

SILVER APPLES MAGAZINE

MODERN MYTHOLOGIES

ISSUE 1





Published By:
Silver Apples Magazine
Gráinne O'Brien and Alex Dunne

Collection © Silver Apples Magazine 2014
All authors retain the rights to their own work.

Cover Design By:
Hannah Deacon
Follow her at Twitter @Hannah_Etc

Logo Design By:
Hannah Eagle

Published in the Republic of Ireland

Silver Apples Magazine

Modern Mythologies

Issue One, May 2014

Creativity Worth Consuming

Gráinne and Alex would like to dedicate the first issue of this soon-to-be world famous magazine to themselves. Because they deserve it and it's their magazine so they can do what they want.

Alex: "Want to make any other dedications Gráinne?"

Gráinne: "Nope."

Contents

<i>Letter from the Editors</i> Gráinne O'Brien and Alex Dunne	7
<i>Centaur</i> JD DeHart	8
<i>Horse</i> Katy Jensen	9
<i>Jim's Daughter</i> Catherine Olohan	10
<i>Hephaestus Puts Down his Hammer, Steps Away from the Anvil-Block</i> Deborah Herman	16
<i>The Fox Kiss</i> Máiréad Casey	17
<i>The Space Between the Snow</i> Rachael de Moravia	20
<i>Human Studies</i> Jeremy Szal	28
<i>There Are No Stars in the Sky & The Circle</i> Bart Van Goethem	30
<i>I Was Your Golem</i> Simon Lewis	31
<i>Letters to Aunt Sophie</i> Dan Lambert	32
<i>Snatchers</i> Hannah Eagle	36
<i>The Bone Necklace</i> Rebecca Parfitt	37
<i>Married to a Carrot</i> Frances Gapper	41
<i>Modern Myth #37 - A Problem in the Bedroom Department</i> Colm Liddy	42

<i>Persephone</i> Nadia Gativa	46
<i>The Done Thing</i> Deirdre Moran	47
<i>That Time of my Life</i> Judy Devine	49
<i>Arctic Dreams</i> Máire Morrissey-Cummins	51
<i>Psych Consult #63</i> Andrew Tejada	52
<i>Terzanelle: Farewell Miss Saigon</i> Shari Jo LeKane-Yentumi	55
<i>Stormy Beach Night</i> Matthew Rochester	56
<i>Cerulean</i> Mícheál McCann	57
<i>Sweet Dreams</i> James Holden	58
<i>Cadaver, or What Else</i> Jillian M. Phillips	61
<i>The Oldest Industry in the Galaxy</i> Susanna Crossman	62
<i>Ogre of the Ojito Wilderness</i> Matthew J. Barbour	67
<i>Poems from Mystes</i> Matthieu Baumier	69
<i>Catchfools City</i> Alex Dunne	71
Silver Apples Magazine Presents... <i>The Beginning—Stork Inc. Prologue</i> Brian Grace	75

Letter from the Editors:

In which we introduce our magazine with all the wit and charm we can muster

Gráinne O'Brien and Alex Dunne

Dear Friends,

Welcome the inaugural issue of the soon-to-be world famous Silver Apples Magazine. If you are reading this letter, you are a contributing author, have purchased this E-Zine via our Pay What You Want service, or have been emailed an illegal free copy by a friend or family member. Which ever option applies to you, we hope you enjoy this issue. (We hope those of you who actually paid for it enjoy it more though. We're petty like that.)

We are sure you have many questions. What is Silver Apples Magazine all about? Where did the idea come from? Who are Alex and I? What is the meaning of life? Sadly, I can only answer the first three for you.

Silver Apples Magazine started out as a vanity project. Alex and I met on day one when we arrived at the University of Limerick, to study English and History, a career choice which has opened doors you would not BELIEVE. Granted, those were mostly the doors to retail and office work, but what we did, we did with creative flair and flourish. Frustrated with what we viewed as a lack of opportunity in a country struggling to find its way after a crushing recession, we decided to create our own, while dragging a select group of writers, photographers, artists, and friends along the way.

Not only did we want to create a platform for new artists to be published alongside established ones, we wanted to create something that reflected our personalities. Something with a sense of humour that artists could contribute to, confident in the knowledge that we love what we do, and have fun doing it. This attitude not only makes the whole project more appealing to us and helps us maintain our enthusiasm and do our best work, it also attracts unique artists who are doing their best work.

This first issue is just a preview of things to come. In the next few months you will see special issues, sister publications and competitions (for actual prizes you guys!), all created under the umbrella of Silver Apples Magazine.

And now kind reader, continue onto the wonder that is Issue One: Modern Mythologies, and always remember that creativity is worth consuming.

Centaur

JD DeHart

JD DeHart is editor of the Mount Parable website. His work has appeared in a variety of journals, including The Commonline Journal and Eye On Life Magazine, and he has work forthcoming in Straight Forward. He has two poem collections available on Amazon (Decaf Days and Sunrise of Tomorrow). He blogs at spinrockreader.blogspot.com.

*Why we chose this piece:
It's centaurs. In a trailer park.
Centaur. Trailer Park.
Enough said.*

Seriously though, we both loved Centaur and thought this extremely clever poem was perfect to kick off this issue.

The once proud centaurs now reside
Together in a trailer park in the east
Part of town, that section so famous
For arguments in the front yards
Occasional gunshots

Inside the house, you will find meth
Cooking on the stove in the place
Of meat or vegetables, and the nuptials
Are replaced in back rooms with
Unspeakable acts

I wonder about these centaurs, the species
That was once half-horse, how could they be
Leveled to such a lower tier of life
Forced out of their homelands, trudging through
Elements, now defeated, watching game shows

A once valiant breed now so unstable
(pun intended)
Listless, complacent, barely neighing
When offered economic carrots, just give us
Our cigarettes, they say, ordering the number
Of cartons by stamping their hooves.

Horse

Katy Jensen



Katy Jensen lives in California with her family. This photo is an ornament from her mantle piece combined with a Christmas light. Gráinne begged her to submit it to Silver Apples Magazine and we were thrilled when she did.

Why we chose this piece:

This image was sort of solicited by Gráinne. She found hanging on the wall in the apartment of a very close friend of hers who mentioned her mother had taken it. Simply titled 'Horse' this image captures everything we wanted for this magazine. It reflects the theme, the fun, and the colour we hope to give you in every issue, and we are very grateful to be able to include it.

Jim's Daughter

Catherine Olohan

Catherine Olohan, is a seventeen-year-old girl who loves to write. She currently lives with her ten brothers and sisters in Warrenton, Virginia.

Why we chose this piece:

We loved Jim's Daughter from our first read and were even more impressed when we discovered Catherine's age. Catherine has a great future in writing and we think Jim's Daughter demonstrates some real potential. Plus anyone who finds time and space to write with ten siblings deserves some respect!

It all began one evening in April, 1896. He had been going through the ledger when he heard someone clear their throat. He turned around to find himself face to face with the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Years later, he would marvel that he had not realized sooner that big blue eyes like that could do nothing but cause trouble. For a moment he thought she was a vision. He coughed and stood to greet her, "May I help you, Miss?"

Her wide eyes grew earnest. She leaned forward and rested a pair of delicate elbows clad in brown calico on the counter.

"Are you the owner of the bank?" She asked, laying her tattered hand bag on the counter.

"Yes, Miss. Horace Burkham, at your service." He answered, tearing his eyes away from her hypnotizing face to glance her up and down. Certainly not a potential customer, her tattered clothes said as much.

The girl paused as though unsure of herself, "My name is Elaine Sinclair." Her voice trembled, "My father Jim--Jim Sinclair, was a school pal of yours back in Kentucky."

"Jim Sinclair?" Horace's normally grim face brightened as he laughed. "Yes, I remember him! He was a devil. The things we used to do together..." He stopped, noticing her distressed face. "Well, well, and how is he?"

"He's gone." She said, tears rising to her eyes. "He was killed in a logging accident last fall."

"Oh." Horace sobered and glanced at the girl out of the corner of his eye. "Oh. I'm sorry to hear that. He was a good friend of mine."

"He told me to come find you after his death." She continued with hesitation. "He said that, if anyone would help his child, it would be you."

Horace nodded. "Well, he was never the best

at making friends.” He said drily, and then, noting the pain on her face, cleared his throat and continued, “Well, young lady, how might I be of help? Where is your mother?”

“She died shortly after I was born.” She wet her lips. “You see, sir, I—I was hoping for a—a job.” She looked pained, as if the humiliation of the request was almost too much to bear.

“A job?” He repeated, frowning. He had not expected this. “How old are you?”

“Twenty-two.” She answered steadily, looking at him sideways underneath a pair of long, thick eyelashes.

“Hm.” He grunted. “More like nineteen.” Horace leaned across the counter and gently took the girl’s hand in his, “Tell me, how bad is it really my dear? I can remember what a fool Jim was about money.”

Her lips trembled and she looked down at her hands where her fingers laced and unlaced themselves nervously. “I haven’t eaten since I took the train yesterday morning.”

“Good grief, girl!” Horace looked at her with disbelief. “Not really?”

She nodded wearily, suddenly looking very young and childlike.

“This won’t do.” He grumbled, reaching for his jacket. “Now, come with me, Miss Sinclair.”

“Where?” She raised her head, looking a little frightened.

“It’s alright.” He reassured her. “I have a lovely wife at home who would love to have you for company—and we have plenty to eat besides. We’ll take my carriage; it’s just down the way.”

She turned to follow him, her ragged handbag dragging across the counter, then stopped and began to sway. “Mr.—Burkham...” She stretched out a hand towards him and then sank to the floor.

Horace prided himself on keeping his head in any situation, but where beautiful, blue-eyed, fainting females were concerned, he was utterly helpless. He gave her one look, and then rushed from the room, yelling for his secretary.

At first, she wasn’t a bit of trouble. She arrived promptly at meal times, played with the baby until it followed her around with crows of “El, El”, and kept Mrs. Burkham company. Sometimes the maid shocked the sweet, placid Mrs. Burkham with reports of “dear Elaine” playing loud, rollicking tunes on the piano - “Nothing like what a young lady should play, miss!” - but for the most part she was pleasant and brought laughter and cheer to the household.

Then one morning at breakfast, she took up the old issue: "Mr. Burkham, please, I think it is time I started earning my keep."

"Nonsense, my dear." He stirred his coffee, preoccupied with his morning paper. "You 'earn your keep' as you say, by keeping Mrs. Burkham Company."

"But, Mr. Burkham," She said earnestly, wiping her lips delicately on her napkin. "I feel so out of place and uncomfortable. Word has not gotten around about my staying with you yet, but when it does, everyone will think I am—I am...oh, Mr. Burkham, you can imagine. If I was working, it wouldn't be like that at all. I do wish you would consider it."

"It's out of the question." He answered good humouredly. "Miss Sinclair, no one will think poorly of you at all. Maybe back in Kentucky they would, but not here."

"No, Mr. Burkham, you don't understand. They certainly will, and they would be right, too. Here I am, living with the family of my father's old friend, not deserving this lovely life any more than one of those beggars on the street. I am tired of being a charity child."

He put down his paper. "Miss Sinclair," He said kindly. "You are not, and never will be, a charity child. You—"

"Mr. Burkham, if you will not give me work, I will have to go find it somewhere else." She cut him off sharply. Her usually sweet face suddenly looked ugly and contorted, and Mrs. Burkham's heart contracted as she realized the poor girl was probably trying to hold back the tears.

Horace started, but she continued to gaze at him steadily. "Well...it's highly irregular..." he stammered. She did not lower her gaze. "I suppose I could take you on in the afternoon as a...clerk?"

Her face lit up like the sky after a storm. "Oh, thank you Mr. Burkham! I don't care how much I get paid, I just want to be of use."

Her happiness was so contagious that Horace smiled himself. He really had not noticed how blue her eyes were. And after all, she was a smart girl. Maybe it was not such a bad idea after all.

Before, she had been constantly in the house, but now she was exposed to society. Mr. Burkham was constantly asked about his pretty young companion who helped him at the bank, and he was acutely aware that he was suddenly the subject of gossip at all the respectable dinner tables in the city.

The rich young men of the city could not, it seemed, get enough of Elaine. Often, when he arrived home, Mrs. Burkham would greet him with a twinkle in her eye and the whisper: "Elaine is with a new admirer in the parlour."

She was rarely in the house anymore but spent her days visiting new friends, shopping, attending plays, and going to parties. Mrs. Burkham watched her with the pride of an older sister, and Horace hinted at her giving up her job

at the bank to devote more time to her social activities.

Through it all, she laughed at him, patted him affectionately on the cheek, and refused to listen. “Nonsense.” She would answer, revolving in front of the mirror where Mrs. Burkham was pinning up a bunch of her curls with an ornate clip. “I still need to earn my keep. Besides, what would you do without me?”

Horace shook his head. He had never seen such a girl.

One morning, he pulled aside Mrs. Burkham with the anxious whisper, “My dear, I think Elaine paints!”

Mrs. Burkham started, whispering back, “Why ever would you say such a thing?”

“This morning the baby kissed her and got milk on her face. And, and right here,” he pointed to his cheek dramatically, “there was a brown mark, a mole I think. I’d never seen it before. She gave the baby to Hannah and went upstairs. When she came down, the mole was gone.”

“My dear.” Mrs. Burkham laughed, waving her hand. “What of it? Many young girls do nowadays. If I had an awful mole or some such thing on my cheek, I’m sure I would cover it up. Now, don’t be silly, Horace.”

At the bank, she was quick with numbers. Horace came almost to depend on her. Despite the gossip, he found it refreshing to be able to leave the bank open during dinner hours while she took care of affairs and handled customers for him. To be sure, it was highly irregular, but as his wife said, what of it?

The number of young men visiting their home became, according to Horace, “almost intolerable, my dear Mrs. Burkham, almost intolerable.” They were some of the finest young men in the city though, and he found some pride in that.

The bank’s business became more and more profitable; partly, he suspected, because the customers appreciated the chance to get to know the beautiful, wide-eyed Miss Sinclair. At any rate, his spirits soared. When his partner came back from a visit to Boston, he greeted him with exuberant reports and praiseworthy account books.

“You know, James.” He told his partner smilingly, as he toyed with his watch. “It’s funny how things work out. As a boy, I stayed in Kentucky for my health. In my school, there was one little boy who was always getting into trouble—and getting me into trouble. He stole money and wooden pistols, that sort of thing. No one would play with him except for me. I was whipped for it many a time. I remember I once stood up for Jim when our teacher sought to punish him, and he said he could never repay me. Well,” He chuckled, “Well, now he has. He sent his beautiful daughter to bring in business for me.”

“Strange the way things turn out.” James smiled, shaking his head as he lit his cigar.

Horace laughed and reached for a cigar. “The way my mother used to nag at me for hanging about with ‘that Sinclair boy’...”

“Sinclair?” James interrupted. “Did you say Sinclair, from Kentucky?”

“You know him?”

“I’ve heard of a Jim Sinclair.” He shook out his match. “He’s a no-good sort. He robbed a bank back in March, and made off with about five thousand dollars.”

“Back in March? Well, you must have the wrong man! Jim Sinclair died last fall. Logging accident.”

James frowned. “I’m certain I saw a write-up about him in the newspaper. He was raised in Kentucky, it said.”

“But--that’s preposterous! Elaine said--oh, the poor girl. The scoundrel must have run off and left her destitute and she was probably too ashamed to admit it.”

“Miss Sinclair is his daughter, you say? The article stated he had never married so she couldn’t be legitimate.”

“The poor girl.” Horace stared at the stub of his cigar with distaste. “Well, I must be off. Mrs. Burkham is probably waiting for me for supper.”

The butler helped Horace out of his coat and he walked into the dining room. Mrs. Burkham stood and kissed his cheek. “Where is Elaine?” He asked, noting her empty chair.

“Why, out at the theater, dear. That charming young man took her. The one with the—well, the one with the nice way of moving his mouth when he speaks.”

“a woman robbing a bank...there’s just something so inherently wrong with it!”

“I have no idea who you are talking about.” He sat down. “My dear—”

“Well, I have an interesting bit of news!” She said, cutting across him. “There was a hold up in March, up in Boston. A really terrible story actually. Some man from Kentucky robbed the bank with a *female accomplice*. What do you think of that?”

“Really my dear, you are the progressive one, insisting that Elaine keep her little job at the bank.” He said, keeping an eye on the servant pouring his wine.

“Yes, but at least that is honest work. Now, a woman *robbing a bank...* that’s just—well, there’s just something so inherently wrong with it! Then there was a funny thing. The man’s name was Jim Sinclair; the same as our Elaine’s father. He wasn’t married though, or else I’d start to wonder about dear Elaine.”

Horace steadied himself by taking a large sip of wine. “My dear, I have something to I need tell you about that—”

She continued, oblivious to her husband’s words, “Neither of them was caught, either. They both disappeared—vanished! But they are looking for them.

They think the girl will be easier to find, though because she has some awful mark, it said, on her right cheek. Something like a boil or a mole.”

Horace choked, almost spitting wine all over the table. “What did you say?”

She looked startled. “Why—“

The butler tapped his arm. “Sir, a letter just delivered from the bank. Mr. James Melworth sent it over with instructions that you read it right away, and asked that you forgive his opening it.” Horace tore his gaze from his wife and fixed it on the letter.

“It’s not addressed in his handwriting.”

“No, sir.” The butler answered. “He said he did not write it, it was left on your desk. He also said you might care to come down to the bank when you were finished.”

Beads of sweat broke out on Horace’s forehead. He unfolded the letter and began to read. Upon reaching the end, he swore violently and tossed the note to the floor. “Martin, call my carriage, immediately! No—no—never mind, I’ll walk. Just leave me alone!” He cried as he stood from the table and rushed out of the room.

“What on earth?” Mrs. Burkham rose and picked up the letter. She opened it and read it with pursed lips.

My dear Mr. Burkham,

I take pen in hand to write you a quick note of thanks for all your kindness during the past three months. I have really had a marvellous time here; a time that I will never forget. Please give Mrs. Burkham my regards; she has been a wonderful companion.

I do wish that circumstances had not prevented my stay from being longer, but I had a deadline to meet. Of course, as a businessman, you will understand that.

I hope you will not mind my borrowing a little money from the bank. It comes in handy these days, you know.

Please give my love to Henry, and all the other little geese that followed me around during my visit. What a pity I couldn’t stay longer!

*With my regards and Jim Sinclair’s,
Annie Miller, or to you, Elaine Sinclair*

Hephaestus Puts Down his Hammer, Steps Away from the Anvil-Block

Deborah Herman

Deborah Herman is an emerging poet from the Greater Toronto area. She has been published in Existere, Transverse, and anthologized by The Nashwaak Review and Silver Birch Press' Noir Erasure Issue.

Why we chose this piece:

Heff-eff-fa-fa? Hes-if-feh-tah? Our inability to pronounce it aside, we recognise that this is a beautiful tribute to a father retiring after a lifetime of labour. We found it incredibly moving.

My father retired last year,
working forty years at the same job
with little to show for it.
A gold coin with the company insignia on it,
a certificate in the closet,
a stopped watch.

The retirement party
grabbed promotional swag
secretively from the supply room:
a model kit, the exact replica
of the freight line's airplane;
a coffee mug, a card
signed by almost everyone.

The cake had the company's navy blue logo
embossed in inedible candy, the anchor and the railroad tie
drawn on in icing with confetti-sprinkles.

More fitting would have been an anvil-block,
crucible, fire-tongs, and hammer.

Forty years he toiled like Hephaestus in a dark cubicle
workshop
as the gods called in orders on the phone.

Supporting an ungrateful wife, building
a golden palace with his own two hands.

I remember the nights after dinner
when he would fall asleep at the supper table,
his breath bellowing from his lungs.

Or after his surgeries when I heard his crutches
clanging against the banister of the staircase
as he dragged his lame leg to bed each night.

The Fox Kiss

Máiréad Casey

There are thoughts that niggle the back of the brain, gnawing away parasitically, until we give them due attention. Pervasive but barely noticeable, like lines of a prayer, learned by rote in early childhood. A moment of reprimand at the office can deliver one right back to the Lilliputian desk at school, eyes wide, arms tense as the old chant repeats “You must not cry; you cannot cry here.” It could be that these memories, analysed, unlock mysteries to our motivations, to who we really are. Conversely, the exercise could be entirely futile, like examining a single frame of the kaleidoscope, offering little to no insight to the bigger picture.

“You must not cry; you cannot cry here.”

I do not know the name of the production only that it appeared to have a rural setting. Tree branches encircled the stage like the yawning jaws of a forest beast. An apple and a hunting knife lay idle at the foreground of this pastoral scene. A man and a young woman occupied that space. The man was my father. I do not know the woman. It seemed to have been a romance and he played his part with gusto, donning a wooden mask as he made his amorous offerings. The mask looked like a fox’s face and covered his eyes, nose and cheeks, leaving his weak chin and crowded teeth as the only means of knowing that the man inside was still indeed my father.

The woman was less convincing. Her nymphet form was shrouded in a sheer gown of shimmering white and trimmed with goose feathers. I whispered to my mother beside me when I realised the woman was naked underneath. She shushed me. My father had made a commitment to be the man on the platform and it was our duty as the audience to honour the performance.

I saw some familiar faces in our number: friends of my parents, the woman who ran the local shop, the

Máiréad Casey is a writer of short fiction who aspires to become a writer of increasingly longer fiction. She has been published in The Attic, Fullstop online journal and Steve Berman's anthology, "Where Thy Dark Eye Glances: The Queering of Edgar Allan Poe." She likes woodland creatures, Shirley Jackson and Adventure Time.

Why we chose this piece:

While we are huge fans of whimsy and laughter, we definitely have a darker side and The Fox Kiss spoke to that. We love the tone of this piece. It demonstrates how a child's memory can be distorted through fear and misunderstanding making them an unreliable narrator. Did she really witness the play? We'll never know, and that is pretty scary.

priest from the parish over, all stared on with clenched fists or perhaps a pensive thumb and pointing finger at their chin.

A piercing cry returned my gaze to developments on stage. The play appeared to have changed genre during my inattention as the girl was now tied to a tree on stage-right. Later in my childhood I would accompany Father to an abattoir; cattle there were strung and hung upside-down so when the blade sliced their bovine throats all the blood drained from the body. These recollections are married in my mind; both bear the spectacle of a victim bound and betrayed.

I should mention that in earlier repetitions of this scene with the girl and the tree I had thought her to be mute or stunned incapable of speech. I now wonder if her blubbering cries were uttered in some other language. I never heard her speak before this sudden and unfortunate turn of events.

She stood frozen in anxious trepidation as my father raised the snout of his *aghaidh fidil* to plant a kiss on her tear-moistened lips. There was a muffled yelp of pain and when he removed his mouth from hers, she coughed and dribbled thick crimson down her chin. Father triumphantly spat a chunk of bloody meat into the crowd. The stunt was met with bemused laughter and appreciative clapping. I think this was due to some clever ad-libbing on his part to a story they already knew; these were the first sounds of reaction throughout the show. In a way, I too instinctively knew that a climax was soon approaching.

“Father triumphantly spat a chunk of bloody meat into the crowd. The stunt was met with bemused laughter and appreciative clapping.”

Father reached for the apple and serrated hunting knife that awaited him patiently in the foreground from the beginning. He juggled the two inexpertly as he stalked toward to the young woman who spluttered her incomprehensible protestations. She began to dash the back of her skull into the tree-bark with manic fervour, perhaps hoping to render herself unconscious before his approach. He caught her by the hair and, with auburn locks twined around his fingers, held her still. He forced her to open her mouth wide and jammed the apple between her teeth. I cried out. It sounded like she was choking. When he again raised the hunting knife, he dug the long, taloned nails of his left hand into the creamy flesh of her hips, steadying her flailing torso. He drove the knife into her small, sparrow-like breast, stilling her once and for all.

There was an awful, reverent silence.

Then glorious, uproarious applause.

Everyone moved to standing ovation as my father bowed. My mother whistled encouragement with tears in her eyes.

After much chitchat and fervent post-performance discussion we made to exit the rustic theatre. I remember looking back once more as we filed out, seeing that the young woman remained on stage, tied to her prop, and her head hung forward, and the bloodied apple fell from her lips, rolling solemnly into centre-stage.

That's all I have. Throughout the years I tried to broach the troubling recollection with my parents. Well, to my mother - my father is not the sort of man to venture into conversation easily. Attempts have been met with curt dismissal, "Your father was never in any play," and "We never should have brought you there, you were too young to understand."

I had been satisfied once to hear the excessively long nails on my father's left hand, the only detail that remains consistent with the memory, were "remnants of a past-life as a classical guitarist." I have yet to see my father pick up a guitar, but I have seen him, in a quiet moment in the kitchen, practice tossing a small red apple and knife with a jagged blade.

The Space Between the Snow

Rachael de Moravia

CAST:

HÉLÈNE: Female, early forties, petite. Thin, due to extended period in zero gravity. Short, dark hair. Wears a French flag on her white sleep-suit. There is a photo of her with her young son taped on the panel next to where she is sleeping.

THE COMMANDER: Male, mid-fifties. American military buzz-cut hair style, salt and pepper grey, bushy moustache. Thin and gaunt, due to lack of sleep and extended period in zero gravity. Has a southern US accent and wears an American Flag on his spacesuit.

SERGEI: Male, mid-thirties. Thin, but he has retained some of his previous strength and is tall, broad and muscular. He has neat blond hair, a Russian accent, and wears a Russian flag on his spacesuit.

SCENE: The set is curved glass all around but open towards the audience. Beyond the glass is dark. During the course of the drama a bright light (source unknown but we assume it is the sun as we are in orbit) moves slowly from the right to the left, reaching this position as the drama draws to a close.

Inside are abstract metal panels with wiring, lights and switches. There are several cylindrical metal containers strapped to the panels.

HÉLÈNE is sleeping peacefully and strapped upright to a panel in a space sleeping bag. The light is dimmed over her. It is lighter where THE COMMANDER and SERGEI are talking. They are agitated, hurriedly securing the lid on a metal canister and strapping it to a panel.

COMMANDER
Bloody Russians!

SERGEI
If I had a rouble for every time you said...

COMMANDER
I bet JFK would be turning in his grave if he knew NASA was up here, sharing technology with you lot.

SERGEI
The Cold War's over, Sir. We have a new enemy in our midst.

COMMANDER

Yes, yes. And as for Little Miss European Space Agency over there.

[he nods in the direction of Hélène]

SERGEI

Commander, she has more degrees than you and I put together.
She's the best science officer I've worked with.

COMMANDER

Shut it, Sergei.

SERGEI

Sir.

[They work in silence and finish securing the cylinders. They walk around inspecting the all the panels.]

SERGEI

They'll figure out what happened eventually. It'll all be on the data recorders.

COMMANDER

If they ever find them.

SERGEI

They're monitoring us now, Sir. [Goes to panel and flicks some switches] They'll be ... We should have heard from them by now.

COMMANDER

We're in a black spot, Sergei. I had to power down. We're just out of satellite range for another few minutes.

SERGEI

Sir?

[Pause. The Commander ignores Sergei, but he insists.]

SERGEI

Sir?

COMMANDER

[sighs]

We have to make a few decisions before we're back in contact [he

glances at Hélène].

SERGEI

It was an accident, Sir. I was just checking the contents. I didn't know the pressure would've...

COMMANDER

A stupid, stupid mistake. This is my mission. I should've checked everything myself.

SERGEI

We're a team. We do everything together, right? [Pause] Commander?

[Pause]

COMMANDER

No. Not now, Sergei.

[The Commander continues to inspect the panels. Then he walks up to where Hélène is sleeping and stands in front of her. He looks closely at her sleeping face. He raises his hand as if he is going to stroke her cheek but changes his mind. Sergei approaches but the Commander puts his arm out to block his way.]

COMMANDER

We can't tell her.

SERGEI

She has to know.

[Pause]

SERGEI

Give her a chance to say goodbye. If not for her, then for the kid. Let him say goodbye to his mother.

COMMANDER

No, we can't do that.

SERGEI

We have to, Sir.

COMMANDER

No, he'd blame himself.

SERGEI

He wouldn't think that.

[Pause. The Commander walks away from H el ene and strokes the instrument panels. Sergei continues to look at her.]

SERGEI

He wouldn't think that, would he? Would he, Sir?

COMMANDER

[angry] What would she say to him? Eh? Thanks to you, we'll never make it home? He'll have to live with the guilt for the rest of his life.

SERGEI

She doesn't have to explain it. She could say there's been an incident, an electronic fault. [pause] Something. [pause] Anything.

COMMANDER

Whatever she tells him, control will be listening. There'll be investigations. It'll all come out, eventually. And he will feel the blame, believe me.

[The Commander takes Sergei by the shoulders and grips him tightly. Sergei is visibly taken aback by the sudden physical contact.]

COMMANDER

If we keep it between us, we can spare her and the kid. It's only a matter of time. She won't figure it out until it's too late.

[H EL ENE stirs in her sleep. We think she is going to wake but she settles]

SERGEI

Haven't got long 'til she's on shift.

They walk around picking imperceptible specks out of the panels and carefully placing them in sealed bags. They work in silence but when they get to H el ene they resume the conversation.

COMMANDER

[quietly]

She looks so peaceful. What a waste.

[Pause. They back away from her slowly]

SERGEI

Would you have said goodbye to anyone, Sir?

COMMANDER

No. No-one left for me down there. You?

SERGEI

I would've liked to see my parents again, and my girl in Moscow. But they teach you emotional detachment at the Academy. You say goodbye when you walk through the doors.

COMMANDER

Does that work? Emotional detachment?

SERGEI

[laughs]

I don't know.

COMMANDER

[laughs]

[Pause]

SERGEI

You never married, Sir?

COMMANDER

Only to NASA. And to the freedom that being a single man brings.
[sighs]

SERGEI

I never asked about your parents. We've been here for four months and I never once asked about your parents.

COMMANDER

Don't feel too bad, I never asked about yours.

[Pause]

SERGEI

Where are they, Sir?

COMMANDER

What? [Looks around]

SERGEI
Your parents.

COMMANDER
Ah! Now there's a question. Their car came off the road on the way to my graduation. They drove all the way from Sweetwater, Texas. A real shit-hole of a hometown, like living in a fucking glass bubble. No way out, except on a scholarship.

[Pause]

I told them they didn't have to come, but they insisted. They were so proud. I wanted to make them proud, and it killed them.

SERGEI
Sir...

COMMANDER
Don't.

They sit down on the floor either side of the canister they secured earlier and stare at it. They seem resigned.

COMMANDER
How long was our last orbit, Sergei?

SERGEI
Ninety-three minutes exactly, Sir.

COMMANDER
And before that?

SERGEI
Ninety-three minutes, Sir. That's our optimum orbit for efficiency.

COMMANDER
And before...

SERGEI
Ninety-two minutes and fifty-eight seconds. [smiles]

COMMANDER
And what's the distance from the earth to the sun?

SERGEI

School-boy question, Sir.

COMMANDER

How many, Sergei?

SERGEI

Ninety-three million miles.

COMMANDER

Do you believe in coincidences?

SERGEI

No, Sir, everything can be explained.

COMMANDER

Can it? Can it all be explained away through numbers and equations?

SERGEI

You know it is. That's what we've been doing up here all this time. Recording the patterns, calculating the data. The earth's natural cycles, it's all a series of equations.

[Pause]

COMMANDER

If I had to take a guess, I reckon that snow globe smashed into ninety-three pieces. We should count them... [starts looking into the bags trying to count the specks]

SERGEI

[places a hand calmly on the Commander's shoulder] I don't think that's necessary, is it Sir?

[Pause]

SERGEI

I mean, we can't really know how many are scattered around, lodged into the circuits, sucked into the air vents.

COMMANDER

[Stands up, paces around, raises his voice] Rocket science, ha! All these highly-educated brains from expensive universities, and no one ever considered the pressure changes on board might shatter a boy's gift to his mother. Billions of dollars and fifty years of en-

gineering, blown apart by a snow globe.

[The alarm on HÉLÈNE's watch goes off. She wakes, smiles at THE COMMANDER and SERGEI and lets herself out of the sleeping bag. She walks towards them, and senses something is wrong. Sergei opens his mouth as if to speak.

The stage goes black and hundreds of shiny silver pieces of glitter, backlit by spotlights, flutter onto the stage and into the audience. The cast remain static; the stage resembles a giant snow globe. Silence.]

[Curtain]

Rachael de Moravia has written features for national newspapers, edited business and lifestyle magazines, and has worked as a broadcast journalist and presenter. She now writes fiction and poetry, and in 2013 was long-listed for the Lightship International Poetry Prize. You can visit Rachael at www.rachael-de-moravia.com or follow her on Twitter @Rachael_moravia.

Why we chose this piece:

The Space Between the Snow spoke to a secret desire we have both had to go to space. Or was it to be Russian.... I can't really remember. Either way, Rachael's stage direction and dialogue set up this story beautifully and will continue to affect you long after you are finished reading.

Human Studies

Jeremy Szal

Jeremy Szal is an 18 year old university student and inspiring novelist who spends far too much time reading twisted science fiction and fantasy and watching Game of Thrones. His fiction has appeared (or will appear) in Robot and Raygun, Blitz, Tharunka, AntipodeanSF, Every Day Fiction, Bewildering Stories, and Short-Story Me.

Why we chose this piece:

Human Studies is another example of our desire to encourage new, emerging talent. This quirky short story detailing an alien's observation of human behaviour made us laugh as well as rethink some things in our own lives (we really do eat a LOT). We hope it will do the same for you.

I knew that my study of the alien species known as *humans* would be an enlightening experience if nothing else. I sat down at my desk and drummed my fingers against the bolt glass table top, watching said subjects on my monitors. My partner had done a good job of placing surveillance drones in the humans' quarters. He even managed to place one in the room where humans took off their clothes and stood under a stream of hot water, rubbing themselves with nasty looking ointments.

I intended to record my thoughts and take notes immediately, but as always I became far too preoccupied with what I was seeing. I scratched my head, wondering why the course of human evolution had decided to leave their goods on the outside of their body – the place they were most vulnerable. Wasn't it difficult for the male species in particular to have their bits dangling free like that? I discovered the reasons why later on when observing a human bedroom, where I noted they engaged in a strange ritual that I can only presume was their form of breeding. It seemed more of an enjoyable activity than a task. The humans would continue on and on before collapsing asleep, presumably exhausted from the task at hand. Why would they bother to perform such an activity if it made them tired? It was very puzzling. I knew I would have to look into this later on.

I watched as they conversed deeply about several topics, each of them more bland and inane than the last. My translators must have been faulty; they continuously made references to things that were utterly irrelevant. And the language they used was atrocious. I cringed as I listened to them use words that were beyond foul to describe such simple tasks. My, this was very strange. Even more strange than their references to some sort of deity. I decided I would have to do some additional research on this.

I observed as countless humans clawed their way through a crowd of more humans, shoving, nudging, and hissing at each other as they struggled to get ahead of the creature in front of them. It reminded me of the *draket* that scurries along the roads outside my quarters.

I put this behaviour down to “stress”, a state of being quite evident in humans during the early hours of the day when that glaring sun of theirs rose in the sky. I was astonished to discover that the place these humans were in such a hurry to arrive at was their place of employment. The specimens clearly detested their jobs, which mostly consisted of mundane activity, yet they would attend said workplaces for nine hours a day, five days a week (I still struggle to comprehend the confusing way in which humans measure time).

Most of this time consisted of them sitting on uncomfortable looking chairs, pounding away at primitive computing equipment. I barely managed to stop myself sniggering at the sight. Was *this* the best piece of machinery humans could produce? It looked like something a young hatchling could think up in mere seconds. I had to keep reminding myself that these were only humans. I couldn't expect too much from them. It was clear I had already overestimated their species.

There was another thing that perplexed me. I wasn't exactly an expert on human behaviour, but putting together their facial expressions and their brainwave signals, not to mention their choice of words, I gathered that they weren't very happy to be there. If they were going to spend so much time at work, wouldn't they choose to spend that precious time doing something they enjoyed, like that mating ritual I had witnessed?

“...for creatures so small, they were able to consume a lot of food.”

I started to think I was far less educated on the subject of humans than I thought myself to be. I scratched my mandibles nervously. This would not do at all. I would have to improve my knowledge on the matter if I was going to produce positive results for my studies. I only had the turn of five moons left until my report was due, and it was barely begun.

Not for the first time, I wished I had acquired some previous knowledge on humans before attempting to study them. Not that I was going to give up. It was far too fascinating, even if studying them was proving to be a daunting task.

The monitor to my right showed a swarm of humans sitting around small tables, shovelling discoloured, mushy food in their gaping mouths. It was almost too disgusting to watch them eat so much at such a fast rate. It suddenly occurred to me that for creatures so small, they were able to consume a lot of food. Interesting. Did this have anything to do with the polished basin that they'd sit on at least three times a day, groaning and making strange sounds? This was becoming even more revolting than their eccentric breeding rituals. It was almost too much for me, which said a lot, as I never backed away from an off-putting project.

I brought up some statistics concerning the humans on my monitor. I clicked my mandibles as I read the details. It seemed humans were capable of having more than a dozen or so offspring in their lifetime if they felt so inclined. Perhaps this was connected with their unparalleled joy in the act of breeding. This looked like it would be useful. It went into my files. Analysing the details of their anatomy would have to become a priority, but not right away. I'd seen enough. I glanced at the time, shocked at how late it was. My observations would have to wait for another day. I had more than enough data to ponder over as I slept. Perhaps the human need to reproduce would be a good start...

The Circle

Bart Van Goethem

Bart Van Goethem. Father. Copywriter. Drummer. Author of the self-published and sold out 'Life's too short for long stories', a collection of micro-fiction (2012). The one word story 'The Meaning of Life' was published in 'Scraps', the anthology for National Flash Fiction Day 2013 in the UK.

“You have almost reached our level of technology. Therefore we must wipe out your world.”

Why we chose this piece:

The reasoning behind why we chose these pieces will be longer than the two pieces combined. Well written flash fiction is much harder than it looks. In just a few words, Bart successfully demonstrates what good flash fiction does. It makes you think, makes you feel, and leaves you wanting more.

There are no Stars in the Sky

Bart Van Goethem

“Let me tell you a bedtime story,” my Dad said cheerfully, and I've never been the same since.

This story has appeared in the self-published collection, Life's too short for long stories (2012)

I was your Golem

Simon Lewis

I did not exist before you brought me
to life, whispering honeyed litanies
until I was yours. You took me
to Prague, drank lattes in *Slavia*,
climbed Petrin Hill and laughed
at the name of the Old-New Synagogue.

After our first fight on Narodni Street
outside the *Star Beads* jewellery store,
I cried until you clasped a chain
around my neck and we kissed. You swore
you'd never hurt me again, asked me
to move into your place in the city.

You gave me your credit card,
a mobile phone, nice new friends.
Some nights, you'd check my texts
before I went to bed, ask who I'd seen
that day and go quiet when I told you,
lumber to your office in the attic.

But I was strong, I didn't need
to tell you every time I left the house
and I grew to be the best con artist
when the need arose, until you found
a scrap of paper and dialled the digits,
hung up when a man's voice answered.

You chased me upstairs, shrieking
I was muck - spelled out all the things
you'd ever done for me before you broke
the lock, grabbed me by the neck,
plucked the name from out of my mouth
and turned me back to dust.

Simon Lewis, 35, lives in Carlow, Ireland where he works as the principal of a primary school. He has been published in a number of magazines including Skylight 47 and Boyne Berries. One of his pieces was published in the 2013 anthology, New Planet Cabaret, from New Island. He is currently working on his first collection of poems, which focus on the lives of immigrants to Ireland.

Why we chose this piece:

Simon's poem spoke to us right away. His evocative language and use of the Golem myth transported us straight onto the streets of Prague to bear witness to the end of an unhealthy relationship. (Of course we would have liked it even more if he'd actually sent us to Prague...hint hint future contributors...)

Letters to Aunt Sophie

Dan Lambert

Dan Lambert teaches English at California State University, Los Angeles, East Los Angeles College, and Colorado Technical University Online. His writing appears in anthologies such as *Flash It*, *An Island of Egrets*, *365 Bites of Flesh*, and *When Words Collide*. You can visit Dan online dan_lambert.homestead.com, danlamb23.livejournal.com, or via Twitter @ProfLambert.

Why we chose this piece:

This may shock you, but we are super nerds. I know. I know. How could you tell? Star Wars, Doctor. Who, Battlestar Galactica, Star Trek, Sherlock, Firefly (sniff), you name it, we have procrastinated and put off actual work by watching it. Then emailing each other about it. Dan's Letters to Aunt Sophie is a clever exchange that imagines a world where Sherlock Holmes and H.P Lovecraft could have met and argued over dinner. And that is something our nerdy little hearts loved.

13 June 1923

My Dear Aunt Sophie,

I cannot begin to express my gratitude at having received the brass elephant serving bowl you were so generous to confer upon me. It looks splendid in the centre of our dinner table. The bowl occasionally seems to move about of its own accord, but not to worry: Molly and the children find it a delightful experience to just sit and watch it move.

We had Dr. Adolphus Smythe over for tea, and I asked him what he thought of it. He too, found it to be a gorgeous piece. I asked him about the strange movements, and he said something about curses and Elder Signs and some nonsense about the "Return of the Old Gods". He is Dean of the Department of Medieval Metaphysics at Miskatonic University, and begged me to allow him to take the bowl back with him for testing. I explained to him that Molly and I could never let the piece out of our home. It is, after all, a reminder of your love and caring for us.

How is Uncle Alastair? I hope his wound from the Great War is not troubling him as much as it was last year.

Oh dear, I believe your gift is now hovering over the table. I must consult my appointment book and find Dr. Smythe's telephone number. Thank you again, Aunt Sophie! You are a veritable queen among women.

Glad Tidings and My Deepest Affection,

Your Loving Nephew,

Reginald

23 June 1923

My Dear Aunt Sophie,

I sincerely hope that you and Uncle Alastair are weather-

ing the summer heat in relative comfort. I am writing to update you on the brass elephant serving bowl you gave Molly and me for our anniversary. As you know, I observed the bowl move about our table under its own power. That was last week. For the past three mornings, our maidservant Nell has entered the dining room to find the bowl missing. Each morning, she eventually found the bowl on the hearth in the parlour. Every time she found it there she returned it to the dining room, only to find it back on the hearth the next morning. She did not tell us about the bowl until yesterday, fearing that we would call her a liar (or, worse, think her mad).

Aunt Sophie, Nell has been with us for more than five years. In that time, I have found her to be the very model of honesty. Besides, after witnessing the bowl move about the dinner table by itself with my own two eyes, I am not prepared to disbelieve the poor girl's account.

As you know from my last letter, we consulted Dr. Adolphus Smythe on the matter. I refused to allow Dr. Smythe to take the bowl back to Miskatonic University with him for testing. You and Uncle Alastair are dear to me, and I am not about to let your anniversary present to Molly and me leave these premises! Little did I know that Molly

"It seems that Molly's father has an old friend by the name of Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

had taken the liberty of calling in her own expert. It seems that Molly's father has an old friend by the name of Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Holmes is an elderly beekeeper from Great Britain who happens to be in New England on vacation. We had him and Dr. Smythe for dinner two nights ago, and they ignited a quarrel that I will not soon forget!

It started when Dr. Smythe introduced his theory that the bowl's odd behaviour is due to supernatural causes. He said the bowl is "haunted." Mr. Holmes proceeded to light up a pipe, and lambasted Dr. Smythe for what he called "intellectual laziness." Holmes accused Smythe of reaching for a supernatural explanation when the possibilities for a natural explanation have not yet been exhausted.

Dr. Smythe reacted to this by getting to his feet and angrily reminding Holmes that two distinguished gentlemen of Smythe's acquaintance have done substantive and unquestioned work on what they call "paranormal phenomena." One is a British writer named Arthur Conan Doyle. Another is a man of letters from Providence named Howard Philips Lovecraft.

Holmes took a puff on his pipe, and waved off Smythe's claims about the research performed by Doyle and Lovecraft. "My good man" he pontificated. "Any researcher who looks to supernatural causes rather than natural causes is a veritable sloth. I am familiar with both of these men, and their work is simple nonsense and tomfoolery. Doyle believes in fairies, and Lovecraft believes in giant green octopuses. I once investigated the case of a supposedly-haunted hound. The beast turned out to be a hungry dog slathered with luminescent paint. My dear Doctor, do you also believe the moon is made of cheese?"

At this, Smythe rapped his brass-encrusted cane on the dinner table and exclaimed, "Sir, you are a closed-minded John Bull! I, on the other hand, am a learned American researcher! Good day to you!" He then pulled on his coat and left our house.

Life at home has been anything but dull. The mystery of the elephant serving bowl remains. We are grateful to you and Uncle Alastair for the gift, but I am afraid it

has filled our home with questions. Will Mr. Holmes' strictly-scientific methods solve its riddle? If Holmes cannot solve the riddle, then who will?

I remain,
Your Humble and Loving Nephew,
Reginald

1 July 1923

Dear Aunt Sophie,

I hope that you and Uncle Alastair have weathered the recent unexpected rainfall without too much difficulty. Molly and I are doing quite well. We both want to thank you again for the generous anniversary gift. We want to assure you that the strange problems we have had with the brass elephant serving bowl you gave us do not reflect upon you at all. In fact, the problem may not be with the bowl itself!

Please allow me to explain. You do, of course, remember the incident in which the bowl eluded our maid (Nell) by disappearing from one room and reappearing in another. Soon thereafter, Nell claimed that she woke up in the middle of the night to find the bowl hovering over her bed. As you can imagine, neither Molly nor myself could believe such a thing, but knowing Nell to be a level-headed young woman, we did not dismiss her claim outright.

The strange part occurred the following evening. According to Nell, the bowl not only hovered above her bed, but the bas-relief elephant on the side of the bowl appeared to move and even speak. In a gruff voice, the elephant said something to Nell about "strange eons."

As you can imagine, Nell was inconsolable. She refused to sleep in the house, so we set up a cot for her on the covered porch. Well, the next night the bowl visited her again, and uttered something to her: a single word which sounds like "k-thul-hu." This was the end of the rope, so to speak, for Nell. I am afraid the poor girl is now in the care of Dr. Adolphus Smythe at the Miskatonic Asylum for the Insane in Arkham. Am I surprised to witness such hysterics? Not really. After all, Nell is a young woman, and an Irish Catholic at that. But she always seemed to be such a hard-working and efficient young lady. It troubles me now to think that Molly and I trusted her with Baby Alastair for so many months.

Speaking of Baby Ally, I must return to my original point: according to the latest expert we have retained to look into this business with the serving bowl, the problem is not with the bowl itself, but with the previous owner of our house. Dr. Smythe recommended that we speak with a writer from Providence named Howard Phillips Lovecraft, so we paid the train fare to have Mr. Lovecraft come out to the house.

Lovecraft is a mild-mannered gentleman with delicate features and intense eyes. He showed Molly and me the fruits of his research, and what he had to show us sent

"Am I surprised to witness such hysterics? Not really. After all, Nell is a young woman, and an Irish Catholic at that."

tingles down my spine. According to public records, the house where we now live was once owned by a man named Thomas Denyson. Denyson returned from the Great War without a face, and the locals referred to him as “the masked man.” He became more and more reclusive after the war, and the obvious scars he brought home with him from Europe apparently paled in comparison with the emotional scars.

“What does all this have to do with Baby Ally?” you might ask. It pains me to put pen to paper on this subject, Aunt Sophie, but I must tell you. Lovecraft showed me an old floor plan of our house, dated 1918. The floor plan contains rooms and chambers that Molly and I never dreamed existed here, including a basement library (with a secret staircase connecting it with the old hollow tree in front of the house), a dungeon, a lift, and a mausoleum.

I looked Mr. Lovecraft in the eyes just this afternoon. “What was the lift for?” I asked. Lovecraft looked intently at Molly, then at me. “The lift was designed to transport the children.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

Lovecraft leaned close. “Mr. and Mrs. Berryman, if you read the newspapers from 1918, you will find that Thomas Denyson was arrested, tried, and hanged for luring neighbourhood children into this house, taking them down to the mausoleum using the lift, and killing them there. He sacrificed children to his god, Cthulhu.”

Lovecraft stared more deeply into my eyes. “Mr. Berryman, the strange behaviour of your serving bowl is only the beginning. The spirit of Thomas Denyson is after your son. If we are to save young Alastair, you and I must venture down into the chambers under this house. Will you join me?”

I said yes, Aunt Sophie. What else could I say? Please pray for us.

I remain,
Your Humble Nephew,
Reginald

Snatchers

Hannah Eagle

Hannah Eagle is a freshman at Pacific Lutheran University. She is a mythology enthusiast and all around super nerd. We like her.

Why we chose this piece: Full disclosure. Hannah Eagle is the amazing artist who designed the Silver Apples Magazine logo for us. We were delighted to discover that Hannah is not only a talent graphic designer, but also a budding writer. Her poem Snatchers is a humorous take on the Greek myth of the Harpies and we just knew we had to include it.

The wind whips by in a sudden blast
Making the trees quake and bend with its force.
Voices screech in the wind
Snatching up delight with a call of devilish joy.
Dust kicked up and flowers uprooted,
They come in a whirlwind,
For birds of a feather flock together.
Crap, Harpies.

The Bone Necklace

Rebecca Parfitt

Let it be said that the scavenger will sometimes find treasure, and those who wander, collecting shells and driftwood along the dunes will sometimes find a coin, a plastic bottle, a tin plate and sometimes nothing more than some string or an old boot. What Cedar found on the beach that day was a little piece of treasure, or so he thought. A piece of treasure to give to his sweetheart, a token of his love, lost and found.

He found this gem lying next to three unmarked graves; simple wooden crosses sticking up at the edge of the dunes. At first he thought there was a small crater in the sand – a ridge where the wind had blown, or a damp mark where the tide had been. But on closer inspection he realized the large ring shape was not simply organic matter, but bone to be precise, that had been fashioned into a necklace with a snake’s body and head and two green gems for eyes. It was a beautiful creamy white colour and cool to the touch. On the underside of the belly was an inscription that he couldn’t quite read – dirt and sand had obscured the text.

Cedar had been on the beach, walking for about an hour and had seen no-one. He concluded the necklace had been lost, or washed up – travelled from some exotic country and landed in this remote stretch of the coastline, so he decided to take it, clean it up and give it to his sweetheart, Peppy.

When he got home he filled the sink and placed the necklace in the water. The green gems, brightened, flashed. He gently washed the bone and the dirt lifted and coloured the water a light brown. Now the inscription could be clearly read, and what it said, well, what it said made his heart jump and made the corners of his mouth turn into a broad smile. “This is perfect”, he said. “A perfect gift for my Peppy”.

He thought of the necklace against Peppy’s collarbone, her white skin illuminated by this article, and of her bone, underneath. The neck he longed to touch with the tips of his fingers. The necklace meant ‘forever’. She will be mine forever. One more day and I will give her this gift and oh, how she will be mine.

Rebecca Parfitt lives in Cardiff and works in publishing. She has had poems and short stories published widely in anthologies and magazines. A collection of her poems was shortlisted for the Cinnamon Press debut writing award. She is editor of 'The Ghastling' - a magazine devoted to ghost stories and the macabre.

Why we chose this piece:

From our first reading, we both realised The Bone Necklace was something special. The more we read it, the more it grew on us, (and the more adverse we grew to wearing jewellery. Seriously, is this necklace pinching or is it just me??) The Bone Necklace is a really clever short story that builds tension throughout. Rebecca has created a character for us to sympathise with, and one for us to hate. I won't spoil the ending for you, but once having read it, I think we can all agree, they had it coming.

He placed the newly cleaned necklace on his bedside table and turned out the light. He fell into a deep sleep. The sea air always made him tired, the perfect antidote for restlessness. In the distance the waves were gently breaking against the shore - what wonders would they bring tomorrow? Or the next day, surely. But he already had the pinnacle of his finds, the thing which still lay on his bedside table.

He was woken in the middle of the night with the feeling of something, not clawing exactly, but gripping at his hand. At first it was the comforting sensation of something gently wrapping itself around his wrist, a small hand taking his, perhaps? But it grew tighter and he awoke to the feeling of constriction. For a short while he lay in the darkness wondering if he was still dreaming or if sleep paralysis had taken over him,

“He rubbed his finger across the underbelly, the inscription. He lifted the necklace as though to place it around his own neck, then stopped.”

until he started up and the sensation eased away. He reached for the lamp on his bedside table and switched it on. But there was nothing unusual, nothing untoward. He glanced at the necklace which was still as he placed it, at his bedside. He picked it up, the circular shape hinged, splitting into two semi-circles at the mouth. The bone felt warm - body temperature - almost supple. He had heard that bone would expand and contract ever so slightly at the

change of temperature. He rubbed his finger across the underbelly, the inscription. He lifted the necklace as though to place it around his own neck, then stopped. No, he thought, I should save it for Peppy, my sweetheart. After a while, he slipped back into sleep, waking in the morning believing he had dreamt the whole thing.

Peppy was returning during the afternoon that same day. She had something on her mind, something she urgently wanted to say and there was no easy way to go about it. Three more stops before the train arrived at the windswept, tide-beaten, tumbling village by the sea.

“Three o’clock”, she told Cedar, before she left. “My train arrives at three”. She pictured him at the platform, perhaps with flowers. He liked to bring her wild flowers picked from the hedgerows. The thought of him waiting for her made her shift uncomfortably in her seat. She clasped her bag. It’s just the way things go. She thought. There is nothing I can do.

As the train drew into the platform she saw him waiting. She couldn’t see any flowers. Thank God, she thought, that will make it easier. But it didn’t make it easier.

“My darling!” He called, waving at her. She smiled, but it was more like a grimace. He embraced her in his awkward way and took her suitcase.

Always awkward, she thought, irritated.

“I have something for you.”

“Oh, but -”

“Sh.” He interrupted. “I won’t take no for an answer and I have missed you so much.”

“I’ve only been gone a few days.” She snapped. Then softened her tone. “Yes, I’m sorry I couldn’t write. It was difficult -” She searched for the right words. “Well, I didn’t

get much time to myself.”

Cedar turned to her and said, “Well you look more beautiful than ever.”

“Thank you, I -” before she could finish, he said, “I have something for you.”

Oh God, she thought, Not, no, it’s too soon. And he, well, he had no money, he collected scrap and bits off the beach. He was no real match for her.

She walked up the hill to his small cottage in silence as he chattered away.

“Close your eyes.” He said, before she could even sit down in the dimly lit sitting room. She did as she was told. “Open your hands.” She stood like a blind beggar waiting. He momentarily left the room, calling back, “Whatever you do, don’t open your eyes.” She felt the strangest sensation across her palm - something was moving very slowly, sliding across her hands.

“Cedar, this isn’t funny.”

“Wait.” He said, “it’s a surprise - don’t spoil the surprise.”

“I don’t like it.”

“You haven’t seen it yet.” He was back in the room. “There.” He said. She felt the cold touch of bone across her hand. “Now open them.”

She opened her eyes and couldn’t quite believe what she saw. How could he afford something so utterly beautiful - enchanting, even. Well, perhaps we don’t need to have that conversation just yet, she thought, looking at the green gems which flashed and sparkled in the light.

“Gosh, it’s beautiful.” She leaned forward and pressed her lips against his, they parted, his tongue extended into her mouth. Snake-like, she thought, imagining that he had a forked tongue, long and slender. Maybe I could just stick with him a little longer. He removed the scarf from her neck, then kissed it, her collarbone, her chest. He whispered in her ear, “Let me put it on you.”

“Yes,” she replied. Almost unable to contain her desire to have it wrapped around her throat.

He undid the clasp and placed it around her neck. He closed the clasp, then stepped back to admire her. “It’s more beautiful than anything I have ever seen. I should like to see that and nothing else on you.”

She looked in the mirror. It was perfect. Her skin glowed against the creamy colour of the bone. She turned to him. “Would you like me to?” She asked, undoing her shirt buttons. Nothing else mattered, now that she had this wondrous article about her body. But as she undressed, she began to experience another, different sensation.

It was not something she enjoyed.

“My love,” she said. “It’s a little tight”.

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“I think it’s caught in my hair.”

He looked. “It seems fine to me.”

She felt uneasy. “I think I might take it off now.”

“No.” He said abruptly, “keep it on.”

“But it’s uncomfortable.”

“I want to see you wear it.” He glared at her.

She swallowed, "I really think -" a look of panic flashed across her face.

"My cherub," he said. Leaning forward, reaching for the buckle on her belt. "Let me see you before you take it off, please?"

Her hands lifted to her throat, clasped the necklace. "It's choking me!" she cried.

"My sweet, it's not a real snake - stop messing around!"

But she was not. Her face went red, then purple, she pulled at the necklace making rasping sounds and collapsed at his feet. The necklace could not be moved or broken. It should be said, she had not noticed the inscription, in her haste to wear the thing. It read:

Place this around the neck of your sweetheart and pray they will never be released.

Years later, a gentleman, whose name I don't recall, was walking along the beach. The wind crept up, as it does around these parts. Sand scudding in low clouds across the surface. He stopped at the little plot by the dunes - there were four unmarked graves. He stood awhile by them, then something caught his eye, a circular shape in the sand. "Oh look," he said aloud to no-one in particular, "it's a snake."

Married to a Carrot

Frances Gapper

Quite by mistake she'd thrown her wedding ring on the compost heap with some vegetable peelings and it turned up sixteen years later, encircling a fresh young carrot. How wonderful, cried her neighbours and the world's media. From the carrot's point of view, however, things seemed less great. It had considered itself bound in marriage, but now it turned out the woman already had a husband. Also it disliked the flashing cameras, the harsh daylight, the stupid laughter. Depressed, it wilted and withered. Thrown on the compost heap, it lay meditating on love and loss, and making up little poems.

Frances Gapper's flash fiction booklet The Tiny Key was published by Sylph Editions in 2009 and her story collection Absent Kisses by Diva Books in 2002. Other stories are in The Moth Summer 2013, Cactus Heart 6.5 and two issues of Plymouth University's Short Fiction.

Why we chose this piece:

Image the scene. The quiet room, the clicking of keyboard keys, the soft bubbling of a kettle boiling in the background. The peace is broken by sudden and uncontrollable giggling.

'Married to a Carrot again?'

Sigh, 'Yeah.'

It's flash, it's hilarious, and we can't stop laughing.

Modern Myth #37— A Problem in the Bedroom Department

Colm Liddy

HUSBAND is sitting up in bed.

WIFE enters and gets in alongside him. He switches off the overhead light.

She switches it back on and now has a book open to read.

He switches light off.

She switches it back on, reads the book and keeps her hand on the switch as HUSBAND reaches for it.

Foiled, he instead puts his hand on her knee and leans close.

HUSBAND

I think you've forgotten that it's Thursday night. Y'know our...

WIFE

(frowning)

Oh...yeah. So it is.

HUSBAND

Well?

WIFE

(Closing book with a sigh)

Alright. Let's just-

HUSBAND

Get on with it? That's hardly the right attitude. On the night we're supposed to be trying something new.

WIFE

What?!

HUSBAND

Yes. You said yourself last week that next time we should shake things up a bit. Not just the same old same old.

WIFE

I did? After how many glasses of wine exactly?

HUSBAND

Aaaah. Four, I think. LIDL's finest. You agreed we had to be a bit more adventurous. Try something other than the tried and tested.

WIFE

Something sordid, you mean.

HUSBAND

No!

WIFE

Sick and twisted?

HUSBAND

No!

WIFE

Painful?

HUSBAND

Look, I told you already. It's not like that. I've read loads of comments on the Internet and it's not just men, women enjoy it too.

WIFE

(raising eyebrow)

I sincerely doubt that.

HUSBAND

Well...Damien's wife for instance. I had a chat with Damo yesterday and it seems she's really into it.

WIFE

You actually discussed this with Damien?!

HUSBAND

Sure. And a few other lads at soccer. In fact, nearly every other couple we know have

WIFE

(interrupting)

A few other lads at soccer? How is this something you even talk about? Oh...what's the use...how long is it going to take?

HUSBAND

About...49 minutes. But there's no point if you're going to wear

that pained expression throughout.

WIFE shakes her head, sighs and drops her book onto the floor. Turns to him.

HUSBAND

Or worse still, close your eyes and drift off to sleep just as we're getting to the climax. Your snoring can sometimes, believe it or not, be slightly off-putting.

WIFE

(with exaggerated put-on smile)

Absolutely not, dearest darling! Totally won over by your arguments, I am now filled with joyous anticipation of the delights which await me in the next 49 minutes.

HUSBAND

Good.

HUSBAND takes his hand off WIFE's knee and slides it under the quilt beside her. Then his other hand too.

There are moments of rummaging as WIFE grimaces.

The hands re-emerge holding a pair of remotes, DVD and television. He points both forward and presses buttons.

WIFE

So let me get this straight. It's about this guy Dexter who's a semi-autistic, serial killer obsessed with blood?

HUSBAND

Correct.

WIFE

Remind me why we can't just watch an episode of 'Criminal Minds'?

HUSBAND

Because we've seen every episode and the next season is not out on DVD yet. According to Amazon it'll be released in three weeks.

WIFE

Or CSI: New York? You know I love that.

HUSBAND

Likewise. Season 9 box set is only available in the US.

WIFE

Then CSI: Las Vegas. There's no Horatio but...

HUSBAND

October.

WIFE

O...kay.

HUSBAND

(Switching off the light)

Just give this Dexter thing a chance. Damo's wife gave it 5 stars.

WIFE

(switching back on the light and putting her hand under quilt on-
to HUSBAND's lap)

I really don't want to watch this. Let's forget about TV tonight and
instead have some acrobatic sex?

HUSBAND shakes head, he presses play firmly on the DVD remote and reaches up to
switch off the light.

Colm Liddy is the author of two books published by Penguin. He also mucks around with writing songs and little plays, drawing cartoons and animated films, training the local under 12 hurling team and making tea. You name it, he can do a half-baked version of it. Visit his website at www.colmliddy.com

Why we chose this piece:

This piece is the first of three we received on the idea of the marriage myth. Colm's play is a brilliant commentary on modern marriages, with an unexpected and hilarious twist at the end. We can only hope conversations like this are going on all over the world in the bedrooms of people who have been married for years.

Persephone 2

Nadia Gativa



Nadia Gativa is a Russian born Dublin based part-time artist, dancer, photographer, writer, video editor, theatre enthusiast, jogger, cat & coffee lover, book devourer and drama student. Visit her website at www.nadiagativa.com

Why we chose this piece:

Nadia's use of light and colour really jump off the page. We're both fans of Greek mythology and were fascinated by Gativa's choice to focus on Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter who was abducted by Hades and brought to the underworld. The picture is both beautiful and haunting.

The Done Thing

Deirdre Moran

I don't think it's really me anymore. Nothing I do really feels like me. It wasn't supposed to change anything, just formalise it. It would make things easier for both of us. Just a formula, that's all. It's 7am now and I should be on my way to work, but I'm standing here glittering at myself in the mirror. Maybe I should ask them to tone down the glitter, nobody will recognise me. In for a dime, in a dollar, or something like that. That's what Lisa'd say.

There's a soft knock on the door and I stiffly turn, just my neck. My mother stares at me apologetically. I know she's in on it too. I grimace back at her but she chooses to see a nervous smile and retreats. Everyone is afraid of me today. I'm afraid of me.

Next it's my hair, scraped back to show off my cheekbones. It's the done thing. I look like a starved horse. A starved horse with glittering eyes. I do love him. I'm sure I must love him, I just don't remember anymore. I'll definitely love the baby though.

Another grimace, another pat on the knee. I would nearly be at work now, no I'd be there. Drinking a coffee, well tea these days. No more sneaky puffs of Sarah's sexy skinny fags on the way in. There's nothing sexy about that white monstrosity hanging from the curtain rail. I'm going to look like one of those poisonous puff mushrooms that we were warned to stay away from when we were kids. We used to kick them and run off in case we inhaled any fatal killer spores. I had sleepless nights back then imagining that those spores were eating me from the inside out. I was so afraid, terrified.

I'm trembling. I wish I had a sister. I always wanted one. Sarah complains about her sister all the time but I'm jealous. I love my brothers but it's not the same. James has been in to see me already. I know what he thinks, but he's sure he's hiding it. And I know he's right too. Lisa is due back in a few minutes. Lisa takes care of everything these days. I wish I cared. I want to refuse to wear dusky pink nail polish. It's actually not that bad, I'm just not sure why it's dusky.

"9.30 already."

"Time flies when you're having fun!" a typical Lisa

Deirdre Moran, aged 31, lives in Kildare. When she's not working she spends most of her spare time writing and gardening on an allotment in her native Kildare. She read a piece at Flash Bulbs, the Dublin event which celebrated National Flash Fiction Day 2013, and had two pieces chosen to be read at the Big Smoke Winter Literary Cafe 2013.

Why we chose this piece:

On the marriage myth, Deirdre beautifully challenges the idea that the day of her wedding is the happiest in a woman's life. Are her doubts justified or simply wedding jitters?

response.

I didn't realise she was back, or that I was talking to myself. She'll put it down to nerves and I'll let her. Oh God there's actually a photographer behind her and he's taking photos of my shoes. They are hideous and I'm sure I'll never want to see them again after the pain they will cause me. I suppose it's the done thing, isn't it?

"I'm starting to sound like them. Maybe I always sounded like them. Yet again I'm not really sure."

I'm starting to sound like them. Maybe I always sounded like them. Yet again I'm not really sure. I miss Steve. Nothing he says anymore sounds like him. My Steve would never have stepped up to it or took it like a man. He didn't need to. We should leave. I reach for my phone but Lisa has moved it slightly out of my reach. My outstretched hand catches her eye and mine too - is it really my arm? It doesn't look like mine. It's fleshy and weak.

"Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?"

Of course I am you bitch. I twitch my mouth back at her and she beams at me. Delighted to have caught me out.

"Don't be bothering my bro, you'll see him soon enough."

At noon I was hooked up and twirled and spun into the car and there was nothing I could do. James asked me if I was ready.

"Ready for what?"

He wasn't expecting that, he just squeezed my hand.

That Time of my Life

Judy Devine

It's night-time and the room is still very warm following a lovely sunny summer's day. Yet my husband, in bed beside me, is wearing a woolly hat and long-sleeved top, the bed covers pulled tightly around his shoulders and tucked under his chin. In contrast, I am lying on top of the covers, wearing only a short-sleeved cotton nightie. A large round fan on a stand is positioned close beside me, humming gently as it blows cool air directly onto my face.

A pint glass and litre jug of water sit on my bedside table, to be drunk during the night. I will wake many times and make several visits to the bathroom. Once or twice, returning to bed from one of these visits, I may try turning off the fan, feeling guilty that the cool breeze it creates is causing my husband to feel cold in the middle of summer. He never complains, nor asks me to turn it off; believing, or perhaps hoping, that it will only be for a short while. It doesn't last though, leaving the fan off I mean. After a couple of minutes I can stand it no longer and will switch it back on and move my face even closer.

I only discovered the bliss of this fan last year and it was a wonderful revelation after years of leaning out the window in the middle of the night, or heading downstairs to stick my face in the freezer for a minute or two seeking relief from the heat.

I like sleeping like spoons, usually my front to his back. Or at least I used to, before this. Not a chance now though. Lying close to each other, even without touching, is not always possible either. I feel like I am lying beside a hot oven with the door open (sorry love!) After only a few seconds the heat becomes over-powering and I have to move away, throw the covers off and turn my face towards the fan, my new best friend.

Sometimes I wake, shivering, to discover that my nightie is so wet with sweat that I can almost wring water from it. When this happens I take it off, turn the fan off too, and snuggle up to my husband while I warm up. All too quickly however the snuggle is over and I have to move away, push the covers off again and turn the fan

Judy Devine is 50-something, happily married with a wonderful adult son. She loves all animals, horses and dogs especially, and is privileged to share her life and home with both. She enjoys the countryside and is not a city person. Writing is a hobby and she has never previously been published.

Why we chose this piece:

Judy's creative non-fiction piece blows apart some myths about the female aging process. It is both light-hearted and serious and we are delighted to include it as our first work of creative non-fiction.

back on. Sometimes I put a foam pillow standing on its side between us up by our heads, like a partition, to try and stop the cool air blowing onto him. I don't remember this scenario ever being discussed at our pre-marriage classes, all those years ago.

Going out to dinner, or out anywhere really, presents its own challenges, always dressing in loose-fitting cool clothing, be it summer or winter. Any jacket over the top (or fleece as I like to wear) must have a zip down the front, never a pullover, so that it can be slipped off quickly and quietly when necessary... and slipped on again... and off... and on again... hopefully without drawing too much attention to the spectacle.

It is easy to spot a friend, or indeed any other woman in the vicinity, in the same position as I. Occasionally a small hand-held fan will be produced from a handbag, and held, as discreetly as possible, in front of her face for a minute or two. Or a menu, brochure or any suitable makeshift fan that she

“It is easy to spot a friend, or indeed any other woman in the vicinity, in the same position as I. Occasionally a small hand-held fan will be produced from a handbag, and held, as discreetly as possible, in front of her face for a minute or two.”

can quickly lay her hands on, will be waved to and fro across her face. If women wear glasses, as I do, I watch as the glasses slide down their nose on droplets of sweat, are pushed back up only to slide down again a few minutes later. Sometimes I will leave the restaurant or pub or friend's house, to stand outside in my baggy T-shirt or light-weight blouse relishing, especially in winter, the cold on my face and chest. Anything to stop the panicky feeling of not being able to cool down. A well-

meaning remark from a friend, usually male or younger female, is not uncommon. “Are you feeling OK, are you not cold?” I'll laugh it off as lightly as I can, “must be the wine” I'll say. Those who know that I do not drink may look at me quizzically but are always too polite to pursue the matter further.

If someone were to ask, and they never do, I would maybe equate the feeling to sitting in a hot sauna for hours and then, when you become so hot you cannot stand it any more, stepping out only to discover it is just as hot outside, there is no cold shower waiting and no way to escape the heat.

It is the butt of many a joke and I laughed along, still do, but it was easier to laugh when it was just a word and not my reality. I am told it will pass, and I live in hope that one day it will, but, seven years on and with no sign of it abating, I am slowly coming to the conclusion that this a myth, an outcome invented to make me, and others like me, feel better. Perhaps there is a secret women's club for 50-somethings that knows the truth...that these flushes, once established, never end. Perish the thought.

Arctic Dreams

Máire Morrissey-Cummins

In memory of my father

Snow white wings
of arctic terns, return
to feed in our winter fields.
The scent of birdsong
on the wind,
echoes from empty nests.

On this sleet morning
I flood my mind with summers past,
place a fleece blue sky
across a waxen dawn
willing winter warm.
I frame it with trees of fervent green
and fountains of glassy blue,

and in my dreams
I find you,
a large conch
in my upturned hands.

I bring you the sea,
a vast distance from the stars.

Máire Morrissey-Cummins lives in Greystones, Co. Wicklow, Ireland. She is writing since 2010 and has been published in A New Ulster, The First Cut, Wordlegs, Everyday-poets, Your Daily Poem, Bray Arts Journal, The Galway Review, A Hundred Gourds, Lynx and many other online and print magazines. She loves to get lost in words or paint. She is listed in the top 100 European creative Haiku writers for 2012 and 2013.

Why we chose this piece:

Sometimes a poem will speak to us in ways we can't quite describe and that was certainly the case here. Máire's words swept us up with their beauty and sentiment. A fitting tribute to her father. We're totally not crying by the way. We have allergies...yes...allergies. Sniff.

Psych Consult #63

Andrew Tejada

Andrew Tejada is an aspiring writer with a B.S. in Theatre. He grew up in Jamaica, Queens and exactly 45 minutes away from the Drama Bookshop. Andrew's influences range from Greek mythology to Athol Fugard and everything in between.

Why we chose this piece:

Andrew manipulated our love of all things mutant with this clever story exploring the after effects of nuclear fallout. We all like to think that we will end up with superpowers, but suffice it to say it would probably just kill us instantly. Wow. That got kind of dark kind of quickly... We should write children's books.

"Drop the rum, put on your cape, and go to work." I say to Hercules, who is slumped against the wall. He responds with glassy eyes and a dazed expression. It is going to be another one of those days.

I sigh and think back to when this all started. Ten years ago, I was a normal psychologist working at the Cranston Medical Centre. One day, that mad scientist, calling himself Cronus, announced on live TV that he wants to "rebuild Olympus". He then decided to "make Olympians" by launching a radioactive missile into Rhode Island. While thousands died in the explosion and fallout, around 200 souls made it out alive...with "gifts".

Most people with gifts enlisted voluntarily in the new Olympus branch of the FBI. The branch deals that with terrorist threats, natural disaster relief and, occasionally, unregistered "Olympians".

Some were "gifted" with horrible disfigurement. Others were given major boosts in IQ. And Hercules here got super strength.

Unfortunately, I think as I step towards Hercules, *Only the muscles got stronger.*

"Code name Hercules. Real name Michael—"

"No! I don't deserve that name." Hercules yells, his eyes wild.

I hold my ground and say, "Easy. I was just trying to connect with you. You. The human you."

Hercules tenses and screams, "The human me? *Michael* chose to go on a date that day. Chose to ignore the call. Chose—" he falls silent and his eyes get lost to the past.

I remember the day was speaking of. A twisted man held an elementary school for ransom. Forced all the adults out, but made the kids stay. There were 113 children from grades K-5 left in the school. Not a single one went home that day. Hercules arrived on the scene late, saw the aftermath and just howled. And when Hercules finished wailing, he called the agency and said, "I'm done." Now he resides in an alley two blocks away from an abandoned elementary school—unable to escape that day.

Hercules picks up the bottle and takes another swig. Time for a different approach. I walk around him and pick up his cape. The smell makes me retch and there is an unidentifiable stain. Holding the cape at arms' length, I say, "How about this? We go back to the office, get you a new cape, a warm meal and then, maybe, we can talk about your future."

"No."

"At least take a phone so that we know where you are."

"I don't think so."

"Come back and watch the game?"

"Not happening."

I throw the cape at Hercules' feet. Time for a different approach. "Look. You're Number 63, Hercules. You have assignments piling up. You are going to come back and do your duty."

A crazed look grows in his eyes and stares at me, making my head buzz with thoughts...and strategy. He extends his arm, the number 63 shimmering in the fading daylight and says, "What could you possibly understand about duty?"

I inhale and pull back my sleeve, revealing a gleaming number 6. As the shock registers on his face, I calmly say, "I'm not on the frontlines. I just get people back there. If you don't want to come back, that's fine. Obviously I can't force you." I turn my back on him and my brain clears up a bit.

I'm halfway out of the alley when he says, "Wait, What did the missile do to you?"

"Made me a pacifist." I respond.

When my joke doesn't diffuse the tension, I confess. "I hear voices, all the time."

"How do you live with that?"

"I just close my eyes until they go away." I say, fighting the urge to do just that.

"I do that too." Hercules responds, standing up. He's...taller than he looked in the videos. And as the fading sunlight illuminates him, he looks like a real he—

"Burrp." Hercules belches.

Well...he looks tall, anyway. "Please, at least take a phone. Just for emergencies. My code name is Tiresias." Hercules nods and I toss a spare cell phone in his direction. He catches it easily – I guess he still has the reflexes. Judging by Hercules' downcast eyes, he's still not ready. But he is curious.

"What's your gift?" He asks.

"That's classified." I respond, walking away.

"Why...why is it classified?" Hercules yells, trailing after me.

I stop, bracing myself for what comes next. I turn to face Hercules' blue eyes. I can almost hear the wailing, but ignore it and say, "My power is too terrifying for normal Olympians to handle."

Hercules shakes his head and says, "I'm not scared."

"Oh really?" I respond, chuckling slightly, "Then why are you here in this alley?"

"I failed, I'm just..."

"Scared to fail again? Your muscles may be big, but you can't hide behind them. I

see fear all over you.” I taunt.

“I am not scared!” Hercules bellows.

“Yes you are. You’re terrified to try again. And who knows?” I say, ready to land the killing blow, “There are more than 113 kids in the world. Maybe you can save one this time.”

Hercules bellows and his fist comes flying towards me. I drop away and to the left, sending his arm colliding into the brick wall. I shield myself from most of the rock fragments, but I feel one graze my cheek. I reach up to my face and feel a warm wetness. That, I didn’t see coming.

Hercules stares at me, dumbfounded. “I’ve never seen anyone avoid one of my punches before. How did you?”

I smile. “I have to get back to headquarters. See you there.” I tear my gaze from Hercules and walk out of the alley. My phone vibrates in my pocket. Unsurprisingly, it’s the agency.

“It’s a go. We’ll see Hercules soon. When? I don’t know, I can’t tell the future.” I say. I tuck the phone away and head towards my car, hoping for a more difficult mission on the horizon. Reading minds makes negotiating way too easy.

Terzanelle: Farewell Miss Saigon

Shari Jo LeKane-Yentumi

After all these fine years of treasures bygone,
the fleet pulls me back to the dungeonus sea.
I bid *sayonara*, and farewell, Miss Saigon.

“Return to the ship,” says the captain to me
the night before we were about to set sail;
the fleet pulls me back to the dungeonus sea.

And then there arose such a terrible gale
that had the crew worried for our success
the night before we were about to set sail.

We all came aboard with anxiety and stress
as the sky told the story of an angry storm
that had the crew worried for our success.

The wind blew the sails 'till they burst into form
while the ship rolled asunder on mounting waves
as the sky told the story of an angry storm.

We knew we were headed for watery graves
while the ship rolled asunder on mounting waves.
After all these fine years of treasures bygone,
I bid *sayonara*, and farewell, Miss Saigon.

Shari Jo LeKane-Yentumi lives in St. Louis, Missouri, where she writes poetry, prose, specializes in literary criticism and non-profit matters. She's written a novel in verse, *Poem to Follow*, and is compiling a poetry anthology, *Surviving Gracefully*. Shari's poetry has appeared in several literary magazines internationally and other poetry anthologies.

Why we chose this piece:

Avast matey! Hoist the main-sail and walk the plank with ye. Arrgghh! Ok, so maybe our dreams of sailing the seven seas as pirates and buccaneers is probably not going to happen anytime soon. But hey, we can dream. Shari's poem definitely stirs up some deep-seated childhood dreams of adventure, but also gives us a reality check...the sea is dangerous man!

Stormy Beach Night

Matthew Rochester



Matthew Rochester is a student at The University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He is an aspiring writer, double majoring in creative writing and film studies. He enjoys photography, nature, and magical realism.

Why we chose this piece:

The lights dancing across the sea reminded us of mysterious will-o-the-wisps...or maybe we've just had too much wine. Either way, there's no denying the beauty of the serene night-time landscape captured by Matthew here.

Cerulean

Mícheál McCann

The blue gems foam
Onto the shore, seeking solace.
Naught but Neptune observes
Their plight, as the cerulean crashes
Above Him.

A melancholy wail, laced with fear
Is answered by a whimper; the mother searches
for its babe through impenetrable sapphire.
Neptune is ruthless. He gives mercy not
To those unable to withstand
the blue.

He worries not, the plight of men.
Torn asunder by His vicious seas,
The ships which sink
To the sea bed, mere macabre décor.

And as the world shuts
Its eye, He rests not.

He loves not.

He gives naught.

Mícheál McCann (It's pronounced [me·hall] in case you were wondering) is a seventeen year old student from Northern Ireland. He has always had a vivid interest in English (and in particular poetry). He has always aspired to pursue a career down the avenue of writing (fingers crossed). Follow him on Twitter @mick_andsorts.

Why we chose this piece:

You know what? It's getting a little irritating that we managed to feature so many talented young writers and artists in this issue. I mean, when we were seventeen we were probably more interested in sitting on walls and drinking alcopops. Kudos Mícheál, you've very effectively shown us up!

Sweet Dreams

James Holden

James Holden has had several stories performed at the live fiction event Liars' League and his work has also appeared in a collection of short stories published by the Clerkenwell Writers' Asylum. He works in communications, and lives in a retirement village despite only being in his thirties.

Why we chose this piece:

We love a classic story with a modern twist, and Sweet Dreams will leave you unsure who to believe by the time you are finished reading this retelling of Hansel and Gretel. It will also make you crave gingerbread.

It was a nicer room that they ushered me into. Granted, there was the usual strip light flickering and humming above, and the bars served as a reminder for where I was. There was a lingering smell of bleach masked by air freshener. But there was a bunch of flowers on top of the filing cabinet, in a plastic vase of course, and gentle sunshine bathed the room. It was almost welcoming.

I sat down at the table, ran my hand over the Formica-topped table, and enjoyed the rare comfort provided by the padded chair. She walked in, an A4 pad of paper and pen in her hand. She was older than I thought she would be – you always imagine them to be young and naïve, prison psychologists. Do-gooding *Guardian* readers that'll let you off if you just tell them you were beaten as a child.

She introduced herself formally and I did the same. “Can I call you by your first name, Maud?” I was so used to be called HD6724 Smith by the staff that I wasn't sure what the protocol was so I just shrugged. “Excellent. I want you to know, Maud, that this is just a session to see how you're getting on. Nothing you say in this room will count against you at any stage in the future. I'm not saying we'll be best friends Maud, but think of me more as a confidante. I'm not here to judge.” I was going to ask if she would be writing anything down and whether it would end up on my file, but I hesitated and she ploughed on regardless.

She started by asking how I was getting on with life inside. I told her I'd expected more casual lesbianism after watching prison dramas on the TV. She looked up at me but didn't say anything, I think she wasn't sure if I was joking or not. How was I finding my roommate? Sharing a room with a murderer did scare me a little at night, though I was sleeping better than at first. She kept telling me she was innocent, but I didn't believe a bit of it.

“Do you expect people to take what you say at face value Maud?” Well, my case was different, I know I'm innocent. The press painted me as a complete demon. They said I was a witch, for fuck's sake. She nodded and raised

an eyebrow.

Then she started asking questions about my past. I told her how happy I had been growing up, which was true. No sob stories with me. Why would there be anyway – I'm innocent.

I knew it was coming but I was still surprised when she hit me with the question everyone always asked: "How did you end up living in a house made of gingerbread?" and I had to go right back to the beginning of the whole sorry saga.

I really rue the day I agreed to take my redundancy from the bakery factory in the form of gingerbread consignments – it was all they had left at the time. I wish I'd waited for the cash, now. There was none around at the time, though, and it didn't seem like it was going to be a problem. I thought maybe I could hawk it 'round the markets. But that was a bit of a non-starter in the end. The gingerbread sat in the garage at Mum and Dad's for a while and soon I had to move back home as I'd run out of money.

I watched a lot of TV. They always have those home makeover shows on during the daytime and it was that one on Channel Four that got me thinking – the one where people always try to make a house out of a tug boat, or just out of wood, or in an art deco style. Things like that. And I thought that perhaps I could make a house out of gingerbread. A real house out of gingerbread – I'd be able to open it as a tourist attraction and charge people to come and see inside. We found some land a farmer said I could use – we were going to put it up in a clearing just off the A1 so we were sure we'd get a good number of people.

Dad could see what I was trying to do and thought it could be a really good attraction. He agreed to invest some of his savings in the stuff other than the gingerbread we would need to build the house. He also helped me design and build it. We initially had a problem with the cooker; Dad was worried about the impact the heat would have on the icing sugar we were going to use as cement. I'll hold my hands up – in the end, the chimney was made of brick and that was always a regret. But I thought it would still be unique enough to be a sure-fire hit – the Yorkshire Post would surely want to do a feature on it for the 'What's On' section when it was finished.

Four months it took to complete. And it looked beautiful. I was really proud of some of the touches we'd put on it – there was a mock-balcony made out of Matchmakers and a candy-cane garden fence. As you approached, you could smell the sugar in the air, and a faint hint of cinnamon clung to your clothes if you'd been in there overnight.

I sat back in the chair smiling, and shut my eyes thinking about what it had looked like before those brats had got to it. And then slowly it all came back to me, my anger when I'd come back and found them eating the walls. They deserved bloody ASBOs! I blame the parents, letting kids run round like that eating other folk's homes, total abdication of their duties. Those kids were practically feral, though that never came out in court, of course. My defence weren't allowed to call the stepmother as a witness – she had the measure of them when she kicked them out.

I started sobbing and the psychologist magicked a tissue from somewhere for me to wipe my eyes. "Come on Maud, we're nearly there now." Patronising cow – if she'd have told me I still had issues to work through I'd have dragged her to the oven in the kitchens and actually turned it on this time.

I gathered my thoughts together and continued to tell the story. I'd been out to pick up the leaflets I was going to distribute 'round some tourist information offices for

an open day to get the ball rolling. As I came out of the woods I could see two children gnawing at the corner of my walls. They'd pulled a fencepost out and snapped a candy cane in half before abandoning it on the ground. I dropped the box of leaflets. I could feel my heart constricting, my breath getting short, taking in air so quickly I was almost panting. I shouted over to them and they looked panicked. They tried to make a run past me but I managed to catch them by the scruff of their necks and stop them in their tracks. I stood firm, keeping grip, legs like concrete blocks, stopping them from them running away.

"What do you think you're doing?" I shouted at them. They looked up at me, trying to put on innocent faces. The girl told me that their stepmother hadn't fed them for three days and tried to abandon them in the woods. I almost bought it. But then I looked around the garden and the front of the house - they'd ruined my livelihood.

"If you stop struggling and come inside we'll see what we can sort out for you." I could feel their bodies start to relax as we walked through to the kitchen. The instant we were in there I tried to shove them into the pantry cupboard so that I could lock the door and go get help. They started shouting and screaming really loudly and I nearly managed to get them inside, but I felt a strong hand on my wrist pulling my arm from the handle. I turned around and saw it was the wood cutter from next door. The kids started gabbing at once "Please-sir-can't-you-see-she-was-trying-to-kidnap-us!".

I'd never heard such rubbish in my life and so I stood there confidently, waiting for him to go and fetch the Police. He turned to me slowly and in a deep voice said "Livin' in a gingerbread 'ouse and kidnapping kids? Yerra fuckin' nutter!"

I stood shocked as he led them out of the house, gasping for air and trying to gain my composure - I was going to have to try and call the Police myself. I went outside to look at the damage done to the corner of the house and traced my finger up and down the rough edges their teeth had left. That was how they found me when they came to arrest me later.

I've come to the end of my story, and she looks at me across the table. "And if you had the chance to meet one of them today, what would you say to them?"

I have thought about this a lot lying on my bunk at night. I'm here as a result of them and their stupid lies - telling people I was trying to shove them into the oven! The woodcutter had seen me trying to detain them - the fact it wasn't inside an oven only seemed to be a moot point. The existence of the gingerbread house led the prosecution to dub me an "eccentric", which the tabloids twisted into me being a witch. They stitched me up good and proper!

I want to tell them about every indignity I've had since I came to prison, in detail - all the misery and the humiliation. But you can't say that to a prison psychologist can you, in case it ends up in your probation report or something. So I sit back and in a calm and even voice I say, "I have reflected a lot of the actions that led to me being here."

She nods. "And by that do you mean their actions or your actions?"

I feel my temper start to rise. "Theirs," I say, banging my hand on the desk. "Their actions. It was those little shits!" I feel myself start to lose control, she's standing up, and the vase from the filing cabinet is in my hand, water flying everywhere as I bang it on the table. Suddenly there's an alarm and I'm being wrestled to the ground by officers. And she's stood in the corner of the room, shaking her head and making notes.

Cadaver, or What Else

Jillian M. Phillips

You exist to me in pieces
An elbow
A calf muscle flexing like -----

A photo
Your beard tickling the lip of a bottle
Half a smile visible behind a blanket

A freckle
An ankle rotating
Drawing circles in a bathtub

Just this:
If I ripped the memory of you in half
A liver, verdant
A tendon, gristle on the side
of an empty plate

You have always been
A skinny waist
A scar
Misty Light Menthols
A tattered running shoe

Jillian M. Phillips is a poet from Northwestern Wisconsin. Her work has appeared in Heavy Feather Review, Cellar Door Anthology, and others. Her chapbook, Pretty the Ugly, was a finalist in the Emerge Literary Journal Chapbook Contest in 2013 and was published by ELJ Publications. Jillian is an MFA candidate at the University of Nebraska's MFA-in-Writing program.

*Why we chose this piece:
This poem managed to give the impression that dismembered body parts can be beautiful. How's that for talent?*

The Oldest Industry in the Galaxy

Susanna Crossman

Susanna Crossman taught herself to read at the age of three and a half and still devours books voraciously. She loves green tea, packing and unpacking her bags. Her fiction has recently appeared in Litro, Pygmy Giant and Glimmertrain. Her plays have been produced at the Festival Mythos, by the Cie VO (FR), Cie Cariole and work-shopped by the RSC. When she is not writing, she works internationally as a clinical drama-therapist, improvisational actress and lecturer (France, Botswana, Korea, Portugal, Germany, USA...). Her academic work has been published by Elsevier Masson, Frank&Timme, and Kangwong University Press. Follow her blog at <http://susanna-crossman.blogspot.fr/>

Why we chose this piece:

This story combines two of our great loves—cake and nineteenth century housewives traversing the galaxy as tiny dragons to act as kind of Jedi masters to disillusioned chefs (we're aware that these are incredibly specific loves to have but that's just how we roll). It's weird, it's entertaining, and we couldn't NOT include it. Now, can someone PLEASE make us a Tip-Top Cake?!

The first time Edwina Fray, TV cook and punk gourmet celebrity, saw the green dragon, it was sitting on her shocking-pink marbled kitchen work surface, next to a plate of French organic goats cheese.

“That smells awfully strong”, the dragon said, in a deep female voice with clipped pronunciation. It nodded towards the cheese, which had been matured in fermented vine leaves. The dragon was small and bright emerald-green with a beautifully spiked tail. Edie was short and curved with blond pin-up hair, seven tattoos and had Wicked Black Cab varnish on her nails. She glanced at the dragon as, from between its jaws, came a puff of smoke and an orange flame. Then, it disappeared.

As she returned to her dinner meeting to discuss her latest show “Edie Bakes Cakes”, she wondered whether too much cheese, overwork, alcohol, and a cocktail of pills and many late nights were provoking hallucinations or just making her fat and grumpy. Her black leather skirt was cutting into her waist. She went back to the dining room to her food photographer Elias Green, her TV producer, Helen Shoemaker, and her goddaughter, Flo. She thought that she must ask Poppy, her secretary, to book her a doctor’s appointment.

It was not until a week later, as she was about to drunkenly whisk egg white into her crepe batter, that the green dragon appeared for the second time. Edie had had a dreadful day, first bumping into her recently estranged husband Marcus buying ketchup in Harrods Food Hall, then breaking a black nail whilst getting into a taxi, only to find herself late for a radio interview after being stuck in traffic behind a demonstration of pig farmers.

“Bloody country bastard bumpkins”, she had almost shouted through the window, only remembering, in the nick of time, her supermarket campaign to buy local. In the advert, Edie was standing by a hay bale in wellington boots, wearing a fifties style headscarf, a tight black cocktail dress and bright red lipstick. Hideous.

The radio interview, to promote “Edie bakes Cakes” had initially been a great success; the interviewer had pronounced the retro Black Forest Gateau “Divine”

and the walnut, chilli and chocolate cake “Uber”. However, after the show, the producer’s assistant, who had eaten most of the cakes, had been violently sick in the toilets and was currently ill in bed with a very high fever. The word “salmonella” was being whispered in the corridors of Radio Four.

Eddie had grabbed another cab and headed home. She arrived in Primrose Hill in time for *aperitif* and consoled herself with Bellinis. Two hours later, having quaffed the greater part of a bottle of vintage French champagne mixed with Californian chilled peach juice and a sprinkle of Madagascan vanilla - her original addition to the classic cocktail - she had decided, nostalgically, to make crepes. She had been taught this recipe by her husband Marcus, when they had first been in love, late at night in the tiny kitchen of his minuscule flat off the posh end of the Kilburn High Road.

As Eddie added egg white to the batter, she was rudely interrupted by a loud female voice, “It’s no wonder your husband left if you make crepes like that,” said the dragon. It was sat, once again, on the shocking-pink marbled work surface. “Men are now well served in clubs, to compete with their attractions, you must be acquainted with the right cooking”.

“I kicked out my husband,” exclaimed Eddie with a Bellini-fuelled slur, “He did not leave me. I had to tell him to go, he insisted on eating white-sliced bread every morning. He wouldn’t even bite into my “Eddie Japanese Sushi Breakfast Bagels” with kale crisp sides, or wear the leather trousers I bought him for Christmas”. Eddie swung her whisk violently at the dragon. “Get. Out. Of. My. Kitchen. Reptile!”

“I can’t”, said the dragon, “I’ve been sent here by the Chief Dragon. I have to teach you how to cook one dish and then I can leave. That is my mission, that is the way, that is my destiny.”

“What?” whispered Eddie, sliding onto a chrome bar stool upholstered with purple skull-and-crossbone leather.

“I suppose I had better introduce myself,” continued the dragon, “My name is Isabella Beeton. Yes, my dear, the one who wrote Household Management in 1861.” Eddie was gawping - how could--what was--how come? The dragon continued, pacing up and down the pink marble, “I was once a great cook, an influential member of society. Now I am a dragon. This happens to the best of us. It may be your own fate one day”, the dragon smiled. “Now dear, I’ve been told to come and teach you how to make cakes. The Company of Dragons strives to uphold traditional cookery standards across the Universe; housekeeping is the oldest industry in the Galaxy. Statesmen may carve nations, we the cooks consolidate worlds. You have been a bad influence - your walnut, honey and curry cake with Korean kimchi icing has shocked the Company into action”.

Eddie blinked, “ But-“

“No buts dear” interrupted the dragon, “I am Isabella Beeton, one of the eldest and most-respected members of the Company of Dragons. I am here to teach you to make ‘Tip Top Cakes’. It is a simple recipe. I will tolerate no fussing or lateness. Punctuality and early rising are the secret of a successful home. I shall meet you in this kitchen at six sharp tomorrow morning”.

Then, the dragon was gone.

Slurping the last of her Bellinis and tipping her crepe batter down the sink, Eddie wondered whether she should ring Marcus, contact her photographer Elias Green, her TV producer Helen Shoemaker or her goddaughter Flo. Instead, she fell on her bed fully

-clothed, having set her alarm for five. She dreamed of a salmonella monster making delicious crepes from “Mrs Beeton’s Household Management”.

Unfortunately, the next morning Edie awoke at 5.45, hung-over, having missed the alarm. She stumbled from her bed still dressed in an olive-green cocktail dress and ran into the kitchen, smoothing down her blond hair and feeling rather ridiculous, why was she rushing for a dragon? She made a mental note to tell Poppy to book that doctor’s appointment.

“Now dear” said the green dragon, which was sat, once again, on the shocking-pink marbled work surface, “You may call me Mrs Beeton. I require an apron before the lesson commences. When at work, dress suitably”.

Edie handed the dragon a blue and white striped linen *tablier* from France. The dragon took it and it immediately shrank to the right size, secured around a spike on Mrs Beeton’s little emerald tail. “You will also need an apron,” insisted Mrs Beeton, the dragon. “Edwina dear, do hurry up, I don’t have much time. The Company of Dragons is extremely busy at present; we are highly concerned about the state of cookery in the Universe. I can’t even begin to tell you what is happening on the other planets. Did you know that on Mars, as we speak, someone is promoting chilled gooseberry sorbet in a fried cheese sandwich, served with a digital reduction of Spam?”

“Wow,” nodded Edie, who was prone to mid-Atlantic slang, “How random.”

The dragon let out a violent puff of smoke and a roar of flames, shrieking “Random? I remind you, my dear, that my cookery book survived two World Wars. I saved marriages from discomfort and suffering brought about by household mismanagement, badly-cooked dinners, and untidy ways”.

“Well” exclaimed a defiant Edie, scraping her blond fringe back from her face with her Wicked Black Cab finger nails, “I strongly believe in mess”.

Mrs Beeton snorted, releasing more flames. “I was only twenty-five when my book was published. I died three years later, but I knew more about cooking then than you ever will!”

“You were only twenty-five?” said Edie, surprised, “-but, I always imagined you as fifty and fat”.

The dragon slumped on the work surface, deflated, “Everyone always thinks I was fat. Why does everyone think I was fifty and fat? I may have been plump, but I was a pretty young thing, and a working mother when I wrote my book. I commuted from Pinner on the train everyday. I mean, I had all sorts of problems to deal with.” Mrs Beeton, the dragon, swung her tail wistfully, scratched her spiked head with a minuscule claw. “You can’t imagine, dear, all that I went through with Oswald, my husband. I mean really, don’t mention this to the Company of Dragons, I speak in all confidence, but I don’t blame you for leaving your husband. Relationships are complicated things, but you see, my ‘pitch’, I think that is how you put it, is ‘domestic perfection’. I am the original house-goddess, long, long before that Nigella woman. Miss Harthill once said that if it came to actual values, she would rather do without Shakespeare than me. Just imag-

“I can’t even begin to tell you what is happening on the other planets. Did you know that on Mars, as we speak, someone is promoting chilled gooseberry sorbet in a fried cheese sandwich, served with a digital reduction of Spam?”

ine the pressure I am under to keep up such high standards across the Universe. I mean, sometimes I just long to ruffle my hair, let the cobwebs lie and burn a fairy cake.”

“Multi-tasking is awful,” sighed Edie. “And I don’t even have kids.”

“Not yet” smiled the dragon fondly, “But you will soon dear.”

Edie glared from behind her fringe and smoothed her vintage olive green cocktail dress across her curved stomach, “This is from too many cakes and too much cheese.”

“Yes dear” said Mrs Beeton, nodding her head, her little teeth grinning in their green jaw and the nails on her tiny feet tapping. “But I would avoid the goats cheese in fermented vine leaves. It can give one a rather fruity breath and in your condition...”

Edie began calculating dates, remembering times, when had Marcus left? Only seven weeks ago. When had she last bought Tampax? A long time ago. She stared at the dragon. “You don’t mean-”

Mrs Beeton stared back, “We dragons travel through time and space. It’s one of the greatest advantages of being a member of the Company. Anyway, dear, we must get on with the ‘Tip Top Cakes’. We must prepare. I believe you have a mixer, a labour-saving device - the home must be run on labour-saving principals.”

The dragon, Mrs Beeton, began bustling around Edie’s kitchen, whilst Edie sat, unable to move. She was pregnant and had just been told the news by a dragon called Mrs Isabella Beeton. Edie frowned and thought of Marcus, she began to cry and had a sudden craving for a fried egg sandwich and a cup of builder’s tea. *How dreadful*, she thought. Her gourmet taste was slipping. The idea made her weep.

“Edie dear-” the dragon was now perched on the capped sleeve of her olive cocktail dress and gently patting her blond hair. “Don’t worry dear, it will be fine. I will send you a copy of my book; I’ve been told that it has more wisdom to the square inch than any work of man. Now, do wipe those tears and stand up straight, we have ‘Tip Top Cakes’ to make”.

The dragon, Mrs Beeton, handed Edie a small piece of paper with the recipe for “Tip Top Cakes”, sufficient for about four dozen. Edie slowly gathered the ingredients from cupboards and shelves under the dragon’s watchful gaze and put them on the shocking-pink marbled work surface: high grade flour, butter, caster sugar, fresh eggs, currants, clove, cinnamon and nutmeg.

As Edie worked, Mrs Beeton the dragon explained the reasons for cooking:

- 1) to render mastication easy,
- 2) to facilitate digestion, and
- 3) to increase the food value.

As Edie collected a mixing bowl and a large spoon, Mrs Beeton expounded on the ways in which food protects the body from disease. Whilst Edie creamed the butter and sugar, Mrs Beeton the dragon gave forth on the “Nine Methods of Cookery” upheld by the Company of Dragons. Edie added the separately whisked eggs as the emerald dragon walked back and forth on the shocking-pink marbled work surface discussing her various “Kitchen Maxims”:

“There is no work like early work”,

“Clear as you go”, and

“Wash well a saucepan, but clean a frying pan with a piece of bread.”

Once Edie had added the spices, fruit, and flour and placed the mixture in small

bun cases on the tin sheets, the dragon Mrs Beeton had started on the topic of the caloric value of food. During the ten minutes that the cakes baked, the dragon covered the subjects of haybox or fuelless cookery, marketing, the art of carving at table, spring-cleaning, table decoration, the Home Doctor, the Home Lawyer and the art of using up.

Suddenly, the kitchen was filled with the scent of homemade cakes. Edie Fray smiled, "I think they're ready". She removed the four dozen "Tip Top Cakes" from the oven and put them on the work surface. Mrs Beeton, the dragon, examined the cakes and nodded slowly.

"They are ready and so are you," she said, wagging her little green tail. "I must go now", she continued, "My schedule with the Company of Dragons does not allow for dawdling, that is my mission, that is the way, that is my destiny but-" the dragon hesitated. "I do have a favour to ask, you see, I rather like your nail varnish. I just wondered _"

Edie grinned, "Of course".

She hurried to the bathroom, returning quickly with her Wicked Black Cab bottle. Five minutes later and Mrs Beeton the dragon had wicked-shiny black claws.

"Delightful. Goodbye dear and good luck" said Mrs Beeton the dragon, and with a puff of smoke she was gone.

Edie Fray was left alone in her kitchen staring at the four dozen "Tip Top Cakes" that sat on her shocking-pink marbled work surface. She wondered if she should call food photographer Elias Green, her TV producer, Helen Shoemaker or her goddaughter, Flo. Then she looked down at her round stomach and remembered what the dragon had said and decided that she must ask Poppy, her secretary, to book her a doctor's appointment.

"She hurried to the bathroom, returning quickly with her Wicked Black Cab bottle. Five minutes later and Mrs Beeton the dragon had wicked-shiny black claws."

Ogre of the Ojito Wilderness

Matthew J. Barbour

It had a beak and was furry, kind of like a cross between a hawk and a bear. The fur was black or dark brown. It was hard to tell in the moonlight, but it definitely had horns like a buffalo and it was big. I would reckon about eight feet tall. Looked just like one of those kachina figures you see in all the souvenir shops.

Hold on, let's start at the beginning. Why were you out in the Ojito Wilderness in the first place?

We had gone camping: me, Clay, and Jonathan. The trip started that morning. We had driven out from Albuquerque not long after dawn and hiked in.

What about the shovels?

Uh, what about the shovels? We needed them to dig fire pits and bury our waste, right?

And the pot?

Clay found that while digging the fire pit. We didn't know we were on some sort of ruin or nothing. It came up with some bones. It was beautiful, black and white with a stepped design. The type those collectors up in Santa Fe go crazy about. You know those things can even sell for couple thousand on EBay, right?

And the bones, were they human?

Maybe... I don't know. They were real old. We figured it wasn't like some missing person. Clay put the bones back in the hole. We would have reported it when we finished our camping trip.

But you kept the pot?

Um, well, yeah. But we were going to take it to an archaeologist to look at. They can learn things from them and then, you know the rule on things you find. If no one

Matthew J Barbour is a speculative fiction author living with his wife and three children in Bernalillo, New Mexico. When he is not writing fiction, Mr. Barbour manages Jemez Historic Site and contributes to a number of regional newspapers, including the Red Rocks Reporter and the Sandoval Signpost.

Why we chose this piece:

Initially we thought this said "Mojito" and, being fans of delicious adult-beverages, our attention was piqued. We read the title again and realised it actually said "Ojito". Thankfully, at this stage we had already read the piece and loved it. Incidentally we still feel we are owed a drink, so if you're reading this Matthew...

claims it, it's yours right?

That does not apply to antiquities. Is that the only fire pit you dug?

Well, we dug a couple more, but we didn't find anything else, I swear.

So then what happened?

Night fell. We built a fire and ate some dinner. I know we had a couple beers, but we weren't stoned or anything. We were just relaxing when we first heard the chattering noise on the night air. It sounded like a mixture of bark and chirp. We thought maybe it was a coyote. Clay shouted for it to shut the hell up.

And did it?

No. If anything, it got louder. In the moonlight, we could see a large figure moving towards us. We thought it was another camper trying to spook us. We grabbed our shovels and told them to piss off.

That seems a bit extreme.

Yeah, well that was our spot!

But it wasn't a camper?

No. I got a good look at it right before it charged. I dropped my shovel and ran, but Clay and Jonathan stood their ground. All I remember after that is their screams.

So, bear and hawk?

Well, you know, once when I was in school they had some Indians come out and talk to us kids. They were Hopi. They told us some stories, their myths. You ever seen the *kachina* of Hopi myth? The ogres? The ones they say come to devour the particularly bad children who lie and steal?

Had you done such things?

Perhaps.

Poems from *Mystes*

Matthieu Baumier

In French and English. Interpretation by Elizabeth Brunazzi

1.

à Eva-Maria Berg

Je suis né
dans un pays de neiges
et de cendres

Pays où l'on n'arrive
Jamais.

Et que jamais,
on ne quitte ni ne connaît
Pays d'où personne ne vient,
où
le soleil croît
en larmes de cendres,
débris de neiges noircies
et d'âmes englouties
dans l'étincelle
des silences enfuis

Je suis né - ici,
ainsi que naît la peur.

2.

À la limite extrême
des mondes abandonnés
se produit le son
d'étoiles amères
égarées sous la voûte
de nos corps enfermés

1.

to Eva-Maria Berg

I was born
in a country of snow
and ashes

A country where one
never arrives.

And one
never leaves, never knows,
A country where no one comes,
where
the sun distils
tears of ash
the debris of blackened snow
and souls swallowed up
in the sparks
of retreating silences

I was born---here,
just as fear is born

2.

At the extreme limit
of abandoned worlds
the sound of bitter stars
is heard
wandering beneath the vault
of our cloistered bodies

Alors
la lune s'enroule
aux lisières tranchées
de veines de granit

où luit la parole
des épaves glaciaires
échouées sur la grève
de nos vies

3.

Silencieux
un morceau d'étoile

me regarde
à travers les cailloux
de pluie

l'heure approche
de lui tendre la main

Then
the moon enfolds
the borders carved
from veins of granite

where the word shines out
from glacial rubble
abandoned on the strand
of our lives

3.

In silence
the fragment of a star

eyes me
through the pebbles
of rain

the hour is coming
to hold out my hand to him

Matthieu Baumier is a French writer and author of published novels, essays and poetry. His poetry is featured in many reviews and magazines including: Agora (Spain), Ditch (Canada), Polja (Serbia), Poezjia magazine (Croatia), Word Riot (United States), Poetry Quarterly (EU), The Literary Review (EU), The Inflectionist Review (EU), The Indian Review (India), The Linden Avenue Literary Journal (EU), Sand (Berlin), Aufgabe (EU), MadHat (EU), and 3:AM (EU)... He is currently chief editor of the international online poetry review www.recoursaupoeme.fr—the first issue was published on May 15th, 2012.

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Elizabeth Brunazzi is a poet, translator and essayist currently living in Paris.

Why we chose this piece:

We loved the idea of juxtaposing the English and French version of Matthieu's poems side-by-side and we feel they work together to create something that is more than the sum of their parts. A true work of art.

Catchfools City

Alex Dunne

Ma always said there was a market for everything and I'm guessin' she was right 'cause here I am again, searching the Nightmarket for my first customer of the evening. Business is slow, but the factories up on Level 7 will be knockin' off soon and most of them boys like to swing by good time 'fore heading back to their wife and kids. I lean against the red-brick ruins of the old distillery that marks the western boundary between the Nightmarket and No-Man's Land and survey the crowd. I don't see a likely customer yet so I sit down on the dirty ground and count the rats to pass time.

Usually Jimmy would be here to keep me company, cracking jokes and flirtin' with the food vendors for scraps, but he got picked up by the Morality Squad last week and nobody's seen him since. I don't like being out here alone. Well, that ain't exactly true - you ain't ever really alone down here in the twisted maze of alleys ten miles below city limits. This place is so big it's practically a city in itself, though it's on no maps that we know of. It ain't even got a real name, but most folks around here call it Catchfools City. Seems to me it's as good a name as any.

I'm not waitin' long 'fore the crowd begins to swell as workers from the upper levels start filterin' down, looking for drink or dice or a girl to keep them company for the night. Sooner or later one of them will come sniffin' around this part of the market, so I stay right where I am even though my backside is numb from sitting on the cold ground and I'm so damn hungry I could eat one of them rats that've been keeping me company this past hour.

It doesn't quite come to that though, because a shadow falls across my line of vision and I crane my neck to look up into the eyes of my first customer of the evening - a squat, balding man with a glass eye. I drag myself to my feet and motion with my head to a nearby alley. He waddles on ahead of me and I sigh, time to get down to business.

Alex Dunne is many things, prolific tea-drinker, errant writer of science fiction and fantasy and...um...editor of this magazine. Her work has been featured in What we Didn't Know Existed anthology and she has read at the Impossible Words literary salon in Toronto.

Why we chose this piece:

It's our magazine and we do what we want. Plus we only accepted 29 submissions and we really hate uneven numbers.

It wasn't always this way for me if you believe it. Once upon a time I was happy - well, happy ain't the right word - but I got by. That was 'fore Bill went to sleep though. Saint Bill. Apple o' Ma's frickin' eye. She lived and breathed for that boy! Even when Da up and left us things weren't so bad, as long as Ma had her Billy-boy she could cope alright. She was able to pick bits and pieces o' work around town, and she still remembered how to laugh and cry and yell (oh boy could she yell!). Nowadays Ma rarely speaks an' I'll be damned if she can even remember my name.

“Nowadays Ma rarely speaks an' I'll be damned if she can even remember my name.”

She always remembers to ask for the money though.

Barely ten minutes have gone by 'fore my customer has run off somewhere weepin' and apologizin' to God-knows-who. Probably runnin' back to wifey ashamed of what he nearly done.

"Crazy bastard," I say to a few curious rats clustered around a blocked-up drain. I shrug and stuff the tokens he left behind in my pocket. Don't get many nights as easy as this one so I ain't complainin'. I make my way to one of the ladders leadin' to our quarters on Level 9 - the sector that would be considered the lowest of the low if it weren't for the sprawlin' mess o' Catchfools below.

Ma turns her head slightly when I walk into the room. Her eyes barely even register my presence before her hand shoots out to collect my night's earnin's. I hand her the tokens and she jingles 'em about in her hand a bit and grunts once. I take 'em back from her and add 'em to the rest o' our stash, if you could even call it that. I glance at the body stretched out on the single shitty bed we own.

"Anythin' new with him?" I ask - not really expectin' an answer but it's part o' the routine now. She don't bother replyin'. Her mind is already back concentratin' on the boy asleep in the bed and her never-bloody-endin' vigil at his side.

I grab my dinner ration, rip the foil open with my teeth, and tip the powder out into a tin cup. I stick my cup under a tap that comes outta the wall marked "hot". Very fuckin' optimistic - that tap ain't seen anythin' resemblin' hot water in God-only-knows how long. I stir my government-issue mush and walk over to the far wall, pullin' my small penknife outta my pocket. I scratch a new line lightly into the plaster. I was never very good at my numbers so it takes me a while addin' 'em up but eventually I get there. Bill - my brother - has been asleep now for 762 days... That means it must be close on two weeks now since Ma's had her fix. Too damn long. No wonder she's gettin' pissier. I make a decision.

"Tomorrow night Ma" I holler. Her back stiffens at the sound of my voice but still she don't turn 'round. "After my shift tomorrow I'll go to the "Blue Fairy" for ya. Soon have ya right as rain again won't we?"

No reply. I sigh and head to my pallet in the corner of the room, might as well grab some sleep while I can, tomorrow's gonna be a long day.

Ma stopped talkin' the day Bill went to sleep. She never said it out loud but everyone could tell he was always her favourite. Even when he fell in with that crowd of junkies and started stealin' and takin' God-knows-what, he could do no bloody wrong in her eyes - his dark curls and nearly-black eyes reminded her o' Da when he was young and that was enough for her. We still don't know exactly what he took that night, all's we know is he was gone on one of his benders for close to a week and his shit-for-brains friends left him for dead in a gutter outside one of Catchfool's choicer establishments, foamin' at the mouth and twitchin' like a cat caught in an electric fence.

It was old Giuseppe that found him and how he managed to cart him back to our place I'll never know. Giuseppe is bit of a drinker himself, but he's a good sort really. Ma used to make him supper back when she had her marbles and when there was still somethin' that might be considered actual food to be found on this level. Not much we could do for Bill, Giuseppe told us in that strange foreign accent of his.

"Ya need to be a few levels up to have any hope of seein' a medic these days."

So we shoved him in the bed and waited for him to die. But he never did.

It's almost three years later and Ma hasn't left his side for longer than the time it takes for her to have a piss. I don't even know if she sleeps. Apart from when she's had some fairy dust that is.

Night has just fallen when I set off through the market crowd toward "The Blue Fairy", a dive-bar on the far side of Catchfools known to most folk as the place you go to make your dreams come true. I had a few customers tonight and I just have to hope I've got enough tokens this time. God help me if I go home empty handed.

The guy I'm lookin' for is here already, as I expected he would be. He's sittin' in his usual spot, nursin' a beer and eyein' up the youngest of the barmaids. Seein' him always makes my skin crawl. He's old and fat and though his big toothy mouth is usually grinnin', his eyes are always mean-lookin' and sharp as daggers. He looks up as I approach and his smile widens.

"Well, well, what do we have here? Back for more darlin'?"

"Ain't you heard dearie? Upper levels are startin' to crack down on us lowly folk and sweet dreams have just got a lot more expensive."

I don't say nothin', just hand him the tokens. I don't feel like makin' small talk with the likes of him tonight. I'm anxious to get back to Ma. Maybe she'll even thank me this time. He takes the bag between his tobacco-yellow fingers, weighs it up thoughtfully and shakes his head.

"Not enough." He says, tossing the pouch back at me.

"What are you talkin' about? That's more than I gave you last time you greedy bastard!" I cry.

"Ain't you heard dearie? Upper levels are startin' to crack down on us lowly folk and sweet dreams have just got a lot more expensive." He grins at me with those big donkey teeth of his and takes a long swig of his drink.

"How much?" I ask through gritted teeth.

"More than you can afford."

All of a sudden my chest hurts real bad and I know it's 'cause my heart is breakin'. It took weeks to get this scratch together and Ma will be worse than pissed if I come back with nothin'. Why did I go and open my big trap yesterday and get Ma's hopes up? Woulda been better if I hadda said nothin'.

"Course..." the fat man continued, "I'm nothin' if not charitable. Perhaps we can come to an...arrangement". His evil old eyes look me up and down and I know already I ain't got a choice. I swallow my disgust 'cause I know that when I agree I'm gonna find myself with my face pressed against a brick wall down some stinkin' alleyway. I think of Ma and Bill and wonder what she will dream of tonight. I nod stiffly and let him lead me out the door and into the night.

When we was small, Bill would keep me awake half the night tellin' stories about travelin' puppet theatres and talkin' animals and the like. Once he told me that a so-called Field of Miracles lay just outside o' Catchfools. He promised he'd take me there one day and we would plant a coin and watch it grow into a money tree, then me, him, Ma and Da could leave Level 9 behind forever.

The fat man doesn't take too long to finish his business and when it's over he tosses me a small bottle of blue liquid - smaller than the last time - and walks off whistlin' a merry tune. I curse and swear after him and call him ev'ry foul name I know but it don't do any good. He's already back in the bar and I'm left in the street. I know this much won't last Ma a piss in time but what more can I do?

I walk home slowly. I guess the sun must be close to risin' somewhere a few hundred storeys above my head, but it's hard to tell 'cause down here in Catchfools it's always grey.

When I open the door to our livin'-quarters I don't waste no time. I place the bottle straight into Ma's outstretched hand and watch as she fiddles with the well-worn syringe that lay across her lap, ready and waitin'. She jabs the needle straight into the flesh of her bony arm, right in the nook of the elbow, and pushes down hard. When the last of the blue liquid enters her veins she sighs, her body relaxes and she slumps forward, head restin' on Bill's chest. I ain't even managed to kick my shoes off yet and she's already tumbled into the land of dreams where her darlin' Bill is a real boy again.

All I can do is stand there and stare. She never even looked at me once.

Silver Apples Presents...

“The Beginning” - Stork Inc. Prologue

Brian Grace

Silver Apples Magazine is extremely proud to introduce an exciting and recurring feature: “Silver Apples Presents...” Each issue we aim to showcase an extract or chapter from an unpublished novel for your reading pleasure. If you are interested in having your work included in future issues please send your submissions to silverapplesmag@gmail.com

This issue we are delighted to promote “The Beginning”, the prologue to the novel Stork Inc. by Brian Grace. This novel is currently seeking representation. If you'd like to contact Brian, please drop us a line.

It began small, as these things always do. If you are very quiet, you can hear the snap that breaks the resolve of the world -- an assassination that started the first world war, a desire for exploration that led to the wiping out of entire pockets of the human race. For us -- for our world, our history -- it was the murder.

On May 30th 2018, a cure for the HIV/AIDS crisis was announced. The key, the world was told, lay in discovering where the disease had come from. The myth we had been trained to believe was false. Based on nothing. Filled with lies and mislaid dreams, as most myths are.

The announcement came from a Professor Red, an elderly gentleman with so little charisma those who knew about these things wondered how he had ever convinced a network to put him on television, even if it was just the news. Not only had he managed to convince someone to let him on, he had the world waiting, holding its breath in front of their televisions and laptops. Since January 2015, AIDS had been ravaging its way through the world at a rate no one could have predicted. The developing world was effectively already wiped out, and it was beginning to affect the ‘normal’, upstanding members of the Western World. That was when people had started to care.

While the rest were studying the disease, Professor Red said that the key to understanding how to cure it was to understand where it had come from. The answer, he told him, had not come from the science books, but from the history books. It was the greatest conspiracy they had ever seen, and would ever see again. Many laughed him off as a crazy person, and went about their lives as if their entertainment had not been interrupted.

Brian Grace is an aspiring writer of Young Adult fiction. He's been published in several magazines and anthologies. Stork Inc. is his first completed novel.

Why we chose this piece: One of the foundations on which Silver Apples Magazine was built, is the promise we made to work with aspiring authors to get their work published. We were completely intrigued by Brian's captivating opening chapter to his novel Stork Inc. and are proud to include it here as our first feature. We can't wait to see this novel adorning bookshelves one day.

Those who had interest in the announcement at the time, lost it once he informed them that it would be another week before he could make his discoveries public. He signed off by telling those who were still listening that the world would finally understand what they were dealing with, what we were up against. He promised that it would rock our beliefs to the core, and would change the future of our being as we knew it.

On that night, exhausted from years of hard work and research, Professor Red locked his work away in his lab. He came home and ate dinner with his wife, who was more concerned with telling him about their grandchildren and how they were getting on in university, than she was with her husband's television debut. After dinner, she settled down to watch the repeat news coverage of her husband's announcement. She mused at how the world would be changed in just a few days. Professor Red internally rolled his eyes, not for the first time, at his wife's stupidity and inability to comprehend even the simplest aspects of his work. He kissed her on the top of her head as he gathered up their dog for his evening walk and stepped out into the warm evening.

“the tiny rebellion of a husband who had for decades silently suffered the way only a man with a loud and domineering wife can.”

He had only gotten a few blocks before the urge for a cigarette overwhelmed him. He had been secretly smoking for months, the tiny rebellion of a husband who had for decades silently suffered the way only a man with a loud and domineering wife can. As he inhaled, a well dressed young man approached him and requested a lighter. As Red fumbled in his pockets, the man then politely requested Red hand over his wallet, while pointing a gun at his face. Before Red could even move, the trigger was pulled.

The news would report that an elderly gentleman was the victim of a random act of violence, a mugging that had unfortunately escalated when he had refused to hand over his wallet to a desperate homeless man. It was claimed that victim had pulled out a gun he owned and carried for protection, which had been used against him in this tragic way. The article lamented once again how unfortunate it was that people did not understand that even when they carry guns for their own protection, they could be used against them.

It was small news, hardly making it into national papers. But those few people who had not simply gotten on with their lives in the hours that followed, began digging into Professor Red's research, before his wife had even been notified of his unfortunate demise.

Thank you for reading Issue One: Modern
Mythologies

Submissions for Issue Two, 'Box of Tricks'
will open 1 June 2014, closing July 31 2014.

To keep up to date, follow us on Twitter
[@silverapplesmag](#)



© Silver Apples Magazine 2014

Creativity Worth Consuming

*Confessions from the Back Page:
I really liked Billie Piper's music career*