

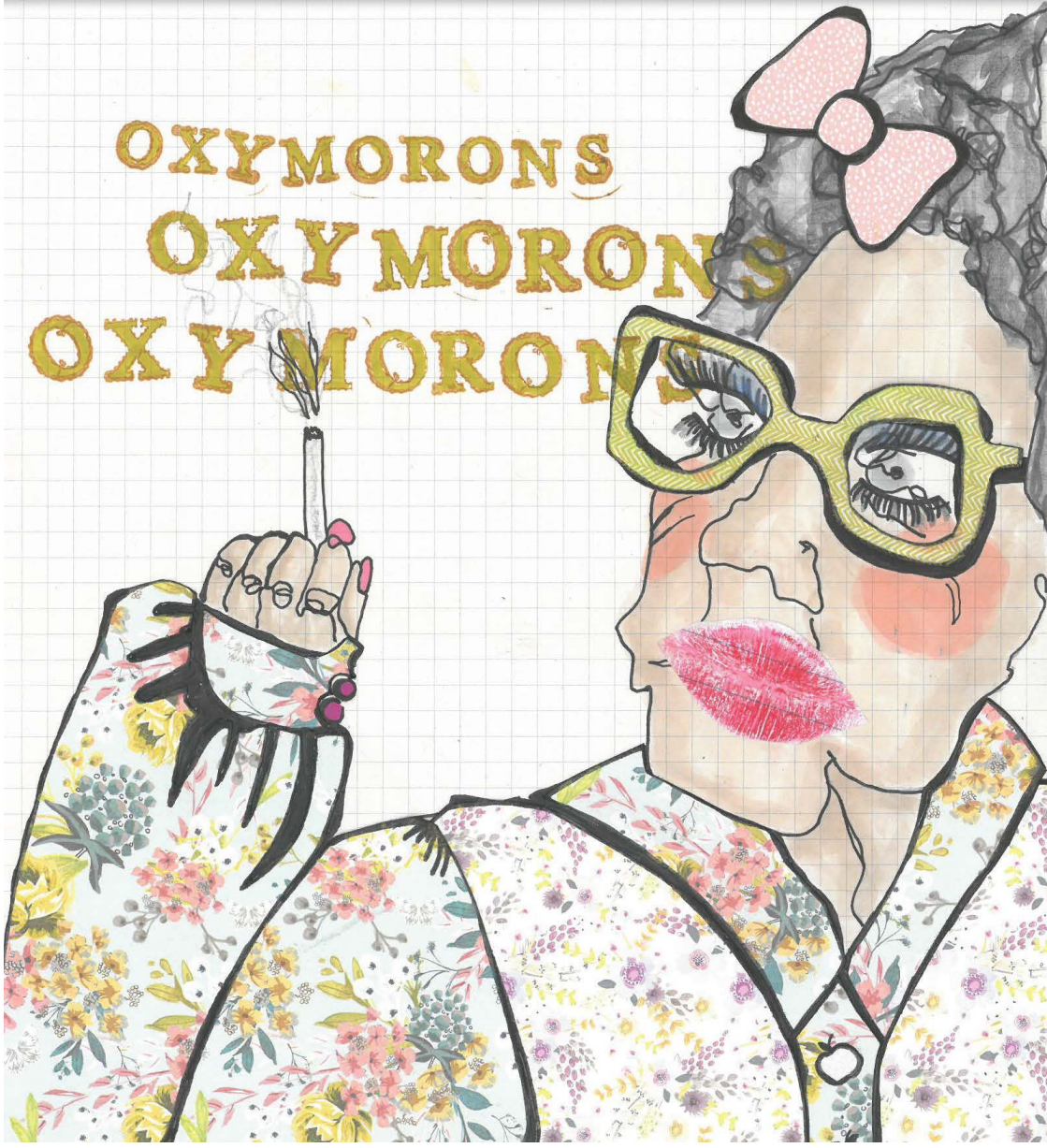
SILVER APPLES MAGAZINE

Creativity Worth Consuming



Issue 5 - August - 2015

OXYMORONS
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Oxymorons

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Origami Handcrafted Gifts & Wedding Craft



George Dempsey Flanagan of Mojo Creations also known as 'The Maker of Magic' is a trained Graphic Designer and Artist based in Birr Co. Offaly.

George studied Graphic Design in Limerick School of Art & Design - specialising in design for print. He prides himself in being able to connect with the client turning any vision into a reality.

George's other area of expertise lies in his passion for creating and teaching Origami - 'the Art of Japanese Paper Folding'



"As a child, before I ever knew what Origami was, I taught myself how to transform paper airplanes into birds. some years later, I learned it was an art and Mojo Creations was born!"

As well as teaching workshops, George has developed a range Origami Handcrafted products that include framed artwork and Miniature Origami Art Vessels Origami Pet's in jam jars known as Whimsy's, as well as creating bespoke pieces for weddings, these include everything from bouquets & boutonnières for the entire bridal party, to table decorations & centre pieces for the venue.



Custom orders and personalising requests are all part of the service. If you are interested in working with George to create your own bespoke wedding ideas or Origami Crafted Gift for a someone special you can follow the magic on facebook & email: g-dempc@hotmail.com

Origami Craft Products & Bespoke Gifts
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Mojo
creations.....
Makers of Magic



Letter from the Editors:

In which we spout off so many paradoxes we probably punch a hole in the time-space continuum

Gráinne O'Brien, Alex Dunne & Una Hussey

Editing a Lit Mag can be a bit bitter sweet. We get the thrill of accepting and encouraging amazing submissions, with the unfortunate job of having to turn down those that did not quite fit our theme. Indeed, it can be an act of cruel kindness.

But, as usual, we have decided to lead from behind, and present to you our fifth issue, Oxymorons.

We hope you find this issue to be a new classic, a collection of works that creates a fine mess of various mediums of artistic beauty. Search for an irregular pattern, but you may not find one. Painfully beautiful, disgustingly delicious and sometimes clearly confused; the one thing all of these pieces have in common is that they combine to produce an issue we can be proud of.

Our office tends to be controlled chaos, so please forgive us if we contradict ourselves, but it is usually a deliberate mistake.

In all seriousness, we are delighted with how this issue has turned out. The quality and number of submissions we receive each issue continues to astound us. We want to thank you the reader for purchasing this issue, thank the artists for their continued faith in us with their work, and thank each other for being great.

Remember, creativity is always worth consuming.

Alex, Gráinne and Una.

The Seats

Mark Tuthill

Mark Tuthill lives in Dublin. He currently has a feature film in development with the IFB, while two short films he wrote have been awarded at numerous film festivals, including the BFI London Film Festival by a jury chaired by director Terry Gilliam. Mark also recently completed his first novel.

Why we chose it:

We picked this story precisely because it's about more than you think it's about. We enjoyed it immensely, and know you will too.

"What do you mean they're gone?"

"I'm afraid those seats are already booked Sir. If I could turn the screen around to show you I would, but I assure you they're already selected and paid for."

"Then unselect and unpay for them. Where's Ronan? He'll sort this mess out."

"Ronan's not here today."

"Well get him to call me when he's in tomorrow. My name's Ciaran Flaherty. He has my number."

"Ronan won't be in tomorrow either," she said.

"What does that mean?" he said, turning back to the booking office.

"I mean he's dead."

"Don't be bloody ridiculous. Have him call me. Ciaran Flaherty. He has my number."

"He had an aneurysm," she said, struggling with the 'r', "I think that's how you say it."

"That's impossible. He was in his thirties or something."

"It happened in the John Field room. I wasn't working, but Sinead was there. She said it was just awful. I can get her if you want?"

Ronan wasn't dead. It was a complete impossibility. Clearly the girl was a simpleton of the highest order. Ciaran had thought standards had been slipping for months; now this girl was final confirmation of his theory. First, there was the growing indifference ushers paid to people in the choir moving seats at the interval (sometimes even *before* the interval), then having the gall to plonk themselves next to people who had paid significantly more for significantly better seats in the

stalls. So bloody what if it was a quiet night and there were plenty of empty seats around the place. That wasn't the bloody point. If you cheapskated on the choir then that's where you should bloody well stay. Elizabeth would have been appalled. Although she would certainly have been more irked by the t-shirt brigade. While Ciaran always went to the pains (literally, considering the tightening arthritis in his hands) of making an effort, these ruffians probably couldn't tie a tie if their lives depended on it. Well, they could certainly grow a beard. That's for sure.

"He couldn't be dead. Sure I only saw him two weeks ago." Ciaran said.

"I know. No one saw it coming. Especially not Ronan."

God bless her. She must have hit every branch on the way down. Or was that some other idiom? Anyway, enough with this nonsense.

"I need to talk to a manager."

"You are talking to one."

Heaven help the country. And just when it was getting back on its feet.

"Well, then I need to talk to a different manager."

"Is there a problem Sir?"

"Yes. There's a bloody problem. Someone's sitting in my wife's seat. You say you can't remove them, and I need someone who can."

Elizabeth would be turning in her grave right now. Ciaran could see her; actually rotating, like a pig on a spit. Although that was a little harsh and he felt guilty at the visual association that had sprung to mind as he imagined his wife going apoplectic at such ineptitude on the part of the booking office. Christ, everyone knew those seats were their seats. After all, there was hardly a performance that the Flahertys hadn't enjoyed from seats 19 and 20 in the front row of the side balcony, and such was the added joy associated with the seats, that by simply sitting in them the music of the world's

"the positioning of their bums in those seats carried as much weight as the wedding bands they had slotted on each other's fingers"

greatest composers was elevated from genius to godlike. On the rare occasion the seats weren't available (which in Ronan's day, and Stephen's before him, was hardly ever the case), the performance would be diluted to such an extent that it was better to skip it all together rather than watch it from elsewhere in the house. Call it irrational. Call it insane. Call it whatever you like, but the positioning of their

bums in those seats carried as much weight as the wedding bands they had slotted on each other's fingers at a time when the world seemed so much simpler, and their love seemed immune to the inexplicable and horrible mutations of a marriage stumbling through its third decade.

The seats were *their* thing. It was what bound them together when everything else had failed. Their failures were no more marked or special than any other couple's, and manifested themselves around timeless themes. There was the outpouring of words expounded over hypothetical children that never materialised, despite Elizabeth becoming a sacrificial guinea pig in the early days of fertility treatment; triggering circuitous conversations that left them both drained and exhausted. And then there were the heavier unspoken words Elizabeth had pushed down deep inside her. Daring verbs and outrageous adjectives relating to an affair she had managed to keep hidden from Ciaran for almost five years that only ended when Elizabeth made it clear to her lover that she would never leave her husband, so her lover left her instead. The incident had created an aura between Elizabeth and Ciaran that was thick with a resentment he could never understand, and that he rather conveniently (for Elizabeth at least) dismissed as menopause rather than confront in any meaningful manner.

And just why couldn't this particular performance be skipped in light of the farcical circumstances surrounding the seating plan? Because this was Holst. This was *The Planets*. And Elizabeth bloody well loved Holst. Missing this would be like her missing the wispy little arrogant sprite Beethoven himself performing his first Piano Concerto in 1798. Or her passing up on Handel in Fishamble street. No, this would be a night Elizabeth would adore, and would have been looking forward to for weeks, and to miss it would be inexcusable. Just as inexcusable as any failure on Ciaran's part to sort out this whole debacle.

* * *

Days of phone calls to the booking office ensued, right up to the evening of the performance. The fact that the night wasn't even a sell out only added to Ciaran's frustration. I mean for the love of God, put it down to a computer error and reassign the seats for whoever the people in question were; their anonymity - with the booking office having consistently refused to divulge any information as to who they were - only adding to Ciaran's irritation.

He arrived early on the night in question (when did he not arrive early?), and took up a position on a bench in the foyer from where he

could watch the crowd drift in. He had defiantly refused to buy a ticket, certain that the matter could be satisfactorily concluded by the relevant parties. He would simply outline his position, and the occupying forces would be quickly humbled and shamed into conceding their error and the seats. In fact, he was so convinced of a positive outcome that he was mildly embarrassed by the fuss he had made to date, and was certain that the Cadbury's Roses he had handed into the box office a half hour ago would iron out any lingering grievances.

Ciaran lingered in the foyer until he realised his own foolishness in believing he had psychic powers sufficient to identify the guilty couple within the shuffling herds of the general public. With the clock nearing eight, and the tannoy announcer requesting that people begin taking their seats, Ciaran was left with no choice but to confront them in the auditorium, something he had been reluctant to do, should they proceed to make an almighty fuss. He struggled to his feet (regretting his decision to choose a comfortable bench over a sensible one) and ascended the staircase alone.

"I'm afraid you're sitting in our seats."

A young woman looked up at him from her programme.

"I don't think so," she said, rummaging in the pocket of her coat for her tickets. "No, it's right. 19 and 20. Sorry."

"Well, I'm wondering would you consider moving? I'm on a first name basis with many of the ushers, and I'm assured it won't be a problem. I'm not only willing to compensate you for your current seats, but will gladly cover the cost of your new ones. You can choose anywhere." Ciaran said, gesturing to the rest of the auditorium with a dramatic sweep of his arm. "Anywhere you like." While he stood there, suddenly feeling like a policeman standing on a podium directing traffic at a busy intersection in an Italian caper movie, he had a chance to take her in. She couldn't have been more than nineteen or twenty he thought, with ridiculously thin legs crossed like chopsticks beneath a blue napkin that was her dress for the evening. Her face suffered from the same deficiency of body fat, yet had all the features of classical beauty to warrant her presence in a more illustrious cinematic masterpiece.

"You can sit beside me if you like?" she said.

Ciaran was thrown by the proposal. He had anticipated a two against one duel, not an invitation to sit down.

"I'm on my own," she said.

"But -"

"I don't mind if you don't?"

Ciaran stood for a moment, disarmed at the way events were unfolding. With the orchestra starting to emerge from the wings, before he knew what he was doing he was sitting down.

He looked across at her, uncertain how it had quite come to this. Just what the hell was he doing?!

"I'm Eimear," she said with a smile.

"That's my wife's seat you're sitting in."

"Oh," Eimear said, taken aback somewhat. "Where is she?"

But the drums were beginning to rumble. Holst had intruded on the conversation.

* * *

"Would you like to get a drink?" she said, as the applause finally flitted away.

She weaved her way back from the bar armed with a gin and tonic and a glass of white wine. Ciaran usually only had a tea. And usually engaged in some solitary sipping by the grand piano.

"So, where's your wife?" Eimear asked as she sat down opposite him.

"She couldn't make it," Ciaran said, swirling the black plastic stick in his glass.

"Must be something in the air," she said. "I didn't want to miss it though. I've never seen *The Planets* before. Heard it, I mean. It's great. I thought I might hate it."

"You've never even heard it before?" Ciaran said.

"Tonight wasn't my idea," she said sheepishly.

Ciaran looked up at her, not intending to be so blatant in fishing for an explanation.

"He's the classical music fan," Eimear said, "The guy who was supposed to be sitting where you are. I'm more into, well, not classical really. But it's nice to get out of the house."

Ciaran nodded wholeheartedly. He couldn't agree more.

"Do you come here a lot?" she asked.

"Pretty much. My wife's a big fan."

"The one who couldn't make it?"

"As opposed to my other wife you mean?"

The words were out of his mouth before he could prevent the joke. She laughed rather too enthusiastically he thought. God, he must be getting old.

"Well, maybe next time," she said when she'd managed to suppress her laughter, but Ciaran couldn't track her train of thought, and she could tell.

"I mean, maybe your wife can see it another time."

"I don't think it's on very often. It's just part of the season, you know."

"Oh, I didn't know. I didn't book the tickets."

"He did?"

She looked away, as if she were looking for someone in the crowd, a face that might rescue her from her verbal missteps.

"I'm sorry." Ciaran said, "Not my place."

An awkwardness fell, and Ciaran was suddenly desperate for the tannoy to give them the final call he felt they both needed to return to their seats after the interval, but it didn't come in time.

"Our friends don't know yet," she said. "We're not really sure how to tell them." She stiffened slightly in the chair. "How long have you been married?" she asked.

"Forty-two years," Ciaran said. "Give or take."

"One year's pretty crap compared to that. He's not too bothered though."

"Things always get rocky. Trust me. I'm sure you can figure it out. And if not, well hell, better one good year than...well, anyway."

She smiled faintly and the tannoy announcer took it as her cue.

Eimear rose to her feet with an ease befitting her age, and walked across to extend a hand for Ciaran. He was as touched as he was embarrassed.

"I've got it."

But he hadn't, and he found himself having to grip her arm to make it all the way up.

"I'm looking forward to the second half." Eimear said.

He smiled at her as they made their way to the staircase. "Holst is over you know, it's something else now."

"Oh." She said.

"And I don't think they call it the 'second half' either."

"Well, I guess I'm still learning."

"Me too." He said.

Other bodies rushed past them, one of the ruffians (surprisingly beardless) taking the stairs two steps at a time. He brushed Ciaran's arm, looking back without stopping.

"Sorry," he called out.

"No harm done," Ciaran said. "After you my dear."

Cotton Wool and Coffee

Catherine Power Evans

Waterford-born Catherine Power Evans resides in Wales. Writing poetry, flash fiction and short stories, some of Catherine's work appears online and in print (e.g. RTE Book Show anthology, and Brilliant Flash Fiction website.) She belongs to Carmel Harrington's Facebook writing group, where she contributes stories to their Kindle anthologies.

Why we chose it:

.When we think Oxymorons, we think something that contradicts, something that challenges what it is. A new identity, an attempt to leave behind what you were and become something new. A contradicting identity? We dig that.

This morning I woke up dead. There was a gauzy, hazy light; white and warm. I felt myself float, at peace. Ideas tumbled around in cotton wool cascades.

The harshness of a dissonant car horn drew me out of the dozy duvet and my eyes protested at being dragged out of the soft focus. The flimsy voiles billowed across my bed in demure puffs; I had left the curtains drawn back when I went to bed, inviting in the last of the summer night.

Being dead is strange. It feels almost like the last few weeks of being alive had - a lot of numb nothingness. I was a ghost then. I'm not entirely sure what I am now, but it is damn superior to mourning the loss of a dropkick boyfriend. He didn't die, by the way. He wouldn't. In the end, he killed me - or at least my stupid, devoted heart.

Skinny-dipping was a doddle today; I didn't have a care in the world, not even about my chubby bum. I've met some good people. They're all around me. We had a picnic on the beach and got drunk. It was a blast.

So there it is; Georgia is no more. She's an ex-person, an RIP. *The late Georgia Moher.* Me. I no longer exist as I have for the previous thirty-one years. An obituary might have read: *'died 6th June, 2015.'* A eulogy might reveal that I had been dying for some time, one foot on the edge of the dispatch depot in the ground. For the best part of a year, I'd held on there at that slippery periphery. They wouldn't say I died peacefully. Those who knew me would tell, between sobs, how I slipped away bit by bit. It was

the truth.

My name is Hannah. Hannah Morgan. That's what the starch-white sheet of legal documentation says, the *Deed of Change of Name*. I'm still getting used to it, the moniker. And the new life. Which officially, only began today. However in preparation I spent the last while sorting the move to this new town. I got braver, testing out my new name, minus my old things. I cut my long hair. This shorter length suits me better than I'd imagined. Danno wouldn't like it: he loved my long dark curls. But then, he's not here. And if he was, I wouldn't be, if you see what I mean?

I - Hannah, sorry if you're confused - had a fabulous day. Caught some sun on the beach. I came home smelling of salt and ozone, and seaweed - those sea smells. Oh and coconut. Don't you always associate it with the summertime? It's still hot; the windows in my still unfamiliar flat are open. It's okay, I'm on the top floor, it's unlikely anyone will chance sneaking in. Unless they're daredevils. And even then, it'd be an adventure. I'd tell him - statistically greater chance of it being

*"I spread tanned arms
across the king size bed,
luxuriating in the space
and the satin sheets"*

a male - to grab what he wanted, with the proviso he would sit and drink coffee with me first and tell me all about his life.

The duvet drops to the floor, the night is sultry. I spread tanned arms across the king size bed, luxuriating in the space and the satin sheets. Georgia never got to buy them but Hannah, well she's

different. Yes, I can be obstinate, rebellious. Why not? It's on my mind to taunt singledom and say it doesn't matter, and that hey, I can be anything I want to be. I can do it; Hannah is a confident, capable woman who relies on no one. Other than a short list that includes her parents, sister, brother, best friend, new boss, oh and the guy who served her coffee at the café just round the corner.

He's hot. I first noticed him a few weeks ago, but he never served me until this morning. Nicko, they called him. Eyes the colour of the beans he ground for my macchiato (extra strong), Latin locks darker than midnight and a body like a god working up to a triathlon. Yep, I put my hands up, I closely scrutinised all of him under the t-shirt and black barista apron. And, I'm proud to say, I owned my perving when he caught me at it. In slow motion, I watched his lips stretch to one side in a sly, filthy grin. Hannah had him!

Jesus, it felt good. As Georgia, I was always shy and easy-going. This new person who perfectly fits my red-soled shoes is a sleek,

prowling panther. A shiver passes through me, delicious, exciting and petrifying all at once. I love it. He'd written his number on the take-out coffee cup. I put it in my mobile, after I'd finished flirting with him over the change.

Should I text him? Was it too early? Too late? What would I say?

I flipped my thinking and slid into Hannah mode. She, I, am an invention, a stereotype of some sort, but then are we not all unoriginal at this point? Deciding to delay messaging him, I mused about what to write. Something short and snappy; clever, sexy maybe. It could wait. I'd grab a coffee on my way to work at my new job, I'd act all cool and unconcerned. I could do it, I was Hannah, Georgia was dead and buried. I squirmed as my fists gathered the sheet, mischief and Nicko on my mind.

You Are Never Too Old to Become Younger

Una Hussey



Una Hussey has a degree in Fashion Design and a Masters in Fashion and the Environment from one of those fancy London colleges. She loves but is not limited to fashion in her desire to make the world a more beautiful (and sustainable) place. She currently writes a fashion blog and takes photos of beautiful things in her spare time. She has been known to do some volunteering with young people, as well as styling fashion shoots and making clothes into the small hours of the morning for London Fashion week. She is big into art and technology fusion and has collaborated on projects with other artists in order to bring that to the world. She loves illustration, and her own work is usually old fashioned pen on paper.

Why we chose it:

Una is basically awesome. She's our art director and not only does she chose epic pieces for every issue, she's also a wealth of talent herself. Not only did she contribute this piece, she also designed the cover. This piece was part of a group of illustrations depicting a collection of clothing inspired by the quote 'you are never too old to become younger.' The concept of the collection was to depict older ladies who did not want to let go of youth in a way that society seemed to dictate they should, and embrace their inner child-like qualities in the way they dressed and in the way that they presented themselves to the world. Both this, and the cover illustration, stem from this concept.

For C.

Kevin Kiely Jnr

And do you feel the cold now in the evening?
And can you see the moon as it ascends?
And would you want the drumming of our heartbeats
To smirch the definition of “Just Friends?”

And does One tire of being One’s un-dresser?
And can you press yourself into your bed?
And would you want for bated breath and stillness
To fortify that passion in your head?

And did you ever gaze into your mirror?
And can you always look into my eyes?
And would you want a ticket for a journey
To tear apart the seams from our disguise?

Kevin Kiely Jnr is a classically trained actor and self taught filmmaker. He has a broad range of experience in theatre, recorded media and live performance. Though best known for his performance work, Kevin also has a passion for creative writing in the forms of plays, fiction and poetry.

Why we chose it:

We loved the lyricality of Kevin’s piece, every line dances across the tongue. Not literally though, that would be a cause for concern.

Jack and Jill

Sharon Thompson

Sharon Thompson lives in Donegal, Ireland. Bare Fiction Magazine, Mills & Boon and Malinki Press all acknowledged or shortlisted her work. Brilliant Flash Fiction, Silver Apples, WritingRaw, North West Words and two anthologies by Imagine, Write, Inspire have all recently published her short stories. Elijah Lucian also recorded her story for his audio flash fiction site. She is an avid member of Imagine, Write, Inspire an on-line writing group under the mentorship of Carmel Harrington. Sharon Thompson. Writing Fun is her writing page. Her blog is remembervictoria9.wordpress.com and she tweets @sharontwriter.

Why we chose it:

Jack and Jill... what were they at at all? Sharon did an excellent job of giving us this story from the perspective of the person that matters most (the woman, obviously).

“We need water.” He doesn’t look at me. I sigh, curling my tired hands around his bucket handle. Getting into the sunshine will be a reprieve.

No-one mentioned how men like their crowns and kingdoms. My own father, long gone, was no example. All the churchgoers said I was lucky that Jack had taken pity on me. Mam had known poultry. Shown me cookery, darning and planting seeds, but she didn’t know the art of farming men. That type of husbandry never passed her thin lips.

I had no dowry. Except Dora the cow, named after my dead sister, the poor creature. At least she is happy, knee deep in the finest meadow looking out into the hills. Munching all the day long, no longer gnawing at the tight, rented grass. I pat her warm behind and she follows me a step, ambling like a pregnant woman. Her udder filling for me to pull on it.

Mornings are my favourite time with Dora. Steam rises when I squirt her milk into this same bucket. The smell of her rough hide ‘round me in the byre or outside by the metal churn, when the rain is hiding behind the mountain. She’s given him three calves, since he put his claim on us. Three fine heifers, red like herself, big eyed, as they were wrenched from the familiar and prodded with a sally rod.

“Thank Christ, Jack’s proddin’ hasn’t made me big,” I tell Dora. She leaves me in disgust to bow her head low. Her crunching audible despite the swings of my bucket. I walk, loosen my red hair and hold my freckles to the sun. Eyes closed, willing the expanse of

blue behind them to absorb me into the possible abyss of peace. I know that I cannot dally for long.

The spring up the hill spills into the deep heather and shimmers down the mountain as if it's the moving skirt on a young one. There's nothing like spring water for the milk or the poteen.

I think on Jack's poteen still in the byre. A groan leaves me. I failed to take off a pour from it last night. Failed to milk off the badness. The almost-ready batch will be ruined.

My face will be also.

It's the warning of the corncrake he unsettled from its afternoon bed, that makes my goose pimples rise. Fear, that makes me squint into the sun. But it's the sight of his march through the long grass, the flash his flailing stick makes at Dora and the sound of the water filling, that makes my water leave me. The warmth wets my legs and drenches dry heather under foot, as my tears come.

"JILL."

The hill echoes of my own name and tosses water from the pail. Frozen, I stare at his contorted features and the sally rod getting closer. Closer still he strides, as my pail rattles. The sun scorches the hill as his mad fingers tangle in my hair.

Down I bow, "You cow!" he roars. My face comes level with the top of his welly boot, as he slashes with the rod. The sting long and sharp, with my scalp giving his fist another clump of me. Stumbling, he reaches to get me.

I fall lower, in prayer and howl, "Please."

Not sure-of-foot, used to flat pasture, he grabs my dress. Hauling me to him with such ferocity, he topples. Backwards he rolls, over and over. I go too. Watching the greens and blues flash by, as my limbs meet dull thuds. There is no sound. I open my eyes. The sky is blue and the heather purple. All seems the same. Straining and stiff to rise, the meadow's verge swishes in the coming evening breeze.

Before me lies Jack, with his broken crown.

"We need water," I say to Dora. No one looks at me. But I curl calm hands round my own water pail now.

Fading Blossom

Matthew Moynihan

Matthew Moynihan is a Cork-based poet and comedian who is published in Brain of Forgetting and Ó Bhéal's 5-word anthology. He likes cuddling puppies and eating Big-macs. He tweets at @auspiciousfate

Why we chose it:

We loved Matthew's take on the theme of 'Oxymorons' and it's definitely made us look at flowers in a different way...next Valentine's Day we'll just take the chocolates thanks!

You see me in the shops on Valentine's Day,
Standing proud and erect,
Awaiting your choice, a choice
Some believe could lead to wedding bells
And pollination.

But I have my own love story.
A story never told.

Inception - earth, air, sun, water.
The elements, my demi-creators,
Demi-destroyers yearning me to
Blossom.

The earth in its maternal
Embrace only to strangle.
The air feeding stomatically
Only to suffocate.
The water lubricating, nourishing,
Only to one day drown.
And the sun, showing the light,
The way, only to scorch.

The elements chew up
And spit out - then
Divorce.

Now I am bitter.

Hunger

Louise Kennedy

I throw my bike against a lamp post and take the steps of the Town Hall two at a time. The condolence book looks too heavy for the table it rests on, a desk-with-chair-attached from a classroom. A placard is propped nearby asking the mild folk who are beginning to move through this bloated midland town to SUPPORT THE HUNGER STRIKERS.

Che McGarr is struggling to pin a crude black and white image of Bobby Sands to the front of the desk. A charge of early summer wind wraps it around his narrow hips. Che used to stand outside Mass selling month old copies of the Morning Star, but now he's a republican socialist. I don't know where to look and wait until he has subdued the poster before taking the pen, one of those yellow biros that won't write unless you carve deep scores into the paper. Che McGarr's face is a breath from mine and this close I can see that his hair is thinning and he doesn't look remotely like Franco Nero.

I bend to the blank page. Slowly, I etch my sympathies onto the paper in the affected, pseudo-celtic handwriting I have copied from a Jim Fitzpatrick poster. I hand the pen back.

"*Tiocfaidh Ár Lá*, chicken," says Che. Our day will come. Sparking up a Lambert and Butler I run down the steps and grab my bike. In the window of Gogan's Hardware there is a tabby cat supine on a mat emblazoned with the face of John Paul II. It opens a green eye at me as I pedal home for breakfast.

Louise Kennedy grew up in Holywood in Co Down. She has been published in The Incubator and was shortlisted for both the short story and memoir prizes in Fish 2015. She lives in Sligo and writes in a shed in her garden while her husband and two children are sleeping. She cooks for weddings and game shoots in a in a big house and used to have a restaurant called the Silver Apple.

Why we chose it:

If you are unfamiliar with the history of the Irish Hunger Strikers, we suggest you get to your local library (or Google) pronto. We grew up listening to stories of this tense time in Ireland's history, and feel that Louise captures the mood and feel of the country beautifully in her story, 'Hunger'. Hold up... did... did she say she used to own a restaurant called the Silver Apple?! Spooky.

My mother has been up since six. She is standing at the ironing board beside a three foot high pile of wrinkled clothes, scratching at the taut skin on her belly. She is nine months and seventeen days pregnant. Her housekeeping has recently taken on a demonic quality. The pregnancy books call it nesting.

"I don't know what I'm going to call him. It's probably another girl anyway," she says. She nods at a box of Bran Flakes but I pat my stomach as if I am full. I've smoked three cigarettes and feel sick.

"But what's wrong with the name Bobby? Dad's grandfather was called Bobby. And you loved the Bobby Kennedy who got shot," I say.

"Jesus Christ. Can I get through the delivery first?" my mother says. She leans on the edge of the kitchen table and waves my grandmother's cigarette smoke out of her face.

"Poor Terence McSwiney. Seventy-five days he lasted," my grandmother says, putting her cigarette out and lighting another one. She is lamenting the passing of the Lord Mayor of Cork, who also died on hunger strike; in 1920. My grandmother left her home in north Belfast last year to join us down south. The Troubles then and now are all the same to her, the intervening sixty years of no consequence.

"Don't encourage her," my mother says, stretching her arms above her head. I try again.

"You can still call it Bobby if it's a girl. Bobby Magee was a girl." I say. This might work. "Me and Bobby Magee" is my father's favourite song. "Somewhere miscellaneous I let her slip away", he sings at family parties. I haven't the heart to tell him the line is "Somewhere near Salinas".

"Thatcher's a bad article. She even abolished the free school milk," my grandmother says.

"I was the only person at the Town Hall. Nobody down here cares," I say.

"Where we lived in the north nobody cares either. We are not from Ballybloodymurphy," says my mother on her way to the clothes line. "Go to school." I can't argue. The pretty north Down town we left two years ago is unlikely to be waking to the sound of bin lids banging.

"Language," says my grandmother. She fills the kettle and while her back is turned I take a quick, dizzying gasp from the sopping cigarette she left in the ashtray.

I go to school. My day has come. I am the only northerner in the building and everyone wants to talk to me about Bobby Sands. My English teacher says that at least the hunger strikers have the courage of their convictions, even if this IRA is nothing like the old IRA.

“The only difference, Sir, is that you lot down here got your crappy Free State and left us as second class citizens under a thinly veiled form of apartheid,” I say. He gives me a warning.

At break time a girl I don’t know very well from the year above pauses in front of me near the tuck shop. She is holding a pink Snack bar, two bags of cheese and onion Taytos and a packet of Silvermints. The Silvermints will have their work cut out.

“Hi, Attracta,” I say.

“I wish the rest of you murdering northern bastards would ever starve yourselves to death as well,” she says.

After school I climb the steps again and lean over the condolence book. There are about twenty signatures now. Che McGarr’s entry is after mine, his handwriting even more elaborate. Jim the carpenter who never finished building our garden shed has signed his name. My father says Jim is an armchair republican and a workshy

berk, but he underestimates him. In a few months the Gardai will stop a car near the Curragh and Jim will open the passenger door and come out with his hands up and a gun in his pocket. Elmer Fudd, Hong Kong Fooley, and Deputy Dawg have signed their names too.

Che McGarr tells me that nature is calling and slinks into Malon’s pub, leaving me in charge of the book. I sit in the chair and watch a pigeon tap and tug at the wrapper of a spice burger. After fifteen minutes Che hasn’t come back. I look at my own entry.

“Ireland unfree will never be at peace. I love you, Bobby Sands,” I have written. I feel ridiculous. A truck full of sheep spatters the town’s only pedestrian crossing with hot, terrified shit and again I take the Town Hall steps, the poster snapping behind me. I pedal home as fast as I can. My sisters are doing their homework at the dining room table. My granny is fully dressed and not in her usual daytime ensemble of velour tracksuit, unfastened bra and quilted dressing gown. I run into the kitchen to look for my mother, to tell her I don’t belong here, that I want to go home, but she has gone. My father has driven her to hospital. At three am on the morning of May 6th, 1981, twenty three hours after the death of Bobby Sands, my mother gives birth to a baby boy. They name him John.

“My father says Jim is an armchair republican and a workshy berk, but he underestimates him.”

Orange

Shane Vaughan

Shane Vaughan is a writer of prose and poetry. He has been published in various magazines online and in print and is currently experimenting with Prose-Poetry. He runs an event for young and emerging writers to find their voice, called Stanzas, and works for the Munster Literature Centre in Cork.

Why we chose it:

Not sure whether this poem made us feel hungry, aroused, or concerned about that 'red eye' Shane mentions. Seriously, you should go to a doctor about that.

To peel its skin with a polished nail and push finger into fruit, divide segments into moiety - one for me and one for her - hold the parts in equal status and say *Eat with me* - suck the juice, let it run down our throats, our jaws - and neck - let the white fibres that glued the orange stick between our teeth, waiting to be pulled, then reach - grasp and tug on a flower in bloom - *She loves me, She loves me not, She loves not me, Love me not she* - let pollen tickle our red eye, let sour juice burn acidic like *It's good for you* - to slurp until the fruit is dry and the peels ground under heel, to turn and say *We did our bit* - spit seeds at each other until *It's all fun and games*, and lie in the earth, while the tree creaks, feeding on us.

Wild Children

Anita Salemink

In Kilfinane we were known as wild children. And maybe we really were.

What should have been another summer camping trip turned into something completely different. On the first night after arriving in Ireland my parents and my aunt and uncle tried to put up a tent in gale force ten winds on the banks of a grey and rough lake, while we children, my sister and me, my little brother and my three cousins watched on from the car. We must have arrived late because I remember it being dark. We had camped many times but up until that point had always sought out sunny, southern spots in Italy or Spain. Once we went to Yugoslavia but the temperature there proved to be too hot for us. I can't remember if they eventually got the tent up, as sticks were constantly falling over and the wind got into the canvas a few times nearly taking it out on to the lake.

We left the lake the next day and rented an Irish cottage with whitewashed walls and a thatched roof in Kilfinane. I loved the door that was sawn in half with the bottom closed and the top part left open. My aunt and uncle borrowed a caravan and camped on the driveway of Mrs. Connery's estate.

"Terrible weather for camping in a tent," my father said.

I suppose we did go wild then. Mr. and Mrs. Connery lived on a large estate with parklands and a river running through it. My first meeting with Mrs. Connery was when we were jumping on heaps of hay and burying each other in them; we even climbed a tree so we could take a leap from great

Anita Salemink is a Dutch-born artist and aspiring writer. She has written two books and is working on a third. She is looking for an agent for her first book, which was inspired by her Irish childhood and teenage years. It's about a girl living in the 1970's, who, after moving to an old Georgian Mansion, discovers that history is still alive and very much in the present. The narrative is interwoven with Irish myths and history. This short non-fiction piece is taken from her newest project: Childhood Memories, chronicling the first few weeks after moving to Ireland, and can be found on her personal blog www.anitasalemink.com

Why we chose it:

It's always interesting to us to see our native country through the eyes of outsiders, to see how their experiences diverge from our own; and so we greatly enjoyed this small taster from Anita's memoir detailing her first few weeks as an immigrant to Ireland in the 1970s.

heights. She drove up in her black car and left the car door open behind her, walking up to us with a serious face. We didn't speak any English, not yet, but we got the message, we weren't supposed to mess up the hay. But what did we 'city kids' - born and bred in 1960's pastel coloured Dutch suburbs with black tarmac roads - know?

After that we visited her in the big house many times. She had hair the colour of tea, and wore a twinset and pearls. The hems of her tweed skirts were always well below the knee and sometimes she wore green wellingtons. She had a laughing, screechy voice and let us run all over the place. She served us scones thickly buttered with salty butter, which we pretended to eat. Back in the stables we scratched the butter off and hid the lump under the hay, 'too salty', and wiped our greasy fingers on our trousers. We ate the scones even though they tasted as if they contained too little sugar or too much, "our palettes hadn't accustomed to Irish flavours yet."

Mrs. Connery had a puppy that my cousin named Oscar, and we ruined him. He was a sheepdog meant for helping on the farm, but after our holiday he was only good enough for being a pet. Too spoiled, they said. Never picked up any commands, just wagged his tail expecting to be stroked, hugged and kissed in abundance when taken out into the fields to herd cattle. They had kittens; we loved them too. You had to sneak up on them in the stables, as they were always hiding from us. And they had a calf that would suck your hand and even try to swallow it if you gave him the chance.

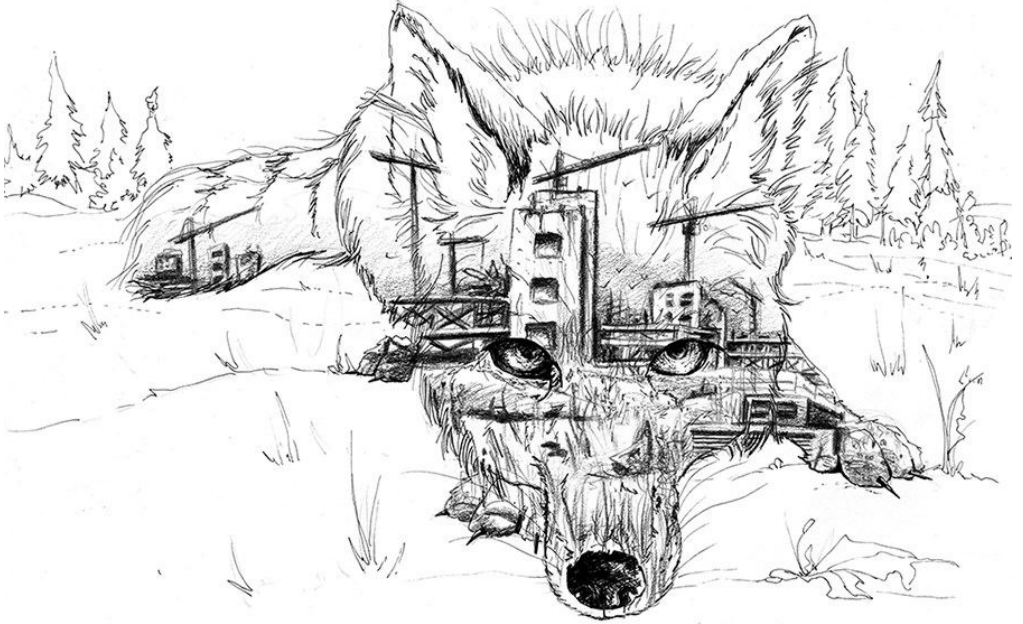
Sometimes Mr. Connery would take us on his horse-drawn cart up into the hills. We sang songs we weren't allowed to sing at home, but nobody could understand us, so we sang at the top of our lungs. My mother had warned us not to stray too far away from the cottage because of the gypsies - they were always in need of good dishwashers, she had told us.

Once we jumped off the cart while it was still moving, and I ripped my trousers from mid-calf all the way up to my thigh on a rusty nail sticking out and catching the material. I knew my mother would kill me because the trousers were ruined. I remember walking back bending backwards, holding the material together in an awkward way.

But of course all this was before we made friends with children from the village, after that we really went wild...

Astray I

Helena Grimes



Helena Grimes is an artist and illustrator based in Limerick. Her drawings desire to tell a tale or to spawn anew in the minds of the viewers with it's fable like qualities. The non-human form is a subject she is deeply involved with using as an agency to understand human society. She illustrates her inner most thoughts blends them with pieces of her imagination. Familiar themes fabricated within her work include anxiety, power, greed, vanity, love and degeneration. The work challenges society and culture with aims to enlighten and impact consciously or subconsciously. She graduated with a Fine Art BA hons degree in LSAD. Her work has been exhibited in numerous places nationally and internationally.

Why we chose it:

The reason Una choose this image was the beautiful juxtaposition; a wolf that you would fear, seemingly internalizing a barren desolate construction site, clearly man made. The wolves gaze invites you to stare at its eyes and into the internal workings of this destruction.

Coveted Nightmare

Carol McGill

I wake at the same moment I realise I'm not alone. My eyes jerk open as the man on top of me lifts his face away from my mouth.

"You're awake!" he says. His delight is confusing.

He's pretty, not much older than me, with thick chocolate hair, chiselled face and sky-blue eyes. But he's undeniably a stranger.

His hip is pressing against mine through the silk bed sheet. One of his hands is pressing into the pillow beside my head. His breath is sweet, flowery almost, but I feel sick at the taste of it in my mouth. My own body is rigid, frozen. I can't seem to make myself move. This is partly because I've been trained not to appear rude. But also because I'm scared. I can feel his muscles through the covers and my arms are trapped down by my sides.

I smile to hide my panic, trying to remember whether there is anything around my bed that I might use as a weapon. But I can't think where it is I fell asleep. The only things in my mind are the fingerprints of half-formed dreams.

"Where am I?" My voice feels thick.

"Oh - of course. I'm sorry." The man takes my hand - as naturally and purposefully as if it was the bridle of his horse - then twists away from me to indicate the rest of the room. (I take this opportunity to shove back the sheets and wriggle to my feet on the opposite side of the bed, putting as much distance between us as our linked fingers will allow.)

"I found you here," he says.

I don't recognise the room at first. It is

Carol McGill lives in Dublin where she makes to-do lists and then avoids doing things. Her work has been published in the anthology Words To Tie To Bricks as well as in Germ, the online magazine. In May she won the Puffin/RTÉ Guide teen writing competition in Ireland.

Why we chose it:

And they lived Happily Ever After? Try again love. A failed fairy tale; what happens after the credits roll. Princesses that realise shit just got real. That's everything Oxymorons (and we at Silver Apples) are about.

small and round, with just one gaping window. I can see the rafters, so we are right under the roof, I suppose. The boards on the floor are bare - which is unusual in my father's castle - but rich tapestries hang on the walls, depicting woodlands and fairies and dark, isolated towers. The bed is surrounded by gauzy curtains. Dried petals scatter the floor. And in the corner is the - what's it called? - the spinning wheel.

I've seen this room only once before. It was my sixteenth birthday. I found a staircase I didn't recognise. Curiosity took me to this little room.

There was an old woman here, at the spinning wheel. I assumed I'd stumbled into a servant's quarters. The woman called me by name - Frieda - and asked did I want to try the wheel. I think I said yes. I hadn't seen one before. I can't think how I ended up on the bed.

I look down. I'm still wearing my golden birthday dress.

So, it can't have been that long ago.

Except, the perfumed fabric smells...musty.

"I've saved you," the man says. He sounds almost victorious.

It's reassuring to know I'm at home. But no one would hear me scream from up here. "I don't understand," I try tentatively.

"Of course. I apologise. Again." He laughs, somewhat nervously. "I am Charles IV, crown prince of this land. I am honoured to free you from your curse and wake you."

"My...curse?"

"Well...yes? They always tell the story, of the beautiful" he shoots me a smile, but it doesn't stop my palms dampening, "princess lying asleep, in a castle buried in the forest of thorns."

I'm so confused. I move to the window and he - Charles - releases my hand. I look out. And forget he's there.

That can't be our beautiful garden below me, but there are some ruins where the walled garden once lay, and there is the lily pond, dry and lined with scum. All is consumed by an explosion of thorns. They fill the garden and crawl up the walls, over even this topmost windowsill. Their ugly brown and red is softened by thousands of roses, settled over everything like a heavy dusting of sugar.

The land beyond is worse. The mountains' outline is familiar,

"All is consumed by an explosion of thorns. They fill the garden and crawl up the walls"

but botched and blurred; the little town nestled in the valley, stretched and warped. Queer new houses, with battered brown roofs instead of thatch, make the town crowded, cluttered and dirty. The trees have disappeared, and there's a lake I don't recognise. But, most confusing and frightening of all, away on the furthest mountain is a castle that should not be there.

It's made of beautiful white marble, not our castle's dull stone.

"You fell asleep for a hundred years," Charles tells me gently. "You and everybody in the castle. I saw them on my way up." Out of the corner of my eye, I see him shudder. "Only a kiss could wake you, but nobody was able to get through the thorns until time was up."

A hundred years?

"Don't be upset..." the Prince takes my hand, then suddenly he's taking me in his arms. I stiffen instantly.

"Don't be upset," he repeats softly. "It's a lot to take in. I'm sorry. But no one will hurt you, I promise. I'll protect you." He kisses a tear away from my face, then tucks my head against his chest and strokes at my hair.

I don't want him to protect me. I don't want his strange futuristic existence anywhere near me. He shouldn't be alive right now. (Or I should be dead right now...). Regardless, *my* grief for *my* world is nothing to do with him.

But I'm reminded of how small the room is, and how much bigger this Prince is than me. I have to wait until I can get downstairs and find my parents, or the housekeeper, or anyone I recognise.

Sucking in a deep breath through my teeth, I force myself to relax and - nervously - lean into him. He pulls away, looks down and smiles in a way that's probably supposed to be reassuring. Then he kisses me, sliding his tongue between my lips. Suddenly, there are whole new fears.

"Can we go downstairs?" I interrupt him unsteadily. "I...want to find my parents."

"Oh - I understand. Certainly." He smiles again. He just keeps smiling at me. Like I mean something to him. I don't want to know what I might mean to him.

After one hundred years of sleep, I'm still weary. So I suppose I'm meant to appreciate Charles's final demonstration of his strength and desire to protect me. When I move towards the door, he cups the back of my knees and carries me, weak and limp and helpless, down the stairs.

* * *

My home is crumbling.

The castle where I have grown up is cracked and faded, cobwebs in every corner and rooms smelling of must. The walls are peeling, the floor stained with one hundred horrible years' worth of elements that blow through tattered silk hangings from the unrelenting view outside.

"We have glass in our windows now," says Charles unhelpfully.

We wander down corridors and stairs. The Prince is in no rush, and from this position I don't dare ask him to hurry. I keep my head turned firmly forwards. I don't want him to stop moving and kiss me. As we approach the grand staircase, my stomach churns with anticipation. A few minutes more, and I will be safe.

We turn the corner...and a scene of utter chaos faces us. All the kingdom's dignified leaders who were to attend my birthday banquet are gathered into gangs, tearing clumps of dust from their hair and screaming. Servants run frantically about the hall, which looks as weary and wrecked as the rest of the castle, banners wilting and leaks dripping. All that remains of the feast itself are congealed, stinking scraps that flies abandoned decades ago.

But hunched in their thrones and surrounded by angry nobles, I can see my mother and father.

"There are my parents!" I tense in anticipation of my feet hitting the stairs.

The Prince has begun a slow, deliberate descent. "Yes, I see them," he says calmly. "We're almost there."

"Let me *down*, please," I snap. Charles doesn't even seem to hear me, but I'm done here. I jerk my legs, swing half-out of his arms and half-fall to the ground, banging my shin.

Charles looks shocked, although it's thanks to his catching me that I didn't crack my skull open. I realise this is not an elegant or princess-like way to behave, but I don't care that I ruined his grand entrance.

"I'm sorry," I appease him, and then I turn and run. I don't know if he's chasing me.

"Mother!" I cry as I go, panicked nobles turning to give me unmistakably hostile stares. "Father!" The muttering crowd parts. I fling myself into my parents' arms.

I am safe. Nothing can touch me ever again. They will sort it out because that's what they do. "I'm so glad to see you," my father murmurs.

"Frieda?" my mother is looking down at me as though through a haze.

“Yes, mama.”

“I’m so sorry about the curse,” she whispers. “I’m sorry we couldn’t protect you.”

“My mother is holding me, but she’s tight with worry - braced against some unseen threat”

It’s then that I realise I was wrong; it isn’t over. My mother is holding me, but she’s tight with worry - braced against some unseen threat. I can smell the sweat off her. Father has his arms around us both, but he’s more than protective - he’s defensive, aggressive. The sobs and screams are growing louder - people have lost interest in my

family’s reunion, which is strange. The gentry always pay attention to royals.

I try to turn my head, but Mother won’t let me. I’ve never seen my parents afraid before.

“Why are they all so upset?” I whisper. Mama’s lip trembles.

“We didn’t realise...the curse would make *everybody* fall asleep,” she says.

“Your majesties.”

I freeze.

Charles.

I pull free of mother enough to turn and see him, carving a path through the crowd. They back hurriedly, reverently away. They’re intimidated. He is claiming his entrance once again; but he is watching me, his expression both tender and possessive.

“Can I help you?” My father’s dust-smearred cloak blocks us from Charles’s view. “Since you *dare* interrupt,” he continues, “I take it we have you to thank for...this?” His tone blames Charles for the crying lords, the cracking hall, the hollow black holes where the food should be.

“Indeed,” Charles says, his voice cold and sugary. “You have me to thank for breaking the curse and waking you up. Prince Charles the IV, crown prince of this land, at your service.”

“*This* land?” my father says sharply. Quietly.

“Correct.” Charles is smiling.

“I think,” my father’s voice is hard, “you are mistaken.”

“Oh, no.” Charles is matching my father’s tone, except the Prince maintains an air of politeness and professionalism. “All the ministers and governors and generals were visiting the castle for the princess’s little party, so after it disappeared under thorns, there was

nobody to lead the country. No authority. Total chaos - riots, looting, killings. The ordinary people were migrating to escape the lawless mess of a land. Then my great-grandfather stepped in. He gave this kingdom to my grandfather, his second son, who restored peace.”

“Oh, did he?” my father snarls. “He and his army of what? Ten thousand men? Twenty thousand?”

“What are you suggesting?”

“You know damn well what! Who was your great-granddaddy, then? It was Cedric, wasn’t it? I know it was, I know he has his eye on my kingdom for that bratty son of his -”

“Cedric III is dead,” interrupts Charles coldly. “You’re talking history.”

“Darling.” My mother catches my father’s wrist. “I’m going to get Frieda out of...out of that party dress.”

For a moment I see Charles’s eyes narrow, but then he gives a merry, mocking laugh. “Well, I’ve no objection to a new dress. But I would prefer if she stayed here. It’s not that I don’t *trust* you, but, I seem to feel protective of her ever since I saved her.”

My mother mutters a curse. Charles meets my father’s glare. “If you would prefer,” my father says finally, “you may hire a servant to...ensure her well-being.”

Charles seems satisfied. He beckons a cowering manservant and hands over some gold, promising more. “Frieda,” he calls in a softer tone, as I move towards the door. It’s the first time he’s used my name. “Come here a moment.”

No, thank you, I appreciate your help but I’m just not comfortable...

“Frieda!” My father has become strained and pale. “Go on. Don’t be rude to our guest.”

When I look at my mother, horrified and confused, she drops her gaze. So I stumble forward and Charles catches me once again in his arms.

“Don’t worry,” he says gently, smiling down at me from his great height. “I won’t let them keep you locked up for long. I’ll get us out of here soon enough.” He kisses me softly on my mouth.

He has a beautiful, beautiful face. And maybe, if I’d met him at a ball, or my birthday banquet, I would have fallen in love with him. If he’d asked me to dance, or to walk with him in a moonlit rose garden...or said *May I kiss you*, on a terrace under the stars. Maybe then, but not now and not like this, when all I feel is fear.

What does he mean, “get us out of here”...?

He twirls me away to join my mother, whose hand is slick with sweat. As she hurries me from the hall, I hear him say, “Don’t worry,

sir. I'm sure we can arrange for you to keep your castle. I wouldn't turn away my own *in-laws*..."

The corridors echo with the sound of sobs. Wild-eyed servants scurry past. The newly-bought manservant is tight on our heels, following Charles's orders faithfully. I remember the respectful crowd of nobles. The smarter servants have figured out where their loyalties should lie.

When we stop the air reeks of damp left untended for a century. My mother throws her shoulder against a small door, bangs it open and ushers me inside. She addresses the manservant. "Could you wait outside, please? The princess is undressing." She shuts the door.

This is where pressed, ironed and folded clothes wait to be taken upstairs. These dresses have been waiting a very long time. "Why did you bring me here?" I ask.

"Because there's a screen you could change behind in your room. The Prince won't let us get you out of the castle, but at least here we can talk without that servant hearing." She puts a hand to her head. "Find a dress, Frieda - not that one!" she hisses as I reach for a white lacy gown I recognise.

"Mama, tell me what's going on." I understood enough of what was said in the throne room to think I know what will happen. I hope I'm wrong.

"It's complicated, darling..."

"I'm not too young to understand!" I say angrily, and she makes hasty hushing motions. "Tell me!"

She hesitates. "The curse is our fault. We insulted a fairy when you were a baby. There were rumours we tried to prevent it - that we burnt every spinning wheel, nonsense like that - but we knew better. You can only prepare for these things. The curse itself, the sleeping, wasn't so bad, but we were worried about when you woke up. We thought only *you* would fall asleep, you see, and we'd be dead. We were trying to provide for you. We saved a huge dowry...we were going to tell you as late as possible - but we left it too late. It wasn't until we woke up that we realised the entire castle was affected. And then we had a panicked mob on our hands."

I look at the stacks of neatly folded, moth-eaten clothes. "What will happen?"

"I don't know." My mother looked close to tears. "I think...I hope it won't turn out this way, but..."

"Charles wants to marry me."

When she nods, dread settles permanently into my life.

"Will I have to?"

"No," she says aggressively. "Daddy's fixing it now. We just..."

we're not sure what will happen to us, if you don't. And we have a duty to the servants. But never mind. We'll sort it." She digs through the clothes and produces a pale pink, only-slightly-damaged silk gown, long sleeves, high neckline. "Put this one on, darling. I'm going to the kitchens, then back upstairs. We'll sort it." She kisses me roughly on the forehead. Then she's gone, leaving nothing but the tang of worry in the air.

Maybe when I enter the hall, Charles will have relented, my parents granted their castle, I will be free and all will be well. But it appears my family's only ticket into this society is me.

* * *

"I'll send someone over to take everybody's names," Charles is saying. "We can trace their families, see who's left."

I stand in a doorway to the hall, rosy silk rippling, the manservant close behind. The nobles are strewn crumpled around the room. They've accepted their fate. I try to remind myself I can't determine mine.

"Frieda!" Charles beams at me.

"There you are, sweetheart."

My father is shaken, defeated. I suddenly see how decrepit and deadened he looks, his velvet cloak made ridiculous by mildew and dust. Nobody can compete with Charles, so utterly alive in a room filled with those who should be dead. "Charles says he's eager for the wedding. He wants to bring you to his father's castle for a quick ceremony tonight, with a banquet tomorrow morning. How does that sound?"

The remains of hope are crushed from my lungs.

I walk past Charles to my father, to show my assent by brushing my lips to the dusty hem of his robe. His hands are shaking as he smooths my hair. Though I'd hoped not to hurt his feelings, I know he realises I cannot look at him.

What will you give me for my daughter today...?

Well, sir, these past few years...inflation...you've no idea.

I seek my mother, looking for comfort, but find none. She sits broken in her throne, a marionette with limp strings.

"Mama?" I have to crouch uncomfortably to embrace her,

"Nobody can compete with Charles, so utterly alive in a room filled with those who should be dead."

shielding her from Charles.

She looks bleakly at me. Her eyes are red, makeup smeared from tears and a century of sleep. I smell wine.

“The scullery maid,” she whispers. “Lottie. Cook found her... hanging. Her entire family lived outside the castle. All dead.” She grasps my wrist, nails scratching skin. “There’s no place for us in this world, Frieda.”

* * *

My parents stay behind in their meaningless thrones. Charles and I walk holding hands. He laughs with a lover’s content, all cruel leadership absent as we wander into his sunset. He is sweet and attentive, lifting me over mutilated garden sculptures, carefully releasing my skirt when it snags on thorns.

He seems disappointed by the ease of the path, insisting the thorns have withered since he fought through them. When we pass the rusted castle gates, into alien land, Charles’s horse is tethered nearby. A strong black mare, fit for a prince, waiting patiently. She stamps and whinnies when she sees us.

“You can ride up in front of me,” Charles says grandly. (He refused my father’s offer of one of our horses, who had woken confused and stiff and hungry in their stalls. Their keeper, learning his wife was eighty years buried, raided the royal wine and drank himself into oblivion in the hay.) Charles checks the girth, then turns to me. “But first...”

He takes my face in his hands (I arrange it into a smile), and kisses me once, gently. Understanding I’m supposed to respond somehow, I slide my hands cautiously into his hair. I’m trying to be what he wants, be enough – give him whatever it is he’s looking for in my eyes. I can’t fathom the expression in his.

Suddenly Charles gathers me up and presses me against the stone wall. His mouth moves to my throat and his strong, hateful hands are slithering towards the hem of my skirt.

“Not yet,” he murmurs. “Soon. Tonight, we’ll be married...” Blood is coursing through my veins, heart pounding to the beat of fear as it steels itself for its sacrifice.

I Don't Belong

Shalise S. Ayromloo

Shalise Ayromloo is a PhD student in the department of Economics at University of Illinois at Chicago. Since the very first letter she wrote to her imaginary fairy friends many years ago, she has never stopped writing and heartfelt poetry has always been her favourite style.

Why we chose it:

A poem for everyone who feels out of place in the world (so, that's all of us then?). We loved Shalise's gorgeous fairytale-esque style.

I was born in the wrong century,
with a heart that is fluttering
against the cold glass of my cage,
with a voice that betrays
the sorrowful melodies of my loneliness.

I was born in the wrong century,
with a hand that leaves steam marks
on the cold surfaces of my surrounding,
with an eye that glares
at my mocking reflection.

I was born in the wrong century,
with a dream of a girl running through
an empty field, chasing butterflies,
laughing in the wind,
finding friendship in the imaginary shapes of
the clouds.

I was born in the wrong century,
with no masks, with no shells;
Naked and vulnerable;
Ready to love and ready to be loved.

Networked Dull

Chris Hayes



Chris Hayes is an artist and writer based in Limerick, Ireland. At the focus of his work is the intersection between technology and contemporary culture. His writing can be found here: <https://chrishayesart.wordpress.com/> and his artwork here: <https://instagram.com/chrishayesart/>

Why we chose it:

What we like about this image was how the painting was situated in the photograph. The painting itself we feel is a dialogue of human interaction with technology, which in itself is open to social and individual understanding of the world. Such a painting is open to varied interpretation depending on the viewer, and their social context. What we found very engaging about the photograph was the composition of the painting in a social space, set out for public viewing, with fire alarm and network cables on the walls. The interaction of the public with the painting in it's space becomes part of the dialogue of the painting.

The Metal Man

Jessica Clerkin

The statue lived on top of a cliff, perched on a pillar near our cottage. Mammy told us that he was there to warn vessels about the treacherous rocks and the ghosts of sunken ships below. I had always taken kindly to the Metal Man but it wasn't until one bedtime tale that my interest was truly stirred.

"If you want to get married," Mammy said, her weight causing the already overloaded bed to moan in protest, "Then ye'll have to hop on one leg around the pillar that the Metal Man lives on."

"But how will that make a difference?" I asked, enchanted with the tale.

"Well," Mammy said and took a sip of tea, "There is magic with the statue, and he'll see to it that you're married within the year, only if you're well-behaved of course and do what your mammy tells you."

"What about the two-empty pillars on either side of the Metal Man? What happens if you hop around them?"

Mammy lowered her voice and fixed her face into a mask of gargoyles ugliness: "The empty pillars are for forsaken children, the ones that cause so much vexation to the world that the lord turns them into a statue."

I pulled the covers over my face, making the blankets my fortress. Mammy had captivated and enthralled me in terror at the same time. From then on I was a regular visitor to the Metal Man for I desperately wanted to be married. I felt that marriage would grant me the happiness that I so desired. My mother had no reservations in telling me that I was blessed with neither

Jessica Clerkin lives by the sea with her daughter in Co. Waterford. She is an avid reader and enjoys the company of her pet rabbits while she writes.

Why we chose it:

Every issue we pick a submission that makes us feel uneasy as hell when we are done reading it, and this time it was Jessica's The Metal Man. We had to share it, to make the rest of you shiver like we did.

beauty nor brains; she herself was a plain woman and wherever my sisters acquired their splendour from it was most certainly not from her.

My sisters' golden ringlets hung beautifully, cascading in a fall of perfect curls; Mammy said their hair was spun at dawn by a mystical spider. My hair was a dull brown that hung limply down the side of my face. My eyes were small and were not unfortunate but compared to the blue jewels that my sisters' viewed the world from I might as well not have had any. Why it should be that my mammy gave birth to seven girls and I the middle child would spoil her run of perfection, I don't know.

My education in an all-girls school didn't stop me looking for my future husband. I would skulk outside the boys' school waiting for them to potter out. My eyelashes were blessedly long and I'd bash them at the boys hoping for one of them to look my way. But these attempts proved futile for the boys would see the golden army waiting to walk home with me and I would be invisible next to them.

And so it was to be for the years that followed, I was the unsavoury sister that was to be avoided at all costs even if it meant crossing the road to avoid a banter with me.

My childhood passed unremarkably; I had few friends, in the classroom I was often the object of practical jokes and cruel jibes.

“his clothes never changed whatever the weather. An old-fashioned-blue jacket with red trousers, his black hair frozen in a perfect wave”

Our cottage was small; we lived crammed together in its three-shabby rooms. Even with constant company I was often lonely; none wanted to hear about my ailments, all except one: the Metal Man. His enormous girth towered over me, his clothes never changed whatever the weather. An old-fashioned-blue jacket with red trousers, his

black hair frozen in a perfect wave. His predictability gave me the comfort that I desired in those times of bleak solitude. Many a day I spent sitting on top of the cliff where he lived. His finger reaching out to warn the oncoming vessels. The view of the open sea and its endless possibilities breathtakingly glorious from his place above the world.

My younger sister Martha was perhaps the most beautiful of us

all and without doubt the foulest. Her angelic face was a trap to conceal her devilish disposition; indeed all my siblings made fun of me and my yearning for matrimony but Martha took her cruelty to a new level. In the summer months we would cool ourselves off at a private beach that was known only to a few of the locals. We did not have any swimming costumes to conceal our nakedness; our clothes were sparse so it made sense that we should enter the ocean in the same outfit that we entered the world. The beach was accessible by venturing down a rocky and twisted path. The path was so overgrown with vegetation that few visited the beach other than ourselves - so we did not fear the eyes of men.

As I was the strongest and most graceful swimmer, it was the only time that I could cherish being the ugly duckling amongst the tide of swans. But all good things must come to an end and it did with my blossoming from girlhood into adulthood. My sisters escaped the acne that plagued me; my body was covered with red welts and I no longer felt comfortable bearing my deformities to their eyes. With the appearance of my hideous spots I swam alone; the only way to do this was by entering the ocean before the others had a chance to wipe the sleep from their eyes.

When I woke that morning it was just after 6 a.m. The cottage was quiet as it always was on a Sunday. Mammy was taking it easy and wouldn't rise until 8; Daddy visited the pub the night before and fell in the door before the sun greeted us — his drunken snores were a common occurrence that vibrated the walls of our cottage.

I greeted the morning with a smile as I emerged into the already warm day. The walk was pleasant, I allowed dreams of tranquility and happiness to enter my head as I hummed a gentle ballad. If I had of been silent on the walk then surely I would have heard the other footsteps pattering softly behind me, but all that could be heard was the crow song that was my voice.

As it was still early the sun had yet to roast the water into the tepid lagoon that I was used to, but that did not interfere with the joy that my early morning swim gave me. I swam in my blissful state until the sun moved enough for me to know it was time to leave (Mammy would show me the back of a wooden spoon if I wasn't gleaming from the results of a bar of soap, clean and ready for mass).

I left the water in a daydream; both tired and refreshed from my exercise. It didn't occur to me that my clothes would not be waiting for me on the mossy grass. At first I thought that I misjudged where I placed them and blamed their disappearance on a wind that had not stirred in weeks. It wasn't until I saw the green and white ribbon that belonged to Martha that I knew what had happened. She

had stolen my clothes. I tried calling her name, I screamed and begged for her to return my belongings but I knew that she couldn't hear. Martha wouldn't have dared to be on the receiving end of Mammy's anger; Martha would be rosy cheeked, waiting patiently in her Sunday-frock for mass.

The journey home was degrading, my nakedness on full show. I passed the Metal Man, his eyes forever searching for stray ships. Back then it was rare to see a motorcar in the country but sure enough one passed me, filled to the brim with people. At first they appeared stunned to see me (I tried to hide but the path was wide and open). All but one laughed: the priest who hitched a ride. Not just any priest, my local parish priest, his countenance grim and his mouth stretched into a firm line.

The priest, I concluded, was on his way to preach to his weekly congregation. I hoped Mammy and my sisters were on their way to mass and had not waited for my return. I didn't pass another living soul on the journey home, any respectable person had flocked to the church. And true to my wish Mammy and the gang had not waited for me. I began to entertain the notion that my nude stroll would go unnoticed. When the front door slammed announcing my mother's return I paid it little heed, but when she stormed into my shared bedroom and slapped me square across the face I knew I had been caught. Not only had the priest told my mother about my escapades but he announced it during the mass; proclaiming me a "vixen and sinner". Martha stood in the doorway with a thin grin and watched me take a beating, never once opening her mouth to proclaim her guilt.

Each year a new trauma unfolded that was somehow related to Martha but the worst trick she ever played on me was when I was twenty-one.

Over the years, my three-elder sisters left the home one-by-one to marry. I watched their weddings with my hands wringing behind my back, a smile painted on my face. I longed to be the one walking up the aisle and have Mammy sniffing into her good-lace handkerchief. I wanted Daddy to shake my groom's hand in congratulations. I began to lose hope of it ever happening until I met Owen.

In looks he wasn't much to gawp at, but he was a grand height and had a wide body; these attributes made up for his mediocre face. The deciding factor for me: he was a man and he didn't run away when I approached. He was untainted from the local gossip about my scavenging ways for the company of a male.

We went steady for a fortnight; during those magical weeks I conjured images of myself and Owen skipping up the aisle. I'd look

almost pretty in a dazzling-white gown to match my virginal status and Owen's boils would appear diminished in a navy tuxedo. At the end of the two-weeks it seemed only right that Owen should meet my mammy and daddy. It was on that fateful visit to meet them that it happened. Martha wasn't even meant to be there (that is the bit that plagued me on those lonely nights when the wind howled outside); she should have been at work but she swapped shifts at the last minute.

I was in the height of ecstasy with Owen beside me, with my hand entwined with his I opened the door. Mammy and Daddy were not at home, apparently they thought the meeting was not for another hour. An hour is all it took for Martha and Owen to fall starry-eyed in love with each other. She giggled at his jokes and blushed when he looked at her; Owen who was usually level-headed tripped over his words in her company. By the following Wednesday I was dumped. He even had the audacity to deny our parting was because of Martha. By that spring they were married; I was cruelly appointed the maid of honour. I didn't believe then nor do I now that my sister possessed any feelings for Owen; I believe she married him just because he was the one man who would steal me from spinsterhood.

"I was in the height of ecstasy with Owen beside me, with my hand entwined with his I opened the door."

When I reached the sunset of my twenties, I was the only offspring of my parents living at home. My youngest sister Margaret had recently left to harbour her fantasies on English soil. Daddy's drinking became thunderous with the departure of Margaret and I would often find him slumped on the front yard, too drunk to open the front door and sleep in his bed. Mammy resented my presence in the cottage - I was the wound that refused to heal. My luck with employment was no better than my luck with men. My average job lasted just three months before I was either fired or the company went out of business. This made it impossible to save up enough money to start a new life where my chances of obtaining a husband might increase. Whenever I did manage to save up an honest amount I would blow it on a frock that was drastically out of my price range, usually worn to impress my latest conquest.

After a particularly volatile fight with Mammy one night I lay on my bed with my clothes crumpling against my body. The rain pelted

against the window and fresh drops of water trickled through the cracks of the carelessly-fitted windowpane. A puddle began to form on the floor. I ran over the day's events in my head, the mundane-repetitive existence that I led. All my problems could be resolved if only I could find love, if I could just be married. I watched the rain commandeer the floor and thought of the Metal Man enduring the hardships of the inclement weather. I sprung from my bed, feeling dizzy from the intensity of my feelings but I knew with absolute certainty that if I was to abscond into the night and dance around the Metal Man then my wish of marriage would surely be granted.

The night was colder than I possibly could have guessed from the warmth of my home; the pelting rain cutting me like shards of ice. Even though the night was dark and the moon was hidden behind a veil of cloud, the Metal Man was visible from the muddy field where I stood gazing up at him. The sea surrounding him was invisible but I could hear the angry waves crashing onto the rocks. I pleaded with the statue to aid my happiness: "Let me find love!" I shouted into the night and began the one legged hop around the Metal Man. With the last jump it was done, it had been many years since I engaged in the peculiar dance and the exertion left me exhausted.

My feet were pointed in the direction of home when I heard someone calling my name. The wind hid the identity of the voice but I could pick up the tones of a maddened-deranged speaker. On top of the cliff, above the world, I remembered what my sister had done to me all those years ago. She had not completed her malicious attack. I could think of no other that would follow me into the depths of the night. Even with the fierce clamour of nature the rapid beating of my heart was audible, the heavy thump-thump no concealment to the terror that suffocated me.

"Martha!" I yelled. "Show yourself you demon!"

My legs walked backwards, carrying me further from the pillars and closer to the cliff edge.

"Martha I know it's you!" I longed to leave my refuge, Martha's presence had tainted it.

"Why can't you leave me alone?"

My head jerked up as sudden as a hunted animal; through my bleary eyes, I saw movement on the pillar that entombed the Metal Man.

A phantom light shone on the statue's face so that I could see his vivid features as if I was looking at him in the light of day. His head tilted to the side and he grinned. I gasped; my legs carried me the final two steps that I was to make alive and I fell over the edge of the cliff.

My tumble with fortune lasted seconds before I landed on the rugged rocks below. The cliff seemed colossal from my place at the end of the earth; I didn't think it possible to mount them.

To my surprise I climbed the cliff with the agility of a spider. If it wasn't for loose pebbles falling to the ground, my eyes wouldn't have been diverted to the roaring waves smothering the rocks. I wouldn't have seen my lifeless body being spat out by the sea. The wind and the rain fought each other in an epic battle, but I could feel nothing.

A silhouette from the surface reached for me, I thrashed and wailed for I thought it my insidious sister coming to swallow my soul. My meagre attempts of escape proved fruitless for the hand sought me and pulled me to the top. In that insane moment I didn't know friend from foe; I closed my eyes and when I opened them it was the amorous face of the Metal Man that greeted me. My hand was entangled with his, my own metal hand. Finally the love that I searched for was found. We walked to the pillars and I took my place on the empty one beside him. Together to stand for eternity.

Pillow Panther

JD DeHart

*JD DeHart is a writer, blogger, and teacher. His chapbook, *The Truth About Snails*, is available from RedDashboard and his main blog is jddehartwritings.blogspot.com*

Why we chose it:

We first published JD DeHart way back in Issue One: 'Modern Mythologies' (woah, doesn't time just fly?) and we continue to be big fans of his work. We love the idea of an animal that would normally be thought of as dangerous and predatory providing comfort to a child instead in the form of a much loved pillow.

Our child rests her
head upon the velvet
comfort of the panther,

sleeping sweetly near
its vicious row of plush
incisors and waking

to gaze in its fiery
golden eyes, listening
for the absent hum

of a living creature.

Veterans Day War

Steve Lambert

On the day Phil realized he'd had enough, that things were different to him somehow, they were on their way to Vanessa's sister's house. The shabby-looking diner he chose was not the kind of place Phil would normally have stopped for lunch but he was tired and hungry and it would, Phil had decided, have to suffice.

"I'm sorry, Phil," said Vanessa, "but Veterans Day is not a real holiday." She slid her narrow body in between the cushiony seat and Formica table.

"Of course it is, dear." Phil eased his boxy frame down into the seat and scooted until he was dead center. "I'm a vet, and I say it is." He winked at his wife. He knew better than to push the matter any further than a friendly rebuke.

"What utter nonsense!" Vanessa broke into a loud laugh. Many of the patrons in the small dining room looked over to where the old couple sat then looked around at each other: some giggled, some whispered, some stared.

"Try to keep it down, dear," whispered Phil.

"What happened?" whispered Vanessa.

"Nothing, Van," said Phil.

They ordered, and their food came and they ate quickly. They always ate quickly in restaurants. Phil never knew how much time he had before Vanessa erupted into a full-blown episode, and Van, by now, was synced to Phil when it came to routine things, like eating and public comportment. When in doubt, and when she had the presence of mind to do so, she'd just loosely mimic Phil.

Steve Lambert's fiction has appeared in Fiction365, Word Riot, Storyglossia, Segue, and other places. His stories have been a "top 25 winner" and a finalist (twice) in contests held by Glimmer Train Stories. Most recently, a story of his won third-prize in Glimmer Train's Very Short Fiction Award. He is a second-year MFA student at UTEP. He lives in the uncool, unhistorical part of St. Augustine with his wife and daughter, and works in a public library.

Why we chose it:

Ouff! That's the sound we made when we finished reading Steve's submission. As much as we love reading international submissions, we love publishing them even more. We hope you love this as much as we did, whether you believe Veterans Day is a holiday or not.

Vanessa pushed her vacant plate to the middle of the table and took up her tall glass of water and drank from it until there was nothing left in it but a cathedral of melting ice.

“So, where are we headed, dear? It seems to have slipped my mind.”

“To Sister’s. Just another two hours or so, I’d say.” He picked up his coffee cup and held it in the air. Their waitress, a woman in a dress the color of butter, came over and filled the cup with steaming dark-brown liquid. She smiled at Phil and he smiled back. She was pretty to him. She was in her late forties—tall, thin, with messy black hair. Phil looked at her name tag. *Judith*, in faded gold letters.

He thanked her and watched her walk away.

“Two hours or so....But you’re not sure?” said Vanessa, her eyebrows arched high.

“I’m not exactly sure,” said Phil. “It’s our first time driving it....But from what she said, we’re close.”

“Sister’s?” she said.

“Yes. Your sister’s house. Sister. That’s what you’ve always called Ava. Anyway, it’s our first time to her *new* place.”

“It’s strange to me,” said Vanessa. She brushed some crumbs from her shirtfront with the back of her hand.

Phil was getting nervous now because this was how it normally started. A gradual ramping up. Inquisitiveness turning into out and out paranoia.

“This is our *first* visit to my Sister’s house?”

Phil leaned into the back of his seat, the vinyl covering squeaked. “Yes, first time to the *new* place. She moved a little under a year ago and we’re just getting around to visiting.”

Her lips tightened and her eyes narrowed and she pressed both hands on the table, and leaned in. “Do you think I am some kind of fool!?”

Phil looked around nervously. At least we’ve finished eating, he thought.

“Go ahead, ignore me! Ignore me, you, you...kidnapper!” She got up from her seat. “You’re keeping me from my connections!”

“Where are you going?” Phil looked around for their waitress.

“I’m not as stupid as you think!” She turned toward the entrance.

“No, Van!” Phil turned without getting out of his seat.

Vanessa started walking back towards Phil and then climbed into the booth and stood up in the seat and pointed at Phil. “THIS MAN IS KEEPING ME FROM MY CONNECTIONS!!!” She looked around the dining room. Everyone was quiet, most were staring at her. The rest were emphatically looking away. No one moved.

Phil got out of his seat and stood next to the table and held out a hand to his wife. She smacked it away, and took her purse up in both hands and held it close to her body. She looked around the room again, but this time she let her eyes linger on the individual faces of the diners until they looked away in embarrassment or awkwardly smiled. The look on her own face gradually went from shock that no one was defending her, to a sort of realization, a realization that perhaps she was not quite correct in her assessment of the situation.

“Please, Van,” Phil said. He held out his hand.

She looked around. She was almost crying now.

“Okay,” she said in a shaky voice.

Phil smiled in an effort to make her feel more comfortable.

She sat down at the booth and did some fake primping to her hair. She opened her purse and absently looked inside. She pulled out some Chap Stick and applied it to her lips.

Finally their waitress came out of the kitchen and Phil waved his hand.

“Can’t wait to see...” Vanessa said, putting the Chap Stick back into her purse, staring into the confused jumble of things inside it

“Yes. She’ll be happy to see you.”

“How long has it been, dear?” she said.

Phil did not respond and Vanessa did not repeat herself.

The dark-haired waitress put the bill on the table and her hand brushed against Phil’s. He looked up at her and smiled and then looked across the table at his wife who was watching.

“Thanks.” he said.

Phil handed her the check and some cash.

“Keep the change.”

“Thank you....Come and see us again.” Phil thought that maybe he would come again, but by himself next time. It was a thought he’d never had before in all the time he’d been with Vanessa, and he felt somewhat guilty.

“Not likely,” said Vanessa, grinning.

“I’m sorry,” said the waitress in the butter-coloured dress. She stood next to the table holding a nearly full pot of coffee in her hand.

“I said it’s not likely. Not likely that we’ll, as you say, ‘come again.’” There was no hint of sarcasm in Vanessa’s voice, no timbre of cruelty or superiority of any kind. She was, in her mind, simply stating a fact.

The waitress raised her dark eyebrows and looked over at Phil.

Phil smiled and put his hand on his wife’s hand.

Vanessa calmly moved her hand away from her husband. She gathered up her purse and scooted out of the booth and took a step towards the waitress. “Can I ask you what you think of Veterans

Day?" She tilted her head a bit, the way a dog sometimes does.

"What I think of it?"

"Yes, it's not a proper holiday is it?" Vanessa was smiling now, as if she and the waitress were in the midst of a friendly conversation. To an observer they might have been discussing a wonderful place they'd both visited.

"Veterans Day. Let's see. Well, some people—a lot of people—get a day off from work for it, so, to me, that sort of makes it a proper holiday. If you get a day off for it it's a holiday in my book." She chuckled nervously.

"*You* didn't get the day off, though, did you?"

"But I don't get *any* holidays off—except Christmas Day." She looked at Phil again, shrugged her shoulders and let out a short burst of laughter.

"Come on, dear," said Phil. "We need to hit the road." He grabbed his wife's elbow.

"Valentine's Day," said Vanessa, as she turned to go with her husband. "Also not a proper holiday. No one even gets a day off for Valentine's Day."

"That's true, dear," said Phil. He held the door open for his wife and looked in, watched the waitress named Judith walk away into the kitchen. There was a healthy lightness about her, he thought, as he turned to close the door. That's what he missed.

Vanessa had stopped to wait for Phil. She stood on the sidewalk, purse in hand, smiling vaguely at a young family walking up toward the entrance. "They look nice and happy, don't they, Phil?" Phil told her they did and he walked with her to the passenger side of the car and opened the door for her. "I might be losing my mind," she said, "but I can spot a happy person when I see him." Phil shut the door, walked slowly to the driver side, and got in.

The Fly

Jennifer Elizabeth Saunders

There's a fly in my kitchen, I can't see him
but I can hear him.

Buzzing and flying and pitching on things,
crawling around on my half eaten tuna
sandwich on whole wheat - like it just hit
the fucking jackpot.

Doing shit that a fly must do.

If I had the energy I'd swat him off his little
fly legs and squat him into oblivion.

I am still not fully awake from my benzo
induced coma last night, so I put up with
the buzzing - right goddamn next to my ear.

Fuck you fly and all your little fly friends,
someday your ass is MINE.

I got a rejection email today from a lit jour-
nal. I guess we now live in a world where
paper correspondence is obsolete.

This makes me sad. It would be more per-
sonable to be told my writing sucks with a
goddamn real letter, one that I can hold in
my hands and turn over and squeeze and
sniff.

Hold the envelope up to the kitchen light to
see if I can make out the words before I am
brave enough to break its perfect seal.

Tangible repudiation.

After playing with the crisp white envelope

Jennifer Elizabeth Saunders hails from Bishop's Falls Newfoundland, Canada. She has been a poet since the age of 8, and derives inspiration from the beautiful chaos she sees in the world around her. She is the mother of two, a self-proclaimed punk rock princess and a connoisseur of beat culture. Her literary inspirations include Kurt Vonnegut, Charles Bukowski, Hunter S. Thompson and the Beat Generation writers. She is eternally stuck in the 90's with a 1940's flair and can be reached at jennifer_elizabeth_saunders@hotmail.com

Her work has been recently published for the first time in the online literary journal *Anderbo*.

Why we chose it:

How could we NOT include this poem in an issue entitled "Oxymorons"? What greater paradox than a lit magazine publishing a piece about rejection from a lit magazine? Or wait, maybe that's irony? Wow we really need to crack open those English textbooks gathering dust in the corner

hand addressed to me, mauling it until sweat from my fingertips makes the paper damp, I rip it open allowing it to spill its hidden contents like I had spilled my guts a few weeks ago to the author of this very letter.

"Dear writer, we are sorry we are unable to use your submissions at this time, as we receive a large number of submissions each month and only publish a few."

Well fuck you! You pompous bunch of pretentious cretins!!!!

I gave you my guts, my blood, my sweat on pretty paper with fancy script and all I get in return is some generic electronic memo you send out to all the losers like me who dream too big.

My fist is clenched so tight I can see my veins shining through the red skin pulled taut, pale blue and prominent. I open my fist and inside my hand is mister fly, scrunched into a tiny ball, a black dot, no more shiny wings, no more little fly feet, no more bulging eyes.

Just a small black ball of fly guts stuck to the palm of my sweaty hand. I wash the remnants of mister fly off my hands in the kitchen sink, watching his life being sucked down the drain adrift in soapy bubbles that smell like green apples. Yup, time for another benzo coma.

This is What Happens When Gaiman Stays Over

G. J. Schear

I murdered God last night.

He crept into my room around four o'clock just after I'd fallen asleep. When Gaiman visits, we always stay up late, just to be on the safe side.

I woke with a jump and clubbed your man, God, over the head with my copy of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* and down He went.

It was His own fault. You'd think He'd know better than to creep up on a guy, what with him being the Supreme Wotsit and all.

In my defence, I didn't know it was Him until I sat up and turned on the light. He was lying face down in a puddle of ectoplasm.

There was no help for it. He was a goner.

Despite the ruckus, Gaiman never woke up. I could hear him through the wall snoring in an English accent.

Bastard. Things like this always happen when Gaiman comes to stay. Last time it was a group of drunken vampires in the back garden singing *Volare* 'til all hours.

I figured there wasn't much I could do about a dead deity until morning so I picked my *Complete Works of William Shakespeare* up off the floor and wiped it down. There was dead-God goo all over *Titus Andronicus*.

I got back into bed and was just about to turn out the light when a couple of angels drifted down from the ceiling. They hovered over the bookcase looking down at the Corpus Dominus.

"Bugger," Gabriel said. "Now how are we going to get a job? You know what work

G.J. Schear is a novelist and short story writer. She was born in Dublin and currently lives in Kells. That's right. The Book place. What better place for a writer to live? She is a past winner of the Irish Writers' Novel Fair (2012) and has published several short stories in a variety of literary journals in Ireland and the US. Her articles have appeared in Writers Digest and Writers Forum and her debut novel "A Biased Judgement: The Sherlock Holmes Diaries 1897" was released in October, 2014 by MX Publishing. You can find it on Amazon.com

Why we chose it:

How did Geri know that the way into our cold shrivelled hearts is through Neil Gaiman? Someone's been doing their homework. We love the surreal weirdness of this little gem and hope Neil gets to see it himself one day.

there is for angels these days?"

"We'll have to join the damn circus," Raphael said. "Or go work for the other place..."

"Hell?" I said.

"Hollywood."

The two angels exchanged a look that I wasn't supposed to understand then swooped down and picked up the Almighty by the lapels of His pin-striped suit and dragged Him upwards.

"Serves Him right," I said. "Doesn't He know pinstripes went out with the ark?"

The angels hissed at me and then vanished into the ceiling. I put my *Complete Works of William Shakespeare* back on my bedside table.

It'll stay there until Gaiman goes home.

Ear Worm

Words by Gráinne O'Brien, Art by Ray McIlroy

Gráinne had always longed for the invention of something that could read her mind, and do the writing work for her.

On the day the critter arrived she let him dive into her ear cavity without hesitation.



From that moment, her brain was useless, but her writing was extraordinary.

Gráinne O'Brien is known for her love of many things, but mostly academics and Harry Potter. Graduated from University of Limerick with a BA in English and History, and an MA in Gender Culture and Society, she has spent the last six years bouncing between conference organising, office managing, fiction writing, academic writing, and blogging. She has been published academically several times. Oh, and she's one of the co-founders and editors of this very magazine!

Ray McIlroy is a rake about town who draws sometimes when given the appropriate subject matter due to his personal lack of inspiration.

Why we chose it:

Alex has known Ray for some time through their involvement in the mysterious international redhead cartel. A few months back, over a drink or twelve, she found out that Ray is secretly a fantastic artist and immediately started badgering him to submit something. He agreed (probably to shut her up), but only if he could illustrate some fiction. Luckily Gráinne had the perfect little slice of weird waiting in the wings. The result is something magical!

Thank you for reading Issue Five:
'Oxymorons'

Submissions for Issue Six: 'Frostbitten' will
open on Sept 21st, 2015

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Creativity Worth Consuming

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Confessions from the back page:
I just don't really care for crackers all that much.