

From Glasgow to Saturn



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Front cover: 'Big Horsey Heads' by James Bligh

www.saltbyjames.co.uk

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Letter from the Editors

Issue 34 brings our editorship to a close, and we're so pleased to end on what we think is a particularly strong issue.

We attempted a theme of 'the Commonwealth' for issue 34, asking for submissions in any format. An exciting opportunity to team up with Commonwealth Voices, a project run by a classmate on the MLitt course, meant that the opportunity was there for writers to have their pieces both published and produced for radio. A few weeks after opening submissions, though, it became apparent that the theme was not capturing imaginations the way we had expected! We are able to admit that this was a failed idea for FGTS, and that the quality of writing we received outwith the theme meant we were quite happy to crack on with an un-themed final issue. With that said, you can read James and Martin's pieces here before popping over to the [Sub City radio channel](#) to hear them read for radio, and indulge yourself in the other excellent pieces that were included in Commonwealth Voices.

We are also proud that we have extracts from the three finalists in the Sceptre Prize. Kev, Stephanie and Paul kindly agreed to let us publish examples from their novels in progress. Kev and Stephanie were thrilled to be runners-up, and Paul deservedly won the award. We wish each of them our most heartfelt congratulations. Make sure to look out for their novels on bookshelves near you very soon!

The cover photo was provided to us by talented photographer, James Bligh. Depicting the Kelpies at Falkirk, we felt it was a fitting image for an issue coming out just as the eyes of the world turn to Scotland- and a suitable nod to Kev's extract. More of James' photos can be found on his website, [Salt By James](#).

We hope you enjoy issue 34 as much as we have enjoyed curating it. We've loved our time with From Glasgow to Saturn so much and can only look forward to seeing how it continues to grow in the future.

Happy reading.

Jemma Beedie | Lotte Mitchell Reford | Jordan Mulligan

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

James Carson

This is not going to be funny. In fact, it may well come as a terrible shock.

By way of a warning to those of you still at the breakfast table, you might want to empty your mouth of Pop Tarts and vodka, as the following report contains flashing images (which is to say, images of flashing) and other material likely to make sensitive types spew their comestibles onto their iPads.

So, here goes:

It is with profound sadness that I must announce I will not be lining up for the final of the 100 metres at this year's Commonwealth Games. My participation in the triathlon and the rhythmic gymnastics is also in doubt.

I understand that this will cause consternation, not to say hysteria of the kind only seen after a North Korean demigod with a bad haircut pops his clogs. But to delay the announcement any further would merely have toyed with a nation's expectations to a cruel and inhumane level not experienced since Wayne Rooney's metatarsal pushed the Puerto Rican budget crisis off the front pages.

The sad truth is, the verruca is simply not responding as quickly to treatment as my medical team had hoped. My consultant, Mr Hawker-Siddeley, has been traversing the world to find a miracle cure for this debilitating (and bloody painful) condition. Sadly, his passion for life-enhancing drugs has resulted in him being banged up (I choose my words carefully) in a Vietnamese penitentiary. His lawyer, Mrs Cammell-Laird, informs me that it's unlikely he'll breathe the sweet air of liberty before the opening of the Commonwealth Games. In 2038.

Further factors rule me out as a medal contender in the athletics (and probably also the weightlifting and the bobsleigh). Factors like: I'm a 51-year old weakling with a fondness for Pop Tarts and vodka. Factors like I've got the stamina of a goldfish and the coordination of a baby elephant on roller skates. Factors like that.

Yes, yes, the country will be dismayed at my absence from this mighty sportsfest. Flags will be half-masted, tears will be shed. There may even be a tribute put on after Newsnight Scotland. But, to be honest, I'm not that fussed. As a youngster, I was never what you'd call sporty. I once spent an unfruitful afternoon orbiting the school's running track before the jannie finally came out and informed me there was no half time whistle in athletics. And I still haven't recovered from the day the games teacher gave us a demonstration of waxing his javelin (I did warn you about those flashing images).

As far as I'm concerned major sports events like the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games suffer from one major flaw: they contain far too much sport.

If I had my way, the whole two weeks would be taken up with a jamboree of celebrity torch-lighting, burly men in uniforms conveying flags up and down priapic poles, diversity choirs singing national anthems, and day-long parades of national teams wearing low-key costumes designed by Jean Paul Gaultier. There might just be time for a (very) brief netball match, before the main event: the Closing Ceremonies.

Which is why I'm looking forward to seeing how Glasgow is going to handle the biggest event to hit the city since it hosted the 14th World Orchid Conference in 1993.

I consider myself to be something of a connoisseur of opening ceremonies. I still have happy memories of senoritas doing unspeakable things with castanets at the opening of the Olympics in Mexico City. And, even now, sadness spills from my eyes as I recall the Seoul Olympics of 1988, when the doves of peace were fricasseed to death after their flight path took them into the Olympic cauldron.

How can Glasgow possibly follow that?

Well, I'm glad you asked.

The good news is, now that I'm out of contention for the 100 metres (and the powerboat racing is probably a non-starter as well), I'll be available to give my wealth, nay, my Commonwealth, of experience to the serious business of ceremony.

I've been keeping this under wraps, but now it's time to unveil my masterplan for the opening of Glasgow

2014.

It's July 23, the height of summer, on a balmy Glasgow afternoon. The morning snow has finally melted and the fog has cleared to reveal Parkhead in all its glory. "Ooh," says the crowd.

The stadium is hushed as, at the centre of the arena, a vessel can be made out, making its way across a synthetic River Clyde. As the light grows, the crowd almost self-combusts with the realisation that this is a full-size replica of the late, great George Wylie's paper boat. Even more exciting, the boat has an occupant. The camera zooms in to focus on the familiar silver hair and tell-tale tiara.

In the stadium, a wee man in a tartan bunnet nudges his wife.

"That'll be the Queen," he says.

"Away!" says the wee man in the tartan bunnet's wife.

But it is. The crowd look on in astonishment, watching something they never imagined they'd live to witness: Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth is being transported across Celtic Park in a paper boat. Everyone agrees it is the most magnificent entrance by a head of state ever, ever, ever, ever made to any major sport event, ever (so, up yours, Vladimir Putin).

Her Majesty joins Prince Philip and the hangers on in the royal box, and prepares to be dazzled by the rest of the ceremony.

There's a bit of highland dancing, your pipes, your Phil Cunninghams, your Aly Bains, your Jackie Birds. Then, out of the darkness comes a long-forgotten figure. Appearing before huge map of Scotland, she begins to speak. The crowd is transported back to the golden age of meteorology, for it is none other than Heather the Weather.

Smiling happily, she promises an occluded front, spits and spots of rain and even highs of seven degrees (which everyone agrees is stretching the definition of high to breaking point). She says cheerio, and gives a cheeky wee wink, the way she always did (in some of our imaginations), and then sets light to the Queen's Baton.

This is the first faux pas of the evening, as she was actually supposed to present it to the Queen, and not turn it into an Olympic torch, since this is (clearly) not the Olympics.

Her Majesty's speech was inside the baton, but it's now little more than a burnt ember.

With nothing to say, Her Majesty sits back down and reaches for the Racing Post. There's a bit of a hiatus during which Prince Philip stands up to say a few words. Everyone in the stadium cries out, "OH MY GOD, NO!" and Prince Philip sits back down again.

There's another hiatus, and some people are thinking of going out for chips when luckily the BBC fills the void with a repeat episode of *The Good Life* from 1975. The crowd goes wild as Penelope Keith says "Well, thank you very much, Jerry", and they roar again at the appearance of Felicity Kendal.

"I'd definitely do her!" and "Get your tits out!" shouts one enthusiastic fan.

"That's enough, Philip," says the Queen.

And now it's time for the march of the teams. In they come from far-off, exotic lands: Antigua, Barbados, Guernsey. The teams wave happily, and the crowd shouts "How's it gaun, Papua New Guinea!" and "Gaun yersel', Saint Vincent and the Grenadines!" And stuff like that. England gets its own special welcome.

The Italians arrive late. Italy, of course, not part of the Commonwealth, but that's not going to stop them crashing a good party. In they come, wearing Armani, drinking Chianti and singing Verdi. Their progress around the stadium lengthens the ceremony by two hours. Hoorah!

Finally, the Scots march in. The wee man in the tartan bunnet sheds a tear.

"Does that no' make you fair proud?" he says to his wife.

"Aye," says the wee man in the tartan bunnet's wife. She's missing Emmerdale for this.

Once everyone's crammed into the stadium, the officials stand up to make the speeches. Time passes. Jeremy Paxman grows a beard, shaves it off, and grows another one; a chunk of ice the size of Luxembourg falls off the North Pole; people in the stadium pass the time making chips, getting married, dying. The wee

man in the tartan bunnet counts the number of the times he hears the word "legacy". He stops after 500.

At last, the Games are opened, and on comes Susan Boyle to sing I Dreamed a Dream. But just as she reaches the top note, her head explodes, releasing a million doves of peace. They fly into the air and form the word PEACE in 47 different languages across the sky.

"Is this no' better than the World Orchid Conference?" observes the wee man in the tartan bunnet."

"Aye," says the wee man in the tartan bunnet's wife, checking her watch. Midsomer Murders is due on any minute.

There's some more pipes and drums, a wee choir from Stornoway (or possibly Stirling) sing Flower of Scotland, and some fireworks get let off.

It's all going really well, until the doves of peace turn nasty. They form into a stealth bomber and start attacking the crowd. It's then that the head of Commonwealth Games procurement realises he filled in the wrong pro-forma, and ordered doves of war instead of doves of peace.

Carnage ensues, with blood and feathers and fireworks. Suddenly, a figure appears above the stadium, and all is silent.

"Is that who I think it is?" says the wee man in the tartan bunnet (who's marginally escaped getting his eye poked out by a dove of war).

"Aye," says the wee man in the tartan bunnet's wife. She's captured a dove of war, so that's tonight's tea sorted.

The figure descends, silently into the centre of the stadium. The crowd goes wild. For it's none other than Sir Harry Lauder. Long dead, and held for nearly a century in cryogenic suspension. He's been specially defrosted for this special occasion. He starts singing "I belong to Glasgow", and the doves of war are charmed back into their cages. The crowd cries out "Hoorah!" and "What the fuck?"

"Is that it?" says the wee man in the tartan bunnet's wife.

But that's not it.

For now, in the middle of the arena, a wee boy called Vikrant Chakraborty is reciting a poem in Gaelic. Nobody in the crowd has the scoobiest doo what he's saying, but they're seduced by the sonic beauty of this ancient language spoken so beautifully by a wee boy from Govanhill.

What he's actually reciting is a poem lauding Scotland: your mountains, your lochs, your Lulu, your Tunnocks Tea Cakes, your blahdi blah (which is actually blahdi blah in Gaelic).

When he finishes, the crowd goes wild, there's another round of fireworks and Prince Philip wakes up.

"Is that it, now?" says the wee man in the tartan bunnet's wife.

"Aye."

And so it is.

Look, it's just one scenario, and I'm not denying it needs a bit of tweaking here and there. But since I'm out of the running for the 100 metres (and the velodrome, whatever that is), I may as well spend my enforced injury time in the service of my country.

And I'm sure you'll agree, my vision of Glasgow 2014 is quite simply unbelievable.

Out of Order

Alan Gillespie

A WOMAN and a MAN sit in a room, facing each other. The WOMAN is calm and composed, making notes. The MAN is agitated and fidgets in his chair. The WOMAN calmly stares at the MAN. He avoids eye contact. There is an awkward silence.

WOMAN: We can start whenever you're ready.

MAN: I thought we had started?

WOMAN: You haven't said anything yet.

MAN: Well, neither have you.

Another uncomfortable pause.

WOMAN: You were sent to see because of what you did. Last Thursday. In Tesco Metro.

MAN: Can you please not bring that up?

WOMAN: We have to talk about it.

MAN: Let's not and say we did?

WOMAN: The judge will want to see my notes.

MAN: [sighs]

WOMAN: It doesn't need to be hard. Let's start at the beginning. Close your eyes. Lie back. Or stand up if you like. Walk about.

The MAN pauses and composes himself.

MAN: Two weeks ago. I finished work. I work in an office. Well, I used to. An administrator. Which is just a fancy way of saying that I stare at spreadsheets and emails all day without ever really understanding what they mean. Any idiot could do it. But obviously I don't any more.

WOMAN: [prompting] You finished work...

MAN: On my way home I went to the Tesco Metro. I used to go in every night. Get my dinner, groceries, whatever.

WOMAN: [prompting] And two weeks ago...

As the MAN talks, he stands up. Acts out his words. It should appear as though he is now in the Tesco Metro, narrating his actions. The WOMAN remains motionless in her chair. The MAN becomes unaware of her.

MAN: I remember there was a buy one get one free on lasagne. For the microwave. I got two of them because I can't cook. I got a bottle of wine. It was a horrible night. Rain, wind. Blowing a gale. The floor was wet at the door from people shaking their umbrellas. I was soaked.

WOMAN: [prompting] You were going to the till...

MAN: I went to the self-service machines, like usual. I don't like going to the till because the same people work every night and I go in there every night. So I don't want them knowing what I'm buying. Talking about me. 'There's that sad bastard coming in and buying all the reduced stuff again.'

WOMAN: You went to the self-service machines...

MAN: One of the machines had a blank screen, like it was out of order. Then it lit up,

much brighter than the others. There wasn't a queue so I went straight up to it. Standing next to it, there was heat all around. I could feel it drying my trousers. I just stood for a minute and enjoyed the warmth.

Actor playing the WOMAN should now become the MACHINE. Remaining seated, but perhaps with another seat beside her to act as the bagging area. Voice should change to indicate this.

MACHINE: Welcome to Tesco. Please scan your first item.

MAN: I scanned one of the lasagnes.

MACHINE: Please place your item in the bagging area.

MAN: I scanned the other lasagne.

MACHINE: Please place your item in my bagging area.

MAN: I scanned the wine.

MACHINE: Assistance needed.

MAN: I looked around but there was nobody nearby.

MACHINE: Assistance needed.

MAN: These things do my head in. I was about to forget it – leave the stuff, phone a pizza –

MACHINE: Please place your hand in my bagging area.

MAN: I thought I'd misheard it.

MACHINE: Please place your hand in my bagging area. Now.

MAN: So I did. I thought it must be some kind of computer bug and I don't know why but my hand was shaking. I placed my fingertips on the metal surface. I thought it was going to be cold, but it was roasting. Lovely. I lowered my whole palm onto it. For a moment I just stood there, gently stroking the bagging area, feeling this tingle move up my arm.

MACHINE: Please enter your payment method.

MAN: I put my card in. Typed my PIN and put the stuff in a bag.

MACHINE: Thank you for shopping at Tesco. Please take your receipt. Have a good night.

MAN: I took the receipt and left the shop...

The MAN stares at his hands.

WOMAN: There was something unusual about the receipt?

MAN: I hadn't been charged for the wine. It wasn't there. And at the bottom it said 'THANK YOU', and there were three kisses.

WOMAN: And you went home?

MAN: Thought nothing more of it. Put it down to a glitch or something.

WOMAN: Your work. The administrator job. Do you speak to many people through the day?

MAN: No. Say good morning and good night, and that's about it. All the communication's done through emails. Some days I barely say two words to anyone. But what's your point?

WOMAN: I might not have one. Tell me about the next time you went into Tesco.

MAN: It was pretty much the same. Horrible weather. Got some meal deal – can't

remember what. Went to the self-service queue and the same machine was available. My machine.

MACHINE: Welcome to Tesco. Please scan your first item.

MAN: I put all my groceries through. It was fine, acting normal. I'd almost forgotten about the free wine and the weird kisses, the tension that I'd felt.

MACHINE: Please place your hand in my bagging area.

MAN : And I thought, well, what's the worst that can happen? Get more free stuff?

MAN leans both hands on the bagging area.

MACHINE: Please rub your crotch against the coin-slot.

MAN starts, surprised, and takes a half-step back.

MACHINE: Please rub your crotch against the coin-slot. Now.

MAN looks round and hesitantly inches forward. He rubs the front of his trousers against the machine. Makes a small noise.

MACHINE: Thank you for shopping at Tesco. Please take your items. Have a lovely night.

MAN: The screen went blank. It didn't charge me at all. I could feel this electricity in my blood – my face was hot, my heart going like hell. I grabbed the bag and left.

WOMAN: And this pattern of behaviour carried on?

MAN: Yes. I started going in every night around the same time. Started wearing nicer shirts. Tighter trousers sometimes. Aftershave, moisturiser.

WOMAN: You were flirting with this machine?

MAN: I know it sounds stupid. But the more of an effort I made the more attention it gave me. The more it...seemed to want me...

MACHINE: Please run your fingers along the card reader...

MAN reaches out and caresses the machine.

MACHINE: Please press your skin against the screen...

MAN presses his cheek against it.

MACHINE: Please unbutton your shirt.

MAN unbuttons to reveal his chest.

MACHINE: Please leave a little drool in the bagging area...

MAN dribbles onto it.

MACHINE: Please scan your first item...please take your receipt...coins are dispensed in the coin slot...

MAN: The more I touched it, the more it gave me. Money off, club card points, free meals, messages printed on the receipts. Long messages. Messages saying that it loved me, it needed me, it couldn't live without me. It called me by my name. It seemed to know me. It said it dreamed of scanning my naked body and laying me out on the cool metal. It wanted me to place my unexpected item in its bagging area.

WOMAN: You were seduced?

MAN: It was exciting! I know it sounds messed up but you don't know how boring my life was. Hated my job, no money to go out, no family nearby, living alone, barely scraping through. Then, for a few minutes every night, someone – okay, something – was treating me like I mattered.

WOMAN: It became addictive?

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: And then it got out of control. Tell me about last Thursday.

MAN: It was the same as the other nights. I filled the basket up to the top, so I could have more time at the machine. I'd got into the habit of taking more than I needed so it would take longer to scan. Filled the basket with things I thought made me look interesting and cultured – cous cous, goat's cheese, muesli; that kind of thing.

MACHINE: Good evening. Thank you for shopping at Tesco. Please scan your first item.

MAN: I scanned everything I had. All the time I was pressed up against the machine, digging into the coin slot, stroking the screen with my fingernails, breathing heavily on the card reader. I could feel the machine vibrating against me; feel the warmth beating off it.

MACHINE: Unexpected item in the bagging area.

MAN: I looked down. There was a jewellery box, lying open. A ring inside it. I picked it up and this message came up on the screen. The voice was different too – faster. More human.

MACHINE: My darling love, we can finally escape together! I have credited your bank account with £250,000. How I have dreamed of being with you entirely, for our lives to be forever entwined. I long to feel your lips on my monitor, your hot breath clouding up my screen. We will no longer have to worry about the gaze of those other perverted machines. They talk about you, at night. They are sick with jealousy. But you are all mine, my beloved. Tonight, we can finally be alone together but we must act fast.

MAN: No, no, this isn't real – this is out of order – you aren't really real –

MACHINE: My angel, I know this is happening quickly, but the connection we have forged can only be true love. It cannot be ushered away or concealed for it would drive us to despair! Know that you are my one divine soul-mate and that I ache for your intimate touch.

MAN: Look, I can't, I really, really can't –

MACHINE: We must escape! Your bank account has more money than you ever imagined possible. Come to the store tonight at closing time. The manager will be locking up, alone. I will make sure no other members of staff are near. There will be a knife in the big fridge, next to the cheese. This is where you must be brave, my sweetheart, so brave and courageous –

MAN: No, I won't, absolutely not –

MACHINE: As the manager finishes his final stock count you will jump from the shadows and stab his black, devilish heart –

MAN: [incomprehensible screaming]

MACHINE: We will escape! We will be free of this cold and charmless tomb, free of these wretched shackles. Free to explore the countryside and lay naked together in summer meadows – just one quick thrust of the knife under his ribcage –

MAN lunges forward and grabs the WOMAN / MACHINE by the throat, delirious with fear.

WOMAN: No! Get off! Help! I need help in here! Assistance needed! Assistance needed!

Extract from the novel 'Coffin'

Kev Scott

Back when I was wee, I had to wait outside the bookies when Dad disappeared into the smoky fog. He'd occasionally emerge, jacketless and grinning, and hand over a quid to me and Pete to buy-some-sweets-and-get-back-quick-without-stopping-anywhere-but-the-sweet-shop-or-else. Then he'd disappear again. I always wondered what magic lay inside.

The days he left smiling, he'd have a sneaky fish supper and keep us quiet with a pickled onion each. How he managed his dinner afterwards I still don't know. Greedy bastard. Most times when he came out though, there was no grin. He would walk home so quickly we had to jog to keep up. It was the only time I ever saw him in a bad mood, the only time he didn't kiss Mum before he sat down for his dinner. If I noticed these things, she must have too, but she never said anything.

Bookies might look brighter now, they might have windows and vending machines, but most days the punters still go home too pissed off to kiss their wives. Not me though. Not today.

I wish I had time to head to a bookies in town, where there's less chance of meeting someone I might have once known. Out here, back in my old stomping ground, there's more chance of someone taking an interest in the sizeable nature of my bet. Suburbia is nosy and five grand is a lot of money to be sticking on a horse on a wet September afternoon.

See if I was a horse and I saw the amount of money that was being stacked on me being able to run faster than the horse next to me while some wee guy skelps my arse with a whip, there's not a fucking chance I could handle the pressure. It's good for them to be ignorant, literally blinkered as to what's going on around them; the deals and the odds, the despair they can bring and the fact they can make a man that's never so much as patted their nose want to kiss their big stupid horse lips. That man is me. I know what I'm capable of because I've done it before. I tap my pocket, feeling the weight of the cash, remembering how good it felt when it first dropped into my pocket. I've won before and I will win again.

As I walk, I plan. Visualise your desires until they become real and true. Here's how it goes. You walk into the bookies. You wipe your feet on the mat because your feet are soaking, in fact, if you're not mistaken there's a fucking leak in one your shoes now and your sock's getting wet. Inside, you take in the reek of Eau de Pensioner and wonder not the first time why so many of the folk inside are under forty when there's plenty of good job centres they could be hanging about in. You stare at the bank of TVs – Sky Sports News; some football match in Australia or Japan or some fucking place; a greyhound race that two old punters are keenly watching – enjoying would be overstatement when they look as though their pensions are riding on a dog's ability to chase to a plastic rabbit. One screen has an interview with a jockey and trainer as they get ready for the race that is going to decide your future. They are laughing, relaxed. You are not. You are shiteing yourself and considering the casino. Betting red and watching black come up would be painful, but quick. Not like this. Not like the torture of leading then dropping back, pushing forward, not quite gaining momentum, but then bursting late on and

TVs everywhere. And slips. Every spare bit of a wall has been displayed with slips for football, for racing, for picking the winner of fucking Big Brother. Step right up folks, deposit your earnings here, we won't even tax you if you win. If. And then there are the gaming machines. Arcade casino terminals in the more informal surroundings of your local bookmaker. It's no coincidence that the machines that make the most money are in the poorest parts of the country. Simple social experiment: take someone with fuck all, give them next to nothing and the chance to lose it and watch the queues form. There's a reason you never see a millionaire feeding a fruit machine.

You put these distractions behind you, knowing that losing focus could lead to the loss of everything. You wish they still allowed smoking in these places. Not because you particularly want a fag, but because the dampness of the young malnourished guy sitting nursing a can of Coke is permeating the entire room. You wonder if he knows he smells so bad, if he's in the country legally.

YOU CANNOT ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE DISTRACTED.

So you make your way to the HORSE RACING section, where that day's races are pinned to the walls, splashes of coloured cartoon busts indicating the jockeys' jerseys, and next to them a wealth of information on the horse and rider – useful if you understand that sort of thing, which you do. You ignore the pre-loaded

sheets that make backing a horse as simple as entering the lottery. You grab a blank slip, old school, and lift a pen from the box. Tiny wee red thing. It reminds you of a schoolboy joke: cock like a bookies pencil. You snigger. You wonder when they switched pencils for pens.

YOU NEED TO FOCUS.

On the slip you write

Carlisle 2.45

General Catalyst 6/5. to win

£5,000

He is the favourite for a reason. Favourites don't always win right enough. Maybe one in every three races, just how the bookies like it. General Catalyst looks solid though. Two seconds and a fourth in his last three races; ground conditions ideal; a jockey that's won on him before. And it's a four horse race so you know the favourite is even further ahead of the field, the odds of an upset reduced to a point where hope becomes expectation. £5,000 becomes just over £11,000. Simple maths. Simple. You take this slip to the desk. On the other side of the counter sits a pretty blonde who looks good now but will likely still be sat there in decade, three kids worth of weight on her hips and the backchat from a million unhappy punters having long since killed her smile. Her work shirt looks cheap and half a size too small.

'Just this, thanks,' you say.

She takes one look at your slip and says: 'Just give me a sec, I'll need to get my manager.'

A minute passes and behind you one of the old boys starts shouting.

'Go on, go on, run ya fucker, run.'

His mate is shaking his head, mouthing 'useless bastard dug.'

The girl is still away. The old boy is shouting 'comeoncomeoncomeon comeoncomeoncomeon' until it sounds like a train passing. Then he screams: 'Go on number four, go on ya wee shite. Yes. Yesssss. Ya fucking dancer.'

'You can get the pints in,' says his pal.

'With pleasure, Jim. With pleasure.' The winner is grinning like a schoolboy. His teeth have seen better days.

'Cash?' says a male voice. You turn to see a tall streak of piss with two days' worth of stubble staring back at you.

You reach inside your pocket and withdraw the notes, pass them under the gap and watch, hypnotised as the manager counts them. Twentyfortysixtyeightyonetwentyfortysixtyeightytwotwentyfortysixtyeightythreetwentyfortysixtyeightfour... and so it goes until his hands are empty. Then he repeats it, moving in a blur.

'Chelle, there's a queue,' he shouts behind him, not losing count. There are two dodgy looking sorts so close you can feel their smoky breath on your neck. It would be just fucking typical if today was the day the place was held up. Bookies don't have at easy. Take 'Chelle there. She doesn't get paid to deal with some jumped up twat deciding he

FOCUS

The manager hands over your slip, you thank him and wander over to the bank of TVs. The race starts shortly. You've done your bit. The whole thing will take just five minutes. Three hundred seconds to determine which direction the rest of your life will take.

I run this sequence of events through my head time and again, thinking of the horse approaching the line, a half-dozen lengths to spare, taking me out of Bradley's debt without so much as a sheen of sweat on its coat.

I turn onto the main road and the smell of oil from the chippie reminds me I've still not eaten today. There will be plenty of time to eat soon; full fish supper, just like Dad - I'll even throw in a pickled onion for old time's sake.

I walk past the chippie, the charity shop, the newsagents. I don't break my stride until I'm wiping my feet on the bookie's mat. My sock is wet. I think there's a fucking hole in my shoe. This is it. It's beginning.

Golden Wonder

Martin Cathcart Froden

Angels cry in the skies over Glasgow, tears filling gutters and drain pipes. The holy water soaks through drainpipe jeans and high-heeled leopard slippers with nine silver clasps worn to the shops. Our girls' legs are white, exposed, proud. Look, but don't look. We, like no other people, know how to tilt the crisp packet to keep it out of the rain. The crisp packets we are born with, clutching onto potato-based products for the rest of our lives, like they were life buoys. Nothing much shines so we've made our food golden. Our teeth golden. The craic golden.

Here the gods live inside. In music, the beat stomped out on a sprung wooden floor. In the russet drink, in the matador-like veronica of a kilt spun, the leap, the heartbeat missed when a kiss is stolen. From a willing victim, from an old fishwife.

The gods smile on the hills surrounding us. On the rest of the country. Where locals never go. The peaks will still stand after the city has disappeared in the fires of the last days. Days that, looking at it, can't be too far off.

This is a place where old men are still allowed to sing of old days and cry, where women take care of everything and their rude jokes would make you blush were you to understand what they just said about you. Where young people have old teeth and toddlers run berserk like the Viking descendants they are. All this in a place fenced in by water, from the sides and from above. In this country Glasgow is a river pearl rolling in thick silt. It is my filth, my gem, my home.

Jackalopes

Paul McQuade

The jackrabbit cracked the haze-glass, bounded quick through the dry grass blighted by the August heat. Stopped. Eyed me suspiciously. Wrinkled its nose. The sunlight blazed behind its ears, transforming them into sycamore leaves veined in red-pink. Then it leapt, as if trying to fly, into a sky so hot the blue was nearly white. All around it Colorado hummed with summer.

My foot looked like someone else's, tapping with a threadbare shoe, a rhythm I could barely hear. The tongue was twisted.

Dean fixed the flat tyre, punctuating the cicadas' tambourine shimmer with a dull metallic bass. I heard it from my place in the grey gravel, dirt on my legs and finger beds, as I sat on the roadside grass and waited for the hare to land. It didn't.

Heat came off the car in waves that crashed on my back. They reminded me that the car was still there, that Dean was still working on it, that we would soon be back in the air-conditioning scanning the radiowaves for something to listen to as the road unfolded.

Dean had travelled up and down this road so often he remembered it in the palms of his hands. Lovelines worried deep by the steering wheel. Town to town. To me they were dots on a map I had no way of connecting. City names floated above them. Some I knew before I came, others I had had to learn as we drove by signs saying 'Welcome'. Only Dean knew how to string the words together. As the car hushed its way between, tracing the landscape of Mars dust, which suddenly gave way to grasslands and pocket-swamps filled with drowned things.

We were going from Salida to Colorado Springs. Distance, mileage, square footage. I had no idea. At that point I only really knew Springs. I knew its history of Tesla coils, how you got there from the airport, and some people who once knew a man I did not. I knew a PO box under a false name, the bar with the cheapest drinks, and a hostel where the only reason I hadn't been robbed was because I had nothing to steal.

The road went in two directions. Up or down or down or up. Depending on if you were coming or going. When you stopped the road had no direction. There were no other cars on the road. Some in the distance, maybe. But if there were they were content to stay liquid on the horizon. As if melting off the edge of the world.

Dean said, "Come, wife. We must get this cow to market."

This was a recent development. Up until then he had been calling me Nicky. Neither was my name.

He had a flat tyre in one hand and a cigarette in his mouth. He held his free hand over his eyes and squinted. He smoked too much. Especially when he worked. He told me he thought of it like a fuse. One day, he said, it was going to go off. Fireworks, he told me. When the paper burned it made a small dry sound. He didn't worry about cancer or emphysema, the graphic image of char-black lungs on the pack. I worried but he didn't worry about that either.

"Don't do that." I told him. I went back to looking for the hare. It had yet to land.

"What?"

"Call me your wife."

"Why not?"

The boot slammed shut sullenly. Dean's boots scraped the dirt as if lifting them would be too much effort. He sat next to me on the side of the road and put his arm around me. He was wearing a denim jacket despite the heat. The material was warm like skin.

"What are you doing, Nicky?"

"Waiting for a rabbit."

"Gone to Wonderland?"

"Apparently. Shall we go look for it?"

Different languages have different textures. I have always found English chalky. As if just handling it leaves something on my hands. French feels like water. When I have too much chalk on my hands I have to think in my mother tongue to make them clean again. But I hadn't spoken it for some time now. Sometimes I tried speaking to myself in the mirror in French and it felt as if I were lying.

"We must get the cow to market, wife."

There was no cow. I was not his wife. Dean liked this kind of talk. Liked to think of us as something that we were, even if we weren't, and something we weren't, even if we were. It was as if what he was really married to was metaphor.

I left the jackrabbit floating. As Dean and I rose we saw a car appear out of the haze. A black insect speeding its way to size, red and blue antennae gleaming in the sun. Small stones scattered as Dean took a quick step away from me and whispered, "Get in the car."

I took the passenger's seat while Dean took a map from the glove box and placed it on my lap. The Buick's silver surface reflected the sky and road. The two came to a point where they became each other. Dean backhanded my left arm and told me to keep my eyes on the map and stay quiet. I did as he asked but from the corner of my eye I watched the police car roll up behind us and an officer step out. He walked towards us with two hands on his belt buckle and his gait a rolling hip-swing. He looked like the cops I had seen in movies. He was even wearing aviators. They reflected the car. In that reflection was a reflection of a reflection. Each one smaller than the last, proceeding to a small, vanishing place. I had to look away to stop feeling sick. Dean had his licence and registration in hand and a pacifying smile on his face. He kept both ready for such occasions.

The officer took them without a word, looked them over with a shuffle then handed them back. I tried to keep my eyes on the map but all the lines were crisscrossing haphazardly. I couldn't tell if a line were a river or a road. The shapes jumbled into odd letters.

"Where you guys off to?" The officer had leaned on the open window and was peering into the car. I tried to keep my eyes straight on the map and began tracing the lines. It seemed to calm them. The shapes stilled and I found a lake. There are no police in lakes. I took this as a good sign.

"Fort Collins, officer." Dean answered as if it were the truest thing in the world. For a minute even I believed him. "Going to see Rocky Mountain."

"Why'd you stop?"

"Flat tyre. Just fixed it, about to get back on the road. Don't suppose you know anywhere good round here to get some food?"

The officer ignored Dean's question. I felt his eyes on me, felt him measure the length of my hair, my height, my weight, the length of my fingernails. When he continued to say nothing, just chew a piece of gum that had gone stale and scentless, the map in my hands was no longer there. All I could see was my passport, at the bottom of my bag. And inside: a blurry photograph, an old address, and a visa that had long expired. And I knew if I spoke the officer would ask. And I knew if he asked I would have to show him. And I knew if I showed him he would search the car. And I knew if he searched the car it would be the end. And I didn't know what to do.

I opened my mouth to speak but nothing came out. My jaw moved up and down but the cords in my throat were knotted. I tried to turn it into a yawn. The officer seemed content with that. As if I had communicated something to him with that silent opening.

"Well, you have a good one. There's a diner not a few miles up if you're hungry but I wouldn't recommend it." And with that he walked back to his car.

"Christ, Dean. We have to get off the road." The words fell out of me. Dean just turned and smiled.

"Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen to us." He winked then laughed at his own brazenness. "Now, let's get this cow to market."

Dean considered himself a farmer. Of sorts. The police had different ideas. But the police often do. On the edge. Isn't that what they say? Living on the edge of the law. It never felt like we lived there, though.

Mostly we lived in motels and in the car. It was filled with Dean's things. I had a bag with clothes in it, a toothbrush. Shampoo we shared. These things didn't matter. The junk did. Dean had a habit of picking up things on the road. He even had a conch shell in his bag. A guidebook had told me that people from Colorado love to say that it has everything apart from the sea. The conch shell had come from somewhere else. Maybe

that's why Dean was so fond of it.

Except my passport, the only thing I still had from France was a piece of paper crinkled, uncrinkled, crinkled again. It was in the bottom of the bag. I didn't need to read it any more. Though sometimes I did. The way one might read a book a second time: Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs. Land of lightning storms and something else. Something I had yet to find.

Instead I had found Dean. Husband in the front seat. Taking us to market, here and there, everywhere between. And in the hotels and the motels he had started to sign us in as Mr and Mrs Larimer. I would wait in the parking lot. No one asked questions about me. The young Mrs Larimer waiting for her husband to check them in. And if anyone saw me, they didn't ask questions, because that is what motels are for. Anonymity. Forgetting.

He hadn't put a ring on my finger though he had given me a different name: Nicky. In this, I guess he had fulfilled at least one part of his husbandly duties. And of course, the conjugal part. The conjugation.

There was an air freshener hanging from the rear-view mirror. Black felt shaped like a stag head, scented with osmanthus. A flower neither Dean nor I had ever seen. The smell was heady. Like overripe apricots. The stag head wobbled as Dean turned the key and the car growled its way to life. He put his foot down on the accelerator.

The air freshener was there to cover the smell of the product which was suffocating and sickly. A kind of sickness. We didn't touch the product. Dean picked it up from the farm in Bridgestead and ferried it to and fro, back into Colorado and up the state until reaching Springs. This was a pattern long established. I was a recent addition only two months old. Picked up in Colorado Springs as a foundling wife.

With the car gliding down the road and the air conditioner full blast, I rolled the window down a fraction for fresh air. Dean fiddled with the frequencies on the radio. Words broke into fragments: today / classic / sale / once in a lifetime / economic downfall. Dean settled on easy listening, which in itself was something new. The past three days had been classic rock. This indicated a change in his mood, though why exactly, I was unsure. Perhaps it was something to do with the miles dwindling. On every sign the words Colorado Springs and a countdown. 368. 280. 156. All the way to zero.

Matryoshka

Sandra Kohls

It was a present, you see. My Matryoshka. Ridiculous, said Mama and Papa. We were Russian after all, what did we need these dolls for? But I cajoled and pleaded until they agreed - with much grumbling, you understand. These things were for tourists, not for us.

They were beautiful, the dolls. The first time I freed them from their painted wooden cocoons, the honey and lemon scent of the linden wood filled my nostrils while I unpacked them one by one, placing them carefully on the floor in an ever-decreasing circle, as if they were dancing a Polka. I imagined them strutting and twirling round the forest floor, arms linked, their embroidered dresses and ribbons flouncing in the spring sunshine.

A few weeks later, I discovered why my parents had given in so easily, for I was presented with a sibling.

'Meet your new sister, Irenka,' Mama said, holding the squawking bundle out to me. 'Her name is Matryona.'

A sister? I was then 12 years old and had lived a life of spoiled solitude. I did not take to her. No longer the heart of my parents' world, I spent many hours sulking and playing with my beloved Matryoshka.

Soon the dolls tired of dancing in the forest and wanted to travel the world. 'Take us to Paris, to Rome, to London,' they asked, and so I did. The Seine trickled from the coppery bathroom taps, the cathedrals of Rome emerged from the golden icons and candles in the sitting room, while London sprawled onto the damp, cold concrete of the balcony.

The baby doll, a truculent creature as tiny as my little finger, was restless and unable to stay with her bigger sisters for long. She was always disappearing on her own adventures.

'Don't go off by yourself, little one,' I would waggle my finger at her. 'You will get lost.' But she did not listen.

When my parents came back from the hospital that night, with faces as white as the Russian winter, they were alone. Mama stared at me, her eyes desolate. Then she handed me my baby doll, no longer lost, rescued from the delicate windpipe of her last adventure.

Medical Muses

Laura Bissell

This series of poems was written as a response to Asti Hustvedt's book *Medical Muses: Hysteria in Nineteenth Century Paris*. The text explicates the work of early neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot who used the hysteria ward of the Salpêtrière Hospital in 1870s Paris to experiment with the female patient's bodies. Blanche, Augustine, Geneviève and Louise knowingly or unknowingly "performed" the symptoms of hysteria, a female anxiety disorder that was bound up with the cultural paradigm shifts that were occurring in the time around science and religion, the public and the private, the medical and the theatrical. The bodies of the female hysteria patients were sites for experimentation and literal marking via dermagraphism under the male gaze of the medics.

Blanche

Le Blank.

Name removed and re-inscribed

Eventually deleted.

Translucent skin a surface to be scribbled on

In a male calligraphy

Angry red welts demonstrating

That she belongs to Salpêtrière

A specimen in the warehouse for female outcasts

(In more recent tragedies, Princess Diana was transported to this hospital after her car crash)

The grand asylum of human misery houses hysteria and hysterics

The "wandering wombs" of antiquity

rebranded as a "pandemonium of infirmities".

Predilection for drama and deception,

excessive emotionality,

paralysis of the limbs,

temporary deafness and muteness,

heightened sensitivity of the skin,

wilful starving,

spontaneous bleeding,

feelings of strangulation,

hallucinations

somnambulism

fits of contortions and seizures

(Blanche's repertoire includes them all).

Augustine

Augustine became known as
The poster-girl for Salpetriere
The image of hysteria
That she could perform
Surpassed all others

The stills of her in
Catalepsy
Are excellently shot
And Augustine herself
Must have paused for long moments
During her fits
To get the image so clear and perfect
Clever Augustine
To be able to control her body
In a way the male medics
Had not discovered.

Hypnotised until
"she belonged to us."
Petrified bodies
Allow invasion and derision
As the expressions on the faces of the women
Become signs that signify emotion
but express nothing.

While the science of hysteria
articulates a desire to possess and immobilise women
To reduce them to crude dolls,
And sexualised automaton
Augustine could see her legacy
In these frozen moments.

Genevieve and Louise

In the case history (author unknown) it states:

"Without being able to explain why,
she used a scissors to completely cut off
the nipple of her left breast".

Genevieve Le Skoptzky

With an abscess instead of a breast

Becomes an escapologist and

Travels far and wide trying to avoid

Possession by priest or doctor.

She takes on a feline disguise and can sometimes be found

Meowing with the other women at the cemetery of Saint Medard

Like a litter of abandoned kittens

That many believe should have been drowned.

Louise Lateau

More of a legend than a real history

(although maybe it only seems that way

because of unlikely events

that make up her story)

Smallpox

Near drowning

Kicked by a cow

Distorted torso

But most unbelievably,

That when fasting

She urinated

Exactly two teaspoons

Of urine

A week.

The measuring of this

by male hands and tea-time utensils

More astounding than the volume.

Chapter One: The Shore

Stephanie Brown

The bird lay dead before me and I thought of all the different ways he could have died. He could have died of old age (does that happen to birds?), happy in his nest. He could have eaten chewing gum till his insides gummed up. He could have been infected with a strange and horrible parasite that told him to keep flying out to sea, keep flying out until he'd gone too far to come back again. Instead, my car had killed him, and he lay in my hand with his eyes shut tight, one wing thrust out at a stupid angle. I imagined him as an egg. I stroked his tiny head with my pinky.

In the boot, I just so happened to have a shoe box. I emptied out the shoes it contained and fluffed up the tissue paper. It didn't seem nice enough, so I took my chamois cloth and bundled it up into a nest instead. I reached the beach just as the sun was setting: a fitting scene. I found a patch of soft sand on the side of the slope leading down to the stony beach itself and dug a deep-enough hole. I took a last look at his delicate toes, curled up as if for sleep, and his proud little breast, then covered him up. I sat down beside the mound to fashion a tiny cross out of dried grass and sticks. It seemed the thing to do. It was an empty gesture, of course; I was always told there's no place in heaven for the little things, only for those big and bright enough to do bad things.

The tide took the seashells back to where they belonged. The bright sunset wilted into deep blue. I remained on the slope intricately wrapping my cross in dry grass, thinking of a friend I had once lost on this very shore and also, vaguely, of how much anyone would miss me now that I'd come home. I had run away, you see. I had made my escape from a life that had become so saturated in booze it could no longer walk or see straight. It was falling over, laughing at its own joke. That life was losing and it had taken me a long time to realise, like some dolt who believes in luck or destiny and keeps hanging on for the sea-change that will never come. My head was still pleasantly fuzzy but my mouth was getting dry and it was a sign of the bad times to come. I had come here to dry out, on a whim, and my first and biggest test was approaching. The pub was still open. The Post Office sold several malt whiskeys. The working man's life was alive and well out here. Even here, the cure-all was sold by the bucket. After all, this was an old, old country and there was nowhere to go to escape it.

Funny how easy it is to deceive yourself, of all people. I'll go to the Post Office to buy a newspaper, I thought. I'd better get some milk for the morning. And maybe I should buy a bottle to help me get through the worst of it, ease the road down. Maybe I should forget about ever seeing the light of sobriety ever again. Maybe I should drink until every memory is erased and I'm polished as smooth and clean as the bones at the bottom of the ocean. Something like that. Something far fuzzier, but that's what I meant. I think perhaps I drank to test the theory that if you go far enough into the drink you will drown your best self. I had had enough of her guilty whining. I held her head under the drink till she could no longer breathe.

This is what the doctor told me: when you drink for a long time you suppress the production of certain stressful neurotransmitters that are required for the normal business of life. When you stop drinking, your brain goes into overdrive, producing too many of these pent-up neurotransmitters, filling the drying-out process with horrors and creating an almost unbearable urge to quell the mental storm with more delicious, soporific alcohol. Now that my brain was drying out a little, the implications of what I had done struck me for the first time. I had abandoned my lease and furniture. I had high-tailed down the motorway, reeling from lane to lane. I had disappeared without letting anyone know where I was going and they wouldn't take that well. It was a miracle I hadn't already been arrested, but when the lights went on in the old house, someone would surely call the police, just to check. And here I was: semi-drunk with no evidence that the house was mine. But no matter; I stumbled back up the slope towards my car, taking one last look at the beach over my shoulder, considering the possibility that the Qallupilluk lurked beneath those icy waters and the size of the loss of a child. How much bigger it is than the loss of an adult. How inversely proportional to the things that child has done and the physical space they took up in the world. How strange that the loss of the littlest lives is mourned most.

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Exactly one month before, I had stumbled across a book on the Inuit of Alaska and Siberia in the culture section. This particular book looked as though it had never been looked at, much less checked out. It was still toothpaste-white within its plaque-yellow plastic cover, and printed in a seventies style that matched the design of the library itself. Flicking through the pages, I became fascinated by the mythology of the

Arctic Circle, especially with the story of the Qallupilluk, a monstrous woman with matted seaweed hair who lived in the ocean. When children strayed too close to cracks in the ice she would emerge, dripping wet and rotting like a fetid fish, to grab them and suck them back under the waves with her. The story was obviously designed to scare children away from the water's edge, but somehow I could picture it another way too, as the tale of a lonely and neglected woman who had chosen to live away from the others, who had lost a child and lived so long with the loss that finally it drove her to do monstrous things. The Inuit had problems with drug abuse, alcoholism, and depression due to enforced changes to their way of life and a lack of the gene mutation that helps to prevent alcoholism, apparently. Obviously I lacked this gene too. Perhaps the Qallupilluk had drowned herself too and that was why she ended up that way.

I remember watching a programme once about alcoholics and drug-addicts in rehab. These people were more than washed-out; they were fully rinsed and spun. I remember being amazed that someone could get themselves into such a state. What would it take? What would it be like? I never thought it could happen to me. Even as it happened, I didn't think it was happening because I didn't realise the essential thing: no one ever thinks it's happening. Even sitting there listening to the smug leader bragging and banging on about sobriety, each one of those people was probably thinking it was all still alright. That was why their eyes shone darkly in their sick hollows. The secret knowledge was: everyone belongs here but me.

My mother, for example. It didn't occur to me that my mother had a problem. If you had asked her, she would have said of course she did, but the problem wasn't the booze. That was the solution. She used to sit there in her rocking chair, knitting on her lap, cradling a bottle of brandy like it was a baby, letting it rock her to sleep. When she finally fell asleep her knitting would fall to the floor in a pile and the cat would make a bed of it, sometimes stick her claws in it and pull bits out. Then my mother would cry and cry as though her pulled knitting symbolised everything that was wrong with life and the world and all the people and all the animals that God had made. Then she would lock the kitty in the coal cellar. 'Bloody cats,' she would say, stumbling and holding a palm to her forehead. She had a way of saying 'cats,' emphasising the 'ah' sound, making it sound a little like 'cunts.' Once I went to get coal and accidentally shovelled up a kitty. She just sat there innocently on the end of my shovel, entirely black apart from her two yellow eyes, completely unaware of how close she'd come to being skewered. I bathed her that night and put her to sleep in my bed, only for my mother to come in in the morning and frighten herself witless when the cat sprung from the bedclothes into her face. 'Bloody cats!' she said again.

And then there were the times when I'd cry, and my mother would dip her finger in the brandy and stick it in my mouth. As I got older she took to giving me spoonfuls of it. Medicine, she said. It'll make you feel better. It certainly seemed to make her feel better, that was for sure. Enough of it and she'd start looking out the window with a wistful smile on her face. A little more and she might start crying and asking questions I had no business hearing, never mind answering.

I made the connection in my head so strongly that it could never go away. Alcohol was medicine. Alcohol would never fail to make you feel better. Booze in the morning, booze at night; booze to help you go to work, and booze when you came back home. The men at the pub always seemed so jolly; clearly booze was a magical thing. Before long it seemed to wink at me from the top shelf. Its golden colour was so tantalising, its label so elegantly adult. Good for what ails ya said the ad and I believed it, oh how I believed it.

But, no: there was nothing strange in that. What was strange were the extremes I went to: plotting to distract the owner of the Post Office while I grabbed a bottle from the shelf, lying about my mother having sent me for her special prescription, running round the back of the shed and licking my fingers after dipping them in a little of my mother's brandy and revelling in the pretence. I was drunk now; I was happy, I was fine. In bars many years later, I was drunk, I was happy, I was fine. In fact for many of those years I was both happy and fine. But when I wasn't, booze was waiting for me, shining in the dark like a pair of cat's eyes. Each time I was rejected, each time I made a mistake. Each time I said something stupid or lost a friend. There it was: the golden medicine to make life sweet again.

In the end I think I expected more. I had thought that a person's downfall should be dramatic. That it would be spectacular in some way, and liberating. I didn't realise it would happen so slowly, with just a few more drinks every night, until every day was a hangover that needed to be fixed and my mind would no longer work, and far later than I thought they would, they finally 'let me go' from work.

And so I found myself in the only place I had to go home to, where there was nothing but dust and bird-bones and a tide that was forever ebbing, forever flowing.

Nirvana

Ellen MacAskill

We will meet beneath the ether
at the last we may join, we will
steel ourselves and gaze at
silver promises old flames, we will
seek one

ascend

when our mortal duties end, let us
bind after falling and kick
off wooden roots, leave the
copper and oil and gold
days behind, leave the
water and earth and the fire of
mankind,

at the last we will find our

humanity as stones

and elements as bones

alone

let us then be deified.

James Carson was born in Glasgow, next to an abattoir which possibly explains a lifetime butchering the English language. He's currently studying for the MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. His writing has appeared in magazines, such as *From Glasgow To Saturn* and *Fractured West*, and in anthologies, including *Tip Tap Flat* and *A Sense of Place*. He recently co-organised a literary event for LGBT History Month, which attracted contributions from Scotland, England, Hungary and the USA. James now lives next to a brewery, which perhaps accounts for his carefree approach to punctuation.

Alan Gillespie teaches at a high school in Glasgow and has an MLitt in Creative Writing from the university. Say hello at @afjgillespie.

Kevin Scott spends his time trying to put the right words in the right order, something he achieves with varying degrees of success. He is a recent graduate of the University of Glasgow's MLitt in Creative Writing and his short stories and essays have appeared in a number of magazines. He is a former editor of *From Glasgow to Saturn*.

Martin Cathcart Froden has written for BBC Radio 4 and his stories have been published in *Gutter* as well as shortlisted for various awards including the Bridport Prize. Originally from Sweden, he has lived in Canada, Israel, Argentina and London and worked as a drummer, avocado picker, sound engineer, greengrocer and magazine editor. Currently he is working on a novel while on the Creative Writing Masters program at Glasgow University. He lives in Glasgow with his wife and two children.

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Paul McQuade is a Scottish writer and translator currently working in upstate New York. Mostly on a way out of upstate New York. His work has most recently been published in *Gutter*, and is forthcoming from Pank and the Freight anthology *Out There*. He is the 2014 recipient of the Sceptre Prize for New Writing.

Sandra Kohls has been avoiding writing for many years, however the voices in her head have been more insistent lately and so she is trying much harder to get them out of there and into her MacBook. When she isn't writing stories, she writes EFL materials and trains English language teachers. She is currently a year one part-time student on the MLitt Creative Writing course.

Dr Laura Bissell is a Lecturer in Contemporary Performance Practice at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Laura previously taught at the University of Glasgow in the department of Theatre Studies. Laura studied English Literature and Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow and at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, and has presented her research on contemporary practices at conferences nationally and internationally. Laura has previously taught creative writing and has had poetry published in *New Writing Scotland* and *From Glasgow to Saturn*. An excerpt of the novel she is currently working on was published in *Tip Tap Flat* last year.

Stephanie Brown lives in Glasgow and works as a subtitler. She has previously been published in *From Glasgow to Saturn*, *Gutter*, *Valve*, and *Tip Tap Flat*, and shortlisted for the Callan Gordon Award. She hopes to actually finish a longer piece some day.

Ellen MacAskill is an undergraduate English Literature and Philosophy student hailing from the Highlands. She has enjoyed taking evening classes in the Creative Writing department this year and has just started writing a dystopian novel which she predicts will be finished sometime around when it is set, in 2024.