



The Right Eyed Deer

Issue 5 – Spring 2011

Poetry and fiction from around the globe

Interviews : Jonathan Pinnock – Mrs Darcy and the aliens
: Charles Christian – Ink, sweat and tears

The wonderful art of Erin Duquette

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-Words from an editor-

The Deer has been dormant for a whole year. All it needed perhaps, was a fresh burst of inspiration and energy, some vibrant new impetus to drag him from the woods. And, after asking for volunteers on the Write Idea forum, I got a wonderful assemblage of poets and fiction writers who were all prepared to help out and jump in. A mix of Brits and Canadians, some young, some not so young, but all talented. All, and this was the key, keen to make The Right Eyed Deer a totally kick ass publication again.

Now, while the original remit of The Deer was to publish 9 pieces of work per issue, we were staggered to get as many submissions as we did. We went from 'Think we'll get enough?' to 'Holy smoke, this is going to be damned tough turning anything down!' Sure, we got submissions, but the quality was stunning. We have actually rejected roughly three quarters of what came in, and we're still publishing the very biggest and best issue of The Deer yet.

Sixty pages of poetry and fiction from around the world. Contributors from France, India, Australia, Canada, the USA, England, Scotland. From the frozen North to the tropics.

It's a lot to pull it all together, editing fiction to try and sharpen or clarify it, tweaking bits here and there. Wrapping it up in the sublime artwork of Erin Duquette. Trying to be formally polite even when rejecting friends' work. Arriving at a structured and consistent format, something that hopefully gives the reader even more of a 'Wow!' while they enjoy the fabulous writing. No point having great reading if the presentation is sloppy, and when the work featured is as good as this it just adds to the pressure to keep it blindingly good.

We also decided to pick out 'Editors' Choices'. The pieces that we consider the best of them all. Even those choices were difficult. We are spoiled with a richness of creativity, of sublime moments in word and language. Amita Basu's wonderful 'Vocation' takes you right to India, right to the character's place, her work, her life. Taylor Copeland's poetry left the poetry editors totally delighted with its craft. Diamonds amongst a field of gems.

There are too, the interviews. That place where I can hide behind my slightly roguish mask of The Deer, pose questions to the friendly and charming editor, Charles Christian, who runs Ink, Sweat and Tears and the multi-talented writer, Jon Pinnock, who is on the brink of his first big book deal. There are serious questions in there, there are wonderful straightforward answers, but I just had to wrap them in my usual goofy style. I hope it's informative and fun too.

There are really two aims for The Deer. One is to showcase great bits of writing, the other to 'front' that wonderful writer's forum, The Write Idea, to make a wider audience aware of the vibrant community there dabbling with fiction, poetry and everything else. It is a global, online community that is based around writers helping each other to improve, writers that range from total newbies to experienced and published poets and writers. There are others that just join in to read. It is, for many of them, their spiritual 'home'. Do look in, join in, it really is a great place. It costs nothing except your time and friendship.

But ... I babble ... a trait of mine. This is Issue 5, The Right Eyed Deer. All I ask, is this; Enjoy!

Douglas Pugh

Passacaglia

by Maude Larke

Two days
this way
of living

and I
only stain
a page.

I. It's hard to separate two days
from an ongoing mind this way
but it provides a test of living

in its awareness, and I
find in it my only stain
in having left blank a page.

II. Two days faced
each other, blankly.
"This way, companion,
lies the way
of living." The
other turned away.

And I must
follow, nothing more,
only stain my
leaden, ashen face,
a page torn
from my existence.

III. Only two days have passed,
but with this way my heart is working
I've taken out of living two decades.

She and I must be resolved
or I only stain my soul for nothing
and make, perhaps, a page in an
institution's record.

IV. Two days this way
the rain has fallen
to dampen the minds
of living beings

And I only stain
some letter paper
to brighten friends with
a page from me.

V. Two days and I can come
this way, only stain your tranquility
with the audacity
of living a page of my dreams,
then disappear utterly.

Madrigal

by Maude Larke

to tease the fickle senses
and create a stream at will
to tease the fickle senses
with costumed smiles
and hidden fingers
and masquerading perfumes

to tease
with captured light
and create a stream at will
with costumed smiles
with wizard sparkle
and laughter falls
and waves disclosed
and cool shade

to tease
create
with smiles
with sparks
and scents
and waves
and shade
and light and

O!
to bottle spontaneity
in black prisms

and set it free
in refracted air

“Madrigal” was published as part of a series of poems with a musical inspiration (with “Two Hands”, “Segovia”, and “Higdon Strings”) online in *Cyclamens and Swords* (August 2010): http://www.cyclamensandswords.com/poetry_august_2010_2.php

Interview with Charles Christian, Editor of Ink, Sweat and Tears

First of all, Charles, I'd like to say thank you so much for agreeing to be subjected to this. Your site, Ink, Sweat and Tears, is a refreshing place in the writing webiverse, and a happy 'hunting ground' for many of our forum members. Well loved and respected too, so kudos for that!

So ... if we can get the preliminaries out of the way ... (unpacks thumbscrews and handcuffs) ...

What is your favourite kind of sandwich? And your guilty late night secret snack or tipple?

Charles : *Sorry to disappoint you but I'm on a health kick at the moment so I'm cutting out bread and late night snacks but when I'm in the mood, brie with cranberry jelly or cambozola & date is a favourite – tho obviously not if I'm travelling by rail in the UK. My not so secret tipple is rosé wine – you can't beat a peanut gringo blush.*

How long has Ink, Sweat and Tears been going?

Charles : *First saw the silvery light of a cyberdawn in January 2007*

The 'why' of Ink, Sweat and Tears seems to be a desire to combine the edginess and freshness of writing with the wonders of the web. That can be a tricky, double edged beastie. Lots of people think they can write, even write well, and the web gives them a degree of enablement. Do you find yourself rejecting a lot of stuff?

Charles : *I do find myself rejecting a lot of stuff – maybe 50 percent. This is probably less than most traditional magazines because you can at least get a feel for IS&T before you submit. And – and I appreciate this may be controversial but a lot of the people who submit the really dire 'moon, June, balloon, macaroon' end rhymed stuff are not online so they don't submit to us.*

I'm guessing that you sometimes come across tricky rejections, something that you maybe think is great in some ways but flawed in others. How do you deal with those?

Charles : *The two biggest causes for rejections are (1) it is just not IS&T material – because we accept literary flash fiction & prose poetry, we get a lot of genre short stories + we get religious stuff – just because by name is J C Christian does not mean I am one. And (2) stuff that falls into the 'I wish I was a Beat poet and look I'm writing like Charles Bukowski' category, normally by writing an indifferent poem and breaking it*

Up Into

A string

Of two

Word lines

We just say 'no' to all these. My general practice is to offer no feedback even if asked as it just causes arguments of the 'well all my friends think I'm a great poet' variety. However, occasionally a poem will come in where there is something obvious that jars – the wrong word or perhaps an unnecessary opening or closing stanza – and then I will suggest the writer makes an edit – and usually they agree. Usually.

Did you want a pickle with that sandwich?

Charles : *No but my glass could do with a top up.*

Writing is often a labour of love, even the running of ezines and forums, it all eats into that precious commodity, time. How on earth do you manage it all? Do you regiment yourself with a schedule? And how does that affect your own creative urges?

Charles : *It is a labour of love however I now have Gregory Award-winning poet Helen Ivory on board as my deputy editor and she has halved my workload. Schedule? No, not really but I've earned my living as a writer for over 30 years (primarily as a trade & technical journalist) so I'm used to managing my time and keeping to deadlines. As to my own creative urges, since the spring of last year, I've completed and had accepted for publication a collection of short stories and flash fiction (all sci-fi & dark fantasy). The collection is being launched in the autumn. And I'm also averaging about 750 words a day on a novel which is now hovering in the 105,000 words region. I suppose I'm lucky in that words are my thing – I enjoy writing for the day-job and I enjoy writing as my leisure/hobby.*

Should a writer keep up with a web presence? The net seems to evolve from blogs to social networks and now into Twittering. Doesn't this just distract from that end product, just writing?

Charles : *This is an awkward question for me as by day I'm a technology journalist so I live online: I run 4 blogs, a website, get through enough emails a day to wallpaper Buckingham Palace plus I have a Facebook presence & 2 Twitter feeds. BUT, I would say that a creative writer, Facebook is a good way to spread the word about your activities and maybe pick up some reading opportunities. If you are serious about being a writer, it also makes sense to have a blog, where you can give your prospective audience a taster of what you are doing. As for twitter: its fun, and a way of keeping in touch & making online contacts. Yes, it can distract from writing but it is far less of a distraction than spending your days in a pub discussing with other wannabe authors that you never get any writing finished.*

An ezine. Do you have hopes or long term plans to take Ink, Sweat and Tears into any other realms, such as print? Or are you happy with the web side of things? With the growing number of e-readers etc, the publishing world is undergoing a large transformation, not only with copyright issues, but also with the traditional publishing world having to change and quickly. Do you foresee anything large and murky coming along, that a lot of folks haven't thought about yet?

Charles : *We have experimented on a couple of occasions with a print anthology of the previous year's poetry but the take-up has been so poor as to be not worth getting out of bed for. So, for the foreseeable future, which in the modern age is up to next Tuesday, we are staying as a web-based ezine only. However the key to survival is to keep monitoring developments and being prepared to reinvent yourself as and when necessary.*

Brown bread or white?

Charles : *Ciabatta please.*

Just two more questions, then I'll take those thumbscrews off. Makes eating that sandwich a bit tricky, eh?

The born or made debate? Is a writer born or made? Or a bit of both? There's a huge market of literary MFAs and stuff out there, are they producing a lot more Tennyson's and Dante's these days? Or is it just fluff to keep the places of education filled and their coffers overflowing?

Charles : *Writers are born – if you don't get the 'writing' thing you are not going to have the discipline to sit alone for hours staring at a VDU screen or a sheet of paper. As for the courses... how good is your libel insurance! Some are good. Some can provide some useful steering in the right direction. But many are just part of the creative writing industry and probably harmful for would-be writers as they are staffed by frustrated or failed writers with chips on their shoulders. I walked out of my creating writing MA. If you want to write, you will write. If you need to be taught everything, you never will be a writer.*

Lastly ... the best piece of writing advice that you've seen (apart from Einstein's short theorem. Yes, I did read around your site first :)), come on, spill the beans ... everybody wants a soundbite that will make them a genius ... what is it?

Charles : *As someone who failed 'O' level English and who, if left to his own, devices would start every sentence with either the word 'Well' or 'And' I'm, the last person to give advice however...*

The best advice I've heard on poetry is from my deputy ed Helen Ivory (who does teach creative writing at UEA) and she reckons most poets could lose the first and last stanzas of every poem they write although obviously this is bad advice when it comes haiku. As for other types of writing: you can go on courses and you can do research but ultimately you've got to start putting ink down on paper – everything else is displacement activity.

Brilliant! Thank you very much, Charles. It's been a delight talking to you, and your time and patience will be very much appreciated by our readers.

Now did you want that sandwich toasted or not? I'm just gonna chomp on a bit of grass ...

Charles : *Did you just say smoke a bit of grass?*

Cough, cough ... no comment ... I mean, errrr ... just eat yer sandwich, eh?

The Road to Goodbye

by Vicky Daddo

“Get out of my way,” the man snarled, pushing past me.

I held my hands up in surrender. I didn't realise vegetarians had so much grunt in their tanks, I thought, as the man dropped the last packet of soy and lentil burgers into his basket, triumphantly smiling. I stood shaking my head.

“Dad?” Milly asked, frowning and drawing out the word as though it tasted like horse manure.

“Sorry love, I was beaten to it by the Ninja vegan from hell. I swear he leapt out from nowhere. He must have been camouflaged behind the mung beans.”

Milly didn't crack her face. “I did manage to get you some veggie ravioli – spinach and ricotta. Is that okay?” She might have nodded, but I couldn't be sure, as her thick sandy hair fell over her face like a stage curtain.

Shopping done, we headed off and I was grateful to see the urban ugliness of the city recede in favour of the verdant welcome of Gippsland as we began our journey to Wilson's Promontory.

The trip hadn't started well. I was late picking Milly up because I ran into road-works on the freeway and I hadn't got enough credit left on my mobile to make an apologetic call.

Apparently I'd woken up the baby with my overly-loud knocking, and he'd only just gone to sleep. Then, the cardinal sin, I hadn't packed any vegetarian food for Milly. The last time I'd been with Milly she'd been tucking into chicken parma, but I was informed that Milly had been vegetarian for three and a half weeks now and she *definitely* told me. I threw my hands up. That seems to have become the habit for the day.

We drove in silence towards Leongatha. Milly was listening to her iPod and looked out of her window, obviously wishing she was anywhere else but with her Dad.

“How long's it been since we've camped, Milly?” I asked brightly, as we took the turning towards Fish Creek.

She eyed me suspiciously and pulled one earphone out. “Dunno. Don't remember ever camping with you.”

“I reckon it must have been Philip Island, when you were about four. You were just about to start kinder I think. You had these cute little pig tails...”

“Dad!” she protested, subconsciously wrapping her hair around her hand. Her cheeks dappled with pink spots and she ran her tongue over her braces.

“What? You were adorable,” I smiled. Still are, I thought, but saved her embarrassment by not articulating the sentiment.

“Mick’s taking us to Dream World in the winter holidays,” she announced with cruel timing, as we got out of the car at the Fishy Pub for lunch.

The mere mention of her stepfather’s name had my blood rushing noisily around my ears, but I just about managed a polite nod and an “Oh right, that’s great.”

Over hot chips and ketchup, Milly went on to tell me about Mick’s parents’ apartment in Eden, overlooking the beach, and the new plasma television in her room. I told her about the mice infestation in my garage and the smell of the Paper Mill being worse during the recent heatwave. Then I reached into my bag and gave her three books.

“Your mum used to read these. I thought you might like them. I found them when I was clearing out the garage.” Milly took the Virginia Andrews paperbacks and inspected them. “It’s alright. I wiped off the mouse poo.” Milly glared at me and stomped back to the car. I couldn’t be bothered to throw my hands up again.

We drove to Meeniyan and through the shrubby plains of Yanakie, catching the occasional tempting glimpse of rippling deep blue water as we neared the Prom. No matter how many times I visited, there was still a bubble of excitement that bounced around my insides as we paid the fee at the booth and started the scenic drive towards the Tidal River car park. However, the feeling was tempered slightly when I looked at Milly’s pained expression.

We pulled up at the camping site and she reluctantly got out to help me unload. I could hear her grunting and groaning and rifling through the boot as I set about marking out where I was going to erect the tent.

“What’s up?” I called, mallet and tent peg in hand.

“Can’t find my bag.”

My insides froze and my brain wobbled in my head. I distinctly remembered taking out her overstuffed Billabong backpack to make room for the ice box and then, nothing. I couldn’t remember putting it back in. When Milly walked round the side of the car to confront me, I dropped the mallet on my right foot but didn’t dare utter any obscenities for fear of stealing

her thunder.

“Don’t tell me you didn’t pack it,” she stabbed me with the words. “What am I going to wear?” Tears burst forth and she scrunched her hands into balls of hate. “I had my best pair of vintage jeans in that bag.” She was truly devastated but I couldn’t help but think she wasn’t crying over the bag.

“I’m so sorry, love. We’ll go shopping tomorrow. We can replace everything,” I raced the words out but I was talking to the tent peg. Milly slammed the car door shut behind her.

“Shit!” That was for the mallet and the bag and for life in general.

Milly finally released herself from self-imposed exile when I produced a bowl of ravioli in tomato sauce with home made damper. She took the plate and sat on a camp chair next to me, eating silently and chewing me up with every mouthful.

“Didn’t know you could cook,” she said eventually, not looking at me, but at least talking.

“Your mum taught me everything I know,” I said cautiously. She turned slowly towards me, her grey eyes still red and watery. “It’s true. I was hopeless, but she showed me how to do the basics and every time we went on holidays I would cook for the whole two weeks. She enjoyed the rest, I enjoyed the challenge and camaraderie of the camp kitchen. We used to have a ball. The bread’s your mum’s special recipe.”

Milly wiped her eyes and bit into the damper and said, with a cracking voice, “It’s really nice.”

“Thanks.” A sharp prick of pride and sadness hit me between the ribs and I tried to swallow the feeling that I’d left our father-daughter camping trip for far too long. “You can wear one of my t-shirts tonight and we’ll go into town tomorrow to get some more clothes. I am sorry love. This trip is so important to me. I’ve been planning it since, well, since you know, and I wanted everything to be perfect.”

Milly turned a grimace into a half-smile and back to a wobbly-lipped frown before getting up to take the dishes. “Don’t, Dad,” she whispered. She never said “Nothing’s perfect.” Neither of us did, but it didn’t mean the words weren’t there.

By eight-thirty I was embarrassingly exhausted, the drive taking its toll. Milly was too and I handed her my wash-bag and one of my tops. When she returned to the tent, all foal-like legs and coyness, she couldn’t wait to get into her sleeping bag and out of the gaze of her useless

father.

A tender sun gently tore open the morning clouds and Milly woke up to share a quiet plate of eggs on toast with me and the crimson rosellas. She looked so young with morning fatigue still hazy in her eyes, just like that ringletted four-year old, ten years earlier. I breathed in my tears and washed up.

We returned from Leongatha, tight jeans, short t-shirts, even shorter shorts, strangely-inscribed hoodies, exotically-coloured bras and uncomfortable-looking undergarments in tow and a couple of hundred dollars poorer for the experience. I suggested a trek to Squeaky Beach. Milly followed quietly, dressed in her new rainbow-coloured Roxy beach shorts and a neon pink vest.

“The sand is made from quartz, so it squeaks underfoot. It’s also excellent sandcastle material,” I said in my best tour-guide voice.

“I’m a bit old for sandcastles, Dad.”

“Nobody’s too old for sandcastles,” I retorted, sinking to my knees and burrowing out the white sand with my hands. “We, your Mum and I, used to make you really extravagant palaces and boats. Your Mum was the artistic one. I was just the labourer. You always squealed with delight when you were finally allowed to play with the finished product.” Milly squatted down too, a slow smile of memory opening her lips and revealing her braces.

“Why have you got those?” I asked as she patted the sand with me.

“Mick thinks my teeth are wonky.” I kept my mouth shut, but I swear Milly could hear the colourful words flitting around my head. She cocked her head sideways and we giggled conspiratorially. After congratulating ourselves on our magnificent version of the Sydney Opera House, we laid down on the beach, enjoying the warmth of the late afternoon sun as it hovered over the huge rounded boulders that define the edges of the bay. We came back that night to watch the sunset and Milly sat a little closer to me, crying softly.

The next morning I let Milly choose which walk she wanted to do. She chose the trek round to Little Oberon Bay. We chatted more easily as we meandered along by the tea trees and climbed gently up and around the side of Norman Point.

“There’s Skull Rock,” I pointed out to sea. “It’s really called Cleft Island.”

“How do you know all these things?” Milly asked. “The names for the islands and that?”

“My Dad used to take me here when I was a boy and then when I married your Mum,

we used to come down this way all the time. I still do a lot of coastal and bushwalks. I love it. You should always know about where you come from, your roots. That's why I wanted to bring you here, before you go." The wind whipped Milly's hair over her face and she hooked it back behind her ears, just like her Mum.

"I don't really want to go to Sydney," she confessed to the sea.

"I know, but you have to."

"Couldn't I stay with you?" she pleaded. "Mick wouldn't mind." I kept my doubts about that unspoken.

"What about your brothers?"

"They wouldn't care," she shrugged, tears threatening.

"They need you, Milly. You've got to be there for them."

"It's so not fair. Why should he dictate my life for me?" I'd been thinking exactly the same thing but didn't dare say. I'd promised her Mum.

"Your Mum and I had our first kiss here. We weren't much older than you are now, I suppose. It seems like yesterday." Milly's face crumpled then and she sobbed. Gulls shrieked with her and my own salty tears spilled onto her hair.

Back at the tent, I barbecued veggie sausages but neither of us was hungry. Milly was reading one of the books I'd given her and as I said goodnight, I reminded her of our plans for the morning. "Mount Oberon. Better get up early. It's supposed to be a scorcher."

Following the subtle rise of the track up to the summit of Mount Oberon, I felt my legs complaining. The light breeze did little to stop the sweat from flowing down between my shoulder blades. Milly walked in brooding silence, but at the peak, stood taking in the breathtaking beauty of the panorama. Tidal River, the white-striped bays below and the islands marked by frothy breakers, it was magnificent. This was her Mum's favourite place, this was something unspoken that was finally "Perfect."

I took out the small canister from my backpack and handed it to Milly. Her shoulders shuddered as she undid the lid and we both walked closer to the edge.

"Happy birthday, Mum," she shouted as the ashes whipped up on the wind and seemed to hang there, suspended in the air, for one last goodbye.

'The Road to Goodbye' won the 2008 Yarram Agricultural Show short story competition and was published in 'FreExpression' magazine in Australia in November 2008.

Dressing Table

by Marilyn Francis

*wicker figure in a bonnet with basket of flowers
small framed print of daffodils*

You were lost
at the top of the stairs
and asked for directions.
Your map-reading, you said,
had never been good.
Smiling politely you asked our names
and whether we had travelled far.

*Kleen-e-ze hairbrush
Rimmel 60 - second nail varnish [813 Euphoria]*

We had the party without you that year
and though you beamed at the sight of a cake ablaze
with eighty pin-pricks of pink fairy lights
you were alarmed by the houseful of strangers.

*cellophane bag containing two brass-effect buttons
brown glass bottle labelled glycerine and rosewater*

You wore the greasy paisley apron
over your best white cardigan
and Sunday skirt. Someone had moved
the cooker and hidden the vegetable knife.
The saucepans were in the wrong place.

*fumovate ointment
knitted viscose primary dressing*

A confusion of bramble crept
around the kitchen window
scraping the panes with black thorns
tapping witchy-fingered on the glass.

*reel of EFGEECO fishing line
plastic Quality Street tub containing 80 used candles*

Sea-weed memories taunted you
played hide-and-seek. Refused to be netted
drifted away. Out of sight. You slept
for years on the narrow couch
while a tangle of briars grew in your head
until at last a princely kiss released you.

From *red silk slippers* by Marilyn Francis
Published by Circaidy Gregory Press 2009

Confessional

by Alicia Winski

in a fevered quest for redemption, you come to me driven by
a new found vocation; professing a devout adoration as you pray
for restoration of a faith we lost *long ago*

head bowed, a supplicant kneeling to a deity, zealous in your
worship of consecrated flesh, your murmured invocations fall unheard
under the intonations of a deaf, exalted prayer, your parched lips
anointed with the wine of a familiar, heady, *sweet* sacrament

as you slip resolutely into my feminine sanctum, we come together in
unholy communion, committing ancient sins in momentary, beatific union,
seeking absolution *only* in the aftermath of our heavenly raptures

these baptismal fires cooled in the languid liquids of salvation,
we lie completed, content, depleted, spent, entwined for eternity in
the confining *hell*

of this confessional



Mission accomplished

by Wanda Morrow-Clevenger

Billy Biando grabbed his Super-Soaker 1000, filled to the brim with ice-cold water, and set out to conquer the world, one screaming victim at a time. Young Billy lived grudgingly in the pedestrian burbs known as Bluebell Estates. Oddly enough, for all the assorted flora and fauna it hosted along its sugar-maple-lined lanes, not even one puny patch of bluebells tinkled in the breeze. The tiptoeing, Tiny Tim pansy-pants who christened it with the wussy name hadn't considered the ramification: the unmerciful razzing from the older boys in middle school. "Hey look, it's Tinkerbell Bluebell Billy. Ooh, sprinkle us with fairy-dust."

The torment didn't sit well with Billy, no sir. Wise for his twelve years, he considered the put-down a call to war. Obvious retaliation: defend his wounded pride by laying waste to all things girly. To that end he initiated a campaign to kick the "belle" out of Bluebell.

Poring over G.I. JOE comic books late into the night, he formulated a plan to elevate himself from grunt to Comandante Supremo. And he'd do it Great American Hero style. "Go Joe!"

On a sweltering Saturday afternoon, a salami and Velveeta sandwich clinched between his braces and water spitting out the super-soaker's fill-hole, Billy bounded out the back door. His mother's voice, growing fainter with each step, admonished, "I better not get any calls from the neighbors today or we'll go round and round."

It was summertime and the pickin's were easy. All the high school girls living in Bluebell Estates lay out in the sun on the weekends, peepers closed behind Ray Bans, grossly preoccupied with their tans. Sneaking up on them was a cinch. Like shootin' fish in a barrel.

Two weeks back he drenched Carol Tweed right in the kisser. She made that hysterical Rodney Dangerfield grimace behind the splosh. *Ha ha! Where were Ashton Kutcher's Punk'd cameras when you needed'm?*

His aim was off-meant for a kill-shot through the heart-cause he was temporarily blinded by the sight of a bikini smaller'n a baseball card. Nodding, he recalled the vision: they bounced around like beach balls on a trampoline when she chased him across the drive. Holy cannoli, she had some big'uns. "Get off my property, you grimy goober," she yelped, bare feet slapping the blacktop.

Boy, now he knew what “madder’n a wet hen” meant. What a commotion. It was only a little water, he was doing her a favor. She might've got heatstroke otherwise. But heck if she didn't almost nab him. Good hustle, coach'd say. Just like making a winning lay-up at the buzzer, he pivoted and got off a hip-shot, blasted a jet-stream point-blank into her navel. Folks tending their tulips for three doors down caught the finale, with credits: her screaming bloody murder and him sprinting away in a freckled frenzy.

He plastered Lucy Deever next. It was an encounter he'd never forget. She'd been tipped off for sure. Them doggone girls really stuck together, like gum wads under the gym bleachers. He sure fumbled the ball that day, broke the cardinal rule: get no closer than striking distance.

Lucy was lying real still, like “bathing beauties” do so they don't get fuzzy tan lines—or whatever—and wearing only three triangles of purple spandex. He tiptoed to where she sprawled on a mesh recliner.

Anticipation built. His trigger finger twitched. *A real sitting duck, oiled and browning under the broiler, begging for a basting.* But his gaze froze on the purple sheen longer than it should've, the commando and target momentarily suspended.

Billy aligned his weapon and readied a war-whoop. Water gurgled and Lucy leaped. He stumbled backward, nearly losing his balance. She grabbed his arm and yanked, let out a screech—same sound he'd heard once from a stray cat in a dog fight. Since when did girls know hand-to-hand combat?

They struggled an awkward waltz for ten seconds. Reminded him of Miss Prudie's Cotillion Class in fifth grade, except those girls weren't wearing swimsuits. Or boobs. The dance paused, but instead of changing partners both clung to the soaker, Lucy's eyes glued to the gun's icy innards, Billy's glued to Lucy.

“Not as clever as you think, huh?” Lucy shifted her weight from one foot to the other.

With just two feet between them, his face leveled at her swaying, sweaty chest, he realized an added benefit of male assertiveness. G.I. JOE should get so lucky. A light bulb flicked on; there was more to be gained by this mission than initially surmised.

Lucy caught a second wind and shoved. Billy held tight. They flung the water gun back and forth, side to side, up and down, moving closer and closer to her lounge chair. Sprits of water flicked out the top like a thirsty dolphin coming up for air.

Without warning, Lucy's grasp loosened. Still focused on the triangles, wondering how they managed to stay put in the tussle, Billy didn't see her offensive move sailing in portside.

Pink Country Time swam across his face and neck, followed by thunks of ice cubes. “How do you like it, pip-squeak?” Lucy hissed.

He laughed at the turn of events, wriggled free and hightailed it, hooting, “Hooah.” Licking his lips, he called over his shoulder, “Thanks for the nice, cold drink, Lucy Goosy.”

A furious finger stabbed the air. “I know where you live, kid.”

The escapades landed him in trouble, deeper than expected. Carol blabbed to Lucy that he'd doused her and Lucy's mother gave him up to his mom. He took some grief for the pranks, fidgeted through a lecture about respecting women.

“What's got into you, Billy, pestering those young ladies who've never done anything to you?” And worse, she'd threatened disarmament. “If it happens again, you'll leave me no choice but to confiscate that portable fire hydrant.”

Funny thing, though, his dad stayed neutral. Only remarked, “Listen to your mother, son.” But Billy saw the look the man gave his wife, saw him turn away smiling. His dad understood guy stuff.

Billy knew the two raids weren't going to be enough to impress the boys at school. Yeah, he riled those gals up, no doubt about it. But any kid his age could pull that off with one arm tied behind his back. He also knew he'd get busted to dogface and probably confined to quarters for what he was planning next. Yet, he couldn't retreat until the objective was met. And the objective was in sight.

Sara Kresser lived a block over. She and Mace Graham were sixteen, and good looking for girls, Billy conceded. Their jiggle-jams weren't near as big as Carol's and Lucy's, but he hadn't really seen enough of them to come to an informed conclusion.

Except for the wrestling match with Lucy, the best gander he'd caught was a bobbing blur out the corner of his eye while running for dear life in the opposite direction. That situation was about to change. Tinkerbelle Bluebell was toast.

The two teens sunbathed every weekend in Sara's backyard with their tops unhooked. When startled they'd pop up, and with luck, everything would pop out. Previous forays made good practice, but Kresser's was the big pay-day; primo prey for a tactical maneuver. A victory of that magnitude would get the zit zombies off his case. They'd be eating out of his hands, drooling over every detail.

He stealthily crossed the Emmons' backyard, careful not to rouse their Saint Bernard, Bitsy. Poor dog. Naming the behemoth Bitsy was another example of Bluebell's sissified influence. Billy's fist punched upward. *Free the prissy pets.*

“Billy boy, what'ya up to?” Mrs. Emmons, his mother's second pair of eyes and ears who lived next door, peered around the spring-floral bed sheet she clipped onto her clothesline.

Startled, he snapped to attention. “Hey, Mrs. Emmons. Nothing at all, ma'am.” Then hedged quickly past the percales and her question.

“Mercy, that’s a big water gun. Don't get into trouble with it.”

Billy slipped around the Emmons' deck and zigzagged through seven backyards to the Kresser's bungalow, ricocheting shots off azalea plants, unwary sparrows, and Trixie, a freshly shaved poodle making a doodle.

“Ugly shave-job, dawg.” He snickered. “Hope you bit whoever scalped you.”

Approaching the Kresser's house, he stopped and cocked his head. Keen senses relayed data that the girls were near: unmistakable coco-butter aroma and brainless prattle. Info from recon missions guaranteed Sara and Mace were stretched out on chaise lounges, slicked up shinier than newborn baby butts, rocking-out to Nickleback, and chattering faster than chipmunks. Not to mention the unsecured bikini top thing.

Glued to the sunset-gold siding of Sara's house, holding his breath, Billy ventured a peek around the corner then jerked back. Bull's-eye. He dropped to the ground and belly-crawled twenty yards to the nearest natural cover, the sloshing soaker clocking his chin. Each lurch forward released cold droplets from the cumbersome gun that seeped into his Mad Max t-shirt. Ignoring the frigid entry wounds—no pain, no gain—he hunkered down in a clump of rhododendron shrubs, acutely aware of a half-dozen bivouacked bumblebees.

“Has Tommy called?”

“No, but he smiled at me at Lucy's party. He's so cute. I wish he'd hurry up and ask me out. I bet he's a great kisser.”

“Mike said ‘hi’ to me, but I was at Ponderosa with my stupid family—”

“Omigod, for real? Mike’s mega-hot.”

“I know. Carol's got a thing for him, but she's such a skank. Mike would never go for her. He's got way better taste—”

“Yeah, for sure. You're wicked hotter than her.”

“Well, *duh*. Do you think he really likes me? Should I call him?”

“Maybe, except some guys don't like that. Jeez, it's hot. Do you want a Pepsi?”

Forgetting her unhooked bra, Sara rose. Billy rose with her, right into a mass of pink blooms. She caught the slipping bandeau. “Holy crap, I almost flashed you, Mace.”

“And old man Motley next door.” Mace grimaced in mock terror.

“Ahhhh!” they squealed in unison.

Cripes. Billy groaned, shifted position. *Steady soldier, almost time to unleash the big gun. One for the money. Two for the show. Three to get ready. And four to . . .*

A wayward bumblebee nosedived. Billy ducked. The buzzing was getting louder, the ground harder. Both he and the perturbed insect agreed, it was now or never.

“Ouch. Dangit,” he said, a little louder than he'd meant, and rolled onto his back to inspect the bee's damage.

Sara, fumbling with the hook behind her back, looked at Mace and whispered, “What was that?” The girls carefully scoped the perimeter then closed ranks.

Unforeseen, a blast of garden hose hit him square in the face, then smeared Mad Max between his eyes. Billy's attack thwarted, he rolled out of the bushes, his useless weapon glugging ammo into the grass.

Sopping and spitting bubbles, he hollered, “What are you, crazy?”

Sara and Mace, sparkling with droplets of over spray, leaned over him, frowning.

“Take that, you little perv.”

“Yeah, you little perv. Does the zoo keeper know you've escaped?”

Billy wiped a swelling hand across dripping eyes and looked up, blinked once at Sara, again at Mace. The ideal angle the girls provided, coupled with gravity, proved most advantageous.

Defeated, like an upturned turtle clawing at the air, and by females no less. Still, the sun glinted off his braces. Mission accomplished.

Yes, young Billy Biando resided in a cul-de-sac of a lame suburb with a dorky name, but he knew, then and there, nobody would call him Tinkerbell ever again.

Published in Falling Star Magazine – Volume 9, Issue 1; 2010

27th & Main

by Kim Clark

Over café con leche
outside the Saltspring Coffee Company
she eyes up the street
and the man with a double
glance between Elements.

The Million Penny Giveaway
urges the #32 bus north to Commercialism
while Charlie Chaplin leans into
the doorway opposite an angel
under the oxymoronic closing
out sign reading Modern Time Antiques.

She forgets about
the shepherd with bad hips,
the small bag of peek-a-poo shit belonging to
the self-propelled breasts making the crossing,
the pot-bellied Canada Post pick-up.

She forgets about the taxidermist
landlord who warns of tsunamis
and even the gnawing rat under the floorboards
back at the house on Carolina

and remembers instead
the Colorifics spicing up
last night in tuxes, with bongos
and Patsy's smoky voice
on the croon.



La Grande Jatte , Ottawa

by E. Russell Smith

This summer Sunday the only rain fell
on a church, and drained to captive gargoyles,
leering from exalted eaves and gutters,
spitting insults at us lucky infidels.

Otherwise, a sunny afternoon, with music
from the *pavillon*, and on the water
novice politicians under small sail circle
the high-powered fibreglass of bureaucrats.

Middle-managed families in pedal boats
spy upon the cruisers' cocktail hour.
The water-scooter of a working stiff
buzzes a student's rowing shell.

Two lovers, ignorant of faith or politics,
practising safe transports of delight
coast by on bicycle and roller blades
holding hands and helmeted,

and we are dappled silhouettes
who glide between petunia beds
and maples placed by touring luminaries,
bright confections on the public lawn.

Published in *Why We Stand Facing South* , E.Russell Smith (Moonstone Press,1998.)

The Right Eyed Deer – Issue 6

The Right Eyed Deer team is now open for submissions to Issue 6.

While we will consider poetry and fiction of virtually any length, we are particularly focusing this issue on the Best of Flash. Partly because of the ongoing success of the Monday Flash on The Write Idea forum with its delightful host, Cathy Edmunds, and partly because we think there is an awful lot of work out there from Flash that deserves maybe a little better recognition.

So, come on, get subbing ! The Deer is at ; <http://therighteyeddeer.weebly.com/>

The Whittaker Prize 2011

The fourth annual Whittaker Prize writing competition begins on March 12, 2011. It consists of nine rounds, each lasting two weeks. This competition is open to anyone over the age of 18 who writes fiction or poetry in English.

There are two categories: fiction and poetry. Writers may enter one category or both categories. Anyone wishing to participate in this competition must currently be a member of The Write Idea or register and be accepted as a member of the forum. Each round, entrants receive detailed marks based on a scoring grid, along with comments from the appropriate judge.

There is an entry fee of \$30 CDN. Writers may enter BOTH categories for a fee of \$50 CDN. Fees may be paid via PayPal to donnagee@vianet.ca. Writers may enter AFTER March 12 but must submit the full entry fee.

PRIZES

\$200 Cdn for the winner of the fiction category PLUS \$200 Cdn for the winner of the poetry category. Winning entries from each round (fiction and poetry) will be published in an anthology available for purchase before the end of 2011. Authors who place first, second and third in each category will receive a free copy of the anthology.

JUDGES

Fiction --

EVA STACHNIAK <http://www.evastachniak.com>

WILLIAM MEIKLE <http://www.williammeikle.com>.

Poetry --

SANDRA KASTURI <http://chizinepub.com>

LEA HARPER <http://www.blackmosspress.com/pages/Author%20Pages/Harper/untitled%202.html>

For more information, please visit
<http://www.helenwhittaker.net/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=8191>

That Tiny Sliver of Time

by Sharon Birch

It's when you wake and pause, that time when your mouth is dry and your tongue sticks temporarily to the top of your mouth and you cough a little to clear your throat and phlegm catches. That slight moment when you prise open an eye and last night's smudged mascara flakes away from your sleep-filled lashes and you resist the urge to rub as your vision is an altered blurry view of the bedside table. It's then, that tiny sliver of time, that moment between waking and reality hitting you hard in the solar plexus as you realise with a painful thud that it's true after all and not a dream or a nightmare from which you struggle to wake but there, in front of you and you wish you could go back to thinking it was a trick of the mind whilst you slept. It's then that you know it's real. And it begins all over again.

They rang in the middle of the night. Disorientated, I reached for the phone. I didn't have time for that moment to kick in.

'He's dead.'

He's dead and it echoed and bounced around in the dark corners in my head as I made my way to my office on the top floor of the police station. First one in, before the cleaners, only the night-shift cops skulking in corners. On automatic, I made coffee, pouring in half a packet of dark strong roast. I opened the slatted blinds to let in the frosted early sunlight. As I looked out of the window and past the chimneys, spires and old-architected rooftops, the glint of the distant sea speckled, defying the chill of the early morning. It would be another two hours before the station came alive. I could stand and look at the view forever, watching the town unfold and come awake. Alive. Not dead like the cynics called it, but buzzing, bright, alive and vibrant. For an old cold northern town. It's grim 'Up North' they say. They know nothing. Brothers Grimm. This is no fairytale.

I completed the paperwork. Sipped dark coffee. Same forms, different names. I faxed the bundle across to the coroner's office so they would have it by the time the first person arrived just after eight. The dozen pages printed on slippery, smudged paper would lie half on the floor, upside down and scattered, some fallen and toppled over and a couple into the waste bin no-one thinks to move. The last sheet would be dangling by the margin as it hung from the

machine by metal grippers refusing to give it up. But that wasn't my problem.

I had known there would be trouble, could smell it like a cliché. Twenty three years of training wasn't wasted. It never is when you deal in kiddie deaths for a trade. That's the ultimate, the worst, the grim reaper of social work, police work, of public service.

For some reason, I decided to call round that day. No other reason than that urge. I had intended to be there by ten but I was delayed by a phone call from the Crown Court. The judge wanted detailed information about a convicted paedophile I had dealt with. He was looking at 'life' this time and they needed to get it right. The lack of information wasn't the computer's fault. It was human error. A result of an eager-to-make-his-mark over-promoted chief superintendent who decided we shouldn't keep information for more than three years. Another product of flawed policy. General information, useless information, information about someone phoning 999 asking for a plumber not a policeman was fair enough to consign to the recycle-bin/delete button but the nitty-gritty down-and-dirty methods of a child groomer?

I gave the court clerk the best of my memory. I never forgot my cases. Or the faces. They flicked in front of me unbidden, like a dealer shuffling and dealing a pack of cards. Flick. Flick. Flick.

It was nearly two by the time I arrived. Unexpected. Unbidden. Unwanted. And they weren't going to let me in.

Kerry stood behind her man, shy-cow eyes and a nervous twitch of the mouth. Imperceptible signs but it raised the hairs on the back of my neck and I knew. His eyes were glazed and I also knew it hadn't been long since his last toke.

'Whatdaya want,' he rolled his eyes with his words.

'Just to see how you are doing after last week,' I smiled.

'Well you've seen, now you can plod off.' He moved to close the door.

My foot was already there. I could see the carpet still had the grime, the dust and the dirt from the previous visit. 'Routine follow up. I've also got some news. Don't want the neighbours nebbing.'

He grunted, moved back and she stepped behind him as if connected with invisible elastic. Or a fishing line. She was hooked, just like they all were, the insecure beaten girlfriends of the local thugs, junkies, no-hopers who lived in and around the estate. All they wanted was someone to love and to be loved back. All anyone wants.

I had visited the house last week with the social worker. Kerry's brother had taken a bad trip, collapsed in the street and been rushed to hospital and resuscitated. A bad batch of heroin was flying around the streets. Five people had died. Society's justice, my boss called it. I wasn't so cruel. Her brother had his four year old daughter with him. She needed a place of safety as her mother was miles away in Glasgow. We found Kerry's address, complete with her own drug-addicted partner and baby. We didn't leave the young girl. I knew something was wrong. No gut feelings, no instinct. The old bill don't believe in that these days. Evidence must speak for itself. And sometimes that evidence is subliminal.

It's more than a dirty house, a smelly house, a house that needs a good scrub. The baby mattress on the floor, the mouse droppings in the corner of the kitchen, the tiny ripped up bits of silver paper trodden into the dirt-grimed worn-off patterned carpet. More than the lack of telephone, the torn up fag ends, the candles worn down at the wick with wax that drips, drips, drips down the window-sill and down the wall, pooling at the edge where the skirting board meets the worn fabric, the baby bottle in the corner of the room growing mould, the knotted hair at the back of baby-mother's head. The tiny drop of red on the dirty bare floorboards in the spare room. It's all that and more.

It's the lack of eye-contact, the defensive body language, the way the baby looks at nothing with his blank vision and he doesn't cry. It's not the obvious things you can relay to a jury to make them believe you when you say you know there's something wrong. It's not the call to the police from a concerned relative telling you the baby is a left home alone, unattended, unwanted. It's not the bruising on the inside of the feet of a child who cannot yet walk and you don't find until post-mortem time. Those things all come later. It's the here and the now and the knowledge and experience that all these things tell you and would be missed, oblivious to an untrained eye.

He opened the door wider and I slipped in. Not to the kitchen. Never discuss anything in the kitchen. I walked through to the living room. The cluttered, too warm, sickly-sweet smelling living room.

'What's the news?' he asked, clenched hands plunged into his jeans pockets, knuckles poised as if punching the insides of the strained material. He moved one foot to the other.

Kerry remained half-behind him, blinking too fast and saying nothing, like a wild animal caught in the traps.

'There'll no charges for your brother. There's not an offence of being drugged-up in charge of a child. Only if you're drunk. The CPS wouldn't run with neglect. Apparently he

didn't know he'd collapse so can't prove intent.' I wasn't sure if he understood what I was saying, even though I'd tried to make it simple.

'No charges? He nearly fucking died!' he snarled at me. 'Does that mean he can have his kid back?'

'She's back with her mum. That's up to her.' I shrugged. She would let him when it came to Saturday night and she had no babysitter. She'd let him when she decided she wanted a break and her mother wouldn't look after her three kids under five. She'd let him if and when it suited her no matter what the social services said. 'I just came to tell you. How's Luke?'

'All right. Why?'

I could have phoned, could have asked the social worker to pass on the message, could have done any number of things but I didn't. I had to see that little boy. 'Routine welfare check. Nothing else.'

I smiled and looked at my watch, deliberate, to make them think I was in a hurry, needed to be somewhere else. Make them think I wasn't a threat.

Kerry answered, 'He's sleeping.' A tiny mouse voice, too high, nervous.

'Just a peek then?' I asked, smiling at her this time. 'Then I'll be off, leave you to it.'

She pointed behind the arm of the worn settee. 'He's over there.'

He filled the tattered moses basket, his inert body covered over with a gray-white cellular blanket up to his chin. His white skin. The lack of little breaths. He was still. Motionless. My heart pounded in the back of my dry throat as I put a hand out to touch his chest. I felt his tiny wrist. It was faint but his heart was beating.

I called for the ambulance.

He lay on the hospital bed, linked up to apparatus. I hoped he would die. I know it sounds cruel but I had seen close-up, too many times, the after-effects of a shaken baby. Severe brain damage, no walking, talking, feeding, confined to a wheelchair, restricted movement, thinking, being. A globule of drool. A crooked smile. Sad eyes. A lifetime in an institution whilst mummy and daddy stay rent-free at Her Majesty's pleasure, serving sentences that won't ever make up for the life lost. Should either or both be convicted.

A neighbour had seen him happily gurgling in his pram at nine o'clock that morning. If only I'd got there earlier. Maybe I could have prevented it. Somehow. Perhaps.

And now he is dead.

When I go to bed tonight, his presence will add to the others as I curl my back to the empty space on the other side of me and I will feel him, like I feel the others. Unexplained. Unexpected. Dead. And every day I carry the pain as a burden.

And it's when you wake and pause, that time when your mouth is dry and your tongue sticks temporarily to the top of your mouth and you cough a little to clear your throat and phlegm catches. That slight moment when you prise open an eye and last night's smudged mascara flakes away from your sleep-filled lashes and you resist the urge to rub as your vision is an altered blurry view of the bedside table. It's then, that tiny sliver of time, the moment between waking and reality hitting you hard in the solar plexus as you realise with a painful thud that it's true after all and not a dream or a nightmare from which you struggle to wake but there, in front of you and you wish you could go back to thinking it was a trick of the mind whilst you slept. It's then that you know it's real.

And you do everything you can to stop it from happening again.

--

Love in all seasons

by Kirsty Stanley

Sun rises and I'm
burning up, smouldering
glances your way.

Sudden downpour drives
me into your arms, legs
swamped in you...

leaf falls from our tree
caught in a gust of air
you take my breath,

freeze in it the ice
and snow. Stuck together,
one, two, we three.

- Poetry Editors' Choice -



In your hospital room

by Taylor Copeland

You are a mannequin in a foreign bed
while I stare at machines that speak
for you, eat for you, breathe the
antiseptic air in this room.

I try to crawl into your head and
pull out what you might have been thinking
when the brown in your eyes turned up
and your lids fluttered as gravity
took you to the cold, unforgiving floor.
Nothing.

You look paler than the sheets,
than the vacant expressions on the faces
of everyone else in this room who just
stand around, shake their heads and mutter,
while I sit back and move my tired hands
over tiny keys and stare at you,
almost expecting you to sit up
and laugh at me while I distract myself
from worry with the thought
"I'm hungry"
while I contemplate the last words you
spoke: "Bitch, get over it."

To deconstruct

by Taylor Copeland

A silence echoed
after you left pieces
of brick and mortar
scattered along the
carpeted steps that lead
to my kitchen, my strewn
junk mail and crumbled
wrappers of Laffy Taffy.
You walked over everything
embedding it into the
brown pile of the hallway
carpet and dragged wires,
pulled the power from me.
Left glasses with a half
inch of soda in the bathroom,
a paper plate pushed against
a window sill.
I found my purse in the sink,
my boots in the pantry,
found a sticky note on my
bare leg in the morning that
read "it was fun".
Too lazy to capitalize.
Too selfish to brew coffee
on your way out the door.

Mikey's Blot

by Sallie Tams

The juddering stop-go through the half-mile of road-works makes her want to vomit. She tries not to think about it.

She thinks about her dress. She's wearing her best dress; her Friday dress, bright yellow like the centre of a daisy.

Thinking about her dress makes her want to vomit.

Her brother sprawls across most of the back seat in the cream Mini. He uses his bony left elbow as a buttress to keep her pressed up against the window. Their mother winds the front window down and the tiny car fills with the acrid smell of hot metal and tar. The girl pushes her hair away from her damp forehead with the back of her hand and leans forward. Her back peels her back away from the seat, *rrrrrip*. A finger of sweat traces a lazy line along her spine.

The radio fades in and out, almost in concert with the motion of the car. She tries not to think about the consequences of being sick in the back of the car. What her would her dad say? Her stupid brother would tell all his stupid friends and they'd laugh. Like they always laugh.

Her brother smirks at her as if he can read her thoughts and digs his elbow further into her side. She glares at him through slitted eyes and injects her words with as much venom as she can muster.

"Drop dead."

"Drop dead, yourself." He hooks his index fingers into each corner of his mouth and sticks his tongue out at her.

The flash of their mother's pale eyes in the rear-view mirror speaks louder than any words. Her warning radiates out of the warm air. The girl sits back, folds her arms and stares straight ahead, stony-faced. Her brother taps his heel to the woozy sound of Dusty Springfield singing about a preacher's son.

The girl just wants to get home. She wants to run up to her bedroom, rip off the dress and hide it before her mother sees the stain. The syllables of a word run around in her mind.

In-del -i-ble.

She has no idea what it means. If she asks her brother he'll laugh and then he'll tell on her.

Lost in her thoughts, she gazes out of the window. She can see a car up ahead, out of line and pulled over to the right. On the road in front of it, there's a dark shadow or something like it. The roadwork crew stands off to one side. A tight little knot, heads bowed, shovels dropped; a frozen tableau but for the spiralling smoke from their cigarettes.

The Mini rolls forward. Her mother gasps. Her knuckles turn bone-white on the steering wheel.

"Don't look!" She commands but there's no strength in her voice, it's barely more than a whisper.

Her brother's arm goes encircles her protectively. He pulls her towards him. She shrugs her shoulders from side to side, trying and shake him off, irritated by such restriction. She wants to see what's on the road.

The boy is face-down; feet splayed, heels together, toes pointing east and west. The back of his blazer is frosted with a stripe of grey dust. His school tie flares out, gold and navy against the grey road; it matches the one around her brother's neck. The bike is half-under the front of the car, mangled and crushed. She can still recognise the flashy racer's handlebars and shiny purple paintwork. Mike Fisher—Mikey— to his friends.

They've put a sack over his head weighted down with bricks on either side. Blood has seeped into the rough cloth making a dark blot. The hands are inert like his body, palms up, ink-covered fingers curled. She can't make it out, but she knows the word that's written on his right palm.

Indelible.

She looks at the body with curious detachment. This is her first encounter with death—real death, not the body-double hamster switching death her dad thinks he got away with. This is no coming back death.

The end.

Finish.

Full stop death.

She wants to study it.

She wants to lift the sack.

Somewhere off in the distance a siren rings and she thinks, I'll remember this: gold and navy on a grey road and Mikey's blot.

'Mikey's blot' was published digitally on iPhone by Ether Books Ltd, 2010.

Sculpting a Mask from Stone

by Julie Corbett

Here, there
in and out
your cheeks,
your smile

a frown
your eyebrows
concave, convex
your short sighted squint

my fingers
thumbs
the pads
the tips

my hands
palming
your breath
stroking bristles
chin, cheek, neck –

straying to the nape
and then the throat
where
the pulse throbs , throbs
robbing time from

the carving of you
your facsimile in
asparagus green jade
rubbing the sand held

In such soft cloth
reducing the
facets and planes
back to the feel and the feel
and the feel of your face

Issue 5's cover artist : The wonderful art of Erin Duquette



Erin M. Duquette was born in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1971 and was raised in the small town of Monson, Massachusetts, graduating from Monson Jr.Sr. Highschool in 1989.

She received her Associates Degree in Fine Art at Mount Wachusett Community College in 1992, and has not stopped showing and selling her work across New England since then.

She has also sold and displayed artwork under the name Erin McFarland.

Erin currently resides in Southern Maine with her family, inspired by the woods, mountains, ocean & wildlife surrounding her.

Erin has shown her work in a number of Galleries and unusual venues throughout New England and beyond as well as filled some of the finest homes across the US with her style and color....

Here are some of our favorites.....

- Bowersock Gallery, Commercial Street, Provincetown, MA www.bowersockgallery.com
- Nikon, Inc, 2008 PMA Photography Expo, Las Vegas, NV
- Sights Unscene Fine Art Gallery, Dover NH & Laconia NH
- UMASS Amherst Botanical Gardens, Amherst MA
- La Vie Boheme / Dover Yoga, Franklin Plaza, Dover NH



We would like to thank Erin so much for the brilliant art that gives the cover so much impact.

You can find some of her work at her online gallery and website ; <http://erinduquette.weebly.com/index.html>



Photographic credits to David Mendelsohn
www.davidm.com

- Fiction Editors' Choice -



Vocation
by Amita Basu

“...has created a gap between the worker and his work. This gap is called mass production...”

He’s a bit taller than I. I think the beard is to hide his bad skin. I wonder if he keeps his hands fisted in his pockets because they’re always cold, or because he’s nervous around young women.

Someday I will grow used to thinking of myself as a young woman. Maybe the day I start working: a real job, not from-home part-time minimal wage labour. If everyone called me by my last name, I’d probably have been a young woman by now, fitting instinctively into the world outside the classroom, the world without cushions.

“...alienation of the worker from his work...”

That’s Bisi Bele Bath. Nothing else from the canteen can project its scent three lecture-halls away. Can this little man sit me in a room with an endless supply of paper and Bisi Bele Bath and show me how to live on alienation of the worker from his work?

I don’t even try to rush. It’s so undignified, and it makes hardly a difference. Mount Carmel women in the canteen are like traffic on metropolitan roads: they keep coming, coming, their source inexhaustible because it is also their destination. The world is round.

The fight to the front, to the counter is invigorating. There is a scientific way to do it, and relentless against the press of thighs and upper arms I perfect that technique. My foot, bold in its sneaker, gropes around and grips a spot between other mostly slipper-clad feet. I anchor myself behind a girl whose fickle arm follows one then another hassled figure behind the counter: “Auntie, one sambhar rice. Uncle, one sambhar rice. Auntie.” Two bills with the crispness clasped out of them are held aloft, cigarette-like, failing to tempt Uncle and Auntie.

Humanity is weighing on my lungs, but I’m absorbed watching them. The haggard pairs of eyes make brief contact with eyes in dark faces, eyes in less dark faces, eyes in sallow

faces, eyes dim behind the glare on glasses. Sometimes they take three, four orders together. I wait for Uncle or Auntie to pour sambhar on tomato rice or bring the lunch with chapatti to the wrong customer. It doesn't happen. The half-second of eye contact, the order once given, suffices Uncle and Auntie.

“Yes ma?”

My turn? Lunch with chapatti.

They give me three teaspoons of the curry and three chapattis. This is not the proportion we grew up with at home. With one chapatti still on the plate I take it back for more curry. The first time they were quick to oblige a new customer. The second time the eye-contact was a bit longer than necessary. This third time a portly Uncle emits a small sound of annoyance as he pours on another spoonful and shoves the plate at me.

They remember faces!

I know I've seen this text before. Haven't I rewritten it already? I have to search for it with Ctrl+F. Yes, I have rewritten it – two paragraphs ago. Assemblée Nationale and Rue Mouffetard. These things have names, of course. I note down the error to report to the co-coordinator.

The co-coordinator is Mr. Kaushik. Kaushik – what? I call my brother by his first name. My brother has seen my soul. But Kaushik – I could walk past a hundred Kaushiks and not know the person to whom I send my work. Yet he calls me “Hi Tulli” and calls himself “Regards, Kaushik.” Informality has become just another form.

My molars withstand a pressure of 1000 pounds per square inch. My new denim satchel is tearing at the seams because I carry two one-liter bottles in it everyday. Not Aquafina. Aquafina is a Pepsi project, supposed to be their prime earner by 2010. I'd rather get a kidney stone than carry a Aquafina bottle.

“He won't charge you more than four rupees,” one of my classmates, one of his satisfied customers had told me.

The sun is behind his little green shop-box, and the shadow of his shop falls six inches short of the edge of the pavement. I open the flap of my satchel and hand it to him. Then I stand back, my back in the sun, and let pedestrians pass between us in the shade.

He unzips the front pocket and his knobby fingers, slightly trembling, feel the inside of the zipper where the denim has come unstitched. His right hand reaches for a tool and sees it

on a ledge above, his eyes on my satchel. He uses the tool, an iron triangle on a handle, to nudge the loose cloth back into the wedge of the zipper, and smooth it inside. He holds one end of a length of black twine inside the unzipped front pocket and draws it out with the end of a long iron needle, as thick as a knitting-needle and with a tapering bent end.

I haven't bothered to take my purse and cell-phone out of the pocket, so I'm obliged to watch him. I glance up at the noon sky. A vague promise of sun has now drowned behind thin oceans of cloud. Beneath my thick cotton salwar the needled warmth of my skin is gathering into beads. On the dusty road the air is almost still but beneath the hair at the nape of my neck a little breeze cools my skin.

The cobbler knots the twine on the inside, where it will not damage the frail beauty of my satchel. He snaps the twine, or the twine snaps in his hand. He prods the edge of the cloth back into the wedge of the zipper and strokes the zipper closed.

I sling the satchel on my shoulder and my hand slips into the healed front pocket for my wallet.

"How much?"

"Five rupees," he says, quickly almost glancing up then looking down for something to busy his hands.

I hand him the coin and walk away without waiting for him to look up.

"I told you not to get me anything!"

"Yeah, but I was passing by Jute Cottage and just thought of getting you something."

"May I open it?" My fingers are already sliding under the tape where it bridges the two layers of paper, and edging it up to peel it off without damaging the upper film of the wrapping-paper.

It is a chic, sturdy-looking cloth satchel. Yes, this will be very useful. Thank you, Raj!

"So, what else are you doing these days. Busy with the Literary Association?"

"Not much. Hardly anyone shows up for meetings. I've started a blog but no one's put anything up."

"Why don't you put something of yours up."

"No, you know I've stopped writing. I mean creative writing. I'm doing a part-time job, my neighbour at the paying-guest told me about it. Their company's doing a guide to all the big cities in the world, and I'm rewriting some content for that. This kind of writing –"

"Are you enjoying it? How's the work?"

“It’s straightforward, and a bit creative too. Of course the pay is abysmal –”

He tells me that doesn’t matter if I enjoy it and earn some experience. I tell him it looks as though the content has been lifted off existing websites. Probably without the authors’ consent, because Mr. Kaushik’s instructions say I’m to change the structure and use different words wherever possible. I have a part-time job as an underpaid disguiser of plagiarism for an American multinational company. My little world quakes suddenly. Maybe with my own laughter.

“Oo! Tulli is plagiarising!”

We laugh.

I walk slowly – the afternoon sun is out. The blood fills up under my skin: my cells prepare to manufacture Vitamin D. When I reach her stall I stand out of its shadow and observe the papayas. They’ve been plucked prematurely; some of them have not even been allowed to lighten out their greens.

The old woman lifts her brows and hairline to ask What. I approach and her thin lips part over the brown-edged wedges of her pan-worn teeth and draw back. I return her senile smile and point to the purple-skinned grapes. They contrast beautifully with the dewdrop-like green grapes and hunger wets the roof of my mouth.

She mutters a Kannada word and I raise my eyebrows and lean closer. She holds up four fingers. This is our ritual. She imagines I might suddenly understand Kannada and I imagine the price of these delicious grapes might sink.

“Half K.G. Auntie –” As she bends heavily to fish out a plastic bag I hand her one from my satchel.

The scales are almost even: my grapes hover above the weight. She drops in a stem with ten grapes and the scales are perfectly even. She does not let me admire the perfectness and empties the grapes into my bag. She squints up at me with her purse-like, practically toothless mouth. I frown down at the unevenly coloured mangoes.

“One K.G. On the raw side.”

Her fingers and palm are already picking out mangoes exactly in the state I want them, firm and easy to peel, tart and not yet full of fibres. I trust her judgement. She gave me mangoes rotten at the core the first time I bought from her, and she’s given me perfect mangoes ever since she realised I am a regular customer.

“How much?”

Twenty-five.

“Aunty, last time they were twenty?”

She waves her hand above her head. Prices have climbed. I know that: the mango carts have become infrequent.

“Aunty, twenty?”

I pay her and she accepts. Not only that, she looks up and meets my eyes and smiles her decrepit, worn-toothed smile.

Ulysses was first printed by Sylvia Beach of Shakespeare & Co. I know that from one of the documents I rewrote. Researching James Joyce on Wikipedia, I see an image of the Shakespeare & Co. cover of Ulysses and blush with pleasure. I'd actually learned something from this!

Back in my room this incident breathes a little blood into my fingers as I type. But only a little. Tulli is plagiarising. If I do it well, the persons from whose websites the material has been lifted will never know. Their name will never appear. My name will never appear.

I'm running out of flattering words. “There is a beautiful view from Place Vendome on Eiffel Tower.” A breathtaking view. A majestic panorama. Surely someone's written a very simple programme that can do this. Why do you need Tulli to pick synonyms from MS Word's Thesaurus?

Some of the text boxes are small. I always do the small boxes first. This wastes a lot of time, going back and forth. I know it's more efficient to go in order. It doesn't matter. No one will reward me for my efficiency. No one will know how I did it. No one will even know who did it. Except Mr. Kaushik. And he doesn't know me.

And if I don't find enough synonyms, if there is a plagiarism lawsuit, I will never hear about it. Just as if a bottle of Aquafina poisons me, I must not shout at the department storekeeper. I must contact Consumer Helpline 1800-180-2356. And speak to a machine?

She must be over seventy. Her shop is open before seven and she's there into the night except when she goes for lunch. For how many years has she been arranging her pile of undersized blemished mangoes in perfect rows? No Solitaire breaks for the fruit-vendor. Blemished greens are more interesting to the eye than black on white.

She's late. The shutter is down and on the brick-red steps where her humble cornucopia should be spread, the men from the slot-sized news-shop next door are tying up

piles of morning papers. I return later – when the sun has dried up, and hideous noisy scooters have pressed into the grain of the roads, the steamy dawn-libations of cows. She’s still not there.

Over the plain shutter and red steps I notice for the first time the rusted white board with faded blue lettering: M. Lakshmi Shop. What is M for? Mother. Mother of wealth, in her sari whose original colour rains of sweat and detergent have permanently hushed. Mother of wealth, who owns each unripe papaya and sun-softened grape that passes through her hands into the battered scales.

One day I’m happy to see her again. Happy, because the mango season is in its last breath and the cart-pushers have wandered away from the neighbourhood. But she, perhaps, will stack the season’s last unripe, shrivelled mangoes on her shelf – tomorrow, perhaps. She’s hanging up hands of bananas, helped by a young man. They’re discussing something in inaudible mutters and abrupt gestures. I wait. There’s nothing much laid out to look at yet. Over my shoulder piled outside a shop across the road I see oranges. I turn back around and finally signal the vendor’s attention.

“Aunty, bananas?”

She wrinkles her gray, eroded eyebrows and jerks her neck upwards. I repeat.

She shows me her hand, the little finger folded. This gesture also said Wait because she resumes slinging up bananas and her conversation with her son. I turn away and start crossing the road. Immediately her hoarse voice calls after me.

Now I have her attention. I buy bananas – mangoes are officially over.

How can she treat customers so casually? There are so many competitors in sight. But she’s right. Her filmy eyes see the dust of my feet lead me in familiarity to her shop. That other shop across the road draws other dusty feet: like, yet unlike mine.

She’s given me good bananas – my attempted escape was a reaffirmation of my status as her loyal customer.

“Raj! I got my first paycheck!”

“You must be excited. I remember when I got my stipend, it was just 900 bucks, but even now when I’m earning much more I can never get that thrill again.”

“Yay! This weekend when we run you must let me treat you, for once!”

“Haha. Have you cashed the check?”

“Yes. But I’ll show you the letter it came with.”

An A4 sheet, folded in thirds. The company's letterhead, actually bearing the scribble of some third person. I don't get to see Mr. Kaushik's scribble. Typed,

'Dear Tulli,

Thank you for being part of (our company),

*Please find enclosed the check for Rs. (= No. of words/800 *75)*

(Scribbled signature of third person).'

Yay!

Textbooks have displaced one of the two bottles from my satchel. Usually I carry the single bottle in my hand. Still, the zipper is again coming unstitched – at a place far from the first time (I cannot blame the cobbler).

Again I stand outside his shop.

I've just cashed my check, but I release myself from the obligation to watch him. I look at him: his head bent, his grizzled eyebrows furrowed. (This time I have allowed the tear to gape before I brought it to him.)

Some readers like open endings. Me they irritate like a censored pair of open legs. *'I have an ending for the story in my mind; I didn't want to spoil it for my readers. Everybody can finish it as they like.'* But I don't like; I want you to tell me. Maybe ending stories has become unfashionable. Like the Fictitious Consumer, the end of the story of the chain. The air-conditioned incubator of ideation – the drafter's table – the assembly line with X/Y - Z pairs of eyes blinking over it – the trucks obesely panting smoke – the shops with crowded aisles – (the Fictitious Consumer).

He's prodding the cloth back inside the zipper with a hooked instrument.

What a waste of time! The chain is too busy ideating, drafting, assembling, shipping, shopping – no one has ended the story. Who is the Fictitious Consumer. My denim satchel was made for him. He doesn't carry water in his satchel – not even one bottle. He doesn't carry a binder – a normal-sized binder does not fit into the bag either way. He doesn't carry books – without a binder backing them, books become spineless, sliding into one another's pages. He doesn't carry a cell-phone in the absurd little cell-phone pocket – the phone could be lifted, even if the pocket had a flap. He doesn't carry an ID card, library card, pens, a comb in the front compartment – fishing for it, I fish everything else out first.

The cobbler's sewing now. With great care, as though mending a first wound.

What does the Fictitious Consumer carry in my denim satchel? He carries the satchel taut with straw on the wide neon-lit streets.

How many sips in an Aquafina bottle? X and a half. X varies, the odd half stays. It lasts one exam of three hours – except the last seven minutes. When I'm filling my bottles, all of them have the odd dregs left which I drink then. In the middle of the night I have to grope for a new bottle. It's too light for a dumbbell, but carrying it in my hand is a bother – I need something to carry it in. I am not the Fictitious Consumer. The Fictitious Consumer smartly snaps the seal of an Aquafina bottle, tilts his head back with the toned V-muscles of his neck, and allows a stream to sparkle past his lips and down his throat – and the bottle is seen, but used no more.

The cobbler zips the pocket and hands my satchel back. Behind the binder jutting out, I slip my hand into the back pocket. Next to the smooth lining material, crisp banknotes are already sponging the moistness of the cloud-heavy weather.

“How much, Uncle?”

“Five rupees.” His eyelids come together and part before blinking.

From the mended pocket I produce a fat coin and hold it out. He has to reach for it, and my eyes catch his. My lips smile, his eyes smile.

I am in the rut. Now the important thing is to not think. To not be outraged by sentences that begin in the middle of a saga and end on the beach of a volcano-shattered island. To not spend time stretching my imagination with the brand-new words the rewriters have invented. Everyone thinks they can write. Shockingly, everyone is also making money by their writing.

I no longer first scan a 10% view for the small boxes of text. I go in order. I make only the minimum changes necessary for bare comprehension. I mass-replace typos with Ctrl+F. My Solitaire breaks are terse, purposeful. My fingers systematically cycle synonyms. A breathtaking view, amazing, panoramic, breathtaking, stunning, amazing. I leave the formatting changes for the last minutes, when my eyelids are falling in love and my brain has folded its wings for the night.

I've been promoted from rewriter to editor. Per page I'm paid less and work longer – or used to, until deciding to get into the rut. If you get in trouble because your rewriter can't write, don't blame the underpaid editor.

Page three, twelve rupees. No looking back.

Every first week I'll get money – good for papayas and bus-fare. Someday I'll get credentials from Mr. Kaushik, certifying my work. Maybe someday I'll sue them for plagiarising. Someday when the rung of this part-time job can rot, because I'll never step on it again.

Buy me a lunch with chapatti too? I only have a fifty.

Agreeing, my friend pushes through. I stand behind her, a barrier to other bodies pressing forward to edge her out.

“Uncle! One chapatti and a pulao.”

“Ten rupees deposit, ma!”

“Damn. Do you have a ten?”

I show her my fifty.

“You must return the plate, ma.”

Tell him no chutney. I only want the curry.

“As though I'm going to eat the plate!”

Let's go outside.

“You should ask for more curry.”

I manoeuvre back to the counter. Auntie, more curry. This time I get a whole dollop.

They've given me four chapattis instead of three! The system is not infallible! They don't always remember!

“Let's return the plates. Hey – ? If they return the deposit for both plates – ”

Of course we keep it.

My friend giggles.

We get back the deposit for both plates: two soggy ten rupee notes.

My friend giggles.

Here's for my lunch – I return my spoils.

“O wow!” giggles my friend.

My lunch paid for itself. The system is not infallible! I'm going to start eating here, regularly, again.

Imagine the little man at the head of a march. The skin of his hands would scrape on the wood of the banner; the fine muscles between his thumb and forefinger would tighten, then loosen. He wouldn't hold the banner high; his voice would drown.

How powerful his voice is here, though the canteen is now making biryani, and the sun is bright on the peach walls, and his voice with the harsh dental ts and ds is threading in and out of the rustle of female voices!

And when you've finished mass production, I'll tell you about the lichen growth of small business on the face of mass production. The old man's stitches on my satchel are almost seamless. I'll always bring my species of dust to his shop, though there is another cobbler closer, right on my block.

Hurry up – no, take your time! and I'll tell you about the Fictitious Consumer.

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Where's John?

or **Does the Question Really Matter?**

By Donna Gagnon

they brought me his head in a basket
figuratively, this was the dream
realistically, wasn't that John the Baptist?

history was never my strong suit
too many people, too many lessons
learned the hard way

all I know is this --
there were men, road-revving,
jockeying for position
steaming up the night air
with earnest sweat and exhaust
leaning out of half-cranked windows
eyes scraping up from our legs

never quite making it to our
mascara loaded eyes

Crossing New Brunswick, 2010

by E. Russell Smith

The new-cut highway
opens up the second growth,
exposing naked aspens,
tall and trembling, foliage
covering just their heads,
like gangly prepubescent
adolescents discovered sharing
showers at a summer camp.

We penetrate their private parts,
where deer, bobcat and weasel,
hawk and jay, and other denizens
annoyed by this intrusion,
jealous of obscurity, retreat.

Ravishing becomes an act of love,
the thoroughfare the only way.
We drive ahead, submissive
to our fortune, leaving it behind us
for our children and all those
who fall into their altered places,
forgetful of our passing
as soon as we are gone.

**An interview with Jon Pinnock,
author of the insanely funny 'Mrs. Darcy vs. The aliens'**

First of all, Jon, I'd like to say thank you so much for agreeing to be subjected to this. Your blog, <http://www.jonathanpinnock.com>, reflects both the energy and diversity that you bring to a few of the forums and circles that you're in. You seem equally at home dabbling in fiction, poetry and other stuff too.

So ... if we can get the preliminaries out of the way ... (unpacks alien probe and a lie detector) ...

What is your favourite kind of sandwich? And your guilty late night secret snack or tippie?

Jon : *Ooh, the hard questions first, eh? I'm very partial to a BLT if you're making one, thanks. I'm currently trying very hard to give up the late night snacking, though.*

How long have you been writing? Serious writing, yeah, notes to girls in class at school don't count. What inspired you to start?

Jon : *I've always wanted to be a writer, although my late father (bless him) discouraged me, saying that I'd never make any money from it. But you can't give up on something just like that.*

Phase 1: I tinkered a bit with short stories in the early nineties, but nothing particularly ambitious. However, I did write the first few chapters of a couple of kids' books - I had a ready-made audience at home - and one of them came close to being taken on by Transworld. Except I screwed up the task of actually finishing the thing. Also, at roughly the same time I lost my job and had to start up my own business in order to stay afloat, which rather scuppered my writing plans.

Phase 2: In the late nineties I pitched a proposal to write a software book, which led to me spending a horrific six months trying to write about a whole load of different technologies that I didn't know anything about. By the end of it, I just about knew what I was doing and I ended up contributing chapters to a dozen other books. Then my publishers went bust, which seemed a good point to pack it in.

Phase 3: In 2005, I rejoined my local writers' circle and got back into writing in earnest. Then in 2007, on a whim, I entered a competition run by my local university, the University of Hertfordshire. To my amazement, I won third prize out of a field of over 600, and that was the signal to step things up a gear. Since then, I've had over a hundred stories and poems published and picked up a few more prizes and shortlistings along the way.

Mrs Darcy and the Aliens? Just tell us a little bit about it, how did it start, and where is it now? Is it getting ready on a launchpad yet, and who is doing the TV show? Angelina Jolie? (got that from a raven down by the forest pond, but he's not THAT reliable with information)

Jon : *Mrs Darcy came about in the course of a slightly drunk conversation in a pub back in*

late 2007 with my fellow writer Toby Frost. I'd just finished "Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell" and we agreed that it was essentially a Regency novel with added wizards. From there it was a simple step to conceiving a Regency novel with added aliens. But the path to publication from there was anything but smooth. How long have you got?

First of all, the idea seemed so stupid that I really didn't want to spend any time writing it. But I eventually did get together a synopsis and first three pages ready to send in to the 2008 Winchester Writers' Conference competition. It didn't place, but got a nice critique, which contained the dreaded words "This is a brave venture!" And that was enough to put me off writing any more for some time.

But my wonderful writers' circle persuaded me to do some more and by early 2009, things were flowing quite nicely. Then the bombshell dropped: "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" was published. I stopped work immediately, because the last thing I wanted to be was to come over as a wannabe imitator. Looking back, I should actually have swallowed my pride and speeded up to take advantage of the bandwagon, but never mind.

But after a while I was persuaded to pick it up again, although it was clear that it was going to be difficult to get anyone to take it on. So in December 2009 I took the radical step of serialising it on its own blog. My thinking was that if I did this and managed to get a readership I would (a) have a reason for continuing to write it and (b) be able to demonstrate to potential publishers that I had an audience. To my utter astonishment, this tactic worked. By aggressively tweeting, Facebooking and promoting it on various forums (especially TWI!), as well as putting out some highly idiosyncratic YouTube trailers, it did indeed get an audience. Complete strangers started commenting on it and telling their friends about it.

And then, when I was about 10K words short of the finish line, I noticed a tweet to say that Proxima books, a new division of Salt Publishing, were accepting open submissions. So I sent it off to them and it all happened very quickly from then. I finally signed a contract in mid-November last year. We're just finalising the edits and the book will appear in print and e-book form in September of this year, with the launch taking place at the British Fantasy Convention in Brighton.

As for casting, I'm not sure about Angelina, because we might to have Brad as Mr Wickham. Just wouldn't work. Natalie Portman's free, though, now that the P&P&Z movie's on hold. What do you reckon?

What was your biggest 'Oh my God ...' moment in your writing career? Maybe we'd better refine that to a good moment and a blush moment. No fibs now, we do have the probe ... crackle!

Jon : *There have been a few OMG moments. The most exciting one last year, on a par with hearing the news about Mrs Darcy, was getting the e-mail that said the BBC were going to broadcast my story "The Amazing Arnolfini and His Wife". Blush moment? Nothing too embarrassing so far, although all that falsetto on Mrs Darcy's YouTuberances is a little cringe-making (<http://www.youtube.com/RealMrsDarcy>)*

Did you want a pickle with that sandwich?

Jon : *Good Lord, no.*

Writing is often a labour of love, you combine business with blogs, it all eats into that precious commodity, time. How on earth do you manage it all? Do you regiment yourself with a schedule? And how does that affect your own creative urges?

Jon : *Not easy. I work for myself, which gives me a bit of flexibility, although not as much as I'd like. I need deadlines to force me to write, which is why I love competitions like the Whittaker Prize. And serialising Mrs Darcy also kept me to a rigorous schedule, even if sometimes I ended up writing some episodes the night before they went out. Sometimes they turned out to be the best ones, though, because that kind of time pressure can often force you to be more creative.*

Should a writer keep up with a web presence? The net seems to evolve from blogs to social networks and now into Twittering. Doesn't this just distract from that end product, just writing?

Jon : *Definitely. If it hadn't been for social networking, I probably wouldn't have got the publishing deal for Mrs Darcy. First of all, I might not have noticed that Proxima were accepting submissions - or at least I might not have been able to seize the moment the way I did. Secondly, the fact that Salt had noticed my presence on Twitter etc. was a major factor in them giving the project their blessing. They - in common with every publisher these days - like authors who know how to promote themselves. Unfortunately, it isn't just about the writing.*

You're a professional software and net company by day, a writer by night. How do you manage with all the terminology, the acronyms that work brings as opposed to the 'arty' side of life with writing? Do software people have somewhere to go when they're shopping for acronyms? And is it easier to write an SS (short story) or a P (poem) or a N (novel)? And would this mean that a novella is just a little 'n'?

Jon : *Ha. It does get confusing sometimes. But it's all language and I love the way language evolves to absorb new concepts. The fascinating thing with people who use social networking a lot is the speed with which everyone seems to pick up on new words or acronyms and then play with them themselves. As for which is easiest to write, there's no consistent rule. I thought novels were really hard until I wrote Mrs Darcy and that turned out to be very straightforward. Then again I've got some short stories that still refuse to behave.*

Brown bread or white?

Jon : *Actually, Morrison's do a really nice potato and herb bread, so I'll have some of that, please.*

You mention on your blog that you've got an idea for your next big project. Can you just tease us a little bit? Don't dribble, just spill the beans, eh?

Jon : *All I'll say is that the idea actually emerged from a TWI competition prompt. No more*

clues until I've written a bit more of it.

Just two more questions, then I'll power down that probe. Makes eating that sandwich a bit tricky, eh?

Jon : *Too right.*

The born or made debate? Is a writer born or made? Or a bit of both? There's a huge market of literary MFAs and stuff out there, are they producing a lot more Tennyson's and Dante's these days? Or is it just fluff to keep the places of education filled and their coffers overflowing?

Jon : *Good question. I think you need some basic level of ability. BUT what you do with that depends on how you go about learning the craft. From my own personal point of view, I can't think of anything worse than doing a MFA, but I do know people who have done very well out of them. I've learnt most from my real-life writers' circle and from places like TWI. There's so much good advice out there if you're prepared to listen to it. But you won't get anywhere if you don't step outside your comfort zone and be prepared to make a fool of yourself.*

Lastly ... the best piece of writing advice that you've seen, or preferably used. Something simple and catchy that our readers can tattoo onto their skin (and maybe hide the scars from these probes).

Jon : *Don't give up. Because it won't give you up. And do you really want a little voice nagging at the back of your mind for the rest of your life?*

Brilliant! Thank you very much, Jon. It's been a delight talking to you, and your time and patience will be very much appreciated by our readers.

Now did you want that sandwich toasted or not?

Jon : *Toasted BLT?! Is that the kind of thing they like in Canada?*

What? The probe? Power? Oh, right woops!

Jon : *Whew. That's better.*

Editor's note : 'Mrs Darcy versus the aliens' is scheduled to be published in September 2011 by Proxima Books. Jon has been a long standing member of The Write Idea forum, and we are immensely pleased that his talent is finding such great success.

You can find out more about it at :

<http://www.mrsdarcyvsthealiens.com/index.php>

The storm-flood

By Gordon Darroch

On those late-summer evenings when leaden clouds massed overhead and the river became a churning copper mass, Melanie and I would sit by the stream and await the impending flood. Years of observation had taught us how to recognise a spectacular storm from its earliest signs: the warm, treacly breeze; the tiny black flies that clung to your fingers; the heavy tinge of grey in the air. It was like the opening notes of a requiem: a gentle, sticky-sweet melody that hinted at a cacophonous climax. And we were rarely disappointed: at least once a year, as the fierce summer torpor faded into autumn, the wind and rain would rampage through the valley, upturning lives and property in a few intoxicating hours.

Our situation, above a tributary half a mile from the main river, was above the reach of any storm. There was a bench at the bottom of the garden where we went to watch the stream in spate, and I cannot deny that the sense of relief we felt was tinged with relish. These periodic deluges felt like a cleansing ritual that swept up all the debris of the year gone by and flushed it out to sea. So when, one evening last year, Melanie lifted her head from the newspaper, wiped the sweat from her brow, hoisted up her hot-pants by the belt-loops, fetched a can from the fridge and wandered nonchalantly out to the back porch, I understood what was beginning. Later I went out and joined her, and later still, as the noise of the quickening river echoed in the darkness, we walked down through the wet reeds to the bench above the stream and held hands in silent awe.

In the days that followed we learned that this latest storm was one of the most savage on record, but at the time, listening to the raging river, all I could think about was the firmness of the bench supporting my clenched buttocks, the solidity of the ground beneath us, Melanie's hand that felt strong and sure in my tightening grasp. When the rain spread to the valley and the first drops fell on our heads, we turned our heads and fused our lips in a kiss that mimicked the seething waters below. After that we sat for what seemed like an eternity, until the night's blackness was overwhelming and we made our way back to the back porch, by then the only pinprick of light left in the universe.

Melanie found the body. Three days passed before we could venture down to the stream again: in an historic breakthrough, the waters had risen up and devastated our garden, though the bench, anchored in concrete, was undisturbed. Milky clouds continued to patrol the sky, and when the rain came on it seemed as if the house was being pelted with needles. And then, finally, on the third day, the sun showed up, the waters receded and Melanie trudged through the swamp-like wreckage of the garden to discover the body.

I had never seen the victim before in my life. He was a black man whose life had been arrested on the cusp of middle age: taut skin, the first speckles of grey hair in his beard, a lean workman's figure with just a hint of a bulge around the middle. He wore dungarees and a cap and looked as if he might have been chopping wood or untying a boat when the storm took him. It might seem reckless for anyone to be out in such weather, said Melanie, but if his livelihood depended on the river then the act of tethering a boat would be a small risk when set against the cost of losing it. Whatever the reason, I told her, his body was now lying at the foot of our bench and it was our responsibility to deliver it to the authorities.

Instead of replying, she reached down with her hand and flicked a few reeds out of the man's face, then pulled at the strap of his dungarees so that they rested on his shoulders. I could see now what a bull of a man our corpse must have been, how serene and handsome his face looked in repose. And I realised too, though not immediately, that in that one gesture Melanie was wiping away not just the residue of the river, but the fraying threads that had held us together these last few months.

That night the police came to retrieve the man's body. Because his next of kin had still not been traced, Melanie accompanied them to the morgue. As she left, she turned in the doorway to give me a goodbye kiss: a firm, final peck on the cheek, with her eyes closed and her arms stiff by her sides.

A week later she stuffed her belongings into a leather holdall and cleared out for good. I knew as soon as I walked into the spare room, a steaming cup of tea in my hand: the curtains were thrown open, the sun glared through the dusty small window and the bed was neatly made up for the first time in history. Tucked inside the covers was a small piece of paper reducing the last 10 years to a few sentences. Of those there's only one I still remember: "Until this summer, I used to think I loved you". That was Melanie: as unfathomable and tempestuous as the ocean.

Sometimes, the storms rise up, wash away that that is not anchored. Sometimes it even erodes what you think is fixed. And sometimes, maybe it's time throwing down a marker, letting you know that even in its silence, it is still ticking along.

Next year maybe I'll take the boat out, anchor it in the rising tides, crack open a can and sit inside the storm itself, maybe watch the bench from afar and how the rain slides off it, the shadows of clouds dulling the gleam of fresh paint on its slats? I'll bob alone in that rush, miss her.

Maybe I'll even dare to say those words to the storm.

"Until this summer, I used to think I loved you".

—

like film the night

by Benjamin C. Krause

like film the night

we fucked in the apple orchard

leaves cracking under our bodies

plays in my head

i can still smell

yellow delicious

you

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Coward's Grave

By Eilidh Thomas

A chill smell catches my throat, my scalp contracts across my skull. I follow him, at first out of curiosity, but this is as far as I dare risk so late in the day. A lone blue jay screeches at me from its perch in an old maple, skeletal in the late winter sun. I turn, get into my ancient Dodge and head back to town.

I wake early on Saturday anxious to be away. There are a few final arrangements to see to before I leave. The roads are rutted with ice so it will be a slow journey to the woods. This time I go prepared. I don't know how the day will end.

I look at the footprints in front of me, creaked and crunched into grainy snow, their maker somewhere in the silent woodland. It's March so I need to be careful. No one else knows I'm here and the thaws create treacherous crusts across hidden streams. I'm certain Jerry will be at the old sugar maple shack. I've been there many times in the past – about this time of year when the sap is rising. I stand silent, straining my ears for sounds.

I put on short skis and head towards the wood where I pick up the tracks of Jerry's sledge. He's one of the last – resisting takeovers by the big production companies. He likes to hold with tradition. When we were kids, it had been a treat to ride on his sledge and help collect the buckets of sap. Later, we were allowed to take a cup of the boiled syrup and pour it onto the iced snow, and then we would twist the sticky mess into candy sticks. My favourite was to whip the syrup in an old cup until it turned to fudge.

When I catch up with Jerry he grunts acknowledgement as if it were yesterday when we last met. I trail along behind him watching the way his movements have become heavy and laden over the years. By the time he finishes his round I'm feeling the cold. At the shack a cup

of strong coffee warms me up. The place hasn't changed much. I wonder that the old timbers haven't succumbed to the heat – burned from years of exposure to the inferno that keeps the vats boiling for several months each year. Jerry stokes them, congratulating himself that he has never once let them die mid season. Not once in forty-eight years.

'Well lass, ye're not out here for conversation.' Jerry says finally. 'What's on ye're mind?'

'It's come up again. Someone in the press is digging through unsolved mysteries. They're making a feature of them every month. Now they're looking for Rory.'

The grilse lies in the sink, cold water running across its back. I place the knife on the kitchen counter. Dead eyes look at me with contempt. The smell is fresh, strong and steely. I hold the tail in preference to the head and feel the hard strength of the body resist my grip. The knife pierces the belly skin and then slits both ways. The innards come out clean. I know how to carve the carcass with precision. Rory taught me well. I still choke with revulsion at the gutting. Rory was patient, but insistent that I learn this skill.

I have my own way of poaching salmon. It's the first thing I taught myself to cook. I like it done in a pot so it sits curled on the plate afterwards, dressed as in life. There's the occasional squeamish person that thinks I should conceal its past existence. It's a work of art to get it right. It's not something Rory bothered with. The art for him was in the catch and the kill.

I guess I wasn't the usual girlie type at school. The summers were too good for swooning in front of mirrors, languishing by the pool or pouring through fashion magazines. Maybe I wasn't as worldly as I could have been. Not in that sense anyway, but I had learned a few skills on my own. My bicycle took me everywhere and when the terrain became too rough, I

walked.

Flowers were my obsession. Finding the common and the rare in woodlands and pastures, Goldenrod or Trillium or Jack in the Pulpit, it didn't matter. I drew them all. With my sketch bag hung across my back, I travelled miles in a summer returning home in late afternoon in time to make a meal for Mom when she came in from work.

It was on one of these outings that I first met Rory. It was early summer and I had spent hours in the cool of the woods sketching lily-of-the-valley. I was lucky to find some still in flower. Rory practically fell over me as he made his way back from the river, rod over his shoulder and something heavy in his canvas bag. We were inseparable that summer and at fourteen somehow still completely innocent.

In the fall of that year Rory was sent away to school. It was a harsh shock to both of us. We didn't write.

Slowly, I grew into a new school routine and by the following summer I was sketching fashions from those teen magazines I had so disliked. Debbie and Elaine were my best friends and we learned to dance, wear makeup and lounge by the pool. It was two years before I saw Rory again. He had changed. Of course we all had, but his change was different.

Then one afternoon, Debbie, Elaine and me were at Becky's house getting ready for one of the teen parties of that endless summer. She lived six miles out of town along the river. It was one of the best and as it turned out, the last party of the season. The trees were hung with lanterns, the charcoals barbequed to perfection and the song I remember, 'Flowers in Her Hair'.

Rory and I got to chatting again. He'd joined the cadets and planned to go into the army as soon as he was old enough. He had an intensity about him that was new and scared me a bit. But, heh, this was an old friend and sure he could hold my hand. We walked under

the stars and down to the river. His grip was like a steel glove. I told myself he was being supportive, making sure I didn't trip on a tree root – that sort of thing.

What happened after is a bit hazy. I don't want to remember – his breath, his body. I didn't scream. Maybe that was my downfall. Instead, when I finally broke free, I ran. And when he caught up, he was the one who tripped. I watched him fall, under the moonlight. I guess his head hit a rock. I did nothing to save him. It was Jerry who found me in the morning sitting by the river, watching him, watching me.

Now the river helps me forget – and remember. I stand still and silent in clear, icy water, waiting for salmon to swim past, their glassy eyes staring.

Rory's name hasn't crossed my lips for years, hardly once since the age of sixteen. Yet, here I am again with this old woodsman, looking for help. Except I'm not a girl anymore and I'm not sure who needs more protection, Jerry or me. I have moved on over the years, maybe coming back is a mistake.

Jerry gets up and signals for me to follow him into a room at the back of the shack. I'd always thought it was his wood shed but looking around it has all the rough paraphernalia of living quarters, a stove, a food press, a table, a wooden bed, a tin bucket and a chair. None of it looks clean. He opens a trunk beside the bed and rummages around inside then lifts out a small cardboard box, which he sets onto the table. I sit on the chair and he drags the trunk over as a seat for himself.

Inside the box is a disorganized collection of items. Jerry pulls things out one at a time. His war medals with disintegrating ribbons. A stone with initials carved on it. A dog's collar with name tag attached. Some coins, country of origin unknown. Finally, a small tattered notebook lies between us. I look at it. I know what's inside. After all, it's in my writing. Jerry

looks at me from under thick white eyebrows.

‘Maybe it’s time,’ he says. ‘I’ll leave ye to have a last read.’

I can hear him busying himself round the shack, stoking the furnace. I’m glad of its heat. I know the chill inside me will never leave. I flick through the pages of the notebook. I don’t need to read it again, every word is written in blood. I stand up, lift the notebook and join Jerry by the furnace. He opens the door for me and I throw it in. We don’t speak much after that. Jerry cooks some food but I’m not hungry. I get up to leave. He puts his arm around my shoulders.

‘It’ll be all right lass. It was a long time ago. Be rest assured, no one will find out from me. It was the quickest way. He was never coming back now, was he?’

I don’t rest. I will never rest. I look at Jerry.

‘That’s not why. That’s not *really* why!’ My voice cracks, my mind fills with images of scaly skin, bulging eyes and worst ... worst of all, involuntary gasping – a ragged pretence of breathing that slips slowly to nothing. I cover my face with my hands, my thoughts icy cold.

Salmon – perhaps they’re not the only ones that rush upstream to seek immortality.

I turn to Jerry with blurred eyes and balled fists. I beat feebly against his chest.

‘He never heard ... never heard me say ...’

Jerry pushes me away – holds me at arm’s length.

‘What? Say sorry?’

He reaches round me, pokes at the book in the furnace – the book that starts with pictures of flowers – the book that ends in a thousand repetitions of one word. Sorry.

Jerry shrugs. ‘He couldn’t hear a damn thing under water.’

Psychedelic Psalm 1
by Benjamin C. Krause

The universe is liquid;
it fits any container.

The universe fits
in a field
and we play a pick-up
game of football.
The universe fits
in a blade of grass on a field,
drinking the dew that
forms on its shaded face.
The universe fits
in a football;
what joy it is to be
kicked around!

The universe fits
in the cells of a blade of grass,
a microscopic,
self-sufficient city.
The universe fits
in the pattern on a football,
an elementary truth with
unfathomable significance.
In its wild green nature
and the way the grass perpetuates its code,
holding secrets the size
of football fields,

the universe fits.



Author Biographies

Maude Larke - Maude Larke lives in France. She has come back to creative writing after years in the university system, analyzing others' texts, and to classical music as an ardent amateur, after fifteen years of piano and voice in her youth. Publications include *Bird's Eye reView*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Oberon*, *Cyclamens and Swords*, *riverbabble* and *Sketchbook*.

Vicky Daddo - In recent years, Vicky Daddo, from Gippsland, Australia, has rediscovered her long-buried love of writing short fiction. She pulled it out, is currently dusting it off and will continue to polish it, long after all the kids have left home. She names her best friends as procrastination and fear of rejection and is amazed that any of her stuff has left the comfort and security of her computer. She hopes her work invokes emotion of any kind in the reader.

Marilyn Francis - Marilyn Francis lives and works in Midsomer Norton in the wild south west of England. Her first poetry collection, *red silk slippers*, (Circaidy Gregory Press, 2009) was said to, 'deftly dissect the quotidian' - she's still trying to work out what that might mean.

Alicia Winski - Alicia Winski was born in Hollywood, and lives in Seattle. Her work appears in *Liquid Imagination*, a *Better Record Magazine*, and *EdgarAllanPoet*. She has published a collection of poetry titled "Running on Fumes" and is currently working on a second collection. You can read her at www.aliciawinski.com.

Wanda Morrow-Clevenger - Wanda Morrow-Clevenger lives in Hettick, Illinois. A graduate of Long Ridge Writers Group, thirty-seven pieces of her work embracing the human condition appear or are forthcoming in an assortment of print and online magazines. When not experimenting with flash fiction, she continues to expand her memoir.

Kim Clark - Kim Clark lives on Vancouver Island. Disease and desire, mothering and the mundane propel her ongoing journey between poetry and prose. Kim's work can be found in e-zines and other publications in Canada and the U.S. Her first short story collection, *Attemptations*, will hit the shelves this fall, via Caitlin Press.

E. Russell Smith - E. Russell Smith was born in Toronto, was educated in Montreal, Cambridge, and elsewhere, and over many years has been variously a farmer, a chemist, a teacher and a writer. In this last capacity he has left behind two novels, two collections of stories, two collections of poetry, one ecology field study and countless inclusions in litmags, journals and newspapers here and there. Presently he writes only poetry and personal correspondence, mainly for his own personal satisfaction. He lives in Ottawa, Ont. Canada.

Sharon Birch - Sharon Birch (also writes as Effie Merryll) hails from Hartlepool, England, the land of the Monkey-hangers. She escaped when she thought she might become their next victim. She now lives in the land of the Scots. Sharon spends her time trying to write fiction, reading more, browsing the net and reinventing her life. She's even been known to win the occasional competition. Just don't mention the monkey.

Taylor Copeland - Taylor Copeland is a Pennsylvania native, now living in Minnesota. Her poems have recently appeared in *Hobo Camp Review*, *Thick With Conviction*, *Chantarelle's Notebook*, *Drown In My Own Fears* and *The Active Voice*. In 2010, she was nominated twice for Best of the Net and also was nominated for Best of the Web. She loves the band Paramore, reads obsessively, likes pink things, drinks too much coffee, drives aimlessly and falls in love too easily. She is unashamed of all of it.

Sallie Tams - Sallie Tams lives in Stone, Staffordshire with Willie the world travelling Plott Hound. When not writing, she works as a Management Consultant. In 2009 she returned to live in England after many years in New York and Massachusetts. Winner of the 2010 Whittaker Prize for Fiction, she has since been published by Ether Books Ltd and was runner-up in the 2010 Slingink Scribbling Slam.

Julie Corbett - Julie Corbett lives in the East Riding of Yorkshire. She writes poetry but most often can be found taking photographs of buildings or collecting fossils on the beach.

Kirsty Stanley - Kirsty Stanley is trying to find the time to take her writing more seriously, but still likes to have fun with it. You can find out more about her at <http://www.kirstyes.co.uk>. Her plan for 2011 is to finish her 2010 NaNoWriMo novel.

Amita Basu - Amita was born in Calcutta and grew up in several metros around India, then graduated high school in New York. She studied psychology and is currently engaged in field research for a project to identify gifted children in India. She lives in Bangalore. She enjoyed reading and writing from a young age. She is fascinated with mythology, particularly Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian, and with ancient history. She also enjoys reading about biology, and of course fiction. Her favourite writers are Dickens, Anthony Trollope, and Marquez; her favourite poets are the Romantics. Apart from reading she enjoys running, listening to Green Day, and watching sitcoms.

Donna Gagnon - Donna Gagnon lives in Haliburton, Ontario (that's in Canada). By day, she works at the Arts Council~Haliburton Highlands. At night, she writes poetry, short fiction and plays. Her work appears at The Fib Review, Shot Glass Journal, SmokeLong, Every Day Poets, Short Story Library, Rumble, Bewildering Stories, Pen Pricks Microfiction, Smokebox, Wingspan Quarterly, Twisted Tongue, Gold Dust Magazine, in Gatto Publishing's Short *StoriEs* e-anthology and in three anthologies published by The Write Idea. A collection of interlinking prose poems, *Two Double Beds in a Comfort Hotel*, appears in *New Writings in the Fantastic*, edited by John Grant (aka Paul Barnett), published by Pendragon Press. Her one act play, *Deception*, was performed at the Toronto Fringe Festival in 2005 and was produced by Borelians Community Theatre at their first-ever Canadian One-Act Play Festival in May 2010.

Gordon Darroch - Gordon Darroch lives in Glasgow. He is variously a journalist, editor, writer, language teacher, polyglot and Twitter addict. His short stories have been published in *New Writing Dundee*, two Whittaker Prize anthologies and several web journals. When not writing he can often be found running on the south side of Glasgow, or less often playing his cello. He can be discovered online at gordondarroch.wordpress.com and twitter.com/synthjock

Benjamin C. Krause - Benjamin C. Krause left a lucrative software engineering job to concentrate on writing. His first chapbook, *Classifieds and Other Poems*, was released by erbacce-press in February 2010. He has been in journals such as *The Literary Bohemian*, *Nibble*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *Gray Sparrow Journal*, and is forthcoming in *Gargoyle*. Jazz music is his muse, and his process often begins with an attempt to poetically “transcribe” an instrumental song. Non-musical influences include John Berryman, Kristina Marie Darling, Catullus, E.E. Cummings, Emily Dickinson, Pablo Neruda, and Allen Ginsberg.

Eilidh Thomas - Eilidh hails from Glasgow, grew up in Ontario, studied in Wales and has lived in North East Scotland for thirty five years. She has recently studied Creative Writing with The Open University and writes short stories and poems. Eilidh has new work in Leaf Books’ Wales themed anthology *Away Too Long*, The Whittaker Prize Anthology 2010 *Body Parts and Coal Dust* and Mason’s Road online literary journal. Eilidh is a member of The Write Idea, an international writers’ forum.

