

FROSTBITTEN

SILVER APPLES MAGAZINE

Creativity Worth Consuming



Issue 6 - November - 2015



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Gráinne O'Brien, Alex Dunne and Una Hussey

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Silver Apples Magazine

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Origami Handcrafted Gifts & Wedding Craft



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

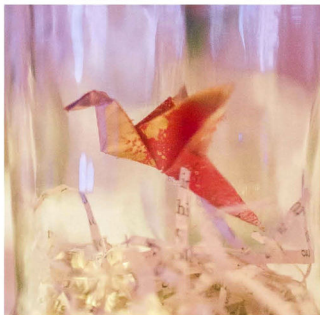
George studied Graphic Design in Limerick School of Art & Design - specialising in design for print. He prides himself in being able to connect with the client turning any vision into a reality.

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



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

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



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

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Mojo
creations.....
Makers of Magic



Letter from the Editors:

In which we are all bark and very little bite

Gráinne O'Brien, Alex Dunne & Una Hussey

Loyal readers (and those of you who are reading Silver Apples for the very first time because you are getting it for free), welcome to Issue Six: Frostbitten. An issue chock full of twisted tales and nasty little surprises interspersed with a few moments of sweetness. A perfect recipe for Christmas reading!

As it's the season of giving, we decided to celebrate Christmas early this year and gift to you a free digital copy of this wonderful issue.

It's hard to believe this issue's release marks the 2 year anniversary of the creation of Silver Apples Magazine. We have grown in ways we never thought possible and look forward to what 2016 brings us.

This issue may seem cold at times, but relax in front of a warm fire, with a glass of mulled wine in hand and delve right in. It has enough bite for those of you reading in the Southern Hemisphere to feel a little chill, so perhaps you should bring it into the sun and have a cocktail for us.

Wherever you are, enjoy, share and most importantly, consume this gift and the creativity within.

See you next year!

Gráinne, Alex and Una

The Confession

Laura-Blaise McDowell

Laura-Blaise McDowell is 23 years old and from Rathgar. Having completed her undergraduate degree in English and Sociology in University College Dublin, she has returned to its hallowed halls this year to pursue a Masters degree in Creative Writing. She's not a fan of people talking down to children, nor writing about herself in the third person.

Why we chose it:

A wonderfully nasty little tale to warm the cockles of your heart this winter season. Laura-Blaise's story reminds us that our behaviour can come back to bite us.

Later, when I was at college, I spent the summer in Berlin. I had barely thought of him since, not 'til I slid over the edge of the granite bowl in the *Lustgarten* and the hard, cold stone sent me spinning back to the lake. Its rim was wide and slippery; climbing in was like being pulled out of a hole in the ice, over the frozen edge. My friends hauled me over and as I slid down the inside it felt like skidding across the ice of another place, with other angles.

The night was at once dim and vibrant, the shadows highlighted with the sounds of shattering glass and laughter, the returning sun winking sleepily through twists of the cathedral next to us. Broken glass pooled at our feet as our empty bottles collided with the granite and our fingers spat blood from tiny mouths with splinter teeth. I lay back against the side and felt the broken bottles grate beneath my hands.

And I saw him there again, his eyes dulling as the cold skewered him against the icy greens and browns of the lake water.

* * *

On winter weekends, all the children in our village were dispatched to the lake to skate until twilight. It was the only thing to do when the frosts came in winter. Our school teacher, Mr. Timor "volunteered" to supervise us every

day, every winter, in order to instil a sense of admiration and gratitude amongst our parents that we as children could not shake. "What a godsend he is, when he has to put up with them all week as well!" they'd croon. It was like being trapped in a snow globe, his face leering over us. There is such a poignant helplessness to being a child, no matter how strong willed or intelligent you are. There are very few people who will take you seriously, regardless of how much sense you make or how right you know yourself to be. And amongst those people lie those who prey on the fact, who feast in the dismissal of children's fearful "stories" and "overactive imaginations", who revel in the blind eyes of adults and the silence of the young.

There had been only four of us out on the lake that day, the remaining few, as most of the children had successfully fabricated excuses not to go; stomach aches, fatigue, sore throats. One boy had deliberately gashed his knee so that he was unable to walk, let alone skate. Another girl made herself sick all over the living room carpet. Others licked their palms to make them clammy, and dabbed warm water on their foreheads and upper lips. We all knew the tricks by then, but we had to stagger our usage of them lest our parents begin to have doubts. Skating while he watched was like being forced to dance, moving alone under a sickly moon. We were marionettes, as he jerked the strings in all the wrong directions.

His face looked like it had been crudely modeled out of pale, cracking clay. His features didn't quite match up, instead they looked as if they had been made for other people and he had stolen them. His upper lip protruded instead of curving inward, until his cupid's bow was almost flat. There was

"His features didn't quite match up, instead they looked as if they had been made for other people and he had stolen them"

no love in him. His black, curled moustache sat like a leech beneath his bulbous nose, sucking all the good blood out. Two more sat above either eye, overshadowing the stones that sat awkwardly in their sockets. They reminded me of pictures I had seen of mummified bodies, sitting with their arms wrapped around their legs, leaning against

the walls of caves way up in the mountains. There was an oldness and a deadness to them. He wore heavy clothes, tail coats and pointy shoes, which shone to reflect the faces of those he brought to their knees. He carried a cane and he smelled like smoke and steak and stone.

In class, on the good days, he was loud and vicious. "How can you expect me to even look at you, let alone teach you, when I can see your brains dribbling down your noses? I suppose that's the last of them making their exit? Honestly, I don't know why your parents bothered keeping you, if you were mine I'd have thrown you in the lake the minute I saw your ghoulish little faces. You're lucky I don't tell them what you're really like, what revolting little cretins you are when Mummy and Daddy aren't around."

But there was a certain relief that came with the roll of his roar, because if he was angry, if he hated us that day, then we could go straight home, and there would be no waiting for the ones he kept behind for "extra tuition." If he wasn't angry, he was just cruel. He was cruel as April.

We would file past him as we left at the end of the day, and he would recline in his chair, his large feet up on the desk, cane drooping lazily from his hand which felt like the skin of an eel.

"Faye, you were particularly stupid today," he'd say. "Stay behind." And if you were Faye, you would feel your blood turn to wands of ice in your veins, and the back of your neck would catch fire. You would feel the helplessness like the Earth on your shoulders. And the rest of us would sigh with relief and thank all that there was to thank that today had not been our day. And we would wait outside for you. He would make you feel like he could see your insides and you would feel ashamed that he could see your heart beating and you'd wish it would stop.

And then we would all walk home together, because it was worse to be alone.

The day on the lake it was just the four of us; Faye, Anthony, Timothy and me. It was his own fault, his own arrogance that led him to skate where the ice was thin like the skin on your wrists and eyelids. We hadn't orchestrated it. The frozen water broke easily under his weight.

When we heard the smash of the ice and the splash as his foul

body hit the water, we knew we could not help him. He surfaced again, shrieking and we skated the length of the lake to where he clawed feverishly at the ice.

“There was a pause as we watched him become vulnerable for the first time”

“Help me, you little fools!” he cried through constricted throat. There was a pause as we watched him become vulnerable for the first time.

“But we’re too stupid to know what to do,” Faye said, her tone matching the weather.

“You never helped us, when we

needed it,” added Anthony.

“When I broke my ankle, you made me walk back inside and told me to ‘stop snivelling’,” recalled Timothy. “Why don’t you stop snivelling sir? Is that the last of your brain dribbling out your nose?”

“S-STOP ST-STANDING AROUND AND B-BLOODY HELP ME, W-WORMS.”

“But we don’t know what to do sir,” I insisted. “We’re just half-witted goblins with no hope of going to college or making anything of ourselves, like you said. I don’t know WHAT we could possibly do to help you.”

“GO AND BLOODY F-FIND A GROWN UP, OR A L-LOG TO PULL ME OUT WITH, OR SOMETHING! P-PLEASE!”

Anthony snorted. ‘Please? Are you...begging sir?’

“NO I’M NOT BLOODY B-BEGGING, TH-THIS IS AN ORDER, G-GET ME OUT OF HERE N-NOW OR I SWEAR I WILL K-KILL YOU.”

“How can you ‘k-kill’ us, sir, when you’ve already died in there?” Faye inquired.

“MY G-GHOST WILL KILL YOU.”

“You told us ghosts weren’t real,” I reminded him. “Remember when I said I saw my grandmother? And you told me that I was imagining things, and that they’d lock me up where I belonged if I kept talking about it?”

“I LIED.” He was slipping further down now, his head only barely above the freezing water.

“Lying is awfully wrong sir.”

“GET ME OUT OF HERE OR I’LL D-DIE.”

“But you always say you’d rather die than see our nasty faces again. You say that every day. But it’s not quite true is it sir?” Timothy slid a little further back from where the desperate hands clawed. “It’s not our faces you want to see, most days.”

“I’m s-s-sorry, alright? NOW HELP ME”

“You said it so many times. Don’t worry sir; you’re getting your wish. You’re going to die, and then you’ll never have to see our faces ever again.” Faye was smiling now.

He struggled, unable to waste anymore energy speaking as his life was pulled out of him by the cold, as easily as a handkerchief drawn from a sleeve. We watched, remaining still and silent as we always had. We watched as the world swallowed him back up because he didn’t belong. We watched until his eyes faded, like stones left behind by the tide. We stayed ‘til he sank. And then we skated back to the other side of the lake and took our boots off.

*“We watched until
his eyes faded, like
stones left behind
by the tide”*

“What do we do?” asked Anthony. “What do we tell our parents?”

“Don’t say anything” I insisted “Seriously. Just say nothing about the whole thing. Just say, if they ask, that he was here when we left. That’s not a lie. He must have fallen through after we all left. No one heard him shouting because we’d gone, so there was no one around.”

“Yeah, it’ll be simple” said Faye. “As long as no one tells.”

And no one did. We all went home to our parents and told them we’d had a nice time skating, even though there’d been so few of us. Oh yes, Mr. Timor was nice, as always. The thinly iced part of the lake was furthest from the village and by the next morning the hole had frozen over again.

We back to school on Monday, unafraid and, along with the other eight, appeared surprised when a new teacher stood at the top of the classroom, with oval eyes and a sweet way of curling her hands while she talked.

When the ice thawed in the spring, and his bloated corpse rose to the surface, the village was “deeply saddened” at the “tragic loss”,

having abandoned efforts to locate him when it became obvious that we would have to wait for the thaw to recover him. The children were made to sing at the funeral, but we did so with such shining yellow voices that people commented afterwards were almost too joyous for the occasion.

* * *

Another bottle smashed on the stone as someone else was pulled over the side. The sun now burning a thousand colours.

“Ella, are you okay?” someone called. “You haven’t said a word in ages!”

I smiled and leaned against the granite, feeling the cold beneath my hands.

Silver Bracelet

Faye Boland

Faye Boland has had poems published in Literature Today, The Shop, Revival, Crannóg, Orbis, Wordlegs, Ropes, Headstuff, The Blue Max Review and Speaking for Scéine Chapbooks I and II. In 2014 her poetry was included in 'Visions: An Anthology of Emerging Kerry Writers'. She was shortlisted in 2013 for the Poetry on the Lake XIII International Poetry Competition.

The jeweller and I guessed your size:
a bespoke bracelet, name and date
of birth engraved, polished silver
a mirror for your perfect face.

On a pillow of cotton wool it lay,
expectant in its box, like you.
The engraving immortalised your date of
death. You wore it to the grave.

Why we chose it:

Faye's heartbreaking yet beautiful poem of loss genuinely made us well up. The ability to convey profound sadness in two short stanzas is an enviable one and we're pleased to include her work on our pages.

Coldest on Record

Michelle Coyne

"Me bollix!" says my ould grandad in his little brown armchair, all of a sudden and loud as you like.

"Jaysus!" says I, not so much to him as to myself. Grandad doesn't know where he is or what he's at. There's no point in anything saying actually to him. You'd be better off chatting with the holy Jesus statue on the mantelpiece. Be better craic at least.

It's my turn to sit here with him, feed him cups of tea and Mariettas and wait for the health nurse to come back from her dinner and tuck him into bed. Two hours of face melting boredom once every two weeks. He hasn't even got coverage in his house, and Mam says that, no, his pension won't get him a discount on a wifi connection. No tweeting, no Snapchat, not even Facebook. All I have are the games on my phone. There's only so much candy a lad can crush before he cracks.

Over in his chair, Grandad's little hairy-mary eyebrows are bouncing up and down and he's looking at the telly like he wants to hit it a box. "Me bollix!" he roars again, and I hop up to get him to chill the fuck out before he busts a blood vessel. Or knocks his tea.

On the telly, a postman is molesting a bush, squeezing the berries and grinning at it. The lad on the voiceover on the news goes, "and so, I hope you've got your winter

Michelle Coyne is a Galway-based writer. She recently won the 2015 Listowel Originals Short Story Award. She was shortlisted for Fish Flash-Fiction prize 2015, and won third place in Over the Edge New Writer of the Year 2015. She has had stories published in the likes of Crannóg, Wordlegs, Silver Apples: Box of Tricks, and Ropes.

Why we chose it:

Michelle's "Coldest on Record" is about as far from a warm and fuzzy Christmas story of family and love as you can get, and that is precisely why we chose it. After reading this we certainly felt a little shiver.

woollies at the ready for the coldest winter on record."

"Meeeee bollix!" says Grandad again and I think about giving him a slap, like I sometimes have to do to his fat old telly when it starts acting the maggot and going all snowy. Then he sits back and he starts whispering underneath his beard. "Sure, amn't I almost dead? How could I be doing that?"

*"If I'm nearly dead,"
he says, all conde-
scending, "how am I
going to make it
cold?"*

"Doing what?" I say to him, pretending for a second that he hasn't gone totally mental.

He stares at me like I'm the thick in the equation, the little grey hairs in his nose all huffy and mad. "If I'm nearly dead," he says, all condescending, "how am I going to make it cold? Sure, I haven't done it in near ten year. And I haven't done it

proper-like in more than a hundred."

"More than a hundred what?"

"Years, you thunderin' halfwit. Who are you anyways, coming in here talking to me about the cold? Who let you in?" He starts going cracked, shaking his crooked yellow finger at me, and then looks around the arms of his chair, finds his tea and chucks it all down my front.

"Ah, ya fuckin'..." I say, more wet than burnt, as the tea's been sitting there for more than half an hour.

He watches me with his little weasel eyes, and I stalk off and find a musty tea towel in the hot press to stuff up under my t-shirt. When I get back, he's smiling at me like he's got one over on me.

"Wha?" I say, still fucked off with him over the tea.

"I'll show ya 'wha'," he says. "You want it cold, you'll get it cold. Even if it kills me."

"Ah here, Grandad," I say, thinking I need to calm him quick before the nurse gets back and starts accusing me of raising his blood pressure.

"Here's your thing," he says, and I can see in his hand he's got a hold of my phone. "Take it away with you and get out of my sight."

"It's flipping freezing," I say when I take it off him. "What did you do to it?"

"Hah. If you think that's bad!" he says, all delighted with himself.

"You turned it off," I say, and he doesn't answer. I start pressing the buttons but there's no life at all in her. "What did you do, you streak of miserable shite?"

And of course, that when the nurse comes in. And as normal, I get it in the neck.

Every two weeks after that, when my turn comes around again, Grandad is delighted to see me and have another go at taunting me. "I'll show ya," and "You'll see." As though it was me that had upset him and not that soft fella from Donegal stroking the leaves. And now that's he's bollixed my phone, I have no time for his shite, so I just ignore him and take a biro to his paper, filling in his crossword with dirty words and drawing willies all over the photos. At Christmas he comes to our house for the dinner. The others all got their excuses in first, which means me and Mam are stuck with him. I wouldn't mind, but we always get the worst of his shite, cracks about her being a brazen hussy and me being a poor fatherless bastard.

I stare across the dinner table, over the cranberry sauce and soggy celery, at the fucker staring right back, his cement mixer mouth shedding flecks of stuffing and turkey all over everything. Half-chewed mouthfuls spat out and wrapped in a sheet of Bounty. I've hidden my new phone from him in case he gets any ideas, and I'm delighted when he's finally carted back off home to bed. In the new year, it's my turn again, and Mam says that, no, I can't skip it. And, no, he won't be grand, and hadn't I seen the snow, and he'd probably be all cold and wondering where I am, and sure, amn't I his favourite grandchild?

In his own words, "me bollix".

But I go anyway, because, what can you do? And I can't even cycle because of the state of the roads and paths. It's like something from the arctic, only wetter. A frigging blizzard. My new runners are getting soaked and my feet are fucked. It even hurts to breathe.

When I get to his house, I'm so late that the nurse must have given up waiting. There are two tyre tracks coming out of the driveway getting quickly covered in more shitty snow.

I go on up to the house and it's lit up like a Christmas tree. Grandad is so tight he has one of those slot machines for the electric-

ity. Feed it a euro and it'll let you put on the light. I seriously thought he'd taken the bulbs out of most of the rooms, but they're all there now, beaming through the windows. I go into the house and the lights are so stupidly bright that you can see the wallpaper coming up at the edges, the weird brown stains all over everything. The one that makes up Grandad's shape where he's missing from his little chair. It's funny to see the chair without Grandad in it.

"Where are ya?" I shout, hoping ta feck that he's not in the bog and I won't have to help him clean his arse. I go down the hall knocking on the doors but there's no sign. The light in his bedroom is raging, the bulb is buzzing and his bed looks like something out of a horror. All lumpy and stained brown and smelly. The wallpaper is torn off in big strips and scattered all over the floor, and you can see that it used to have a pattern once. Big pointy seashells.

"Grandad!" I shout. "What the fuck?"

There's no noise, only the buzzing of the bulbs, and I look down the hall to the back door. The fucker better not have gone wandering. It's only me who'll get the blame. I look again at the bed and wonder how in the living fuck does he sleep in that yoke, and then the lights go out with a crack.

Me heart is doing ninety as I'm feeling my way down the hall, headed for the back door, not knowing how I'm going to find him now with no lights. I put the hood up on my hoodie and pull the strings so tight that there's just enough hole for my eyes to peep through. I take my phone out and light up the screen, before turning the handle to open the back door.

It flies in, clipping me hard on the shoulder, like the wind just took it and decided to batter me with it. But there isn't a puff of wind outside. The snow is falling in big fat flakes, and all I can see through it by the light of my phone is the dark. I take a couple of steps out and it crunches under my feet. What's falling is sticking to me, making a snowman of me, probably wrecking my new phone too.

"Grandad," I say and I can hardly hear myself. The snow is making everything silent. But from what I can hear, I sound scared. Not in the, Oh shite, I'm about to get run over by the busway. But in a way I don't know how to talk about. Too scared to move. Too scared to stop.

More steps out into the dark and the snow, and I can see noth-

ing but snow snow snow and hear nothing but thump thump thump of my heart. And then the sound of metal slicing the air and WHOMP to my head and the pain coming wet and sticky after that, with me flat on my back on the snow, and it seeping freezing all up into my clothes to my skin.

I hear snow crunching next to me, and then, "Now for ya!"

"Grandad," I say, pressing the button on my phone, still in my hand, and angling it up to see him. Snow stuck all over his usual jumper, his head, his beard. His eyes like two little coals, face smug as you like.

"Coldest winter on record. How's this for ya?"

"Fu-ck," all shiver in my jaw, and my phone shakes too.

In Grandad's hand is a rusty old scythe he must have walloped me with. I'm not dying, I know, but I pretend to be so he might go away.

"Enough of your shite-hawkin'," he says and lifts the scythe and butts the end of it down hard, right beside my ear, and I—

"Enough of your shite-hawkin'," he says and lifts the scythe and butts the end of it down hard, right beside my ear"

I am ages in the hospital.

Weeks. They keep me lying down and they're scanning me and scanning me to make sure there's no brain damage or bleeding or whatever else. And Mam is in the whole time, sitting next to me, annoying the head off me about how I can take the term off and go back to school and everything will be fine with my Leaving.

"I'm sorry about your Grandad," she says, a week or so in.

"It's not your fault, Mam, Jesus," I say staring up at the spotty ceiling.

"No, I mean, he died."

I can't look at her. I mean, I want to look at her but they have my head in this yoke to stop me from turning it. She sounds sad.

"What happened?" I say.

"Ah. One of the others went over there yesterday and found him in his chair. We went peacefully."

"Good for him," I say, even though inside I'm thinking, fuck him.

"It means that the nurse will have to drop her charges though. So, as they say, it's an ill wind that doesn't blow someone some good."

"Right," I say to the ceiling.

The poor fucking nurse. That smelly old bollix grabbing her and pushing down on top of her, all those rotten teeth, evil little fucking eyes bearing down on her. And my fucking Mam telling her she was lucky to get away. Like everything was fine because ould grandad didn't manage to stick it to her before she grabbed the mug of tea and clocked him with it.

"You're glad he's dead," Mam says.

"Too right I am."

"I suppose I should be too," she says.

"And why aren't ya?"

"Eh," she says, all high, like she's trying not to cry. "He was still my Daddy."

I swallow hard as I think of all the shite he put her through, all of it just forgotten 'cause he was her Daddy, and for the first time in my whole life I'm glad I have no father. I'm glad my dad freaked out and ran off to Australia when he found out my Mam was pregnant. I'm glad I didn't have to spend my whole life forgiving him for the all shitty things he'd likely be doing on me.

"Mam?"

I hear her blow her nose and then, "Yeah?"

"I'm sorry about Grandad."

Rocks

Shane Vaughan

I found a lump of ice in my stocking
once
not even coal
couldn't heat the fireplace
it sogged at the bottom of my sock
until it was pulled
out

family watched the yellow lights splinter
prismed
then I was tasked to crack the clear
pelt
my tips turning the colour of
cold
my palms raw

the cracks gouged into the dermis of the ice
spreading
until I could pull the lump
apart
I could pull the lump apart into
chunks
into rough cubes
into seven rough cubes
seven

a piece for every brandy

which father drank

while we waited for the ice

to melt

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

Why we chose it:
What says 'Christmas' better than alcohol and abject disappointment? Shane's poem truly captures the magic and wonder of the season.

Warmth

Matthew Rochester



Matthew Rochester is an aspiring writer that dabbles in photography. When his storytelling doesn't live on the page it lives in his photographs. He will soon be graduating with a double major in Film Studies & Creative Writing. His photograph "Stormy Beach Night" was published in Silver Apples First publication.

Why we chose it:

A moment of pure stillness, we can almost smell the crispness in the air and imagine the breath billowing from our lips like wisps of fog. Matthew's image captures of the beauty of the winter season

November

Gráinne O'Brien

November is a month of nothingness, intended to be enjoyed. An entire thirty days of calm before the storm of December brings bright lights, unwelcome music, the panic of shopping, money worries, and anxiety over present-giving. In November, nothing needs to be done in a hurry. Kettles can take as long as they want to fill hot water bottles that never seem to cool. Cars drive slower because November wants them to. It wants them to be safe, to see December.

In November the sky is full of contradictions. It is dark and clear simultaneously, with specks of starlight thrown haphazardly across it, only a few, as though it too is caught up in the relaxed November attitude. It is as if the stars themselves are waiting until the rush of December to burn brightly, as if they are also enjoying the calm, and the quiet.

November is not the time to consider complex questions. Even the sun seems lazy; reluctant to rise, and in a hurry to set, leaving us to get dressed and undressed in darkness and the cold. Most days it rains, but every now and then in the month we get an odd surprise day of light, as if the sun forgot to be lazy that day, forgot it was November, but the next day it remembers. Or maybe those days are November's treat to us, to remember that it isn't always dark, and light will shine again soon. And how the moon takes advantage of this laziness, using it to fulfil his vain desire

When she isn't busy reading or procrastinating, Gráinne O'Brien likes to walk in the sunshine, and miss typos in her own work

Why we chose it:

Who doesn't love a little creative non fiction eh? And it really had been a while since we shamelessly self promoted.

to shine brighter than any other time of the year. He is the only one of us working hard this particular month, thriving off the sun's disregard for nature and its reluctance to burn. The moon admires its reflection in every available surface in November, shining off the slick roads, the empty fields, and the few cars that make their way slowly home, and seems to be full, practically every night. He has told the sun to take a break, he's got this month, and the sun has happily obliged.

And what about the rainy days? The ones where the wind and the rain whistle and pound against every surface. November is the only month you can hear. You can hear it from the moment you wake up on that first day, the gusts of wind whipping the rain drops against the glass window, trying their hardest to wake you, to encourage you to come out, to run in the rain. November wants you to splash in the puddles, to feel the prickle and splash against your skin, like you did when you were a child. When you were too smart to worry about what it would do to your clothes, or how late for work you might be, to worry about money problems, or to let them spoil your perfect November day. November wants you to laugh, to remember what it was like to be young, when cold didn't prevent you from living your life, but encouraged you to

The darkness of those long extended nights isn't cold or unfeeling. It's a different kind of darkness, not black, but blue. It descends on us from nowhere, like the whole world is telling us to slow down, to rest and catch up on sleep. To sit together, around a crackling fire and remember last November, and the one before. The month is trying to warn us. December brings worry and stress, and January new beginnings. November asks nothing from us. It just wants us to be. Wants us to rest. Turn off the news it says; it's bad for a reason. November wants us to enjoy the quiet, to let to world pass us by, while we enjoy the dark.

What do I do for November? I save my books for November. Not all of them, but November is a month to read the favourites, the classics that should not be rushed. To take to the couch with a hot cup of anything and greet the old friends you have been neglecting for so long. To linger over every word, and discover the endings at a quiet pace. Hamlet doesn't know who killed his father yet, Ms. Havisham is still as cruel as ever, who is pride, and who is prejudice, and

Gulliver is stuck on Lilliput. They are exactly where I left them. Waiting for me. Waiting for November. Some are even halfway through, stuck in the story, on page turned over into a crooked triangle to mark the place, then abandoned when December came. But they always knew I'd be back, in November, when the assignments from college are no longer due, and the words can dance through me, with no guilt barrier to block them. They smell so familiar, they smell like November.

Even now, as I sit up later than usual, November wants me to rest. A misty fog is creeping its way across my window, fuzzing the street light that are only half-heartedly trying to light. One solitary lamppost, fighting a war against the friendly darkness of November. It knows it can't win, sometimes it won't even try.

“A misty fog is creeping its way across my window, fuzzing the streetlights that are only half-heartedly trying to light.”

I look down occasionally, startled out of my dreamy contemplation of the window by some reminder that life does go on even if November doesn't want it to, but every time I look up I am hypnotised again. The light is dimmer, the fog is thicker. The stars are going, all but one determined to burn through the fog, just for me. The fog is working almost as hard as the moon this month, and it brings with it a thick, heavy feeling, the kind that forces eyes to close. And as they close, November gives them hope, because the next morning, through the dark, you can see the teeniest glimpse of a white country side icy diamonds glittering on the cars and road, and entire countryside frozen in peace. Be careful, November says, as the sun hesitantly begins to rise, you have to be safe, for December.

November

Catherine O'Donoghue

At present, Catherine O'Donoghue is working on both creative and academic projects. She is sifting through a fair few poems with the hope of publishing a first collection in the near future. Her poems are informed largely by nature and the human experience.

Why we chose it:

We thought it would be interesting to juxtapose this poem against Gráinne's essay of the same name. While Grá's November is a time for rest and reflection, Catherine's is a "darkening mouth...seductive and cooling". We loved her sensual use of language and are thrilled to include this poem in our winter issue.

Yours is November
This darkening mouth
Of a month
Seductive and
Cooling

Yours is a fire burning
To its very last

Embers hot
As desert stones
In this hopeless freeze

The brutish breath of
A bull
Escapes you
Misting the windows
Like rain

I wonder how heavy
The carrying
Is for you

My heart carries
The image close
As hope needs to be
On a cold November
Morning
Such as this

The Boyfriend Shop

Arron Ferguson

It was the sixth time this week and Jenny's patience was running thin. Why couldn't Phillip understand that constantly leaving wet towels in a heap on the floor was responsible for the rancid smell that had swamped their home?

"I don't want to sound like a broken record," she began.

"Well you do," Phillip interrupted. "It's not that big of a deal."

As Phillip went to work Jenny opened her laptop and turned her attention to penning her latest article. But she couldn't focus. The wet towel problem was growing into a real issue. A musty scent was all over the home. All her friends were noticing it. She had to vent.

Slamming her laptop lid down, Jenny rang her old friend (and prime gossip partner) Alison.

"More wet towels. Again!"

"AGAIN!" Alison said.

"Again!"

"Consider yourself lucky Jen. My Joe keeps interrupting when I'm trying to watch films."

"God I hate that."

"Who's that?' he'll say when we're only two minutes in. I don't know Joe. I'm watching the film at the same time as you!"

"That is annoying."

"Ninety minutes later and he's asking

Arron Ferguson is a London based writer who won the First Light Award for Best Drama for the short film The Apothecary, which he wrote with Paige Lian Copsey. Since then he has co-created a children's radio show, published short comic strips and written sketches for BBC Radio.

Why we chose it:

We knew this issue's theme would result in a few darker pieces, that's why "The Boyfriend Shop" came as a breath of fresh air. A genuinely funny story. Plus, the Boyfriend Shop kinda seems like a good idea in theory and a girl can dream can't she?

me things about the film he didn't understand and I don't have the answers because I was too busy answering his other questions about the film to watch the film!"

"Well at least your house doesn't stink!" Jen said.

"You know... There is one thing you could try. I've been thinking about it for a while. I've got work in five but why don't you try it and tell me how it goes."

"I don't understand" Jen said.

"Have you heard of The Boyfriend Shop?"

"Yeah. There's a couple in London aren't there?"

"They've franchised. There's one in town. Opened up Friday."

"Seriously?"

"Yeah. Why don't you pop in? See what they can do about your Phillip."

Some years before, all the men of Britain had forever been lost due to what the Prime Minister at the time called 'one hell of an admin error.' This was the catalyst for a period of time known as 'The Decade of Joy', which then led to 'The Loneliness Epidemic.' To combat the growing desire for companionship among heterosexual females, life-like robotic males were created. Frustratingly lifelike.

Taking Alison's advice, Jenny entered the newly opened Somerset branch. She headed for the customer service desk, hoping to clear up her model's 'wet towel problem'.

After a long wait (it seemed quite a few women were having issues with their models) she reached the lumbering hulk of an employee at the desk. Jenny had high hopes. The Boyfriend Shop came across well in advertising; the perfect place to get your model fixed or upgraded. She was ready to get her hands on both the perfect partner and a house that didn't stink.

"How can I help?" grumbled the woman at the desk with a rhythm more befitting the phrase "I hate my job, please kill me."

"I need to upgrade my boyfriend," Jenny said.

"Okay," the employee replied. "What's wrong with him?"

"It keeps leaving wet towels on the floor."

"Is it a Phillip?"

"Yeah. Why?"

“Not much I can do on that front. Every Phillip has that problem.”

“Well fix them all then,” Jenny said, taken aback.

The employee rolled her eyes, fed up with having this conversation with every woman dumb enough to buy a Phillip. She said the same line to Jenny that she said to them all. “We don’t fix stuff that’s meant to be there, that’s part of his programming; I can only get rid of glitches, not personality traits.”

“That’s his personality is it? Leaving wet towels about?”

“That’s a Phillip for you.”

“Well then I don’t want a Phillip!” Jenny said, seeking an opportunity to move on from Phillip’s bad habits for good.

“You bought a Phillip so a Phillip is what you got. Could maybe do a trade in if you’re desperate?”

“What d’you have?”

“Got quite a few Mikes?”

“How are Mikes?”

“How willing are you to tolerate repressed homosexuality?”

“What?” Jenny said, pondering why such a feature would even be installed when the point of The Boyfriend System was to offer robotic men for women, “Not at all. I want one that’s going to fancy me.”

“Then Mike isn’t for you. You could do with a Spencer. Those are very attracted to your body type.”

“That sounds great.”

“Should mention, in case it’s an issue... They come with a third nipple.”

“That’s fine, I’m not that superficial!” said Jenny.

“On the face.”

“Nope,” Jenny said, realizing she was more superficial than she thought. “Not a Spencer, what else you got?”

“Could trade your Phillip for a Joe?”

“They talk through films right?”

“Yeah that’s right.”

“I can’t be dealing with that. It’s driving my mate up the wall. You’ve got to have something else!”

“How willing are you to tolerate repressed homosexuality?”

“We’ve got a Hamza in stock, maybe two. Take a Hamza; Hamza’s a nice boy. I’ve had a few of those. Tall, good-looking, experimental in their bedroom if that’s your thing. They’ve got a desire to have kids. Kind. Feminist. Good around the house. Talented pianists. Any of that your thing?”

“Sounds good so far, right up my street! Any negatives?”

“Wouldn’t you rather discover naturally as the relationship went on?” the employee groaned. “Like girls in the good old days?”

“What’s with that tone?”

“What tone?”

“You had a tone.”

“I didn’t have a tone.”

“What’s wrong with the Hamza model?”

*“Every Hamza uses
the word party as a
verb”*

The employee sighed, desperate to move on to the next girl. The queue was growing and she wasn’t allowed to go home until they had all been dealt with. “Every Hamza uses the word party as a verb.”

“Nope.” Jenny said, nearly vomiting at the thought. “What else you got?”

“How about a Benjamin.”

“Tell me all about him.”

“Just... take him. We’ve got a few.... The fun will be in discovering for yourself!”

“I’m not having another Phillip incident. Tell me everything.”

The employee groaned. “The Benjamin model is loyal. Loving. Kind. Playful. Always excited to be with you. Loves spending time with you, appreciates everything you ever do and will always be at your side.”

“Wow. That’s... that’s perfect, why didn’t you open with that? I’ll take a Benjamin please?” Jenny said.

“There is one more thing I should mention.”

Jenny tensed, bracing for the worst. “What is it?”

“Benjamin is a dog.”

Jenny stood in silence for a while pondering if the word dog had a second meaning she was unfamiliar with. Maybe it was an embarrassing job? It was clear from the look on the employee’s face that

this was not the case.

“What type?” Jenny asked.

“Black Labrador.”

“Okay well... What else?”

“There’s... Nope scratch that, you won’t want a Gareth.”

“How d’you know I won’t want a Gareth?”

“No one want’s a Gareth they’re...”

“What?”

“There’s not really a word to be honest. They’re just sort of...‘off’. How about a Tim? Pretty average looking. And dumb. Quite mean. Aggressive. Racist. Eats way too many eggs. But... BUT... Good at golf. So that’s something. Take a Tim,” the employee pleaded. “I’ll chuck a second one in for free.”

“Does anyone get the Tim?” Jenny queried. The queue behind her was building, woman after woman looking to swap their faulty boyfriends in for another model that was just as faulty but in a different way.

“No one buys the Tim.”

“Why haven’t the developers made a perfect man, one not riddled with problems?”

“The developers styled the models after real men from back in the day so...”

“Well that was a mistake.”

“Yup...”

Jenny was starting to give up, losing faith in finding anything good. “Look. Just... Just tell me everything you’ve got and their biggest faults. Just... go. Shoot.”

“There’s Eamon. He’s a kicker. Ahmed, he will never have a real job. Stuart, Jon, Billy, Vladimir, Kevin and Jay all have flatulence issues. A Ryan can be good... As long as you don’t mind being bitten when you’re trying to do your tax returns. Or could do a Damian for cheap if you don’t mind having a suspicious spare room in your

*“How about a Tim?
Pretty average looking.
And dumb. Quite
mean. Aggressive.
Racist. Eats way too
many eggs. But...
BUT... Good at golf”*

house that you're never allowed to go inside."

Jenny was losing hope. When she had entered the store she had dreams of getting what she wanted but those dreams were fading fast.

"The queue's building" the employee sneered. "I'm going to have to rush you."

Jenny sighed. "Which one was a dog again?"

"Benjamin." The employee replied.

Jenny looked the employee in the eyes and said the same thing every woman in the queue in front of her had said and every woman in the queue behind her would go on to say.

"I'll take a Benjamin please. Screw it. Give me two."

Cancer

Paul Devlin

Let us be serious for once. Every so often something comes along that melts our black little hearts and when we heard that this poem is about a subject very close to Paul's heart we knew we had to include it in our winter issue.

This can be a tough time of year for those who are struggling with disease or dealing with the loss of a loved one, so let's take a moment to be thankful for what we have and remember those who are less fortunate than us.

God, we're getting very sappy in our old age. We promise we'll get back to the sarcasm soon!

Cancer is an awful disease,
A cure for it would be wonderful please,
Cancer takes so many lives,
Mothers fathers children and wives,
Losing someone to it can be so upsetting,
Most of the time the cancer is life threatening,
Someday someone will find a cure which will be great,
But for some families it's already too late.

The patients with cancer suffer so much,
On different types of meds as such,
Hoping the cancer will just go away,
But that's hardly ever the way,
Cancer patients can deteriorate very quick,
And become very ill or sick,
And there's not much we can do about it,
Just pray to God to answer the prayers on the candles we lit.

Some people are able to win the fight,
But they struggle for loads of days and nights,
The ones that beat it make me so so happy,
The ones that don't make me feel crappy,

If there was only something we could do,
But honestly I haven't got the slightest clue.

I acknowledge all the work done by medical staff,
They take it seriously because they know it's no laugh,
They do the best they can with what they've got,
But in fairness sometimes cancer is difficult to spot,
When it's found it's acted upon very fast,
Because they don't know how long the person will last,
Treat it quick and it might not spread,
But hearing the results is something we dread.

Do you know the signs of cancer?
Take a trip to your local GP for that answer,
A check up every now and then wouldn't go amiss,
It's better to act fast with this,
So please know the symptoms so you're aware,
I'm telling you this because I care,
It's better to be safe than having to worry,
A check up is as simple as buying a McFlurry.

If you're reading this please say a prayer for those who have passed,
And those who are fighting it so they can beat it at last,
I hope this poem makes you stop and think,
Because cancer does not just stop or shrink,
Again I will say that cancer is one horrible disease,
So a cure for it would be wonderful please.

Paul Devlin lives in Galway. He loves poetry and has written lots of poems since a young age. If you like his poem feel free to message him on Facebook: [Facebook.com/devlin1993](https://www.facebook.com/devlin1993)

The Elsa Dress

James Holden

I don't know why we had even bothered asking my daughter what she wanted to do for her fourth birthday party, as she wasn't ever going to be anything but a *Frozen* theme. Since Meghan's been old enough to express preferences I've had to cope with her obsessiveness around specific TV programmes. We often enter a six-week long stretch where one thing is asked for more than anything else, and we watch the same episodes time and time again as our digital recorder can't keep up with her demands to watch the show again. As she's gotten older each choice of programme seems marginally less tedious than the one before, but *Frozen* seems to have held her interest better than anything else. I've watched it at least once every week since Christmas when we bought it for Meghan. She's infatuated.

So, my wife Leah and I had planned an entire party around the film. We were planning to play Pin The Nose On The Snowman; musical statues to the soundtrack; and blow bubbles when we put "Let It Go" on the stereo to pretend it was snowing. We got character cake toppers to put on top of the royal icing that we were hoping would look like freshly laid snow. Oh, and branded banners, goodie bags and plates. We did wonder for a while if we could make reindeer shaped sandwiches as we had been to a party where they'd been cut into dinosaurs, but our experiments in

James Holden's short stories have been published by Silver Apples Magazine, On The Premises and the Clerkenwell Writers Asylum, and performed by Liars League. He's a regular contributor to The Short Story, and lives in a north London retirement village with his wife and children, despite only being in his thirties.

Why we chose it:

Never have the words "Let it Go" rang so true. If you have managed to avoid the Frozen craze, we salute you (and ask what that rock where you've spent the last two years living under is like). If like the rest of us, you've been subjected to Disney's newest hit, you'll love James's heart-warming story about the lengths Dads go to for their little princesses... or rocket scientists .

granary and cheese were far from successful.

We had bought Meghan an Elsa dress to wear as well and given it to her for her actual birthday a couple of days previously. Elsa's her favourite character - the one who has the power to make everything frozen.

She was very excited to have been given it, and was keen to try it on the night before the party. I relented whilst my wife was in the shower, on condition that she clear the building blocks she'd been playing with. I left her tidying up whilst I supervised my younger child, Thomas, who wanted to get the paints out, in the kitchen. Meghan had gone into the living room to get changed and started shouting for me to come and "look at me, daddy. Daddy. DADDY!"

There were only so many times that I could take having my name yelled whilst I was trying to cope with the art attack on the kitchen table. "You'll be alright, won't you, little man," I said as I stepped out of the kitchen.

"Meghan proudly stood in the living room, her face lighting up as I walked in. She started twirling round, waving a wand, pretending to turn me into ice"

Meghan proudly stood in the living room, her face lighting up as I walked in. She started twirling round, waving a wand, pretending to turn me into ice. I stood still on the spot a couple of times, to play along, and then said that I had to get back into the kitchen to see how Thomas was getting on.

But Thomas had followed me in. His outstretched palms were covered with red paint, and I stepped towards him to make sure that he didn't turn our house into an advert for the Ulster Tourism Board by smearing them all over the door or the wallpaper.

What happened next seemed to happen in slow motion. Thomas tripped on a building block and went flying forward, as Meghan twirled around like a Disney dervish. As he fell over he put his hands out, landing on the back of Meghan's dress. She let out an almighty scream as Thomas, by now face down on the carpet - which was also being given the red-hand treatment - was possibly slightly injured. But, also aware that he may have done something wrong, started cry-

ing as well. I instinctively went to pick up Thomas as the youngest of the pair, but this only seemed to make things worse with Meghan.

I could hear the hurried thump of feet on the stairs, and then Leah burst in, her hair full of shampoo bubbles, clutching a towel. “What’s going on?” she half-shouted over the combined decibel count of two crying children.

“We’ve had a little accident with the paint,” I said, trying to show that contrary to appearances I was actually in control.

“Oh, right,” she said, picking Meghan up, who started to mutter about her dress. “I can’t hear you, poppet,” my wife said. “You’ll have to speak clearer.” Meghan continued to mutter, and my wife put her down, bending so they were at eye level. Meghan muttered something about her dress again, and my wife’s towel started to slip down. She pulled her hands from around from Meghan’s back to lift it back up, but shrieked herself when she saw red paint on her own hands. She span Meghan round, and saw for herself the damage that Thomas had done to the dress, a long red smear on the cape that had seeped through to the dress.

“It’s a good job I’ve got the self-control not to swear right now,” she said. “I leave you all for ten minutes, the three of you, and look what’s happened.”

The ensuing melee meant that bedtime for the pair of them had gotten somewhat distraught, and we ended up watching – yes – *Frozen*, to calm things down. We gave every reassurance to Meghan we could that the dress was going to be fine, that we could wash it and that she would be able to wear it the following day to her party.

As I walked into the kitchen after putting the pair of them to bed, my wife was scrubbing furiously at the cape and the dress to get the paint out.

“Wine?”

“Oh God, yes,” Leah said, looking at my reflection in the window, inky black with the night.

“I suppose we should be avoiding red, should we?” I said with a weak smile.

“Just pour the damn wine.”

“I’m really very sorry,” I said.

“Okay, I get it. You’ve said that three times tonight. Anyway, accidents happen.”

“Yes, but...”

“Don’t beat yourself up about it,” she said, pummelling the dress as I poured us each a large glass of red.

Pulling it out of the sink, she wrung the water out before crossing the kitchen to hang it on the radiator.

I laughed a little. “Do you remember when we were at your mother’s that time and Meghan pulled her training nappy down and crapped all over the floor and wallpaper?”

She sat down at the table. “Look – it was an accident. I’m only going to get angry if I have to listen to a list of ‘parenting mistakes what I have made’. Okay?”

I smiled at her. “Top of the list would be buying bloody *Frozen*,” I said, taking a large slug of wine.

“It really wasn’t meant to be this way, was it?” Leah said.

“What wasn’t?”

“The whole ‘in love with *Frozen*’ thing. I thought we wanted her to have broader horizons than Disney princesses. And here we are four years later washing a fucking Elsa dress to get paint out.”

“Oh, it’s fine,” I said. Although I didn’t think it was, really. When people found out Leah was pregnant, there were always two

things that people said to me. “Well done,” was the first – not congratulations, as though for men the whole point of having children was simply to prove virility and there was nothing left for me to do apart from have my children presented to me on annual basis. And the second was “hoping for a boy, then? Genuinely, I wasn’t fussed. And I wasn’t bothered when she was born, either.

“No footie down the park for you then,” one of my friends had said.

“Why not?” I’d replied, leaving him looking sheepish.

What Leah and me had agreed was that we weren’t going to force her into specific gender roles as part of her play. And to us that

“I thought we wanted her to have broader horizons than Disney princesses. And here we are four years later washing a fucking Elsa dress to get paint out.”

had meant trying to avoid the whole Disney princess thing. *Cinderella* was out, and *The Jungle Book* was in.

But not everyone plays by the same rules, and she learnt all about *Frozen* from nursery and had learnt all the words to “Let It Go” off by heart before she’d even seen it, as well as bringing home judgements about what were girls toys and boys colours.

We moved on from assessing whether our daughter was more likely to be a nuclear or nail technician, to drawing up a list of what needed doing to finish up for the party. It was quite a long one as it turned out and after about an hour, whilst my wife poured a second glass of wine, I went to the hallway and retrieved the dress, spreading it out on the kitchen table.

“Looks alright to me,” I said, smiling at her.

“No,” my wife said, “look at the cape.”

She was right. The paint had come out of the dress, but the snowflakes on the cape, which was made of a blue shimmery material, had a distinct pinkish hue to them.

“It’ll be fine,” I said, trying to inject some confidence into the evening.

“She can’t - she won’t - wear it.”

“Maybe she can wear something else.”

“Yeah ... good luck with that one.”

“Sorry...”

She groaned. “Stop it with the sorries, okay!”

The following morning was my wife’s turn for a lie-in. After I’d got Meghan and Thomas sorted for breakfast, and made myself a strong coffee, we sat watching telly whilst I checked Facebook and the news on my phone.

“Daddy?”

“Uh-huh?”

“Is it my party today?”

“Yes, you know that.”

“Do I get to wear my Elsa dress?”

She looked up at me so sweetly, I had no choice but to say “of course you can.”

“You got the paint out?”

“Yes, we did. Mummy and Daddy scrubbed it very hard last night after you went to bed.”

“Can I see it?”

“Oh, well, it’s - drying.”

“On the radio?”

“What? ... No, it’s radia-tor cupcake. And anyway, it’s outside.”

“Can I see it?”

“Well, it’s hanging up at Mrs Jefferson’s next door.”

There then followed a long pause, as she dipped her spoon into her cereal, raising it to her lips and then putting it back in the bowl.

“Why?”

“Because she had some magic cream we put on the dress and she thought it would be easier to leave it on her washing line.”

“Oh.”

There was a pause. “Can I see it.”

“Later, darling.”

She seemed to accept this for the time-being, anyway. When my wife got up later, Meghan raced up to her. “Mummy, Daddy says you got the paint out.”

“Did he?”

“Can I see it?”

“I’ll leave that up to Daddy,” she said, hand on hip.

“Daddy, can I...”

“Later, darling, later,” I said, interrupting her. After I got her settled in front of the TV, Leah and I stood in the corner of the kitchen whilst we brewed some coffee.

“Where the fuck are we going to find one at this time?” she said.

“50p. Or is it a pound for an ‘eff?’”

“I don’t care about the sodding swear box right now.” She ran her hands through her hair.

“And what about the dress?”

“You’ll just have to go to the supermarket when it opens,” she whispered in an aggressive tone.

With three hours to go until the party started I was stood outside Asda. I was surprised at how many people were waiting for the doors to open - there must have been about twenty of them, holding bags for life and leaning on trolleys. There was even a brace of couples with toddlers already installed in the trolley baby seats, and a man with a baby in a papoose. I hope they’re not all here for Elsa dresses.

A woman who already looked seriously harassed opened the doors and then quickly stood back to avoid the surge in Sunday shoppers. I leapt out of my car to join them, jogging into the store. I slowed down to quickly have a look at the front pages of the Sunday papers before launching myself into the clothing section.

A woman who was looking at bras tutted at my presence in the lingerie aisle, as I did a fast turn into kids clothing. I made my way past Peppa Pig and Hello Kitty, pyjamas and onesies, but, dejected, I couldn't see anything related to the film.

Meghan has a real talent for spotting anything *Frozen*. She can't perceive when the living room is a mess, or when it might possibly be a good idea for her put her shoes in the front cupboard. But she has an unerring knack of spotting the pastel pink or blue used for the packaging, the font used by the designers, or the merest hint of Olaf's arm or Sven's antlers. It leads to all sorts of tantrums and negotiations around posters and ponchos, stickers and cups.

But on this occasion, it seemed that I'd inherited my daughter's powers. Turning the corner, I spotted a hint of the right shade of blue, and I finally found the *Frozen* display. There were hairbands, braids, and ironically for a film centred around an eternal winter, sunglasses.

"I finally found the Frozen display. There were hairbands, braids, and ironically for a film centred around an eternal winter, sunglasses."

And there was a rack of dresses close to the ground, full of the dress I was looking for. The dress at the front of the rail had a 4 - 5 sticker on the hanger, and bent down to lift it off the rack. But when I did so, it met with resistance.

Turning my head, there was another man crouched in the aisle next to me, his hand firmly on the hanger. I looked up at him and smiled, and pulled the dress towards me again, but he held firm to it.

"Erm... I.. erm..."

He smiled at me. "It's for my daughter. It's her birthday and I need the dress before I go and pick her up for the day."

I laughed nervously. "But I need it for my daughter as well. It's her birthday party today and she wants to wear it."

He tried to pull the dress towards him, but I held on.

"Hang on," I said, "there might be another." I had a flick through the rack, but there were no other dresses in the size we were looking for.

Unable to pull the dress off the rail, we both stood crouched next to the rail, and a cramp started to develop in my thighs. We each maintained an iron grip on the dress, and eventually a shop assistant arrived.

"Are you two okay?" she asked.

"I had hold of the dress first, I need it for my daughter's birthday party. But this man here won't let go of it," I said.

"Have you got another one?" the other guy asked.

"I'll go and check. Shall I hold it whilst I do it, so you don't disturb the other shoppers?"

We shook our heads in unison, and she went off towards the back of the store, shaking her head.

I smiled at him. "Disney have got a lot to answer for," I said.

He smiled back. "I've got a bit of cramp coming on. Mind if we co-ordinate standing-up?" he asked.

I nodded. "On the count of three, yeah?"

He nodded back to me. I looked him straight in the eyes as I counted. "One... two..."

I felt like I was participating in the least masculine stand-off ever to have taken place, both of us - grown men! - stood clutching a dress together.

"Three."

We stood up at the same pace, but he started shaking his leg as we did so. "Pins and needles," he said with an apologetic smile.

But then he seemed to lose his balance, and fell forward. As he fell against me, his arm shot upwards, and his balled up hand collided with my nose.

I'd be lying if I said it really hurt, but I wasn't about to lose the advantage I'd won through the moderate amount of pain in my nose.

"Owwww!" I moaned, putting my free hand to my face.

"Oh my God, I'm so sorry," he said, stepping back an inch, his knuckles turning from white to pink as he relaxed his grip on the coat

hanger.

Even better, just as the assistant returned, her hands held up in the air, “We don’t have any more in stock, I’m so sorry gentlemen,” three drops of blood exited my nose, landing in a neat line on my t-shirt. “Are you alright?” she said, looking at the blood, then at my nose and then at the other dad. Blanching a little, he let go of the dress and started to back towards the front of the store. “You take it, honestly mate. I’m so sorry – you have it.”

“Are you alright, sir?” she repeated.

After a pause, I replied. “Never better.”

My wife looked up at me as I walked through the door, triumphantly holding the carrier bag aloft. “What happened to you?” she said as she clocked the blood stains on my t-shirt.

“I’ll tell you after bedtime. But I got it.” I said, a huge grin on my face.

Meghan suddenly ran out into the hallway.

“Daddy, did all the paint come out?”

“Yes, it did,” I said slowly crouching down to her level and pulling it out of the carrier bag with a flourish.

She frowned. “Daddy, you got some on your t-shirt when you cleaned it,” she said, pointing at the blood stains on my shirt.

“Mmm. They’ll wash out.”

“Just like on my dress.”

I nodded.

“Thank you Daddy. For washing my dress all nice and new,” she said, and came towards me, her arms outstretched, to give me a big hug. I looked down at her and I hugged her back, tightly, flooded with warmth.

Peaceful Winter Day

Kate Salvi



Kate Salvi is an internationally known photographer. She has been exhibiting and selling both her photos and paintings since 2009 and after receiving the People's Choice Award at the Chabot Fine Art Gallery in June of 2010, Kate decided to expand her photo greeting card business. They are now sold in 23 shops throughout RI. Kate's work has been published in over 15 magazines both national and international. Kate finds much solace in her work as she struggles with the tumultuous illness of Manic Depression. To view more of her work, go to www.katesalviphotography.vpweb.com

Why we chose it:

Kate's picture does what it says on the tin—it captures a perfect moment of stillness on a cold winter's day. We love the warmth of the light and the subtle hint of colour from the holly in the background.

Let it Snow

Cassandra Schoeber

Cassandra Schoeber is a writer of fantasy, horror, and speculative fiction. If it's magical, odd, weird, or impossible, Cassandra is writing about it. When she takes a break from writing - or is procrastinating - she heads into world as a fitness and transformation coach, encouraging women to be their best selves.

Why we chose it:

A twisted take on a winter legend, this iteration of Jack Frost is most certainly not family-friendly but it definitely has some bite!

Jack smelled the gingerbread before he saw the cabin. His mouth watered. He imagined the ginger and molasses lingering on his tongue as the warm cookie disappeared bite by bite. Humans looked so happy eating their little gingerbread men. The creature itself smiled as teeth bit off its arms and legs.

If only it wouldn't freeze the moment it touched his lips.

"Jack!" Perchta grabbed his arm.

He yanked away. "Don't touch me," his voice was small, a mumble. His sister was always striking to behold. The whiteness of her long curls blended into her alabaster robe. She appeared pure and timeless, while he had the look of a discarded orphan, too large for his hand-me-down clothes.

"What are you waiting for?" Perchta's face, delicate, with no scars or creases, shifted slightly. Jack thought he glimpsed the hag within, but her pale features held. "You're already late. You said you were going to do it tonight."

"I know. I will." He dropped his gaze.

"You better." She shoved him, he stumbled back. "Or else I'll go ahead. With or without you."

Perchta floated down the trail, hidden somewhere in the woods. Watching.

She'd cross the boundary of tradition if she hunted before the frost. But he doubt-

ed she would care. He should just do it now - every year it was his job - but he wanted to wait a little bit longer.

He edged up the trail, rounding the corner. The cabin rested within a clearing. The red SUV parked outside seemed small next to the log structure. A familiar song came from within; “The weather outside is frightful, but the fire is so delightful...”

Jack’s hand grew icy. He nearly pressed it to the ground. But he wasn’t ready.

He crept up the porch steps, the railing decorated in fir branches and bits of holly and ivy. A wreath layered with red flowers welcomed at the door.

He glanced inside the window. A family of four was gathered around a piano, singing. Beside them was a brick fireplace, logs ablaze. Jack’s skin crawled with an icy shiver. He imagined himself sitting in front of the flames, its warmth penetrating his cold.

On a table nearby were five uniform gingerbread men, white icing eyes and gumdrop jelly buttons. They smiled, beckoning him to come and taste.

A small boy of Jack’s height with slick black hair and golden spectacles turned towards the window. Jack ducked down, out of sight. His handprints left icy tendrils on the glass pane.

He froze, waiting, listening. The carol continued, the girl on the piano leading the rest of the family along. Her voice was high, like cracking ice.

Jack inched up again, peering at the table and ginger treats.

He felt something in his chest. A crackling, slow, hesitant. He glanced at the family - a father, a mother, a young girl, and a-

Jack blinked, the boy had gone.

“What are you doing here?” a voice asked. Jack jumped up, turned. The young boy stood in the doorway, arms crossed.

“I...I...” Jack didn’t know what to say. He’d never spoken to a human before. It violated spirit law.

“Are you lost?”

“No.”

“Then what do you want?” Even though the air was cool, the human seemed unaffected in his black velvet robe and matching slippers, a golden “S” etched over one breast.

Jack glanced inside. At the presents, the cookies, the glowing

fire. Another icy crack shook his chest. He felt a thaw within his bones.

“Let go of me!” the boy shouted.

Jack looked down. Without thought, he’d grabbed the human’s arm, ice pinning them together. Jack dropped his hand, stumbling back.

“Get out of here!” the boy spat, brown eyes wide.

Jack fell back into the railing. The softness inside him shifted and hardened until all he could feel was ice surging through his veins.

“Sully!” A woman called. She joined the boy at the door, shivering beneath her blue house-robe. “What on earth are you doing outside?”

Jack froze. He knew he should leave, Perchta would be watching. But the woman, her voice soft and gentle, made him pause.

“Just a hapless local begging for bread,” the boy snarled. “He’s not welcome here.”

“Oh, Sully,” the woman smiled at Jack. “He looks almost blue, his hair frozen at its tips. Invite him in to keep warm.”

She stepped outside, the scent of gingerbread following her. Another crack shook Jack. A quick thawing produced moisture in his limbs. A sensation kindled, new and enticing.

This must be what warmth felt like.

Sully pulled his mother back. “Look at him. Pathetic, begging, no sense of pride.”

“No,” Jack whispered. He could feel the warmth dissolving, out of his control. Frost was coming.

“Staring at us, watching.”

“No!” Jack’s voice rose. Sully’s mother stepped into the house, arms hugging her chest. But the boy took a step forward.

“He wanted to steal from us.”

Jack shook his head. His hands covered in ice.

“Didn’t you?” Sully shoved Jack, pushing him hard. The railing broke. Jack landed on his back. Ice surged through his veins, his fingers found the dirt, gripped the ground. He held back the frost’s release.

“What’s all the commotion?” A man rushed outside. Tall, dark, a larger version of the boy. Poking her head out behind him was the last human, the young girl.

Go inside. They needed to go inside.

Jack shook. His vision grew foggy around the edges. A cackle came from somewhere behind him, among the trees. This was just what she wanted to see. And now Jack wouldn't be able to stop her.

"I'm handling it Father." Sully strode down the stairs, rolling up his sleeves. "This good for nothing thought he could steal from the family of Sullivan Octavius Drisole the Third."

"Sully, please," the woman whimpered. Jack caught her gaze. Something lingered in her eyes. Every part of Jack wanted to release everything. But because of her, he couldn't. The urge teetered on its edge.

"Quiet," the man snapped. "Sully can handle this."

"Good for nothing." The boy shoved Jack towards the woods. "The likes of you are better off dead."

Jack blinked. Blackness cloaking his vision. Ice hardening within.

He drove his hands into the ground. Ice shot out everywhere, covering the entire landscape.

Jack stared, his body shaking. He looked at his hands. What had he done? Four iced humans decorated the deck and lawn of the cabin in the woods.

"Well done, Brother." Perchta floated out from behind a tree, clapping her gnarled hands. She cackled. "These humans were a nasty bunch."

Her appearance had changed - her skin wrinkled from centuries of hardship, a black hood and cloak covering her stooped frame. And at her waist a long blade, specks of dried blood marring its edge.

Disgust twisted inside him.

"You can't escape what you really are, Jack Frost." She smiled, her teeth yellow, with gaping holes. "None of us can."

"Spare the woman," he whispered as Perchta drew her blade and glided towards the immobile humans.

"And since we've no place to go..." her voice cracked as she sang each note. She raised the sword before the frozen statue of Sullivan Octavius Drisole the Third. "Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow."

Winter Haiku

Eileen F. Connolly

Eileen F. Connolly lives in Kenmare, Co. Kerry, where she was born in 1944. She is a founding member of Clann na Farraige writers' group in Kenmare. Her work has been published in Irish and in English in Feasta, Reality, Cúm, Podium IV, Breacadh, An Chainnt Bhreá, Mermaid's Purse/Púits an mhadaruaidh, Heart of Kerry, Doghouse Book of Ballad Poems, The Stony Thursday Book, Speaking for Scéine and The Blue Max Review.

Why we chose it:

Preeeeetty sure this is significantly longer than a haiku but whatever, we at Silver Apples like those who play it fast and lose with the rules. Eileen's evocative language in this poem captures the feel of the season perfectly.

Raindrops cling
to window pane
silent tears

Aspens shiver
dreading winter
darkness

Cold winds moan
gathering winter
fury

Bashful moon
hides behind
a sycamore

Rapt in wonder
nose against windowpane
counting snowflakes

Drowsy owl
loses balance
doesn't give a hoot

Duvet wrapped
primed for dreaming
winter lullaby

The Lunch Date

Alex Dunne

Finian ran his neatly manicured hands across the tablecloth, smoothing down the bumps and creases that kept stubbornly reappearing beneath his fingertips. He frowned down at the place setting; one luncheon plate, one salad fork and butter knife, one teacup complete with saucer and pewter teaspoon. Everything supposedly in its proper place, and yet the symmetry was off somehow.

With infinite care, he nudged the base of the delicate china cup until the handle and teaspoon rested in perfect perpendicularity. As if on cue, a fresh lump arose in the tablecloth.

This was all Nellie's fault. He resolved to have a stern word with her when he returned to the Manor that afternoon. He may have culled her from the rank and file of the less sanitary classes but that was no excuse for slovenliness. She worked for the Delahunts now and the family had rigorous standards to maintain.

While he was on the subject, he would have to ask what on Earth had possessed the woman to pack the chequered cloth in the first place? He must impress upon her that from here on in, all his tablecloths should be white and white only. This sort of engagements only comes about every thirty days or so and it requires a certain gravitas, a sense of occasion.

The sun reached its zenith in the re-

In her spare time, Alex Dunne likes to typeset the magazine and pull her own hair out while doing it.

Why we chose it:

Speaking of self-promotion, check out this little ditty from editor extraordinaire Alex. (Alex would like to point out that it was Gráinne who wrote the 'editor extraordinaire' bit. Having said that, Alex made no move to delete it when typesetting this piece)

markably cloudless October sky and Finian knew his wait was almost over. He folded one long thin leg across the other, straightened his tie, and produced a gold pocket watch from inside his worsted-wool jacket.

A thunderous crack shattered the peace of the meadow. Finian turned his face to avoid the disorienting flash of light. Once the smoke had dissipated he popped the cover back on his watch and returned it to his breast pocket.

There, in a smoking crater three foot deep, sat a man of middle years, naked as the day he was born, and clearly suffering from acute shock.

"Afternoon my good man!" Finian said, gesturing for the stranger to rise. "I must say, your punctuality is to be commended. So many of my guests keep me waiting, and I really do not like to be kept waiting."

"Wh-what--" the man stammered, but his host cut him off.

"What are you doing in a hole in a field? Why, I brought you here. Or at least my agents did. They really are very good you know, among the best in the business. Of course, they would have to be con-

sidering the amount they charge for their services. It's positively scandalous! Still, one should never scrimp on necessities. I have very exacting standards and they so rarely disappoint. Would you turn around please?"

"my dreams usually feature that busty blonde who lives down the road and I'm not normally the naked one..."

The stranger began to rotate on unsteady legs, confusion writ large on his soot-blackened face. "Am I dreaming?" he

asked, his voice slow and thick, "Because my dreams usually feature that busty blonde who lives down the road and I'm not normally the naked one..."

"Hmm? Pardon?" Finian said, momentarily pausing his appraisal of the stranger, "Oh no, you're not dreaming old boy. I assure you this is all perfectly real. By the by, approximately how much do you weigh?"

"Oh, um. Around 12 stone I think?"

Finian nodded. "That's good. You seem in relatively decent shape for an older chap. Were you a weightlifter in your younger years?"

"Amateur boxer," the stranger replied, twisting his left leg slightly inwards in an effort to hide his modesty. He was beginning to accept the fact that he really was standing in a field in his birthday suit conversing with an alarmingly pale gentleman who appeared to be enjoying a solitary picnic with no actual food. The realization left him a little uncomfortable. "If you don't mind me asking, Mister..?"

"Lord actually, Lord Finian Delahunt, Fourth Earl of Rossmanagher."

"Beg 'pardon. If you don't mind me asking m'Lord, why exactly am I here?"

Finian smiled and for the first time the stranger noticed his teeth, sharp and pointed like a cat's. He shivered.

"A pertinent question," he replied. "But I have not quite finished my own line of inquiry just yet. How fast can you run?"

"I-I'm sorry?" The stranger's tongue felt thick and dry in his mouth.

"I asked how fast you could run. I find it does one good to work up a bit of an appetite before lunch you see. It aids in digestion. Now, I shall ask you again, how fast can you run?"

Finian watched as the stranger's mouth opened and closed like a fish, but no words came out. He hoped his agents hadn't sent him a stupid one again. It did take some of the fun out of it when his guests couldn't humour him with a bit of banter. He sighed in resignation and decided to cut to the chase, so to speak.

"Tell you what; you run for your life and I'll even give you a head start, just to make things a bit more sporting. Count of ten suit?"

"He hoped his agents hadn't sent him a stupid one again. It did take some of the fun out of it when his guests couldn't humour him with a bit of banter"

The stranger's eyes widened in horror, but he did not budge.

"One," Finian rose.

"Two," He buttoned his jacket and straightened his sleeves.

"Three," The stranger finally snapped to his senses and bolted, sprinting at full tilt toward the stream at the south end of the meadow. Finian was pleased to note there was a bit of life in the old boy yet.

The Fourth Earl of Rossmanagher took a deep, satisfying breath savouring the slight chill in the air. If he was not mistaken the first frost was due soon. This very well could be the last hunt of the season and he fully intended to enjoy every minute. He cracked his knuckles and grinned. It really was a marvellous day to be alive.

Thank you for reading Issue Six:
'Frostbitten'

Submissions for Issue Seven:
'Places We Have Travelled' will open in
January 2016

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Confessions from the back page:
I apparently do not pronounce 'iron' correctly