

THE NAUGHTY LIST

Issue 3

NORTH POLE - Three women were arrested at the North Pole today for the alleged blackmail of Santa Claus. The women in question - Gráinne O'Brien, Alexandra Dunne and Una Hussey, all hailing from Ireland - were apprehended in the ginger bread cottage they had rented on the outskirts of Elftown.

women's location by local Elf, Mr. Bob Twinkletoes, who stated that he was made aware of the gang's fiendish plot when they arrived into the Candy Cane Tavern and began boasting of their exploits after one too many glasses of hard egg nog.

Officials from the Elfish Special Police forces found the women to be in possession of a dossier of incriminating photos of Mr. Claus in various states of undress. They also found printed transcripts of so-called 'sexts' between Mr. Claus and Ms. O'Brien. It seems the gang of women, dubbed the "Ho-Ho-Ho's", were planning on extorting a large number of gifts from Mr. Claus this Christmas season and had repeatedly threatened to expose his strange fetishes to the world unless he give in to their demands.

"I could tell they were outsiders," Mr. Twinkletoes is quoted as saying, "For one thing, they were far taller than the average Elf and they swore profanely."

Mrs. Claus was also tipped off to the women's location by local Elf, Mr. Bob Twinkletoes, who stated that he was made aware of the gang's fiendish plot when they arrived into the Candy Cane Tavern and began boasting of their exploits after one too many glasses of hard egg nog.

Officials were tipped off to the



Silver Apples Magazine



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Gráinne O'Brien, Alex Dunne and Una Hussey

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Sarah Lally

Sarah Lally is a Graphic Designer by day and the supervillain "The Maniac Insomniac" by night. She was delighted to be asked to provide the cover for the 3rd issue of Silver Apples Magazine and would like to thank the editors for the opportunity and trust they bestowed upon her to get the job done. You can find her at www.owliath.com, Facebook, LinkedIn, and with her nose at the bottom of a tea cup

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Silver Apples Magazine

The Naughty List

Issue Three, December 2014

Creativity Worth Consuming

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Letter from the Editors:

In which we wish you a Merry Christmas and discuss exciting new plots

Gráinne O'Brien, Alex Dunne & Una Hussey

Greetings Earth Dwellers,

When composing this letter from the editors, we pondered long and hard about what kind of tone it should take. Should we make fun of the 'Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays' debate? Should we keep it PC, or should we try to offend as many people as we could? Truly, the possibilities were endless. Instead we decided to focus on the new year, a new beginning, and a new issue.

2014 was a year filled with ups and downs for us, but one of those downs (or was it an up?) thankfully lead to the creation of this magazine. 2015 will see some changes for us; a new look, a refocus on the kind of work we want to publish, and new blood on the Silver Apples Staff in the form of Una Hussey, our new Art Editor (hi Una! Nice to have you aboard!)

As always we will endeavour to publish great art. Art that stays with you, that makes you think, laugh, cry, and never makes you feel like you don't deserve it.

'The Naughty List' is already embracing some of the changes we want to see. We accepted less submissions this issue than we ever have before, choosing instead to really focus on the pieces that called out to us. This does not mean we have changed our desire to encourage new artists to submit to us without fear or ridicule and judgement. Quite the contrary.

We want to refocus the magazine to show the quirky and original talent we feel is largely under-appreciated. In the next few months we will be running competitions to design a new logo that reflects our personality and rebranding our website. As we become more focused, we believe that our submitters will recognise our magazine as a place to showcase the weird and wonderful creations they have worked hard on, and have them appreciated by an audience who is as weird and wonderful as they are.

So read on friends old and new, and remember as you scroll through the pages of 'The Naughty List' that creativity is always worth consuming.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, Joyful Festivus and a Happy New Year to you all!

Gráinne, Alex and Una.

Krampus Elf

Amelia Gossman



Amelia Gossman is a MICA graduate with a BFA in Illustration and a minor in creative writing. Her work is inspired by fantasy and nature. She loves whimsy and colour. She currently lives in Maryland, where she works in a public library, creates art and music, and takes care of 2 cats. Visit her website at www.amelia-grace-illustration.com

Why we chose this piece:

This clever illustration really embodies the Silver Apples Christmas spirit—quirky, a little odd, but loveable nonetheless. Plus we were afraid she'd send Krampus after us if we didn't publish her drawing. (Seriously, google it—that is some terrifying Christmas mythology!)

Greed and Charity

Dan Mooney

Dan Mooney is a thirty year old Limerick writer who's still finding his writing feet. He enjoys experimenting with screenplays, short-stories, novel writing and the occasional report for work. So far he has six years of journalism under his belt, an (as yet) unpublished novel and two screenplays. He enjoys writing absurd and/or surreal characters and unusual storylines typically inspired by sci-fi, fantasy or horror.

Why we chose this piece:

Dan captures everything Christmas is about in this wonderful little story—commercialism, crowds, and the overwhelming urge to tackle other shoppers in the street. It truly is the most wonderful time of the year. It's also good to know that when we give into our baser urges at this time of year, we cannot be held responsible for our actions. We are at the mercy of a higher power. Thank goodness.

Greed strolled down the cobble street with a placid half-smile. It was winter, and winter, Greed had noted, was a wonderful time to be Greed. All about him decorations and shop windows seemed to share in his merriment. “Good for you”, he thought as they twinkled at him. All along the street shoppers bustled, hauling bags stuffed full of things they had spent money on. It seemed there were more of them about the town this year than last.

He had found the town when other cities had gotten too big for him. Other cities meant other Greeds. Other Greeds meant sharing power, and Greed hated sharing - though that seems a pretty redundant statement.

For just a moment he thought back to his birth. It had happened during a sale in a department store around this same time of the year. He was born on the floor of the shop in full knowledge of what he was, as he climbed up from the corpse of the man trampled to death by fellow shoppers. He had gorged himself on the greed in his first beautiful, blinding moments of life. The realities in the immediate aftermath though, had been less than magnificent. Considerably less.

The department store in which he had been born was in a city. A massive city, containing millions and millions of people, which meant it contained more than a reasonable number of Greeds, as well as Friendships, Forgivenesses, Hatreds and all the Others who shared his form of existence. He opted for something a little more low-key, and had found it. This town housed little over one hundred thousand people in the whole place and there was not another Greed in sight. He decided he would stay here for a few centuries until he mastered the manipulation of the Older Others.

To the watching humans he was simply a man in his early twenties. Well dressed, strong looking, whistling happily to himself as he ambled along a Christmassy street during the most wonderful time of the year.

Then he stopped whistling. Sitting on a rough stone bench, the kind that was made yesterday but fashioned to look as though someone had carved it five thousand years ago, he saw Charity. Or one of them at any

rate. It was wearing one of those stupid, smug, hideous little half-smiles that it wore when it was winning. The smug shit even nodded its head when it spotted him.

Greed began thinking fast. Physical confrontation was pointless; he hadn't mastered the art yet and was uncertain who was stronger. Instead he tried to keep his pleasant smile about him and sat down on the stone bench across the street, where he could keep an eye on Charity.

It looked amused when he sat down. It stretched its hands in front of it and cracked its human-looking knuckles. Then it lifted an eyebrow at him. A challenge.

For just a moment Greed was unsure. Why was it challenging him? Did he have the skills? But then he spotted the woman. She had left her bags on the ground while she took a clearly important phone call. Three bags, undoubtedly packed full of swag. Nudging someone to steal the bags, at Christmas time, would be easier than taking candy from a baby. And he knew how easy that was. He did it all the time.

“He spotted the first target coming. A teenager. She was barely seventeen and walking in that manner that they sometimes did; an attempt at appearing alluring or perhaps a little beyond their years.”

Charity was still smiling at him. Greed felt his temper fraying. He would show that smug fuck a trick or two. He spotted the first target coming. A teenager. She was barely seventeen and walking in that manner that they sometimes did; an attempt at appearing alluring or perhaps a little beyond their years. She looked well-off, which meant she probably loved things.

He swallowed and unfocused his eyes. All at once the street blurred and shone, colours flared as the humans' auras became instantly visible, surging around them in a mass of sometimes conflicting impulses. From across the street Charity

seemed to come into sharper focus, as the rest of reality blurred out. Its face became more angular, less human, and there was no aura.

The teenager's aura was purer than he could have wished for, but not above tampering. He reached out with his mind, delicately extending his influence, which had grown in the season that was in it, and Nudged her just a little. Too hard and she would suspect something amiss, but just right and she would believe it was all her, and a wonderful idea to boot.

He refocused his eyes and watched her lick her lips slightly. She kept walking, but he saw her gaze flick toward the bags. The woman's back was still turned. The teenager would do it. That's when Charity shimmered. It was too quick for Greed to get a read of its strength, but whatever it was trying to do, it seemed to have failed. The teenager was still coming. Right up until a reveller wearing a Santa-hat bumped into her. He had been opening a box of chocolates, to give to a friend walking with him and not watched where he was going. The teenager looked shocked and blushed. The Santa-hat man laughed. Merrily. And handed her a chocolate. “Happy Christmas,” he said to her, and she smiled.

Charity was smiling too. A big fucking smug smile. Then it shimmered again.

Greed looked about desperately to find the target. Everyone seemed to be lost to their own worlds. Everyone except a little old lady. She was smiling happily as she walked toward the woman. She was going to warn her about the bags she had apparently forgotten.

Greed struck quickly, dropping out of focus, he scanned the humans for the dirtiest aura he could find, and this time he didn't bother with delicacy. He hit it hard.

The young man in the business suit didn't know why he did it, but he altered his course and made a beeline straight for the sports store across the street. In doing so he stepped on the elderly woman's foot as he powered past. The look he shot her was venom. When he snapped out of it later on, he would probably feel bad about that, but at the time he looked like he wanted to shout at her as well. The old lady, for her part, pulled up in pain as the polished black shoes trod on her toes. She bit back tears and shuffled for the safety of the bench that Charity was sitting on.

Charity was no longer smiling, but stood out of its seat to console the old woman. Greed swallowed a laugh. Charity narrowed its eyes as it looked at him.

Greed felt himself becoming a little unsettled. It was a good time of year for both of them. A massive, bumper time for both of them. It seems paradoxical, but there it is. Perhaps he should just let the challenge go... He considered standing up and walking away before he realised what was happening. A charitable thought. A terrible, charitable thought. The sneak was trying to play him.

He buckled down and scanned the crowd, surely there was one person he could get to, one weak-minded simpleton he could overpower. He would steal this victory and the rush of power that comes with it. Sure, it wouldn't be all-consuming power for the ages, but they weren't playing for high-stakes. He just wanted to win.

Then he spotted the boy. Ten, maybe eleven. Too young to know the difference. He eyed the child greedily, as Greed is wont to do. Children were easy, too easy. If Charity spotted the child first, it would win. He looked up at his rival, Charity sat with one arm around the elderly lady, but its eyes were fixed on Greed. It sighed at him and then gestured with its free hand. It was surrendering. He grinned at the idiot. Teach it to be smug.

He Nudged, not quite the brute force attack as he had deployed on the businessman, but not far off it. The child, wandering free from his parents who were catching up with old friends not far away, seemed to stagger on the spot. His eyes lit up when he saw the bags. He walked toward them, not even attempting to feign subterfuge and made a grab, lifting a bag while the woman still chatted and buzzed about the holidays on her phone. The little one took off at pace, scuttling around a corner to check his loot. The woman hung up her phone and turned around to find only two bags. Just in the nick of time.

Greed wins, Greed thought, as he began to feel the first trickling of power up

“Greed struck quickly, dropping out of focus, he scanned the humans for the dirtiest aura he could find, and this time he didn't bother with delicacy. He hit it hard.”

through the soles of his feet. When the humans choose you, that's your reward. He smiled in triumph over at Charity.

The fucker was smiling back at him. That smug fucking smile again. Then it hit him. Charity had given it to him. Lowered him in. Surrendered so he could have it. It had given him a gift. He had accepted that gift. He had won, but in winning, he had lost. The power drained back out of the soles of his feet. Across the street he saw Charity sit up straighter. The old woman seemed to be happier too, though that could just be coincidence. Then Charity shimmered in its seat and Greed watched the bashful looking little boy walk back to the woman. She was distraught, searching for her bag, when he walked back over. She must have been feeling charitable too. She didn't even give out, just took the bag solemnly before shooting him a wide smile and walking away.

Charity stood up and bade the old woman farewell. It nodded to Greed somewhat respectfully. The asshole was magnanimous on top of everything else, Greed thought.

Then it wandered off down the street, whistling a Christmas Carol as it went.

Tough at the Top

James Holden

James Holden works as a political geek, and lives in London, England with his wife and daughter in a retirement village, despite only being in his thirties. He has previously had work performed by London Liars' League, published by On The Premises, and occasionally blogs and writes for the Clerkenwell Writers Asylum <https://clerkenwellwritersasylum.wordpress.com/>

Why we chose this piece:

James has a wonderful ability to make us smile right from the first reading and the more we read this story the more we loved it. James captures the roller coaster of emotions everyone experiences around Christmas from what is definitely a unique perspective

My looks may have faded slightly, but I know that I haven't lost what it takes to be a good angel. My halo still glitters in the twinkling lights. My face is still porcelain white, save for two big rosy cheeks. My blue eyes are only a little dimmed. My lips still form a gentle smile, though they are so red and full that they would probably make Mary Magdalene blush. My waist has held its shape, and my large skirts still shine, even if they have lost the clear creases and folds that they used to have.

So it was something of a shock to discover that not only was I banished from my usual spot on the top of the tree, but that I was only momentarily considered for a place on the tree at all. I was eventually relegated to the plate rack above the dresser unit. I, who had graced the top of the Mottershed's trees for five successive Christmases.

Lucy had made me at primary school, and I don't think it would be too vain to say that I was one of the better angels to come out of Class 2B, if not the best of the lot. She had lovingly cut my skirts from silver foil, pinning them to my toilet roll torso, white cardboard glued to my back for wings, the left only slightly bigger than the right, my face carefully drawn before being glued to the top of my body.

I remember the comments her parents made when she handed me over. "Oh Lucy, she's perfect," her Mum said, an approving look in her face and no trace of a patronising tone in her voice. Her Dad eyed me up and down before telling Lucy how beautiful I was. Well, it was true.

I really enjoyed those years spent at the top of the tree in the dining room. Listening in to the traditional discussions during the build up to Christmas, about how people were going to fit around the table and how best to make sure that Joan wasn't in Bill's eyeline. Peering through the French windows into the lounge beyond, the snow and reindeers and mistletoe framing the adverts on the television, passing on information from the programmes to my fellow inhabitants of the tree. I loved the inexorable spread of cards across every conceivable flat

surface before the string came out and they started to fill the walls instead.

Lucy's Dad would sneak out to the garage on Christmas Eve, piling presents under the tree after she had calmed down from the excitement of what was to come and gone to bed. After he'd finished he would drink the brandy and eat the mince pie that Lucy had left out, whilst her Mum would interrupt her large glass of chardonnay to sip the milk and gnaw at the carrot, wiping lipstick from the rim of the beaker. From my vantage point I watched them kiss under the mistletoe at midnight each year.

And then, this year, I ended up perched on the edge plate rack. The plate rack, I ask you! The only perk of being there, as far as I could tell, was that I wouldn't have to suffer a pine needle jammed up my behind for two weeks. I turned to the old reindeer that had casually been placed next to me. He had used to occupy the lower branches before being relegated to the rack last year.

"I can't believe that I'm here. Simply can't believe it."

The reindeer snorted before turning to face me, dragging one of his front hoofs across the plate rack. "Tell me about it," he said in a slightly wheezy voice.

A Lladro figurine turned around. She was a young girl, wearing a pastel coloured dress that came down to her ankles, long curls nestling on her shoulder. One of her arms leant on a parasol with a golden handle.

"Are you two joking? Look at how decrepit you are." The reindeer bowed his head, and I noticed that one of his eyes was missing. "You've both seen better days. Not that you would have won a beauty parade to begin with," she said, haughtily eying me up and down. "If I'm honest you used to let the whole tree down. The new angel is a definite improvement."

"If I'm honest you used to let the whole tree down. The new angel is a definite improvement."

I looked up to the angel that was now sat on the top of the tree. She had been bought the week before at a German Christmas Market. My replacement had straw pigtails and a white felt hat. Her face was a perfectly spherical wooden ball onto which eyes, mouth and nose had been painted. I thought her expression was haughty. She had a long white robe, small twigs for hands, and a miniature pair of golden coloured slippers peeped out from the hem. Wire wings flared outwards from her back.

"She has no halo, though," the reindeer said, looking up at me with his one eye.

"Yes, but yours *is* made out of a silver pipe cleaner," said the Lladro figurine.

I couldn't recall ever having felt jealous or annoyed before - I am meant to be an angel after all. But I suddenly felt a real need for revenge. I shuffled to edge of the plate rack before dropping down onto the dresser. My landing created a slight waft of wind that almost blew a Christmas card over onto Jesus' crib in the nativity. Joseph tutted, and one of the Three Wise Men turned to track my progress as I made my way along to the edge of the sideboard, the middle tier of the Christmas tree now within my reach.

I jumped over, the branch bobbing up and down slightly, some needles showering down onto the carpet. The twinkling lights reflected nicely in my skirt - you wouldn't get that effect on a plain cotton skirt. I started to climb upwards, pulling

myself up on the tinsel, forcing my way past baubles. A couple of branches below the top, a plastic Santa figure straddled a branch.

“Ho Ho Ho, Angel! Where are you going to?” he boomed.

“I’m going to pay my replacement a visit.”

“Oh, she’s not nearly as nice as you were, Angel. She has the best vantage point of all of us and she never passes on any gossip. Please, ask her to tell me whether Ken and Deidre are happily together at the moment - I do so miss the Coronation Street updates you used to provide us with.”

“You think that’s bad? She told me that my wool was fraying at the edges and that it was a shame that they hadn’t bought more decorations,” said a knitted snowman a couple of branches along.

“Oh, it gets worse than that,” said Santa, shaking his head. “She kicked one of the baubles off the branch below. She said it was tarnished and old, and didn’t reflect enough light up towards her.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” I said, hoisting myself up on the penultimate branch. I stood there looking up at the new angel, coughing to get her attention. She looked down at me.

“*Achtung!* Who are you?” she barked.

“I’m the angel that used to sit on the top of the tree, until you came along.”

She sneered. “Well, I can see why they replaced you. I was crafted by a professional who understood the qualities needed for a good angel - beauty, poise and grace. None of which you seem to possess.”

“I was crafted by a schoolgirl, with love, which seems to me to be the point of Christmas. Unlike these German Christmas markets which are overpriced, overly intricate, and unfortunately, over here.”

Emboldened, I started to climb up the base of the needle on which she was sitting. The top of the tree started to wobble, baubles further down started to jingle and there was a rustle of tinsel. “What are you doing?” the angel cried, struggling to use her outstretched arms to provide some balance.

The top of the tree eventually stopped moving, and I could hear murmuring from the decorations below. I reached up and put my hands round the branch, but she started to kick at my hands. I gave it a hard push and it started to oscillate wildly. Stuck on the branch, she was unable to steady herself and the panic started to show on her face. She was askew on the branch, struggling to right herself.

“One more shove, Angel,” Santa boomed from below. I leant back, ramming the branch with as much force as I could muster.

“*Schwienhund!*” she shouted as she came loose from the tip of the branch and fell backwards. She plummeted to the floor, landing on her back. The fall had dislodged part of her straw hair, which was sticking out at a peculiar angle, and one her wire wings was twisted. She lay there, muttering to herself, and no-one climbed down to help her. Santa led the decorations in a chorus of “Hip-hip-hooray.”

And so I climbed on top of the tree to claim my rightful position. I smiled to myself, looking out at the cards and decorations from my usual vantage point. I sighed, my halo now slipped to one side after the fight. I felt exhausted by the excitement, and there’s still a week to go until Christmas. It’s tough at the top.

Low Poly Deer

Laura Crowe



Laura Crowe is a motion graphic designer and illustrator type living in Newcastle. She loves what she does, and is trying to establish herself a little bit more around the real world and the digital world.

Why Una chose this piece:

I imagine this deer is a modern day Rudolph. Drawn with mathematical accuracy, I love the unnatural perfection of the geometric shapes that make up the image. I chose this image because Deer are an archetypal symbol of the festive season, and this picture contrasts the sweet romantic images of flying reindeer typically associated with this time of year. Laura has some amazing digital images and hand drawn illustrations on her site, check her out at <https://crowcrowcrow.wordpress.com>

The Night After Christmas

Stuart Nealon

Stuart Nealon is the Spiritual Successor of Ebenezer Scrooge, minus the redemption. When he's not teaching in a Chinese university, Stuart spends his time working on his latest novel and yelling the words "Bah! Humbug!" at incredulous passers-by. He extends the season's greetings to all human beings.

Why we chose this piece:

Hey, who are we to judge how other people choose to spend their holidays? Stuart's humorous poem sheds light on a very different kind of Christmas party .

T'was the night after Christmas when all through gaff
Not a reveller was silent, not even the staff
The ravers excelled in uproarious feats;
Upside down on the ceiling they danced to the beats!
"This stuff's too much for me," I did say with disdain
As I poked at my skull while massaging my brain
And deciding a sojourn would do me some good,
I departed the dance floor and threw on my hood.
On the landing some session-heads sat and were merry,
While a girl who was wrecked thought she stood on a ferry;
But a generous crew - kindness too great to trump
As I stuck out my nose, 'suffulating a bump.
In a daze I did stumble, descending the stairs
While I gulped from my bottle, discarding my cares!
But too late did I realise my erroneous way;
At that silly house party, why didn't I stay?
In a hallway I stood by a twist of fate violent
While the darkness engulfed; the house quiet, cold and silent.
Then a sound did disturb, reminiscent of Hell,
The air, it did ring with a fell jingle bell.
To the window I ran and I saw a grave sight
It was Santa Claus yelling at tyranny's height!
My heart, how it seized up with crippling fears
As Santa Claus cited his evil reindeers:
"On Techno, Electro, on Dubstep, on Trance
Now Drum and Bass, Ghettotec, Jungle, by chance
On a session have we just now happened to stumble?"
"This cannot be happening..." I said with a grumble.
As the sleigh, it did settle, Santa's whip, it did lash
Having chosen our session to suddenly crash!
In my stomach: a rumbling and terrible feeling
Those horrible footsteps that pounded the ceiling!
In a flash down the chimney the sucker had plunged
And behind the red curtains I skittishly lunged.
'Neath the plastic, pine tree, where our presents did rest,
Did Santa then grab, revealing his quest:
I was witnessing one of the Lord's crueller jokes
As I told myself: "Santa's stealing our yokes!
"Ai Santa," says I. "Get away out of here,

'Cause none of us need such undue Christmas cheer!"
Reply he did quickly, with a furious scowl:
"Get away out of it, buddy, you're only a gowl!"
Like a bullet he shot, your narrator he grabbed,
While evading advances, his jaw I then jabbed.
With a fire in his eyes he removed a sharp knife
And proceeded to slash with impeccable spite,
All the strength I could grasp I bestowed to a kick
And to Santa's red head did it viciously stick,
While triumphantly yelling: "That's enough of this of this farce!"
'Gainst the wall I did push him while kicking his arse!
Firing back up the chimney - Santa's thrilling escape -
As I patted my back, wrapped in Victory's embrace.
And just at the point of my action's perfection
I find myself shaken with utter dejection:
All around, people stare as I lie on the floor,
For what reason they're here I just cannot be sure...
When I ask around: "Guys, was it all just a dream?"
They reply: "Why of course! You were on Ketamine!"
The statement I hear, yet I cannot believe
While examining the powder that covers my sleeve.
So the party goes on, while they think I am mad
Yet reflecting on it, I am secretly glad:
Though they stare at me docile with gazes redundant
Their merriment rests on my actions incumbent;
I had vanquished Saint Nick, who fled into the night
As I yelled: "Merry Christmas; now get outta my sight!"

Working Late

Kevin Liston

Kevin Liston is a member of the Limerick Writers' Centre fiction group. He spends as much of his spare time as possible reading, writing and avoiding the internet

Why we chose this piece:

While we certainly believe that contract killers deserve to go straight to the top of Santa's Naughty List, there is something heart-warming about the fact that even the most ruthless professional hitman enjoys a natter now and again!

“Once you accept your vocation life is much easier. Do you agree? You shrug. What I mean is, when you understand your own nature then everything else is rather simple. You can live your life without doubting your overarching purpose. Many years ago, when I began my career, I went through a moment of doubt myself. However, since confronting and overcoming these misgivings what I do for a living has come easy to me. Many people have issues with it. People outside my world would no doubt like to ask, “Was it hard, in the beginning?” Politeness means I would answer, “Yes, yes indeed it was.” But it is like learning to smoke, difficulties arise the first time sure. But the second time is much easier. Soon after that it was like breathing.

You can look at me how you like, but it's true.

A medal-winning runner I once spoke with, told me that every morning he struggles to begin his daily training schedule. A trainee doctor once confessed to me that he hated his studies. I wondered if these were their true callings at all. People can be funny about their dreams, so I kept my opinions to myself. It's best not to poke holes in the things that give people their self-worth, unless of course that's your pleasure. Keep things polite, I say.

Some of the most interesting conversations I've had, have been with targets. I always find I can speak freely to them, more so than I can with anyone else. It is as if I can be my true self with them. Take that doctor and runner as examples, I had riveting conversations with them. It would've been a shame to ruin their passing by being cruel or unkind. I let them die simply, with dignity.

Don't get me wrong I've done some awful things. I'm not proud of it, I'm not overly sorry either though. I'm a pro. It's unavoidable when the client requires it. I tend to not make conversation with those targets. Why put them at ease only to begin pulling their fingernails or some such. In films, they go for elaborate things. I keep things tidy. Do you have any idea how much cleaning, washing and double-checking of cleanliness is involved otherwise. DNA is a tricky business. Covering your tracks without going around like a surgeon is an art form of its

own. Few people appreciate that.

Sorry? I can't hear you with that gag on.

Now that's an interesting question, very interesting. Few people would think to ask that. Most are too concerned trying to find a way of surviving to ask who wants them dead. They probably think I'm just a common killer. Funny really, I've rarely done this for anything other than money. I even let my ex-wife live. Bet she'd have been slower in fooling around if she'd known my profession.

“Now that’s an interesting question, very interesting. Few people would think to ask that. Most are too concerned trying to find a way of surviving to ask who wants them dead.”

Anyway, I'm not really allowed to say who put in the order. It's kind of like doctor-patient confidentiality. I understand you psychologists are the same.

I suppose you'll be far too dead to tell anyone though. I can say that it's not your wife. Although this little bag of goodies here will point things in that direction.

Okay, it's one of your clients. I know, weird isn't it? I was a little confused by it too. I suppose he must have told you something he shouldn't. It wasn't my place to pry. He described you as a psychologist and gave your work address,

which is why I figured it out. He didn't even know where you live. I suppose that must give you some reassurance. Anyway he looked the type to need a psychologist.

Oh, that was part of the deal. Throw the scent off by putting the spotlight onto her. I thought it rather unnecessary. Unkind too since you've been cheating on her for so long.

How do I know? I do research. I'm no bum. No point doing a job and finding out later that they were a politician's cousin or a police officer's son, is there? You've to be careful and check these things out before committing yourself.

I suppose I'd best put the gag back on you. What? No, look we've wasted enough time already.

Shh! It's time.

I hope you don't mind if I do it a bit messy. I've to make it look like a crime of passion. Would you believe I've never had to make a job look like as if it was done by a woman before? Something new to put on my CV.

No, we don't really have them. That'd be rather silly now wouldn't it? Anyway, enough chitchat. I'm afraid I've to put on these scrubs. It'll ruin my ensemble, but otherwise I'll look suspicious later walking around covered in blood.

Are your binds okay? What? Too tight? Well it won't be long now. Do you recognise this? Yes, it's from your shed. Not very secure, I must say.

Ah, now don't start that. There is no need to be kicking out at me.

Why'd you ruin things? We'd been getting on so well. I'd even planned on making it relatively painless for you. Well... we might need an extra gag now, for safety. Is red okay?"

The Silence of Snow

Stephen Bourke

Stephen Bourke hails from Knocklyon in Dublin. His interest in creative writing started in school and reading the many books in his house growing up. He's also a big movie fan and enjoys a good story.

Why we chose this piece:

Brrrr. Did you fee that? You must have. Stephen's short piece "The Silence of Snow" will leave a chill running through you long after you have finished reading it that has nothing to do with weather.

A thick blanket of snow lay on the ground and slowed his progress. He pulled the scarf over his face, protecting it against the heavy snowfall.

It was eerily silent as he trudged through the housing estate. The orange glow from the lampposts illuminating the white houses.

Pausing for a moment, he shivered and gazed at the cosy warmth of the sitting room. The flickering of Christmas lights beneath the window barely penetrated the snow. The family were gathered around the fire and the smell of turf burning filled the air; a flashback to his childhood.

He gripped the straps of his bag, his shoulders hurting from the long journey. It felt strange for him to be so close to home after all this time, in the city he knew so well.

"One more and I'm done," he muttered.

For the first time in a while he thought of his wife. The young children inside reminded him of his baby boy Michael. He would have given anything to surprise him that night and see the look on his cute little face.

"Get this over with and I'm home free," he thought.

The house was at the end of a cul-de-sac. He ploughed his way through the snow-filled air, stopping outside to observe the family from the garden wall. They were playing charades. The mother stood up and he began to play along with them.

"It's a film," he whispered "one word."

The woman swam like a shark.

"Jaws!" he muttered.

An easy one if you want to give away your turn.

As the father stood, he got him between the crosshairs and time stopped. Everything was so silent now. The only sensation was the iciness of the snow laden rifle barrel. A jolt of emotion came through his body and a tear ran down his cheek, melting his frozen beard.

"Merry Christmas," he whispered, stuffing his rifle back into his bag and disappeared into the night.

(Farewell) My Summer Love

Noel King

She left at the end of the summer,
off to college or somewhere.

By Christmas she'd faded from my night sweats
and others took her place until today

- seeing the news clipping.

Her face wasn't smashed at all apparently,
just the rest of her body. In bits.

Noel King was born and lives in Tralee. His poems, haiku, short stories, reviews and articles have appeared in magazines and journals in thirty-seven countries. His poetry collections are published by Salmon Poetry: Prophesying the Past, (2010), The Stern Wave (2013) and Sons (forthcoming in 2015). He has edited more than fifty books of work by others. Anthology publications include The Second Genesis: An Anthology of Contemporary World Poetry (A.R.A.W., India, 2014).

Why we chose this piece:

Noel's short, sad poem reminds us all that despite the coloured lights and festive food, winter also brings about an end to all things.

Snowscape in Sepia

Brian Michael Barbieto



Brian Michael Barbieto is a poet and writer residing in Ontario, Canada. His work appears in various print and on-line journals. He is the author of Chalk Lines, from Fowlpox Press. Brian also practices landscape photography. Follow him on Twitter @BrianMBarbeito and check out his blog <http://brianmichaelbarbeito.blogspot.ca/>

Artist's Statement:

This was taken during the first or second snowfall of the season in Southern York Region of Ontario. The tree and path belong to a long and wide field that has as its frame or perimeter a walking trail. I felt that the moment of the photo captured something picaresque about the field. If looked at closely, there is not only snow on the field and branches, such as glitter would affix to glue, but in the air. The dots in the sky are snow falling.

Why Una chose this piece:

*There is something about a sepia-toned photograph that would make even the youngest (ahem) girl feel nostalgic. Add a snow covered tree **and** country lane and you are winning at both romance and Christmas. Brian has really captured something special in this scene.*

Genesis

Paul Anthony

You wake with a start. It is two forty seven am. You can feel it coming on and wish it was an erection instead of a short story. But it *is* a short story. Like erections, short stories can spring up at any time and in any place, but generally they do not cause embarrassment unless you shout “Holy Fuck, I’ve got one,” in the middle of Mass.

Anyway, you turn round to the sleeping form of your beloved, nuzzle into her and murmur, “Guess what I’ve got!” She replies through the haze of sleep, “It better be an erection and not one of those short stories!” You turn away, feeling rejection, not for the first time.

So what do you do? You were always told by the priest that you should not entertain impure thoughts, but ideas for a short story? Now that’s different!

The idea slowly begins to take shape. It is based on the engineer from Sky who is coming in the morning to fix your set box. But instead of the chirpy guy from Galway who sorted your weak signal out before, it is a Pamela Anderson lookalike in dirty overalls, open to the naval. She tells you it is warm and asks can she remove her working clothes. You readily agree and she pulls off the aforesaid overalls to reveal a sweaty body, smeared with grease from her last job of resetting another set top box.

She suggests you rub her down with suds and a sponge and you offer her a vodka martini which she drinks provocatively. Pretty soon you are doing the deed with her, up against the flat screen TV. Suddenly you feel a sharp pain in your back. It is the elbow of your beloved. “Pick another one”, she says. “That’s disgusting!” She knows you too well.

Like a number ten bus, where you wait for ages for one then two come along one after the other, another idea filters through. The story evolves at speed. It is loosely based on a brief encounter you had with a dancer where you only made first base. You want to get up and write it down there and then but the bed is too warm. You repeat the first line over and over, “*Some more Chablis?*” he said.” It even has a title, “*Unfinished Business*”. You fall asleep.

It is Saturday. No rush to get up. It is your turn to

Paul Anthony is a drinker. He has supped in seventeen countries in Europe as well as the USA and Canada. When he is not drinking, Paul likes to write. He is a contributor to magazines and anthologies such as “The Incubator”, “The Blue Hour”, “Crannóg” and “A New Ulster”.

Why we chose this piece:

This story-within-a-story has a definite naughty streak. It also provides the most... um... interesting analogy on where writers’ ideas spring from that we’ve ever seen!

make breakfast. It is *always* your turn. You shuffle into the kitchen. Your back is sore. You open the fridge and take out the fruit - bananas, apples, grapes and plums. You can make interesting shapes with a banana and two plums but decide against it in case she comes in and catches you again. You know that keeping bananas in the fridge make them go black. This amuses you, especially when you make your interesting shapes. Your other half calls you childish.

You take out that new type of bread. It is Kingsmill Sandwich Thins - only 418 kilojoules per slice. A body would need four to make up one decent round of bread and besides it is out of date, so you throw it in the bin and get out the Brennan's Batch. It makes better fried bread anyway.

While the coffee is percolating you turn on the computer to check your Emails, the witty remarks from your FB buddies and the new morning releases from Porn Hub...in no particular order.

The first one is a Pamela Anderson lookalike.

"*Shit!* The story!"

You begin to type.

"*Some more Chablis?*" he said."

Another short story is born!

Unfinished Business

"Some more Chablis?" he said.

"Just a half glass. I really should be going."

He passed it slowly across, making finger contact for slightly longer than was necessary. She sipped and stared at the centre of the table. The silence was almost oppressive. It unnerved him. He tried to focus his thoughts. It was time to make his move.

He reached across. His hand hovered.

She rose abruptly, spilling the Chablis in the process.

"I'm sorry" she said. "I shouldn't have come!"

He stood up after her, leaned in and kissed her once, fleeting and clumsy.

"Don't!" she said as if reprimanding a naughty dog.

"Please stay!" he said, feeling the tears well up.

"I can't. He needs me!"

"But I need you too!"

"He needs me more. I am sorry!"

"Will you come back next week?"

She felt her own tears welling. A single one trickled down her cheek. She turned so that he could not see it.

"No. It's for the best! And don't try to contact me!" She added a '*please*' in an attempt to soften the blow.

"I won't!"

She grabbed her coat and ran out. He watched her go, willing her to turn round. He recalled the final scene in that Clint Eastwood movie with Rene Russo,

"If she looks back that means she's interested!"

She didn't. He went back in, fingering the remains of the kiss on his lips.

He was true to his word. There was no contact. It was only by chance that they met again. He was testing the supermarket loaves for freshness by squeezing them as people of a certain age do.

"It has a sell by date on the side", she said as she approached.

He turned quickly to face her, stunned by the familiar voice.

"How have you been?" she said.

"Fine thanks. Time heals!"

The silence was awkward, just as it was the last time he saw her, some twenty years ago.

"I'm sorry for the kiss", he said.

"Don't be silly. It was lovely! The time just wasn't right"

"And how *is he?*" he asked, trying to summon up as much interest as he could.

"We're no longer an item".

"Didn't work out eh?"

"No.... he died", she said smiling, trying to ease the tension. "Ten years ago now."

He gave himself a high five in his head and just managed to squeeze out a 'sorry'.

"Have you met anyone else?" he asked.

"Not yet!"

"Fancy a drink some time?"

They both said it together.

They decided that it should be his place.

"Chablis wasn't it?"

"Still is!"

He poured a glass and passed it slowly across the table making finger contact for slightly longer than was necessary. She let her own finger linger on his.

"Are you going to make that move now?" she asked

"It's been a while. I'm not sure if I remember."

He leaned forward in his chair and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Queen to Rook 5! Checkmate, I think. Now, we have other unfinished business to attend to."

Confessions of an Amateur Footballer

Frank McGivney

Frank McGivney lives in Kells in Meath where he can't but help to be inspired to write novels and poems and short stories in the tradition of the great book that was once written here in a round tower where the Blackwater flows into the Boyne

Why we chose this piece:

As girls raised in Catholic Ireland, we were more than familiar with the awesome terror inspired by one's first confession. Was the priest really able to forgive your sins? Could he really keep your secrets? If you think the answer is yes then read on, and consider what might have happened if you were confessing more than just stealing sweets and pinching your brothers.

"What sins are you going to tell him, Gerry?" Hughie whispered into his ear just above the sound of sniffles and the shuffling of feet.

The dimly light pews offered even less heat than comfort. The wooden benches were filled with parallel lines of eight year old boys wrapped up in duffle coats that exposed their less than eager heads to the winter's cold, which the priest refused to ease by turning on the oil burner.

"I'm going to tell him it was us pair that did it" Gerry whispered.

"Jaysus! Gerry you can't, he'll lamp the pair of us out of it." The fog made by his breath evaporated in a ghostly trail highlighting his sin of talking to any adult who cared to notice.

"Did one of you pair take the Lord's name in vain?" Father McGillicuddy, who had risen from his slumber, was now filling their noses with the scent of sweat and liquor.

"Oh gosh no Father. Hughie just asked me was my Uncle Jacksey coming home for my communion."

"You're a smart one Reilly." He said, giving them both clouts across the back of their heads in one flowing motion, perfected from years of practice, before walking back to slump down in his pew, his eyes closing once more.

"Cranky auld fecker."

"Least he gave us some heat with the slap."

"I'm surprised he could afford it."

Both boys took to whispering as low as they could to avoid any more heat been doled out to them.

"He can't lamp us, Hughie. I will tell the priest what I did, then you tell him what you did and he has to forgive us because that's the rules for confession. It's a perfect plan, we have him by the short and curlies."

"What if he tells our parents?"

"It's confession, he can't tell anyone. Just stick to the plan and we will be sorted."

"If the pair of you don't whist up I swear I will beat new arses out of ye." The school principal was now sitting behind them with a bored and contemptuous look about

him.

Up on the altar the parish priest Father Murphy was preaching on the virtues of confession and all the benefits it would bestow upon their heathen souls. As his talk of hell and damnation bounced fruitlessly off the church walls, Gerry and his classmates leaned in closer to each other against the fear and the biting cold. Eventually the two priests took their positions on either side of the main altar, on dark brown wooden seats, waiting to start the bestowing of benefits on the boys for their first confessions.

Twenty eight breaths were held in anticipation as the first boy took the lonely path up to the altar to confess to the priest all manner of terrible sins against God and man; such as telling lies, fighting with his sister, and not doing what his parents told him to do. In turn, the newly absolved children came back down the aisles with their hand pressed together, their heads pointed downwards trying to look solemn but their footsteps lighter and the tension faded from their foreheads.

“Don’t do it Gerry” Hughie pleaded to deaf ears as Gerry’s turn came around.

“Bless me father for I have sinned.” Gerry started after striding up to the altar.

“Is this your first confession?”

“It is Father, to be sure.”

“What sins have you to confess son?”

“Well Father I told lies to my mother.”

“What lies did you tell her son?”

“I told her it was the cat himself who had climbed into the washing machine, but it was me, father. I just couldn’t bring myself to tell her the truth about throwing the ball of wool he always played with into the drum and how Whitey had jumped in to get it. Then Father, I shut the door and put it on a quick spin.” Gerry looked up and he could have sworn the priest was laughing.

“You should have seen it, Father, it was quare funny altogether, the head on the poor misfortunate cat, and he going around and around. But when he got out afterwards he looked like some cut of a drunk of a Saturday night. Mammy was dreadful upset Father and I felt shocking bad about the whole incident.”

“That was a terrible thing to have done son, you’re not to do that again, do you hear me? God would be very cross at you for harming one of his creatures.”

“I swear I won’t Father. I also have another sin to tell.”

“Well son this is the place to tell it. God forgives men of all their sins. Don’t worry, cleanse your soul, I am but a servant of God, what you say is between you and your saviour alone.”

“So you can’t be repeating what I tell you?”

“Of course not. You are safe to say whatever sin no matter how bad.”

“Fair enough then Father, I feel terrible bad about this one, even worse than I do about the cat. You know the way last year, around Easter time, a football was kicked through the window above the altar?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, you know the way the football broke that coloured window?”

“Stained glass.”

“What? Father, I didn’t stain anything.”

“No son, it’s called stained glass not coloured glass and it’s very expensive.”

"That must be why you have that white glass in still, Father." Too mean to spend a few shillings, his daddy had told him.

"Yes son, God will provide."

"Thank God the whole church didn't go up, the way it broke your fancy window and the way it hit the candle holder and the way all the candles fell on Father McGillicuddy and he could have burnt to death only he had managed to get out of his dress in time. But these things are all God's will isn't that right Father?"

"Yes, all things are God's will... and it's a cassock not a dress"

"Well Father it was myself and Hughie Roche that kicked the ball, that's the sin I have to confess, and I am terrible sorry about being the instrument of God's will. The pair of us were out in the yard, Hughie was the goalkeeper, we had set up the goal between the graves of old Ms Lynch and that big grave where a heap of priests from years ago are buried. Well I was taking a penalty, it was a belter of a shot so it was, Hughie hadn't a hope of saving it, and then didn't the ball only up and hit the gravestone of the priests? That was definitely God's will I reckon. It's like the priests themselves kicked the ball. Well you should have seen it shoot up into the air and straight through your lovely window. I tell you, as bad as Father McGillicuddy was with the shock, he wasn't half as bad as myself and Hughie. My whole life flashed in front of me. But sure isn't it grand now that Holy God himself can forgive us of the whole incident? Father? Are you alright there father, you don't look well."

"You what? You little pup!" He had giving up on whispering.

"Ah now Father you look very angry, are you okay? Your head has gone shocking red."

"Red...red...I'll redden your arse for you, you little gutter snipe! You nearly killed Father McGillicuddy and burnt down the church."

"Now Father, you said that God forgave all sins no matter how bad."

"You...you little. Jaysus I could kill you."

"Father now, that's shocking, you taking the name of the Lord in vain. Father McGillicuddy gave us a right clip earlier over that."

"Get the hell out of my sight before I do something I regret."

"My Penance Father, do I need to do any penance?"

"You can say fifty Our Fathers, one hundred Hail Marys and fifty Glory be to the Fathers. I absolve you of your sins," he growled.

"You couldn't spare anymore?" Gerry mumbled to himself.

"What did you say?" the Priest was roaring now.

"Nothing Father I just wondered, is there any chance of getting my football back?"

The crash as the wood of the chair cracked under the force of Father Murphy standing up echoed through the church. The gasp from the pews reached the priest's ears just in time and he stood there pointing his finger at Gerry and nodding his head, his hair wildly flapping round his puce features, the congregation the only thing preventing violence.

Suddenly, the principal had Gerry by the ear and was dragging him down the aisle. On the altar the priest stood for a long time just staring. The whole church gasped once more, in response to the bang as Hughie collapsed in a heap behind them.

Nicotine Buzz

Jared Nadin

It's Monday yet again, and the waking world reaches
With clawing hand inside my head,
Hooks its talons to my skin and rips me to reality.
I'm shaken awake by the morning demons
And the birds sing a Totentanz from their perch in the trees:
"The Death March of a Modern Monday,"
A number one hit in the charts of Nature.
Reluctantly I unfold from sleep and uncrumple from my bed,
Quickly shower, trim my beard and trudge to the kitchen below.
There is a vice I need: a hit, a fix
A Buzz of Nicotine.

The ritual begins again:
Open tin, take filter tip
Place tip between dry lips,
Peel paper from packet and place tip on left.
Pinch, pull and take the leaves.
The fabled smooth, golden leaves.
Pulled apart, and ready for spreading.

The paper is a crisp, white valley. The tip, a dam to stem the flow.
And I, as God, bring Autumn to the valley:
As brown leaves fall and float along the wind,
'Til they rest upon the valley floor, still.
With both hands I take up the paper and roll it.
The ritual finished with: Lick and Stick.

And I, as God, say: "Let there be light."
With cigarette between dry lips and hellfire in hand
I light the end to burn the beginning
And suck sweet smoke from the burning bush.
My begging lungs accept the gift,
Lightning sparks beneath my skin, my hands tingle, my head floats.
And as I stub the butt in the cigarette cemetery
I smile pure bliss and calm relief.
I've had my hit.
My fix.
My sweet, sweet, Nicotine Buzz.

Jared Nadin is a 22 year old writer and performer from Limerick. He has been published in The Floor Magazine and is a founding member of Stanzas, an evening of poetry, prose and theatre held once a month in The Cellar Door café in Limerick.

Why we chose this piece:

We all have our vices, but I think we can all agree that smoking is particularly naughty. Tut-tut Jared! In truth, we admired Jared's excellent use of language and free form stanzas in this work.

Naughty Bunny

Tim Wilkinson

Tim Wilkinson began writing at an early age. After spending thirty-three years working in the telecommunications industry, writing in between the conflicting commitments of family, work and life in general, he now focuses more time and effort on his most enduring dream.

Why we chose this piece:

Here at Silver Apples HQ we love a story that's just a little bit twisted, and that's exactly what Tim has provided. We wanted to make a joke about Tim destroying our childhood memories of Peter Rabbit but we're still too raw. Come back later Tim, maybe we'll have forgiven you!

"I've already told the story," said Wayne to the small group of onlookers sitting around him. "I hid nothing. It happened just as I said."

"I know son," spoke the man with the soft voice and kind face. "But you must do this. It's...well it's more important now."

"Get on with it! We don't have much time," spoke the tall, lean man standing impatiently before the opened door. The dull grey of his well-worn suit, pressed and over-starched, melding with the deep shadows of the poorly lit room. His harsh expression firm and unyielding, he stared down at Wayne, sitting before him on the edge of the short and shallow bunk.

"Humour him Wayne," said one of the others. "Besides, might even do you some good, if you believe in that sort of thing,"

Casting a harsh glance upwards to the speaker, the soft voiced man continued. "This is no time for such talk! He deserves this chance now as well as anyone, regardless of what you may or may not believe. Besides, it's his right. It is true though, Wayne. Time is short and you need to get this off your chest now, before..."

"Okay, but like I told you, I have nothing to hide," Wayne said, then leaned back and closed his eyes, picturing the scene.

In spite of their obvious discontent, even the ones who already knew the tale stopped fidgeting and listened.

* * *

The rising sun found Wayne in the large, second floor bedroom seated in a stiff, high backed chair set against one wall. He sat in silence looking ahead, his back arched forward, the palms of his hands splayed across his knees, a long barrelled shotgun resting casually across his lap.

Before the edge of the bed and just across from him sat a teenage boy, his hands and feet securely tied to the twin of Wayne's wooden chair. Behind the boy, sticking out and over the edge of the mattress, lay the bare

legs and feet of Wayne's wife. Her silent, naked form, stretched across the mattress, mostly hidden from view by the young man's tall frame.

"What's your name, boy?" asked Wayne.

As Wayne spoke the young man's shoulders shuddered, his fists curling and stretching, testing the taut ropes binding his wrists behind him. He stared blankly at the floor, his neck bent down in apparent supplication, his head weaving in doleful rhythm left then right. He made no reply. A lone string of bubbly red saliva stringing from his broken lips, quivered with each laboured breath.

"Look at me when I talk to you boy!" Wayne added, his voice rising, his tone increasingly irate and angry.

Again, the youth made no movement and offered no reply.

Pumping the wooden sheathed grip of the shotgun, Wayne ejected the chambered shell, smiling as he watched the young man wince at the grating, metallic sound, lurching involuntarily as the large round clattered to the wooden planked floor.

Bending, Wayne retrieved the red-tipped, copper-booted shell from the floor, rolling it in the palm of his right hand while glaring back at the captive form before him.

"I asked you what your name was boy!" Wayne spat, stretching his right arm back then hurling the shell forward, striking the boy solidly just above one downcast eye.

"P...Pete," stuttered the boy, stunned and jolted from his silence, blood dripping from the small cut on his forehead made by the shell. His lips trembled as he spoke, his voice wavering, pliant and weak. His red, tear-streaked eyes now facing Wayne's own, pleaded as he struggled to speak, their deep blue cores twinkling in the bright morning light. As he spoke, Wayne could plainly see the fear painting his features and hear the terror tainting his voice.

"M...M...My name is, P...Pete."

"P...P...Pete?" Wayne teased. "Y...Y...Ya...you mean Peter?" he continued, taunting.

"Ya...yes sir," answered the boy, struggling for composure.

"Peter...! Really?" Wayne replied, laughing cheerfully. "My word. Now that's very interesting. Well Peter Rabbit, you've been a naughty little bunny haven't you?" he added, nodding toward the bare and still form of his wife stretched out on the mattress behind the boy. Then, leaning his head back while tipping his chair against the wall, he closed his eyes, lost in reflective thought.

"Mmm..." he continued. "I must say Peter, I'm sorry you told me that. You see, well, it reminds me of something, And to be honest, had your name been damn near anything else I would have simply blown your head off where you sit and been done with ya. Now...well that just won't do, will it? It's just a bit too perfect, don't you see?"

Leaning to his right, Wayne let his gaze fall first to his wife, then down to the wet, blackened sheen of blood soaking the sheets beneath her, dripping to the floor and gathering in a large, dusky pool.

"Seems you like the married girls, aye Peter?"

Pete only whined.

“Yes you’ve been a naughty bunny Peter. But before you go, let me tell you a little story.

“I was about nine or ten I reckon. My grandpa, my uncles and I were out rabbit hunting, you see. It was a cold winter’s day and there weren’t many rabbits out. Sure, my uncles got one or two, but then they were great shots, you know? They could blast the centre out of a dime rolling down the street at twenty-five yards. Anyway, we were out rabbit hunting and like I said, I was just a boy, a city boy, spending a week in the country with gramps. I’d never really been hunting before, not for rabbits anyway, just ducks and quail, and well...hunting birds is somehow different. It’s sort of like fishing. It don’t touch your heart in quite the same way as killing something furry, blue eyed and warm. Ahhh, perhaps I’m just too soft. At any rate, the point is there weren’t any opportunities for me to get off a shot, what with the cold weather and all. Not until grandpa called me over to see what he’d found.

“Seems he’d walked up on a little cottontail huddled all by himself in a small hole beneath the grass, just under the ground. Poor little thing, it just sat there, too scared to run, looking up at me, its big blue eyes wide and wet, shivering and shaking, looking kinda...well kinda like you.

“And of course, I can’t say exactly what Grandpa was thinking and all, but after calling me over, I guess he figured I wasn’t going to land a rabbit any other way, so he asked if I wanted to shoot it. Hell, I didn’t know what to say. I sure didn’t want to let my grandpa down or look like a sissy or nothing. So I took my little four-ten shotgun, stuck it in the hole, pulled the trigger and killed the helpless thing.

“God, I can’t tell you how bad I felt, killing that frail, weak little creature, all helpless and terrified like it was. All I wanted to do was cry, but I couldn’t do that, you know? No, I had to act like I was happy and proud, while all I truly felt was dirty, evil and ashamed.

“Well the word got out soon enough that I’d killed a rabbit hiding in a hole, one that wouldn’t even run, and my uncles looked at me, talked to me, as if I was some kind of coward or something. From their looks and how they treated me after, you’d have thought I was some kind of traitor, or a child molester or something. And when grandma heard about it... let’s just say grandpa took plenty of hell for that, I can assure you.

“Well Peter, I have never forgotten that day and how it felt, nor have I ever found a way to atone for that deed, to forgive myself or to forget. But now...” Wayne paused for a few moments, staring into the deep blue of the young man’s eyes. “You have no idea what the hell I’m talking about, do you?”

“N...N...No sir,” answered the young man, now sobbing loudly, shivering with renewed dread.

Standing, Wayne walked up to the boy. Picking up the loose twelve-gauge shell

“Poor little thing, it just sat there, too scared to run, looking up at me, its big blue eyes wide and wet, shivering and shaking, looking kinda...well kinda like you.”

at his feet, he slid it back into the weapon. Then, pulling a small, serrated kitchen knife from his back pocket, he leaned in towards the boy.

The boy began mumbling incoherently, his eyes widening at the sight of the blade, tears streaming down his face.

“Oh shut up, Peter,” said Wayne, bending over and cutting the nylon ropes binding the boy to the chair. “Quit your snivelling boy. I won’t make the same mistake again, I promise.”

Placing the knife back into his pocket, Wayne pulled the boy to his feet, turning him towards the door that lead out of the bedroom, down the short stairway and out of the house to escape and freedom. Then with a firm push he shoved the boy forward, bringing the butt of the weapon to his shoulder and loudly said...

* * *

“Ok Father, heard enough?” asked the grey clad warden.

“Please! Let him finish.”

Wayne looked up, smiling at the priest. “It’s ok, Father. I guess you know the rest anyway.”

“Yes, my son,” replied the soft-spoken, darkly robed man, fingering the stiff, white collar about his neck. “You did well. May God forgive you. But there is one more thing Wayne.”

“Come on you two,” urged the warden. “Let’s take a little walk. We’ve got an appointment to keep.”

“Hang on, Warden,” said the priest rather harshly.

“Yes, Father?” asked Wayne. “What more can I tell you?”

“You haven’t finished the story. You must lay it all out if you want remission. What happened after you cut the boy loose, and pushed him towards the door?”

“Father, don’t you know?”

“Yes my son, but this is *your confession*.”

“Father, it’s simple...I said, ‘Run Peter...run.’”

Fatal Attraction

Sheena Kelly



Itchy feet, that's what they call it—the desire to travel. Smelly feet might be more apt. Sheena Kelly's feet have stunk out 5 star afternoon teas and champagne breakfasts at the finest hotels, mingled with the pong of other travellers in damp hostels, and been licked by goats in the warmest of gers. People with itchy feet are all searching for something, and Sheena's realized it's not just about the beautiful landscapes and the wonders of the world; it's about the connections you make and that feeling of the unknown, the anticipation. Sheena's artworks try to capture the connections she has with people and how they made her feel. The drunk shaman on a hilltop, the kid that made her play 3 hours of Yu-Gi-oh cards, the taxi driver that serenaded her with his guitar while driving, the very, very generous lady who shared her special 4 animal cheese curds. (Side note—cheese really should not be made with the milk of horse, goat, sheep and cow.) For all of the positive interactions she has had there are bound to be a few that make the naughty list.

Artist's Statement:

This painting is about a man that I fell for in Korea. He was in the American Military. He was stationed somewhere else after 7 months. I moved to Mongolia. He still messages me 3 years later. I know it's just when he needs a pick me up someone to flirt with but the attraction is still strong so I respond. He is the gold rectangle. He is rigid and knows where he wants to live and he wants stability. I am the circle I am drawn to him but I am also expanding my bubble. Exploring but he still draws me back. He is holding me back from moving on emotionally.

Why Una chose this piece:

This is quite a unique interpretation of the theme 'The Naughty List'. Sheena immediately submitted this image on hearing this issue's theme; a painting depicting her emotional turmoil over a break-up. There is nothing like a bit of heartbreak /conceptual art combo to really get you into the festive spirit. I have been a fan of Sheena Kelly's work for about a decade, and my favourite thing about her work is her unrelenting use of purple paint. And let's face it- nothing says Christmas like the colour purple.

Rain Over Mizen Head

Donall Barry

It was a Friday afternoon in late December. One of those short and drab December afternoons where the month hangs thick about the air and the rain pelts down from first light.

All along the motorway the traffic was heavy until it finally came to a standstill just outside Mallow, where wisps of fume rose about the gridlock. It was within that wedge Albie sat, listening to the radio as children read out their letters to Santa whilst rubbing his hands against the rasp of the heater. Outside the Fiesta, the rain spilt down in pouchy silver droplets that tumbled down the windscreen until they were sprayed to shards by the swoosh of wipers.

From the glove box, Albie took a rag and wiped the fog from the windscreen and watched as the light turned again to red.

“Pillocks,” he said, to the chorus of horns that greeted the change. “No bloody patience at all.”

Those making the traffic were headed for the city too. Christmas was only a few days away and the final rush for parties and presents and the like had begun. Such things did not concern Albie that day. It had been a long time, in fact, since he cared for their ilk. Since the change came upon her, Christmas was, for him, just another day on the calendar. Another evening spent in the dim of his sitting room, half-watching a soap on the telly, with a microwave dinner resting lukewarm on his lap.

*

His journey had begun at ten in the morning, with a prayer, a hot cup and a walk along the beach. That had been their routine for so many years, but now it was only his. For the few days past he had been staying with some friends in a small village along the west coast, where there was ample opportunity to think back on that time.

“C’mon Albie, you need the break,” his friends had said, “leave your troubles where they are and get away from it all for a few days. It will do ya the world a good to get back to the coast.”

Donall Barry is originally from Navan, Co. Meath but moved to Melbourne some four years ago. When not writing, his time is spent playing Gaelic Football, pondering over the mercurial fortunes of Southampton F.C and trying to convince his mother why she should like his work.

Why we chose this piece:

Some pieces stay with you because they are, quite simply, heart-breaking. Donall has managed to take that sense of hopelessness that many feel around this time of year and make something poignant out of it.

Despite his initial protests, he knew they were right. He rarely left the house for anything other than her visits anymore, and his interest had long faded in the cricket, the rugby, and the racing. The conversations too were becoming harder, the words not so free. Alice was his only thought now. Four days had passed since he saw her and she was poorly then. Seldom was she any other way of late. He knew a decision had to be made; he had known it for a time, but it was only that morning as he stood on the stony shore and watched the black sea roll out to the world beyond that his mind was finally made up.

After a while the traffic fell away and the rain'd been outrun as he took the turn to the home. Switching off the radio, he steered the Fiesta along the avenue. The recent spill had mulched the late falling leaves to a blackened paste that hissed beneath the tyres. He slowed right down to avoid a dip of brown puddles. There had been a time, mostly in autumn, when he enjoyed passing beneath those trees. The drench of gold light made him feel like a youth again. A youth upon the avenue of his lover's home. But that time had long passed and it was winter now. The carcass of autumn left only claw-like branches and melting leaves.

“But that time had long passed and it was winter now. The carcass of autumn left only claw-like branches and melting leaves.”

He parked the car, turned off the engine and slipped out the key. He watched the momentary scud of grey cloud that filled the sky and thought about the night they met. The dress she wore; how she danced; how she spoke, and his gaze fell on the passenger seat. To the lilies, in the plastic packet from the filling station. Most of their heads were still knuckled in buds, but they were lilies all the same. They were always her favourite, she wore one on her breast on that first night.

Between trembling finger and thumb he smoothed a petal and sat a while, looking to the sky as he thought about his decision. Was it right? Was it wrong? Can anything ever be both?

*

Behind the reception glass, a plump woman stood on a stool fixing strips of tinsel to the outer window frame. A piece of sellotape hung between her teeth as she taped up the tinsel, red as her face, and sang along to John Lennon playing over the radio.

“Let's hope it's a good one, without any fear,” she cooed, a good second behind Lennon.

Albie folded his arms across the counter-top and shook his head as the woman's voice cracked horribly at the peak of the song. *Fea...eeee...eeerrrr...*

When she finished he cleared his throat. “It's a good thing Lennon's buried. Ya would have killed him if he'd heard that.” The woman, in her surprise, slipped forward and the stool wobbled beneath her weight.

“Albie,” she cried, straightening up and patting her chest. “I didn't hear you come in there. Ya nearly gave me a heart attack!”

He nodded towards a loose strip. “I'm just here to see Alice.”

“Of course. Of course. Just sit down there and I’ll be with you in a tick.”

She ripped another length of tape with her teeth, edged the loose tinsel into the corner of the frame, stepped down off the stool and admired her craft.

“Awful mucky out there isn’t it?” she said, motioning towards the door, “It’s just yuck!” He made to answer but she continued on. “Would ya believe I’ve still to do the shop and then drive up to Galway tonight for a party - with that traffic and the weather that’s forecast!” She took down the visitor sheet, moved to the front window and let out a sigh.

“All set for Christmas yourself Albie?”

“Aye,” he scribbled a name on the sheet. “I’m set as I’ll ever be.”

She waited for him to continue, but he didn’t, and a silence fell between them until she noticed the flowers and smiled.

“She’ll love those Albie.” He smiled back in the full knowledge that she wouldn’t. Seldom she even recognised him these days - what chance did a fistful of bulbs have?

“Well I better get back to it,” she picked up another piece of tinsel. Outside Alice’s room he stood, taking in breaths of the bleach-stenched hall and fingering, at length, the grooves of the door. He knew each groove too well. After a few moments the bleach began to burn his throat so he knocked softly on the door. There was no answer. There was never an answer, but he still always knocked.

“After a few moments the bleach began to burn his throat so he knocked softly on the door. There was no answer. There was never an answer, but he still always knocked.”

In the corner of the room a plastic Christmas tree stood, its branches flashing from white to red to green again. Three cards were around its base. He walked over and picked one up. On its front was a colourless photo of New York in the snow. In the photo some children in paddy caps were skating on a lake of ice. Others stacked snowmen at its edge as a boy tried in vain to catch a flake on his tongue. “Evelyn,” he said, and smiled and put the card back under the tree. The second was from Aidan,

her son in Australia. He recognised the hand. Aidan always sent a card at Christmas time. The third, from her sister, he twisted between his hands and tossed in the bin.

Alice lay upon the bed in the same position as he left her last, sleeping. Her chest spreading as it rose, like a puffin’s, then fell softly again. From out of her nose came the elongated sigh. She’d always had that sigh, said it ran in her family, and he’d teased her many a time about snortin’ like a pig.

“Albie,” she’d say, and pinch the flesh of his arm, “you’ve had your fun. Now leave me be.” Her skin was paler than before. He smoothed her brow with a palm and kissed her cheek.

Beside the bed a vase full of flowers nested between her photos, their drooped petals and stalks speckled brown from the heat of the room. He filled the vase afresh, put in the lilies, and looked at her photos. One of her children, of their wedding, of their first home in Leeds. The shadows of a life long left behind.

Picking up a frame, he felt the cool of its edge and thought about those years spent in Yorkshire, where she nursed and he ran the shirt factory. Day and night he'd work, seldom even halting for lunch. "You're wearing yourself into the ground," she'd say, when she arrived in the evening with a fresh shirt and pot of hot dinner. "A man of your age has no need to work so late. You know Albie, I do want something left of you for myself!" But he never listened and when the workers were all gone they would sit down to dinner, amid the steam and the stench, on a small table with a candle in its centre.

In England, though, she struggled, pining always for her people in Ireland. So, eventually he agreed to sell the factory and they bought a small shop close to where she grew up near Mizen Head. There they settled and built a white stone cottage on the edge the sea. He always wanted children but it was too late in life when they met and she had her two already from her previous marriage. Both were away now, Aidan beyond in Sydney, and Evelyn, still in Queens.

Albie squeezed her hand tighter and she gurgled softly. "I was always in a rush those day's wasn't I darl? I wish I had just..." the frame slipped from his hand and the glass shattered upon the floor. His chest heaved at the fright and he coughed a gobble of tar-black phlegm into his palm. Alice tossed and turned, half opened her eyes, then tossed again.

His coughing stopped and he wiped the phlegm upon his trouser leg. "It's okay lass, go back to sleep."

It was four years ago the confusion first came upon her. Initially it was just little things like forgetting her keys or an appointment missed. But soon enough it spread and one night in the early hours he awoke to the sound of the car engine outside. Her groove in their bed was still warm but she was gone. Down the stairs he ran and into the garage. There she was, sitting in the Fiesta, shivering in her nightdress, her arms bumpy with goose pimples. He sat in beside and rubbed her arm.

"Where ya off to at this hour lass?"

"To work...I'm, I'm going to work. I have to go to work."

She turned blankly and he began to weep as he held her close. So close he could feel the cold of her skin.

*

Soon afterwards they closed the shop, sold their home and moved into a more suitable flat in the city. There were still good times of course, made all the sweeter by their infrequency. Moments when they would sit on the couch and she'd scoop his hand in hers and run a finger along his wrist. She wouldn't speak, she didn't have to.

But those good times didn't last and it was in the kitchen one night, she asked. "Please Albie," she said, "I don't want to end up like Dad. I just can't...I want to remember us as we are now. Please, don't let me go that way." She'd sat night after night by her father's bed and him looking upon her without a hint of knowing. And she watched as he grew scared of living and scared of dying. Scared and lonely long before his time.

Albie rested his head upon her breast and felt the faint hum of her body.

"I miss ya Alice, you know that. I really do." He tickled her palm with his. "But

I'm scared. For the first time in years, I'm really scared, if I do this you'll be going somewhere I'll not be able to reach you again." From his eye a tear fell upon the pillow as he took it in hand and squeezed. He wondered how long she might linger. Days. Weeks. Months. Years, even. He kissed her brow and moved the pillow closer - "I'm so sorry ma love" - and he closed his eyes.

"Ah Albie?" A nurse was standing in the doorway. She was tutting at the glass on the floor. "Was there a wee bit of an accident here?" From the cupboard she took a brush and pan and swept the glass into it. She lifted the bin lid and dropped it with a hiss.

"Albie?"

"I'm...I'm sorry love. I was just lost in a memory there." He released the pillow and smiled, but her mouth curled in pity when she noticed the blotched redness that crusted about his nose. "I hope you've been talking care of yourself?"

"Would you believe I've never felt better."

He winked and she shook her head and smiled sadly. "Let me get that. You have enough to worry about." She took the pillow, patted it and put it under Alice's head. "There you go Alice. Nice and comfy again."

Alice didn't respond.

"Can I get you a cup of tea or anything Albie?"

"No, ta, I'm good. Have to head on soon enough, try to avoid the Christmas monsters 'nd all that."

"Terrible isn't it? Well I'll be back to check on her in an hour or so. Try to take care of yourself." She squeezed softly on the shoulder as she passed. "Oh, and Albie? In case I don't see you, happy Christmas."

It was just her and him in the room, and their life between them again. Stepping up, he pressed his back against the door and twisted the lock. Taking back up the pillow, he looked upon her and smiled in the knowledge that he had found her that night in Galway and they'd been lucky enough to spend many years of a life together in love. There were tough times but they had worked through them well enough. Now it was time for that life to end.

There would most likely be repercussions, but he would deal with them in time. The letters had been sent to Aidan and Evelyn. They'd be getting them any day now explaining it all. He hoped they'd understand. Others, he wasn't so sure what they might say. Her sister, what might she call him?

Murderer?

Criminal?

But she'd hadn't been to visit Alice in a year, and he'd made peace with his choice. He knew his own mind as the greatest jury of fact, and that any words spoken could be reviewed, revered and revealed. Outside, the grey clouds were still clinging on to the sky, and the roused-again wind was pulling hard at the trees. Across the breath of the country a sweeping rain had started to fall as he knelt over her with trembling hand. From down the hall a scream rang out and was met by another. Soon

"It was just her and him in the room, and their life between them again. Stepping up, he pressed his back against the door and twisted the lock."

the patter of passing feet filled the hall. There was a thud at the door and his chest began to tighten. He started to cough again. Harder this time. Gasps of heaving that felled him onto the mattress. The force woke Alice and sent the pillow to ground. She opened her eyes and looked upon him lying there, clasping and gasping, but she did not see the man she had loved for so long. Her eyes met those of a stranger. A stranger with the scars of love heavy about his face.

Easing himself back up, he wiped his face with a sleeve and looked across the picturesque greyness outside the window. He had little doubt now, the forecast rain would be falling over Mizen Head and rattling on the roof of their house. From their home of a clear day, you could see the groove of the Head as it fell away to the sea. The rain would be drifting slowly across the Atlantic until it gave way to her pleas, and its fall would be leaden with melancholy and the drops seeped with mourning.

Taken

Gabriella M. Belfiglio

What the fuck am I doing?
I am sitting at the corner of the bar,
watching the woman who's been pursuing me.
She is taken. Taken.
She and her girlfriend live upstairs in a one-bedroom
apartment; their clothes hang together in the closet.
She likes to read Borges, and when I mention Neruda,
she quotes him back to me.
If she were only just cute.
In between making drinks, she pours me a glass of
water, no ice, mixes me a wicked
Cosmopolitan that I try to drink slowly.
She's even sent the other barkeep over
with a fancy dish of shrimp. There are three,
shaping a tangled triangle atop a bed of frisée.
It will never work.
I like watching her work. I like the straight
line of her freshly cut blonde hair, just above her neck.
She flings the silver mixer over her head. Spins,
flashes her dark eyes in my direction, and catches it just
in time.
I really want to kiss her.
I gulp down the last of my drink.
What are you writing? she asks me.
Just what I'm observing, I reply.
What, me showing off for you?

Gabriella M. Belfiglio won second place in the 2014 W.B. Yeats Poetry Contest. Her writing has appeared in the award-winning anthology Poetic Voices Without Borders, The Potomac Review, The Dream Catcher's Song, C,C,&D, Avanti Popolo, Folio, The Centrifugal Eye, and Lambda Literary Review, among other places, and she has most recently been published in The Monterey Poetry Review. She works as an artist and teacher in New York City.

Why we chose this piece:

Gabriella's work is rich in atmosphere and resounds with a refreshing honesty. And let's face it, contemplating an illicit liaison with a sexy bartender is pretty damn naughty!

Visitors

Anna Foley

Anna Foley is from East Cork, Ireland and is relatively new to writing. She is, as yet, unpublished.

Why we chose this piece:

Anna's story is both sad and eerie and stayed with us long after we had finished reading. And we're not just saying that because we are also a bunch of cat ladies who drink too much wine while watching Eastenders

I was just home from work and my feet were cold. Mindlessly, I kneeled to light the fire. Once done I stood again and, still wearing my wet wool coat, trudged to the kitchen. I flicked the switch and a fluorescent light flooded the small room, highlighting dirty plates and stained wine glasses. They would have to wait, the back boiler takes at least an hour to heat a basin of water. I lit the gas oven and smoked my fifteenth cigarette of the day. I snatched a bottle of Merlot from the glass cabinet and put it next to the fire to warm up. Flames had begun to lick around the coal already. I didn't really trust the central heating.

I knew I should go upstairs and change into something dry, but the pile of mail was calling out to be read. I opened five envelopes, every one containing bills or reminders about unpaid bills. As always, I stuffed them in that drawer in the hallway. I couldn't pay them even if I wanted to.

The bedroom stank. I gagged and turned on the light. As my eyes grew accustomed to the overt brightness I scanned the room, expecting to see a "present" left by the cat. There was nothing. Almost instantly, the smell was gone. "Hello" I said to nobody. Where was the damn cat anyway? I had left the bathroom window open for him, but he had not presented for supper yet. I carried out my daily ritual; removal of tights and boots, tracksuit bottoms on, hair up in a bun and slippers on my cold feet, same order as always. I shivered and closed the window. Rudy would have to use the front door when he decided to grace me with his company. He was always making a fool of me.

There was a sad chicken kiev and a handful of oven chips in the freezer, so I threw them out on a tray and into the oven. I grabbed a goblet from the draining board. The fire was roaring when I turned on the TV in the living room. I poured my first glass of wine. The TV showed a woman applying lipstick and it made me think of the girl with the funny eye make up that I saw on the bus. Her tights were ripped.

I went upstairs to use the bathroom, and on my way heard a scratching at the front door. I smirked and

opened it to let Rudy inside, but nothing was there except the night. I poked my head out and looked around the garden but there was no sign of anyone. I closed the door and locked it from the inside again. I wasted a lot of energy worrying about a cat who didn't really give a damn about me! He was probably sitting by somebody else's fire down the road.

When I let myself back into the living room I discovered the TV off, leaving the place in near darkness. "Ah for fuck sake!" I screamed at the blank screen. A sizzle of static buzzed in my ears as I slapped its side and the picture returned. The cockneys

"I was watching a show about gardening and smoking number eighteen when the scratching returned."

were down the pub slugging pints now. I drained the end of my glass and refilled it. I was watching a show about gardening and smoking number eighteen when the scratching returned. This time I opened the living room window and the phantom shot in through the gap. He was soaked through and meowing loudly. Once fed, he lay by the fire and

slept, glancing at me occasionally to make sure I hadn't gone to bed without him.

I hung my wet coat over the back of a chair. The woman in accounts had sneered at me when she saw the button missing from the sleeve. She probably told all the horrible bitches in the canteen about it, most likely they all had a great laugh.

Bedtime was determined by the emptying of the bottle. As soon as I picked it up to throw it away, Rudy raced up the stairs. "Off to get the best spot again" I muttered. I lit my final cigarette of the day and checked the bolt on the back door.

That night was the first time she visited my bedroom. As I reached the top of the stairs, I glimpsed first the pair of bare white feet, then the long dress and ashen hair. Her hands set entwined on her lap. She didn't look at me at first but inclined her face toward me as I entered the room. Rudy lay curled up, slumbering near her. If he wasn't afraid, why should I be?

Those evenings were bright and warm when I returned from work, on the days when I actually went in. I now found the job I had once enjoyed a monstrous burden. Upon carrying out my evening routine, the spectre would creep into my peripheral vision slowly, like ink running into a shirt pocket. I was glad she didn't sneak up on me. She didn't speak at first, just sat there until one evening I heard (more felt) her talking. Her words sort of resonated in my head without my physically hearing them. Truth be told, I quite liked her. She was not malicious like my previous visitor, so I didn't mention her to the doctor at my last review. It had been different when "he" used to wake me in the night. Serious trouble ensued when I took the bad man's advice. If I did mention her, the inevitable dosage increase could render me catatonic.

One morning about this time I just decided to give up. I didn't go to work. I didn't call them and they didn't call me. I just ceased getting up and going in there. Every day I walked anonymously to the local shop for provisions, eyes down, avoiding cracks. The man in the shop deemed himself very clever as he reached for my cigarettes before I had a chance to ask, obviously unaware of how irritating he was. I walked home accompanied by the clink clink of wine bottles against jars of beetroot and tins of beans, past gangs of stoned youths and smug couples out walking dogs.

“I never occurred to me to ask her name. Looking back now, I realise that she did the talking for both of us.”

I never occurred to me to ask her name. Looking back now, I realise that she did the talking for both of us. And she barely spoke. When she stopped visiting I regretted not knowing more about her. I would stand in one spot and try to will her into existence though I knew the room was too warm.

It seems strange now to relay this in such a matter-of-fact way, given the reaction of the doctor. I asked for help in dealing with my loss, my grief.

Within two hours I was inside again. Seeing no point in protesting, I simply lay there, as they administered the cure. A smudge appeared in the corner of my vision. It swelled and spread. It was him.

Naughty Elf

Jadwiga O'Brien



Jadwiga O'Brien is an unqualified and out-of-work astronaut. She is also a qualified Health Promotion Specialist - but still out of work. Whilst not working, Jadwiga enjoys using her obsessive compulsive tendencies to get shit done. However, the shit she gets done is usually some form of procrastination and does not generally result in anything positive or useful. Basically, she hoovers a lot and sometimes makes squiggly marks on pages/canvas using paint or pencils - but not soft pastels. Never soft pastels.

Why Una chose this piece:

There will be a moment—for some it may only last for a mere second, for others hours, or a whole day. I speak of that moment that happens every Christmas when the naughty elf inside you takes over. Common offences include: opening gifts too early, drinking the last of the wine/beer/gin/tea, finishing off the good sweets in the Roses tin and leaving only the strawberry creams, and taking the seat everyone knows has the best view of the T.V. You know it's true.

The Fifteen Theses

Joe Keane

Joe Keane is a former furniture salesman and enjoyer of stories. He prefers gathering stories more than writing them, but dabbles with penmanship from time to time. His favourite storytellers are the modern ones who pave the way for others and he especially likes modern fiction. He hopes you enjoy his first comic offering.

Why we chose this piece:

Oh those poor elves! We never give them a second thought. This hilarious manifesto will give you more consideration for those who toil away in Santa's Workshop all year round

Dear Big Man,

It's time for some changes. Another year's past and brought with it another near-fatal incident, two cases of hypothermia, a plethora of nervous breakdowns, and the money we're spending on diabetes medication is off the charts. If we're to take on another Christmas together, we demand the following...

1. Union representation

It's the twenty first century. I'm sure you're aware of this, what with your ongoing obsession with calendars. So I'm sure you're also aware that in this day and age a union is not a threat to democracy or to an effective workplace, quite the contrary, it is essential. In general I'm against putting more than ten of us into a room together at the same time, stupidity levels tend to rise not fall, but as long as that dope Dopey isn't running it I think it'll help you get shit done. Bottom line: We demand one.

2. A right to freely elect the members

It's all well and good listening to you dish out the orders, and nobody is proposing that we vote you out... yet. But I don't like the idea of you giving us a union and then installing Dopey and Sleepy et al to the union's executive committee. With this in mind, we're free to hold our own elections for union positions. Honestly, we may actually do more harm than good, (remember the absurd idea of voting kids onto the "Nice List"), but that's still our choice.

3. A pay increase - to actual pay

I understand that you do this work on behalf of the children and you do it for free, but you get to have nine reindeer (eight if you-know-who is feeling depressed, again) to drag your ample ass around the globe *and you get all the kudos. Nada for us. One crap movie with Dudley*

Moore doesn't count. We want a pay increase. From zero to something. And don't be stingy either. It'd be just like you to be the most generous person in the universe to a bunch of snotty kids and then give us more "Christmas spirit" instead of wages.

4. Weekends off (or shift allowance)

This one we'll discuss further in item number nine, but it seems ridiculous to wait 'til November to start work. We've done nothing the for previous ten months. A bit of forward thinking so we don't have to work 'round the clock makes sense, and week-ends off would be nice. You get them, why shouldn't we? In fact, you only work one night out of 365, so you know, a little perspective here. Failing weekends off (we're not unreasonable, we know it's a busy time) we want shift-allowance to take into account the people who have to work weekends when others don't. It's not like we don't cut loose and shake our rumps on the weekend. More on this to follow.

5. Relaxation of fraternising rules

I'm not going to get into this except to say you and Mrs C. get to have a grand old time at your fancy. We don't. We don't want to have to sneak out into the snow so we can have a good time. It's cold and you're probably aware of the effect that ice has on certain genitalia. Not to mention it's a mood killer. Enough said.

“It's cold and you're probably aware of the effect that ice has on certain genitalia. Not to mention it's a mood killer.”

6. The appointment of a Safety Commissioner

You know that old saw about “it's all fun and games 'til someone loses an eye”? We may as well have that carved into the shaggin' roof. I heard of a fella down in section twenty three had his eye out from a Nerf gun, and let's not get into the amount of Lego-and-bare-feet related injuries last year. Bloody Ninjago sets may as well contain actual knives.

7. The commissioning of a Safety Standards and Procedures Board

As with the union, we'd like this not to be populated with dopes please. Some smart people to decide what's best practice in the workplace so we don't end up sawing our arms off. Again. As I recall you complained bitterly about having to fly all the way to Alaska to get what's-his-name that emergency treatment last year.

8. A technology upgrade

You know that we're still using handsaws and sandpaper? It's properly difficult to make a PS4 using a fucking hand drill. I know, I know, we're all about the quaint, but this is getting ridiculous. I'd like to see you come down to my section and try to indi-

vidually carve the nether regions of a Ken Doll. It's soul destroying stuff Big Man.

9. The summer problem

Okay, I said we'd get back to this earlier, and here it is. Frankly, it's fucking boring in the North Pole during the ten months of the year when we've fuck all to do. As already discussed, we could be working and preparing at this time, and I'm not just talking about the "Naughty List/Good List" multi-layered surveillance operation. I mean we could be getting some work done. Having said that, we also need to find some way a bit of fun out of the downtime. The production of bootleg booze and the associated chronic binge drinking in May and June is getting out of hand and if I have to look at one more miserable elf, crying drunkenly over a picture of Marbella, I'm going to claim 'snow madness' and start going to town on them.

"I don't want to have to make the call on whether or not kids cheating at Monopoly is being naughty. Everyone fucking does it."

10. The Naughty/Nice issue

Since we're on the subject of surveillance...twenty four hour a day, seven days a week surveillance of children is a little unsettling. I'm not saying it needs to be cut, maybe just rotate the teams a little. There are some of these guy that think they're in the shaggin' Strasi. Also, the whole Naughty/Nice thing has always come off as a bit arbitrary. Some proper

guidelines on the subject would be welcome. I don't want to have to make the call on whether or not kids cheating at Monopoly is being naughty. Everyone fucking does it.

11. Animal handling training

Some of the lads going out to feed, train, and clean those reindeer are woefully under-qualified for the job. The reindeer don't like it when the elf is clueless. They get nasty, and you know what they're like when they're nasty. Aren't we still giving Rudolph counselling? And he needs it. The bastards. Bit more training in this field would go a long way. Failing that, stronger fucking muzzles.

12. A suggestion box

For pretty much everything. No one's been able to tell that fella who works on the top floor that he stinks. No one has been able to tell Mrs C. that her chilli-con-carne is chilli-con-crappy. A suggestion box adds the anonymity we all need, and spares us all these difficult conversations.

13. Exclusive Access to the Toys

Not all the time, but in terms of R&R it would go a long way if some of the lads and

lasses could blow off some steam playing Grand Theft Auto, and I personally want to use the Nerf gun to act out a number of daydreams I've been having recently. Nah, I'm just kidding. It just seems like unnecessary torture to have them all at hand and have to pack them up for some kid who barely made the Nice List and should probably be put on the entirely hypothetical "Little Bastard List".

14. Relaxation of the Uniform Rules

Frankly put, I don't think I could look any more fucking stupid if I tried. And I have to come to work every day dressed like this? This yellow fucking hat? Come on big guy, this isn't too much to ask. Also, shoes with toes that curl up and have bells on them have to be the single most impractical piece of footwear ever invented. What were you thinking? Seriously?

15. A Coffee Machine (And fruit option)

I know, coffee is technically a drug. I know you love hot-chocolate. To be fair, most of the gang do, but a few of us would just love it if we could love a cup of joe with our afternoon smoke. A cigarette and hot-chocolate break seems wrong, you know? As for the fruit... I'm not complaining, this one is entirely from the rest of the gang, but apparently fellas are fed up of candy canes morning, noon and night. Aew apples here and there would go a long way. By the way, did you know there's a black-market for them and fellas trade the apples you give to the reindeer for up to three boxes of cigarettes?

Anyway, I'm not trying to break your balls or anything, it's just that enough is enough. Hope we're all back on the same page again soon. Merry Christmas Big Man.

Sincerely,
Grumpy

The Darkness Wins

Lette Moloney

Lette Moloney has been an artist since she could first hold a crayon and a photographer for over a decade now. She used to regularly photograph Gigs, Weddings and Events under the Business name Lette Moloney Media, but she now lives the quiet life for a while due to disability. She is from County Limerick, Ireland where she lives with her Husband and their little pup, Boo.

Visit her at

<https://www.facebook.com/LetteMoloneyPhotography>

and

<http://irishdysautonomia.wordpress.com/>

Why we chose this piece:

Lette actually submitted this piece to our last issue. While we loved it, we didn't think it suited our theme. Thankfully, she was gracious enough to let us have it for our winter issue and we are thrilled to have her in the magazine again.

She stands alone in the middle of blackness
visible only to herself.

She feels a presence,
hears the sound,
adrenalin flows,
panic follows.

Aimlessly willing her eyes to strain to see
nothing, Wait,
breathing...

Heartbeat quickens.
A single step backwards into the dark,
a glance over shoulder.

Hearing heightens,
sound is closer,
chest tightens.
Breathing shallows,
trying desperately to hear
feeling desperately alone,
lost...

What was that?
red, quick and gone!
close.

Sweat tickles as it leaks from her hairline
it drips to her shoe.
Too close.
Dread...

She turns quick to run
legs like lead,
moving in slow motion.
No friction.
No pounding,
only from the fear in her chest.

Something brushes her face,

terror scalds the back of her throat
like acid.
Nauseating terror...

The presence surrounds her
as thick as the blackness,
it climbs her body.

She feels its weight,
an oily veil of darkness.
Temperature drops.
Freezing.
Alone.
Scared.
Screaming...

Deafening screaming,
presses in on her ears.
Swimming stars.
Pressure
Pain
Panic
and yet,
silence...

Nothing escapes her lips.
The empty void echoes her fall.
Eyes searching wildly.
It tightens its grip.
Gasping breaths stop,
veins pulse slowly.
Black envelops her vision,
eyes close...

The darkness always wins...



Silver Apples Presents...

Our fabulous new Art Editor—Una Hussey!

Big things have been happening at the Silver Apples Magazine office. Because of our on-going quest to make sure we are more than your average magazine, we have extended our staff.

We'd like to welcome our new Art Editor Una Hussey to the team! In true Silver Apples Magazine style, we hit her with a bunch of random questions so we can all get to know her better!

Welcome Una! You're going to fit right in!

Twenty Questions We Just Came Up With:

1. **Why are you excited about joining the Silver Apples Team?** *I have so much in common with Silver Apples, I feel like I'm suffering from 'new-best-friend' syndrome. (that's totally a thing) Silver Apples is fun, I like fun. Silver Apples celebrates creativity, I like creativity too! Silver Apples is a breath of fresh air- I LOVE air!But I'm trying to play it cool so don't tell Silver Apples I said anything...ok?*
2. **What is your favourite piece to feature in Silver Apples so far and why?** *The cover page illustration for the Modern Mythologies issue.*
3. **Did you just read all of Silver Apples for the first time so you could answer the above question?** *You think I haven't read all of Silver Apples word for word and image by image up to date? Shame on you! I have been in love with that illustration since I first saw it, so far it is my favourite. Is that a bit of a cheat answer because a cover doesn't necessarily feature?!?*
4. **List your top five favourite traits about Grainne and Alex.** *Really?...5 might be a stretch! Just kidding! They are quirky, courageous, welcoming, WAY TOO intelligent, and absolutely hilarious.*
5. **Who is better looking, Grainne or Alex?** *....sorry I really have to take this call...what do you mean you can't hear my phone ringing?*
6. **Where were you conceived?** *Somewhere in England.*
7. **Does it annoy you when people mispronounce the word controversy?** *Yes*

8. **How do you pronounce the word controversy?** *Cont-Ro-Versy.*
9. **How many things can you do at once?** *I'd say 5 or 6 (not counting things like breathing and looking at stuff right?)*
10. **What's your favourite drunk text you ever sent/received?** *This is the best question. I like to text my boyfriend when I am drunk, and he likes to read the texts out at parties, a la spoken word or beat poetry. One of the best ones was 'I'm so derunk I cant take off my pants to pree' ...yeah, I'm a lady.*
11. **Do you think Luke ever got to Toshi Station to pick up those power converters?** *This question smells a lot like nerd...Did Nerd just happen? Did I just get Nerded?*
12. **Have you ever, ever felt like this? When strange things happen, are you going 'round the twist? (Also, do you remember this TV show or did I just dream it up?) AAAGGGHHH!!!!!! OF COURSE! Did they live in a lighthouse?**
13. **If an ambulance is on its way to save someone, and it runs someone over, does it stop to help them?** *While a tree is falling in the woods? While one hand claps? Is this one of those questions that makes you think about life or a legit question about ambulatory best practice? Oh....then yeah it stops to help them.*
14. **Fill in the blanks: My blank brings all the blank to the yard.** *My milkshake brings all the boys to the yard. I do have the best milkshakes. Well, maybe not as good as Grainne's milkshakes.*
15. **Lyons or Barry's?** *Barry's 100% no question whywouldyouevenaskthat?*
16. **Bacon fries or Scampi fries?** *Bacon anything all the time*
17. **Give us a good cocktail recipe.** *Gin.*
18. **Is this a trick question?** *Gin???*
19. **What's your go-to karaoke song?** *Anything by the Backstreet Boys and don't you dare judge me I'm cool I swear.*
20. **Is Bigfoot real? Discuss.** *Totes...scientists found proof and everything...did you not see that documentary? It was a documentary...so definitely telling the truth.*

Thank you for reading Issue Three: “The Naughty List”.

While we ponder the theme of our next issue, we are delighted to announce a **new competition!**

We are in search of a new logo, one that reflects our personality, something quirky, off- the-wall and hilarious. Think “nerdy hipsters on LSD”.

The new logo **must** contain a Silver Apple and encompass our tagline “Creativity Worth Consuming”.

The winning artist will receive 100 euro, have their logo appear on our website and all social media and on our business cards (yes we do have them), and of course it will be included in every issue of the magazine. We’ll also throw in some free advertising for the winner to boot! Most importantly they will win bragging rights over their fellow artists.

We will be accepting submissions for this all through January and February so keep an eye on our Twitter: @silverapplesmag, Facebook: www.facebook.com/silverapplesmag and website: www.silverapplesmagazine.com for more details in the new year.

Best of luck!



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Creativity Worth Consuming

Confessions from the Back Page:

I quite fancy Disney's Robin Hood even though he is both a cartoon and a fox