

From Glasgow to Saturn

The University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Showcase



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A Word from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Hello, welcome, and Happy New Year to you all. We're delighted to present the latest issue of Glasgow University's creative writing magazine, in which you will find a selection of well-honed prose and glorious poetry. We have a fine variety on offer for our readers this month, with pieces from graduates living in Japan to award-winning poets to current students appearing in print for the very first time.

January is a time of change and evolution, and here at *From Glasgow to Saturn* we are thoroughly delighted to welcome a new voice to our pages. Louise Welsh is the bestselling author of *The Cutting Room*, *Tamburlaine Must Die*, *The Bullet Trick* and *Naming the Bones*, as well as a playwright, a performer, and the university's new Writer in Residence. She has agreed to turn agony aunt and lend her expert opinion to writers seeking guidance. Whatever you are having bookish problems with, be it characterisation, tension, plot or motivation, she is here to help. Her debut column appears in these pages, and for details on how to pitch your own dilemma to Louise for future issues, please visit <http://glasgowtosaturn.com/ask-louise>.

In other news, we are finally able to confirm details of the long-promised Reading Party for our contributors and subscribers. This will be held on February 24th, between 5.30pm and 7.30pm, at the Anatomy Museum, within Glasgow University. There will be performances from Alan Bissett, Anneliese Mackintosh, Raymond Soltyssek and JoAnne Ruby McKay, as well as two other talented writers who will be confirmed shortly. The Anatomy Museum always lends these occasions an unreal atmosphere, with its pickled babies in jars, various dissected limbs and even, somewhere, the skull of Robert Burns lurking on the shelves. So, put the date in your diary and keep your eyes peeled on our website for further information about this exciting literary event, which everyone is very welcome to attend.

You can also say hello on facebook, twitter and of course via email. Don't forget to continue sending us your stories and verses for publication; without submissions we are nothing, and this is *your* magazine – make of it what you will.

With good wishes,

Alan Gillespie, Nick Boreham and Sheila Millar

Homegame by Iain Maloney

It's like the in-laws meeting. Japan v Scotland. A friendly.

We travelled through to Yokohama and checked in. We were ten minutes from the stadium. Far enough to enjoy the crowds on the approach, close enough to escape. We get dressed up, special occasion. She has a Scotland top, with a Japanese flag around her shoulders. Rising sun painted on her cheek. I have a Japan top from the last world cup, Nakamura's 10, and the Saltire tied round my waist, hanging like a Highland sarong. We look good, an advert for internationalism, cultural brotherhood, some pish like that.

We take the lift with some Japanese guys.

"Scotland?"

"Hai."

"You don't wear skirt?"

"No."

"Nande?"

"I forgot to shave my legs."

Then the teams come out, line up, and it's anthem time. The Japanese one, slow, sad, interminable fades into life and people start singing, mournful. Round of applause. Then it's our turn, *Flower of Scotland*. And they start to boo. The people around me. And with each boo I sing a little louder. And a little louder. Then I stand up, flag up. Alone. I can barely hear the 50 outriders of the Tartan Army at the other end, but the indignation, the anger makes me add my voice to theirs. I try to drown out the booing. I fail.

I sit in a purple rage, fists clenching.

"Good job," says the man two seats along. "Good singing."

"Fuck you," I say. "Fuck you. Why did you boo?"

"Boo?"

I show him.

"Oh, to show we support Japan,"

"You hate Scotland?"

"No."

"'Boo' means you hate something. You all said 'I hate Scotland. Scotland can fuck off.' Well you can fuck off, too."

He says nothing, looks at the pitch.

"Cunt," I say, though I don't expect him to know this word. He'll get my meaning anyway.

She's been silent throughout all this. She looks at me.

"Leave it. They're stupid. They're ... what do you say? They're not worth much?"

We're not worth much. A drubbing. Smirks. Scotland isn't well known in Japan. Now they know something about us. They know we're crap at football. My students are going to rip the piss when I get back to work. We leave. The crowds mix, and the kids are fascinated by the gorillas in skirts and up ahead one guy is teaching them English.

"Say *Fuck*."

"FAKU."

"No, not FAKU, *Fuck. Fuck*."

"FAKU. FAKU."

"Better. Not great. Now. *The*."

"ZA."

"Not za, *the, the, th* – " And he makes this sound like a snake with a lisp.

"Thrpp," the kids say, blowing raspberries.

"Together. *Fuck...the...*"

"FAKU...ZA..."

His mates are in stitches. A father says to me, in Japanese, "What's he teaching them?"

"A football chant."

"He is funny?"

"He's strange," I say. "Hen na Oji-san. But safe."

Which is what he wanted to hear.

Is this how they see me? They're like the goons in the Popeye cartoons. Huge slabs of flesh, knuckles penduluming.

"Hey pal, vodka coke eh."

"Fucksake, this is Bacardi, no fuckin vodka. Hey pal, a said vodka. V-O-D-K-A. Understand?"

I intervene.

"Wokka cora."

"Wokka cora? Ah, wakarimashita. Domo."

This is a nightmare. There is nothing but arrogance and violence coming from these guys. They really do think of themselves as an army. They are here under the flag and to do anything, drink anything or eat anything different from home would be an act of treason. I finish my drink fast.

"Come on, let's get out of here. We'll go to an izakaya. There won't be any fans there."

As she finishes her drink I go up to pay. There's fear, exhaustion, something in this guy's eye as he watches me approach. What hassle am I going to give him? Relief when I ask for the bill, hand over the money without any problems. As he gives me my change, I say

"Konya, ganbarre." Good luck tonight.

He grabs my hand and starts shaking it.

"Arigatou. Thank you. Good night."

We go home.



Two Trees in Early October, Glasgow **by Mairi McCloud**

One holds back,
feeling the summer sun still
in its veins.

The other sighs, and small
rusty leaves drift
like discs of fire
on the wind.

One resists,
and will not bend with the breeze,
holding its branches stiff.

The other moves
and sways,
alive to the touch
of the slightest wind.

Pétursdóttir

by Amy Rafferty

Pétursdóttir took a boat all the way to Svalbard.
With a little seed cupped in her little hand.
The seed was her father
and the boat was her love
and Svalbard was the only safe place she could think
to take him.

Pétursdóttir knocked on the door of the doomsday vault
and asked in a little voice from her little mouth,
'Let us in please.'

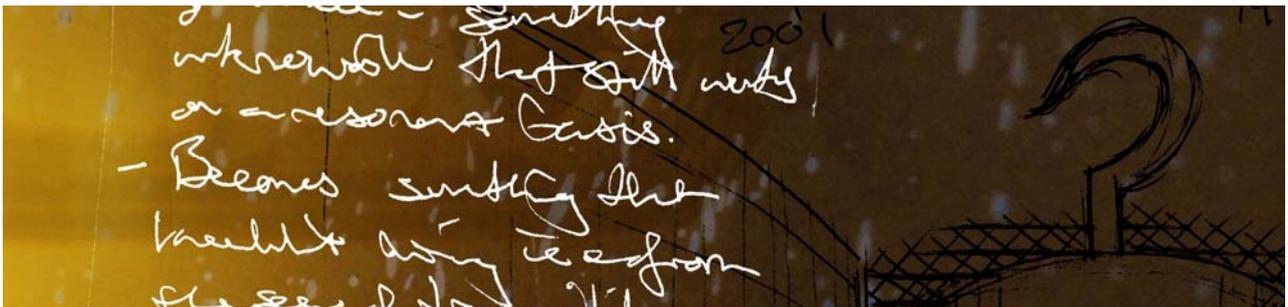
But the vault was empty.

Nothing stirred.

Not even an icy wind to freeze the tears that came.

Pétursdóttir lay down in the snow
and died where she lay,
with the little seed cupped
in her little hand.

Waiting for the doomsday vault to save them both
and what warmth there was left in her
woke the seed.



Harlequin Dreams

by Bethany Anderson

Her name was Fleur de Lis: regal, but gentle; a flower among the thorns. She wasn't the star of the show, but everyone knew she was the queen of her game. Not young enough to be a new attraction, not old enough to be reduced to backstage, Fleur was in her prime.

Harlequin Dreams wasn't a dingy place, not like others; no neon signs, silhouettes of Barbie-proportioned women. As teenagers, we knew about those places - they let in guys who were only seventeen, sometimes sixteen, so long as they paid. And we did. But I found Harlequin Dreams by mistake. It's amazing what people find when it rains, the places people retreat to in a downpour. In my case, it was down a little alleyway that I never knew existed before. The lights were what I saw first, warming the streets with a fuzzy orange glow. I'd barely made it across the threshold when I was apprehended by a mammoth of a man. A hulking shape, but his face was obscured with the beak and feathers of a crow. 'Where's your mask?'

'Sorry?'

'No mask, no entry.'

'I'm sorry but I didn't - '

The bouncer thrust a cardboard box in front of me, nodding his long black nose at the colourful contents. Masks, and lots of them; full-faced animals, Venetian faces, disguises of feathers and glitter. I removed the fox face, alarmed at the matted fur, so convincingly real. This mask eventually became my identity; not a disguise, but who I would be known as at Harlequin Dreams. 'Why the mask?'

Exclusively anonymous. No conversations passed between client and star, no faces or voices to be recognised at work or on the street. Anonymity meant absolute safety.

Harlequin Dreams was a bubble of burlesque fantasies; impossible waists, heart-shaped pasties and mermaids splashing in martini glasses. It was a classy place - the kind of atmosphere that drew in groups of women with low self-esteem and couples who planned to copy dances in the bedroom. Me, I just liked the sounds and the sights. Ripe women on a stage, flaunting flesh and teasing with boas and gloves. The band played hearty

songs from the 20s, big numbers from the 50s, and smooth renditions of popular pop. Everything sounds better from a big brass band.

The night I made my discovery, I took a seat by the side of the stage; a table that became my own spot: ample light, ample sight, without appearing greedy like the men in the front row. The anticipation of the audience rose as the lights dipped. Candles flickered gently and cast grey shadows the shape of my whisky glass.

I'll always remember the first time I saw her. She burst onto the stage like poetry:

Sequins in her eyes
Glitter on her thighs
Feathers on her heart;
A sparkling work of art.

Fleur wasn't like the others, they told me. She wasn't trying to be discovered as an actress, and she never had interests in modelling. Fleur de Lis just wanted to dance.

When she left the stage, everything was mute. People were applauding but I couldn't hear the sound. *Fly Me to the Moon* still drifted between my ears and I was still watching Fleur dance on an empty stage. My thoughts only returned to reality half-way through another performance: a sprightly little thing in a tartan skirt. But where was Fleur? Not serving drinks, or flirting by the bar, not chatting by the toilet door or waving staff goodnight.

Next time I spruced up; the Fantastic Mr Fox in a tailored suit. The last time I'd worn it was for my grandfather's funeral (the order of service was folded in the jacket pocket) but I knew he'd only be proud that his grandson was wearing it to woo the one he loved.

And I did. I loved her. Fleur de Lis with her round calves and painted toes. Her very image sketched on my retinas; a sweetheart halter neckline and a tutu of tulle and feathers. Love at first sight is a confused cliché, and I knew that, but what is more romantic than a pair of star crossed lovers? The problem was getting her to see me. There was no knowing if the dancers could see their audience; their attention was on the boxes of lingerie and bouquets of flowers spread across the forestage. It pained me, but if that was the only way to be noticed...

So I brought the biggest bouquet of red roses a man could find, a small box with a diamond ring and a ribboned bag of chocolate – all those so-called secrets to a woman’s heart.

There was Fleur, every inch of her body sparkling softly beneath the stage lights. When you wish upon a star. White teeth bit into the ends of a glove. Blue shoes shimmered, white feathers dropped. My gifts spread out beneath her feet, a blanket of dreams. Tread softly, Fleur. I’d never more desperately wanted to rip off an item of clothing in my life. If I could just take that turquoise mask, discover the hidden depths beneath, then I would be a very happy man. Such things have happened before at Harlequin Dreams, but not without a man losing his eyesight and access to the club. There could be no worse offence.

I frequented the club so often that before long I was privy to small snippets of information: where costumes came from, where the girls came from, and how to have one on one time with a dancer. Strictly, it was breaking the rules, but the barmen knew the ways around them.

‘Fleur de Lis?’ The barman sucked air through his teeth from behind a badger’s face. ‘That’ll cost you a pretty penny. You’ll need to be really careful.’

But the challenge was such a small price to pay for time alone with the love of my life. I worked in a bakery those days, just your average job selling rolls and yum yums at the weekend. That, and my parents had been saving my pocket money for the proverbial rainy day. Five hundred pounds for fifteen minutes, and they turned out to be the best fifteen minutes of my life.

Imagine the most beautiful woman you’ve ever seen. Picture hair, shoulders, elbows, ankles. That girl has nothing on my Fleur de Lis; that I can guarantee. My palms were sweating as I took my seat, my own little stage set up in one of the backstage dressing rooms. I struggled to undo the buttons of my coat, my skin was hot and itchy beneath the fox mask and I was consciously worried that the room would soon smell of nervous sweat and dead animal.

But Fleur had a way of changing the atmosphere the moment she was within sight. Carefully she pulled herself across the table, presenting herself on a makeshift stage complete with tablecloth. Her eyes skimmed past me only briefly, but I chose to believe that she recognised the fox, that she knew who I was. I decided that she was smiling beneath her mouthless mask. Fleur writhed on the table, slithering up and down, charmed like a snake.

Professional and mythical trapped in one celestial body. Doing anything quickly or smoothly with shaking hands is bound to go wrong, and sure enough I dropped the paper and pen I'd brought with me. Leaning over in my chair, my hands stretched across the carpeted floor while my eyes refused to miss a second of the spectacle. Writing without looking at the page is difficult too, and still I don't know if the message I wrote was in any way legible.

I love you, it should have read, and I want to take you away from here. I want to set you free and make you mine.

No word of a lie; I meant every character I scribbled across that page. She paused as I held it in front of my chest, but she didn't forget to keep bending her knees or shaking her shoulders. There was a thumping at the door, and once again I found myself victim to Time – that cruel way he speeds things up when I'm enjoying myself. Fleur tiptoed from the room, and I was left again feeling like something important had been ripped from beneath my skin.

'Mum, do you happen to know how much money I've got left saved?' She was sitting on the living room sofa, an empty Sudoku open on her lap.

'What for? You got plenty the other day.' Dad brushed past me in the doorway, flopping next to Mum on the couch and retrieving the abandoned puzzle. 'Hear that, John? Your son is asking for even more money.'

'Eh? What for?'

Mum nodded her that's-what-I-said head.

'I just *need* it, okay? It's really important.' I probably should have lied from the offset, but I found myself waiting for my parents to ask more questions, which they didn't. '*Seriously*. I need it. Otherwise...'

'Otherwise, what?' Their heads both turned at once, Dad's eyes owl huge behind his glasses.

'Well...I'm in trouble.'

'See that, Linda? He's gone and got himself into drugs. I told you that would happen.'

'Oh, and this is supposed to be my fault? *My* fault?'

They say that if you're really angry, it's best to slowly count to ten under your breath, in your head, and you'll feel calmer. It works. 'Look, I'm not doing drugs. I just really need that money or I'm going to be in big trouble.'

'Stealing then?' Mum has a habit of her voice rising pitch along with level. Dad and I winced: that's how we know that we're really in trouble.

'Not stealing, not nothing. I just need it. Urgently. For the bank.'

'At this time in the day? Banks are closed. It can wait.' Dad sighed heavily, always one for hating any involvement with banks or loans or overdrafts. 'I'll transfer some through in the morning.'

Clearly nothing was going according to plan. The prospect of drugs had never appealed to me, but perhaps stealing wasn't such a bad idea after all. 'Okay. Thanks, Dad.' Hanging my head like the shameful sheep that I was, bowing at my guilty confession. My parents' attention turned back to the television, as I knew it would, Mum complaining quietly about my dad doing another night shift between soft chuckles at *Have I Got News for You*.

So I wasn't doing drugs, but I was addicted, and I couldn't care less. What side effects are there from loving too hard? Fleur was only good for my health; a superfood. The only problem was that I needed more, right there and then. If I didn't have her soon I would die, I was sure of it. Back to the stealing, and I stole my way into my parent's bedroom, hoping they'd be crazy enough to keep their savings hidden beneath the mattress. No such luck.

Dad's study, on the other hand, is an Aladdin's cave of locked drawers and cabinets: things too boring to break into ordinarily. As I rattled handles it occurred to me that the grey IKEA room had never held any interest to me before. After all, what could I care about Dad's mundane job? Not even Mum cared enough to be able to tell me what he actually did. Maybe she didn't know either.

My mission was beginning to look futile when I noticed the flash of blue out of the corner of my eye. A single turquoise feather protruded from the cabinet beneath the desk. But what drew me to it was the fact that it was not any turquoise – it was the turquoise of my dreams. My own father was my enemy. Infatuation prevented me from leaving, and I tugged at the feather only to produce a line of more. With difficulty I tugged the boa from between the doors, feathers and glitter floating to rest on the grey carpet. I grabbed scissors from the pencil stand on the desk and did my utmost to wrench the metal drawer open.

There she was; the object of my every thought and the inspiration of my every heartbeat. First a feather boa, then a sequined set of lingerie, two blue peep toe shoes, glittering in the street light filtered through the blinds.

Like a dream I took the *piece de resistance*, and held in my hand the mask of Fleur de Lis: beauty extraordinaire. I placed the mask over my own face, inhaling a scent made of Fleur and home. My breath sighed hot on my lips.

Dad's slippared footsteps made their heavy ascent, and as fast as I could I put the costume back. On the landing, my arm and leg were smeared with silver glitter that flashed beneath the bare bulb. Dad stepped towards me, licking a finger before dabbing at a spot of glitter on my eyelid. 'It's a woman, isn't it?' His voice was soft, because he knew he understood – the money, the late nights, the desperation. 'You know, you can always come to talk to me about these things.'

I could, and I couldn't. The five hundred pounds waited for another day.



Ask Louise



A new monthly column in which Louise Welsh, novelist, playwright, performer and Writer in Residence, tackles our niggling dilemmas. To pitch your own problems to Louise for next month's issue, visit <http://glasgowtosaturn.com/ask-louise>

Q: Can you make your main characters do what you want them to do, or once you've created them, do they act independently and even surprise you?
Nick from Stirling

A: Dear Nick,

I once heard Muriel Spark answering this question. She said, 'I have heard that characters can run away from their authors, but on the whole I think it's best if I'm in charge.' She's right of course, writers should be in charge. Aren't we the gods of our own universe? And yet believable characters cannot be made to do things that are against their nature simply to service the plot without becoming puppets. So no, my characters don't act independently (I made them up Nick) but they do sometimes surprise me with little acts of rebellion.

Q: I'm writing a novel set in the 1960's – do you have any tips for carrying out research so that I can accurately capture the time period?

Alan from Glenrothes

A: Hi Alan,

Music, taste and texture are really important to me when I'm writing. As an extremist I'm a bit of a fan of the immersive technique. Read books and magazines from your period. Think of what is going on politically at the time. Get a hold of sixties recipe books, haunt the Barras and vintage clothing shops. Now comes the difficult bit: resist telling your readers everything your research has revealed. But remember, adults in the sixties were not all up-to-date hipsters, they were children of the fifties, poor sods.

Q: When the plot in a novel requires one character to deliver a lengthy speech – for instance while re-telling events or reminiscing – what other devices can you suggest to indicate direct speech, other than conventional speech marks?

Sheila from Largs

A: Hello Sheila,

Hmmm, the lengthy speech problem. Personally I am not convinced that it matters what punctuation you use to denote speech as long as you are consistent and the layout is clear enough for readers to avoid confusion. What is essential is that the character's voice must be present and interesting enough to keep readers engaged through the lengthy speech. My main advice is to ask yourself: do I need a lengthy speech?

Louise Welsh is the author of three novels: *The Cutting Room* (2002), *The Bullet Trick* (2006) and *Naming the Bones* (March 2010), and one novella, *Tamburlaine Must Die* (2004), all published by Canongate Books. She's also produced many short stories and articles and written for radio and the stage including a libretto for opera. For more information, visit <http://www.louisewelsh.com>.

Clydebuilt

by Elly Farrelly

Crankshaft and piston. Hard words roll
Off the tongues of the island men.
Unschool'd, they carry their knowledge
Like grime, in the folds of their skin,
In the creases of their hands. Geometry
is instinct. Physics they have by heart.
And the miracle of setting iron and steel
Upon the water is well within their grasp.

Sons of the sea. Of Vikings and fishermen,
Ferryman and adventurers. A boat is after all
a boat. This much they have learned.
Their work done, they can only stand by
And watch as she vanishes, escaping to a point
Beyond the horizon. (The hulk upon the river is
Always inexplicably female)

Queen Mary, Queen Mary...

Downstream sailing, in search of a better life
In the huddle of tenements: Black-smoked
Inside and out. Hole-in-the wall beds
In a single-end. Five to a room and a fight
On the stair-head on Friday night,
When pay day comes around. Again.
Pay out the bills and send something home.
They find ways to hold out a little longer.



The Lift

by Donald Ferguson

The lift door opened and a penguin shuffled into the lobby. It stood for a minute facing the wall and then began to shoogle. The plastic bag it held in one flipper clinked. It kept shoogling until it was facing the door again. A flipper reached up but fell short of the button.

'Goin up?' The penguin nodded. I pressed the button. 'Could you no reach the buttons in the lift?' Nod, nod, clink. 'What floor are you goin to? You could tap out the number with a flipper.' One of the flippers flapped fourteen times. 'I'll press the number for you when the lift comes.'

I could hear the lift groaning and shuddering. Bugger off and leave me alone, it said. I pressed the button again. When we moved to Sighthill I imagined that the lift door would open Star Trek-style. Whoosh.

The lift arrived and convulsed to a stop. The door jerked three quarters open and stuck. On a good day it wafted disinfected pish. The penguin waddled in and I waddled behind it. I kept the door open. 'Whit's in the bag, son?' Two framed eyes stared at me. I would guess the penguin was no older than nine. I stood on one of its flippers.

'Let's see what you've got.' The penguin handed over the bag. Four cans of Nukie and two bottles of Merrydown.

'You're too young for this stuff. Bad for the brain cells. You can enjoy yourself without gettin stocious, you know.' I pressed the button for the eighteenth floor and clinked my way out to the lobby. Part of the learning process, for the boy that is. At his age he should know better than to wander the concrete tundra with a bag of goodies. Bound to be spotted by a bear.

Just as the door closed the odd lift arrived and out shuffles Shug. Shug had been part of the landscape since primary school. We had grown up in the same street in Maryhill, got married in the same month and landed a flat in the same multi. What are the odds?

'Is that a carry oot in the bag?'

'Naw, a couple of bottles of Irn Bru. For the wean.'

'Ya lying bastard. Where's the party?'

Now there's a thought. A wee do. But Eilidh would do the nut if we had it in our place. 'Whit about your place Shug? Mine's off limits.'

Shug is standing with one foot jamming the lift door. He likes to take a few minutes before committing himself to the outside world. Sometimes he steps out into the lobby, turns round and goes back into the lift. He can go up and down in the lift for hours. He says it makes him feel safe and it gets him out the house.

'No can do.' Shug looked up for inspiration. He was wearing his furry army hat and Russian Front coat and looked like a soviet statue catching a

glimpse of the workers' utopian future. 'Sandra's a wee bit delicate this weather.'

'Right Shug, we'll think of somethin, but there's just you and me so far.'

'We could ask Windy Millar. Three's the quorum for a party and I've an idea where we could have it. You still got that tranny?'

'Aye.'

'Right I'll phone Windy, you bring booze, the tranny and yourself. Take the odd lift to the eighteenth floor. Half eight. See you there.'

'Who do you know on the top floor Shug?'

'Naebody.'

Shug stepped back into the lift. 'See you the ni...'

At half eight, carry out in hand, tranny tucked under oxtail, I pressed the button for the odd lift. I was wondering what Shug had in mind for our wee swallie. Still I've been to a few strange places for a drink: the toilet with my ma's miniatures, the abandoned dyke in the back court, numerous closes, bushes, a concrete pipe and some hairy pubs. But when I stepped out the lift on the eighteenth floor you could have knocked me over with a pigeon. Shug had a curtain spread over the open door of the even lift; it was strung across a wire that hooked onto the lift at either end. A hand written 'out of order' sign hung on the 'call' button. Inside the lift the 'hold door open' button had a black X of electricians tape on it. There were three chairs in the lift, Shug on one. Windy on another. Three glasses sat on the third.

'Come on in,' said Shug. 'Have a seat, put the tranny on.'

'Aye,' said Windy. 'Make yourself at home.'

'I like her,' said Shug.

'Does Sandra know?'

'Her on the tin – the Tennents bird. Here, haud this.' Shug handed me an unopened bottle of Teachers. 'I was keeping it tae wet the wean's head.' Baptised in the name of the Father and the Son and the 40% Spirit. 'Put a couple of fingers in the glass fur me.'

'Whit made you think of this?'

'Only here and the ground floor have two lifts. The rest of us have tae make do wae the wan.'

'Listen tae that.'

'Listen tae whit?' Shug tilted his head.

'The dryin area. Even wae the tranny on you can hear the wind howling. Whit a waste of space.'

'Ah don't know' said Shug. 'Good fur pigeons. I like pigeons. Ma cousin's built a doo loft in his drying area.'

Windy finished another bottle of Nukie. 'Aye and they're good fur a bracing winch as well. A wee bit privity'

'Jist cause you're afraid tae take a bird intae your house.'

The Nukie bottle banged on to the floor of the lift. 'Enjoying work these days?'

Shug pretended the question was aimed at him.

'We're goin on constant nightshift. We don't work for the Record anymore, some fuckin, whit was it, aye, sub contractor. But he's got his place next tae the power station – less of a journey. Silver lining says Sandra. An it's good money.' Shug had a slug of whisky and leaned over. 'I could get you a weekend job as a paper boy. No like what a kid does, you wid be helping to load the vans – and then ye go on the run and take the papers frae the van tae the shop. Ye get extra money for working nights and working Sundays and sometimes you finish early.'

'Thanks Shug, leave it wae me. Don't say anything tae Eilidh while I'm thinking about it.' A desire for some Newcastle suggested itself.

'Windy, whit happened tae the Nukie?'

'Here, have some of the Merrydown. This is great', said Windy. 'Turn the tranny up. I like that song. Marvin Gaye is it?'

'Lee Marvin stupit, no Marvin Gaye.'

'They've started tae sing it at the match.' Windy joined in the chorus. 'Try tae imagine the tune.'

'I was born under a Union Jack. I was born under a Union Jack. Do you know where hell is? Hell is in the Falls. Heaven is in the Shanklyn Road and we'll guard old Derry's walls.'

'Fucksake, no so loud. This isn't Maryhill. These places are mixed.'

'My da's beliefs are mixed. Twice he has blessed me with unsolicited advice. I pass his gems on for your consideration. Number one – "Son, never marry a Catholic." Number two – "Don't believe any of that God stuff."'

'Is that a flipper?'

The cloth across the lift twitched and then there was a ripping sound. The curtain was torn in two – from top to bottom.

'Whit in the name...!' Shug froze mid-swallow and Windy's song miscarried. Two wee eyes stared at the stairs. A hulking apparition began to take shape step by step. The penguin had brought the abominable snowman with him. Normally I would have said that the odds were in our favour, but then the abominable snowman would have to duck to get in the lift. 'Dae something,' said Windy. So I picked up the first thing to hand and threw it beak first at the snowman.

'Hit the button Shug!' Windy tore the tape off the 'hold' button and Shug stabbed the G. Abominable steadied himself and picked up the penguin. The lift door shut.

'He was big.'

'You think so Shug?'

'And he was wearing a Celtic top.'

Windy checked the seat of his trousers for any wet patches. 'There was a tattoo on his arm. I believe it evoked divine blessing upon the head of the Catholic Church.'

'He had a penguin with him.'

'That was the penguin's Newcastle we were drinkin.'

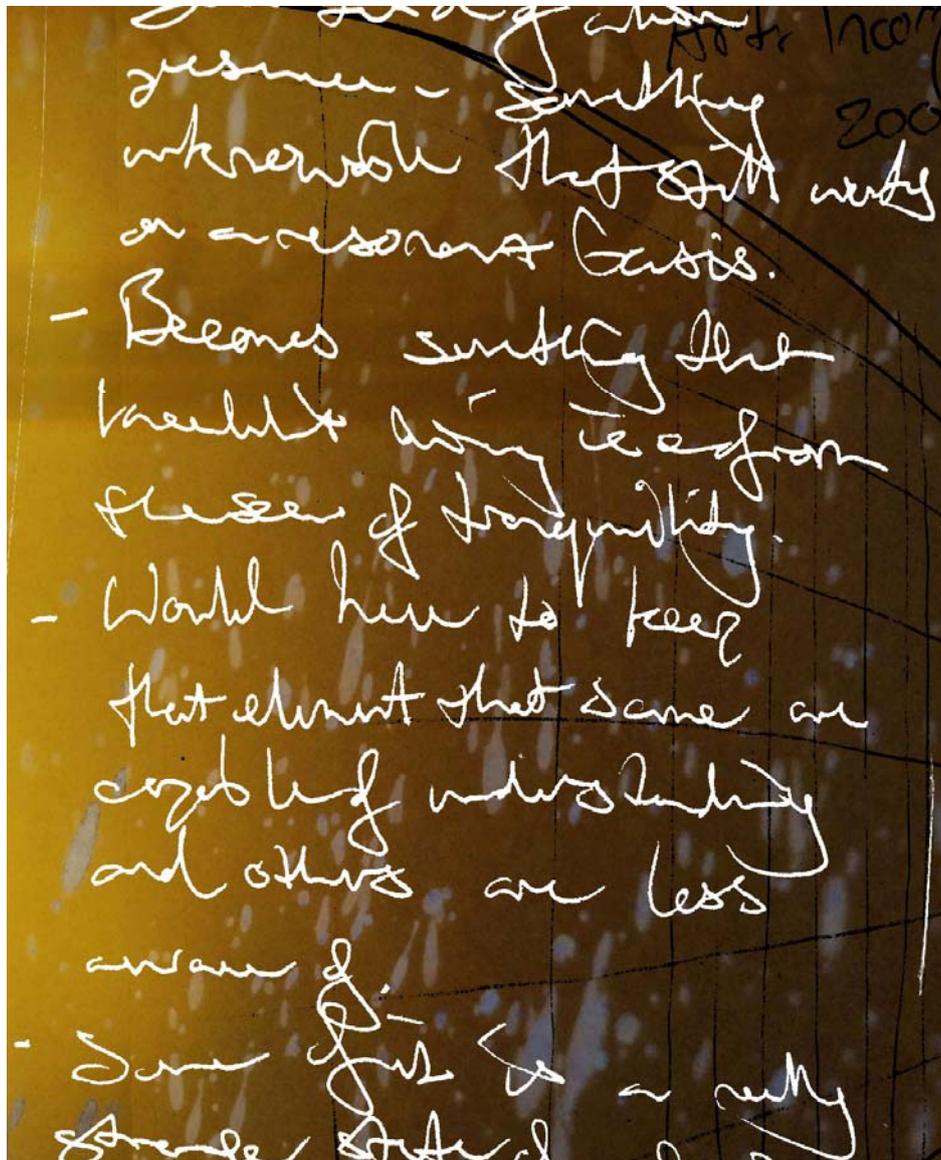
'Friend of yours?'

'And the cider - that was his too. Press the button for the second floor.'

'Your place?'

'And leave the remains of the carry out in the lift.'

'An offering tae the Gods,' said Shug.



View from the Interior by Vivien Jones

For sixty two years,
my quiet heart has pumped
without faltering,
my lungs have taken
and given breath,
other organs keeping up.

My outsides have fattened,
sagged where gravity
pulled on the excess,
red patches on my ankles,
purple filament veins
surfacing on thighs.

But loose me in life,
let the view sting my eyes,
the air flow over me, the sky blaze.
From the inside, I am the babe
that gurgled with new life,
the infant that walked true,

the girl that sang to trees,
the woman who twirled,
dancing into men's hearts,
becoming lover, then mother.
Nothing inside is changed,
I am still butterfly.



Parched

by Nasim Marie Jafry

I introduced him to the pleasures of tea long ago: he didn't like Lapsang Souchong; he said it was like drinking boiled fish. It makes me think of camping, I said, the smokiness. You've never been camping, he replied.

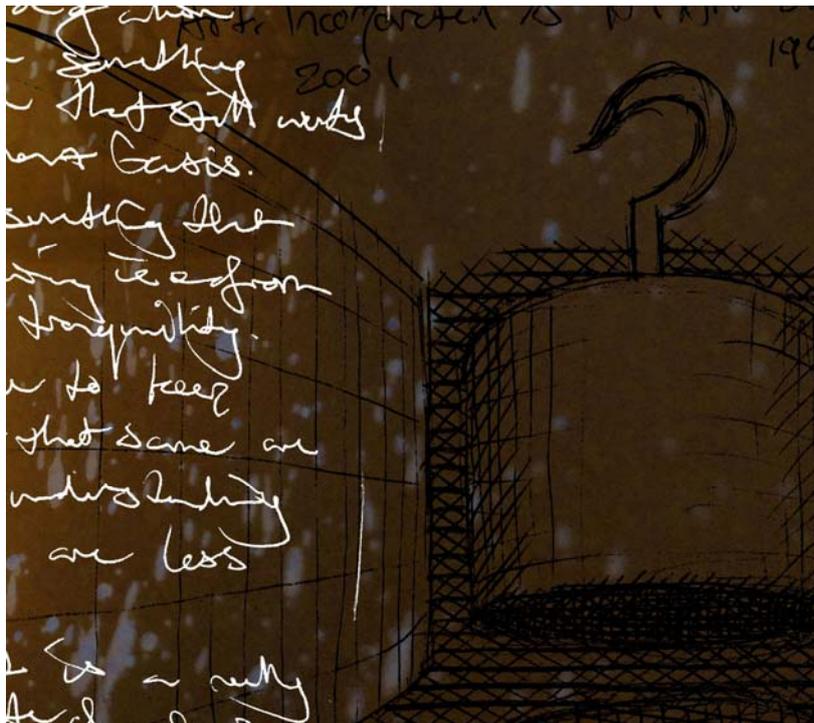
He turns my drinking into a crime: tea bags spilling everywhere from colourful little boxes offering beauty and comfort. He once told me, I think you're only truly happy when you're crying into a cup of tea, with the cat as your only fucking friend.

I like seeing people in films drinking tea, especially if the camera zooms in on the cup and saucer; and I like when characters in novels drink tea. It makes you want to be there, part of someone else's story.

It was romantic the way his affair started. He had ventured in to buy the perfunctory cashmere sweater for my fortieth birthday. She'd folded the garment carefully in tissue paper and he was mesmerised by lacquered nails fingering soft grey wool.

Last weekend, we stuck pink feathers in our hair like garlands, my nephew and I. We're lizards! he said, crawling under the table. He beckoned to me: *Be a lizard!* I didn't follow him under the table, but it's tempting now, the thought of being a lizard, scaled and armoured – darting.

Escaping from this parchedness.



Two Poems by Paul Joseph Abbott

Re. Ships

after Rimbaud

Yours is still, as is the water
There's singing from the deck
A little dancing, too.
Clouds are clenched above, full and purple.
Once there was mackerel, petrified
Shining and flailing in a jitter-wave on the hull
Pulled from the sea, but not entangled in a net
Just free and flapping against rough and grainy mango.

Kindle

After not stopping him
Helping even
Lifting her hips
Keeping her lips
Where he found them
She disturbs the few things taken from her –
Underwear, hair grip, a watch
She placed on the floor
(a moment that paused a moment)
– Things that became the scene
From the spark
To the squib
Maybe she knew he would write this down
She made a scene of it.

Odd,
He recalled his mother's corpse
He was not holding a bible this time
But a bottle of wine
The edge of a table.

Tears insist in the same way
(why do we resist?)
And words like never, eternity
Remember their meaning.



Sunset on Skye **by Ellen Glasgow**

A pink ring of Rum sunset,
The glory of the end of the day
There is nothing more stunning than watching
The heavens kiss the sea.

In the café the owner tells us
That life's just so different out here –
The cares of the day are measured,
The pressures less competing and fierce.
But you won't see the fishing boats
Coming in tonight –
There's a boy missing off Uist,
Anyone able has gone to look.

A creeping awkwardness,
The place falls silent, eyes shift.
And I sense that I alone don't know his name.
She goes back to clearing the table.

Out there in the isles,
They still live and die by the sea.
I will stand in uneasy solidarity for the lost boy.
A common faith –
Yet an outsider to their
Close and certain grief.

Adulteress

by Katy McAulay

Don't talk to her about guilt. Don't even say the word. You can only feel that if you believe you owe someone something. Truth or love or fidelity. And how can you owe anyone if you never made the promise in the first place?

There's a lot to be said for saying nothing these days. She learned that young. It's one of the reasons why she's so good at her job. It's a skill – keeping quiet – something she puts to use everyday, releasing and recording terrible stories from the mouths of criminals and victims for *Real Life Stories Magazine*.

The things people will tell you, she always says. It's enough to make you sit down in the street. Enough to make you put a gun to your head. And when you think that, finally, the confession's all out, that there's no information left to vomit, that's when you have to be quiet. You don't say a word then. The trick is to be absolutely silent, no more questions, because that is when they will open their mouths and they will say something more awful than even they thought they were prepared to share. We're all animals, don't ever think anything else.

And the power in that, her ability to say nothing, it's one of the reasons why Douglas fell for her so hard, and so fast. But if you asked her, if anybody asked her what she was doing carrying on with a married man, sat her down at the kitchen table with a cup of tea and said it to her face – *what d'you think you're playing at?* – then she could justify herself. Just give her the chance.

She'd say: you can't understand.

She'd say: it's not like I make a habit of this.

She'd say: this is too big; it's too romantic for normal rules.

With the desperate certainty of the unfaithful everywhere, she'd say: I'm a good person. I worked hard at school and I got the grades and I didn't complain when there wasn't enough money for me to go to art college. I found a job because I was prepared to work hard for the minimum wage until they understood that I'm good at what I do. I turn up for that job – punctually – every day, and in the evenings I enjoy myself with the allocated time and money that I have, and I call my mother every week, and I give money to Amnesty International every month. I pay my bills on time and I don't dodge council tax like everyone else does, and I go for dental checks every six

months. I try not to complain, I don't ask anything of anyone, and I succeed in not ripping up every piece of administrative correspondence that flops onto my doorstep each morning in a blind rage that my life has turned out to be so ordinary, so why should I not be allowed this tiny space of happiness in which to be something more than me, in which to be invisible and free?

She'd say: everybody needs something. Maybe it's a gaggle of babies, a bag of pills or an Olympic medal. Maybe a fortnight in the south of France will tide you over for the next year, or a win on the races. Maybe even playing the races is enough.

This married man? He's my thing. He's what makes me special. So I'll make you a deal. Don't question my thing, and I won't question yours.

If only you gave her the chance, she'd say all of this, with a gorgeous expression of defiance on her face, too. And when she'd finished talking, you'd be within your rights to put down your cup of tea, look her in the eye and ask her: what the hell has that got to do with *anything*?



Erratics

by Mandy Haggith

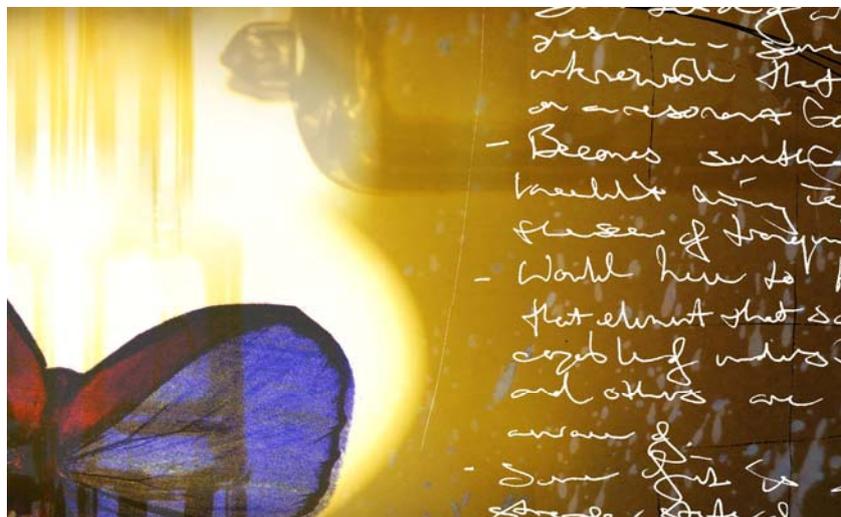
The boy, Mish, is throwing stones into a hollow. He picked them off the ground and is tossing them one by one, trying to place them accurately in the lower part of the dip so they form a small cone in the centre like a volcano re-emerging from a crater.

Mish's grandfather, watching him, says, "Do you see that big lump of quartzite there?" He is pointing to the angular, whiteish rock, taller than Mish, over to his right. Then his arm swings round to a pinkish rough-looking uneven boulder on the next knoll, up above the pebble-hollow. "And that big bit of sandstone?"

"Aye," says Mish. He knows what is coming.

"Long ago, before people came here, this was where giants lived and one of them used to throw chuckies, just like you're doing now. You can't trust giants. You can tell by their names. You know how dwarfs all have little names like Sleepy and Glum. Well, giants all have big long names like Unreliable, Forgetful and Dysfunctional. And whose rocks are these?"

It has become conventional for Mish, at this point, to fill in the punchline of the story. But he has reached the age where he no longer wants to do so, and the story has now been told so many times it no longer really needs completion. Perhaps it is no longer worth retelling at all. Maybe Mish's grandfather has other stories that he has not passed on, that he should tell instead, or possibly the urgency has gone and they are all told. Mish leaves the silence hanging and tosses his last stone.



Author Biographies

Iain Maloney lives in Japan and his work features in the latest issues of *Gutter*, *Modern Haiku*, *Presence*, *Southpaw Literary Journal* and *Poetic Diversity*. His novel, *Dog Mountain*, needs a home. He holds an MPhil in Creative Writing from Glasgow University.

Mairi McCloud is an undergraduate student from America. She is studying Archaeology, Gaelic and Celtic. She was raised with a strong sense of her Scottish heritage and is happy to be living in Glasgow.

Amy Rafferty is a postgraduate student of Creative Writing at Glasgow University. She is also the baby in the graveyard scene of the original *Wicker Man* movie but she doesn't like to talk about it.

Bethany Anderson is a student on the MLitt Creative Writing course. She lives in Edinburgh where she is fulfilling the dream of the penniless writer/reader/book reviewer. Bethany is one of the Guardian's circle of Edinburgh Literary Bloggers. She has also very recently finished the first draft of her first novel and would like to thank *Misters Tea and Chocolate* for guiding her creativity.

Elly Farrelly has recently completed an MSc in Teaching Adults at Glasgow University and currently works at an FE College.

Donald Ferguson is 54 years old, married with two children and has recently left teaching to help care for his elderly mother-in-law. He has a fine Glasgow pedigree: born in a single end in Maryhill; moved to Sighthill aged 11; father from the Gallowgate; mother from Govan. He graduated from Glasgow University in 1985 with an upper second in Medieval and Modern History.

Vivien Jones lives on the north Solway shore in Scotland. She graduated (MA Hons) from the Crichton Campus of Glasgow University in 2006. In August 2010 she won the Poetry London Prize. She has been awarded a Writer's Bursary from Creative Scotland for her next project on the theme of *women amongst warriors*.

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://www.velo-gubbed-legs.blogspot.com>.

Paul Joseph Abbott has lived in England, Australia, China and India. He is presently studying full time for his MLitt in Creative Writing.

Katy McAulay writes novels, short fiction and short scripts. Escape is often the theme for her work. Since graduating from the Masters in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow in 2006, she has been an Arts Council writer-in-residence at Cove Park, Scotland, and a Fellow of the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, USA. Her short film – *Floating is Easy* – premiered at Palm Springs International Short Film Festival in 2009 and was awarded best drama at the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival. She is currently working on a novel. Find out more at www.katymcaulay.com.

Ellen Glasgow graduated in 2007 in English Language and History at Glasgow University, and followed this by studying for an MLitt in History the next year. She remains at Glasgow University as a PhD student.

Mandy Haggith is a writer who lives on a woodland croft in Assynt, in the northwest Highlands of Scotland. She graduated from the MLitt in Creative Writing in 2005. Her first novel, *The Last Bear* (Two Ravens Press), won the Robin Jenkins Literary Award in 2009. She also has two published collections of poetry (*letting light in*: Essencepress 2005 and *Castings*: Two Ravens Press 2007). She has spent much of the past two years writing about fire, ice and stones in Assynt, thanks to a Scottish Arts Council writer's bursary.