

FROM

GLASGOW

TO

SATURN



ISSUE 42

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TO  
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ISSUE 42, SPRING 2019

Dear Reader,

Welcome to Issue 42 of *From Glasgow to Saturn*. We're glad you're here. Your editorial team for 2018-2019 crosses the Atlantic, from Northern Ireland to the United States. None of us are local to Glasgow. It is a city that has drawn us, and many of our contributors, for different reasons and in different ways. Glasgow is a city that fosters a sense of inclusivity; it is welcoming, friendly, and generous. In that vein, we strive to make *From Glasgow to Saturn* a creative publication that holds to these same principles for our contributors and readership, current and future. We will continue the tradition of fostering new creative talent within our university community as well as strengthening our ties to the international community created here.

This year, with the help of our Social Media Coordinator extraordinaire Jack Bigglestone, we've made exciting changes to the look and feel of the *From Glasgow to Saturn* identity. We have a dynamic new logo, we've updated our website, our social media presence has grown stronger, and we're working to bring fresh, interesting content to our communities in Glasgow and beyond.

Inside these pages you'll discover a variety of short stories, poems, and hybrid pieces—works that cross genres, defy convention, and stretch the imagination. From the playful 'Milhouse Gets a Girlfriend' by Stuart Rawlinson to the poignant 'The Sounds of Other Folk' by Sarah Spence to the inventive 'Reliving a Visitation' by Max Parnell, you'll get a snapshot of the creative work of those who have walked through the iconic cloisters: those who call the University of Glasgow their academic home, whether they be undergraduates or postgraduates, current students or alumni, staff or faculty. So follow the paper airplane, and read on ...

Sincerely,

Suki Hollywood | Daniel Gee Husson | Erin MacDonald  
Erin Morin | Siobhan Mulligan

co-editors



# Table of Contents

<i>We Have Arrived.</i>	5
<i>Camera Men</i>	6
<i>Mosque Chairs</i>	7
Billie Rose McHugh	
<i>Button Eyes and Icky Floors</i>	8
Miriam Methuen-Jones	
<i>Medusa</i>	14
<i>Heirloom</i>	16
Pip Osmond-Williams	
<i>Sister Philomena</i>	17
Sue Burnside	
<i>Three Prayers in Reverse Order</i>	20
Jamie Redgate	
<i>The Sounds of Other Folk</i>	26
Sarah Spence	
<i>Milhouse Gets a Girlfriend</i>	29
Stuart Rawlinson	
<i>Reliving a Visitation</i>	30
Max Parnell	
<i>Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Weekend</i>	35
Ruthie Kennedy	
<i>Cat Ambitions</i>	40
<i>Little Spoon</i>	41
Allie Kerper	
<i>Strangers in a Croft House</i>	43
Alli Parrett	
<i>Boy</i>	49
Alison Raine	

<i>Baba Yaga</i> Mina Moriarty	50
<i>Inheritance</i> Felicity Anderson-Nathan	54
<i>Inside Voices</i> Rachel Schrauben Yeates	57
<i>Anchor Mill!</i> William Burns	58
<i>Flowers by Zelda Margot</i> Kevin Wilkinson	59
<i>Tinsel fever</i> Alice Hill-Woods	63
<i>Sentinel</i> Steve Rigley	64

# We Have Arrived.

*Billie Rose McHugh*

Sweet and woody essences coalesce,  
soft and clean.  
We are being carried  
towards the city.  
Thumbs scroll through feeds;  
hunger for information.  
Onlookers look on,  
stolen glances at other people's screens.  
Trying to go unnoticed,  
my eyes are open.  
Hot metal creaking,  
bodies gently rocking,  
houses turn to steel and glass.  
We are being lulled;  
pulled  
across the river,  
which lies beneath,  
inky and motionless;  
hidden secrets of the city submerged.  
The station stands, a vast ship,  
reassuring in its permanence,  
steadfast in this cityscape,  
now plastic and disposable,  
we have arrived.

# Camera Men

*Billie Rose McHugh*

I sit in a Liverpool coffee shop.  
Talking Heads are playing.  
A glass is used as a sugar bowl.  
Two men talk about cameras  
and I think about all the times we talked about cameras  
(or maybe you talked and I listened).  
Their spiel is familiar:  
Voigtlander (used for taking snaps),  
Portra,  
The Real Camera shop, Manchester,  
Medium format,  
Pentax,  
Contax.  
You gave me your Contax when I left  
and at the time I decided you weren't getting it back,  
put it in the pocket of my pannier  
and photographed my cousin's new baby on the way home.  
It went with me to New York and I didn't take a single photo  
(but thought about Garry Winogrand whilst walking downtown).  
I found a strip of photos of us, taken in an old-style camera booth, black  
and white.  
You're holding your film camera.  
We'd been to the Manchester camera shop,  
looked through an M6 and been impressed by the clarity of the lens.  
Sunny day, too many coffees.  
We're kissing in one of the photos,  
I couldn't throw the strip away,  
'Film works on an atomic level',  
once taken,  
the picture remains.

# Mosque Chairs

*Billie Rose McHugh*

The money is taken care of so  
in the meantime,  
you choose self-imposed poorness  
and move to a rougher part of town  
where  
    actually, there are some really good greengrocers  
and,  
    by the way,  
    these refugees have been marginalised.  
You tell me about the time,  
you were moving some chairs,  
being got rid of by a local mosque  
and, incidentally, fucking uncomfortable.  
Some local Romanian boys helped you carry them along the road,  
then asked you for money once they were at your front door.  
Marginalised  
and  
not daft.



# Button Eyes and Icky Floors

*Miriam Methuen-Jones*

I am standing at the edge of the platform when everything goes black. I surprise myself by not reacting. I assess the situation. My sight leaves rapidly, fading to black from my peripheral. Both eyes. I will look back and describe them as button eyes. Like Other Mother. I can see four pinpoints of light which I know must be the approaching train. At the same time, my hearing goes. I think my music has cut out because I'm underground and my 4G is gone. I take my earbuds out. Nothing. Where there was the dull hum of the underground and the faint roar of a child in the distance, there is nothing. I am deaf and blind and alone at Argyle Street, inches from the edge of the platform.

I take two very measured steps backwards until I feel the stout wall of the escalator entrance against my back. Okay, one crisis averted. I know there is a man to my right, I remember swapping my bag to my other shoulder because he looked dodgy. Now he is my lifeline. I hope he hasn't moved. I use my right hand to feel along the brickwork and take a shaky step to my right. *Excuse me*, I try, but I can't find the words. I write for a living, surely I can remember some words. I know I am thinking with words, but none fancy meandering down to my mouth. Lazy fuckers. Instead, I make what I presume to be an alerting noise. On repetition of the same noise in front of my mirror later, I realise I made a sort of rasping rattle from the back of my throat.

The dodgy man ignores me, as does everyone on the platform. Ah, I look high. It's the middle of the day on a Friday and I look mid-bender. My body is drenched in sweat, I am feeling my way along a wall, and I cannot formulate any sort of language.

The train had been halted at the end of the tunnel for some reason, but now it begins to approach. I can see the lights—manifesting as one smudge in my button eyes—slowly descending upon us waiting spectres. I sense a shifting wave of human bodies and know that the train has arrived. Luckily, the inside of a train is always lit for the gods and this new slash of light allows me to stumble my way onto the carriage. I praise my OCD for always insisting we wait on the platform in the right position for the doors to open. I would not have crawled my way on had I been waiting mid-carriage.

I find a seat by running my hands over the partitions and working out what each new texture means. This particular train has the old seats, rough

and matted with years of passengers. As I sit, sweat springs up anew: like my body is telling me I have reached the end of the race. I sit with my head bowed, desperately wishing someone would ignore their usual civility and ask if I need help. But would I have heard them if they did? As it stands, everyone aboard the train finds somewhere else to look. No-one acknowledges the blind, deaf, mute creature which has dripped her way onto their train.

As I sit, my sight begins to flicker. From the centre this time, my eyes begin to clear. I approximate that I have been entirely blind for seven minutes, because the train had been due to arrive in five and was of course delayed and now I am waiting for my stop. I thank my tiny flat for only being one stop away and for being 100m from the station. I just need my sight back. It continues to fizzle out from the centre: slowly I can make out my own fingers, then my legs, then the seat. My peripheral takes the longest to return. I am tunnelled into my own head. I look around with glee as my sight is nearly completely back. I have no idea what the colours are around me, but I can see them. I make up new names for them before my brain catches up. Pigeon, inside of a bike helmet, table, American pencil.

My hearing is still entirely gone. I know this because the people around me—they were there after all—are all singing along to music which isn't playing. They are lip-syncing for their lives. I feel like twelve-year-old me, watching as my older sisters got ready for a night out together. They were singing to songs released before I was born, drinking things I wasn't allowed to even try, talking so fast and so interchangeably that it was a new language. These train strangers—strangers?—have absolutely no idea that they are witnessing the entire breakdown of a human mind. Or they are, and they don't care. I looked in the mirror when I got home, and it was pretty obvious to me.

Three different therapists have told me I'm difficult to treat because my defence mechanisms are so well-ingrained that I'm discharged when I'm at my worst. I used to be proud of that. Proud of my ability to hide everything about myself. I went to school the day after my first suicide attempt and no-one noticed. I also turned up to school with a black eye and two broken ribs and was so convincing in my telling of a heated boxing session that I decided to lie professionally. That's me, creative writer, bullshit hider. It's why I find it funny if people don't like me; stick around long enough and there's a new me to try.

I stumble off the train, a wavering version of sight now back in my possession. I see the steps to street level and groan. This groan sounds like a groan. A groan is hard to do wrong, even with limited vocal capacity. I wonder how parents manage prams at this station, or anyone with physical disabilities. Temporarily, I am physically disabled and due to the temporary nature of my condition I have absolutely not thought this through. I let all the hurrying people past me, feigning nonchalance. I lean against the side of the stairs and grit my teeth. I stop on every second step. I make it to the top in one piece, but my body is weeping. Please take us home, my legs cry.

I inch my way along the street, overtaken by hordes of elderly women, watching as toddlers speed past me using their clearly brand-new steps. I finally arrive at my door and thankfully already have my keys in hand. It takes me twelve attempts to slot the key into the lock. Each new attempt frustrates me more. My hands shake so badly that on one successful insertion I rip it straight back out again. By the time the key is snugly in the lock, tears are streaming down my face. Sods law that Life plays games with you when you're at your lowest. Or, maybe it's always fucking you over and you just don't notice until you're down and out.

I'm in the building.

I live on the second floor.

I decide to time this ascension. I know I will retell this, so I want an accurate number. I pause, heaving, at the bottom of the stairs and check the time on my phone. The light from the screen scratches across my retinas and I have to pocket it sharpish. 14:17. I crawl my way up the communal stairs. My brain won't allow me to touch the icky floor, so I use my elbows to propel myself upwards, knees bringing up the rear. I crawl and rest. Crawl and rest. Rest. Rest. Crawl and rest. I make it to my door. 14:28. Eleven fucking minutes.

I slam the door behind me, sorry neighbours, and shed everything on my way to the bedroom. Later I will follow the trail: trousers, long sleeved shirt, jumper, coat, boots, bag, and chuckle at the cinematic implication. In a sodden tangle, I flop onto the bed and fall asleep atop the covers. The cold will nearly wake me hours later, and I will somehow crawl inside my duvet cover and fully awaken more confused than ever as I have become a human duvet, sandwiched by poppers. I sleep for five hours and wake up with my sight and hearing. The human duvet cries with relief.

'Funny story,' I say to my sister on the phone.

‘Not a funny story,’ she will reply a few minutes later. ‘Get to a fucking doctor.’

I roll my eyes.

‘Funny story,’ I say to my partner.

‘Not a funny story,’ he replies immediately. ‘When are you seeing the doctor?’

I roll my eyes.

‘Funny story,’ I say to my best friend, studying Medicine in London.

‘Ha! That’s super unusual. Get to a GP,’ she says.

‘Really?’ I say.

‘Really.’

I wait in the GP’s office. There is a man with a hacking cough and leery eyes. I don’t like him. There is a man with a tiny, curly baby who is singing ‘Beautiful Girls’ to his tiny offspring and begging her to stop crying. I like him. The receptionists have a Christmas radio station on—mid-November—and are not-quietly rating the seasons of *Bake Off*. I like them a lot.

My name appears on the screen and in I go. Wow. I blush violently because they have given me young Jason Statham GP and I suddenly forget why I am there.

‘So, fill me in,’ Dr Jason Statham says.

Fill *me* in, I say, thankfully in my head. I tell him the story and my blush quietens as his frown deepens. He keeps absolute eye contact and doesn’t turn back to his computer at any point. He frowns again. He repeats everything back to me word for word. Impressive. Worrying? He starts a series of tests. Heart, lungs, jaw, temples. He gets one of those horrible bright lights on a black stick and tells me to focus on his nose. My eyes water immediately because the light still burns. When the main light comes back on I see him frowning again.

‘Squeeze my hands, really try to crush my fingers,’ he says.

I really do try. My right hand is crushing it, literally, but my left is flopping about like a wet sock—that’s less floppy than a wet fish, but still pretty floppy. I look down at my left hand like what the fuck dude? It looks back like get off my case pal.

Dr Jason Statham does more of these tests and then suddenly sends off an email quick as lightning. I didn’t even see him move to the computer. His fingers are flying over the keyboard, like a whole bunch of

fleas jumping about looking for a new host after theirs has been doused in salt.

‘I’m referring you to the Royal. I don’t mean to scaremonger, but I’m sending you for a CT scan. It probably wasn’t a mini-stroke but it’s best to rule these things out.’

He says some other things, but all I hear is ‘Stroke’ and ‘Cardiology’. I’m twenty-one. I shouldn’t be hearing this kind of nonsense from a GP. He hasn’t even asked if I do drugs. Do I look too clean to do drugs? I went to a posh school and then a small uni, I never even got offered drugs. I got told when I was fifteen that I looked more like a narc than a drug-user. I was kind of offended at the time and then I watched 21 Jump Street and was like heck yeah narcs have cool undercover spy jobs.

I say goodbye to Dr Jason Statham and wander back to my flat. I sit on the sofa for a long time, just thinking. I was completely alone when I was underground. If I had died down there, who would have known? I mean, sure, someone would eventually realise I was dead and sort of drag me out of the station. But no-one even knew I was there. I had no signal, no 4G, no Wi-Fi. I had no-one in the city who knew me well enough to know where I was on that Friday afternoon. My partner was working all weekend and wouldn’t have known until I had already been eaten by Argyle rats. I sit in my glorified studio and realised that if this happens again, I will be alone again. I live alone. I have a crazy unpredictable schedule. I double-lock my door when I get in. I lock out the entire outside world to keep me safe.

I watch the sky darken into a deep magenta. I love nights where it skips blue and fades directly into the purples and reds of the spectrum. Red sky at night.

The next morning, my phone rings and I actually answer. I don’t know why. I am booked for an emergency consultation with a neurologist, and a CT scan, and an ECG. I write all the details down and figure out what she means after she has hung up. ‘Dirty Queen’ is actually Dr Quinn, the neurologist I will be seeing. ‘Alexander’s ride’ meant ‘the clinic is on the Alexandra Parade side of the hospital.’ I am in bed by nine thirty and awake by seven.

I walk there and back in my new boots that make me feel like a powerful witch. The boots give me three blisters and something to focus on. I arrive half an hour early, of course, and sit in a waiting room full of grey, overweight men who look like a haunted gallery when I walk past. Only their eyes move. Eyes follow me to the reception desk. Eyes follow

me to my seat. Eyes quickly dart around the rest of the waiting room as I look up squarely.

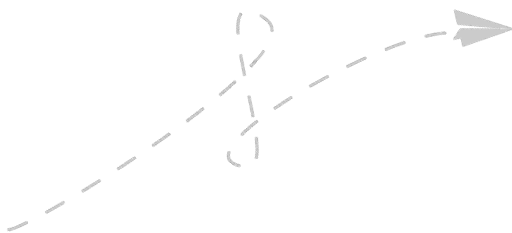
I speak to Dr Quinn's doctor-in-waiting and he frowns at me in the same way Dr Jason Statham did. He does the same crush tests. Blow your cheeks out. Follow the devil light pen. Close your eyes tightly. Raise your arms. I preferred Dr Jason Statham's proddings.

'Clearly an acute ocular migraine,' he murmurs to himself.

'Do you lose hearing with those too?' I ask, looking at his sparse, upside-down notes.

'Ah. Not usually.'

Inner me pumps the air with her stubborn little paw. Fucking migraine my arse. Although, if I was going to be diagnosed with a migraine, I like the fancy words he put before it. Acute. Ocular. Nice.



# Medusa

*Pip Osmond-Williams*

You didn't always hate the sea.

In another time,  
by the shores of Sarpedon  
you would dip your hardened heels  
and threads of rust and gold in blue.  
Wave to Selene as she looked down upon  
the girls burning  
coils of citronella  
by the waters of Cisthene beach.

In another time,  
you and Euryale collected seaweed and shells  
(A strand for every man who looks your way,  
A cephalopod for every heart you think you'll break)  
popped olives in your blistering mouths like cherries,  
kissing the scrapes on each other's hands  
like you did when you were girls.

In another time,  
you were scared of the snakes who hissed in the dunes.  
I should have told you to be scared instead  
of the monsters inside the temple,  
the sea and its thunderous pools.

For you, Medusa, I will never speak his name.  
And do not listen when she tells you  
that you are more losing battle than gentle girl.  
She weaves salt in the wounds of divinity's war  
then waits to watch the women burn.

The owl swoops and claws  
at the roots of your hair and skin.  
banshee whore harlot gorgon  
M O N S T E R

you, Medusa, who could not swim.





# Heirloom

*Pip Osmond-Williams*

I started smoking cigarettes  
on my father's knee aged three  
the glowing ends  
curling around our heads  
and the television set  
as we watched the races on a Saturday  
the light of his eyes  
pale like the dome of a midsummer sky  
his gold ashtray piled high  
with the chalk dead ends of Lucky Strikes  
and me, a smudge of a girl,  
my hair still gold and light  
chasing those silver ringlets  
with my stubby chubby fingers  
he would waft them away  
not see my longing for the  
dragons around my head  
and then he would  
take another drag again

# Sister Philomena

*Sue Burnside*

*‘Sister Philomena’ is an extract from a longer piece of semi-autobiographical writing, based on Sue’s experiences growing up in an Irish Catholic family in East London in the 1970s.*

On my first day at secondary school, I refused a lift from my mum who had recently passed her driving test and was always on the lookout for victims. I really couldn’t bear the thought of her Irish mamminess at the school gate, scrutinising my face for traces of illicit makeup, or wiping imaginary smudges with a spit dampened hanky. Her car was stuffed with religious artefacts, glittering rosary beads hanging from the rear view mirror, garish statues of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Motorist’s Prayer magnets and St Christopher medals mounted with sticky tape on the dashboard. Getting anywhere by car seemed to be a perilous business which relied solely on divine intervention for a safe arrival. Bottles of Holy Water from the shrines of Knock and Lourdes and other holy places nestled in the glove compartment, and she splashed us liberally at the start of each journey and at the end as we ventured into the world. I had miraculous medals pinned into my knickers, and scapulas hanging around my neck. The outside world was to my mother a very dangerous and ungodly place, and she was going to do her best to protect us from all evil.

So I headed down to the bus stop to wait for the number 58 bus. My older brother already stood in place, hands in pockets, head down, refusing to meet my eye or acknowledge me except to hiss, ‘you’re not with me.’

But what did I care? I was off to secondary school resplendent in my red corduroy hat, in my navy blazer with its sleeves grazing the ends of my fingers. I had applied a dash of navy mascara. ‘Even my lashes are in uniform,’ I laughed to myself. My outfit was completed by a pair of black platform shoes bought from Ravel in Stratford Shopping Centre in the summer holidays, despite my mum’s mutterings and warnings.

If I am honest, much of the first day at school has passed mercifully into oblivion. But even now from a distance of forty-four years, some images still flash back as if from a half-remembered nightmare, except I know these things really did happen. I have no memories of morning registration at all, so it must have been uneventful.

But I do recall my first lesson, Cookery with Sister Philomena. She was a fearless Irish nun of the old school. No baby blue twin sets for her, she wore a full-length habit in vampire black. No folk masses with guitars, singing Lord of the Dance, she was strictly Sweet Sacrament Divine on an organ. She had a phenomenally huge bosom, on which rested a crucifix on a chain, a depiction of Our Lord in his final grotesque agonies. A rosary with beads like golf balls hung from one full hip and the keys to her stock cupboard hung from the other, each capable of delivering a stinging blow. She had a broad, weather-beaten face like a farmer and hands like shovels. She had a nose like a potato and looked like Tommy Cooper in a habit. She was a terrifying creature and I was late for my first lesson with her.

I limped in, trying to draw as little attention as possible, but the door closed with a crash. My classmates looked at me, their expressions a sickly mixture of pity and glee.

‘Well, well, come in. So good of you to join us, miss ...?’

‘Miss Howard,’ I gulped.

‘Miss Howard. And what kept you? Touching up your make up, perhaps?’

Her eyes raked me up and down, coming to a theatrical stop when she got to my hat.

‘Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, what is that on your head?’

‘My hat,’ I whispered.

‘My hat, Sister Philomena.’

‘My hat, Sister Philomena.’

‘It looks like a carbuncle. Get rid of it!’

I stuffed the hat in my bag. Suddenly, I felt a burning need to urinate, but knew better than to ask. She gazed downwards at my platform shoes.

‘And what in the name of the sweet Baby Jesus are those?’

‘My ...’

‘I know they’re shoes. Take them off. They are not appropriate footwear in a kitchen. Maybe in a bordello, but not in my kitchen.’

I stood in my American Tan pop sox, grinning nervously at my classmates, as she emerged from her stock cupboard carrying a pair of ancient and oversized grey plimsolls. ‘Put these on.’

I didn’t protest but flip-flapped like a penguin to my place at a worktop, thus beginning my strange relationship with Sister Philomena. For some reason she liked to keep me close to her, almost as an exemplar of what not to do in cookery. My worktop was too chaotic, my hair was too long and untidy, my nails too bitten. She held out my hands for my

classmates' inspection, holding them gingerly, as though they were the paws of a diseased rat. I couldn't stack crockery, or mash potatoes, or whip cream. All I could do was emit a mad giggle that was impossible to inhibit.

If she was feeling whimsical, she would gather the class and declare, 'I had a nightmare last night and in my nightmare a girl was actually drying a saucepan with a tea towel. Can you believe that?', staring at me until I gently dropped the tea towel, or stopped whatever other nightmare inducing behaviour I was engaging in; the list was endless. But moments of whimsy were few and far between. She would gather us around her by banging on a saucepan with a wooden spoon, and then point out our failings and misdemeanours. No surprise then that I was too frightened to tell Sister that I had dropped and smashed four out of six eggs down the side of the cooker, and had to make my Christmas cake with only two. I was in unspeakable terror as to what her response would be if and when she did discover the mess, praying to St Jude that she wouldn't identify me as the culprit. But, no doubt thanks to St Jude, she didn't.

Despite her savagery, or perhaps because of it, we were naughtier in that lesson than any others. This spirit of misrule culminated in an inexplicable act of rebellion in the third year. We had spotted her keys in the stock cupboard door and, without a word, someone had turned the key and locked her in. Our exhilaration was mixed with a deep terror. For twenty minutes or so, we pretended to try to unlock the door, offering bland reassurances—'nearly there, Sister. Won't be long now,' and 'shall we call the caretaker?'—all the while trying to stifle laughter.

Eventually we freed her. By this time, fear had taken over and we were nearly weeping. But when she emerged, she was a different woman. She didn't rage or lash out. She was quiet and seemed more fragile, vulnerable. Her power to terrify seemed now to be diminished. She let us go to break early. We had broken her.

Soon after she announced she was retiring. On her last day, during our last lesson, she asked me very quietly if I would visit her in the convent. But to my shame, I never did. I couldn't bear to see her vulnerability. I much preferred the threat of a slap from her meaty hand.

# Three Prayers in Reverse Order

Jamie Redgate

3. One day back then, when I was lost and alone in the wilderness after the worst date anyone ever had, I looked at myself in my bathroom mirror and I cried out, 'GOD!'

And I thought, if you find me my soulmate I'll believe in you.

God said, 'No one believes in soulmates anymore. Do you know how many people there are? It's mental.'

But I would not be dissuaded.

And I was clever. I said to the mirror, 'It doesn't

count if he lives in North Korea or died in the 1600s. I know there's a man out there who is perfect for me and I want him in my life. Otherwise there's no deal.'

Well guess what? The very next morning my doorbell rang and I sprinted to it. It was my best friend Jen, on her hippy-kick back then, come round to sanctimonise at me as usual about her next blood drive. Imagine my disappointment. Jen said airily, when you offer up your own blood it can feel so *rewarding*. I said I supposed I'd go.

I regretted it almost immediately. The drive was miles out of the way and took a comfortless age in Jen's scuffed

up, salt of the earth Volvo, and for all that all it was was this ratty old gross school gym like a warzone ward you wouldn't wish on the worst of your enemies. And the nurses there were these complete nutjobs too who, even though my iron level turned out to be perfect like I said it would, still pinned me to the ground to prick my finger.

But those witches and Jen and the whole leeching ordeal were all worth suffering in the end because ... I found *him*.

He was a doctor. Taller than me (though not too much!), and he had hazel eyes and the softest voice and a beautiful half

moon of freckles  
on his forearm, the  
mirror of mine.  
We had the same  
blood type: O. He  
said that Jonathan  
Franzen was  
overrated.

You can call  
me a believer.

I swooned  
when he took my  
blood away, and  
came to in his  
strong qualified  
arms on the way to  
the biscuit table. (I

could tell Jen was  
trying to catch his  
eye and steal him,  
but he didn't once  
take his eyes off  
me.) At the table  
he fed me a wafer  
and said he wasn't  
allowed to date  
patients.

I said, 'marry  
me then.'

He said there  
were probably no  
rules about that.

I know what  
you're thinking.

This is the part of  
the story where it  
all has to go  
wrong. Sucks to be  
you. Have a little  
faith. Me and him  
we've been  
together ten whole  
years today, and in  
all that time he's  
never changed at  
all or tried to  
change me, the  
way people always  
do. **God**  
**giveth.**

## 2. Little Peter

Mullins, of all  
people, knew that  
those that ask do  
not get.

So it came as  
a complete  
surprise when, one  
hot afternoon in  
his thirteenth June,  
the love of Peter's  
young life—Emma  
of the year above,  
Emma with the  
bra and the  
boyfriend—  
popped into  
sudden existence

at the foot of his  
small bed. Like a  
cold shower this  
mad fact shocked  
them both into  
silence, and they  
sat there, naked as  
you like and  
staring at each  
other until what  
had happened  
slowly dawned on  
both their faces. In  
the time it took  
Emma to catch her  
breath to scream,  
Peter blushed like  
a robin and fell off  
the bed trying to

claw back his  
covers to cover up.  
It was somewhere  
in that tangle  
between his sheets  
and the hard floor  
that Peter,  
panicked and  
shamed out of all  
thought, cried out  
loud inside his  
head to whoever  
had heard him the  
first time to get her  
the hell out of  
there right away.  
**And, lo.**

Just as  
Emma's screams  
began to surface,  
away she went.

For a long  
moment Peter hid  
on the floor under  
his recovered  
duvet, breathing in  
his own hot air,  
limp with surprise.

My God, he  
thought. My

God my

God my

God. He could  
have anything in  
the world.

So try again.

This time  
Peter requested  
specifically that  
Emma would  
come because she  
wanted to. It was  
quiet in his room  
for several  
desperate minutes,  
and he worried  
he'd wasted his  
one chance.

When he  
heard the gravel  
tap at his window

at last, Peter's  
heart nearly burst.  
He pulled back the  
curtain and saw  
her waiting for him  
in a thin dress in  
the garden. (Worth  
noting that Peter  
had asked to make  
it night-time too so  
her arrival would  
be secret, romantic  
like a film. Plus the  
garden was  
definitely looking  
grander).

Emma looked  
nervously around  
and smiled up at  
him, her lips lit by  
moonlight. He  
helped her shimmy  
up the pipe. Once  
up and inside she  
kissed him (on the  
MOUTH), and slid  
off the yellow  
pants Peter'd seen  
the soft edge of at  
school once, and  
said,

'I always  
loved you, Peter,  
from afar.'

Peter was so  
in love with her he  
couldn't stand.

Emma could not  
tear her eyes off  
him, and through  
Peter's small  
intestine drilled a  
great tapeworm of  
guilt. He got rid of  
her before the next  
kiss stopped.

Alone again,  
Peter prayed  
to be rid of  
the worm  
and was  
relieved.

So this time  
he made her come  
again but asked to  
make it so she  
really *wanted* to  
want to, please. He  
didn't want her  
changed into  
someone she  
wasn't: he wanted  
her.

Emma  
arrived for a third  
time that day,  
already wrapped  
around him. She  
lifted his t-shirt so  
their tummies  
touched and

whispered in his ear how this time it was her choice. Peter couldn't make himself believe it. He asked to get rid of her again.

Peter felt miserable. Okay, he thought. So what if it isn't her then. Say it's just a replica, with the

same soft legs and the look and the laugh and the other bits he knows not of, so no one's getting changed around, no one's being altered. Call it the Emma from the parallel universe where despite all the odds she loves him.

The worm said **NO**.

Fine. So what if it's just her body then that comes true, and it can just lie there and not speak or even look at poor Peter, who'd run out of other ideas to try.

1. Edith received a letter in the post about a week after she'd had her baby, about a New Mummies Group the other mums from the hospital were starting. It was a form letter, addressed to INSERT PATIENT HERE, but that didn't matter. To Edith, who felt then like she couldn't survive a single second more of the screaming, a

support group sounded like a gift of grace. Thank God I'm not the only one, she thought. *Thank God.*

When Edith arrived the next morning, however, at a room all bunted out like a pageant and full of mums comparing their doll-quiet babies like children comparing presents at Christmas, her heart fell off a cliff

inside her. She was not the type to cry or embarrass herself in front of anyone but, sitting alone in the corner that day, staring into the loud dark gummy mouth of her baby so she needn't see the mums all staring at her like the noise was her fault, Edith was sure that if she forced the tears down much longer she'd tear a hole in her throat for real. In her head she



begged the ceiling to collapse. But it didn't.

At home after, in the long shadow cast by the light of her morning's hope, Edith never felt so alone. She sat on the floor and rocked back and forth, hitting her head off the cot on each swing, pleading for him to shut up in her singsong voice. The screaming drove her up her own walls. She hated the idea that her own baby would see just how incredibly upset she was, it was his fault she was. The endless sound was like the sound a knife makes inside you. Edith tugged dumbly at her ears, and, for the first time since she was a little girl, she prayed.

‘Please  
God give me  
silence,’ Edith  
cried.

With one arm holding her bawling child, Edith went to the kitchen and found a long knife, still sticky from the cake she'd had a slice of instead of cooking. She wiped the blade on the baby's clothes to get the worst off. Babies were God's gift they all said, but Edith was sure now that there was no God at all.

She stabbed herself in the leg and passed out.

When Edith came to she was still exhausted and the baby was still wailing. She looked in horror at the red knife. She didn't know what she might do if the

noise kept not stopping. She limped down the street until she saw a taxi, and bundled herself and her wrapped up baby in the back. At the hospital she sat in a small waiting room, watching the receptionist who had a bandage on his forehead and a Japanese zen garden on his desk, and a mini concrete mixer that he'd concreted over the garden with.

On the form he gave her Edith wrote, ‘I just want us to be happy.’

It was a new procedure, terribly risky, but it made of Edith's hell a heaven. A nice doctor patched up her leg while another explained how to use the little remote control, saying all

she had to do if  
her baby ever  
threatened to  
scream again was  
just press the red  
button hanging  
from the cord  
around her neck.

For the first  
few weeks Peter  
still wailed awfully,  
but with the sound  
gone it was so  
much easier to  
forgive him. He  
grew up loved. His  
teachers adored  
him ('so smart and  
thoughtful, he'll be  
a lawyer or a  
doctor one day'  
they said). Edith  
felt more  
comfortable in his  
company than she  
ever had with  
anyone.  
Sometimes he  
went whole days  
without needing  
muting, and they

would have long  
conversations  
together, so long  
as he chose his  
words carefully  
and never, for  
god's sake, made a  
scene.

But the guilt  
over what she'd  
done was always in  
Edith. One day  
near the end, when  
she was in hospital  
and Peter was still  
young, she finally  
bared her soul to  
him, explaining all  
about the groove  
on his skull where  
the hair didn't  
grow so well,  
about the doctors'  
'Little Trip to  
Broca's Area,'  
about how she  
hadn't had a  
choice because  
she'd have died if  
she hadn't done it  
but that she was

sorry she'd had to,  
sorry she hadn't  
been a good  
enough mother to  
cope. Peter stared  
at the floor for a  
long time, listening  
to his mother  
crying quietly. At  
last he took her  
hand and tried to  
explain that **he**  
**forgave her.**

After all, who  
can honestly say  
they have a say in  
how they turn out?  
He's sure he'd  
have done the  
exact same thing if  
he'd been in her  
shoes.

It was just  
what Edith had  
always needed to  
hear. Alas that  
she'd had him on  
mute at the time.

# The Sounds of Other Folk

*Sarah Spence*

I'm just through the door, shouting, it's only me!, carrying that bloody plant and lucky no to have my eye out. I follow my ears through the kitchen and here no, is Magret no got two big pans steeping and going at another like a woman possessed. At this time in the morning.

—Christ, I says. —You'll have the bottom off that.

—Aye, well, she goes.

Some mood she's in. Probably some daft falling out, I'm thinking, the boy's probably said a bad word against her and she's taken a huff. Still though, at their age.

—That's me brought that plant, I goes.

No so much as a nod from her.

—Davie still in his bed is he, I says.

Still nowt. Just the sound of the scourer, the tap dripping into the water. So that's me standing there like a spare part. Some weight in this thing too and her no even turned round the once to see it.

—Right well, I says. —I'll set this down through the front room and get out your hair.

The scouring stops. —Just set it down here.

—No chance, I says. —It'll no get the light and take up half the table.

—I'm no wanting you through, she goes, right snippy. —The room's a state.

—Don't be daft.

—Jean, she goes.

Christ, some folk. I'm just shaking my head at her cos I'm no having it, some nonsense that, folk with high ideas of themselves. Acting like I'm just someone off the street and no her own sister. I'm needing out that wee kitchen, it's too wee for two, especially when one's off her trolley, and she's that busy back at they pots anyway, no like she'll even ken I'm gone.

The curtains are drawn through the room but och it's no worse than usual. Just the paper out and a biscuit wrapper and a tea cup needing put away. There's a big bit blanket slung over Davie's chair and I'm laughing, almost apologising, thinking it's him.

I turn the plant this way and that on the side cabinet. It's no sitting right, I canny place why, but it's the best spot for it getting the light. I get they curtains open and oh what a difference. The room's fair

transformed with a bit morning coming in. I give the place a last wee once over and I'm just getting all the rubbish together when I catch sight of a wee bony ankle and a slipper and my hand jumps to my chest. I'm seeing something I'm no meant to see. I must ken what though, cos it's none of that sorry Davie no meaning to wake you. It's Magret's name, no Davie's, I call out.

Magret kens too, cos when I'm back through she's just bent over the sink, no moving.

—Christ Magret, I says. —What happened? Did he no come to his bed?

—He gets up in the night, she says. And that's that.

There was Sheila's husband dropped down dead outside the Safeway. Just the week before last. It was in the papers before they even had him in his suit. I reach for her arm and her hand is stone cold. Makes you think, how long has that water been standing.

—You'll be needing to phone someone, I says.

She pulls away and gets a hold of that washing up liquid. It's for the bin but she's shaking it like nothing else and it's wheezing away as she's squeezing out the last drops.

—I'm no having the polis poking their noses, she says.

—The polis! What would they be wanting?

She shakes her head.

—It's the GP when it's in the home, I says.

She's right dismissive of that too. —Davie's never set foot in a GP.

Oh aye, and that's him deid at 67. No fool like a stubborn fool. But it's no the time for that. I'm starting to think she has the right idea with they pots, idle hands and all that. I have a go at the drying rack, try to get the lot put away, make myself useful. But the tea towel just puts me in mind of that blanket chucked over him.

—Magret, I says. —You canny just leave a dead man to sit in his chair.

Christ, the daggers she's giving me. Even the tap's no dripping.

—That's my husband, she says, her voice too big for this wee kitchen. —I'm no handing him over to strangers, she says. —A doctor and an undertaker and they bloody lawyers, she says, —all speaking down to you and wanting you to sign every bit paper.

She goes quiet and I go quiet and you realise just how quiet the house is. She's got that scourer clenched in her fist. I get her down into a seat at the kitchen table. Her hands are red raw and when I pat them dry with the

tea towel wee streaks of blood come away. She's just sitting shaking her head.

I fill the kettle and stare into the filthy water in the sink while the thing boils.

I get it. He's her Davie so long as he's sat in that chair of his. Time he's wrapped in a sheet, or stitched in a suit, time he's David Matthew Foster, a printed name, and hers signed beneath ... That's what passing over is. Into the record books.

But that wee bit bony ankle, that slipper sticking out.

Two cups, a teabag each. She's got all her phone numbers taped to the cupboard door, the Sellotape right yellow now and that dried up that the whole thing comes off no bother. The dentist, the taxi, the takeaway, the post office. The doctor.

—I'm no having all sorts traipsing through my house, she says, but soft now, no so harsh.

—Aye, I goes, soft too. —Never you mind about all that.

There's voices across the road, shouting. Men bringing crates in, shutters going up. Folk'll be in for their Sunday paper, their milk, their rolls. Just a sit first. I add an extra two sugars, set the tea down in front of us, watch the steam from the cup til the steam stops.

# Milhouse Gets a Girlfriend

*Stuart Ravlinson*

Keep your hair solid. Keep it in place.

You've come to this stage  
that happens in every boy's life,  
where your best friend develops feelings  
for a girl and his puberty seems to be onset  
a little before yours so it's kinda weird  
because you don't really understand  
what's happening to him or those arch comments  
from the grown-ups, either. You must remember.

Dress in something easy to animate.

He doesn't come round as often  
as he used to. Every time you hope  
he might be free he is instead, with her.  
You try to find other friends, or pastimes.  
But all you can think to do is sit  
in an empty treehouse to wonder  
about the friend you used to have. You must remember.

Count your fingers. One. Two. Three. Four.

Just take solace in knowing this was inevitable,  
it's called a universal story. Someday you'll  
do this to someone else, presumably.  
You've watched it happen, in brutal detail,  
so you'll know what to expect.  
So do your audience. Say goodbye  
to your old habits, Bart. You must remember.

Don't blink too often, there's a sweet-spot  
of just enough movement to know it's there,  
just enough to keep your eyes comfortable.

# Reliving a Visitation

Max Parnell

18:00, dusk. Strong breeze and a cloudy sky. Suitable conditions for re-experiencing a forest.

Bird's eye view, looking down on a small clearing of cloud grey chalk. The wind carries minor augmented tones: excerpts from a hueless euphoria.



A faint thump drifts through the air. Sound carrying clockwork regularity. Metronome precision. Slow, before a steady increase in tempo. Like a steam train accelerating.



His focus descends, moving to the sea foam leaves packed tightly amongst dense, interwoven branches.

Clusters of dew drops gently glissade down the branches. Focusing on one viscous pod, he catches a glimpse of a drowning ant: six legs flailing, locked inside an aqueous cell. And then it happens:

Was it *experienced, felt, visited*....? His tongue thrums, hammering the roof of his mouth as he peers into the dew drop, catching flashes of his own body locked in the barrel of a wave.

Did that count as having experienced or felt this?

When you're drowning do you *feel* the water or *experience* it?



His throat becomes dry, his saliva salty. He makes a mental note of this image. And continues. Now on ground level, he looks up to the sky, tracing his descent trail.

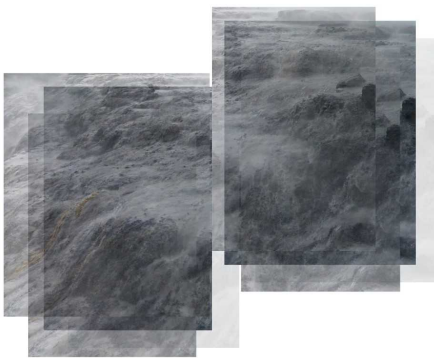
A negative landscape. A landscape in negative. Upwards being a shade of sky that becomes invisible to the non-augmented gaze. Wind churning into achromatic matter.

Chromatically, a bee's hum rises and falls, lulling the saturated clouds that scurry across the sky's surface, uniformly becoming teal blue. As it approaches, its hum arpeggiates, climbing triadically, shifting in shades of yellow as it does so: Flax, Ochre, Tuscany.



Reversing focus 180 degrees, the sky steps back. His focus falls on his bare feet, his pale toes masticating the crisp foliage. Below, a rivulet's saffron water splits in two, running both directions like a dual carriageway. Edging forward, he dips one toe into the right hand lane.

He can sense the water's brackishness dehydrating his throat. And then it happens again. He knows he hasn't been here before, but is déjà visité place specific, or related to revisiting a sense, sensing a visitation?



Again his mind reverts to the ocean, arms flailing, stuck in the wrong lane, throttled by each thrust of the saline surge. His eyes close, feeling each current interweaving, listening to the congestion. Shards of aquamarine blue pierce the swell, bursting the memory. Had he felt brackish or experienced brackishness? Can



you revisit a taste without revisiting a memory of experiencing that taste?

Removing his toe from the trickling stream, he turns left, continuing to follow the forest path.

Coming out of the woodland into a clearing, he enters a greenhouse growing physalis fruits: a garnish for the culinary landscape. He enters the space, sensing a familiar coastal breeze.

Like a hidden frame placed inside a film reel, he glimpses his dessert plate at the oceanfront restaurant, his last meal before that evening swim. His saliva ducts overflowing, he opens his mouth, inhaling that passion fruit cheesecake with sea salt biscuit base, garnished with an unripe laguna yellow physalis.



Plucking a fruit, he places it in his mouth, rolling it around on his tongue before biting into its soft flesh. Bursting, it floods his ears with salt water, leaving his throat still dry. Inside his eardrum he hears the ocean churning, practising Origami with its own undulations.

He stumbles out of the greenhouse onto the arid sand dunes becoming ocean.

Off balance, the open expanse adopts the ocean's respiration: a beige ship deck swaying just below the grains.

Proceeding through the ankle-length grass, he sees the horizon peering over the thin blades, embodying the wind's patterns.



He proceeds, finally reaching the edge of a brittle cliff, his bare toes curling around the chalky rock, securing their grip.

Tilting his head backwards, 80, 85, 87, 90 degrees, he places his hands on the outside of his thighs. The wind drops to the bass clef, adopting a bassoon-like timbre, sustaining a long note he can't quite place.

Raising his arms, stretching his shoulder muscles, his left hand meets his right above his head. The wind catches in his jacket, pulling it outwards to create two fluttering wings. His arms continue to ascend, the wind following them step by step, climbing up the staff, its timbre morphing into a vibrant metallic bite as it reaches the higher register.

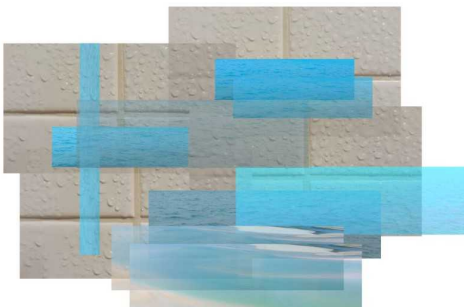


Fingers pointed straight, heart careering against his rib cage, he dives forward, the wind's vibrant sustain ricocheting around inside his skull.

His pale fingertips pierce the sky blue ocean, glitching.

As his outstretched figure enters the water, his body freezes, rotates

180 degrees, arms descending from above his head to fall into a crucifix position.



Three doctors catch him mid-fall. They allow him a few seconds to lie in their arms, before removing his headset.

They ask him how he found the experience. What did he manage to *work through*?

He stares up at the ceiling of the PTSD support space. In the thin lines of grout that run symmetrically between the white tiles, he can just make out tiny fragments of ocean, drifting in multiple directions.

His throat dry and a little briny, the watery colors of his past trauma dribble into a polychromatic puddle.

Arms still spread wide, he coughs up a brackish cacophony, which the doctor interprets as such:

‘Recognition of immemorially known. Revisited himself or a past version of himself, re-lived his experienced, re-experienced the scene of the trauma, traumatically re-felt his former self, re-formed himself through feeling, pieced himself together in the inner peace found through a both personal and *imp*personal visitation.’

## Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Weekend

*Ruthie Kennedy*

Snow spewed across the city and turned to a hardened froth which stuck to the lips of the kerbs, where dark figures walked by, silently, in pairs. Angie ducked her head back from the window and continued duct-taping the curtains to the walls. Winter preparations were nearly finished. A thinning hot water bottle tucked into the kangaroo-pouch formed by her unbuttoned jeans; socks and towels shoved into the rotting window-panes; bubble-wrap taped across the sunken and cracked glass; three pairs of socks, hat, scarf, and a dressing gown: what more could be done?

‘Tea, Ange?’ Mel, her flatmate, shouted from the kitchen.

‘Yes please.’

Angie shuffled out of her room.

The kettle began to roar, adding its voice to the deafening rattle of the washing machine. Mel was dressed in a mere shirt and jeans, ankles exposed. She was wiping the countertops with distracted intensity.

‘How are you dressed like that,’ grumbled Angie.

‘Like what? Not a wimp?’

‘Hm. Oh yeah, Sarah’s coming to visit on Thursday, if that’s cool.’

‘Sure.’

Angie huddled at the table, sipping her tea absent-mindedly. She was scanning the kitchen for signs of heat-stealing vulnerabilities. The large cracks in the floor were already oozing with expandable foam, but what else? The window had been painted shut and forced open so many times that she couldn’t quite tell where the holes were. Her gaze rested on the yellow lights dotted on the kitchen ceiling, of which around half were functional and two were hanging by their wires. The light quivered and grew, giving the illusion of warmth. All sound faded in the quiet luminescence. Angie’s jaw went slack.

‘Angie.’ Mel clicked her fingers in Angie’s face. ‘Angie!’

Reluctantly, Angie drew her eyes away from the light. Veiny green clouds swarmed over Mel’s face. She blinked.

‘Can we put the heating on yet?’ she asked.

‘I don’t want to; not until it’s dark. Do some star-jumps with me.’

Angie chose instead to tuck her nose into her dressing-gown, pressing the mug into her cheek. She hated exercise. Mel huffed and puffed while the expandable foam squealed under hoof.

‘Are you – working – today?’ she panted.

'Yeah ... later,' mumbled Angie into the fluff of her gown.  
'Meet me – oof – after? There's a – ha – thing I want to go to.'  
'Okay.'

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The warehouse was a forty-five-minute trek from their flat, in the rain. Mel wanted to go there because of Peter, the experimental sound artist. He was tall in a lurching way and sported a curly blonde hairdo that ran down to his waist. He reminded Angie of a giraffe drawn in a picture book she'd read as a child. They found him trying to light a cigarette around the corner from the entrance of the warehouse. When he saw them, he smiled goofily.

'Look at this!' he said. 'Raindrop landed right in the middle of my cig. Of all the raindrops in all the world, what are the chances?'

Mel and Angie rolled cigarettes, too. Thumping, wavy sounds were leaking from the building, offset by the syncopated rhythm of rain. They were the only ones on the street. Angie sloshed around in the melting snow puddles, feeling her toes go numb.

'Did we miss you?' asked Mel.

'Nah,' Peter smiled. 'You're just in time. This junkyard dude is just finishing his set. It was pretty gnarly; I'm nervous to go after him.'

Peter always talked like a Californian surfer. He was actually Swedish, and although he technically had the accent, something about the knowing irony in the way he talked grated on Angie's nerves. She never felt like he was being serious with anyone. They threw their cigarettes in the slush piles backed up against the wall, eager to get out of the rain and into the relative warmth.

Despite the unremarkable exterior, the inside of the warehouse was huge and metallic. Furnishings were sparse, save for the PA systems and DJ decks in the centre of the far wall. There was a trellis table on the other side of the room, with a couple of crates of craft beer provided by the sponsors. A dozen or so people loitered around the space, beers in hand, looking cold. Angie felt her eyelids squeezing shut, without her permission. She never could concentrate at events like this, too aware of the 'cool factor,' the peacocking, the impenetrable art. She wanted to enjoy them. Mel did. Mel was looking round at the space approvingly. Angie knew she was eyeing it up for its potential as an exhibition venue. It was nice, though, that no matter what kind of event you put on, people would travel far, even in the cold, just to be part of something. Angie took a reluctant gulp of craft beer. When they'd got to the trellis table, they were

out of the 'Heaven' brand. 'Hell' was infused with dark chocolate and chilli. It was a disaster of a flavour. At the other side of the room, Peter wrestled with his assembled machines.

'I always find it amazing how people have such strong sense of self,' said Angie.

'What do you mean?' asked Mel, distractedly.

'Well, I think of you as a "sculptor", and I just caught myself earlier thinking of Peter as an "experimental sound artist." You guys give off something that cements that in my head.'

'We probably just tell you that's what we do, and you believe us.'

'What do I tell people?'

'That you're just bumming around.'

Because they had come to see Peter, it was unthinkable that they should lean against the comfortable, anonymous wall. Angie and Mel stood at the front, rocking back and forth on their heels. He gave them a wave.

'Okay, guys, this one's called "My Grandma Ate A Pine Nut." '

\*\*\*

Peter and Mel had a date at the flat, because Angie was—'Are you sure?' 'Yes.'—invited. Angie looked around at the teapots and mason jars crammed with flowers and saw in them Mel's blushing and excited face. Everyone had to bring a cocktail, but Angie's Class War (Buckfast and prosecco) was vehemently vetoed. So that left the tame and romantic mojitos and Wings of Love. Mel served some freezer soup, for a starter, while Sister Sledge grooved in the background.

Angie leaned back in her armchair and swilled her mojito around in its glass. They were waiting for the main course to cook; a vegetable lasagne made by Peter's mother, currently bubbling in tinfoil containers in the oven. Peter had been so proud to pull these from his carrier bag, to be able to bring such a love-filled meal to the table. Angie had loaded the tray into the oven with a warmth and consideration that surprised her.

Dessert was a petrol station apple strudel. Angie melted away to her bedroom at the soonest possible opportunity. How do you know when your friends stop belonging to you, and you alone? Angie tossed around in bed, brain wired. A harsh wind whistled through the gaps in the Sellotape. She couldn't stop imagining a future where magazines were intent on interviewing her on her outlook in life, in the context of her success. She stared unseeingly at the black ceiling because she held a secret phobia that daydreams you fixated on were cursed never to come true.

Stop seeing yourself like that, her mind chanted, instead of counting sheep.

I want it to happen, so it can't happen.

You don't think of yourself as successful.

Narcissistic people who imagine their success without the hard work never carry through.

Because you recognise that you don't put in the work, you are able to avoid the trap of becoming someone in thrall to daydreams.

There must be a secret heart inside of you that wants something so pure and divine it can't be put into words.

One day you'll fulfil your divine purpose.

If you don't pay attention to your daydreams, how are you supposed to answer any question honestly?

Angie, what is your advice to young artists growing up today?

There is a secret heart in the world that rewards actions pure and divine.

\*\*\*

On Thursday, Sarah arrived.

'Wine?' asked Sarah.

'Wine,' Angie agreed.

Sarah had been to the open day at Glasgow University, shopping for postgrads. Angie refused on some level to engage. Not that smart, she reminded herself.

Sarah was growing beautiful and headstrong. Angie had the feeling of being confined to the backseat of a car, with the child locks on.

'Remember that night?' asked Sarah. 'We sat on the beach, with our midnight picnic ...'

'Sounds romantic,' Mel scoffed.

Thumping basslines sounded up from the flat below. The expected chill took over the room. Whenever the bass began, a rush of cold air would make its way through the floorboards. The windows were open downstairs.

'Ugh, I'm off to bed,' said Mel. 'Night-time burrito time.'

'Goodnight,' said Angie and Sarah. Then:

'Remember when ...' said Sarah.

'Yes,' laughed Angie. 'And do *you* remember ...'

The night melted along like that. Out on the street, the snow had gone completely—the weather always behaved that way. Nothing stayed for long. Rivulets and gushing streams made a waterpark of the pavement,

dully lit by orange streetlights. The overfull gutter dripped loudly. Angie was glad not to be outside, glad to be feeling the reservoir of heat emanating from the cheap red wine in her stomach, in her cheeks, at the base of her skull.

Eventually it became 4 a.m. Angie and Sarah had a case of snuffling laughter, and Sarah nuzzled her head into Angie's neck.

'I forgot just how many of my memories you carried,' Angie said thoughtfully. 'A whole other part of me comes to life when you're here.'

Sarah sighed contentedly but said nothing. If it had been summer, the sun would be beginning to yawn through the cracks in the curtains; as it was, the room was as silent and cold as midnight. Too late, thought Angie, as she crawled up next to an already sleeping Sarah on the couch. Too late to go bed.

\*\*\*

That night Angie dreamt of girls from her high school she'd been afraid of. Unapologetic girls reprimanding her for her vague martyrdoms. Through these heavy dreams, she felt a gentle weight removing itself from beside her. A little kiss pressed into her temple. When she woke up, her cheek had a bright red smudge from sleeping smushed up into the sofa cushions. The room smelled of citrusy hangover sweat and stale smoke. Angie peeled back a curtain, though the thought of actually opening the window was unbearable. Nothing that could be called light made its way into the room.

Later, Angie and Mel's landlord came over to inform them that the pipes had frozen overnight. He brought two halogen heaters hanging from his old, curling claws.

'Cool,' said Mel. 'Free stuff.'

The hot orange light fumed from across the room. It was deathly quiet in the dark day. Angie stared at the orange square jiggling and vogueing. It filled her vision; her eyes began to burn. But when you were looking at the light it cancelled the rest of your brain for a moment. I am a bright orange rectangle, thought Angie, hypnotised. Nothing more, nothing less. As soon as she looked away, green squiggles would begin to dominate her vision. It was divinely impossible to look away.

'Angie,' said Mel, snapping her fingers. 'Angie!'



# Cat Ambitions

*Allie Kerper*

to curl around myself  
like half-bloom petal

to scratch at doors  
unembarrassed by desire

to settle  
only in warmth

to summon touch  
and soft language

to enforce boundaries  
with teeth

to be sharp in pleasure  
and pursuit

# Little Spoon

*Allie Kerper*

I want to crawl  
inside the pores  
on your chest  
I want to live  
in your skin  
like mites

I want to build  
a house in you,  
an ingrown hair,  
burrowing,  
unshavable

I want to bathe  
in the spaces  
between cracked joints,  
go splashing  
in your sweat glands

Let me map  
your capillaries  
like soft play tubes  
in fast food restaurants

I'll sleep  
on your cells'  
membrane mattress,  
a lullaby  
of mitochondrial whirl

I want  
to shrink down  
to a single  
point in space,  
wish  
on your electrons  
like stars

Reduce me  
Be my universe expanding  
I want  
an infinity of you



# Strangers in a Croft House

Alli Parrett

*monday*

On the train from Edinburgh to Inverness the view was quick to shift from medieval city to farmlands to the rugged, rich cliffs of the Highlands. About fourteen miles east in Beaulieu sat a restored croft house devoted to writers. At the top of a hill, it was nestled between snowy peaks and blanketed by clouds. We were meant to spend the week discussing short stories and indulging our writerly whims.

I heard him before I saw him. The image I'd conjured in my head didn't match the tenor of his voice. A brown trilby hat rested on one knee while he balanced a full glass of wine on the other. He looked like a long-ago model from a hunting magazine. I sat down on the couch and listened to the conversation when he handed me a glass of wine. 'Mark,' he said, offering a hand shake before continuing his discussion.

Over dinner and wine, we got to know one another. The conversation was lively and pleasant. Everyone still on their best behavior as they sought out who was friend or foe.

After dinner, we were to interview a fellow writer about our work and ambitions and report back to the group. The tutors paired me with Mark.

'Ladies first,' he said.

I gave him my elevator pitch—I'm writing the second draft of my debut novel, developing a short story collection, and am partial to literary fiction set in the modern day.

'So like *Outlander*,' he said.

'No, that's more like historical fiction with a magical realism twist.'

'Yes, but their historical details are realistic and very important to the story.'

'I understand, but that's not what I'm looking to write.'

'She's very popular. It's now become a television series,' he said.

'That's great but that's not what I'm looking to do.'

'What are you looking to do?'

I repeated my pitch. He nodded. I was unsure if he actually listened to me or pretended. A bell rang. My turn to listen.

He wanted to write a memoir about his wrongs and the wrongs committed against him. 'That's what I've come here to work on,' he said. He digressed about his time as a journalist, his first marriage, his second

marriage and how he saved it, hunting trips, estranged children, love for substances (but not addiction). His words filled the air between us and all I could think about is how his objectives opposed those of the course we were attending. I nodded and retained the few relevant facts to present to the group.

Mark offered to speak first.

‘This is Alli and she wants to write the next *Outlander* series.’

For fuck’s sake.

*wednesday*

Guest author David Constantine joined us that evening. Over dinner, most were on their best behavior and asked innocuous questions—what books he’d recommended, where he liked to write, how he knew when something was a good idea. Not Mark.

He gestured with his fork. ‘The four of you, I believe to be quite shy and quiet and I cannot judge your intelligence because of that,’ he said, singling out the women he was referring to before blocking his words with a fork-full of food.

We were on the opposite end of the table from Mr. Constantine, but Mark’s voice reached every corner of the room.

I looked at the other women sitting around me. Anger filled their eyes, but no one wanted to waste energy confronting his unsolicited judgements. I leaned forward. ‘I’ve never been called shy a day in my fucking life.’

My words pushed him back in his seat as though we’re still in his heyday and women just didn’t talk that way. Another woman stepped in to my defense, but Mark was daft and childish and continued to offer an opinion that no one requested. The women and I traded glances with one another.

After, we took our drinks out to a round, thatched-roof house warmed by wood stoves to listen Mr. Constantine read *In Another Country*, from his collection by the same name. A love story during World War II; two people separated by tragedy and time but brought together, in a way, decades later by a natural phenomenon.

Our tutors thanked him profusely for sharing his work. Mr. Constantine offered to stay a while longer to answer questions. A shared dread filled the room. Instead of a question, Mark offered an assertion.

‘It’s about anti-Semitism.’

‘No it isn’t.’ Mr. Constantine was steadfast.

‘Yes it is.’ Mark continued, defiant and erroneous. ‘The girl had a Jewish name but the boy was not Jewish. I would know, my mother was Jewish.’

Mr. Constantine spoke slowly, annunciating each syllable as though talking to a child. ‘Though they could seem as star-crossed lovers, being from two different faiths, the nature of this story is how their love outlasted war, natural tragedies, and death. Their faith had nothing to do with the story.’

While Mark battled Mr. Constantine about the subtext of his own work, I debated whether or not I was surprised by Mark’s actions. Having studied literature, I’ve witnessed my fair share of pretentious intellectuals debate the intentions and realities of an author’s words. But we were not around a long table discussing the works of those, living or dead, that were not there to verify our assumptions. Sitting before us was the author, clear as day, telling us exactly what his intentions were.

The brave among us tried to shift the conversation until Mark tired at last.

#### *thursday*

Several of us stood around the kitchen, talking and drinking coffee and tea as we prepared the communal meal. Mark burst into the room. ‘I’ve had a success! I need to kiss a woman.’

The women looked around at each other, some more nervous than the others. I answered on behalf of the group. ‘No.’ A complete sentence.

Mark complained that it was a simple request, nothing sinister, before he sauntered off. He left us alone for the majority of the night. Or maybe we’d been successful in avoiding him. At that point it was a concerted effort.

His general presence and my combative nature wore on me. I ate, cleared plates, cleaned up the kitchen—anything that maintained distance—while he passed around another bottle of mediocre wine.

He had brought his own stash. A self-proclaimed burgundy man. ‘I like fine wine,’ he told the group, though the bargain-store label suggested otherwise. I declined a second glass and extracted myself to write in the comfort and relative silence of my room.

Noises deadened. Windows turned black as lights were extinguished before I ventured back to the common spaces of the croft house. I made tea and sought the solitude of the quiet bench out front. Beneath me, the

wooden slats were cold from the crisp autumn winds that had blown through the Highlands. Balancing my mug between my thighs, I cupped a hand and flicked my lighter. The embers raged in the paper as it crept towards my fingertips.

Between bouts of wind that rustled through the shadows of bare tree branches and tall grasses, the night was mute. The deep silence ensconced me in the unfamiliar landscape. I paced my breath with the stillness of my surroundings, careful not to disturb the established peace.

The door flew open as if propelled by his voice. He did not notice me. He lit his own cigarette and checked his phone. Like an animal confronted by unexpected head lights, I froze. My breaths were shallow and quiet. My tea grew cold and the cherry on my cigarette neared my fingertips as I sat motionless.

He spotted me. 'I didn't know you smoke.'

I released the air from my lungs. His declaration had no care for the calm he was disturbing in the darkness.

'Only occasionally. When I want some quiet.' I inhaled, pulling the embers closer to my lips.

He put his hands up in surrender. 'I know when to shut up.'

For a few moments we sat in silence, though silence had never felt so arduous. In attempts to refocus myself I looked everywhere else but his direction. The clouds as they floated under the moon. The moon in its various shades of brightness as the clouds passed underneath sometimes creating rings around it like a halo, first white then orange then red. My cigarette was out.

There was one left in the pack. Lighting it in that moment would seal my fate. I would say something. I couldn't not. Not after the few days I'd spent listening to him go on about everything and nothing.

I flicked my lighter.

'A few nights ago you said something to me,' I broke the air between us. 'You said I was shy and therefore, possibly, unintelligent. I paid six hundred pounds to come here and learn. I can't very well learn if I'm the loudest one in the room.'

He nodded. 'You make a great point.'

But I had opened a door. He began in on his philosophical feelings of emotions he trusts and doesn't. He trusted intuition. I reminded him that intuition isn't an emotion so much as a judgement call.

He changed his word. 'I trust uneasiness,' he said. He didn't trust anger, fear, people who are too loud and too confident. In that moment I

seemed to agree with him. For a moment, I wanted so badly to be a mirror.

Alice might as well have been there with us. We went down a rabbit hole with the conversation diverting to women's rights and experiences in general. 'Women have always had, at least since I've been in the business when I started in the seventies, equal opportunity in the workplace.'

I couldn't take it. 'You're going to actually sit there and make that statement to me with all the Harvey Weinstein bullshit going on right now?'

He did so happily. He prattled on with a story of how he once was up for a promotion against a woman for two roles, one junior and one senior. 'She got the senior job because she had more talent,' he said.

'I don't doubt it.' None of his work over the week had suggested that he would have been the more qualified candidate. 'But you don't know if there was anything else your management considered before she got the senior job.'

'Well, she never told me.'

'Why would she?'

I was surprised when he paused, considering my question. Maybe he hadn't considered himself a member of the patriarchy before. 'But I don't think she was ever propositioned,' he said, failing to understand my point or the weight of the words that tumbled from his smoky, inebriated mouth.

Without many departing words, I excused myself.

All at once I had won and lost a battle. I felt strong and resilient yet small and nauseous.

I showered to try and rid myself of the smell on my fingertips, the anger in my blood, the pit in my stomach knowing that I had actively given up on someone. The idea that someone was past repair, or at least repair that I would witness, made me ache. I sat in the shower basin, hunched over as the hot water came down, unmoving until my skin turned red, purifying only the top layer. I was as small as I felt.

### *friday*

A week I had eagerly awaited had nearly gone. I laid in bed trying to decide if the end was a good thing. The previous days had been as sweet and sour as a take-out dish. I did not want to part with the weathered hills that surrounded me, but I made a silent wish for the day to end as quick as it started.



The evening was meant to be a ceilidh of sorts. Large bowls of haggis, neeps, and tatties sat in the center of the table. Drams of single malt were handed out. In true tradition, ‘Address to a Haggis’ by Robert Burns was read, glasses were raised, and we toasted to our literary week.

There was an unspoken truce amongst us twelve. The dinner was reflective of the week we spent together—things we’d learn, stories we hoped to write, ways we’d attempt keep in touch with one another. Even Mark was thoughtful when he spoke. I wondered if maybe I had given up on him too soon. If perhaps our discussion had resonated with him, settled into some nefarious groove of his ignorant mind. Each of us of course were trying to keep our nerves at bay prior to our reading.

Mark read second. His voice filled the room of a story that really happened on a race track that really existed with people he really knew. All of us attempted to give him dedicated attention.

Nine other writers read pieces that they’d written before it was my turn. I had done a reading before, but it never seems to be less nerve-racking. I held my five-minutes worth of pages in front of me. Despite my nerves, I managed to keep my voice steady and at a normal pace for the first few paragraphs—until his phone rang.

Mark jumped up. ‘One moment! I’ll return in a jiff!’ The front door open and closed between us and him, leaving cold evening air in his place.

My hands fell to my side, still clutching my pages. I asked the tutors if I should keep reading or wait. Manners overruled anger at the start. ‘Let’s give him a moment.’

People whispered about his rudeness and his transgressions over the week as if he were standing just at the other end of the room.

After five minutes, they told me to read on. Seconds after I finished, he walked back in the house. Any merriment being shared by the group was deflated in an instant.

‘Thank you all for a lovely week, but I’ve got to be off.’ Mark placed his remaining two bottles of wine on the dining room hutch and tipped his hat.

His desertion hung silent in the air.

The croft house grew lighter.

Huddled around the kitchen with the remaining writers, I stood taller than I could the night before.

# Boy

*Alison Raine*

(Inspired by After Bruegel, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*)

Icarus, my son, these wings  
are safe. I took great  
care; secured  
the fragile feathers with twine,  
poured molten wax  
at the base of every one. Set the  
heron's  
curve. My craft  
will help you  
hang  
in the beaten air.

Shepherd, look!!  
Call!  
For while you gawp,  
sheep  
scatter - the  
sea -  
they will surely  
drown.

Ploughman, see how we rise -  
the breath of good advice.  
Below, you plough a straight  
furrow.  
This is how we fathers pass  
on to our sons,  
the steadying whoa.

Icarus,  
soaring  
too near  
the searing  
sun.

Stay close,  
stay low,  
stay.

Stay solid  
wax.

O

my stone dropping  
heart stopping boy -  
falling  
- flailing  
splintering  
past my ever outstretched  
fingers.

My son -  
a fragment of feather  
forever

in my eye.

# Baba Yaga

*Mina Moriarty*

She grinds bones to make her bread  
pestle and mortar,  
her haven built from  
trees and mud  
her silver hair marries  
spider's webs and  
yards of yarn,

they call her Baba Yaga  
the witch who constructed her home  
on the legs of chickens,  
where she hoards men's hearts  
in enamel chests,  
their chorus  
a backbeat to her  
kitchen rhymes.

How did she end up like this?  
through years of hard work  
and dedication  
skulking beneath street lamps  
scooping children from  
the arms of predators,  
a hunched vigilante  
cloaked in inky shadows.

In her youth her hair shone ebony  
thick with the deeds of the city,  
her follicles harboured  
dirt from fingernails and  
ale-tinged breath  
but never once  
did fresh water  
touch her locks,  
each foul smell  
a reminder of  
each beautiful kill.

Many years later she met a child  
who was all  
muddied feet and indigo stripes  
no different from the rest except  
her eyes were made from amber  
protruding from her skull  
like honeyed glaciers,

they lived together for some time  
teaching the robins tricks  
in exchange for worms  
and belly rubs,

but it wasn't long before  
the villagers came for them  
glinting pitchforks and  
murmurs laced with unwelcome.

To their surprise  
the woodland creatures defended them  
wild cats wielded swords  
foxes spat fire and  
robin's beaks crunched corneas  
until

December descended upon the land.  
Winter's fingers crafted  
their masterpieces  
Baba Yaga and her child  
became sculptors,  
snow became skin.

One day there came a hunter,  
a dagger held tight to his chest  
he crouched beneath  
a weeping willow,  
watched the witch and her child  
as they searched for herbs  
and spun smoke between their palms,

white knuckled and bared teeth  
he leapt towards the child  
just as Baba Yaga lunged to protect her,  
their battle ensued.  
Her fists gripped his blade  
yet her aging body contorted,  
feet slid on icy puddles  
arms ached against the weight of his menace,

She succumbed to his force.  
No longer shielding the child from his fury  
his dagger met flesh  
rivers of scarlet  
made an uneasy home  
on frozen earth,  
the child's body limp  
death flung her soul  
over his shoulders  
and sighed,  
climbing the air  
in silky strides.

Baba Yaga could not  
forgive herself for  
the loss of a girl  
not born of earth  
but like her  
from the same chasm of sky  
where she had slipped out,  
flakes of cosmos  
in their veins  
Pluto's mist in their pores,

now her guilt  
plucks hair from her scalp  
narrows her belly  
and splinters her spine,  
with her gaze fixed on the galaxies  
she weeps at the mirage  
beneath the moon  
her child  
suspended in clouds.

# Inheritance

*Felicity Anderson-Nathan*

After she died, my mother's laugh would sometimes jump out of my mouth. I would write a word and her handwriting would flow out of my pen. Jagged words I'd smoothed out of my accent would thrust themselves up. I'd be cooking and my hand would move by itself and I'd shake out the seasoning her way—heavy on cumin, light on chilli. It was so much like when she was still alive and she would tut and knock the spices out my hands. 'No one wants to shit fire, dear,' she would say. 'Spices are for flavour, not masochism.'

It was a real pain being haunted by my mother. It wasn't as if I'd forgotten her opinions on my various bad habits, or that I didn't hear her chastising in my head anyway. She closed cabinet doors behind me and hung up my towel when I'd ditched it on the floor. She tipped over the vacuum in a suggestive manner. Instead of ghostly moans and rattling chains, my walls echoed with weary sighs and pointed silences.

The spiritualist I consulted didn't seem to care. 'As ghosts go, she's harmless,' Gabriel said, sliding me a flyer for his astrology-themed acapella group. 'Burn some sage if you like.'

I tried that and found myself stuffing the bouquet in the sink and wafting a tea towel at my smoke detector. I opened a window and gave up.

It was a comfort, sometimes. I'd never been able to make a decent pastry—it either crumbled like sand or turned chewy and limp. With my mother there, her hands moving through mine, it was buttery and toothsome. In my bolognese, the infinitely varied balance between oregano and nutmeg and garlic came out smelling like home.

The terrible thing was that my mother's ghost seemed completely domestic. She was tied to my house, but also to housey affairs. Cooking, cleaning, mothering. Her haunting was like the perception I'd had of her when I was fifteen and too selfish to give a shit. I used to think she must really like cleaning, she did so much of it. Her ghost seemed to agree.

There was nothing of her politics in this spectre, or her interest in science, not even her relish for online poker tournaments. I bought copies of *The New Scientist* and left them lying around, hoping she would be moved to inspect them, but I felt nothing. When I checked my browser history, it was just my own wearying circle of social networks.

Gabriel of the Mercury Retrogrades was no help. ‘It’s quite natural,’ he said. ‘Ghosts often find themselves retracing the patterns they followed in life.’

Bullshit. Housework was a necessary habit, but it wasn’t her reason for being. Once I’d moved out, she barely bothered to cook, just eating slivers of smoked salmon and a few salad leaves. Along with a glass of wine and a bowl of ice-cream she called it her special diet. She spent those years reading and travelling and painting awful watercolours she insisted on giving away as gifts. Cooking was something she did for fun, but an eternity spent picking up after my domestic scene would be a kind of torture.

I was being sucked into the pattern, too: I was preparing beautiful meals for no one, polishing my flat like I expected an inspection. I brought boxes of home-baked biscuits into my office and spent the breaks washing up other people’s coffee stained mugs. No one even seemed to notice. I missed my hobbies—the crossfit group, reading, even the dumb ones like playing video games in my pants. I was being overcome by the kind of life I never wanted. I wanted to be free of it and I wanted to free her, too.

If you’ve ever googled ‘how to get rid of ghosts’, you’ll know that it’s not very useful. No one can agree on best practices and it’s not as if there’s an authoritative source to look to. I tried Gabriel one last time and he gave me the number for The Lady Simone.

The Lady Simone looked just how I expected, from the long midnight hair to the array of moonstone rings, but she moved and spoke like a high-powered executive. Slap some shoulder pads on her and she could have been the CEO of Exorcisms Decorporated.

‘Show me the objects you have of your mother’s,’ she said, laying a velvet cloth on the table. I wanted to dim the lights, maybe light some incense. ‘Theatrics won’t be necessary,’ she said. Her long nails scraped across the few objects I had as she examined them, her eyes closed.

‘Is this everything you have of hers?’ she asked. I shrugged. My mother wasn’t big on heirlooms. The Lady Simone looked at me, doubtful of my intelligence and integrity. I probably had a murky aura.

‘No gifts? From before she died?’

A denial was in my mouth but I caught myself. ‘There’s something from years ago. When I first moved out.’

I brought her the recipe book. It was a paperback, the cover splitting and stained. It was the kind of book which covered all the basics for a young woman running a household. It had been hers first, but by the time



I moved out she had everything important memorised. She gave it to me in the hope that I wouldn't spend my university career eating chicken nuggets and deep-fried pizzas. It hadn't worked, but I took it with the same vague hope that one day I'd be the kind of person who cooked dried chickpeas and fresh bread. What I kept it for was the notes in the margins, the loose sheets stuffed in from when she would send me *something you might like*.

I had very few examples of her handwriting and they were all in that book.

'She's here,' The Lady Simone said, her index fingernail scraping down the spine.

Her soul was trapped in the amber of my teenage selfishness and a manual for domestic competence. I had to be a better caretaker for my mother's memory.

I let the book go and watched as The Lady Simone burned it, business-like and without drama.

My cabinets stopped closing themselves. I stopped sleepwalking with a duster. My cooking returned to a general state of averageness. When I remembered her, I remembered her whole.

# Inside Voices

*Rachel Schrauben Yeates*

I am three, and Mom stretches the corded phone counter  
to counter in jump rope invitation. There's a knot  
in the cord from when I tried to straighten it like how  
in the basement there's a greeting card from my dad that says  
please come back.

Hair, braided. Dress, brown. Apple,  
embroidered under my chin. I am  
three, and I look like the preschool photo  
Mom has perched on her dresser.

Next to it, she and her best high-school friend link  
arms in optical illusion. A couple's first toast,  
but it's Vernors or sherry vinegar or  
anti-freeze.

She's wearing high-waisted jeans. Or a blooming  
violet sun dress. Or her mother's gloves. Or the  
feathered church hat she wore to her  
second wedding reception. I am three, and I don't know if  
my mom returns the bottle to her own mouth  
or another's.

# Anchor Mill!

*William Burns*

Anchor Mill! Ye stand rid brick n tall  
By Hamill's frothin waterfall  
Once gutted, n near sure demolition  
Near spewin histry oan the people fishin  
Fir the ghost of Tannahill.

Anchor Mill! Ma Granny used tae walk  
Tae work, finishin, wae thoosans a folk  
Flowin alang that bridge across the Cart  
But now there's nae industry or art  
Jist expensive flats nae finisher could afford.

Paisley! Yeez aw did so well fae Coats and Clarks!  
The big yins geed yeez statues ae themsels, parks,  
Schools, hooses, hoaspitals, big bastart buildins  
Carryin their names, n don't you say firra MEENIT  
That they did it for themsels. They didnae NEED TAE  
Dae it. They wur good Christians.

Feegie! Did you no huv a mill

Before it goat sent tae the landfill?  
Histry demolished firra buck  
These people Do. Not. Give. A. Fuck.

Paisley, ahm sorry fir bein so rude  
N swearin like that, n mibbe ahm missin the point.  
The machinery is too much fir me  
But how dae you feel?

# Flowers by Zelda Margot

Kevin Wilkinson

In this month's edition we look at elephant migrations, endangered trade routes in Laos, and China's plans for a new hydroelectric dam. Animals, people and power. However, at the heart of this issue we have flowers. The flowers of Zelda Margot.

Ten years ago, Zelda submitted a poem to this magazine, no doubt hoping it would be the beginning of a wonderful career. Years later, when her photographs began filling my front cover, she made me realise what a terrible rejection letter I'd given her. She had kept it pinned to the wall of her study beside a collage of other rejections. When she hosted a dinner at her studio in Manhattan, I came across my letter again, printed on the back of the evening's programme. That sums her up well enough.

That poem of hers had asked the question: 'is it better to leave a flower to grow for any passerby to see, or is it better to take it from the ground and show it to those you meet on your journey?' I think that's why she decided to be a photographer—so she could show the world the flowers without pulling them from the Earth.

In 2016, Zelda visited a military training camp in Eastern Finland. I wonder if she was thinking about her philosophy when she photographed her military guides, Helen and Jonah, pulling the flowers up at the base of the entrance. Through the loupe, I can see the wild buttercups and bluebells entwined around the gate's metal lattice, holding it closed. Perhaps it was nature's sign to leave that place alone and go home.

Jonah was evidently strong and any flowers that escaped Helen's weeding would be quickly ripped up when he forced the gate open. Zelda would have stayed behind to get the best shots, ducking and bending on the stems and petals that swung in to the field with the gate.

I can see the sun was rising above the sharp mountains in the distance. To catch the morning light, she would've convinced the guides to wake up early; not an easy task with someone like Helen around. The spool with these photographs had arrived on my desk with a short note pinned to the side:

*Don't worry Maddox ... Jonah isn't nearly as mean as he looks ... but yes, Helen really is that much of a bitch.*

The spool holds forty images; the first is Jonah, his bushy ginger beard framing a big smile as he shovels the morning's porridge into his gut. The last is the military compound where they were staying: a

windowless concrete mound with dim orange lights lining the roof. The first shot of the shooting range shows Jonah and Helen marching in front, two automatic rifles hung around their necks. I imagine Zelda holding the camera steady, zooming in to the background.

She had pitched the idea to me six months earlier.

‘Can you imagine this place?’ she had said. ‘This is where the killing begins.’

‘What do you want to say though?’

I didn’t think the magazine was the right platform for the piece, but I hadn’t said no to Zelda in years. She would just do it anyway.

Approaching the range, Zelda probably increased her pace. The next photograph used a wide-angle lens and I can see her dropping a strap from her shoulder, swinging the backpack around her front and grabbing the lens from inside—desperate not to miss the morning light.

They obviously reached the crest of the hill just as the sun was bouncing its first bands of light across the range. Zelda would have been frustrated that they hadn’t arrived earlier; this was the best light of the day and she only got two or three shots before it changed.

She pointed her camera ahead: through the lens she saw the silhouette of the two guides walking amongst the targets. It looks like Helen was the first to raise her weapon, looking through her own lens. She took the shot. The noise would have ached through the plain and a figure fell backwards into the grass.

Startled, the camera must have fell from Zelda’s hands, jarred against her chest and taken an accidental photograph of the ground. The noise must have been heard as far away as the mountains, the morning calm splintered by sound, as though everything was suddenly seen through a prism. I know Zelda was hoping to take a photograph of the birds flying above the range, but there wasn’t one. The birds must have fled a long time ago.

I met with Jonah and Helen three months after the accident. I learned that Jonah had completed three tours of Afghanistan. He had a scar above his right eye, largely hidden by the dense bristles of his eyebrow. When he was nine, his father had accidentally knocked him off the bed when they were playing pillow fights in the dark. His fall was broken by an empty bottle of whiskey that was lying by the bed. Helen, on the other hand, had never left the training academy, although her face was etched with battles and her hair was pulled back like she was ready for another one.

I showed Jonah some of the photographs. One was taken as Zelda was approaching the green plastic figures strewn across the field. The first target she came to was flat on its back and had the caricature of a man taped to it. The expression was furious, but he had been drawn in the style of a cartoon with large comical features. Wild buttercups and bluebells had grown through the bullet holes in its torso. She knelt beside it, focussed on the petals, raising their heads to the sky, and shot a photograph.

The next target she came across was still upright, even though it was also covered in holes. Zelda focussed her lens through one of the bullet holes, towards the distant mountains, and took another shot. The timestamps suggest that she spent another hour making her way through the dummies, examining the spring mechanisms that re-positioned the targets and looking for some rodent or even an insect among them—that was the shot she really wanted to get.

Jonah and Helen emerged from the row of dummies in front of her. For a second, Zelda saw them merge with the targets. She took a shot. I showed it to Jonah.

‘I think we must have left the range after that one,’ said Jonah, ‘Helen was getting restless and started asking a lot of questions. I supposed she was bored.’

‘What kind of questions,’ I asked.

‘Had Zelda ever fired a gun? Was her father in the military? Had she had enough of the range?’

‘How did Zelda react?’

‘She just kept taking photographs and then asked Helen why they use those strange images on the targets.’

‘Why do they use those faces?’ I asked.

‘That is the beginner’s range,’ said Jonah. ‘We went to the advanced range the next day, where you can see the real targets.’

‘The real targets?’ I asked.

‘Yeah, those have the faces of the people we’re really trying to kill.’ I cannot do justice to the wit and wisdom of Zelda, to her eye for a theme or her processes as a photographer. I can’t imagine the shots she didn’t take that day; perhaps she did see a bird flying high above the range or perhaps caught Helen in a moment of weakness, in tears beside a fallen target. These are the things we cannot know. In the evening, Zelda posted the day’s spool to me for processing. Alongside her note about Jonah and Helen, she wrote:

*Would a comparison between this range and a military graveyard be too obvious? I'll send another spool tomorrow.*

It was several months before that second spool made its way to me. There were a lot of beautiful shots among them, but I can't ever forget the last photograph. I can see Jonah and Helen, surrounded on all sides by an army of lifelike statues. Jonah is examining a word someone has etched on to a target; he can't quite make sense of it and is on his knees, scrubbing the green moss from one of the letters. Helen has her gun raised to her shoulder, her right eye is closed and her left has taken position at her scope. Zelda triggered the shutter on her camera and it must only have been moments later when Helen accidentally pulled her trigger and a bullet was lodged in Zelda's skull. The bullet travelled faster than the speed of sound. She died instantly.

So this issue is dedicated to Zelda Margot. She will never have the chance to exhibit her latest work, but I've tried to tell the story she wanted to tell. She wanted to display her work beside quotations from Nobel prize winners. I had asked her for an example and she had replied with this example from Vonnegut:

*This was a tool whose only purpose was to make holes in human beings.*

# Tinsel fever

*Alice Hill-Woods*

*In dialogue with Louise Bourgeois' print 'Empty Nest'*

Kitchen table meanders for the family  
at two / one – you can see them  
in drypoint tableau performing lines  
and maybe basting chicken

their nest is chintzy: I leave moulted  
undercoat at their discretion  
    it bubbles gauzy  
                    off twig shivers

my thoughts are corniced  
and unreflecting  
held up for gasps and liminal  
frontiers on the windowpane

there you are again:  
inviting me back in to wombspace  
not unlike the habitat of roaming  
petal dense from outback arid palettes.



# Sentinel

*Steve Rigley*

Watching dogs chase a blind ball  
past some dumb yard

and on through the foyer of  
that long-demolished cinema

I thought I caught you  
waiting for a cab or the tram

or maybe for that friend from sales  
who died in the dance hall fire

And perhaps you saw me too  
perched in the bakery window

with tall mug and ears wired  
facing my palm and prattling on

like there was no tomorrow

as you would often say

Silent, I now wait with you

reach through the wires

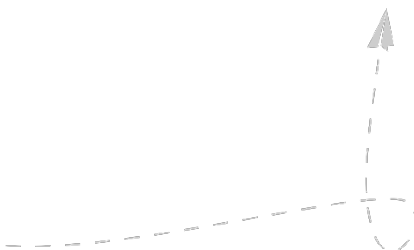
to clasp your frail hand

and turn from darkened glass

that heralds

each bright

defiant leap



## About the Contributors

**Felicity Anderson-Nathan** is a writer, tutor, and freelancer. Her work has been published by *Gutter*, *Dear Damsels*, *Monstrous Regiment*, and *Blood Bath Zine*, and performed at the Edinburgh Book Festival Story Shop and That's What She Said. You can find her on Twitter @flick\_writes.

**William Burns** is in the second year of his PhD in English Literature. His research focuses on the interdisciplinary potential of blending oral history and creative writing practice, with an ear to the voices of Paisley thread mill workers. He is from Paisley but now lives in Yorkhill.

**Sue Burnside** is a former head teacher, originally from London and now living in Largs, in Ayrshire. A second-generation Irish woman, she grew up in East London in a staunchly Roman Catholic family and (almost) everything in the piece is true. She still has a guilty conscience about locking a nun in a cupboard and has never attempted another Christmas cake.

**Alice Hill-Woods** is a third-year undergraduate studying English Literature. Her poems have been published by *The Corrugated Wave*, *Gargouille Literary Journal*, and The Poetry Society, among others. She is the creative writing editor for *Glasgow University Magazine* and the founder of Ekphrastic Glasgow, a community workshop investigating visual art and poetry.

**Ruthie Kennedy** is currently studying for her MLitt in Creative Writing at Glasgow University. She has previously been published in *SPAM Zine* and *From Glasgow to Saturn*. At the time of writing she has been suffering the year's worst cold, has gone through like twenty packets of tissues, and is wrapped up in a mountain of blankets. She would like to thank everyone for their kind words and continued support. Oh, and for buying this book, too. Good job everybody.

**Allie Kerper** is a poet pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. She holds an MSc in Creative Writing from the University of Edinburgh and a BA in English and Creative Writing from Hamilton College in New York. Her work has appeared in *Adjacent Pineapple*, *From Arthur's Seat*, *The Inkwell*, and *Red Weather*. She has performed in feature slots in Edinburgh poetry nights such as The God Damn Debut Slam, Vespers, and Loud Poets. She agrees that it's outrageous to have three degrees in creative writing. Follow her on Twitter at @kerperplexed.

**Billie Rose McHugh** grew up on the Isle of Mull and now lives in Glasgow. She is studying towards an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow and is currently working on a memoir. Billie also enjoys writing poetry and is inspired by her own experiences of love and loss, with her poems often taking an observational view point. As well as writing, Billie is a keen runner and cyclist.

**Miriam Methuen-Jones** most often goes by MJ. She is a writer currently living in Glasgow. In 2018 she completed her undergraduate degree in English with Creative Writing and is currently studying on the MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. She has a preference for short fiction, and usually incorporates dark humour or absurdism into her writing. She is a lover of tea, puns, cats, and rain. She delights in the macabre and the off-kilter, but is trying to step away from the ghoulish and into the light ... it's a work in progress.

**Mina Moriarty** is studying an MLitt at the University of Glasgow. She writes poetry and short stories and is fascinated by the imaginary worlds of myth and legend. She has also been published as a journalist in titles such as *Cosmopolitan UK* and *The Scotsman*, and is writing a non-fiction book due to be published by Bowden and Brazil in Spring 2019.

**Pip Osmond-Williams** grew up in Macclesfield but moved to Glasgow in 2010 to study English and Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow. She has since completed her Masters in Scottish Literature and is now in the final year of her PhD research, which focuses on love in the life and work of Edwin Morgan.

**Max Parnell** is a Glasgow-based writer, currently undertaking an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. He works as a poetry translator (Brazilian Portuguese to English) and poetry editor at *SPAM Zine*. His first collection of poetry, *Gente*, was published by the Rio de Janeiro based editor Multifoco. His work has also appeared in *SPAM*, *Adjacent Pineapple*, and *Gutter*. His current writing focuses on exploring posthumanism and including modern technology, such as augmented reality, into his practice.

**Alli Parrett** is a prose writer, currently enrolled in the Creative Writing MLitt programme at the University of Glasgow. She completed her bachelor's degree in English Literature at Iowa State University and a Certificate in Literary Fiction Writing at the University of Washington. Alli was born in Illinois but has spent much of her adult life in the Pacific Northwest and Scotland. She lives in Seattle with her husband and two dogs.

**Alison Raine** graduated from the University of Glasgow back in 1982, MA (Hons) English Literature and Drama and is now an MLitt Creative Writing student. She won the Andrea Badenoch Award for Fiction and has had her play *Stuff* performed at the Queen's Hall Arts Centre in Hexham. Her short story 'Spinnerinnen' was performed at Northern Stage in the Listen at Lunch Programme and read by the cast of Margaret Wilkinson's play *Queen Bee*. Her ambition is to finish her first novel before she is 60.

**Stuart Rawlinson** is a writer currently studying in Glasgow. Other work of his can be found in *SPAM*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Ghost City Review*, and *A Queer Anthology of Rage* (Pilot Press, 2018).

**Jamie Redgate** completed his PhD in English Literature at the University of Glasgow in 2018. His book, *Wallace and I: Cognition, Consciousness, and Dualism in David Foster Wallace's Fiction*, is forthcoming from Routledge. He has had fiction and essays published in *Electric Literature*, *Bandit Fiction*, with the Scottish Book Trust, and elsewhere. His story 'Letters to Nowhere' won third prize in the Imprint Writers Award in 2018. He tweets @JPRedgate, and his website can be found at [jamieredgate.co.uk](http://jamieredgate.co.uk).

**Steve Rigley** is currently enrolled part-time on the MLitt Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. Three stops down on the subway, and in his other life, he leads the Graphic Design pathway at the Glasgow School of Art, maintaining research interests in Graphic Design history and the mapping of practice.

**Sarah Spence** is a PhD researcher at the University of Glasgow, specialising in the medical humanities. Spence is currently Associate Editor of medical humanities website *The Polyphony* and was previously Editor for literary journal *From Glasgow to Saturn*. Recent poetry and stories appear in *Amberflora*, *Gilded Dirt*, *Hold My Purse*, and *Sawney*, as well as anthologies *Queering the Map of Glasgow* and *F, M or Other: Quarrels with the Gender Binary Volume 1* and 2 (Knight Errant Press). Twitter: @\_sspence

**Kevin Wilkinson** has been writing novels and short stories for around ten years, having a few published in various journals along the way. He studied creative writing at the University of Glasgow for a year, where he wrote a collection of stories set in Iceland. Otherwise, he likes to write literary fiction with surreal aspects. He currently lives in Copenhagen with his wife and an imaginary Labrador.

**Rachel Schrauben Yeates** is a graduate of Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia. Currently based in Chicago, she adores storytelling of all kinds. The semester she spent in Glasgow left her with a profound appreciation of disciplined communal literary criticism and vegetarian haggis. Right now, she's probably annoying one of her three cats. If she's lucky, she's annoying all three of them at the same time.

## About the Editors

**Suki Hollywood** hails from Northern Ireland, is a Glasgow-based prose writer, and a previous University of Glasgow graduate. Currently pursuing her MLitt in Creative Writing, she experiments with fantasy and science fiction, while trying to keep one eye on the real world. In her spare time, she is a musical performer.

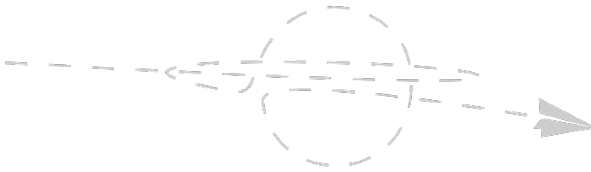
**Daniel Gee Husson** is a playwright, director, and dramaturg who also writes short stories and the occasional poem. He graduated from the Riggio Honors Program: Writing and Democracy at the New School in New York City in 2015. He recently received an MLitt in Playwriting & Dramaturgy, and is working on a second master's in creative writing, at the University of Glasgow.

**Erin MacDonald** currently studies on the Creative Writing MLitt at the University of Glasgow. She holds a BA in Anthropology and Cinema Studies and a certificate in Editing from the University of Washington. Influenced by her three-year immersive study of cross-cultural shamanism, her writing explores issues of spirituality, lineage, gender, and sexuality. Originally from Seattle, Erin now calls Glasgow home.

**Erin Morin** is a literary scholar currently obtaining an MLitt in Fantasy Literature from the University of Glasgow. A Mississippi native, she earned a double Bachelor of Arts in History and English Literature from Mississippi College. Prior to her return to academia, she worked as a public servant in her home state's cultural heritage sector. Her deep-south upbringing contributed to her academic interests, which include representations of gender, sexuality, and race, as well as transmedia narratives.

**Siobhan Mulligan** is currently a student on the MLitt Creative Writing programme at the University of Glasgow. She writes poetry, speculative fiction, and everything in between. Originally from Atlanta, GA, she travels frequently to South Africa to visit her family, and she now considers the UK home. Questions of place, religion, and mental health inform much of her work.

**Jack Bigglestone** is a queer writer and reader. Originally from rural Shropshire, he now lives in Glasgow, where he is an undergraduate in English Literature. He was recently published in *We Were Always Here: A Queer Words Anthology*. Find him on Twitter @LeBigStone



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