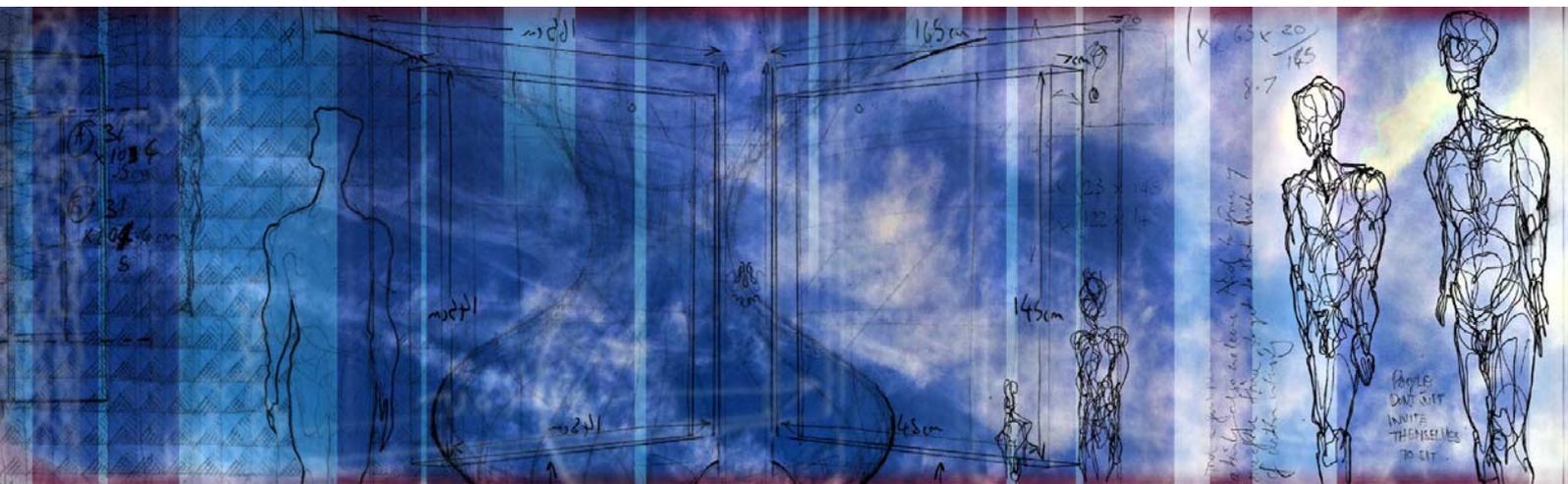


From Glasgow to Saturn

The University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Showcase



Issue 23

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Artwork by Tim Sandys Work. <http://www.timsandys.com>
Find more of Tim's work in [100 Artists of the Male Figure: A Contemporary Anthology
of Painting, Drawing, and Sculpture](#).



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A Word from the Editors

Welcome to Issue 23 of *From Glasgow to Saturn*, and our very first issue as the new editorial team. We have all been avid followers of *From Glasgow to Saturn* since its re-emergence last year, and are thrilled to be tasked with building on the good name it garnered under the previous editors.

One of our concerns in producing an on-line magazine is how our publication can possibly stand out in what is an increasingly crowded marketplace. For us, the answer has to be quality. The stories and poems we've chosen for Issue 23 were selected from a substantial pile of submissions, but these were the pieces that made us pause: the stories that stuck in our heads for hours after we'd read them; the poems that sent us straight back to their opening line to read them all over again. On these pages you'll hear squabbling seagulls and a murderous fox; follow a gymnast who's losing the beat and a child as she considers rebellion. You'll wonder what Dr Who should *really* be concerned about, and contemplate the impact of a new baby on an old friendship. All of this and more in one beautiful-to-behold document, courtesy of artwork from Glasgow-based artist Tim Sandys, whose work has recently featured in the book *100 Artists of the Male Figure*.

We're delighted to be publishing writers who are just starting out alongside those with a body of published work already behind them. *From Glasgow to Saturn* continues to attract submissions from near and far, and included here are pieces from contributors in Finland and The Czech Republic as well as more locally-based talent.

Issue 23 also sees the first outing for our new feature *The Quick View*, on this occasion featuring the poet JL Williams, who not only agreed to be our literary guinea pig for this feature, but has also kindly provided us with three of her wonderful poems to publish.

So now read on and enjoy, and don't forget to let us know what you think.

Siobhan Staples | Megan Primrose | Paul Deaton



Wrath of a Gull

by Alan Gillespie

Two seagulls fight on a rooftop. They squawk and screech and flap. Plumage the colour of dirty water scatters into the sky, feathers with their sinewy rachis, twelve-inch vane, the hollow plasticky calamus. The larger seagull teeters at the edge of the building, fourteen floors up, webbed feet planted on the asphalt roofing. He clamps the smaller seagull with his beak and dangles him over the edge.

‘Aaaargh! AAAAARGH! If you drop me I swear I’ll...I’ll bloody murder you!’ shouts Nathan, flapping his one free wing manically.

‘Aye right,’ says Brian, speaking through the nares at the base of his beak, near the dorsal surface. ‘This is all yer ain fault, man. Ye wouldnay be in this position if ye’d just shared oot yer chips.’

‘Those were my chips!’

‘Ye ken fine well that any and all chips get shared oot between the colony.’ He bites harder. Nathan squeals even louder. ‘What about the bairns? Only just hatched. Poor wee buggers, like. Ye ken fine they’re precocial; we’re no wanting them picking up bad manners from ye.’

‘Those chips had vinegar on them! The babies don’t *like* vinegar!’

‘That’s no the fucking point!’ Brian shakes from side to side, bashing Nathan against the guttering of the sandstone building. ‘D’ye no understand? The kleptoparasitism code, ken? Scavenge thegither, eat thegither. The seagull way. Ye can eat all the stale crusts and flakes of fucking pastry you like. But chips get shared oot.’

‘But...but I was separated from my squadron, there was nobody nearby – I took those chips all on my own, damnit, straight from that little girl’s hands. They were mine by right!’

‘Load of pish. This isnay the first time ah’ve busted ye being a greedy wee bastard. What aboot that time we found the seal placenta, eh? You scoffed the lot afore anybody else got a look in. Ye’re worse than a fucking pigeon.’

‘I am *not* a pigeon!’

‘Naw. Pigeons are just stupid. Dinnae ken any better, ken? But ye’re supposedtay be a seagull, man.’

Brian opens his beak and Nathan plummets towards the ground, screaming for his life. In a panic, he flaps his wings, catches the breeze, and flies away.

If I Was Dr Who I Would

by JoAnne McKay

Dream of my first home, first faces;
forever knowing truly
you can never go back.

Be there at the Big Bang,
begging the question.
Be where at the Big Bang.

Gaze at galaxies' formation:
the absolute beauty
of the zero of space.

Take a millennium or two
to read everything ever written.
To be inside a book
you must swallow its tongue.

Travel through time
to talk with kings;
compare all they had said
with the queens.

Wonder why I always
look so bloody human,
when I am from quite another
place, if not time.

Definitely get the velvet jacket
off my third incarnation -
and the bouffant do too.
That was a bit of a classic.

Ponder why it is evil races
always have evil names?

Have more casual sex.

Have some casual sex.

But most of all, go back and get
lovely, loincloth Leela
the hell out
to make sure she never marries
that twat Richard Dawkins.

Oh no, that was Lalla Ward,
wasn't it? And she was Romana.
Or Romana II?
Didn't wear leather,
didn't carry a knife,
a Lady in real life.

I tell you what, it'd be easier
to be an old man again.
People expect your memory to go a bit.

Somersault

by Kerri McLawlin

The downbeat hits like a rifle shot and I start to count. One coach told me I'd never be a great gymnast because I always needed to count the beats. The great ones, he'd say, they feel it in themselves, they don't need this one two three four. Don't count, Cara. Feel it. But I like to count. It tells me where I am.

Eight is the number of beats I have before I start my routine. This is the best moment, just before. I breathe in deep, right to my toes, but you wouldn't see it if you were watching me. I'm so still I don't even look like a human being. Maybe when I give this up I'll be able to play corpses on TV. Concentrate. I draw my focus back by thinking about the pain in my knee. I felt it go on the bar dismount. I push the pain down like John showed me. It's nothing new. Count. Breathe. And go.

The floor exercise used to be my favourite. The other events we do are so harsh, our bodies colliding with bar or beam or horse and with such speed and force, it's like being in a car crash.

You're black and blue for weeks after a competition. I own more concealer than the entire cast of Grange Hill. You wrench and pull and smash yourself. But the floor exercise is different. There's space and freedom. Nothing to hurt yourself on. Nothing to not be afraid of. The first time you get a routine right on the floor, it feels like flying. But once you really get it, get it perfect, it feels like you are motionless and the whole world is swooping and swerving and veering around you. Then you land and the sprung floor gives a little under your feet, cradling you. And you hold and it holds you, safe and sound.

My final landing today is clumsy and I over-balance, taking a step. I can feel John glaring at me from somewhere in the stadium. I keep my face immobile as the crowd murmurs their disappointment. I walk off to scattered applause as the next girl takes my place.

I see John waiting at the barrier. He's already shaking his head.

'What was that? You should be able to stick that finish no problem.'

I hold up my hands and give him the half-sad smile that usually works.

'I know, John. I'm sorry. But this knee's been playing up and...'

I start to turn away. All I want is to go and have a shower and get back to the hotel. But then John yanks me round by my arm and I see I've misjudged him this time.

His face is red with temper.

'Where the hell do you think you're going? I'm talking to you.'

I start to speak but he just cuts me off.

'You're going to sit your arse down on that bench and you're going to watch girls who actually give a shit. Real gymnasts.'

Some of the other competitors look over, then look away. Furious coaches aren't exactly a novelty round here.

'And get that look off your face.' He stalks off.

I know for a fact my face is as expressionless as a doll's. I pull on a hoodie and sit down, doing my best not to look like a disgruntled teenager. Mei, one of the Chinese team, is warming up for the asymmetric bars. I've seen this girl a few times – she's amazing. Light years from me. And tiny. It's hard to believe she's old enough to compete. Her technique is outstanding yet every movement flows effortlessly into the next. John reckons she's a cert for the Olympic squad. He told me last season he didn't think I'd make it. Said I was good, just not good enough. Said I didn't have the commitment.

For once, Mei's routine isn't as magical as usual. I think I see a tiny hesitation after her first release and re-grasp but she recovers and the rest is flawless. The crowd cheers as she nails her dismount. She jogs out of the arena and into the competitors' area, returning to where her team mates are. One girl, a little older than the rest, spins round and snaps something at her in Chinese. Mei holds up her hand and the angry girl shrugs and turns away.

Mei sits at the end of my bench and I can see her bleeding fingers. She's torn off a couple of fingernails, probably during that mistimed release. It happens all the time. It hurts but you just have to hold on. Either that or fall. I hear the crowd oohing and ahing the next competitor and I wish they'd just shut up. Mei is watching the competition with a fierce concentration. Her lips move slightly as she analyses every movement. I used to do that.

They announce the scores. My team is through to the next day of the event, not much thanks to me. I look delighted. I whoop and cheer and high five. In the dressing room, I smile and nod and laugh at the competition gossip. I do what everyone else does. I don't rush back to my room when we return to the hotel but sit and chat with the rest of the team. I smile gratefully when John gives me advice about getting through tomorrow with my injured knee.

It is nearly ten before I get to my room. I lock my room door and sit down on the

bed. I notice my mobile on the bedside table; the screen shows four missed calls from my mother. I wonder if it's too late to call her, then the phone rings in my hands. I nearly drop it. The voice at the other end is wavery, uncertain:

'Cara?'

'Yes, Mum, it's me. Is everything okay?'

'Are you too busy to speak?'

'No, it's fine. I'm just in the hotel.'

'Did Katie phone you with the news?'

My little sister had texted me last night: YR GOIN 2B AN AUNTY!!! I'd tried to phone but it just went to voicemail. I'd left her a message.

'Yes, I know. How are you feeling?'

'What do you mean? I'm delighted, of course.' Her voice becomes a little tight.

'Just...'

She cuts me off. 'We're all really happy for her here. I know she's a bit young, but you know your sister. She's always been a homebody. Never settled at that university. She'll make a brilliant mum.'

She talks for another minute or two about how my sister's going to move back home and how nice it'll be to have a baby to look after.

'And how are you?'

'Good. We got through to the next round.'

'That's great. Well, I'll let you go then. You'll have a lot to organise.'

I run myself a bath as hot as I can stand. I enjoy the throb in my legs as the heat bites. I lie there looking down at my body. Years of exercise have made it as flat and featureless as a desert. I run a hand over myself, tracing the jut of collar bone, ribs, pelvis. My hairless, naked crotch. The rigid corrugations of muscle on my stomach.

I remember my first proper coach telling me: 'You need to be skinny if you want to fly, Cara.' I was eight, I think. They wouldn't say that now, of course. But everyone knows you don't get fat gymnasts. I'm not even that into it, like some of the girls. I mean, at least an eating disorder keeps you occupied. I've just been hungry for ten years.

And I haven't had a period in six. I know that's not unusual. Not for us. But I wonder sometimes if my insides have congealed and grown as hard and unyielding as the rest of me.

I get out of the bath and pull a bathrobe over my damp, hot skin. I reach under the bed and, at first, I can't find it. Then I feel the plastic whisper against my fingers and I grab hold. I take the box out of the bag and place it in front of me on the bed. I take my

time opening it, then carefully I lift out the cake. I scoop up a piece of icing and place it on my tongue. The sudden shock of sweetness makes my head vibrate. I can't remember the last time I tasted chocolate. I count. 8 slices. I lift the first to my lips and take a huge bite.

After all the cake is gone, I lie back, too full to move. Soon, I sleep.

The competition starts early. I wake before my alarm, shower and pack my kit. I eat breakfast with the team then get on the bus to the stadium. It's like any other competition day except that I feel like everything is happening far away from me. I can't seem to concentrate on what anyone is saying, but I don't think they notice.

I get changed and make my way out to the warm-up area. I start to jog, enjoying the feel of my body loosening off, tension slipping away, breath pouring into me. I'm about to start my stretches when I notice one of the other girls staring at me.

'What's wrong?'

'Your legs,' she mouths, turning away.

I look down. I've forgotten to put make up on my legs and the welts and bruises of yesterday's events are showing, here and there, through my tights. The mesh of the tights distorts them, making them look almost pretty, like purple and red flowers.

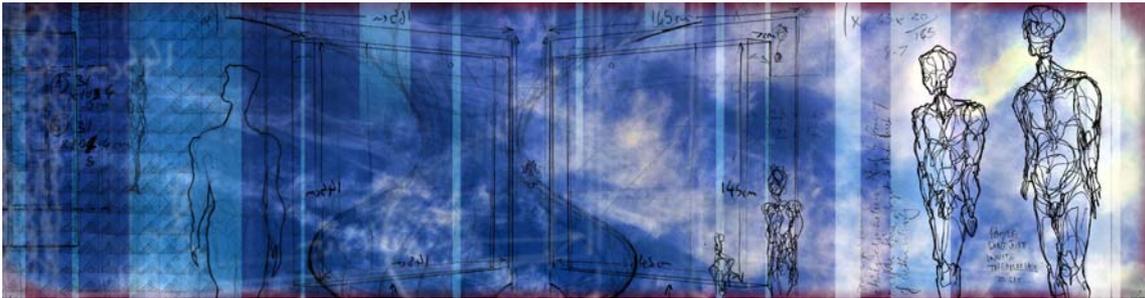
I go back to the changing room and peel my tights off. Without their covering, the bruises no longer look like ghosts of old hurts, but seem fresh and raw. I catch sight of them in a mirror and, for a moment, feel sick. Do they always look this bad after a competition? Or don't I heal like I did when I was young?

The make up we use is made for burns victims. It covers everything. I apply it slowly, taking care to make sure each scar, each scrape is hidden. Every touch hurts. When I finish, my legs are perfect. I place a hand on my stomach.

I go back to the warm-up area and John has started to talk to the team. I hope he won't notice me but he does and gives me this tired look. He goes back to his speech and I try to listen but I just see his mouth moving. I glance around me at everyone else. They are nodding, frowning in concentration. Their eyes glitter. I wonder if they mean it or if they are pretending. When John is finished, I make sure I am one of the first ones out to the arena so no one has a chance to talk to me.

It is soon time for my first event, the floor exercise. I stand and wait for the music. I hear the first few bars and I try to count. I get to five and then I lose the beat. I strain to listen, to see if I can hear when to come in, but I miss it. I just stand there, motionless, and the music plays. I feel very tired all of a sudden. My legs ache.

I lie down. The sprung floor is firmer than you would imagine and I can feel it press against my hips and my shoulders. I will be bruised there later but I won't need to cover them with make up as no one will see them. I hear the music. It pulses through the floor and I can feel it inside me and it is beautiful. How strange that I have heard this music a thousand times and I never knew it was so beautiful. Before it was just beats and pauses. I don't need to count this time, just close my eyes and listen. I sense people moving towards me, flapping like chickens. They think I am ill but I am not. I feel warm and I cuddle into myself. And right at the bottom of my stomach, I feel a tiny, lovely cramp. It's the feeling you get when you stretch after being still for a long time. Cameras flash all around me; red explosions behind my eyelids.



The Forest

by Jane Hartshorn

As trees rib the sky,
Like the drowned hulls
Of skeletal ships,
And my feet steal soft
Upon the moss
Blown bed
Of the forest floor;
Rain dimpled spider webs
Shake themselves free
From their crooked picture hooks
And cling wetly
To the sandpaper of my lips.

The Moth

by Jane Hartshorn

With the thick-set
Shoulder of the night
At my window,
A moth crouched,
Perilous, upon
The paper-thin cool
Of the curtains.
And, cupping it in my hand,
I let it into the night.
It was upon its release
That the air shuddered
Swallowing its yellow whole
And with a warm sigh of relief
The rain began to fall.

Tina Takes a Tumble

by Greg Benson

The sun was shining and it was by all accounts both a beautiful and pleasant afternoon when two members of the local police department forcibly escorted Charlotte Nammersmith out of her local Starbucks.

They were summoned to the scene by Tyler Aberdeen, a barista who called 911 after seeking cover behind the coffee bar to avoid any airborne chunks of ceramic-ware. Later the official police report quoted him as saying Charlotte had ‘exploded’ (even though his exact word was ‘Vesuvius’) at the short, fat, bald patron ahead of her while he seemed to be patiently waiting his turn to order a strawberry Frappuccino. By the time officers Jacobs and Jones arrived at the scene, Charlotte had toppled over every table in the store, save one which was securely bolted down, and was reportedly laboring against it for several minutes while requesting if it was ‘funny now’ at maximum volume to no one in particular before the officers were able to pry her away.

Three hours earlier, Charlotte had been standing in the middle of a room, watching two younger men at a table converse in hushed tones, while trying desperately to ignore the fact that her feet were getting sweaty. Charlotte had always been thankful that her body did not betray nervousness in any sort of overt way. Her hands did not shake, her voice did not waver, and her armpits, even under extreme duress, would remain bone dry. It was only ever the bottoms of her feet which displayed any outward sign of nerves. Indeed, as soon as Charlotte became even slightly agitated the soles of her feet would become relentlessly clammy. Even now, in this overly air-conditioned theatre, it wouldn’t have been a problem, except that while Charlotte was standing there, trying to discern what these two men were saying while desperately attempting to appear utterly unconcerned by their presence, she realised with a dawning horror that her left foot itched. A lot. The two men glanced over at her very quickly, and she in turn smiled at them while her brain unwillingly formed the words ‘Holy Fuck, this is agony.’

Once the two of them again seemed occupied, Charlotte began to reason with herself. She was fairly confident, she bargained, in her ability to balance on one heel, and even though she wanted to avoid falling over at all costs, the discomfort in her foot had moved from nonexistent to excruciating so quickly that she dreaded what would happen if she ignored it much longer. Heart attack seemed well within the realm of possibility at this point, as did an aneurism should she continue to do nothing. Slowly, she slid her foot out of the shoe she had bought specifically for that day, and trying her

best to envision the serenity and poise of a great blue heron, she slowly moved the sole of her foot against the opposite leg, before the two men looked a third time and she quickly jammed her foot back home again. Grinning to avoid the pain of a freshly stubbed toe she politely asked if they wanted to see something else.

‘Yes, can we see that monologue again,’ they asked, ‘but on a table?’

Even earlier, Charlotte had been in the middle of practicing the most depressing monologue she could find (Chekhov, of course) when she received an email from one of the Co-Producers of Comedy Central’s *Tosh.0*

Hello, [it read]

We’ve recently had our attention directed to a video on YouTube called ‘Tina Takes a Tumble.’ We’d be very interested in doing a segment on it as part of our ‘web redemptions’ series. Can you tell me if this is you?

Best regards

Pete Pickerson, Co-Executive Producer, Tosh.0

Charlotte’s immediate response was to archive the email. After one more recitation from *The Seagull* she went back and almost deleted it, but decided not to in the event she might want to write a nasty reply later. At any rate, she had bigger fish to fry. She had an audition to get to.

‘A – a table?’ she asked.

‘Yes, a table, unless you think that’s going to be (Charlotte could have sworn she detected the faint hint of a smile) problematic for you?’

Now, this was not the first time Charlotte had let herself be coaxed onto a table. Five years earlier, Charlotte had gone to an apartment party hosted by Michael Naylor, the boy she had found herself hopelessly attracted to ever since they had played opposite one another the semester before in Neil LaButte’s *The Shape of Things*. From the moment the show closed Charlotte had been sending him signals, but he persisted in remaining utterly oblivious to her affections. For months and months this went on until finally, on the night of the party, Charlotte made up her mind that come hell or high water she was going to make something happen, and with that singular goal seared into her brain Charlotte proceeded to get drunk.

‘No, not at all. That sounds...perfectly reasonable.’

Very, very, very drunk.

‘Great. I’ll just have my assistant director fetch one for you, and we can start again.’

In her spotty recollections of the evening, Charlotte could not be sure at exactly what point the video camera came into play. It was just suddenly there, as if conjured into existence by the mercurial demigod of fun itself, drifting about the crowd, capturing all of the actions and sentiments which doubtlessly needed to be recorded for all time. Nor could Charlotte recall how the camera came to be in Michael's hands, or who had thought it was a great idea to put on Journey's timeless classic *Don't Stop Believin'* but all of a sudden there he was and there she was and there it was and all at once Charlotte knew what she had to do.

She leapt. She leapt onto the coffee table with reckless abandon and managed to stay balanced for a half second – or three lyrics of the rock anthem's iconic chorus – before she fell. In spectacular fashion. First her left foot flew up in the air to come about level horizontally with the floor and then her right foot followed. As her ass collided with the now upturned coffee table and she fell over and backwards she remembered with a great deal of drunken chagrin that today was laundry day, and as such, she had neglected to wear underwear.

'Careful now,' the director said to Charlotte as he watched her climb onto the table and his assistant merely sat there silently grinning in expectation.

'Thanks,' Charlotte said while inwardly telling them both to go fuck themselves.

Strong hands grasped Charlotte's wrist as she lay on the floor, a bit stunned and hoping that no one had seen while gathering from the mounting laughter around her that she was wrong. Those concerns vanished though as Michael pulled her to her feet and, still holding the video camera and chuckling a little, asked if she was okay. Blushing, drunk, feet already beginning to sweat, Charlotte looked directly into his eyes via the video camera and asked the most pressing question which came to mind.

'You didn't see my snatch, did you?'

'The bodies of living beings have vanished into dust,' Charlotte recited, maintaining her balance. 'The Eternal Matter has converted them into stones, into water, into clouds; and all their spirits are merged in one. I am that spirit –'

'Wobble a little more,' coaxed the director.

Five months later, Michael was about to graduate, and Charlotte and he were making plans for what they would do during her last year of school. She was walking through the library, carrying a coffee and a muffin to where he had ensconced himself to study, when she chanced to look over in passing at one of the communal computer screens, where a chubby redheaded freshman, with a beard, checked pajama pants and an extra-large T-shirt that simply read 'LOL', was watching a YouTube video called

‘Tina Takes a Tumble.’ Stopping to look over his utterly oblivious shoulder, she watched for a brief thirty-nine seconds as a girl in a long hippie-skirt and flats jumped onto a table and fell off in spectacular fashion, exposing a minor amount of tastefully censored junk in the process. The camera followed her down to the floor and then back again as she was pulled upward and, bright red, looked into the camera and said something that the boy with the red hair found extremely funny. The video stopped and he, suddenly conscious that someone was standing uncomfortably close behind him, turned around, enabling Charlotte to see the play counter which displayed almost a quarter of a million views. The two shared an uncomfortable silence for a few seconds while Charlotte regarded the screen of his computer and he, blinking uncomfortably and breathing through his nose, regarded her. Later that night Charlotte went home and threw away all of Michael’s things, but before she did that she pulled back from the screen and, seeming only at that point to notice the boy, asked him if he wanted a muffin.

Years later, Charlotte stood on a table after finishing her monologue for the second time, and became conscious that the two men in front of her had really only been half listening. She asked them if they wanted to see anything else.

‘No, I think that’s all, Tina.’

Charlotte still denies any knowledge of where the name came from. People on the internet, it seems, are suckers for alliteration. Among other things.

‘It’s Charlotte,’ was all she replied.

In the intervening years the video had been viewed almost three million times. It had been parodied, autotuned and turned into a drinking game, and by the time it had received all these trappings of having arrived as a legitimate web phenomenon, Charlotte was standing in line at Starbucks, her rotten day having started out rotten, continued rotten, and if at all possible gotten rottener when the short, fat, bald man in front of her started humming Journey absent-mindedly to himself.

As the two policemen took her out into the bright pleasant sunlight of the bright pleasant afternoon, Officer Jones turned to Officer Jacobs and remarked, ‘It amazes me every day how some people just can’t crack it.’

‘Yup,’ returned Officer Jones. ‘They come to a big city thinking it’ll make all their dreams come true.’

‘And they just wind up losing it,’ finished Officer Jacobs.

‘Yup,’ responded Officer Jones. ‘Like this one here.’

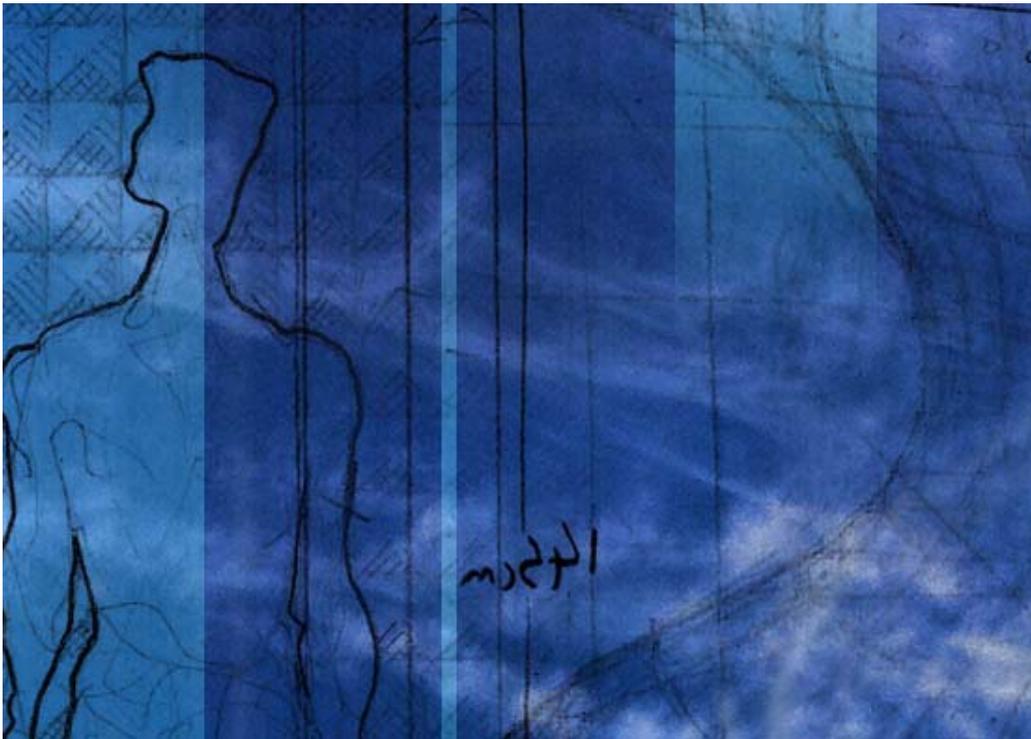
‘Yup,’ quipped Officer Jacobs. ‘Just a small-town girl.’

‘Yup,’ intoned Officer Jones. ‘Livin’ in a lonely world.’

At this point both Officer Jacobs and Officer Jones looked over at Charlotte, their top lips quivering ever so slightly.

Later that evening Charlotte returned to her apartment, having been released on the condition that she never return to that particular Starbucks ever again. Exhausted, feet still damp, she took off her shoes and opened her email account. Still no response from the director, or his assistant. She clicked through her mail absent-mindedly for a few minutes before she opened up the one she had received that morning. She stared at it for a good long while. Then she dashed off one sentence in reply.

‘Yes,’ it said, ‘that’s me.’



Thirddness

by Nick Boreham

‘Writer or artist preferred,’ said the flat share ad. in the *Observer*.

The Sunday morning call box smelled of vomit. ‘My name is Will,’ I said. ‘Will Deliver. I’m a philosopher. Is that close?’

‘Come and speak to Angus,’ said Krissi. Even before I’d seen the purple streaks in her hair, I guessed she had a flamingo tattoo on the side of her nose.

Ladybower Mansions added distinction to the A4, where traffic trying to escape London started to scream with frustration. Twenty feet back from gridlocked lorries, coaches and cars, its brownstone façade supported enough pediments, stone balls and columns for Prague or Vienna. Krissi and Angus’s flat, No. 31, was on the first floor. Angus threw the door open, stroked his ginger beard and fixed me with different coloured eyes (one brown, one green). In his hand he held a sheet of purple paper.

After he’d read me his poem, he told me he’d left St Andrews at the end of his first year. He’d backpacked to London, met Krissi at a party in Kilburn and when she asked what he did for a living, told her he was a poet. Krissi’s father, a Member of Parliament, had bankrolled their marriage to the extent of the first year’s rent on No. 31 Ladybower Mansions, a word processor for Angus and 5,000 sheets of purple vellum bond.

Angus wrote poetry all day and lived by subletting two rooms. The rent he charged me was just affordable for a philosophy graduate working in a filling station on the minimum wage. I should have done a vocational course like my dad said.

Mel, the other lodger, was an Australian artist who made oil paintings of female genitalia. He had raised the air fare to the UK by raffling his body, the winner to do whatever he or she liked with all five feet of Mel for a whole 24 hours. This included the curly black hair that fell across his freckled forehead, the bald patch on the back of his head and the sturdy toes that pushed yellow socks out of the ends of his sandals. Twenty per cent of the male population of Sydney bought tickets, but the raffle was won by a housewife who made Mel wash dishes for the 24 hours.

As I explained to Angus and Krissi, in my time off from the filling station I was writing a book on Thirddness. Everything I discovered about Thirddness I recorded on post-its. Soon, the walls of my room were covered with hundreds of yellow squares.

‘Explain to me, dear Will,’ said Krissi as we sat at the kitchen table drinking Nescafé one day. ‘What’s Thirdness?’ She’d replaced the purple streaks in her hair with lime green.

‘Thirdness is how we represent the world,’ I said.

‘Mel’s still a virgin,’ said Krissi, blowing steam across the top of her mug. I didn’t ask her how she knew.

Soon my post-its had advanced down the walls of the passage as far as Mel’s room. He stopped slapping pink paint and talked to me about Thirdness. ‘What are you trying to prove?’ he asked.

‘I’m trying to discover new systems of representation.’

Walking along the passage, paintbrush in hand, Mel helped me divide the post-its into different systems of representation. For example, the world can be represented by words. Or by arranging milk bottles into intricate patterns on your doorstep. That makes two systems of representation. Slapping paint on canvas is another. My discussions with Mel were really, really informative and always looped back to his art.

Mel had bought 24 cans of lager, so one weekend he decided to cook an Indian meal. The chicken pilau was ready an hour before Mel had finished frying the parathas, and by then we’d drunk all the lager. ‘This meal is a poem,’ said Angus. He reached forward, put his arms round Krissi, Mel and me, and hugged so tight our foreheads rubbed together painfully.

‘This meal is a system for representing the world,’ I said, and wrote a post-it to record the fact. I stuck the post-it on the kitchen wall, over the gas cooker.

A lot of snow fell that winter. One evening, Christmas Eve in fact, I was lying on my sleeping bag in my overcoat trying to figure out how the icicles on the inside of the window could be organised into a system of representation. Round the door came Angus’s different coloured eyes, pulling a very serious face after them.

‘Will,’ he said, ‘you’ll have to go.’

I sat up. ‘It can’t be the rent,’ I said. ‘I’ve never fallen behind. Not once.’

‘I want you out,’ he shouted.

‘Non comprehendo, amigo.’

‘It’s not me,’ he said, calming down. ‘It’s Krissi. ‘That boy will have to go,’ she said.’

‘Is it the post-its on the kitchen wall?’

‘No, it’s Krissi’s bottle of shampoo in the bathroom. What do you use to wash your hair?’

‘Soap,’ I said.

‘Well, you’ll have to go just the same.’

I packed my rucksack, handed back my key and walked down the passage.

‘Just hear my latest poem,’ said Angus, thrusting a sheet of purple paper between me and the front door.

Krissi had shut herself in their bedroom. I pictured the flamingo tattoo coiling and uncoiling as she stared at herself in the mirror and wrinkled her nose in self-justification.

Outside in the dark, the snow was three inches deep. Crimson Father Christmases clung to the tops of lamp posts like escaped chimpanzees. Vehicles chugged, motionless in the A4 evening gridlock, their wipers batting away snowflakes the size of marshmallows. Stretching into the distance, a long line of red tail lights pointed my way west. I glanced back at Krissi and Angus’s flat. All the lights were on. I could see yellow post-its running in waves along the passage wall.

Thirdness, I realised after walking a couple of hundred yards through the slush, means enrolling for an IT course. I wrote this on a post-it and stuck it on the side of a London Transport bus.

After another quarter of a mile, I boarded a double-decker intercity, bought a ticket for Oxford, ran upstairs and sat at the back. There would be lots of IT courses in Oxford. Looking down at the pavement, I saw Mel walking through the snow with a woman on his arm. There was a blob of pink paint on his nose where he’d scratched it. Mel had found a system of representing the world with pink blobs.

Someone switched on a ghetto blaster and filled the top deck with Christmas carols from King’s. As the double-decker jerked its way down the A4 to the sound of *Good King Wenceslas*, I thought of a lover who worked at a pony trekking centre in the middle of Dartmoor. She kept hens, bred dogs and wanted to make lots of babies.

Out of the rear window, I could still see the lighted window of Krissi and Angus’s flat. No bigger than a full stop. Where once there were post-its, now there was nothing.

The Bitter Dead

by JoAnne McKay

So seeming solemn still, because I lie
in garden of remembrance, formally
you have forgotten me, and would I be
these cold, carved capitals just one inch high?
It was not your fault. Here your comfort lies,
they are not my words. Grave, I have no voice,
as grave, that shaded day, I had no choice.
I died. I would it had been otherwise.
A silence is forgetting, what I want
is my roar in a red-haired great grandchild;
the captain, his patrician nose punched again
at public school, real tears, and petulance.
A small life. From such we have been exiled,
dying young. You do not carry my name.

How We Will Be Someday

by JL Williams

The man of greatest intelligence
and the man of least
sit next to one another sharing a thought.

Someday it will be like this.
Maybe even today someone
is like someone else.

As they watch the sun set
there is no need to say,
"How quick. How beautiful."

Bea & Baudelio

by Gary McGhee

At the door of Lifeless Things, a man in an expensive business suit lowered his face to his six-year old daughter's and raised a severe finger.

'Don't make a sound, and don't dare touch a thing.'

Bea didn't want to meet his glare, so she raised her eyes to his tie and nodded. 'Yes father.'

Satisfied, he opened the glass-panelled door. Chimes jingled as Bea padded after him into the gloom. She blinked and shapes formed in the dull golden light of the statue shop. Her father rang the reception bell and Bea heard movement from somewhere behind the scenes.

'Be right with you,' called a voice.

Bea risked a look about the close room. The floor was pink stone, the walls crumbling plaster. Doors went off to her left and right. The door to the left, which was behind a rusted grille, led into a garden walled by high tenements. The sunlight, falling on clustered fountains and Grecian nudes, blazed white from Bea's dusty vantage point, hurting her eyes. She turned away and peered into the other room, glimpsing massed, fantastic shapes before sensing her father's irritation and dropping her eyes to her shoes.

'Hello there,' a friendly voice said. Bea thought its accent was Italian. 'Sorry to keep you waiting sir – you are the first of my customers today, and I was just finishing breakfast. How can I help you?'

'My name is Ness. I telephoned yesterday evening.'

'Ness... Ness... Of course! You wished to buy a gift for your fiancé?'

'Yes. I heard you specialise in Rodin replicas. She's a fan.'

'You heard correctly Mr Ness. I have a number of small ones inside, but I think the larger, out-door versions would be more to your preference, if it's a wedding gift?' Bea heard the shop-owner step out from behind his desk. 'Ah! And who is this young lady?'

Before she could stop herself, Bea looked up. The old man was broad-shouldered, short, and his kind face was crowned with a mess of silver hair. Bea looked to her father. He nodded curtly. She had permission to reply.

'I'm Bea, sir. Pleased to meet you.' She looked to the floor again.

The old man, whose name was Gonelli, beamed. 'Such wonderful manners! I can tell she has been brought up well.' Mr Ness shrugged.

‘Hm.’

‘Well,’ said Gonelli, throwing Bea a pitying look, ‘Mr Ness, if you’ll follow me outside...’

Gonelli pulled back the grille and Bea’s father ducked to follow the much shorter man into the garden. Before stalking into the light he turned to his daughter. Decorum checked him from raising his voice to Bea in Gonelli’s presence, but his eyes adequately conveyed the warning. Once Gonelli and her father had disappeared into the garden Bea took *Cambridge Mathematics 3B* from her satchel, sat down in the corner, and began to work on the chapters her father had allocated earlier that morning.

The minutes ticked away as Bea scribbled calculations. Now and again snippets of conversation would waft in as Gonelli or her father passed close to the garden porch. Bea, hoping for one of the brief lapses in coldness her father lent her when her studies had gone especially well, tried to ignore the distraction and focus on her algebra.

‘¿Hola? ¿Hay alguien allí?’

Bea snapped rightward to the door from which the voice had come. She sensed trouble, but after a moment of silence Bea returned to her book. It had been Gonelli, or the phrase had floated in from the street.

‘Hola! Please help!’

Bea had desperately wanted no-one to be there, but, however keen her desire to avoid angering her father, her conscience would not let her ignore a call for help, even if her instinct for self preservation was begging her to stay put. Heart beating in her throat, Bea stood up, glanced towards the garden to make sure her father wasn’t about to re-enter, and crept into the room of statues.

It was a large, white-walled room, stacked with shelves and lined with tables on which were massed people, animals and scenes. Sunlight streamed in from three round windows, throwing hundreds of the statues into life. The room looked empty of people but did not feel empty of souls. On the highest shelf Pharaohs stared forward with white eyes; on the table by her left bronze marines hoisted a tiny stars and stripes at Iwo Jima; Rembrandt’s Jacob grappled with Doré’s archangel in front of the window; there was a pallid bust of Pallas just above the chamber door.

‘Hello?’ she whispered. Though the room was set out to best accommodate wandering customers, and price tags hung from most of the statues (a seven-thousand koruna price-tag hung from Pallas like an earring), Bea felt like a trespasser. She was disobeying her father. However enthralled, what she wanted most was to be back on the hall floor with her algebra problems.

She started to walk slowly down the aisle towards the back of the room where she thought the Spanish voice had come from, each step bringing her further out of bounds. Bea finally stopped at the far end of the room by a black fireplace, the hearth of which was taller than she was. A gargoyle sneered at her from the mantelpiece, its snout and bared teeth an angry pig's, its wings the Devil's. She had scanned the whole room and there was no one. Had she imagined the voice? She clutched her bag and thought of the work she could have done by now. Her imagination had never got the better of her before. She started to panic. Why today then? Why *right now*?

She turned and began to run back, stealth put aside. Limbs, wings, creatures, towers and faces fell away behind her in locked marble and obsidian. A matador figurine made a gracious bow as she passed. Bea wondered vaguely if there was clockwork inside it.

'Señora!' it cried.

Bea halted. She took a deep breath and turned around.

A bronze-painted face beamed, and Bea had to draw on all her reserves of practiced self-discipline to keep from shouting in fright. Her perspective on the world was one that managed everything in terms of rules and regulations – a statue would only be able to speak via magic and, to Bea's thinking, magic was something chiefly characterised as a violation of nature's laws. Her core instinct was *to always follow the rules*. She had broken one in answering a call for help – how many more would she break talking to a living statue?

'Do not be afraid, my lady,' said the foot-tall matador. 'I mean you no harm.' His voice was quiet but not tinny.

Bea glubbed like a fish. This was like something from one of her contraband fairytales.

'Hello. Sir.'

'"Sir?" Such wonderful manners!' He doffed his Montero, revealing fired-clay hair that somehow shook free, and bowed again. 'Señora, you flatter me awfully.' He snapped his tiny fingers and pointed his arm straight at her. His stone flag billowed on his arm. 'Tell me your name.'

'Bea. Um, Beatrice'.

'Lady Beatrice,' said the statue, with another flourish, 'I am Baudelio, the great torero of Mihas.' He bowed for the fourth time, lower than he had before. 'At your service.'

Bea did not have a clue what to say. She stood blinking at Baudelio, who had frozen at the lowest depth of his bow.

‘You really needn’t be,’ she tried, wondering now how to escape. Then his youthful face looked up and rationality left again.

‘Gratitude demands it, señora! For thirty years I have waited, calling out every day! You, benevolent lady Beatrice, are the only kind soul who has ever answered!’ He mused to himself. ‘You must have a special, sensitive soul, one filled with gentleness and compassion, to have heard my magical plea!’

Bea worried at Baudelio’s use of ‘special’. She’d read enough books to know that enchantments plus being ‘special’ usually led to problems. She wanted to help though, so Bea tried to manoeuvre through magic with manners.

‘How can I help Señor?’ Then again, perhaps that wasn’t the wisest course.

Baudelio grinned at the honorific, but his face suddenly fell. ‘I am the victim of a curse, Lady Beatrice.’

Oh no. She was in it now. ‘A curse? That’s why you can you talk? The others don’t...?’ she stopped, thinking about the gargoyles and the snakes.

‘It is only me. I think, at least,’ he added, failing to reassure. ‘Perhaps they have forgotten that they live. But I, I remember that I am a man.’ His melodic voice roughened with drama. ‘A man doomed to clay and the prison of a plinth, under the mastery of that beast!’

Baudelio gestured through the crowd of statues. Among the busts and figures crouched a great bull. Its glass eyes glinted and its horns were too sharp and black to be the work of normal hands. The sunlight did not touch it. Bea shivered.

‘He lives, I know, even if he pretends he does not,’ Baudelio said. ‘A devil in stone.’

Somewhere a door shut.

‘Señora, with the condition of my faithful service all your life, I ask that you liberate me from this stone cemetery.’

‘Liber-?’ she started – but her father had appeared at the entrance to the chamber with Gonelli. Baudelio froze and Bea’s thoughts tripped with shock. Gonelli, who had just sold Mr Ness a water feature facsimile of Rodin’s *The Thinker*, seemed concerned at Bea’s place in the room. Then knowledge appeared in his eyes.

‘Mr Ness, if you’ll just follow me I’ll prepare the delivery papers.’

Gonelli shuffled away but Mr Ness hung back for a second. When he left Bea had to choke back a sob. She wished that many things were different.

‘Where are you going, Señora?’ Baudelio asked, alive again.

‘I’m sorry Baudelio,’ she whispered, her eyes hot. ‘I have to go.’

The statue turned desperate.

‘Please my lady! Once I have crossed the threshold of this hell, life will return to me! You will have a loyal friend and servant until the end of your days!’

Stuck between terror and the obligations of sympathy, Bea let words pour out. ‘I’ve no money. I’ll remember Baudelio, and one day come back to buy you. I promise.’ There. That was the safest, neatest way to end this. The statue’s knees dropped to his plinth.

‘Then steal me!’

Bea heard, but the meaning met too much resistance to properly register. Stealing something, even out of charity...

‘Please Señora!’ he begged. ‘My soul cannot linger any longer in this clay frame! Like my form, my mind will soon be as stone!’

Bea walked away, mumbling apologies. She wanted out. There was too much fantastic and wrong about this room and too little fantastic and right outside it. She needed an anchor, a constant – and the only constant for Bea was the authority of her father. Bea thought of the bull, and she heard Baudelio cry after her –

‘You cannot know what it is to live under a tyranny!’

Bea stopped. Something sparked in her. She spun round and snatched Baudelio from the bull’s dominion.

Here goes everything, she thought.

She marched out of the room of statues – left the raven, the snake, the knights, the angels, the bull. Her father was at the till, filling out the details of his address while Gonelli watched from behind the desk. Bea gulped, but her mind was made up and did not change. The water-feature copy of *The Thinker* had been carted in and the stone man sat ruminating beside her father. Gonelli also had his chin in hand and a question on his face.

Mr Ness handed Gonelli a cheque.

‘There. I live in the centre. Your man should have no trouble finding the building.’

Gonelli moved his jaw around, chewing on a thought. ‘I don’t doubt it sir.’

Mr Ness sneered at his daughter.

‘We’re going.’

Bea’s heart lightened. This was going to work.

Then Gonelli spoke.

‘Wait Mr Ness,’ he said, his eyes on Bea’s bag. He looked unhappy. ‘I believe-’

Bea moved. She skidded on the dusty floor and sprawled out across it, falling on her bag and winding herself. A tower of wrath yanked her to her feet and with a snarl Bea kicked at it. Her father dropped her, shouting in surprise and pain, and Bea, knowing he would chase her, grabbed *The Thinker*’s cart and pulled down, breaking the statue on the stone floor with a religious *crack*. The crack echoed, the door chimes jingled, and Bea was away.

Once she was at a safe distance Bea jumped in the street, gulping down the city air and smiling at every passerby. She had done it, and a lifetime of adventures with Baudelio, the freed matador, stretched out before her.

She opened her satchel to release him.

‘We escaped!’

Baudelio didn’t appear. Bea’s stomach knotted.

Already knowing what had happened, Bea looked in her bag. When she had fallen across the floor of Lifeless Things, Baudelio had been shattered.

A breeze sighed down the lane. It twisted in her bag and rattled flecks of clay, as though Baudelio’s ghost had only now departed. Dazed, Bea held the matador’s broken face in her palm. One half of a dashing smile was still frozen there.

Then – electric movement. A tram was approaching, bound south. She looked back in the direction of Lifeless Things. Her father was moving in her direction but he hadn’t seen her yet. He was in the sunlight and his cold, furious eyes could not see beyond where it fell.

She could take the tram. Or she could wait for her father, and perhaps the world would not end. Perhaps it would only be a better and more complicated place.

The tram rattled closer.



Waking Persephone

by Gerry Stewart

Moon-soaked clouds,
stairs twist down into leaden night.
Beneath the gaze of weary Cerberus
you spirit me away to your Necropolis,
a city of wandering dreams.

My cold-ache fingers carving
your unearthed tenderness
like a perfected marble statue
forgotten in the corner
of an overgrown garden.
My mossy tears settle
in the curl of your hand,
staining my resolve.

No longer distorted by smoke,
your smile halts my drift
towards summer's abandon.

I am footsteps flickering
across the floor of a darkened temple.
Your words extinguish
my guttering candle doubts.

You sleep with crossed wings.
I lie beside you,
scattered bones tossed into chance patterns.
My future with you dwells in shadow,
the path home pales into faint memory.

I stay within your nocturnal realm,
tasting your proffered fruit,
cherry juice calligraphy tattooing my skin.

Loyal Flying Pigeons

by Sherezade García Rangel

‘I always wanted it to be you, you know that.’ Jane puts down her latte, her ring hand lands over mine and squeezes.

‘Of course I do,’ I stretch a smile. I see that the wrist tattoo’s still there, hidden underneath bracelets with houses and teddy-bear charms. I designed it for her. She had it done after the first break-up. I sip my latte. The scones-to-share look at me and wink.

‘Thank you, sweetie! I knew you would. When she heard we were getting married, she asked. Asked! Can you believe it? I couldn’t have said no. That would have been rude. You do understand, don’t you?’ Jane’s hand travels to the mound at the peak of her balloon belly. What had once been an unwanted complication is now the centre of her being, literally. The baby is the sun and Jane the Earth.

The rest of the afternoon is spent in baby/wedding talk. From her entourage of a million bags, she shows me the things she’s bought for the baby. There’s a moment when I agree to wear the peach bridesmaid dress she has selected. Peach. After a couple of attempts to tell my dead pigeon story, I give up. At six, John picks her up. While she manoeuvres herself into the passenger seat, John and I tetris the bags into the trunk of his car. He gives me a hug, insisting I must come to the house for dinner next week. I agree with full conviction that it will never happen. And so the last Coffee Ritual Thursday ended.

She said she would never move to the suburbs because real life was in the city. ‘Nothing’s more valuable than walking home after a night out or going to the supermarket in your pyjamas,’ she used to say. But I guess if life gives you John, you make suburban lemonade.

‘Do you know how far it is?’ I ask the driver.

‘When does the party start?’

‘Really it’s just dinner. Family dinner. Haven’t seen them in a while.’ I pat the present sitting next to me.

‘What’s the present for?’

‘They just had a baby.’ In the pictures, she looks just like Jane. ‘I wanted to go to the hospital.’

‘You’re not family, then?’

‘Just a friend.’ Just her best friend.

The Times called it a boutique town, all greens and big houses. John and Jane's private driveway stretches before us crowned at the end with a set of double doors. Just when we get there, John comes out, wallet in hand. Before I can stop him, he pays my fare and a very generous tip. The taxi driver asks when do I need him back and John tells him to return tomorrow at two. Apparently, I'm staying over. I protest, but John dismisses it with a wave that makes his watch slide about his wrist. I feel a tingle of annoyance, as if the bigger the watch, the more power over other people's time he feels he has. But then he says 'she's family,' to the driver, who smiles and turns the music up as he pulls away.

The present is in a pink box with a white bow on top of it. John takes it and cradles it to one side. He bends over and kisses both my cheeks saying that I shouldn't have.

'Amy is only a month old and already owns more than me and Jane put together,' He laughs warmly.

'Nice beard,' I say. He used to be one of the cleanest shaved men I knew. Jane said he shaved three times a day.

'I'm a father now, better look the part.' He laughs again, patting his beard as we enter the house.

'You do! And congratulations, again. Can't wait to meet Amy.'

'Jane's with her now, I'm to take you upstairs.' He places the gift on the hall table.

I use this moment to check my outfit in the antique mirror. I bought a dress for today, grey and far more office-gear than anything else I own. But I felt I had to dress up for the family dinner. Makeup's still on, hair remains untouched in a neat bun at the side of my head. I had one of my roommates fix it. She'd said I almost looked the part, except for the eyebrow piercing and the pink hair. But I'm wearing heels and that's as far as I'm willing to go.

John guides me up a wide spiral staircase and we enter the nursery. There's a group of women on my left, sitting close together on an L-shaped sofa. The brothers' wives, I assume, The Ambush as Jane used to call them. The Ambush briefly looks at me and then goes back to a scrapbook that rests on the coffee table. But Middle Wife stares a second longer. She looks towards the windows then back at me. I smile, but she misses it. She's back to the book now, turning the page. The Ambush nods as she points at something in the book. So Middle Wife = Maid of Honour.

I turn to the windows, where there's a beautiful rocking chair and the new parents. Jane is pacing and cooing a bundle, Amy. In a dark-blue sweater and perfect fitting jeans, Jane still manages to look the best in the room. Her hair is up in a ponytail that barely reaches her neck. The famous mane of beautiful black hair is gone. It used to be the first thing you noticed when she walked in, that and the outfits. She used to favour the miniscule skirt, her legs, like popsicles, always looked delicious.

John takes the baby and they freeze for a second, waiting for screaming. When the silence continues, Jane sighs, the ring hand lands on her chest and she turns to me. She smiles as she crosses the room with open arms. She hugs, a warm breeze tickles my ear as she whispers 'Helen.' She lets me go and places her hands on my shoulders. More weight on the left, ring hand.

Jane takes me to the cradle, where John has lain Amy down. Jane leans in, pulling me with her. She caresses the baby's head and she whispers 'Amy,' and smiles. Soon, John ushers the Ambush out of the room and Jane and I follow. Jane grabs a cute baby monitor and dims the lights.

Across the table, John's brothers look like older cookie-cutter versions of him. The Pride was Jane's nickname for them. Lions for the guys, tigers for the girls. Jane still looks more like a bird than a feline.

'The opening set was excruciating,' roars Lion Number One.

'And that's how you lose if you bet on Del Potro,' roars Lion Number Two.

The Pride breaks into laughter and spills some wine. They talk tennis.

This goes on for a while, but by dessert the conversation settles on the upcoming wedding.

'Helen, dear,' Middle Wife calls. 'They'll need you for measurements as soon as you can make yourself available.'

Jane laughs and sips sparkly water. She gives me a 'See what I have to put up with?' look. I smile mischievously back.

After a while, Pride declares it's time for Port and Cigars. And Ambush wants to go check on the baby.

'Please, wait. Jane, I want you to see something,' I say and rush off to the entry hall.

I carry the present into the dining room. Ambush claps and Pride roars Oh, my!s. A space is cleared in front of Jane. I put the present down and wave John over.

They both tug at the bow and I rest a knee on my Edwardian chair. I feel slightly embarrassed at the sheer pinkness of the box, or maybe of my hair. Everything else in this room is white. But I keep smiling while John and Jane take turns in repeating you-shouldn't-haves. Pride starts a bet, whoever guesses what the present is will take home more than it cost. Ambush asks if I kept the receipt. I claim I have it, but I'm not sure.

John lifts the lid and Jane puts her hands inside the box. She looks from it into the eyes of the felines to increase suspense. They enjoy the game for a while, tossing the bow at one another. Then everyone roars a chorus of take-it-out!s. As Jane pulls, my eyes are on her hoping the present will come out in the right order. I sigh when I see the ring hand pulling the hook, the way it should be. She slides it out and I could swear Middle Wife gasps. Then for a moment everyone's silent. I wonder if they are thinking 'Look what the cat dragged in.'

'Oh Helen, it's beautiful!' Jane says and moves closer to John. 'Look sweetie, isn't it gorgeous?' He kisses her cheek and turns to me to say thanks. I exhale for a whole minute.

Pride claps and congratulates me, forking over the bet money. By now, it pays twice for the present. Ambush nods and makes fun of Pride's defeat.

'Well, the weirdest thing happened on the last Coffee Ritual Thursday. I wanted to get you something so I went by that store in the corner you loved, remember? Well, there was a dead pigeon-' I say.

'So charming, really. You should deal with it straight away, Mama J. You know how these things work, Helen dear, if she doesn't tend to it now, she never will,' Middle Wife says.

'Help me set it up, John?' Jane says. She gives me a kiss and hooks her free arm around mine. We lead the procession to Amy's room.

John hunches as he finishes attaching the wooden arm to the crib. Lion One holds the mobile up and helps John measure it. Jane watches from her chair as she breastfeeds, rocking back and forth. At the door, Ambush and Pride wait for the two men to be done with it. Leaning against the wall, I examine the mobile. The wood from the main ring seems a bit darker than the crib's. I try to remember if the carved pattern on it featured waves or tiny leaves. I can't tell from here.

Lion One hooks the mobile in place and John tugs at it. The mobile remains and when John and Lion One are convinced it looks safe enough to put Amy underneath it, they move aside. The five pairs of porcelain pigeons hang from strands of silver see-

through ribbon, tied to the wooden ring. At a push from John's hand, they start to fly in circles above the crib.

The last Coffee Ritual Thursday, I'd gone by the store to get you a present, Jane. When I got there, the shop owner was standing at the door, frowning, her eyes fixed to the sidewalk. I asked her if she was alright. She shook her head and said she just needed some air. 'Can I show you something?' she said. I'd been a little scared at first, but I followed her into the backyard. You would have liked it there, ivy covered walls and a tea table set, perfect for summer. In the grass there was a small lump, a dead pigeon. I know, I know. Gross. But that wasn't it. The shop owner, Melissa, said 'Look,' pointing at two living pigeons standing motionless a few feet away. 'They are mourning,' she said, 'they've been like that for half an hour.' I swear it Jane, it was the most moving thing I've seen in my life. The pigeon couple weren't crying, but it almost looked like they were. They were so sad, human sad. Since then, every week Melissa worked on the mobile, I would pass her tools and help her clean up.

'It's unique too,' I say and they all look at me with questions in their eyes. Melissa only made that one. 'Loyal pigeons, flying,' she'd said, it was the perfect present for a new mother.

Ambush and Pride remark some more on the mobile and leave. John kisses Jane's forehead, puts his hand on my arm for a second and then follows them.

'Where did you get it?' Jane looks up for a second and then back to breastfeeding.

'From that store you liked. On the last...' I shift my hands and lean back against the wall.

Jane walks over to the crib, puts Amy down. She stands there looking at her baby for a while. Then she lifts the ring hand and takes one of the porcelain pigeon couples that hang from Amy's new mobile. She cradles it in her hand, delicately tracing its shape.



The Night the Fox Came

by H.J. Rodgers

The moon wore a scarlet jacket;
Its light turned midnight to midday.
The elder dog – soft and grey,
Usually so alert –
Slept through the single cry
Like a crow
Surprised from its carrion,
The shriek cracked the night-silence.
An archers-slit between the curtains
Revealed no changes,
Bedroom windows remained dark;
No-one rose, squint eyed.
But the quiet was weakened by the break.
Though the night repaired itself,
Still the hairline fracture lingered.
The next day:
A wooden hutch,
Filled with a mess of blood and bone.
Brown eyes unblinking.

Raguel (from a sequence entitled Arch Angels)

by **JL Williams**

That I bleed is of little
regard. That my destiny is to impose
the way that I bleed is true.

Spell a word into my arm.
It speaks vermilion disregarding the numb.
The smell of the letters lasts.

For weeks, no full moon in sight.
My heart disgorges blood that ripens wine.
I cut the grapes from branches.

Drown in me that they may drink.
Crack open stones with Your head because You dare.
I would slice my throat for you.

What Is It Called?

by **JL Williams**

Some say stars don't think and fish don't feel.

Watching the fish blush and mate and die,
watching it throw itself twenty metres up
and crash against a rock, and fall, and leap,
one wonders what the stars think of this?
Eagles feeding on what's come home to die,
the stream bed pearlised with a trillion eggs.

What is it called, the end of everything?
The beginning?

The Quick View: JL Williams



*JL Williams graduated in 2009 from Glasgow University's Creative Writing MLitt. Her first full collection of poems, *Conditions of Fire*, was published earlier this year by Shearsman Books. You can find out more about JL at www.jlwilliamspoetry.co.uk*

Why do you write?

It helps me make sense of what's around.

What are you working on at the moment?

A collection of poems about war and a collection of poems about identity and origin.

What is your writing routine (if you have one)?

I work as the Literary Officer at the Traverse Theatre, which takes up most of my time, so I try to fit in writing whenever I can. I often set myself tasks – like having to write a poem a day, or recently I set myself the task of writing one short story in thirty minutes every day for thirty days.

I find it harder to find the space (both in my head and schedule) to do the editing necessary on what I write – for this I often have to take a few days off work.

Who is your favourite writer:

Living? Alice Notley

Dead? C.P. Cavafy

What book do you wish you'd written?

The Metamorphoses by Ovid

What book / books are next to your bed?

Vertigo by W.G. Sebald, *Zen and Japanese Culture* by Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Mother Courage and her Children* by Bertolt Brecht, *Meeting the British* by Paul Muldoon, *The Widow Ching-Pirate* by Jorge Luis Borges, *The Plantagenets* by John Harvey, *The Essence of Perfume* by Roja Dove, *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard, *The Travels* by Marco Polo, *Let the Right One In* by John Alvide Lindqvist and *Aibisidh* by Angus Peter Campbell.

Best moment in your writing career to date?

Getting to hold Edwin Morgan's tiny, soft hand at his 90th birthday celebration after reading some of the poems I'd written on the Aeolian Isles thanks to the Edwin Morgan Travel Bursary.

Best piece of writerly advice you care to share?

Look outside yourself and write what you see.

Thank you JL!



If there's a writer you would like to see featured in a future *Quick View* then contact us at fromglasgowtosaturn@glasgow.ac.uk (just remember that writers featured in *The Quick View* must have an association of some kind with Glasgow University).

Author Biographies

Greg Benson is an American author and playwright studying in Glasgow for a year for a number of reasons although chief among those is that he writes best in urban settings where it is rainy, windy, and cold. He has had a handful of plays produced, and hopes to more heavily develop his prose during his time in Scotland.

Nick Boreham is inspired equally by vorticism and Louise Welsh. He completed his Glasgow MLitt in Creative Writing in 2011. His short stories and poetry have appeared in *Aesthetica*, *Poetry Scotland*, *Equinox* and other literary magazines.

Alan Gillespie is a 26 year old Fifer living in Glasgow. He was previously editor of the online journal *From Glasgow to Saturn* and was awarded a writers' residency at Cove Park to work on his novel about Scotland's first rock n' roll tragedy. He hangs about at www.atalangillespie.com

Jane Hartshorn graduated from Glasgow University in 2009, and since this milestone has spent a great deal of time manning posts. This stationary pursuit has compelled her to imagine scenarios which extend beyond the length of her own arm.

Gary McGhee is a 2010 graduate of the University of Glasgow. Since leaving the University he has been working as an English teacher in the Czech Republic.

JoAnne McKay JoAnne McKay was born to a slaughtering family in Romford, Essex and subsequently joined the police. She now lives in a small Dumfriesshire village where she combines motherhood, work and a Masters degree with mixed success. Her second pamphlet, *Venti*, was runner-up in the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award 2011.

Kerri Mclawlin lives with her husband and cats in a house on a hill in the Highlands of Scotland. The dark winter months there should be a perfect time to write lots but she is constantly distracted by knitting, Scandinavian crime novels and breadmaking. She has just started the second year of the Creative Writing MLitt at Glasgow and is currently working on a novel about murder and eating disorders.

Sherezade García Rangel is a Venezuelan writer currently based in Glasgow. Having recently finished her Master of Arts in Creative Writing at Newcastle University, she's pursuing her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow, focusing her research on voice and gender studies in the Latin American Literary Boom. Her work has been published in *Friction Magazine*, *Alliterati* and *Project Fifty*. She has performed for *Trashed Organ*, a Newcastle based literature, music and events collective. She founded 'The Readers' a Creative Writing group for the MA community of Newcastle University. Sherezade has been editor for *Alliterati* and *Friction Magazine*. Follow her on Twitter @Sherecita

H. J. Rodgers is a Yorkshire-born writer, now based in Ayrshire in the south-west of Scotland. Her work has previously been published by Route in *The Route Compendium*. She has performed at reading events at Waterstones in Leeds; Tchai Ovna in Glasgow's West End; and at The Forest Café in Edinburgh. Her work was recently used by The White Rabbit Theatre Company during a performance of *Are You Sitting Comfortably?* In October 2011 she will be taking part in the Magic Carpet Cabaret, in Glasgow.

Gerry Stewart, originally from the US, graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1997 with a M.Phil in Scottish Literature. She has since gone on to work as Assistant Editor for *Chapman Magazine*, teach creative writing with adults and children and have her first poetry collection *Post-Holiday Blues* published by Flambard Press in 2007. She currently lives in Finland with her family and is working on her next collection.

JL Williams was born in New Jersey and studied at Wellesley College and on the MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. Her poetry has been published in journals including *Poetry Wales*, *The Wolf*, *Shearsman*, *Fulcrum* and *Stand*. She was awarded a grant from the Scottish Arts Council for the poetry collaboration *chiaroscuro pentimenti* with composer Martin Parker and artist Anna Chapman, and the Edwin Morgan Travel Bursary from the Scottish Arts Trust. In September 2009 she journeyed to the Aeolian Isles to write a collection inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is called *Condition of Fire* and is published by Shearsman Books. JL Williams is the Literary Officer at the Traverse Theatre. You can find JL at www.jlwilliamspoetry.co.uk.