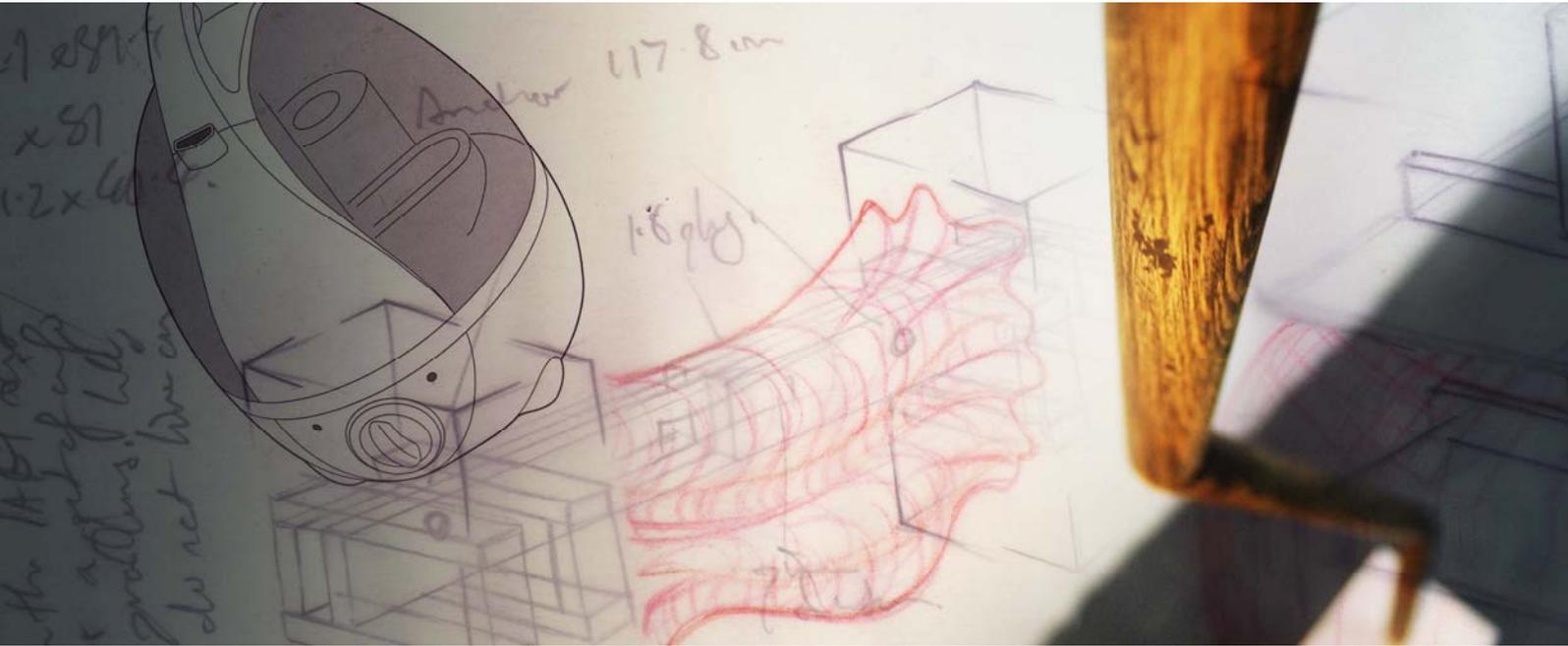


From Glasgow to Saturn

The University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Showcase



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Contents

- 2 A Word from the Editors
- 3 Response to a Silent Reading, *Lewis Irvine*
- 3 Ronnie, *Jenny Kannellopoulou*
- 4 Before Tomorrow, *Ian Hunter*
- 11 Two Poems, *Lucy Cheseldine*
- 13 A Lime and a Sofa, *Nasim Marie Jafry*
- 16 The Seeds of Love, *Cila Warncke*
- 17 End, *Jim Ferguson*
- 20 Glesga Suicide, *Craig Steele*
- 21 Constitution Street, *Katy Ewing*
- 24 Two Poems, *Mark Fraser*
- 26 Celebration, *George Craig*
- 32 Benches (II), *Marise Morse*
- 33 A Job for Life, *Iain Maloney*
- 38 Four Poems, *Angela Blacklock-Brown*
- 40 Two Poems, *Patrick Holloway*
- 42 A Woman's War, *JoAnne McKay*
- 46 Two Poems, *Megan Primrose*
- 48 Author Biographies

A Word from the Editors

Dear Readers,

From Glasgow to Saturn turns 21 issues old this month, and we are delighted to enter this rather grown-up terrain with one of our busiest selections of work since we began our editorship.

Earlier this month we were approached by the National Library of Scotland requesting that we upload our archives and all subsequent issues to its electronic collection, for a project which should be legislated later this year. The Library hopes to create a permanent depository of digital publications, with *From Glasgow to Saturn* the first literary magazine to be harnessed. It is a true privilege to be recognised as a source of worthwhile material and a symbol of Scotland's cultural written heritage; for this, we must thank our contributors and subscribers for their expertise and ongoing support.

This month, as ever, your submissions have been lively in content and varied in theme. The poetry takes us from Scotland to Istanbul and back again and, if the prose does not quite take us from Glasgow to Saturn, it certainly moves between the politically-correct madness of the present to a dystopian not-too-distant future. We have offerings from familiar faces and brand new writers and we are sure you will enjoy this glut of Glaswegian talent.

This is our penultimate issue as editors; showcasing the creative writing of students and alumni has been a fascinating and fantastic experience. Next month we intend to introduce a new editorial team to the process in preparation for next semester, and ensure *From Glasgow to Saturn* continues to foster the enthusiasm and aptitude for creativity we have witnessed over the past six issues.

With good wishes,

Alan Gillespie, Nick Boreham and Sheila Millar

Response to a Silent Reading **by Lewis Irvine**

The daubs of old paint over dust,
rust grey and white in corners,
existing plants exist but still
the air and time.

The world outside unfolds –
the sky longs to scream;
miles of fractal clouds and glacial air
peer down through glass
at creaking bodies and breathing skin.

Inside

a choice.

The odds

voiceless.

Ronnie **by Jenny Kannellopoulou**

Ronnie's left leg is more beautiful than the right.
The knee is higher, hair is reduced and it releases a pleasant odour.
His lip is blue and torn and his breath smells like newspaper.
Good boy.
Have you delivered the news today?
His chest is intrepid his brain functions.
His eyes blaze.
I think I must have them checked.
Ronnie's shirt today is more appropriate than the one he wore yesterday.
The buttons are tight, colours are brighter and there are no visible pockets.
His military trousers allow him to run.
Good boy.
Have you submitted your homework?
His mind is full of ideas his hands grasp.
I think I must have him.

Before Tomorrow

by Ian Hunter

Peeking past the curtain he could see the police car outside. Moving slow.
Cruising the streets. Stalking. Blue light turning slowly on top.

A minibus followed. Policeman inside, and young men, boys, on the verge of tears. Heading for the chopping wagons at the centre of the estate.

They were doing Mitchell Place today, then up the Crescent and part of Palm Avenue, or Napalm Avenue as the locals called it.

Tomorrow they would be here.

Frank Haston turned back to the computer.

He was trying to get on-line. He was always trying to get on-line, and the beauty was that it didn't cost anything. The whole estate was wired up, thanks to the Scottish Government. There was nowhere to go, so why not stay at home, merge with the e-verse? He couldn't remember the site they had been talking about last night in the social club so he summoned up the search engine, and typed in his topic.

UNDER-AGE SEX.

Suddenly there was a knock at the front door.

"Shit," he muttered. He knew by the time he got back to the computer the connection would be timed out. These machines were cheap rubbish. Big plastic lumps of electronic diazepam.

He opened the door. Two men stood on the bottom step with a policewoman behind them. She looked as if she didn't want to be there. One of the men didn't look as if he was from around here. Black, smiling to show off teeth like white piano keys. The other man held up a card.

"I'm Mike Thomson from the Health Care Trust. This is Mr. Ombuko from the United Nations. He's a human rights observer. Is Danny in?"

"He's upstairs?"

"Can I see him?"

"He's busy. Homework."

Thomson moved up a step. "Now, we both know that isn't true, Mr. Haston. Danny hasn't been at school today."

Haston stepped down to meet him, aware of the policewoman tensing slightly, reaching to her side for a pepper spray or her taser. "No-one has been at school today, not from around here. You didn't let them leave the estate. Maybe you can tell me why that is?"

Thomson swallowed and took out a small digi-pad. "I really need to verify that Danny is here. Please don't make this harder than it is."

Haston sighed.

"Danny!"

"What?"

“Come down, will you?”

“No!”

There was a tight smile on Haston’s face as he turned. “Will that do?”

Thomson nodded, thumb pressing a few buttons.

“The estate has been sealed for the night, Mr. Haston. We expect to see Danny tomorrow for his appointment unless you can make other arrangements. If you don’t bring him, the police will. Do you understand?”

“Yeah,” he breathed.

He closed the door, hesitating, wanting to go upstairs and talk to his son, but, Christ, how did you deal with something like this? Something that had been on the cards for months? And he had left it too late as usual.

Suddenly, loud thumping music began to vibrate the house from above. Action, rather than words, that was the thing to do now. Although a part of him knew that any action was a slightly easier option than talking to the boy.

Action.

Yeah, right.

He headed back to the computer.

Wonder of wonders he was still connected and the search was still there.

UNDER-AGE SEX.

His eyes scrolled down the list, and he winced at some of the descriptions. Bastards. Fucking, pervy bastards. Finally, after a few pages he found a company who might have what he was after. He clicked their link and immediately he was bombarded with pro-life messages. Mini-screens unfolded in his screen, showing foetuses, stillborn babies. Ter-rific. He closed them down. One-by-one. Hand on the mouse, moving faster, nailing the X each time.

Finally he was into the site.

He scrolled through the list of services.

There it was.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY COVER.

He clicked on the box. Legal stuff appeared. He started to read it then scrolled down to the end and accepted the conditions. An application form was next. It was an American company and their series of drop down menus didn’t allow for a potential customer from a wee housing estate in Scotland, but eventually he got it completed, having to dig out his wallet to get his credit card details. He’d worry about making the minimum payment next month.

CREDIT VERIFICATION REQUIRED

PLEASE COMPLETE A RETINA SCAN

There was an optical scanner sitting in a holder beside the monitor. God, these machines really were crap, even the most basic machine on the market let you put your face against the screen and it did the rest.

He pressed a button to choose his right eye and held what looked like a thick, stubby marker pen to his face. A light played over his eye.

It didn't take long.

CREDIT DENIED

The site winked off, gone. Not wanting to waste any more time on him, or scared he would infect the company, pass on a poor credit-rating virus that would taint all their potential customers. Sighing, he got up and went to the kitchen.

He could see down the hill across part of the estate to the trees and the sun setting behind what was left of the old mines. This place wasn't a town, just a collection of houses in the middle of nowhere that had sprung up to feed the coal industry. A glorified housing estate, limping on past the glory days. There were hardly any shops left, just cheap ones, or tanning salons or the bookies, or fast food outlets. Subway had come and gone, and Blockbuster was going the same way. He could see the fences that had been erected around the estate, with dogs prowling in between. So much for Mr Ombuko and his human rights. Where was the BBC when you needed them, or CNN? He opened the window. He could hear a loud speaker. Protesters on the main road. Pro-lifers and world-righters. Pity there were no trees about to be cut down in the estate or they could have attracted some tree-huggers, skin painted green with branches and leaves dangling from their waists making them look like bloody walking salads.

He went back to the computer and dug deeper into the search engine.

BRITISH ALL-STAR INSURANCE

INSURANCE FOR EVERY OCCASION

More screens bombarded him as he tried to enter the site. Pro-life messages hitting him like anti-aircraft fire. He closed them down as soon as they appeared, hoping that none of them would leech onto his system. Leave him the gift of an icon that promised his offspring financial assistance, if he didn't have them aborted.

There was a list of potential services, but first he had to put in some details about himself. Feelings began to stir within him as he typed in his name and started on his address. Fear, desperation, depression, anger. They were all there and more, tumbling around inside him, gathering momentum and mass. He was half-way through his postcode when a message came up.

POST CODE INCOMPATIBILITY

And he was booted out of the site.

"Shit," he snarled. He didn't even get as far as putting in he was unemployed, all they needed was his address and a bit of postcode and the corporate alarm bells started ringing.

A bitter smile twisted his face. He should have lied, but that probably wouldn't have worked anyway. He had heard a rumour that the big corps checked your eyes when you did a retina scan. They used some ancient Chinese method to diagnose what was wrong with the rest of your body just by looking at your eyes. He could imagine some old Chinese guy in a robe with a flowing white beard inside a large shiny office at multi-national headquarters, pointing at a wall-sized pupil, or iris.

"Him got bad liver, drinker. Her got lung disease, smoker."

Haston shook his head, eyes settling on the letter on the packet of printer paper. There was a leaflet lying on top, a greeting from the Scottish Government and a photograph of the Finance Minister. A guy in a New Labour suit with a New Labour smile. Haston picked up the leaflet and began to read it again, hoping that it would say something different.

"Everyday there are increasing strains on our social services, and on the country's financial affairs. Due to an increasing ageing population and the Morgan Ruling, the elderly have a right to be looked after, therefore savings must be made. Firm action must be taken."

He couldn't quite laugh, ever since some old man Morgan had won his court case, ensuring a range of benefits for the elderly, the Government had issued a variety of similar leaflets, each with the same opening salvo. He had received several about benefit fraud, incapacity benefit, assistance finding employment, but the latest one, the one he held in his hands concerned under-age sex. It is a crime, he was reminded, before he was told about the steep rise in teenage pregnancies, putting Scotland at the top of an unenviable European league-table. Then there was some blurb about the NHS costs, the social costs, the drain on local authority budgets and why such costs could no longer be afforded. Everything was the responsibility of the individual, even the costs of under-age sex. Which had to be covered by private insurance policies, if you could get one set up, if you had the right post code. If not, then the state intervened and the chopping wagons arrived.

The accompanying letter was addressed to him, but concerned Danny and his appointment tomorrow.

There was a small booklet hidden under the letter, explaining the facts about this brave, new Scottish Government initiative. He shook his head as he read some crap which explained why mass chemical castration wasn't an option for teenage boys who were still developing. There was no mention of side-effects or the drug-dispensing pilot in Easterhouse that had gone wrong and the incident in the Glasgow Fort shopping centre which had left three people dead and many more injured. So it was back to the good old fashioned method - the snip - with a guarantee of a reversal operation at a later date, and compensation if that didn't work.

Haston tilted his head. He could make out the song playing above him. "The Kiss" by The Cure, guitars jangling like sharp knives being scraped

together. He shuddered. What was it like to get the snip, he wondered. He had heard pub talk, horror stories.

It was getting dark outside. The police car and the minibus went past. He couldn't see if there was anyone inside apart from the driver. Maybe this was the last run of the day. Surely they wouldn't continue their little operations in the dark? Take boys away from their homes after nightfall? It was like something out of Nazi Germany, South America, Africa. What happened next? he wondered. After these little operations? When teenage pregnancy rates went down but the number of cases of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS went up? What would they take you away for next time?

He could hear the singing and the chanting when he opened the back door. It was freezing, a bitter wind snatched at him as he made his way to the shed at the bottom of the garden. There was a black rubber torch sitting on a shelf. He shook it a few times to make it work. The light showed the tool kit in the corner. It was heavy, full of crap he had gathered over the years, useful things that had never really been of any use. He opened the lid and lifted out the upper tray and saw what he was looking for.

A noise made him look round. Danny was framed in the kitchen doorway. Bag over his shoulder, already a hunted look on his face. He was tall, handsome, chin marred with acne. The only decent thing from his marriage to Elspeth.

"Where are you going?"

The boy shrugged.

"Got any money?"

"Some."

"So, what's the plan?"

Again a shrug. "Climb the fence."

"Fences, you mean. Too slow. The dogs would be waiting for you." He held up the rusty wire cutters, paint flaked off into his palm. "You'll need these and more money."

"You're going to help?"

Haston nodded. "Don't say anything. I know it's not like me. Let me get my jacket."

When Haston returned they slipped out the back gate and down to the allotments the food co-op had set up. On the way he dug into his pocket.

"Here."

"What's that?"

"My cash card. The number is 7049. Got it?"

Danny looked at him and then at the card. "7049."

"Don't get too excited. You might get a couple of hundred if you're lucky. Got your mobile phone?"

The boy rolled his eyes.

"Okay, okay, I know it's part of you. Don't phone here. I'll phone you, right?"

"Yeah."

The allotments ended at the shed, where the tools were stored. He could still hear singing and chanting. Someone ought to protest about those protesters, he thought and held out his arm to signal Danny to stop. There was open grass between them and the first fence.

"Got your false papers? German uniform?"

"What are you talking about?"

Haston smiled. "Forget it, let's run."

Danny charged on ahead. Haston immediately regretted the running idea, feeling as if he was carrying someone on his back and they had their arms around him, preventing his lungs from working properly. He felt hot and prickly.

The boy stopped before the fence.

Tilting his head, Haston could hear voices, even over his heavy breathing, sounding closer than the singing and the chanting.

Danny grabbed his arm.

"It's the police ! We should go back."

Haston looked at his son, tried to exude a calm he didn't altogether feel. "There's no curfew to stop us walking at night, is there ?" He could see beams of light from torches swirling round and round, getting closer. The dogs wouldn't be far behind. He held up the rusty wire cutters.

"What if it's electrocuted?"

"You mean, electrified." Haston grimaced, poised to press on the handles of the cutters. "There's only one way to find out."

Danny backed away slightly. Haston was tempted to pretend he was getting a shock, but thought better of it. The fence might not be electrified but he was sure it was alarmed. Somewhere lights were flashing and bells were ringing. He cut a few more wires until the hole was big enough for Danny.

"Get through."

"What about the dogs?"

"Now!"

Danny got through. Floodlights started to come on around the estate. Haston cut some more wires and crawled through the bigger hole, pulling at his caught left leg.

There were people standing on the other side of the second fence. Danny shone the torch on them.

Not police.

Haston pressed the cutter against the outer fence but these wires were thicker.

"Who are you lot?" Danny asked.

"Harpies against Trident," answered a woman's voice.

"Scottish Pro-Life Against Fascism," said another, making a fist. "SPLAF."

Haston grunted, putting all his weight on to the cutter, beggars couldn't be choosers when it came to rescuers, he supposed.

This wasn't going to work.

Danny grabbed him.

"Dad!"

He looked round. A dog was bounding towards them. Silent. Tongue lolling between sharp teeth. Eyes glistening.

He dropped the cutters and cupped his hands together.

"Quick!"

Danny shook his head.

"That dog bites your balls off and you won't have to worry about the snip tomorrow."

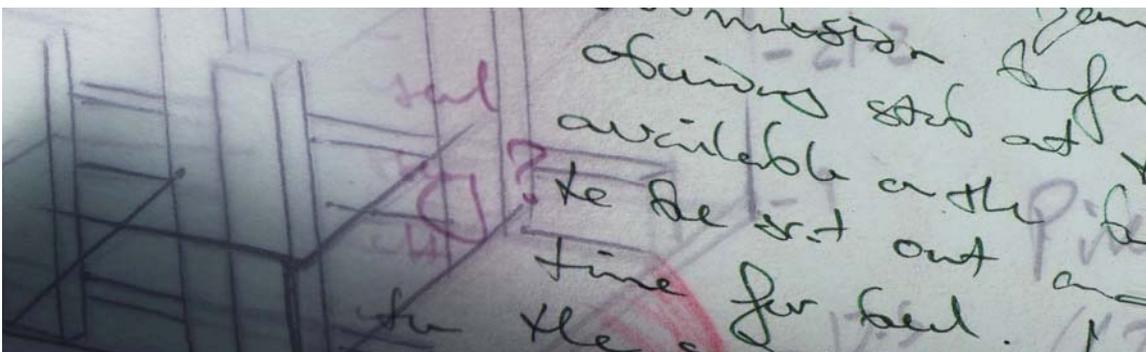
Danny grabbed the wire with one hand and stepped into his hands. Haston pushed up, a muscle went in his back but he kept pushing until the leaping dog took him by the forearm and they fell to the ground together.

The world tilted, looked odd, but he managed to see the boy teeter on top of the fence, before jumping.

He looked round as the dog pulled at his arm, dragging him along the grass. Danny landed among the protesters on the other side, then scrambled to his feet. His son looked back. Haston nodded, a lump in his throat, thinking he should have hugged him before he climbed the fence. Then they were off. Danny and the protesters. Sounds like a good band, he thought, watching them head into the trees. A low, crouching figure leading the way, leaves and branches hanging from his waist like a strange skirt.

Salad-thingy.

Haston wanted to laugh, but the dog shook him. Sharp teeth biting through his skin. The desire to laugh deserted him as the pain concentrated his mind, and made him realise what he had done. There would be a few months inside for this, he reckoned, as another dog arrived to take his other arm, and a head in a riot helmet appeared above him, looming like a dark, malevolent moon.



Two Poems

by Lucy Cheseldine

Skin

The skin,
It was clinging to me, it wouldn't come loose.
I rubbed my forefinger and thumb together.
It was no use
It was stuck.

I know it was mine, but somehow it no
longer belonged.
My body, in its reptile subconscious, was asking it to leave.

A new layer had begun, a fresh, subtle film was about to close the gaping,
once emotionless, hole.
About to flood the abyss with protection;
Shield it from infection and lock in the love, the lust, the whispers he had
brushed my neck with.

When the wound has closed, when the stone has been rolled over,

the skin will fall from my hands,
detach itself, for the desert has been flooded.
It will fall, it will shatter
and my soul will coil comfortably,
in its new skin, by the oasis.

Istanbul Bulistan

Standing on a bridge between two worlds,
Yet I feel like I should be kneeling.
A blue jewel tumbles, scrapes, soothes my cheek.
Unreligious praise.
Humbled by daily noise, a car, a boat, a man
Still not insignificant when wonder begins to hang in the hot evening air.
Sun sets, moon rises, natural progression, a cycle, a circle, complete.

Nothing is missing, the seagulls piece
Together the ancient Islamic scrolls,

Beaten into the Bosphorus,
Undeniable in its politics, proud in its people.

Exposure is my greatest fear, the self, the natural
Now so unnatural.

Material becomes skin, sinking into

Emerald,

Ruby, Gold.

Women.

Liberated.

Head or scarf, their

Beauty is that of the

Haya Sofia, their dark eyes

Beholding the mystery of Medusa

No camera flash can capture herstory.



A Lime and a Sofa – extract from *The State of Me* by Nasim Marie Jafry

When she's falling asleep, she rubs her left foot against her right foot. Stop that, he says, you're like a giant cricket. He deserves an acrobatic lover, a Nadia Comaneci. When she's got energy, she goes on top as a special treat.

Dragging legs, concentrating on every step, I feel like I'm wading through water. I take a trolley even though I'm only buying a few things. I don't want to have to carry a basket. I pick up some tea bags. My arms and face are going numb, my bones are burning. I stop the trolley and pretend to look at the coffee. The lights are too bright, there are too many shiny things to look at, too many jars and bottles. I don't feel real. I abandon the trolley and go to the checkout, picking up a lime on the way.

The woman in front of me places the NEXT CUSTOMER divider between her dog food and my lime. She has a pink pinched face and limpid blue eyes. You can't see her eyelashes. A mountain of Pedigree Chum edges towards the scanner.

I focus on the lime and hope my legs will last.

I'm wondering how many dogs the pinched woman has, and if her husband loves her without eyelashes, when a shrill voice punctures my head: the voice of the checkout girl. I haven't realised it's my turn.

D'you know how much this is? she says, holding up the lime. She's typed in a code, and PUMPKIN LARGE has come up on the till display.

It's not a pumpkin, I say. It's a lime.

She rings for the store manager, who appears from nowhere, brisk and important. He gives the girl the correct code and disappears again in a camp jangle of keys. The girl rings up the lime and I'm free. I go outside and sit on the wall. I feel spectacularly ill.

I make my way home with no shopping. It's only a five minute walk. I pass the dead seagull folded on the road. It's been there for three days. It has blood on it.

I reach the house and the smell of fresh paint hits me as I unlock the front door – we'd painted the bathroom last week, my arms left like rags.

I'll need to call him.

When he answers the phone, I try to sound independent.

I got ill at the supermarket, I say. Can you please get some groceries on the way home?

What do we need?

Pasta, salad, bread. Basics.

I'll nip home just now. I need to get out of here for a bit anyway.

Can you get some Parmesan too?

Okay.

I'm sorry, I say.

It's not your fault, he replies.

That seagull's still there, d'you think I should call the council?

They'll be closed, he says, it's after four.

Someone's moved it into the gutter, at least it's not in the middle of the road anymore.

Call them tomorrow, he says.

I just feel sorry for it.

See you in a bit, he says.

I imagine him taking off his glasses after he's hung up, rubbing his eyes and sighing. When he gets home, I'll tell him I dreamt we had a baby made of lettuce, and he'll smile and unwind in spite of himself.

Things had been tense last night. Why d'you have to hack the whole head, why can't you just chop it normally? he'd said, frowning at the mess of skins and garlic cloves on the work-top. I don't do anything normally, I'd replied – did no one tell you?

I lie down on the couch. I can't get the seagull out of my head.

Why didn't you wait for me to come home? he says, handing me a cup of tea. I could've done the shopping. You really are your own worst enemy sometimes.

The fridge was bare, I say, I got you a lime for your gin.

I have to go back to work for a couple of hours. I'll make dinner tonight. You don't mind eating late, do you?

No, I say, I'm not hungry at all.

He kisses the top of my head as he leaves.

I dreamt we had a baby made of lettuce last night.

Tell me later, he says, I have to go.

I wonder if he's really gone back to work or if he's gone to fuck Lucia. I wonder if I'll have to call in sick tomorrow.

She'd stayed with us before Christmas when her central heating wasn't working. It was supposed to be for a couple of nights, but two nights had become two weeks. She'd given me a bag of Guatemalan worry dolls. For under your pillow, she'd said.

I know, I said, I've had them before.

She went on, girlishly, Tell them your worries before you sleep, and in the morning, they'll all be gone!

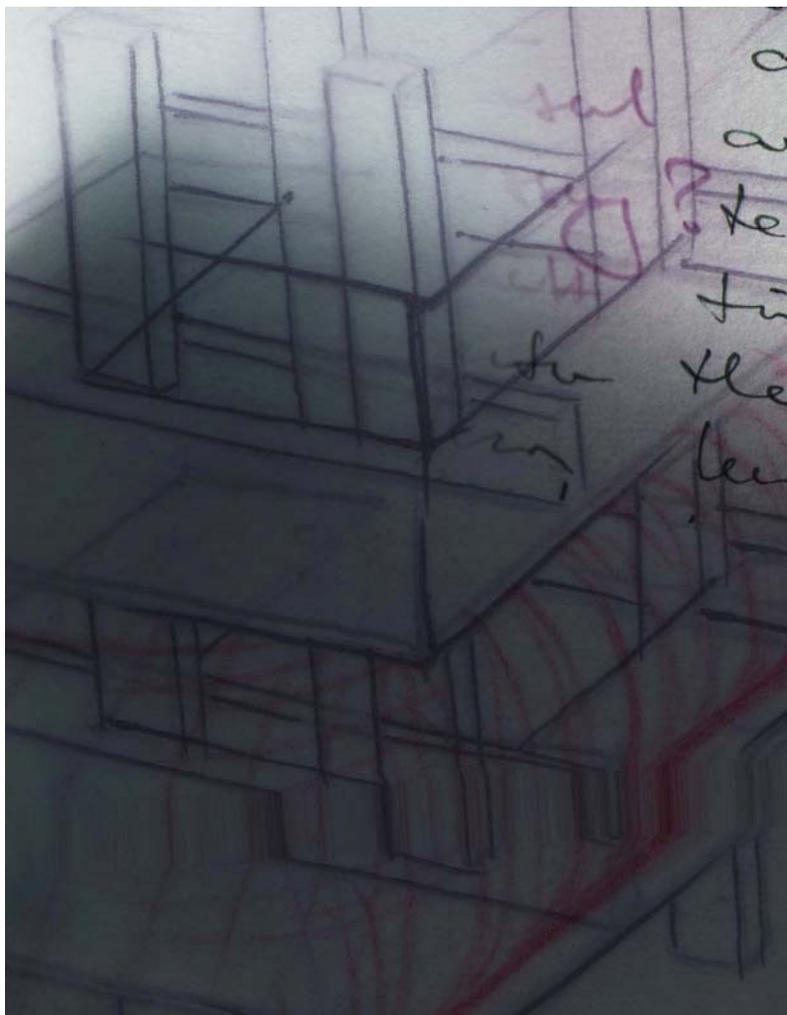
I'm worried you'll sleep with my boyfriend, I'd said into myself.

She'd slept on the sofa bed in the study. One morning, I'd been woken by loud voices and laughing. I got up. The sofa bed was sticking up in the middle of the floor like a monstrous orange sculpture. It's stuck, said Lucia,

giggling, I don't know what I've done! They'd wrestled with it for a while and finally managed to collapse it and fold it up. Sorry we woke you, Helen, he said. We didn't want to leave you with it all day.

I'd hated him referring to Lucia and him as 'we'. I'd watched them go out to the car. I grudged their intimacy, their shared knowledge of genes and proteins. She was beginning to annoy me with her skittishness, her smart coat and boots, so matching and groomed. I'd gone back to bed and tried to sleep more, but I couldn't settle: they had to go – I felt agitated, just knowing they were there. I'd scooped the tiny Guatemalans from under my pillow and thrown them in the bin, covering them with rubbish so no one else would see them.

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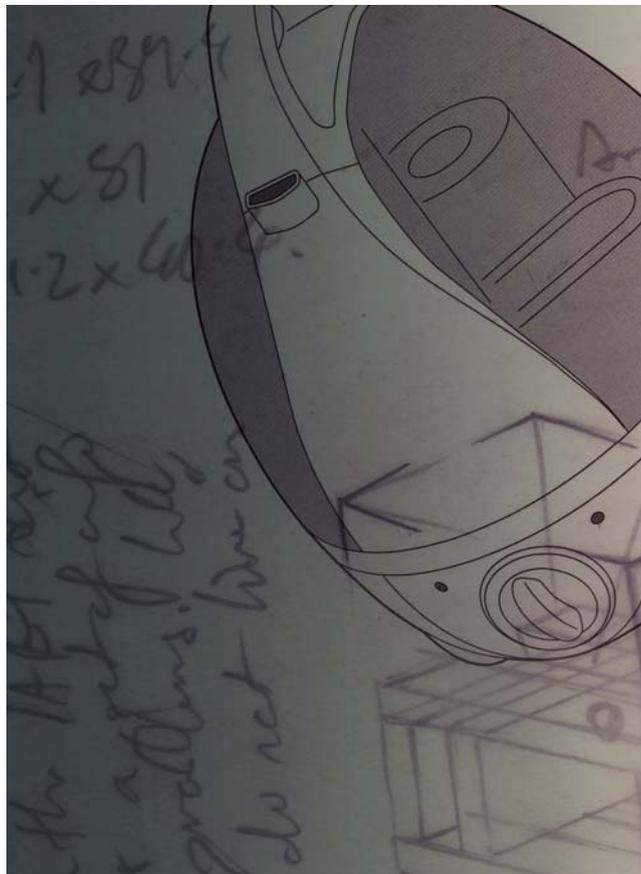


The Seeds of Love by Cila Warncke

I watch and listen.
Wait up late and rise early,
Digging the seeds of love.

My chin rests on his shoulder against the beckoning curve of his neck.
Love has nothing to do with rational, or rationale.
Denser than reason, it sinks into the crevices in my soul.
I dreamt of a garden last night and
Waking felt like bumping an old bruise.
Golden stubble covers his winter-faded cheeks.
I trace the line of his jaw and
The skin that softens the bony arch of his spine.
I forget he is ordinary. I forget he is human. I forget anyone else exists.

If only I could hold these hours.
Sink in
And breathe him:
A perfume I can't afford



End

by Jim Ferguson

Woman's Voice:

...nowhere else to go. Not really. I'm not going to be Scotland's first female astronaut. Come to think of it I don't think there's ever been an astronaut from Scotland, male or female. This country is too poor to send people off out into space. It's just about too poor to look after the poor never mind bloody astronauts. You can hardly get walking through the city centre without about a hundred folk trying to sell you all sorts of crap. Homeless and unwanted. I wonder how folk end up like that, something must go wrong, something must be badly broken.

Things break and things break down, and when it all goes wrong you start to wonder what the point is in being alive, in ever having lived, and there are bound to be cleverer folk than me who have put that question, groped towards ideas of solving it, the making sense of it, the wondering, wondering what it is, all of it, the whole routine, the giving birth, the struggling, the upsets and the satisfactions, and thinking about it, about my life ... and at the end of it I'm no further forward, nobody's any further forward, just lying in a bed full of doubt and uncertainty and waiting, waiting and being miserable, and wanting to die and being miserable. And worse still, wanting to live and being miserable, being miserable because you can't make any sense of it; there is no sense to be made of it. Shots for pain and ridiculous dreams, you get tired. Why bother with doctors and religions and priests and nuns and Holy Books ... There is nothing to be doing at all, nothing at all you can do, the time to die is the time to die and having all the children, having all the money, whatever it is, having all of it makes almost no difference. That's how it is, all the horoscopes and crystals and aromatherapy and relaxation and yoga and mystics and spiritualists can't change the fucking basics of it, just the practical fact of death: of my face in the mirror, of looking at my face in the mirror and saying to myself, I see you, death I wink at you. Death I see you in my face, you are in me and of me death, and when it comes to it you are part of me, part of me and everybody else, everybody who is born, has been born, everything that ever was has death built in, death is built into the whole of eternity there is no infinity in the practical world, in the practical world it all comes to a stop, the energy has to expire, everybody, whoever is born is born with death inside, your children, your grand-children, my child, my ex-husband. People who mean so much, mean so much to us, that is what it's about, all the meaning, all those folk who mean so much and you don't want to leave and you don't want to be without them, to lose, to lose them, to be torn away from the people you love. And to be loved, to know that

someone loves you, just cares, people who do the caring, people who do that, the caring, staring at you when you leave, someone close and watching you die. Watching the life somehow cease, dribble out of you. Seeing it, in front and inside, sensing that presence, that it is the end. How do you defy it? How do you resist the nature of the wild and beautifully wonderful beast, the romantic and unromantic? The sickening sentimental music from your teenage years, your first experience of love, has meaning that brings memories back, memories dredging themselves out of my tired and worn out brain. It all comes back to your head. What's in your head? In my head, inside ... at the centre of things. Find in the end, at the centre of things, all there is is memories. Where the memories are is of course of no account, what they are, the details are no more important than the details of any one else's memories. Why bother writing mine down, writing about myself? Why think people would want to spend time reading about this woman, just a Glasgow housewife, no real drama, no crazy dramas or adventures or great explorations, this is just a long note to say I was here. Really, we're all better off with a gravestone, a gravestone with a few words to let people know you were alive, the living can look at that, put flowers down, if they happen to be interested in the fact that you ever lived at all, that I ever lived. I mean it's just this thing that you'd like someone somewhere to know, know that a life has been lived, not what the life meant, not the explaining of it or making excuses, just saying I had a life, it was mine, I had it: I have had it. Trying to describe it too, talk about it, say something ... It's difficult though, it's very ... it's very fucking hard to work it out, what is description and what is judgement and what is reliable about memory? There is nothing reliable about my memory it's just what seems right about what I want to say, what rings true. Trying not to think about too much, to let the pages fill with as much of my life as I can, and it might be uninteresting, completely dull and mind numbing. The sort of thing some clever man might edit down into a manageable form, just give the taste of it, the edited highlights, concentrate on the easy, happy side of life and let the tragedy lie in the bin, edited out and away, out of existence, keep the lie going, keep all the lies about life going, everybody knows their own misery why read about other people's, why read?

Things break and things break down, even right down inside the cells, in my cells and your cells, down at the level of atoms, down where it is too small to see at all clearly what is going on. Where only people with expert vision can see what is there and you have to trust them. They are doctors and scientists and they are doing their best to see what the problem is, they are trying hard, peering into ... to the small world of atoms and quarks and charm to see how it all works and they are all over the world looking at thousands and thousands of different problems, different problems that require expert vision to detect and describe and understand, because when they are visible,

when the problems become visible to the naked eye it's too bloody late and the patient is dead. Dead dead dead ... nowhere else to go. Not really.



Glesga Suicide

by Craig Steele

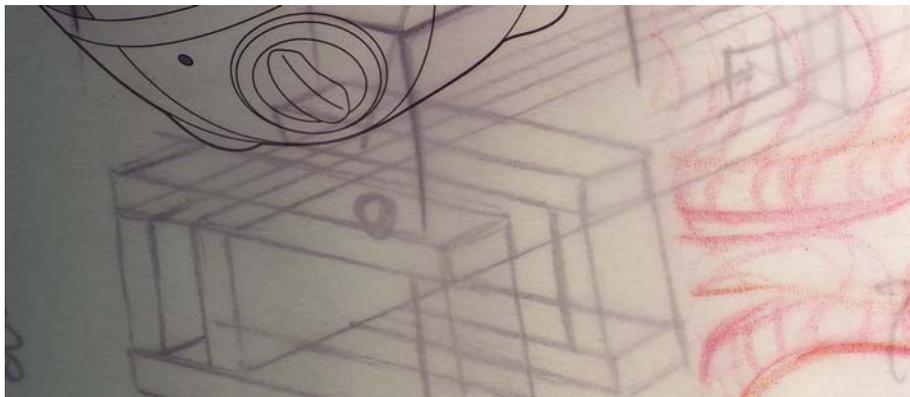
Ah'll sit oan this wa',
Till ah fa', till ah fa',
Drinkin' whisky anaw,
Till ah fa', till ah fa'

Hingin' yirsel is nae way tae go at aw,
Better tae find yirsel a richt high wa,
Mak share tae tak some strong drink anaw,
Pit oan yir best claithes and mak yirsel braw,

Ah'll sit oan this wa',
Till ah fa', till ah fa',
Drinkin' whisky anaw,
Till ah fa', till ah fa'

Tell thum aw jokes, an blaw an blaw,
The craws micht join ye, if ye can caw, can ye caw?
Ye'll be dapper an' fu, and scary anaw,
Efter the whisky, ye'll no feel the fa'

Ah'll sit oan this wa',
Till ah fa', till ah fa',
Drinkin' whisky anaw,
Till ah fa', till ah fa'



Constitution Street by Katy Ewing

She pulls out the kettle's stiff plug, lifts the jug. She's never noticed before how dirty it is; months old dust, handprints and build up of kitchen residue.

She takes it to the sink to fill it, but has to put it down again on the wet counter, roll up her cardigan's overstretched sleeves and dredge the greasy plates from the cold water before there's room to get the kettle under the tap. The sleeves fall back down too soon, one gets damp.

A familiar heat rises behind her eyes and in her ears. Her stomach sinks, her throat tightens. Deep breaths and closed eyes hold back the tears. If she starts, she'll never stop.

There won't be any hot water for the dishes, so she fills the kettle right up, then returns it. As she sets it down, a glug of water splashes onto the cluttered surface. Plug it in, switch it on.

It might all be okay. Where is there a clean cup?

She sees the envelope again. It reeks of officialdom. It's still feigning innocence, lurking on the stained cooker-top where she left it.

When she was a child, Ruth had always been disappointed that mail was never for her. It seemed such an exciting prospect: the unknown and unexpected, forced into the house through such a little slot. Her mum would laugh and tut, "Och, but it's not anything special Ruth, it's always just bills and junk."

But Ruth had coveted those long brown envelopes with their little windows revealing the typed identity. She would sometimes collect discarded ones, then dissect them with stiff old scissors and put the misty plastic up to her eyes just to see how different the world would look. But that was then.

One of Ruth's favourite stories when she was wee had been the Ladybird book of "The Little Mermaid". In the story, the little mermaid was a youngest child, like her. As each sister reaches the age of fifteen, she is allowed to swim up to the world above, go where she wants and see something different, then return to the family and tell them all what wonderful sights she has seen. Ruth had known how it felt to see each big brother and sister grow up and leave the house to varied and exciting lives, while she never seemed to be allowed to do anything. It felt like she had spent her whole childhood wanting to be grown up: pretending to be. Fantasizing all the associated fun and formalities. But of course when it came, it wasn't what she thought it would be at all. Once the initial novelty wore off, nothing was any easier and you still felt small and insignificant.

She looks at the letter. This little window reveals her formal full name, including the embarrassing middle name she had kept quiet at school.

She sees a reasonable cup at last and rinses it.

“Oh God. I’ll have to do the dishes.” Her irritated voice sounds dull and strange in the empty flat. With her back to the ominous envelope, she rolls up her sleeves again and begins piling the dishes on the side, in the right order to wash.

The full kettle’s hiss has built up to a rumbling boil; filling the top half of the room with delicious fresh steam, before switching off with an anti-climactic click.

The milk is already out, which could be bad news. She opens the paper carton’s folded top, brings it to her cautious nose and sniffs it. Seems okay. A little slosh into the cup, find a teabag, put it in.

Jesus, how many little actions can she find to delay the inevitable?

She unplugs and lifts the heavy kettle, fills her cup, rests the kettle. Then, trying not to scald her fingertips, she dances the bag about, watching the milky water darken and stain in swirls of brown, before lifting it, letting it drip and tossing it towards the overflowing bin, leaving a spray of brown drips across the floor.

She squirts a dash of washing up liquid and pours the rest of the boiled water into the worn basin in the sink, enjoying the fast frothing up of dangerous liquid, before turning on the tap to a trickle to cool it to a safe level.

She picks up her tea, goes over to the window - wishing again it was at the sink - and looks out. She glances over the back “green”; overgrown, yellowed grass, which must go with one of the flats below (she doesn’t know, hasn’t even seen the neighbours) and looks out across the wide grey city sprawling towards the grey sea, under the grey sky. Its calm beauty seems to wait for something.

She warms her hands on the scalding cup, just a second at a time.

Some big boys, not yet teenage, play on top of an old orange VW camper, which always sits at the other side of the green. They laugh and shout as they knock each other about.

The light’s so bright that the rest of the kitchen falls back into darkness.

Some washing flaps and rests on a neighbour’s drooping line; all plain, pale, washed-out looking shirts and socks.

It feels like she’s been trapped forever in this little flat.

Suddenly hearing the gentle spill of the basin overflowing, she plunks her still too hot tea down and rushes to save her soapy water. Damn it, it’s already too cold and dilute - what a waste.

She picks up the tea again and props her bum against the counter, looks down at the floor, blows the tea. Her eyes begin to adjust to the dim.

Of course, it’s all her own fault - she could have done anything she wanted. She could have left the flat any time, could have gone anywhere. She could have kept the place nice, organised herself, like normal people.

But it's one thing knowing that and quite another to do it. The fear was so real and solid, like a heavy chain around her neck, that even when she fought against it, pulled on her warm coat, went out the door and down the stairs, out onto the lonely, busy streets, she was aimless and bewildered; like a wild animal released from cage to circus.

A shudder runs through her; the floor so cold under her feet, hot teacup in her hands.

Glancing up, Ruth Miller catches sight of her reflection in a glass cupboard door. Her thick dark hair she hasn't brushed today frames her pale little face, red tip of nose, colourless lips. She can't quite meet her own eyes. She hasn't seen herself for months, doesn't look in mirrors any more.

She sips the tea at last, pushes her hair back away from her face and sighs. A single tear escapes, rolls down her cheek. She wipes it aside with her hand.

That letter just isn't going to go away.

She'll have to deal with it sometime.

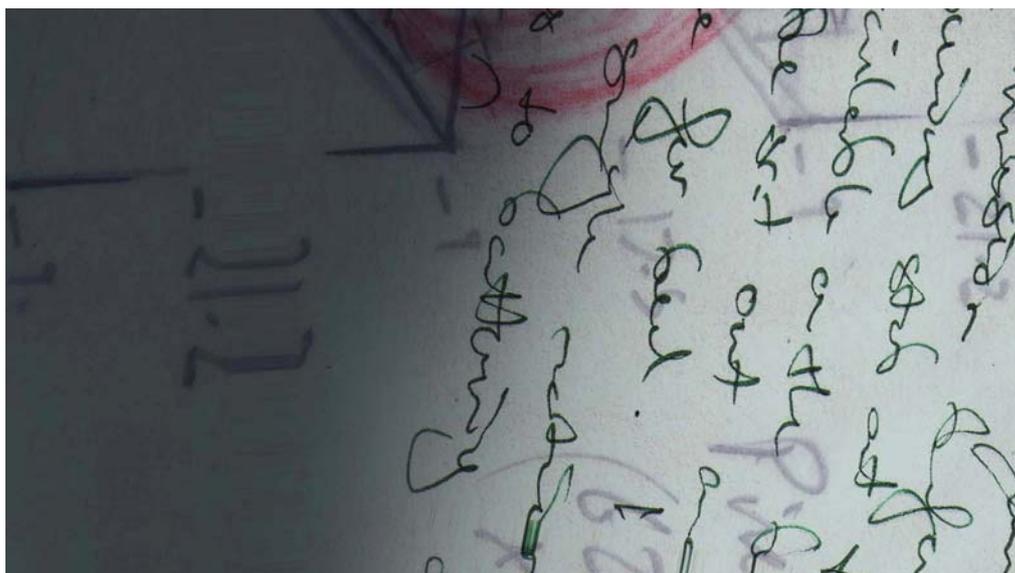
Putting her cup down on the cooker, she picks up the pristine envelope. She reads the name and address once more. It is still hers, in tiny print. She turns it over, slides her thumb under to break the seal, careful not to cut her soft skin.

She'll just have to deal with it.

She slides out the letter, undoes the neat folding and reads.

It's just what she most feared.

"Dear Miss Miller, we are pleased to invite you to attend an interview....."



Two Poems by Mark Fraser

The Bold Wee Moose

A seen it scurry, so a did,
Oot frae beneath the skirting board,
Bombin' it across the room fur a snack.
In the deid o' a overcast night, so it wis,
When the bold moose showed its tail.

It was wee, so it wis,
A could barely see it wi ma ain eyes,
Shooting about, like starts atween clouds.
Saw it in the moonlit, so a did,
The bold wee moose aw braw and effulgent.

Heard its paws, aye a did,
Scratching oan the cold flair.
Chewin' oan ma socks, nibblin' oan crumbs,
An its fur was aw matted, so it wiz,
The bold wee moose came oot tae play.

It wiz a crafty wee 'hing, so it wiz.
An' when a turned oan the light, it froze, so it did,
A heard it squeak, an' it gie'd me a bold eye,
Then it darted aff, aw full a fright.
The bold wee moose was bold nae mair.
A never seen it again.

Street Scene – Glasgow, January 18th 2011

Under a torrential Glasgow night
Traffic bustles past in its usual din
Until it's brought to halt by a dunt
Accompanied by the soggy screeching of tyres,
Interrupting me from my musical distraction.
Outside of my window a crowd has gathered
In the rain
To tune in to an accident at the crossing
Where one man has clearly defied the lights one too many times.

The purple hatchback shaped cell,
(The antagonist in this piece),
Releases it henchmen into the stormy Glasgow night.
These unwitting thieves of another man's evening
Stand around our protagonist.
One of them dances down the street, a phone attached to his ear,
As the others, slightly shaken and waving hands, address the gathered
viewers over the roar of the downpour,
Acting their part as lightning arrives to illuminate the set.

Twenty minutes pass.
Like the sound of a revolving alarm
An ambulance shudders past.
Watching the paramedics disembark, the extras move in closer,
All encased in thunder as the downpour shifts on its axis
And becomes horizontal.

The fallen hasn't moved an inch since he was robbed,
But I can't quite tell if his stolen consciousness is integral to his role.
The paramedic performs his duty in an almost robotic fashion
(I'm sure he performs this part every day)
As the police arrive to interview people and get autographs.
After five minutes, the man is taken from the scene
Into the green (and white) room, his clothes dripping,
Writhing, wakefulness wavering,
People enquiring in silence.

The extras disperse and the officers return to their seats,
Watching the henchmen return to their prison
(Perhaps to a cell they will now carry with them forever)
Two sirens kick off in harmony and each exit to the right,
Then the world continues turning, like nothing has happened tonight.



Celebration

by George Craig

The Preamble

Bernice had made an important decision in her life – no more losers. They might look cute, they might fuck like Duracell bunnies, but the pretty boys could take a hike from now on. They never came through in the end. Bernice had endured one too many bargain bucket / early bird specials. No more two-for-one movie nights. No more cheap dates in the back seat of an Astra up the country park. No more losers.

The Set-up

On the Friday after her epiphany, Bernice didn't join the other secretaries for the end-of-month all-you-can-eat Canton lunch. She heard later that they'd remarked on it, Not like her, Off her food, well she's been packin' on the pounds, Too good for us these days, that one. Theories abounded. None hit the mark.

Instead of gossiping over ribs and satay, Bernice had cruised the top end of the high street stores. The kind of fashion boutiques that she normally veered away from, that she usually dismissed to friends as over-priced versions of Top Shop. The outfit cost more than a month's wages, cost more than she could ever afford, but then how could she afford not to buy it? All the glam mags told her that the look was crucial; the only way things would change.

Bernice cut the Saturday night crowd from her social circle with one determined phrase – 'other commitments'. All except Tracy, she could stay in the loop. Being the least attractive and least well turned out of the girls, Tracy could remain. And so, Bernice was ready.

Notable Moment Number One

Bernice meets her Mark. Grecus private members' nightclub didn't come cheap, but Bernice reckoned that it was well worth the three hundred and fifty annually to meet the right types. And, if things went according to plan, she wouldn't be buying her own drinks. As Tracy chatted on in detail about what she'd eaten for lunch the day before, Bernice zoned out, scanning the blue-lit room, compiling a short-list. Who she would accept a drink from, when offered, who she wouldn't.

Bernice worked her new image, pushing up and out to fill the curves of her Versace. She made sure not to show any obvious interest in potential

targets, but positioned herself to catch any glimpses, to land any glances cast her way. Bernice knew she looked good. Knockout good. She turned her head in flounces, this way then that, running open fingers through rich hair, parting full painted lips into pouts. She positioned herself just close enough to Tracy, just far enough away, to show off the contrast in her figure, her demeanour, her all-important bone structure.

Mark wasn't top of her short-list, but after four hours of posing, he was the only candidate showing genuine interest. And he looked put together in all the right ways – silk shirt, bespoke suit, diamond-faced watch. Worth giving the time of day. A couple of hours' chat followed by some heavy petting back at Mark's townhouse was all it took.

'You're gorgeous. Fancy coming away with me?'

'You're crazy. Where to?'

'Marbella. You'll love it. Nice villa. Private pool. Palm trees.'

'Yeah right! You've got plans. Wicked way, then white slavers. No chance.'

'Aw come on. Loads of nice shops. Great places to eat. And the clubs are brilliant. Better than that Grecus dump.'

Six days after Mark's first feel-up, Bernice was on the jet set for a big weekend. And so it proved to be; big house, big bucks spent on her in the Gucci store, big fuss made all round. And that was it for her, job done. He might be no oil painting, there might be no great thunder under the duvet, but so what. And who could blame her? She'd worked too long and hard on the nine 'til six not to be treated like this on a permanent basis.

Notable Moment Number Two

The next significant moment came only a few weeks later - the proposal. Or, to tell Bernice's tale more accurately, the after-proposal. Mark's clumsy, single-knee'd plea was quickly followed by a return visit to the jewellery store. The application of substantial additional funds secured the ring's transformation into the over-sized solitaire of Bernice's dreams. Then came the good bit, the part that got Bernice really excited. The rounds of calls to friends, family, acquaintances; anyone who could be cajoled along for drinks to admire the stand-out diamond adorning Bernice's ring finger.

'Oh, it was so romantic ... Oh, you should have seen him ... Oh, he's just so crazy about me ...' Every reworked opening line brought further embellishment. Sky altered from blue to sunset orange. Weather became tropical, steamy. Surrounds morphed from local duck pond, to romantic lakeside, to private yacht. Only the groom's description remained constant in this sea of change.

'Oh, Mark. Well, he's fine, you know. Not my usual type. Not really a looker as such. But very successful. Houses here and in Spain. His own

Mercedes dealership. And did I show you the Gucci jacket he bought me on our first holiday together? Oh, he's just perfect. I couldn't be happier.'

Notable Moment Number Three

That would have to be the wedding ceremony. There would be no marquee in the back garden for this couple, no family shindig in the community centre. The bar had to be raised, and raised it was; a romantic all-inclusive wedding-moon for two (local witnesses and minister supplied) in Sans Souci, Jamaica. A lounge-suited, summer-dressed wedding under an arch of roses and bougainvillea, vows hovering over the Caribbean sea. Sounded wonderful. No-one at the travel agents had mentioned that, being mid-July, the weather would be mid-90's. Bernice's summer dress stuck to her like a damp slip. Mark's linen suit crumpled in the humidity. And both participants became thoroughly dehydrated in the afternoon sun.

But the staff of the Sans Souci were nothing if not professional. A large turbine fan provided just the right amount of windswept for 'I dos' and photo-shoots. Then dinner with the twelve other couples married on the same spot, under the same trellis, on the same day (although, like the earlier fanning arrangements, the rather crowded meal-time set up may have been omitted from the official version of Bernice's fairytale day). They returned home as Mr and Mrs. They returned home with tans. They returned home ready to live the dream.

Notable Moment Number Four

The Marriage Celebration - little point in going to the expense and effort of arranging a Caribbean wedding without being able to share the glamour of it all with a few specially chosen friends. Six guests invited to an overnight in one of Fodor's best-rated country hotels. Three couples hand picked to validate the new arrangement; promulgate its perfection; jealously admire its opulence.

None of Bernice's old pals made the cut. But Bernice felt more on par with Stephan & Caroline and Pete & Siobhan. Both men were old friends of Mark, successful, moneyed. Both girlfriends were one step behind Bernice and in awe of her for pulling off the wedding in three easy manoeuvres. Bernice's former boss Andrew and his wife made up the eight.

Bernice had entirely agreed with Mark when he repeated her earlier suggestion that she give up her job to home-make. He didn't want his little woman to be worn out with work when he came home to her at night, did he? To Bernice, entertaining Andrew and Lynne, even being able to call them by Christian names, represented a symbol of hitherto unreachable sociable legitimacy; the place of belonging she most aspired to.

The party congregated in the lounge of the Hydro Hotel for pre-dinner cocktails. Bernice perched herself on a leather footstool at the centre of the women and delivered a full rundown on the happy couple's big day.

'This is us at the hotel pool.' Pause. 'This is us having our wedding dinner, lobster thermidor.' Pause.

Bernice worked her way through the forty pages of tissue-sheeted photograph album at a tedious pace, narrating each memory, pausing for praise on every page. Occasionally, she would test out her contemporaries, asking Caroline or Siobhan what they thought of a particular scene just as she turned the page on it, maintaining a certain level of tension among the two wannabe wives. It was a full hour later, when Bernice closed her book of dreams and placed the wine spritzer she'd been nursing onto the waiter's silver platter. The party were led through to dinner at the hotel restaurant's top table. Other diners stared at the single-file procession making its way through the room. Bernice felt her back straighten under scrutiny. Her breasts pushed forward into her designer silk top, endeavouring to make looks last.

The meal continued the tone of the pre-dinner drinks. 'Mark, darling, what does this salsa salad remind you of? Really everyone, the food in Jamaica is just to die for. And this cabernet – the price of it – in Sans Souci this wouldn't pass for a house wine. Still, drink up, everything's on us this weekend.'

Caroline and Siobhan listened intently, visibly aspirational. Lynne ignored the conversation, instead squeezing the young thighs of Stephan and Pete, who she had made sure sat either side of her at the table. After five drawn out and unfulfilling courses, the party retired to the hotel bar. And it is there, dear reader, that we find ourselves entering that most significant axis point in the tale of Bernice and her Mark ...

Notable Moment Number Five

The reveal.

The group arranged themselves in pairs around the warmth of the log fire. Each couple took their turn, ordering rounds, proposing toasts, downing drinks. It was at some indistinct point during the course of these drinking circuits that the boys began recounting the good old days. Stephan was on a roll.

'Hey, Mark, remember your neighbour's face when the cops drove you home in the panda car after stealing his beamer.'

'Well, what was I supposed to do? I was fifteen. It was seriously wet. And there was his new motor sitting with the spare key under the flower pot.'

'Conviction for theft though, Mark. And the two grand fine.'

Mark shrugged his shoulders as Bernice winced. It was news to her.

'I can beat that hands down,' declared Pete, rising to his full six feet, steadying himself in front of the fire. He flapped open the opulent cerise lining of his suit jacket to garner attention. 'Evie Cameron. The model.' He paused, nodding silently towards each member of the group in turn. 'Well Mark here had her when she was still Miss West Kilbride. In America now, doing the business on the catwalk, and our Mark was her first.' Pete turned to the groom, his face a show of pain. 'You should never have dumped her, man. She was gorgeous.'

Bernice clenched her teeth, trying not to react. Her day, her moment and all they could talk about were model exes. She ground her teeth, felt enamel scrape.

Mark shifted in his seat, waving his arms in protest. 'Now, Pete, come on. That's not fair. Technically we *agreed* to separate. And anyway, live in the present, eh – she's there and I'm here, you know?' He turned to his wife, seemed pleased to have put Pete straight, looked confused at the scowl fixed across Bernice's face.

Stephan re-entered the frame. 'Yeah, look models are well and good, but the Saturday Morning Club – that's the real story. And it was *all* Mark's idea.'

Mark accepted admiring nods from Stephan and Pete with an air of solemn self-approval. Bernice felt her frown subside. Some great achievement of her new husband's was about to be acknowledged.

'What's Saturday Morning Club, Mark? You've never mentioned it. Is it a charity?'

Mark lowered his head slightly, shifted in his seat. 'Oh, it's nothing important, Bernice. Just a wee routine that me and the boys have.'

'Just a wee routine?' Stephan sounded outraged. 'It's fucking genius is what it is. There's us three, not a penny to rub between us and your man here comes up with the Saturday Morning Club - the scheme to end all schemes.'

Andrew grinned, stoked the fire. 'Come on then Stephan, don't hold back. What's this great scheme?'

'Well it's more of a lifestyle thing really. Every Saturday morning the three of us meet up in town. We hit Paul Smith's first, get fitted out, best of gear. Then a stroll through the jewellers' arcade, pick up anything that might look good, a nice Rolex, a smart Tag, whatever appeals. Nice lunch somewhere, then the hospitality bar and the private box at the footie. Best of the best all night afterwards.'

Mark motioned his palms discreetly downwards in Stephan's direction. 'It's not that big of a thing, Stephan. No need to go on about it.'

'But, it is. That's my point – it's how you met Bernice that night at Grecus. The Saturday Morning Club paid for our memberships. And best of all, we get it all for free.'

'What the hell are you talking about Stephan?'

'Bernie darling, it's okay. We've got a plan.' Mark interjected.

'It's a bankruptcy system' said Stephan.

Bernice's eyes flashed onto Mark.

'It's okay, honest. Look, one of us takes out as many credit cards as he can, right. He maxes them out for a year, eighteen months, until he busts and then the next guy takes over and so on. It works a charm. Like, remember that fancy coat I got you in Spain?'

'My Gucci?'

'Yeah, well that was during my watch – and now that I'm 'rupted, Pete's up. He's the man for this year.'

'You're bankrupt?'

'Yeah, but only for a few years. I've been there before. No big deal.'

'It's genius Bernice,' said Pete unadvisedly. 'Your man's a genius!'

'But you can't be bankrupt,' said Bernice, squaring on Mark. 'The dealership. The house in Marbella. The townhouse for God's sake. How can you be bankrupt?'

'No, see, the clever part is, I don't *own* any of those things. It's my folks' company, my brother's house in Spain that he lets me use twice a year and I get to live rent-free in the townhouse for giving the landlord a deal every year on his new Range Rover.'

Bernice felt water well in her eyes. Caroline and Siobhan glanced at each other, straightened from their poses beside Stephan and Pete, and moved towards the far end of the bar where a couple of smart-suited businessmen had just seated themselves for a nightcap. Andrew picked up the photograph album that Bernice left behind as she quick stepped towards her room, pursued by her bankrupt husband.

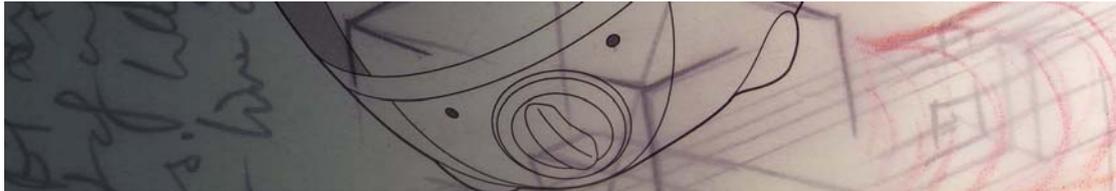
The Aftermath

The happy couple didn't appear for breakfast the next morning. Raised voices had been heard throughout the night from the direction of the bridal suite. Caroline and Siobhan congratulated each other on their new conquests (bar chat having progressed into pillow talk promises) and went their separate ways to wait for dates. Andrew found Lynne pinning Stephan up against the breakfast buffet and managed to prise her towards the exit. Pete hung around a while, ate a hearty breakfast and settled the hotel bill on behalf of all attending Bernice and Mark's marriage celebration.

Notable moments number six and seven consisted of a petition for and subsequent granting of divorce. Mark was relieved of any requirement to pay alimony, being a declared bankrupt. Bernice destroyed all of his Paul Smith suits in particularly permanent fashion.

On her first day back at her old job, Bernice found a gift waiting at her desk – her Our Big Day photograph album saved for her by Andrew. A post-

it was stuck to the front. It read 'At least you can keep the memories'. Bernice heard the other secretaries sniggering as she read the note and guessed they'd already pawed through her past before she got in. She lowered her head towards the rubbish bin at her feet and forced the album inside. The first personal call Bernice made from the office phone was to cancel her membership of Grecus.



Benches (II)

by Marise Morse

When I look up I see him. An unsteady walk coming towards me. One hand clutches a brown paper bag. The other reaches for the bench close by as he sits down. Traffic noises continue off somewhere. Hard verbal sounds fall loosely from his mouth his bloated cheeks. 'Do you want some?' A genuine smile releases his distorted face. For just a moment I have a glimpse of sensual lips. 'It's good. Good Vodka.' My glance falls to the ground. His sneakers are very bright. They seem new. Neither are his jeans too shabby. He looks at me. A weak pull at his lips indicates another smile. He leans in. 'Are you sure you won't have some?' He doesn't look too healthy blond hairs matted, twisted. Neither is he not healthy. He asks again. 'Are you sure you don't want some?' His voice rasps, more insistent, but not really. He seems unable to believe I could pass up something so wonderful. A little bob of the head and he gazes a second or two delaying the smile, inscrutable as though thoughts are passing. He nods again, knowingly, and turns his head forward. It droops. Dips to sleep and he begins to snore. His clutch on the paper bag loosens.

A Job for Life

by Iain Maloney

No idea when I first developed tits, but they're there now. They're not proper tits, not round and nice and sexy. These are saggy, like a hairy tea bag filled with custard. My nipples are massive now as well, like targets. Fucking embarrassing. I can suck my gut in. My muscles are well trained for that, but how do you suck your tits in?

The doctor's disgusted, I can tell. Intake of breathe when I stepped on the scales. Sure he was going to make a joke about needing a longer tape measure when doing the waistline. His cheeks go in, and there's hard lines down his neck. You can't even see the skin under his jaw. Mine hangs down. More chins than a Chinese phonebook. Probably can't say that now.

Tells me to put my shirt back on and goes to his desk, writes something. In the paper a while back they were talking about doctors, how they have abbreviations to describe their patients in the files. DAFO: Drunk and Fell Over. FOS: Full Of Shit. PRATFO: Patient Reassured And Told To Fuck Off. TUBE: Totally Unnecessary Breast Examination. Bet that's what he's wanting. A nice pair of tits to examine, not my saggy paps of fat.

Fucking medical. Tits don't stop me doing my job. Well, except her at reception. Distracting that. Fucking intrusion, that's what it is. Fucking liberty. These new owners. *Employees have to be an example to the world. Our image is healthy, wealthy and wise.* Not a beer gut and man tits. It's not like I have to be in the adverts. We hire beautiful people to do that. They look good. I think good. We don't expect them to think good, not necessary. Why do I need to look good? My laptop doesn't give a fuck.

Usual blah blah. Cut down on the fry ups, the junk food. Cut down on the beers. Take up a sport. You like football, why don't you join a team? I like football, yeah. Standing in the bar with a pint, some mates and shouting "kick the fucking ball" at the TV. I like watching war films. Doesn't mean I want to go and fucking join up.

Cheeky fucker gives me the number of weight watchers. Throw the leaflet in the bin at reception, wink at the Asian girl behind the desk. Not bad that. Not bad at all. Took less time than I expected, that appointment. Told them I wouldn't be back until 3. What is it? Only 2.15. 45 minutes to myself. What to do? Time for a pint? Got the car, better not. Not going back early though, that's for sure. Only be cheating myself.

What's waiting? That jeans ad. Got to write copy for that. What's the point? Why does a jeans ad need copy? Show some muscly guy or some skinny bint in nothing but a pair of jeans and every retard in the country will buy them so they can look like that. Idiots. Should just make the copy

something like BUY THESE JEANS AND PEOPLE WILL WANT TO FUCK YOU. It's what people want to hear; what they choose to hear in fact.

In the car the stereo comes on as I turn the key. Always seems louder when I'm parked than when I'm moving. Engine noise? This new album's shit. When I was at uni REM was the greatest thing. That sound, tight, hard but poppy, poetic, moving. But this new stuff. No ideas. Sounds like they're tired, old. Nothing new to offer. Should've got it free off the net. Wish that'd been around when I was younger. The money I spent back then. Never had enough. Used to exchange. Sell old things to buy new things.

Getting peckish. Spin through the drive thru. Maybe I should do something about this gut. Probably not good that I can hold the wheel straight with no hands. Was skinny as a teenager. No one believes. Tall and thin, angles and spots. Don't really remember. Those photos aunts and people have, 13 year old me, 10 year old me, 6 year old me. Doesn't look like me. Can't connect it. Can't imagine being that person. So maybe it wasn't me.

Maybe it wasn't. Ship of what's his name? Theseus. God, that's going back. Second year was it? Maybe even first. You have a ship. The Ship of Theseus. Gets used a lot, lot of damage over the years. Replace the mast after a storm. Replace the deck, rebuild this, renew that. Over the years slowly everything is replaced as it gets worn out. 40 years after being built literally every plank, nail and rope has been replaced. But it's still the Ship of Theseus. Or is it? It's still his ship, it never sank, he never went to the shipyards and said build me a new ship, but the ship he set sail on 40 years ago, the actual physical ship, is long gone.

That tall skinny boy is long gone. Cells died and replaced. Hair grown, cut, fallen out. Nails trimmed. Not one part of me today in common with 16 year old me in record shops buying 7 and 12". Not even the vinyl. Sold the lot. CD and MP3 today. No side B and PDF sleeves. The march of.

Lost a lot of music that way. All those bands I used to love, not so much as a single now. Can't replace a lot of them either, not easily. Can't go down HMV and get them, now I can afford to. Staff never even heard of them. Recently found one of them again. The Wonderstuff *Construction For The Modern Idiot*. Sounded silly, adolescent. Same level of profundity as whatsername the artist with the bed. Couldn't listen to the whole thing.

Back to the office, shut the door on them all. Can't be fucked today. Tell them I'm working on copy, give me some peace. Email from the boss. I can't even bring myself to read it. No energy. Blood sugar must be low. Could do with a pint. Any chocolate in the desk? Ah, there we go.

Don't look at the clock. Got to get this done then I can bail out of here. Champions League tonight, dump the car and get down the boozier. Focus, get the job done and get on with life. Work to live.

Open the brief. A revolutionary theme, of the moment, tie in with all the unrest around the world. Nothing but in the headlines. Beefcake and bint

in jeans, buy these jeans, but somehow they want “a radical flavour”. Fuck does that mean? Put them in Che t-shirts? Have them reading the Socialist Worker? What kind of copy says ‘buy these jeans and people will want to fuck you’ and also ‘buy these jeans because they are radical and radical things are cool’?

Viva Levi!

Consumers of the World, Unite!

Jeans are the opium of the masses!

No fashion without representation!

Get Up! Stand Up! Put your jeans on!

This is ridiculous! Slip on the headphones and click on London Calling, get me in the mood. This should be easy. Better get help from Professor Google.

“Hey Paul, same again when you’re ready.”

“Aye.”

“Nearly half time and Lennon hasn’t had a go at the referee yet. Three more minutes and your money is mine,” says Jim.

“Have faith, he will. There’s no way he can go forty-five minutes without losing the plot,” I tell him.

“How’s work going?”

“Ach, you know,” I say. “Same old same old. Had my medical today.”

“How’d it go?”

“How do you think? Fancy some peanuts?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

“And you? How’s the shop?”

“Doing alright actually. Strange thing about a recession, while every business suffers, shops like mine tend to see a wee bump.”

“How come?”

“Anger mostly, people look at that shower in Westminster and the bankers and the fat cats, and they’re livid.”

“Aye.”

“But most people cannae explain why they’re angry.”

“Coz it’s no fair.”

“Aye, but why’s it no fair?”

“Coz they’ve got all the money and none of the work, and we’ve got all the work and none of the money.”

“Aye, everybody knows that, but what people start wondering is how we got into this situation, how we came to be living in a world where that’s how things work. And some of them eventually make their way to specialist bookshops like mine to try and find answers.”

“And you sell them answers.”

“Aye. I sell them Marx, mostly.”

"Why Marx?"

"They've heard of him. And coz there's quite a few nails he hit squarely on the head."

"Did he? I thought he was all Communism and workers of the world."

"He was, but he wrote a lot about capitalism and its effects, and sometimes there's something of the Nostradamus about him."

"Like?"

"Listen to this." Jim pulls about five or six folded sheets of paper from his pocket. They're crumpled and yellowed, obviously been in there with the tobacco flakes and crisps for a while. "Here: 'The result is the man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his most animal functions – eating, drinking and procreating, or at most in his dwelling and adornment – while in his human function he is nothing more than an animal'. Now does that not pretty scarily describe this country? Obese and alcoholic and drugged up, fucking our way to the grave? I mean, just look at any paper and it's all fat kids and stabbings and riots after Old Firm games. And Marx said it would be that way, said our life would be like this, "eating, drinking and procreating ... nothing more than an animal."

"Aye, it's life Jim, exactly as we know it." Pretty deep that, and bang on. Maybe something in it, something I can use. "Hey Paul, piece of paper and a pen when you've got a minute." Might be just what I need for that advert. "Mind if I copy that down?"

"On you go. But you owe me a fiver."

"How?"

"Half-time and Lennon hasn't had a go at the ref."

"Should've said full-time."

"I'd never have taken that bet."

It stinks in here.

I knew this wasn't going to be a good day. Late in, very hungover. Celtic won and Jim and I stayed until chucking out time, then I'd a few nightcaps watching *The Wire*. When I got to the office there was a note on my desk to go and see the boss, Cameron, ASAP. That's when I remembered the email from him yesterday, the one I hadn't read. I quickly checked it while finishing the Irn Bru. I had to see him before the end of business, yesterday. I really should've shaved. They didn't tell me I need coins for the locker. Christ, got to go back out now, deal with the snotty staff. Where do they find these people? Must be what Darwin meant by survival of the fittest. My main problem with Cameron James, apart from his names being the wrong way round, and his age, is that he talks solely in soundbites and clichés. "A man of your age and experience." "Really expected better from you." "Pull yourself together." "In this economic climate." "Shape up or ship out." And that's that. No football colours? How was I supposed to know that? This is like school:

forgot your shorts? Fine, do it in your pants. They really go out of their way to make it difficult, to humiliate you at every turn. The fucking cheek of it. How can you fail a medical? I mean, it's not an exam, it's just a check up, state of the union. That doctor's FOS. Okay, I'm not in great shape but it's not like my work's suffering. Even Cameron had to admit that. "Can't fault your output." Just my input apparently. None of their fucking business what I do outside the office. They don't own me. Work is work and life is life. I don't get to take my life into the office, so how does he get to stick his nose into my life? Should be a law against it. There must be a law against it. Look at this woman, standing there with that superior look on her face. Thinks she's so much better than me just because she has a smaller waist line and can work a treadmill. How am I supposed to do this with all these fuckers watching me? Ride the bike, that looks the least embarrassing. Used to love my bike when I was a kid, out in the forest, jumping and skidding. Must be somebody I can speak to about this. It's not right. I'll go talk to the union. Do we have a union? Am I a member? Something I should really know I guess, but who keeps track of these things. Jim'll know. I'll go see Jim after I'm done here. No, still got that advert. After that. Still no idea. Leaning towards the standard Communist aesthetic, red, black and white, bold colours, strong typefaces, clenched fists. Like those bars. Like a White Stripes cover. Must be something I can do with workers. Jeans were work clothes after all, before they became fashionable. How do you make sexy people wearing only jeans look like workers? Must be something I can do. Talk to the union. Go on strike. March with a placard, like the students. Protesting tuition fees? Still? Been there, done that, still got the debt to prove it. Fat lot of good it did, protesting. Can't smash the system, can't change unthinking minds. Meet company health targets or begin looking for a new job. In this economic climate? That'll be right. Two kilometres I've cycled. That must be enough. Sweating like a banker in a job centre. Making me come to the gym with a hangover is pure sadism, a fucking liberty. I need a sleep. A pint to settle the stomach. Big Mac would go down a treat. Not even nearly lunchtime yet. Fuck this. Shower off and back to my desk. Get this advert done. Go see Jim. Suppose they'll want me to be having a salad for lunch. It's a fucking liberty. Must be something I can do. Workers of the world, unite. You have nothing to lose but your ... what? Personal freedoms? Control over your own life? Control over what you put in your own mouth? Tits? Nothing to lose but your tits. Catchy. That might work, you know. Black and white photo. Muscly bloke and sexy bint, only in jeans, carrying tools. Pick axe slung over the shoulder like a rifle. Hi-Ho. Standing close, all sexual suggestion. Copy in bold, red: UNITE. Nice. Job done.

Four Poems

By Angela Blacklock-Brown

From The Kitchen Window

I watch
every day
then race
from the door
through the grass
to pick
those first
snowdrops

Perspectives

We drop through clouds,
drift in to descend
over Manhattan
and I know at once
I will modify my accent,
slip into a different
linguistic jet stream
as we skiff the runway
to land from across the Atlantic.
Seatbelts click,
I switch on my cell phone,
distance has metamorphosed meaning.
Mobile is a town in Alabama.

The Power of X

I
The surgeon said dirt was embedded
under layers of skin,
so made a deep incision into my thumb
to clean out grime and grit.
Three cross stitches and two weeks later
the wound had healed.

II

Was it legend or fate that traced
a white cross on blue sky
at Athelstaneford, clinching
victory for the Scots?
I see the image now
as jet trails etch symbols in our skies,
mimicked by flags fluttering
over Edinburgh's cityscape.

III

I was humbled once, by an Irishman
buying antiques at my parents' auction.
When asked to sign for the goods
he sealed the deal with a cross.

Lockerbie – Twenty-Two Years

'Nothing is less visible than a monument' – Robert Musil

My memories are not chiselled
in tablets of stone. They are fluid,
come and go with the ebb and flow
of time passing.
I did not know them, although I bore
witness to their fate before the world
became aware of a town laid bare,
a wasteland, devastation, destruction.
Body parts perched on rhone pipes,
arms and legs anchored on trees.
No walking wounded, no warning.

Evidence now laundered to oblivion
by a task force, summoned by conscience,
silenced by secrets.
Subversion beyond the decades until
memories fade. I will grow old like
those who have passed beyond.

In that same field a farmer limps
towards his beasts under that tree,
speaks of mischance.

Two Poems

By Patrick Holloway

soon i will be

back,
back
with the birds that seem as
familiar as dreaming.
this place will be too far
for me to put a finger on;
it tries to be recognisable.
i will not remember if it was
a bakery or a movie-store
where you bit my lip so hard
blood
sweetened our tongues. i have
already forgotten
if
it
was your room
or a
motel
where i fucked you from behind
and came on your face.
was it coke or guarana i spat from
laughing
too much. was it me or you
driving when we realised
we only had an hour
left.
did you cry first.
who went
through
the gates
me
or
you?
i
can't recall if you left me
or

i left you.
i like it that way as i
get ready to fall into the
recognisable and wake up
by your side.

Sea-Star

There is an overgrown patch of grass
That keeps an eye on the sea,
I used to sit there, my nine-year-old
Bottom comfy and my mind free
Of amplified voices that shout
Out words I'm not allowed to say,
I sat as one with the blades;
Teeth-chattering as I smiled,
The waves would always attack,
Whispering wet and wild
Secrets that only I could understand;
A new unformed language.
One day, don't ask me when,
For they are all one to me,
I decided I would take her long
Blue hand and marry the sea
But I knew she would outlive me
And I would become just a memory.
I still went, day after day,
Fight after unresolved fight,
Until the days would fade beyond
The horizon; transforming into a night
Sky so spectacular that even at nine I knew
The sea would always love that silver-speckled darkness.
They were each other's for longer than
I could understand and I was just a little boy,
They acknowledged me, the stars would
Wink knowing I was only there to enjoy
The love between them, the love
That screaming voices help destroy.

A Woman's War

By JoAnne McKay

Mella walked. The city was shelled out and walking the streets she thought it was as if the people had been shelled in, for no one was much in evidence save the soldiers. Strange really, for when the houses were whole, furnished and most of all waterproof, everyone wanted to be out on the streets walking, talking and regarding each other. Now that the houses themselves were shells, everyone stayed inside. That older enemy, the dust, was everywhere and if you did go out in the daytime your clothes would be red before you got home. Mella sheltered and listened: there was never ordinary noise anymore, just shouts, masonry falling and those unholy military vehicles racing around. And even in the day you heard odd, punctuated, screaming. At night the screaming was about all that you heard, though there was the occasional gunshot to remind you this was just war, and not something biblical. She sang in the cellar with her girls to cover the sound, but just as new mothers can pick out any baby's cry during carnival, it seemed women can always hear the sound of another woman going through that. Maybe they imagined hearing it sometimes. They just sang a little louder in the tight circle, straight into each other's ears so that their song couldn't be heard from the street.

The terror continued. She heard that women had taken to dressing as men but that the charade didn't last long, as the soldiers would just strip you in the street to check. Besides, she thought, it wasn't much of an idea in the first place as any men left tended to be very old and if they weren't, they tended to be shot. She had also heard that a group of friends had scoured the tottering convent and then worn nuns' habits but, as the first woman who had tried the holy cheat reported (bleeding heavily and just about to die but with the wimple still in place), it had only seemed to increase their appetites. Mella walked past the convent's remaining walls, glancing inside, and dismissed that whole story. Just another tale to demonise the enemy, when she knew exactly what the enemy were.

Later, the night-time knock on the door came. She had made them dress for this eventuality every night, as soon as the building opposite could just about be imagined whole if you half-closed your eyes. She let the women sleep in the day whilst she scurried the streets, bartering all she had saved in the busy days before the retreat for the hard bread and soft cheese they lived on now. And the meat, which was rare, and never quite tasted like beef, or mutton, or even pork, she supposed. She tried not to think about the meat.

If you did not respond to the knock the door would be kicked in, she knew this, so as planned she called out her response and they all walked up the cellar steps to the front hall. She called again, "I am coming", whilst the

women went up to the first floor to take those positions so carefully rehearsed.

Mella blinked twice, set her face, and opened the door. It was the nightmare: at least ten men in uniform, she could smell the cheap alcohol, but, but, but, it was a Captain who stood before her, the others all behind him a little.

Confidence, Mella, confidence, and smile. "My dear Captain, do come in, may I be of service to you?"

It had thrown him, she saw. He had not expected this. "And your men too, of course. All are welcome guests in my house." Mella gestured the way upstairs.

The Captain looked genuinely confused and the men would not do anything without his lead, she felt fairly secure in that.

Do not overplay this, he is in charge. She dropped her chin a little, and smiled once again, retreating inside. The Captain entered.

"My men", he began confidently now, gesturing extravagantly behind him, showing them he had done this thing before, "... need satisfaction, after all they have endured. Are there women in this house?"

You know these words, Mella, you have recited them a thousand times.

"Captain, this is a house of women. Women who offer not merely satisfaction, but pleasure. We are not housewife drudges whose cunts are so stretched from childbirth that it takes five men's cocks to fill them, nor eight-year-old virgins who burst after the first few thrusts. We are professional women, as you are professional soldiers, and if you ...", she glanced to outside the door, "and your men will grace our house then you will have both satisfaction and pleasure, I guarantee it."

"And do you charge your victors, Madam?" He was not sneering.

"Our services are, of course, free to such as yourselves, but should you wish to bestow any small gift upon me if you find our services to your liking, then Captain, I would not be so rude as to refuse." What words! I am surprising myself, and look, my hands do not shake.

She gestured upstairs again and the Captain ordered his men to enter. She led the way to the first floor, hearing boot, boot, boot, boot as they followed her upstairs. Be calm, sisters, remember, be calm and smile.

On the first floor the women were arranged as rehearsed. They were all either sitting or leaning, because Mella knew any tremor is easier to hide when the body is supported. She looked, and felt some small, sinful, pride. Neither Sheba nor Salome could have arrayed themselves better, though her eyes flicked to Maria, her most fragile, to see if she could withstand this. Yes, she was right to have placed her sitting, and next to Magdalena (Magdalena!), for some strength was passing from the fallen to the rising.

Mella stretched her smile and looked at each one of the eleven, and then turned around to face the Captain, gesturing behind her, "Captain, gentlemen, may I introduce you to my ladies."

And she named them in turn, and as each name was spoken the named rose, or stood erect, and turned slowly.

"Now, Captain, please be seated, and your men also. May I offer you refreshment?"

As arranged, Magdalena walked to the sideboard and fetched the tray, taking it first to the Captain and then to the men. Mella fetched the bottle and followed behind her. It was brandy, the glasses were small, and as Mella served them she counted; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. The Captain and nine men. She noticed the Captain's pistol holster, and the nine rifles now leaning against chairs and the enormous ottoman. And she smiled whilst doing this.

She was amazed by the silence of the soldiers. They shuffled their feet, murmured to their neighbour, but that was all. It is as it ever was, she thought. I am in charge in this house.

The plan, so carefully written, then rewritten, then changed again to ensure their best possible chance, proceeded as if the men had already learned their part. The choices were made, the request to leave all weapons ("... for I have heard terrible things, gentlemen, of women shot but no bullet holes being visible") acceded to, and all retired to their separate rooms within the space of a quarter hour. She was left in the salon with Therese, whose brow was only now becoming shiny. Mella felt her own: it was cool and dry.

Obtaining a weapon and ammunition in wartime is not hard and Mella had had choices to make over what to use. A pistol, obviously, but she knew the silencer would be far harder to source, and so it had proved. To secure it had required much, but she had secured it, and then she had shot, and shot, and shot every type of dead flesh she could. She knew the gun now, the gun knew her, and she had cleaned it, and nursed it, and her feelings for it had slowly changed: though you could not call it affection, she had become respectful of this thing that was nothing of itself but which became potent in the hand of one who would use it. She had made sure she was able, and prayed that she could.

Mella removed her shoes and gently made her way to the first room. The women also had their parts to play and this, their monologue, was to be spoken when their door shut; "Sir, I can be your lover, your wife, your mother or your daughter, or some stranger you have never met before. Who do you wish me to be?"

The first room, as arranged, was Maria's for she was the most vulnerable. As Mella entered she saw her with the soldier cradled in her arms. He had his back to the door, and was crying. Mella, do not think, act, simply act. So she walked to him and as he turned his head Mella shot him

through it. Maria, now blood-spattered, pressed her hands to her mouth, as rehearsed, but her eyes were terrible in their sadness and, moving her hands slightly, she said, "Mother. He only wanted to talk."

Of the remaining nine, three others only wanted to talk, and though the rest were in some state of undress nothing had yet happened. Every death was very quick, though Mella would not use the word clean to the women because there was an awful lot of blood. Through the night they cleaned quietly, and once the soldiers had stopped seeping so much blood the women washed the bodies then redressed them in the collected civilian clothes before the final stiffness set in. They could be left in any building of the city and within a day sufficient dust would cover them to make them as any other casualty of the war. Magdalena had volunteered to help Mella with that. They were the strongest. The rugs and sheets could be dumped during Mella's daytime journeys.

Though the women spoke quietly to each other during that night, the sounds of the screams were all they really heard. For this night, Mella thought, forgive me, I am glad of them.

Dawn came, sudden, and it was time to sleep. Mella said only this; "We have done nothing good this night, but you are intact. You may pray for their souls."

Once the Captain and his nine men had finally left them, their routine returned to what it had been. The door was never knocked on again in the night and Mella was thankful, for although they intended to play the same trick she knew it could never be repeated successfully, because they knew the ending now.

Within two months the uniforms of the soldiers changed, the screaming stopped and the women were able to return to their usual habits. The first mass was said, and at confession prior to this the priest had absolved Mella from the mortal sin she had committed not once, but ten times. "It was", he said simply, "war, Abbess."

And Mella thought of the story of the woman who had dressed as a nun, and then thought it was I who was right though, the only people who survive such times are the liars, the cheats, the thieves and the whores.



Two Poems

By Megan Primrose

Silent Wonder

Please ignore
the distraction of this contraption:
from the day I was made
my leg's been confined
enshrined in a coffin
not breathing like limbs should.

The metal
is cold on my skin, the bolts hold
bone in place, keeps my pace
straight as a robot
not lilted and light like
a lady in love.

Remember
-It's easy to neglect and forget
when the dance and the prance
of the playground
sound in your ear-

that I am here.

The silent wonder.
Wondering at your silence.

What Remains

I have never seen so much perfection
in one place
the lick of satisfaction
spread broad and thick
on the smiling face
of you.

How different it was last year-
when we low, skulking, lean
let stark thoughts and concrete skies

make dark shadows of us-
the year we found out about Caitrin.

I remember your face when we heard the news:
swollen with sadness
with none left over for me.



Author Biographies

Lewis Irvine is currently studying Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, specialising in theories of aesthetics. He has previously written for *VOS* and *TYPE Review*, was joint editor of *Letters from the City* and works in *Aye-Aye Books*, an independent art book store in the city.

Jenny Kannellopoulou was born in Athens Greece and has always wanted to write. Anything. From cooking recipes to prose and poetry. She decided to study law instead and draft divorce papers. She arrived at Glasgow University in September and wishes to extend her stay for infinity as long as she finds a place to get creatively depressed. Whisky always welcome.

Ian Hunter is a writer of children's novels, short stories and poetry. His work has appeared in the UK, USA and Canada. He has twice been a writer-in-residence and is a director of the Scottish Writers Collective "Read Raw" and is now poetry editor of *Dark Horizons* magazine. He is currently doing a Masters dissertation, having gained an LEDQ (Local Economic Development Qualification) at Glasgow University.

Lucy Cheseldine is a first year student studying English Literature at Glasgow University.

Nasim Marie Jafry was born in the west of Scotland in 1963 to a Scottish mother and Pakistani father. She has an MA and MSc from Glasgow University, but her studies were severely disrupted when she became ill with ME. Her autobiographical novel, *The State of Me*, was published in 2008 by The Friday Project, an imprint of HarperCollins. She has a short story in the recent fundraising anthology *50 Stories for Pakistan* (Big Bad Media). She has lived in San Francisco and currently lives in Edinburgh. She still has ME. She blogs at <http://velo-gubbed-legs.blogspot.com/>

Cila Warncke is a journalist and essayist, and is also working a novel and a vegan cookbook. She runs thirty miles a week, prefers red wine, and has six tattoos. Her New Year's resolution was to never spend another winter north of the 38th parallel. She is a full-time student in Glasgow University's Creative Writing MLitt programme.

Jim Ferguson is a poet and prose writer based in Glasgow. Jim has been writing and publishing since 1986 and is presently a Creative Writing tutor at John Wheatley College. His collection *the art of catching a bus and other poems* is published by AK Press, Edinburgh. He is the current 'Poet Laureate' of the

Scotia Bar, Glasgow. His latest publication is a monograph on the Paisley weaver-poet Robert Tannahill (1774-1810). *Tannahill: The Soldier's Return* with an Introductory Essay by Jim Ferguson, Read Raw Books, Carlisle, 2010. He recently completed a PhD at Glasgow University.

Craig Steele is a postgraduate student in Support for Learning at Glasgow University. He is 31 years old and stayed 22 of those years in deepest, darkest Ayrshire.

Katy Ewing has always loved to write, but has only relatively recently begun to attempt to be published. She lives in rural South-West Scotland, with her husband and two daughters, where they enjoy a relatively quiet life, as self-sufficiently as they can. Katy is a mature student in the third year of a Liberal Arts degree (at Glasgow University Dumfries), so doesn't have as much time for creative writing as she'd like. When she does write non-academically, it's so far been mainly poetry and short stories, plus a little memoir now and again.

Mark Fraser is a Glasgow native who worked in IT for four long years. He currently owns and runs the website www.dailydischord.com, where he has been putting his journalistic pen to work on for around four years now. He, at the age of 25, has only just embarked on his Glasgow University journey and has recently (and completely accidentally) found a passion for literature that he always knew he had, but was hidden under layers of cobwebs and guitar strings.

George Craig is a complex organism, originating from Lanarkshire, which, although commonly seen around Glasgow's Creative Writing MLitt classrooms, is more local to the Isle of Bute. It has prompted the creation of a number of short stories, poems and is currently focussing substantial efforts on emerging with a novel.

Marise Morse is originally from Connecticut. She is currently enrolled as a full time student in the MFA Creative Writing program at the University of Glasgow. She has just completed her MLitt in Creative Writing at Aberdeen University.

Iain Maloney is a graduate of Glasgow University's Creative Writing Masters, and a writer of fiction, poetry and journalism. He currently lives in Japan. His novel *Dog Mountain* is in search of a good home.

Angela Blacklock-Brown was born and brought up in Dumfries and Galloway. She came to study languages at Edinburgh University and taught for over twenty years. For nine years she tutored part-time work in the Scottish Poetry Library. Now she combines writing with tutoring and travelling the world. In 2004 she graduated from Glasgow University with an MPhil in Creative Writing. She has published five poetry pamphlets and co-wrote a French Revision Guide Book. Her poems have appeared in anthologies and literary magazines.

Patrick Holloway is from Cork in Ireland and is currently studying at Glasgow University for an MLitt in Creative Writing.

JoAnne McKay grew up in a slaughterhouse in Romford. Her first career was as a police officer in Bristol, meeting her husband whilst helping the Scottish Crime Squad out with some fine art related crimes, and thus condemning herself to life in a very small Scottish village. JoAnne has published two poetry pamphlets, *The Fat Plant* and *Venti*. She is currently studying for the MLitt in Creative Writing.

Megan Primrose is from Wales, though her accent belies it. However, if she does not mention that she is from Wales her dad might march her back to her roots and bury her underneath them. She likes writing prose, but attempts poetry sometimes. She thinks she would write a whole lot more if her life depended on it. She is studying for an MLitt in Creative Writing at Glasgow University.

