

SILVER APPLES MAGAZINE



PRESENTS THEIR ILLUSTRIOUS

BOX OF TRICKS

ISSUE 2

**FRESH &
ORIGINAL
TALENT!**



**CREATIVITY
WORTH CONSUMING
CALLING ALL
ARTISANS! VAGABONDS!
TRANSIENTS! VAGRANTS!
STUMBLEBUMS!**



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

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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 2nd issue of Silver Apples Magazine and would like to thank Alex & Gráinne 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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Published in the Republic of Ireland

Silver Apples Magazine

Box of Tricks

Issue Two, September 2014

Creativity Worth Consuming

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Letter from the Editors:

In which we decide to do it all over again

Gráinne O'Brien and Alex Dunne

Dear Reader,

Welcome to 'Box of Tricks', the second issue of Silver Apples Magazine. To say we have experienced some dramatic changes since our last issue would be an understatement. In all the planning, submissions, tweets, Facebook posts, typesetting, editing, typesetting, and typesetting, we learned many things. We wrote a blog post about it. We're sure you've read it. If you haven't then you should. Right now.

Most importantly, we learned that while we may disagree on some things and agree with varying amounts of 'yeah but...' or 'we could do that if...', through out it all our favourite writer Neil Gaiman's words always rang true:

'Make good art.'

Silver Apples Magazine is still a young venture (this is, after all, only our second issue) and in many ways we are still finding our feet as a publication. It's a steep learning curve, but an extremely gratifying one. One thing we can say with some confidence that those three words sum up everything that we are trying to do with the magazine. We are trying to make good art.

What exactly does that mean? Well for us, it means creating something that is accessible to everyone. Literature and art shouldn't be intimidating to be considered 'good' or 'worthy'. We want Silver Apples to be a space where everyone can open it up, flick through the pages, and find something that speaks to them - a story that makes them laugh, a poem that makes them think, a photograph that inspires them.

More than anything, we are trying to provide a platform for the incredible art that is being made all over the world everyday by people who are too afraid, too intimidated, too shy, or too nervous to submit it.

We know you. We are you. We have been you, and we will be you again. It's terrifying, it's exhilarating, and it is all worth it.

This issue is titled 'Box of Tricks' and within its pages that's exactly what you will find - something for everyone, art for the masses. In short, you will find good art and creativity worth consuming.

Mozilla's Fox

Josh Byer



Josh Byer is an artist who lives and works in Vancouver, Canada. Recent publications include a pictorial with !N Magazine, cover art for Plant Physiology Magazine, Anti-Magazine, and Scripted Magazine, as well as interviews with Seek.me Magazine, Positive Magazine & KALTBLUT Magazine. Visit his online gallery at www.byercreative.com and his deviantArt page at <http://joshbyer.deviantart.com/>

Why we chose this piece:

I mean, do we even need to say why we picked this? It's amazing! When we opened his email, Josh's work leapt off the screen. Amazing use of colour and form. We're now big fans.

The Ticket

Peter Indianna

Peter Indianna's stories are, in his own words, about "my own personal transgressions that create a warped cupboard of the cosmos." . He writes for therapy because he works in a psychiatric hospital where things do more than go bump in the night."

Why we chose this piece:

We liked Peter's story from the off, but once he informed us that it is an exaggeration of a true story, well, we just felt for the guy! It might not equate with winning the lotto, but surely being published in Silver Apples Magazine is the next best thing, right?

Hector "Pabo" Rivera played lottery numbers every Friday night at the Route 80 Gas n' Go convenience store on his way home from the bar after spending a therapeutic four hours drinking and bullshitting with his fellow workers from the sheet metal factory. Pabo was a forming press operator. He'd been doing it for six years now and for the twenty-one bucks an hour plus overtime he had a very easy day. The machines did all the work now. Just push a few buttons and the computer program scanned detailed and pressed the rolls of metal into everything from cookie sheets to file cabinet parts.

When he first started they had just got the new machines up and running. The company eliminated sixteen people that week, older people who were running the brutal hand-loaders for years. Since automation is the key in any industry, Pabo was in the right place at the right time, a lucky guy in the corporate numbers game. He was young, eager, and willing to learn and immediately picked-up the computer system that ran the machines, troubleshooting the delays and breakdowns and kept his machine running high-above average efficiency and output. The bosses appreciated that and gave him substantial raises each year.

He always had a knack for mechanical things - auto repair, HVAC, plumbing and electrical. He took some night classes on computer basics for six months and did some data entry at a bank. With these new machines though, the supervisors and upper management never learned to run them and could care less about how they ran, just as long as their shift made their daily production quotas. Of course, Pabo could now run the machine in his sleep and probably put the form blocks and cams together blindfolded, but he always had to hold back that information from the bosses. He knew how to play them, how to make them *need* him. Have the machines breakdown at key times, then, he'd get in there and look like a magician to save the day's production. Just play the system and know when to tweak the tables in your favour.

So tonight driving down Route 80 with a delightful tequila buzz, he turned into the Gas 'n' Go to buy his

numbers. This week the top prize was up to twenty-two million dollars. Pabo would regularly play one dollar for each million in the pool.

He got out of his car and walked into the store pulling twenty-two dollars from his pocket. The guy behind the counter Jerry, knew him by name.

"Pabo, whazzup up, buddy. How you doin'?" Jerry was about three hundred and fifty pounds of deadweight. A big, Italian boy with a triple-chin and fat-pudgy, sausage-like fingers. His hair was greasy and stringy, his face was always stubbly and he never failed in wearing a dingy Minnesota Twins cap.

"Sup, Jer. Same ol' shit. Gimme twenty-two quick picks."

Jerry's plump fingers tapped the keys of the lottery machine and it came to life with a melody of whirring sounds. As the tickets popped-up from the top slot Jerry cupped his plump hand around them collecting each one.

"How you feelin' tonight, Pabo? How's the job goin'?" Jerry's wheezy, gravelly voice broke over the printing tickets.

"Same. They wanna make me a supervisor. I dunno."

"More cash, huh?"

"Yeah, more cash but no OT. That's where I make it, ya know. They stick me on salary, I'm beat."

"Hey, gotta go where the cow eats."

"Yeah. Right now, I got no headaches. Jus' run the machine and get my eight plus the extra."

"Screw them. They're just tryin' ta get ya cheap."

"Yeah. That's what I'm gonna tell them on Monday. Jus' leave me alone runnin' the machines. Go get some other guy who wants to run up the ladder. Some clean, white, smart-ass college-boy Right?"

"Yup. Let 'em take some young, hungry hot-shot."

"Dude, I won't have to worry since you printing the winner right now, man."

"Don't forget my ass if it's in here. Twenty-two mil can buy a lotta shit."

"I'd be gone and out. No more work for me. Get my ass back down to Puerto Rico and live like a fuckin' king."

"Money, women, cars and booze."

The machine finished printing the tickets and Jerry handed them over to Pabo and took the money. Pabo kissed the batch then put them into his shirt pocket.

"C'mon, baby. Get me on the beach."

"Like I said, remember ol' Jerry if you nail it."

"Sure, man. I'll get ya box seats for ten years watching your shitty-ass Twins. Maybe I'll even get you a big-ass razor, too. Catch you later, big guy."

"I'm holdin' ya to that deal, asshole." Jerry joked. "Later, man. Good luck."

Pabo left the store and walked over to his car. As he was opening up the car door he noticed a pink piece of paper on the ground. He kicked it with his shoe.

It flipped over and revealed a single lottery ticket. He bent down and picked it up. It was for tonight's drawing. Somebody dropped it.

1-2-3-4-5-7.

Shitty-ass numbers, Pabo thought. Probably the person saw those numbers and tossed it away. He got into the car and pitched the ticket across the front seat.

He drove home and fell asleep on the couch.

Pabo woke up at seven a.m. Saturday morning with a moderate hangover and cottonmouth as he lifted his aching body up off the dilapidated couch. His entire back and neck were severely stiff. Goddamn piece of shit couch. He hobbled over to the sink and rinsed his mouth and sipped. The cold water shocked his empty stomach and he dry-heaved for a few seconds. Then he wandered back and flopped down on the couch, hit the remote control and the television lit up.

Local news was on. He fumbled for the lottery tickets in his shirt pocket. The rolling information screen at the bottom gave headlines, weather updates, sports scores and lottery numbers. The numbers scrolled by and Pabo missed them the first time. He found a pencil on the floor and scratched them on a paper plate as the banner went past a second time.

Eyes blurry, he checked his twenty-two tickets. All he had was a couple of three dollar winners. Fuck me, he thought. Never had a fucking chance with those numbers. Goddamn rigged, game. He threw the pencil down and got up off the couch.

He shut off the television and walked into the bathroom where he started to strip for a shower. Standing there waiting for the hot water to start was like watching paint dry.

Why don't the landlord fix the fuckin' boilers in this place. Can't even get a decent...

1-2-3-4-5-7.

Shit! Shit! **SHIT!**

Pabo's heart pounded, his mind raced. Those shitty-ass, fuckin' numbers. The Gas n' Go. He ran out of the bathroom leaving the shower running, cursed wildly as he smashed his toes hard on the side of the doorway. He ran in spite of the pain, through the apartment and out the door. Down the one flight of stairs and blasted through the front door of the complex. He ran across the parking lot, his bare feet stepping on rocks and assorted crap, the toes on his left foot now swelling. He jumped into his car and looked around.

¡CARAJÓ! It's got to be here!

1-2-3-4-5-7.

Twenty-two-fuckin' million dollars!

Pabo scattered the ESPN magazines and newspapers and Burger King fast food wrappers and bags. No ticket. **SHIT!** He looked in the back seat, under the seats and between the seats. He was sweating like crazy now and looked down and noticed that he was sitting there dressed only in his boxers. He sat there on the driver's side out of breath.

Calm down, asshole. Think, man! THINK! "NO SEAS TAN ESTÚPIDO!"

He took a few deep breaths and started to relax. *It was here last night. I had that ticket in my hand. It was real. Let's see. I picked it up, got in the car and tossed it. It's gotta be somewhere on this front seat! In this car!*

1-2-3-4-5-7.

FUCK! FUCK! FUCK ME!

"He jumped into his car and looked around. ¡CARAJÓ! It's got to be here! 1-2-3-4-5-7. Twenty-two-fuckin' million dollars!"

Pabo looked again going through each scrap of paper. Newspapers, soda cans and assorted garbage. He cleared out the fast food shit and threw the paper garbage outside of the car. He opened up and shook each sheet of newspaper and did the same to each magazine in the front seat.

No ticket.

Finally he looked down, and lying beneath the heat vent on the floor was what looked like a pink lottery ticket. He reached down, lunging through the mountain of papers and picked it up.

¡MALDITA SEA!!

It was a lottery ticket. But from *two months ago*.

Pabo smashed his fist onto the dashboard. He was losing his grip now. It was here and it still had to be in this damn car. Time out, he thought. Relax. Go back and get dressed and then come back and search again. Pabo stepped out of the car. His white boxers were marked with sweat, maybe even a little piss from the excitement. His left toes were puffed up, hurt like the dickens and were starting to have a bluish tinge to them. He kicked the food bags and papers off to the gutter and closed the door of his car, locking it. He trotted back across the parking lot and drew some laughter from some kids playing on the makeshift swing set on the property. He quickly ran inside and up to his apartment.

The shower! It was still running!

¡MALDITA SEA!!

Pabo darted to the bathroom and the room was steaming hot. He pushed his way through the mist and turned off the water. He went into the bedroom and changed into a pair of jeans, t-shirt and sneakers. His swollen toes didn't fit in the sneaker so he put on three extra socks onto his aching foot.

He stood in the room thinking of what the hell happened to that ticket. He wasn't that drunk last night. Only about six drinks. That ticket had to be in the car. He remembered flipping it across the seat.

Back outside he went.

More kids were running and playing in the yard and in the parking lot. Pabo ambled over to his car and unlocked it. He combed every inch of the car starting from the passenger door. He looked over, under, and sideways. Under the seats three times, under each mat, between the seats and then he decided to remove the front bucket seats altogether. In the map slots on the doors, the ashtray, above the sun visor. Everywhere in case he had unconsciously, drunkenly put it somewhere. He even checked the glove compartment but found nothing but the registration, crumbled saltines, salt packets and a squashed, empty bottle of Coppertone. He stood outside the car and looked at the clutter. He gathered up the newspapers and tossed them into the dumpster. He replaced the seat, but not before Pabo gave the entire inside of the car another check.

No ticket.

¡MALDITA SEA!!

He sat on the edge of the driver's side seat, the door open.

He *lost* a twenty-two million dollar ticket. He stared at the kids playing for a few minutes, dazed, not moving as his eyes starting to well-up with tears. His hands were shaking. He couldn't believe the whole thing. He thrust his arms into the air and gave

the finger.

"FUCK YOU, GOD! FUCK YOU! YOU GIVE IT TO ME! *YO SOL EL PAYASO! FUCK YOU!*"

He shouted so loudly that the kids stopped playing and stared at him. He glared back at them, his eyes red and streaming with tears.

Out of his car, Pabo slammed the car door with such impact that the side view mirror broke off and clattered onto the asphalt. He stormed past the speechless children, limping like an out-of-stride horse and returned to his apartment. Pabo sat on his couch and stared at the dead spider plant that hung in the front window.

He just quietly stared and stared and stared.

Outside, one anxious child was all it took to break the silence and make the rest resume their play. With a slight giggle and jump she shouted.

"TAG! YOU'RE IT!"

Across the parking lot Betzaida Maldonado was walking with her four year old daughter, Isabel and pushing her two-month old son, Edgardo in a stroller.

Isabel ran ahead of her mother and was playing with a tree twig. She struck one of the fast food bags that Pabo had thrown from his car. When it rolled over, she noticed a piece of paper stuck to the bottom of the bag. She flicked at it with her tiny stick. She knew what numbers were and she was a big girl and could now count up to twenty. She started to pronounce the numbers out loud as her mother was approaching.

"One...two...three...four..."

"Isabel! Don't play in the gutter! It's dirty! Come here!"

"...five...seven! Okay, Mama!"

She tossed away the twig which struck the bag and the pink ticket dropped off, dangled at the edge of the storm drain, then finally fell through the grating. It fluttered downward, like an autumn leaf and landed in the unhurried stream of sewer water where eventually the current would take it miles away, to be flushed into the harbour and eventually out to sea.

Only the Rain

G.J. Schear

The funeral's not till one, says Fat Nanny. There's lashings of time yet.

Mammy leads us to the upper deck of the bus so she can smoke, and though I am too old to admit the pleasure of such things, we take the front seats. It's mid-morning and the bus is empty save for the couple necking on the back seat.

Fat Nanny pulls out a bag of boiled sweets and we each take one.

There's probably some place in Deansgrange where we can get a cup of tea. This'll tide us over till then, she says.

We suck on the sweets and Mammy says, I wonder why they didn't give him a wake.

People aren't doing them as often as they used, Fat Nanny says. It's a shame to see the old customs die. Do you know why, Imelda?

I say, with a wet mouth, Well... maybe people have more learning so they're not superstitious like they used to be in the old days.

Ah now, we weren't ignorant when I was a child, Fat Nanny says. For all our want of education. We just believed different things.

Some of us still have faith, Mammy says, giving me a look. In God and the church.

But that's faith, I say. Not superstition.

What's the difference? She grinds the sweet in her mouth and swallows it. Then: I suppose his family doesn't believe in the old ways.

Ah it's all changed, Fat Nanny says. Even Temple Bar is different from when you were a girl, Katie. There's no one left in Essex Street any more. Only me and the ghosts.

Poor Terry was terrified of that house, Mammy says. Afraid of ghosts and isn't he a ghost himself now? He wouldn't come up, but stand at the door and shout up for me to come down to him.

And what did you do, Mammy?

I'd shout back,

Terry O'Toole is such a fool.

G.J. Schear is a Dubliner, currently living in Kells. Her first novel, "Shakespeare's Tree", was a winner of the Dublin Writers' Novel Fair in 2012 and her second novel "A Biased Judgement" is due to be published in October. She has also had short stories accepted by journals such as Hayden's Ferry Review, River Poets Journal Anthology, and Broadkill Review.

Why we chose this piece:

It is a scenario familiar to Irish families since time immemorial—you are out for a day trip and you don't have ready access to tea and sandwiches. I can almost feel the collective shudder of thousands of Irish mummies at the thought. If you're not from Ireland, rest assured that you still will find plenty in this story to enjoy.

Afraid of a ghost so he stands by the post.

Fat Nanny laughs. Ah, he was a grand fellow, was Terry. Do you remember the turkey he brought us that Christmas? I was sure we'd go hungry, but we ended up having a lovely feast. Generous to a fault, he was. God sent that man.

He loved to dance, Mammy says. No one was lighter on their feet. Ah, who'd have thought he'd be in his grave at the age of forty-six?

Was he good looking, Mammy?

He was very handsome.

Best looking boy in Dublin, Fat Nanny says.

They fall silent. After a minute Mammy says, Will it take us long to get to Deansgrange? I'd hate to be late and miss the funeral. Terry always used to say I'd keep God waiting... Mick gave me money for the taxi. I hope it's enough...

We'll be grand, says Fat Nanny. I have a few bob myself if you're stuck.

We stop at the traffic light in Phibsboro and Fat Nanny adds, When did you see him last, Katie?

“He looked grand for all his hair was snow white. He gave me a big hug and kissed my cheek. He gave me five pounds and said I should get something nice for the children. Such a lovely man.”

Who, Terry? God, it's been ages. I ran into him in Clery's when I was doing some Christmas shopping. That was, what, two or three years ago, I think. He looked grand for all his hair was snow white. He gave me a big hug and kissed my cheek. He gave me five pounds and said I should get something nice for the children. Such a lovely man.

You'd have been well set if you'd married him, Fat Nanny says.

Down on the street the hard sun glints on the shop windows. The girls are already in summer dresses. The bus stops to let a

couple of nuns on and outside I can hear someone laughing. The last of the blossom is drifting down from the trees, bleeding pink and white upon the pavement.

It's a fine day, Fat Nanny says. We'll be able to see the sea. Won't that be grand?

It's lucky to rain at a funeral, Mammy says. We won't get any rain today though.

Sure, Terry was a good man, Fat Nanny says. He'll rest in peace no matter what the weather.

We get off the bus in Parnell Square and walk down O'Connell Street. There are a few taxis waiting and the drivers are laughing and chatting to each other. The sun has everyone in a good mood, even mammy, for all we are going to a funeral.

We get into a taxi and Mammy and Fat Nanny are gobsmacked, not because the driver is black, but because she is a woman.

Janey Mac, Fat Nanny says. I didn't know women drove taxis, did you, Katie?

I think between them they've been in maybe five taxis total for the whole lives. Still, they have the air of seasoned travellers down. Fat Nanny and I get in the back and mammy gets into the front passenger seat as befits her position of chief mourner.

Where are you off to? the driver says.

To the cemetery at Deansgrange, Mammy says. Do you know it?

I do, Lady, says the driver. I was there just last week. We'll have a lovely trip by the sea.

Mammy, bloated on the word 'lady', says, How long have you been driving a taxi?

Oh, bless you, Lady, says the driver. I've been driving for two years now. All over Dublin I've been.

Would you like a sweet, love? Fat Nanny says, proffering the little white bag. We all, even the driver, take one.

Where are you from? Mammy says.

Nigeria.

God, that's an awful long way to travel. What's your name? Mammy squints at the driver's ID but doesn't dare try to pronounce it.

The driver says, It's a hard name for Irish people to say. You can call me 'Ade'.

Ade, Mammy says. Isn't that lovely?

So, says the driver, You are going to a funeral?

We are, says mammy. One of my oldest and dearest friends died unexpectedly. The funeral is at one o'clock. We'll be on time, won't we?

Bless you, Lady, you'll be very early.

Is there a tea shop or something nearby where we might get a bite? Fat Nanny says. She frowns at the dwindling bag. I should have made some sandwiches, just in case.

We'll find you something, Ade says.

We pass the Custom House and head up the North Wall, then it's over the bridge and after that I'm lost. It doesn't matter because there's the sea.

I would say something, but they're caught up in Ade's life story. Besides, they'd think me daft for my romantic notions about the sea. Cold, wet and sure to drown you, Mammy would say.

On the horizon the sky is congealing into a necrotic shade of green. It's going to rain, I say, and even as the words slip from my tongue we are hit with a downpour.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Mammy cries.

It's just a shower, Katie, Fat Nanny says. The weather's always changeable at the coast.

The driver turns on the headlights and the windscreen wipers. We turn from the sea and head up a narrow road.

Did you want to stop and get something to eat first, Katie? Fat Nanny says. We've plenty of time.

I want to see the cemetery first, so we know where it is, Mammy says. We can walk back from there if the rain stops.

She means she's got her eye on the meter and doesn't want to keep the taxi longer than she has to.

Well, as long as it's not too far, Fat Nanny says, and she stuffs the sweet bag back in her pocket.

We drive up the road right to the top and the driver stops. That's strange, she says. I was just here last week. I'm sure it was here.

Could we have passed it? Mammy says. Maybe we should turn around and go

back. We must have passed it.

We do a U-turn and go back down the streaming street. At the bottom, with the terrible sea before us, the driver stops again. She pulls out a map and turns off the meter. It's not your fault I got lost, she says. I won't charge you.

That's good of you, says Fat Nanny. Isn't that good of her, Katie?

Mammy says nothing.

The driver follows the map with her finger. She peers through the rain at the street sign and says, I don't understand. This is the right road.

Well we've been up and down it twice already, Mammy says. If it was the right road wouldn't we have found it by now? Let's go to that café we passed. I'll run in and get directions.

Do, Katie, do, says Fat Nanny. And get us some sandwiches while you're in there.

We go back the way we came and the driver pulls up at the café. I can go in if you like, she says, trying to make amends.

No, Mammy says. Then, Do you want anything to eat or drink?

Bless you, no, says Ade. I couldn't eat a thing.

Mammy jumps out into the rain. The shop is busy but whether it is people wanting to eat or are just sheltering from the downpour we can't tell.

She's very upset, the driver says. I'm so sorry

It's not your fault, pet, Fat Nanny says. These things happen. That storm got us all turned around. I think we should sit here and wait it out. We can have our sandwiches and then the weather will clear.

It's almost one, I say. Wouldn't the funeral procession come this way too? If we wait we might see it and be able to follow it.

That's a grand thought, Imelda, Fat Nanny says. Grand. You're right of course.

By the time mammy comes out of the sandwich shop laden with the cups and the bag of sandwiches it is well after one. I scramble out of the car to help her but she waves me back. Go on, she says. There's no point in both of us getting drenched.

Drenched she is. Her thick black curls make wilted commas all over her forehead and her scarf is stuck to her, as is her light summer coat. She hands out the cups and the sandwiches to me and Fat Nanny, and hands a cup to the driver. I thought you'd like some tea, pet, she says in her most Catholic voice. There's sugar here if you want.

Fat Nanny tells her what I said about the funeral procession passing by.

But wouldn't they be here already? says Mammy.

They might have been held up with the storm.

I suppose we're late already, she says. We might as well eat. Ah poor Terry. I hate to think of him being laid to rest without me there to say goodbye.

The rain plays tom-toms on the roof of the car and weeps upon the windows as we eat in silence.

Mammy bought me a ham and tomato sandwich. The ham is fatty and the bit of tomato tastes slimy but I know better than to complain.

After we finish eating the weather shows no sign of improving and the funeral procession has not appeared. The driver says, Did you get directions, Lady?

The word has lost its magic and Mammy says only, Yes. It's the road we were

on.

So back we go up the road and the water streaming down the gutters and the wind bending the trees like straw. We drive very slowly. This is the right road for sure and there is no explaining why we'd missed the cemetery before, but we wouldn't miss it now.

It'll be over by the time we get there, Mammy says through hiccups of tears.

Don't fret, Katie, Fat Nanny says. You'll get to say your respects at least.

Then, just as we are sure we've missed it again, there's the cemetery. Hadn't we been following the long wall of it, for ages now?

How in God's name did we miss that? Fat Nanny says.

Mammy crosses herself.

The storm, I say. Or maybe this is a different road.

It's the same road, lady, the driver says and her eyes are huge.

It's getting on for two, Mammy says. Stop here now and I'll see if I can find out if the funeral is still going on.

She climbs out of the car and runs into the office.

The driver is muttering something under her breath, prayers or incantations, I think. Fat Nanny is silent but she is pale. I think I am pale too, but I can't see my reflection in the rear view mirror.

After a few minutes Mammy comes back and squelches into her seat. The funeral's over, your man says. But he told me where the gravesite is. I'll just go and say a prayer for him, for poor Terry, and then we'll go home.

Do, Katie, says Fat Nanny.

You're drenched, Lady, says the driver. And I don't even have a towel for you to dry your face.

Mammy says nothing but from the set of her shoulders I can see she is feeling better now. She can be a grand martyr standing in the rain and if, please God, she catches cold she can suffer in silence for days to come. At least she can remember her old beau without his wife and children there to smirk at her.

She has a piece of paper in her hand where the man has drawn a map and she directs the driver with an air of quiet confidence. A few minutes later we pull up and Mammy says, It should be just over there. No point in anyone else getting wet. I won't be long.

She gets out of the car and criss-crosses her way through the tombstones. By the time she is three graves in, we can no longer see her. Now and then there is a blur of pale blue as we glimpse her coat. The driver says, Poor thing will be soaked. I'll see if I have a blanket or something in the boot.

She zips up her raincoat and pulls the hood over her black curls then sprints from the car.

That's a nice girl, Fat Nanny says. Very obliging. Ah, poor Terry. I thought your

“How in God’s name did we miss that? Fat Nanny says. Mammy crosses herself. The storm, I say. Or maybe this is a different road. It’s the same road, lady, the driver says and her eyes are huge.”

mother would marry him, Imelda. She was very fond of him.

Why didn't she?

They had a quarrel. I don't know what about. She was never a one for confiding. But a week later she met your father and three months after that she married him. I don't think Terry ever got over her.

The door screams open and the driver dives back into the car sobbing, We have to go, we have to go!

What's the matter with you, girl? Fat Nanny says. You look like you've seen a ghost.

I hit my left leg on a stone.

Are you hurt?

No, no... It's an evil omen. It means our journey is cursed. Go get your mother, lady. We have to leave this place.

Go and get your mother, child, says Fat Nanny. She'll catch her death in this weather anyway.

So out I get and I run through the gravestones calling, Mammy, Mammy...

The rain is so hard I can't see more than a foot in front of me and I'm almost on top of her before I realise it. She's standing there by the maw of the grave twitching like she's been struck by lightning.

"Mammy, we have to go... He's still alive, she says. Listen. I can hear him hammering inside the coffin."

Mammy, we have to go...

He's still alive, she says. Listen. I can hear him hammering inside the coffin.

I'm wilfully deaf. I stutter, He's dead, Mammy. Come on, we have to go.

I drag her away by the arm. She's sobbing and fighting, though too weak to resist. I drag her through the tombstones and the mud and the flattened flowers and eventually get her back to the car.

Are you all right there, Katie? Fat Nanny says.

He's still alive, Mammy says. I heard him knocking from inside the coffin.

My grandmother crosses herself. Saints between us and all harm, she says.

The car suddenly lurches as the driver spirits us away.

Wait, wait, Mammy wails. We have to tell someone... They have to dig him up. He's alive.

Did you hear anything, Imelda? Fat Nanny asks me.

Only the rain. It was the rain, Mammy.

What kind of eejit do you think I am? Mammy says. I know the difference between the sound of the rain, and a hammering from inside the coffin. The man's alive, I tell you.

Tell Mick when you get home, Fat Nanny says. He's level-headed. He'll know what to do. Don't upset yourself, Katie.

Fat Nanny has things in hand and Mammy sits there in the passenger seat sobbing.

We'll go straight to your house in Finglas, Fat Nanny says. Sure, Mick'll give me a lift home later.

We leave Dun Laoighaire and the sullen sea. By the time we reach Ringsend the sun is out and the ground is dry.

Daddy arrives home the same time as we do and Mammy tells him everything: getting lost, the sudden downpour, the hammering from inside the coffin.

You can't think the man's still alive, Katie, Daddy says. He was pronounced dead over a week ago. He's been embalmed. It was the rain, like Imelda says, or...

Or? She's in full Maureen O'Hara mode, her arms folded and her chin jutted out.

Or rats, he says. And though he says it gently she's horrified, caught between two terrible notions: the man alive and banging to be rescued; or his flesh being devoured by rats.

I'm going to be sick, she says and runs from the room.

Such an awful thing to happen, Fat Nanny says. I'll make dinner, will I?

How to Disappear

Jenn Johnson

Jenn Johnson lives in the desert in the interior of British Columbia. She finds inspiration in unintentional poets, the beauty of the landscape around her and her most terrifying nightmares. And everything in between.

Why we chose this piece:

Well we have to say, the idea of wrapping Wolverine around us is pretty appealing and—

What's that you say? She's referring to the animal and not the Hugh Jackman character?

Damn.

Well, we like the poem anyway so it can stay.

Trust me - I'm an expert. First fold in all the corners, the loose ends, the edges. Smooth them down with the soft pad of your finger. Don't let them fray. Curl in against yourself like bark thrown on the fire. Collect the heat into your centre and feel yourself turn to ash. If you're patient you'll be picked up on the wind and blown away. Live on your breath only. What more do you need? Don't ask for anything. You have enough - do you see it? Just a little smaller and you'll begin to reveal the form, pressing out from the inside. Listen. Hold that point until you hear it. Hissssss.... the air coming out. You're doing well. Now wrap yourself up in a new skin, a smaller one, the fur of a wolverine, something fierce. And walk out into the night.

Mr. Ishpeeny Isaac, Vampire Hunter

A.M. Madden

Mr. Ishpeeny Isaac rolled down the window of his battered blue van and took a deep satisfying sniff of the moist evening air. He took out a pair of binoculars; his sharp blue eyes darting from side to side like a demented hawk as he surveyed the nearby graveyard. He slapped his thigh with satisfaction. This was a proper graveyard. There were no shiny marble headstones with their fine gold print and neatly arranged bouquets to offend the eye. The stone headstones here were as gnarled and full of character as the knuckles of his own hand, and the only greenery to adorn them was the grass that rioted through every crevice. The sight of the ruined church brought him particular pleasure. Its crumbling walls had succumbed to the clinging embrace of ivy arms as the earth reached out to take back what man had made. Nature was slowly picking off the carcass of this once proud church and only the bare skeleton remained; a few ribs of stone amongst the trees. Yes, this was an elemental place, a fine setting for fighting the good fight.

He relaxed into his mud-splattered chair and munched joyfully on a bag of Taytos as he waited for events to unfold. It had been raining earlier and the petrichor rising out of the freshly cleansed soil awakened all his senses.

Suddenly, the earth beside one of the gravestones began to tremble. Ishpeeny was not the only one in the graveyard to find the smell of grass after rain revivifying.

He put down the crisp bag and licked his salty lips in anticipation. Ishpeeny stepped out of his van, struggling to close the door against the force of the gale that was now blowing. Ireland was a country with mighty lungs, Ishpeeny knew. Other countries may have lower temperatures, but here the cold travelled on a breath of wind. It blew through to the heart of him, filling him with vigour. He felt more alive than he had in months.

A body burst from one of the graves, shook itself off like a wet dog, and strode stiffly towards Ishpeeny. The old man reached into one of the many bulging pock-

A. M. Madden studied English and French in College. She has worked in shops and offices in Ireland, on farms and vineyards in New Zealand, and in schools in Ireland and South Korea. She is still not sure what she wants to be when she grows up but would like to give writing a try!

Why we chose this piece:

*As two individuals who grew up on a steady diet of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Anne Rice novels, we have always taken particular exception to the bejewelled vampires popularised by a certain series of books (*cough* Twilight *cough*). That is why we were thrilled to make the acquaintance of Mr. Ishpeeny here in A.M. Madden's short story. God speed sir! Keep fighting the good fight!*

ets of his great overcoat. He pulled out a wooden stake that had been sharpened to a menacing point. He smiled as the enemy drew close and waited for him to step into the light of the van's headlights so he could look his adversary in the eye before he sent the unholy creature back to the hellish fiction from which it had emerged.

If only writers knew the damage they did by unleashing their monsters into the imaginations of readers. Readers continue to resurrect vampires in their minds after the books are long finished, they compel them to walk again, they give them a semblance of life. Vampires become 'real' in so far as they are real in readers' imaginations. There are very few actual people, Ishpeeny would wager, whose motivations, thoughts, and characteristics are as well known to us as those of a character from a book. Characters like Stoker's Dracula continue to exist after the last page has been turned because they become too vital in the minds of readers to be laid to rest. They have the power to move out of the books that their creators placed them in and into new worlds; into our world.

Ishpeeny had dedicated his life to chasing down the vampires that people had brought into the real world via portals in their imaginations, as his ancestors had done before him. The first Ishpeeny Isaac had battled the ruddy-faced, uncouth peasants of folklore back in the 17th century. These earthy prototypes were eventually replaced by more sophisticated specimens when Lord Byron's disgruntled former employee William Polodori decided to immortalise his old boss in words. The pale, handsome, but malevolent seducer known as the 'Byronic vampire' continued to roam the literary landscape in one form or another for many generations. These dashing but deadly creatures had proven worthy foes for Ishpeeny's clan. Lately though, the vampires that Ishpeeny had been hunting were troubling him, they had less bite and more heart. Vampires 'with souls' had started to emerge. Creatures who struggled with their baser instincts and rarely succumbed to their dark and deep desires. Ishpeeny hadn't had a decent battle with an honest to god unequivocal force of evil for months! He had high hopes for this vampire though. The graveyard was a classically ominous location; surely it would produce a classically evil vampire!

The creature stepped into the light. Ishpeeny's lip curled into a sideways smile as he prepared to look upon the face of the stone-cold killer that he was about to smite. His face dropped in disappointment. The creature that stood before him was not fearsome, or chilling, or even debonair, it was...well, it was sparkly.

"What the hell is this?" Ishpeeny demanded with outrage, "Did you fall into a tub of glitter on your way to the grave?"

"Oh this," replied the young man, running his hand sheepishly through his ridiculously coiffed hair, "I have diamond skin. It shimmers in the light." He pointed to Ishpeeny's beloved weapon in amusement, "Is that a stake in your hand? How quaint. You won't be needing that though. I'm actually a vegetarian vampire."

"A vegetarian vampire," spat Ishpeeny, "what the hell is that supposed to mean? Ha?"

"It's quite simple really, I don't drink human blood."

"You don't drink human blood?" echoed the old man aghast. "Why the hell not? Well? Speak up boy!"

"Well, you know, it's morally wrong and all that. I only drink pig's blood. I've never hurt a human."

"Then what the hell do you do with them?" spluttered Ishpeeny, almost inartic-

ulate with rage.

"I form relationships with them I guess."

"Relationships?!"

"Well yes, there's this one girl I've been seeing for a while now. Her name is Becks and she goes to Loreto. We're, like, totes in love."

Ishpeeny stared at the glittering abomination in disbelief, opening and closing his mouth like a bewildered fish.

"So, are you a vampire hunter?" asked the young man with mild curiosity.

Ishpeeny nodded numbly.

"That's so cute. What's your name little guy?"

"My name," said Ishpeeny proudly, drawing himself up to his full height, "is Ishpeeny Isaac: slayer of demons, smiter of the undead, and bringer of destruction. In my country, my name means 'death'."

"In my country your name means 'sausage'."

"What?" blustered the old man.

"*Ispíní*, it means 'sausage' in Irish."

"Now you listen to me young man, Ishpeeny is an ancient name that has been passed down through generations of vampire hunters. It is revered amongst my people."

"Well, amongst my people it's a breakfast food," responded the young man snarkily.

Ishpeeny's eyes bulged worryingly from their sockets.

"So," the teenage vampire coughed awkwardly, "I'd best be heading on. I only stopped here for a night. An 'escape to the country' type of thing. I actually have an apartment in the city."

"An apartment in the city," repeated Ishpeeny in horror. "Tell me boy, who owns the warped imagination from whence you sprang? What diseased mind created you and released you onto an unsuspecting readership, thereby allowing you to plague this world?"

"The template for my type was created by an American lady, Stephanie something... She had a dream about a fantastically beautiful sparkly vampire who met a really boring girl and fell madly in love with her. And then you know, the book was written and my kind sort of took root in the popular imagination so to speak. There's, like, a whole franchise. We're especially popular with mothers."

"Right," said Ishpeeny, placing the stake reverentially in his pocket before rolling up his sleeves in determination, "I'm off to see Dracula."

"Oh cool, are you going to smite him and all that?"

"No boy I'm not, I'm gonna propose that we form a truce and take a little trip together."

"A trip, what for?"

Ishpeeny fixed the boy with a stare. Madness danced across his eyes like a dizzy child doing a jig. A devious smile played on his cracked lips.

"Let's just say, I want to help make this Stephanie Something's dream of meeting a vampire, come true."

With that he walked towards his van, his figure silhouetted dramatically by the car headlights and his oversized coat billowing behind him like a cape.

The Final Resting Place of the Code

Gráinne O'Brien

Gráinne O'Brien is known for her love of many things, but mostly academics and Harry Potter. After graduating from University of Limerick with a BA in English and History, and an MA in Gender Culture and Society, she has spent the last six years bouncing between conference organising, office managing, fiction writing, academic writing, and blogging. She has been published academically several times. Her latest accomplishment is the soon to be published "Good Madness: A Collection of Essays on the writer Neil Gaiman", which she co-edited with Alex. She also co-edits this magazine, so there's that.

Why we chose this piece:

Surely by now you have cottoned on to the fact that Silver Apples Magazine is a dual-dictatorship and not a democracy?

He sits, unwanted, unloved in this graveyard of hope. Not even worthy of space on a shelf, he was given a place on the stairs, with nothing to break the monotony of his life other than the occasional kick from careless or thoughtless feet as they pound their way down, racing to pay for their treasures. The bell above the door tinkles as they head for home, the place forgotten. Once acclaimed, now left to gather dust, he is surrounded by others just like him, but not quite.

Once the same, uniform, they have all been warped and changed by their previous handlers. Some are in pristine condition, without so much as a smudge. None of them will admit to being unwanted presents that were never read, preferring to defend their owners as being 'careful'. Others have their pages torn, their covers missing, pen marks all over them, crossed out words. They don't like to speak of the trauma they endured. The rest don't like to pry.

He is not too damaged. He is proud of that. He knows he was loved. His pages carefully dog-eared, a bookmark stuck triumphantly between his last page and his author's acknowledgement. He was handed from friend to family member, with promises of returns they knew would never be kept. Customers come and go, passing through without so much as a pity glance in his direction.

He has become bitter, resentful. Every day he hears the gasps of excitement, calling out when they discover a real find, a gem in among those that have been abandoned or forgotten, under the guise of being given a second chance. Some sit there for months, even years. It's easy for the ones who are chosen, he tells himself bitterly, they are unique. He used to comfort himself, smug in the knowledge that there were so few of them and so many of him. No one wanted them in the first place, he told the rest when they became depressed and angry at the cards they had been dealt. They didn't sell as many copies. Not as many of them were produced. Nobody wanted them the first time around. He used to tell them to be proud. They needed to understand, he used to tell

“He used to tell them to be proud. They needed to understand, he used to tell them, how popular they were.”

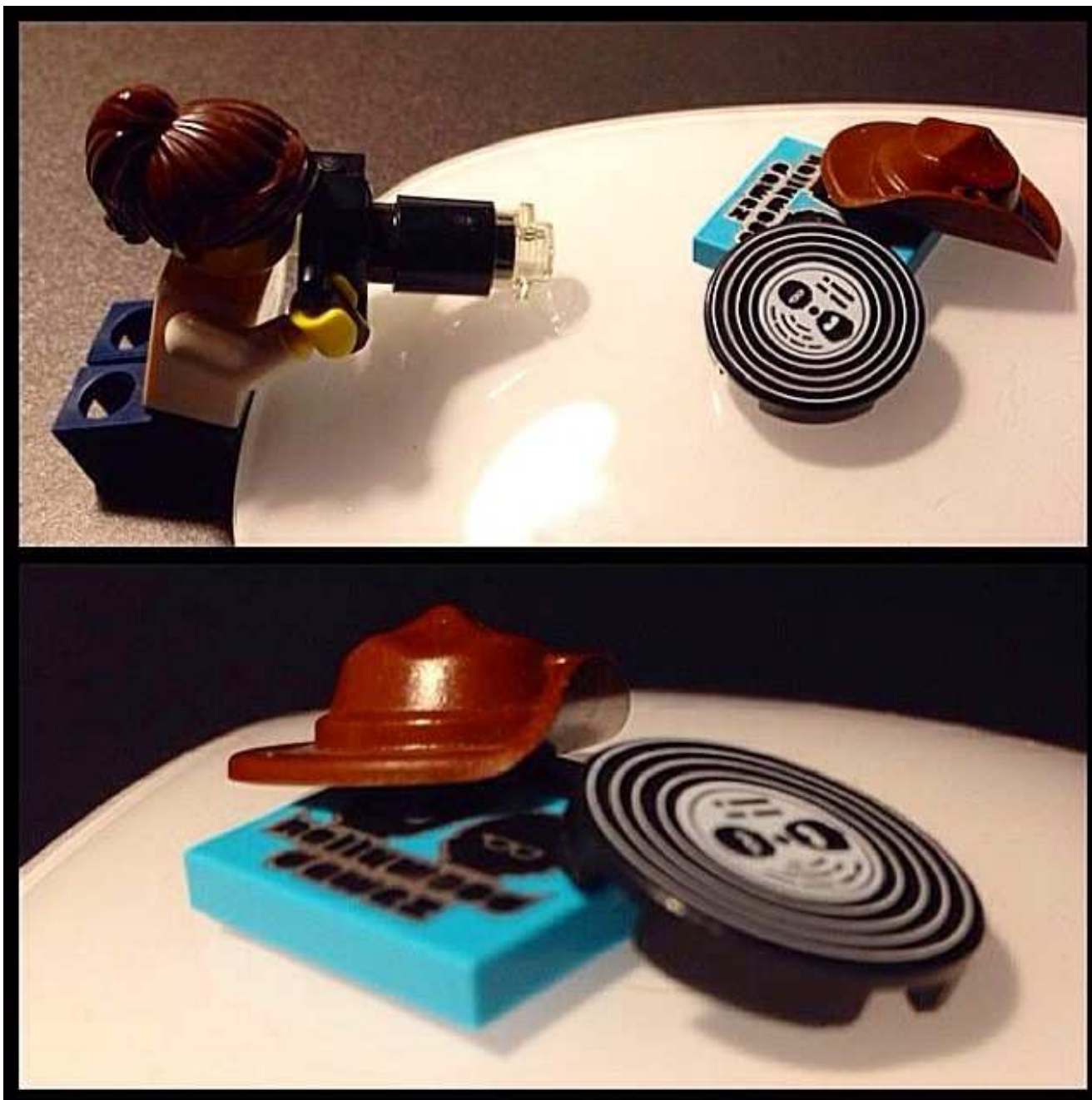
them, how popular they were. But we aren't a classic, they told him, no one wants to reread us. We will never get out of here. Not all of us. He used to be positive, to try to keep their spirits up, but they were right, and eventually he stopped trying.

He gave up hope years ago. There were too many of them. And every week, a new one appears.

All that mystery, all that intrigue, and this, this is the final resting place of the great quest of the Da Vinci Code.

Point of View!

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 www.facebook.com/LetteMoloneyPhotography and irishdysautonomia.wordpress.com/

Why we chose this piece:

Since her diagnosis, Lette has been using Lego pieced in her photography. She positions 'Lego Lette' in places where Lette herself can no longer go, and photographs them. As her friend, Gráinne has loved watching 'Lego Lette' and her adventures, and shamelessly begged Lette to submit something for this issue.

Tricks

Rozz Lewis

We talk about her a lot in the men's shed. She is what you might refer to as a "trick." It's a term that we use to describe a female who plays with your head, in the sense of acting like they want you one day and then hardly notice you the next. In a simpler way, she was a woman who will suck you up but spew you out later.

Up until today, there had been occasional glances, nods, winks from her to me as she walked past my house every evening, but today was the day when the trick stopped playing.

I was sleeping in. The doorbell in the gaff was broken and it left a droning sound that you couldn't sleep through. Pulling up the blind, I saw it was her. I yelled down that I was on the way. A pair of boxers and t-shirt later and I was ready for it.

She said that there was something in her house that was giving her problems.

"Actually, it's in the shed. I think it's those pigeons he keeps there and I don't like to go in there by myself. It's his shed."

Him. Her square of a husband. Doesn't know how to handle a woman like her. Stuck in the shed every night, calling out to his pigeons while she was left unattended, unserved.

"Her square of a husband. Doesn't know how to handle a woman like her. Stuck in the shed every night, calling out to his pigeons..."

And now, here she was on my doorstep, doing everything possible to get me to look at her body, which was phenomenal. When she adjusted her bra straps, that meant look at my breasts. When she pulled up her stockings, that meant check my legs out. And the final one, the touching of her ears. I had read it in one of my wife's magazines that this meant that the person was thinking of sex. The next few minutes were going to be important.

Rozz Lewis is a primary teacher living in Carlow. She runs a literary blog at rozz.ie and is a member of Carlow Writers. She has been published in the anthology What Champagne Was Like, and literary magazines like Word-legs and Literary Orphans. She has been shortlisted for New Planet Cabaret, Penguin Short Story and Fish Fiction Prizes.

Why we chose this piece:

A quick and mysterious read, this story is a veritable box of tricks unto itself! You think it's going one way and then... well... we won't spoil anything, so read on and see for yourself. Oh and when you're done, you might want to check out Rozz's blog for an interview with your favourite dynamic duo. No, not Batman and Robin... it's an interview with us alright?

"I'll look at your shed. When's the best time?" I replied. Casual but responsive enough. I could have high fived myself.

"Now. Are you free now? He's out and he won't know I've gone in there. You might hear the screams they're making."

"The screams? Go back a bit."

"I hear them screaming when he heads to work, which he doesn't believe. It's quite rhythmic at this stage," she added, rubbing the door frame up and down gently. "He doesn't believe me. And I didn't tell anyone that I'd be speaking to another man about it."

"That's understandable," I said, going along with it. "I'll be over in ten minutes." I hadn't showered this morning and this would require full clean and shave. Women like her deserve a smooth man.

"No. Now!" she shouted. "It has to be now. I don't want anyone to know or to see you coming into my house again. It looks suspicious and I don't want anyone knowing."

She had said this twice. That she didn't want anyone else to know. Brilliantly clichéd and fitting and predicting the rest of the morning for me. She was totally up for it.

I put aside the fact I was barefooted in boxers and t-shirt and went after her to her house, through to the kitchen and the sun-room, and then the view of the garden. No dead flowers or weeds on the patio. Everything kept just right. She was an amazing woman to keep a garden like this. He was a prick for not tending to her or it.

There was a row of yellow roses all the way to the shed, almost like a prelude to the upcoming performance.

"There it is. Can you hear?" she asked me, stopping at her back door.

I could hear the pigeons cooing but no screams.

"Yes. I hear it. Let me see what's going on in your shed."

"Take the key," she said and she pointed to the pastel painted shed. She stood at her back door, half her body inside the house, half outside.

"I'll follow you down," she added, bringing her body back fully inside the door. "I just need to get something. You go first."

It was a game. A bloody great game. She was going inside to change into something else, I could bet.

I picked up my pace to a slight jog to get to this shed. To open the door and to see what was inside and what she was planning. This was fantasy territory and I wanted to freeze the moment so I breathed deeply standing before the door, centring myself on the lawn beneath me.

Saplings swell with potential;
pregnant with embers.

Along the tree lined quay
scattered couples whisper
under eavesdropping stars,

nurturing conversations
out of humid vapour; the balmy
orange street lights
and blinking eruptions *in utero*.

Coacervates tremor in
the primordial river as

summer nights return.

Stuart Nealon has been writing since the age of sixteen and concentrates primarily on poetry and fiction, having written plenty of poems and short stories, as well as a novel. Citing Georg Trakl and Li Bai as his current major influences, Stuart writes as much as he can when time permits, concentrating mostly on his current job as an English teacher in China.

Why we chose this piece:

We loved the simple elegance of Stuart's poem and its beautiful, evocative imagery. It also taught us something new because we had to look up what "coacervates" were. Thanks Stuart!

Shroomaloumi

Jason Jackson

Jason Jackson is a writer of short fiction and poetry. He keeps an occasional writing-progress blog at www.tryingtofindthewords.blogspot.co.uk

Why we chose this piece:

Jason initially submitted this piece for our first issue, "Modern Mythologies". We really liked it but it didn't seem to fit with the rest of the magazine. When we were putting together the idea for Issue Two, we remembered Jason's story and asked him if he would allow us to publish it here. Obviously he agreed, otherwise that would be stealing. Thanks for being a good sport Jason!

I'm sitting at the table in the pub. I've already ordered my food. And I'm remembering, now, the last time I was here. The night she left me. I'm forty-three years old, six months single, and I'm here, alone, trying to be happy.

The man with the ginger beard who works here brings across the condiments, the cutlery; and I'm reading my book. Lori Moore. A story about a couple dining out in New York and falling apart, and it's only now, as I reach the end of the story, that I begin to imagine this moment, here, now, as a story itself.

(I do this a lot.)

As always, I reach for my notebook, but I don't have it. More and more these days, it's not there. But my pen - one of those little red ones you get in betting shops - is in my glasses case, so I grab a napkin and I start to scribble notes.

The title only comes to me later, on the bus, after I've eaten, after I've drained the pint of Red Stripe, after I've covered the napkin in scrawl, after I've weighed up whether or not to spend another Saturday evening writing, after I've fought with myself over the whole idea - whether it's too metafiction-y, (*a dead end*, according to at least three on-line writing acquaintances); whether it would be too contrived to do a whole free-indirect, third person, past tense, constructed narrative thing with it (I'm starting to baulk at the whole idea of '*third person*', '*construction*' and even '*narrative*'); whether it's too autobiographical (every word is true); whether it's even a story at all (or if there's even such a thing as 'story' anyway); and whether I'm even a writer at all. But I think it's when the title comes to me that I decide, whatever happens, I'm definitely going to write the thing.

Mushrooms, you see. Big, fat, black ones. And haloumi cheese. In a bun. With onions. Lettuce. Tomatoes.

Shroomaloumi.

(It comes with chips as a side.)

Shroomaloumi is also what I ordered that night I came here with my wife, when we were still together, but falling apart. And Shroomaloumi is what's coming now,

here, being carried over in its basket by the barman with the ginger beard.

“Wanna be in my story?” I say to him.

He puts the basket of food on the table, looks at me, at the pen in my hand, at the scrawl on the napkin in front of me, says “Cool,” and then he walks away.

As I scribble, I know instinctively that the story is not about that night, the last time I was here with my wife. That was a horrible night, and I don’t want to write about that. I know that the story is much more about today, what I’ve been feeling, and also the things I’ve been thinking about for months now.

So I make a note of the thing my boss said to me when she found out about my wife and I splitting up, about how it must be nice (I think she used the word ‘nice’) to be autonomous now, to not have to constantly think about where your other half is (she definitely used the words ‘autonomous’ and ‘other half’), and to not have anyone else necessarily knowing where you are.

I also make a note of the fact that the food - the Shroomaloumi - smells incredible (my note actually says ‘*fucking amazing*’).

I also make a note of the irony that I’m reading a Lori Moore story about a couple falling apart on holiday in New York while I’m trying to make notes for a story about another couple (me and my wife) who fell apart, and who also spent a week in

“...this is not irony, and it’s not even a coincidence. It’s just a tenuous link you’re trying to hang some kind of meaning on for the purposes of giving the narrative extra weight underneath the crossing out.”

New York on holiday, although this was long before we even began to fall apart. (When I read this note back, I cross out the word ‘irony’ and I write ‘*this is not irony, and it’s not even a coincidence. It’s just a tenuous link you’re trying to hang some kind of meaning on for the purposes of giving the narrative extra weight underneath the crossing out.*’)

I also make a note about the two women (attractive, both wearing glasses of the over-sized, black, cool-as-you-like

kind) who asked me just after I walked in (as I hovered next to the only empty table in the whole pub, reading the menu, looking uncertain and nervy and out-of-place as I usually do (I presume)), whether I was ‘*sitting here*’. The note goes on to describe how I scowled at these two attractive, polite women and their perfectly understandable question, how I sneered a ‘*Yes, of course I am,*’ at them, how I looked back down at the menu while they walked away, and how I immediately replayed the whole moment in my head, thinking about how I could - should - have smiled and said ‘*Yes, but please, sit down, there’s plenty of room*’ (the table has four chairs, I am clearly on my own, and it would have been a perfect opportunity to talk to some beautiful women). (After reading this note back to myself I scrawl underneath ‘*they wouldn’t have wanted to talk to you anyway, you prick!*’ and I think about this for a little while before scrawling ‘*and what about the whole ‘being happy on your own’ thing?*’)

I also make a note of how if I didn’t have kids (I have two beautiful boys and this is not a story about them) then I wouldn’t be here now, but far away somewhere, and the note goes on to describe where I might be ‘*Spain, again?*’ it says, ‘*Or back to*

Poland? Find Julita!' it says, referring to the recurring fantasy I have of meeting up with an ex-girlfriend who I last saw at a snowy bus-stop in Warsaw. But as I read the note back again I smile, thinking of my two boys, how much fun I had with them this morning when the youngest (no names) sulked about wanting to buy two DVDs not just one, and then later when the eldest refused to jump into the swimming pool for his new swimming teacher while his mother and I (we still see each other almost daily because of the kids) sat on the side of the pool, not knowing whether to hum sounds of quiet encouragement or mild admonishment. I also think about how happy I am to be here, in this city, for as long as my kids need me, because I need them, and that I will probably never live anywhere else again.

Finally, I make a note that begins, '*so what's the story about, then?*' (this is a note to myself that I seem to make all too often) and then the answer-note to the note says 'it's about coming to terms with being alone, about understanding that you don't need the affection of someone else to validate your own fucking existence!' and as I'm reading the answer-note back I laugh at the fact that I'm shouting and swearing at myself in writing on the back of a menu, and I also think about the whole idea of a story having to be 'about' something, and then I put the menu down and I start to eat the Shroomaloumi, which in truth has gone a little cold but is just as fucking amazing as it smells.

Later, I'm on the bus. It's only six o'clock but it's January, so it's dark, and it's raining, and I am, on the whole, very glad to be on my way home with some food inside of me. I'm looking out of the window as the bus slaloms through the city, not really thinking about anything at all anymore, until a beautiful, dark-haired woman gets on. I watch her pay her money, and I know as clearly as I've ever known anything that she's going to come and sit next to me, and she does, and I can smell her perfume - not floral, something coarse, sharp, strong - and I grab the menu from my back pocket and the pen from my glasses case - nudging her ever so slightly as I do so - and I start to scrawl a note to myself: '*meets woman on bus home!*' says the note. '*Gorgeous! Perfume not floral, something sharper...*' and I glance up to look at her - I want to take a note of the colour of her eyes - and I see that she's reading what I'm writing.

For a second I can't breathe, but then I look back at my note and I see that it's not even a scrawl, that the combination of the jerky movements of the bus and my habitually appalling handwriting has made the note entirely illegible to anyone other than me, so I keep writing. '*They talk,*' my note says. '*She's foreign. A student, perhaps. He asks her out for a drink...*' I scrawl more rubbish like this until, two stops after she got on, she gets up and gets off.

It is at this very moment, just as the bus is pulling away and I'm watching the woman disappear in the wet darkness that I write two final notes to myself:

The first note says, '*Remember what you've been thinking about all day, you prick! You don't need anyone else in this world to make you happy!*'

And the second note says '*call the story Shroomaloumi.*'

The Nesting Box

Emeline Morin

Some people picture others naked. I do too sometimes, but mostly, mostly I think about the inside. Because really, people are more like Matryoshka dolls or delicate Chinese boxes. Layers upon layers. Fragile boxes with precious contents. Under the clothes the skin. And under the skin a mishmash of strange machinery, a feat of synchronicity, nature's engineering at its best.

See, most people find skeletons creepy. They never think that they are surrounded by them and that there is a skeleton inside us all. Skeletons strolling down the street, skeletons buying their coffee and apples on a Sunday afternoon. Skeletons walking skeleton dogs, skeletons cycling... pretty cool if you want my opinion.

And so I look at people talking and I picture the bones clicking together, the muscles being pulled, the blood pulsating under their skins. All the veins and vessels constantly flooded by a great tide. I think about the organs nesting in their rib cages like exotic birds, and the eyes filtering light like keyholes, sometimes giving answers, sometimes furthering questions. That's why some of my friends think I have a strange relationship to lovers.

When I met him I did think of how beautiful he was from the outside. The scars drew a history, and his skin a map. I studied the ink on his arms, alterations, ornaments. But also, I thought of how the jugged bones made his skeleton singular, drawing a unique frame. He talked and laughed and I thought of how beautiful he must be from the inside, of how I wanted to open him

“When I met him I did think of how beautiful he was from the outside. The scars drew a history, and his skin a map.”

up, how I wanted to see more of what was behind those blue eyes. I wanted to know the kind of thoughts the brain encased in his skull could mould.

At night, his heart turns his hands into tools, and he carves

Emeline Morin loves Glasgow despite the weather. She has learnt to keep warm by knitting things and drinking whisky. The rest of the time she writes and reads and works on finishing her PhD thesis on dark fairy tale retellings. Say hello : @EmelineMMimie

Why we chose this piece: Sometimes a story generates a feeling that stays with you long after you finish reading and that's exactly what we got with Emeline's morbidly beautiful meditation on love and lust.

my body. Maybe he doesn't think about my veins or cells, but we understand each other. He knows how to melt my flesh under his fingers, cleaving skins, etching shapes in the candlelight. Opening him up would mean breaking him. To work he needs to remain shut, a mystery to me, and I can only get a glimpse of what happens inside. I wish I knew how he creates behind his lids, how he whittles words. Spreading them on sheets of paper and coloured notebooks. Hundreds of words, small and big ones, drawing pictures in my head. So instead of biting or cracking him open, I taste the saltiness of the sweat on his mended collarbone, the scent at the nape of his neck. I read what he wants to share when I run my hands through his ever-growing hair and count the vertebrae down his spine. I catch the syllables trickling off his tongue and translate them in my own.

“I wish I knew how he creates behind his lids, how he whittles words.”

People say that we're made of stardust. So even if he remains shut, I hold him tight, because invisible inside my favourite box is the universe.



Karen Lee Roberts is a freelance designer and illustrator based in Toronto. To see more of her work, visit www.i-m.co/karenleeroberts/karenleeroberts/

Why we chose this piece:

Karen is one of those people lucky enough to know one of our editors, Alex, in real life. Alex had long admired Karen's artwork because, well, look at it! She kept badgering Karen to create something for the magazine until eventually she relented and came up with this beauty. Alex must now remain at least 50 feet away from Karen at all times. Worth it.

Hel

Alice Nuttall

Alice Nuttall is a tea-swilling, lindy-hopping perpetual student. She has been writing since she could hold a pen, and currently divides her time between working on her novel, finishing her thesis, and prattling about on the Internet. She blogs at alicenuttallbooks.wordpress.com. Her YA fantasy novel "Spider Circus" is available from Amazon

Why we chose this piece:

Hel sounds like our kinda gal and we see a lot of ourselves reflected in this poem. We too consider ourselves "death and glory" and you best believe all will kneel before us once our plan for world domination finally comes to fruition!

I am my father's daughter, but the fire
that smouldered in his veins turned mine to ash
I felt no spark or glimmer of desire,
hate, love, or hope, until the clash
of swords and smash of skull on stone transformed
my state from monster-child to corpse. Below,
in Niflheim, I am no more deformed
than blossomed trees in spring, or shards of snow.
Here, I am Queen - my throne far more secure
than his who cast me down, my armies vast
and swelling by the day. They were so sure
they'd won, but gods, my laugh will be the last.
For I am death and glory, foe and friend
And all will kneel before me in the end.

Lilly, Part 1

Holly Gibson

"I am twenty-nine," I say to no one. No one is here. "And Lilly was twenty-three."

I enter her bedroom, wrapped in one of her bath towels. My wet feet stick to the floor of Lilly's bedroom and leave behind footprints that disappear after a moment. The cat skulks into the room behind me and sprawls in a sunbeam under the window.

I sit for a moment on the bed. Her mother will visit me today. My stomach has been twisted in knots since I awoke this morning. I'm looking at a running shoe, thrown into the corner by Lilly herself after a morning jog. I've never touched that shoe. A bead of water drips from my chin and lands on my scarred thigh. I wipe it away with the palm of my hand and watch the cat instead. His eyes are closed, his sides rising and falling evenly.

"Why am I here, Cat?" He doesn't answer me, but flicks his ear.

The sunlight from the windows in her bedroom shines under the door in the morning. Just after she died, I would lay my hand on the door knob, contemplating entering this most intimate room, but I would always jerk my hand away as though the brass burned. I would lay curled up on the floor in the hallway until the light beneath the door dimmed and then disappeared. The cat would walk past me, sniff my hair, meow for me to feed him. Lilly's mother told me, "It will get easier. I promise, it will get easier."

"But when?" I would ask her.

"Give it time," she always answered.

She visited me every day after Lilly died. She never entered Lilly's room, either. After a while, she stopped coming here.

After many months, I opened the door and discovered that, like a miracle, Lilly's scent remained in her bedroom; in her closet; on all her clothes. When I open her closet doors, I'm immersed in her scent. Every day, it is more subtle, but this doesn't stop me from visiting. I rise from Lilly's bed now and open her closet door and

Holly Gibson hails from Kentucky. She has an undergraduate degree in English. This is her first time being published.

Why we chose this piece:

We'd be lying if we didn't say that the idea of a talking feline didn't appeal to our inner cat ladies somewhat, but in reality, we chose this piece because it is both beautifully written and terribly moving.

look at her dresses. I remember how Lilly looked and moved around in each dress. The swish when I run my hands back and forth over all the dresses is Lilly walking.

“Good morning, Lilly,” I say to the rows of clothes.

“Good morning. How are you?” I can hear her answer.

“Fine, thank you. It’s six years today.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. I keep track.”

“Oh.”

I’m breathing harder. “I miss you,” I say to her.

“I miss you, too.”

“Liar.”

“Don’t say that.”

“You’re gone and you don’t care about me,” I mutter, biting my lip.

“I do care.”

I say nothing to her. I’m looking at the dresses again.

“Why don’t you wear one today?” she says to me.

“You don’t mind?”

“Go ahead.”

I drop my towel in front of the closet and paw through the rack. My fingertips stop on a plain cotton dress. I roll it on over my head. There is a long black hair clinging to the shoulder. I leave it, imagining it has fallen from my own head. I’ll wear this dress for the morning. I’ll be Lilly for a while.

Early in the day, Cat and I spend time watching the Home Shopping Network. I fill a mug with coffee for me, and one with milk for Cat, and we sit side by side on the leather sofa.

“We only have a limited number! These are very popular!” The woman is wide-eyed. She is urging us to buy now, before they’re gone. She smoothes her teased hair, crispy with hairspray. She’s showing us a collection of cookware in brilliant colours: a bold red, a sunny yellow, a green like grass in the spring. They’re non-stick and scratch resistant, even when the owner of such cookware uses a fork or metal spatula on the surface. Even when you hit it with a hammer, it doesn’t dent.

“Wow. Even when you hit it with a hammer,” I say to Cat. We have the set already, in royal blue.

“Now let’s go to the phones!” she says.

“Hello, Janice!” says the muffled voice of the woman on the phone. Her voice is thick. She’s sitting in her living room with her swollen feet propped up. She is rummaging through the old newspapers on the glass coffee table, searching for the remote control.

“Janice, I want you to know that I’ve been cooking for 30 years, and this is the best cookware I’ve encountered,” she says, the overstuffed couch groaning beneath her shifting weight. “My friends come over and see my Le Bon Chef cookware, and they always ask, ‘Kathy, where did you get this? Where can I get my own?’ I have to hide my Le Bon Chef when my friends come over to keep them from taking it home!”

Kathy and Janice roar with laughter. Janice’s laugh is like a smoker’s cough,

and Kathy's guttural and rolling. I laugh, too. Cat stares straight ahead.

Cat and I go into the kitchen. In Lilly's dress, I pretend that the cat can't tell the difference between Lilly and me. I put on the coffee. I get out Lilly's favourite mug, a big ceramic cup which she used to wrap her hands around, the heat from the coffee seeping into her, starting with her long fingers.

I move to the back door. The latch alerts Cat, who leaps from his perch on the refrigerator and follows me to the patio in the back yard, just big enough for a table and a few pots of leafy plants. The steam from my coffee rises like chimney smoke into the clear morning air. I hold the cup under my chin. The steam fogs over my glasses, blurring all that I see. Cat sits across from me at the patio table. When the fog clears, I notice that the fur on his chin is turning white.

"I miss her, Cat," I say, looking into his great eyes. "I'm afraid I'm forgetting her."

Cat looks thoughtful.

"Will you tell me about her?" I ask him.

Cat is quiet for a minute. He is scowling at my mangled jaw line.

"Will you tell me about her?" I ask him. Cat is quiet for a minute. He is scowling at my mangled jaw line. 'Lilly was,' he says, 'exceptional.'"

"Lilly was," he says, "exceptional."

"Oh? Tell me more about her."

"When she was thirteen, she went roller skating for the last time."

"Was she good at skating?"

"No. She was jealous of a red haired girl who could skate backwards."

"Did she have a boyfriend to skate with?"

"Lilly was skating with her two best friends. The girls were huddling on one side of the rink."

'Todd is talking to Luke right now,' Lilly was hissing in Stephanie's ear. 'Luke thinks you're cute. He's probably going to ask you to skate with him.'

'Do you think he's cute?' Kelly ran her tongue over her shiny braces. 'I do. He's definitely going to ask you to skate with him. Ashley told me that Todd told her that he thinks you're cute.'

Lilly was gazing across the room. Luke was stuffing his hands in his pockets and taking them back out to wipe on his jeans again and again, his eyes darting from the girls, back to Todd.

Then Luke was skating across the room to the girls. Stephanie's grip on Lilly's wrist tightened and Lilly didn't mind. Her cheeks warmed and the heat spread to her earlobes. He was in front of the girls. His hands were deep in his pockets now.

'Hey, Stephanie.' His head was bowed a little, and he looked up at the gangly girl.

She writhed. 'Hey.'

He was removing his hands from his pockets again. He looked to the girl on Stephanie's arm. 'Hi, Lilly.'

'Hi,' Lilly was smiling smoothly.

She was developing already, before Stephanie and Kelly. Her pink sweater hugged her small waist. His eyes were locked on her chest. She toyed with a strand of her smooth, dark hair.

'I just- I just wanted to know-' His sweat was glistening in the light from the disco ball.

He was clearing his throat. 'Will you skate with me, Lilly?' And he wiped his palms one last time on his jeans.

She took his arm and they were on the wooden floor together. She was laughing, one hand covering her soft mouth, and his arm was around her.

Stephanie flipped her hair over her shoulder and crossed her arms. Her eyes were filling up.

'I never thought he was cute, anyway,' Kelly said.

They were watching Luke and Lilly glide by. He tugged her arm and the two slid to a stop on the opposite end of the rink, and he pulled her closer to himself.

Down the hall, by the neon-lit concession stand, Todd was eating nachos with Mike. They were watching Luke and Lilly, his arms around her shoulders, their faces together, Lilly laughing and pulling him back to the circle.

'I was going to ask her,' Mike said.

Todd laughed. 'She wouldn't look at you, man. There's no way.'

'And she'd go with you?'

Todd grew silent. 'She's not my type.'

'Yeah. Chicken.'

Cat finishes telling.

"Was she really beautiful?" I ask Cat stupidly. Cat says nothing.

I duck my head and stare at my face reflected in the coffee. The dark mirror could be reflecting her face just as easily as mine. I dreamed last night that Lilly and I were reunited in the same body. I stood smooth and naked in front of Lilly's bedroom mirror, brushing her hair on my own head. I awoke in the dim living room, curled uncomfortably on the couch, with the silence of the room making my ears ring.

"I know Stephanie," I tell Cat. "I saw her a couple of years ago. Do you want to hear about her?"

Cat nudges my hand with his head.

"Not long after Lilly died, I got an invitation to Stephanie's wedding. I didn't have anything to wear, so I borrowed a nice dress from Lilly's closet."

I stop speaking and look him in the eye for a moment.

"Rrrrrrrrow!" he says encouragingly, and again butts my hand with his head.

"I sat alone. I got there early, and the church filled up around me."

"I heard, 'Mommy, what's wrong with her?' from a few rows in front of me.

'Hush, Katie, sit down next to mommy,' said the mother.

'Mommy, but what's wrong with her face?' Katie persevered. She was standing on the pew, pointing at me, tugging her mother's sleeve. Other people were looking, too, and whispering.

'Shhhh. It's rude to stare. Sit down.' The woman pulled Katie into a sitting position.

My ears prickled as we rose to our feet for the bride. Stephanie beamed entering on her father's arm. Her lacy pumps made her a few inches taller than him. At the altar, her groom tugged at his cuffs nervously and patted his belly.

I stared at the rows of stained glass windows on the left side of the church. Jesus was nailed serenely to a cross between two contented thieves and scoffing soldiers stood below. The thief on the right smiled softly, imagining he would soon walk down golden streets where no one would stare at his bloody loincloth.

“The thief on the right smiled softly, imagining he would soon walk down golden streets where no one would stare at his bloody loincloth.”

After the wedding, I stood in line to congratulate Stephanie. Her warm smile froze over as I approached her. She hugged me delicately, as though I might stain her dress.

‘I- I didn’t expect you to be here. I heard about the accident. I meant to call.’

‘It’s okay,’ I told her.

‘I’m so sorry.’ She was shaking her head.

‘Congratulations. I hope you and Daniel will be happy together,’ I said.

‘Oh, yes. Thank you. I hope you’ll stay for the reception.’

People were still whispering. Walking away, I could hear Stephanie murmuring about Lilly. She was telling some friends who were behind me in line, ‘She was so beautiful. I can’t believe it now. Horrible car accident. And her fiancé...dead.’ I stopped at the door and saw her smirking. I didn’t stay for the reception.”

Cat stares. The sky is clouding over and there’s a wind now fluttering the skirt of Lilly’s dress.

“Let’s go inside, Cat. It’s still early. We can watch television for a while,” I say.

I’m pouring my cold coffee down the drain. The dishes piled in the sink are partially filled with water. As I pour, it takes on the look of melting winter sludge. Cat rubs against my ankles and, agitated, I kick him away. “Leave me alone,” I say to him.

In the hallway the phone is ringing, and the robotic jangle is jarring my nerves. Finally, the answering machine picks up. I close the kitchen door to block out the sound of Lilly’s mother leaving a message.

The coffee maker has turned itself off and grown cold. I flick the appliance back on. I lean against the counter, listening to the pot hiss as it begins to reheat. With the sudden change in the weather, there is little sunlight coming through the windows. The kitchen is dim and cool now, and the high ceilings make the room feel cavernous.

Cat meows. “Shut up.” I say to him.

I don’t know what I’ll say to Lilly’s mother when she arrives. My stomach feels both tight and loose, and pounds as though there is venom pulsing through my intestines. Her mother used to love Lilly’s hair. They would sit in front of Lilly’s vanity mirror, the room lit by the afternoon sun. She would brush Lilly’s hair, parting and plaiting the heavy black waves. I run my fingers over my scalp. It is covered

with bumpy patches, like a globe of another world. I put my fingers inside the craters and lakes, and remove them to caress the hills and plains.

If my tongue had been burned instead of my scalp, Lilly's mother could brush my hair while I could sit smiling in silence. Our eyes would meet in the mirror as she would stroke my lovely mane. "You know, if you want to get soap scum off the walls in the shower, there's a trick to it," she would say to me. "Buy a little spray bottle and put some white vinegar in it, and some rubbing alcohol." She would instruct me, as she used to instruct Lilly. "And spray it all over the shower. It'll take the soap scum right off." I would merely smile, her pretty, silent pet.

The coffee maker hisses at me again. I poke it with my index finger. It's hot enough. I pour the remainder into the mug. I know the grounds from the end of the pot will settle at the bottom. When I take the last sip, the silt-like grit will find its way into my mouth.

My gaze wanders to the table, and runs up and down the legs of the chairs. When Lilly's mother used to visit here, they would sit here and have tea or coffee. Lilly would sit with her back to the window, her long legs crossed, leaning on her elbows on the table. Today, her mother and I will sit in the same place. I will sit across the table from Lilly's chair. If the sun shines brightly through the window, I will be temporarily blinded when I look to her seat. I can imagine she is there with us.

Night Scented Stock

Ronan Fitzgerald

A suited man sits in a building called the office and wishes he was still able to think about nothing at all. It is midnight and darkness has crept into empty spaces.

The moon shines on him from the window behind his desk. He touches the top of his head where almost nothing grows. He could measure his life in the time elapsed between haircuts, new boxes of washing powder, and fresh bottles of shampoo.

His wife's life is over, and it is her he considers as he taps a pen on his desk, flips it, and taps it again. He watches its shadow become sharp and then blurred again. He hears the crisp and clear footsteps of a stranger from the street below.

In the daytime, when the office is alive, the man makes up stories about people who are dead to sell products.

The stories, which need not be true, are about families whose name has become the name of a drink or a cigarette or a car or a shoe. They help people the man has never met to decide if they wish to buy the drink or the cigarette or the car or the shoe. He calls these people customers. He assembles data about what they buy and who they are. Beyond this, they don't exist.

Tonight it is a Tuesday and the man is waiting for Alison, a woman he has been sleeping with who will never be his wife.

The man is called Alan by others. He does not call himself Alan, and now he is alone he is hardly Alan at all. He sits three floors above London in the biggest office he has ever had. The space in which he makes money for himself and other men has grown larger and larger over the years. But now this graph levels off, approaching a flatline. Soon he will not be needed and he will retire. Money will not be a worry then.

He is 44 years old, a little more than half of an average man's life. His wife, whose name was Sara, lived less than half of an average woman's life. He sat with her at the hospital for the final six days, three hours and 44 minutes.

While she lay there unconscious, having failed to

Ronan Fitzgerald lives and works in London. He is an ex-BBC journalist, an actor, writer, and comedian. He was 31 when he wrote this bio.

Why we chose this piece:

Ronan's story was another piece that stayed with us long after we finished it. You might even say it 'haunted' us! (Sorry, bad joke!) A fabulous tale of guilt and loss, we're sure you'll enjoy it as much as we did.

respond to light, sound, or painful stimuli, he told her that he had been sleeping with someone else. He did not expect her to answer, and she didn't, but he was still glad he told her.

He heard his own voice above the air conditioning and medical machines. He spoke softly like a doctor, like this bad news of his was inevitable. "I suppose we all do it, just nobody expects to be caught," he told her.

It is now twenty past midnight and there is still no Alison. When she arrives Alan will stop thinking about Sara, who has become more difficult to ignore now she is buried in a box.

He sweats while he waits. He sweats a lot lately. He has talked to the doctor about it. Fever. Dreams about Sara.

"Grief can do funny things," the doctor said, despite his expertise in the scientific causes of human ailment. "Take it easy," he said, since being genial would not harm even if it had no medical value. "Don't work yourself too hard," he added for luck. Then he gave him a prescription for sleeping pills, which ended the conversation, but not the dreams.

"He would dream he was wandering through their wedding day, the room glowing and the faces of their friends young and brimming with possibility."

He would smell her perfume in his sleep. He remembered the brand she wore. 'Night Scented Stock'. £125 for a bottle one Christmas. He would dream he was wandering through their wedding day, the room glowing and the faces of their friends young and brimming with possibility. He would relive shared moments and wake wondering if they ever really happened that way.

Alison is late, if she is coming. Alan puts his head on his elbows and yawns.

The building is tamed by the silence of night. The day's concerns have travelled home in the hearts of the workers. Packed into cars and buses and trains, down 100-mile motorways and cul-de-sacs, until at last they rest behind locked doors and furrowed brows, under duvets in darkness. Alarms sound and they wake as we wake.

He stands and looks out the window at the pavement below. The concrete is three floors down. He guesses 60 metres, maybe 50. Three or four double-deckers down. Just a few seconds and then you'd hit, and life would change in one way or another.

It would feel longer than a few seconds, he thinks. He'd read an article about it. Time seems to slow down when we experience a fall from a great height.

He looks at the clock for the third time in three minutes. He tries Alison's phone but it rings out. He will keep waiting because he has waited this long. The minutes he has spent are a justification for more. As if she is a bus.

At last he hears a swish coming from the double doors at reception. He realises he has been holding his breath, clenching his hands over his pen and his phone. He exhales and tosses them onto the desk.

He walks out of his office and down a long corridor until he faces an empty reception, the doors perfectly still. "Alison?" he asks the room. There is no answer.

"Alison?" he asks again. "You're late," he says, with a nervous laugh, already

smelling the perfume before he's finished speaking.

Here in the night, all alone, he considers things which in daytime he would not think possible.

"Sara," he says, feeling stupid.

This is the first time he has spoken to her since she died, but as he says her name again he finds it gets easier and easier.

"Sara," he says, and he's louder, believing he may get an answer.

He shouts her name to the empty office nine or ten times, the thick scent of perfume making his eyes water a little.

Minutes pass and he stands with his ear arched, listening. For a long time there is only the building and the sounds of its internal organs, the street and passing strangers.

He is almost relaxed again when he hears another door slamming, like a gun being fired. It sounds like it is the door to Moore's office, past reception on the other side.

Moore is the surname of the boss. Like Alan, he is technically not bald, but has thick gaps between the hair he slicks back over his head. People who will never be boss mock him behind his back.

"I'm so dreadfully sorry for your loss, Alan," he'd said at the funeral, in a posh Scottish accent that didn't even sound Scottish and made Alan dislike him from the start.

Moore. He didn't walk around the office, he oozed from room to room. He disgusted everybody. But he was the boss. If he's here tonight, he has to say hello. And what if he heard him? Alone here, talking to nobody. Shouting his dead wife's name to an empty office. Daytime fears replace those of the night as Alan walks to Moore's office, straightening his tie as if to straighten himself.

He is about six steps from the door when he hears a woman's laugh, coming from inside. He has a second to tell himself he imagined it, until he hears it again.

So Moore is with a woman. Alan has never even met his wife, but better not to know either way. He's about to walk away when the door pops open and creaks. The office is dark, there is nobody inside.

From the gloom comes a soft slow moan. Alan freezes. Then he cranes his neck to see further in. He cannot walk away now.

Alan steps in and closes the door. How would he explain himself if Alison or anyone else came in? He stands for a minute, and the room is silent.

Then in the darkness, heat slowly begins to rise all around him. First he is warm, then he begins to sweat. In another minute he is drenched, gasping for breath. The sickly smell of perfume grows thicker and thicker.

He hears the laugh again. A woman's voice is whispering softly. He knows this voice. His mind races and thoughts start to drain down a plughole of panic. The whispers seem to come from all around him and hot breath touches his ear.

He has to get out. He staggers towards the door but swoons to the ground before he can grab the handle. The carpet stings his knees as he hears another long low moan.

His wife is in this room, but she is unlike he's ever heard her before. Unlike she's ever been in his life.

Now he hears Sara whispering "Arnold" softly. Arnold Moore. The boss and his

wife. The thought of it sickens him. Her voice seems to fill his mind, making his temples throb.

He staggers to his feet and tries to reconcile the Sara he hears with the one he so easily misunderstood.

He smells sweat and bodies as he pulls again at the door handle. He hears his wife screaming in ecstasy and presses his hands onto his ears, but the noise will not stop.

He rolls himself into a ball and shuts his eyes, the heat making him feel like he's swimming, his ears ringing from Sara's screams.

The smell of her perfume grows stronger, it's everywhere, tickling the back of his throat like a feather. He gags as he feels a hand brush his face and everything goes black.

When he opens his eyes, it is cool and Alison is sitting beside him on a couch near reception.

"Too much to drink tonight?" she asks, rubbing his arm. "What the hell were you doing in the pig's office?"

"I heard a noise. I thought it was you. I went in to see what it was and I must have fainted. It was roasting hot in there."

She doesn't believe him, he can tell, but she would never believe his story either. It is 4:07 a.m. She puts a hand on his knee and kisses him. He looks over her shoulder at the corridor that leads to Moore's office. He knows he must go back in there.

"Look, Alison, I feel a bit sick. Maybe we should catch up again later," he says.

"Sure, Alan," she says. "When you've slept it off. Whatever it is," giving him a look, then leaving with a briskness that says she couldn't care less.

He sits for a while after she goes, then when he has cooled down, he hoists himself off the sofa. His legs tremble and he sucks the air in.

He creeps back towards Moore's office. Everything is silent again, as he stands by the open door. He steps over the threshold as if the carpet gives electric shocks. Nothing happens. He waits. Still nothing.

He gets braver and turns the lights on. He looks at Moore's things. A photo of him with a football manager, both in tuxedos. A few bottles of Japanese whiskey on the window behind the desk.

He wonders if this is where it happened the first time? One of the office parties maybe. His wife and the boss.

He has the tools to imagine it. First there would have been smiles. An excuse to escape together. Then lowered voices and mutual confessions of unhappiness. A moment of hesitation when one or the other let a suggestive comment hang in the air. Then a kiss and an affair. He knows exactly how it works.

Years ago, before they were together, Sara would tell him about the men she

"He gets braver and turns the lights on. He looks at Moore's things. A photo of him with a football manager, both in tuxedos. A few bottles of Japanese whiskey on the window behind the desk."

wanted. He'd seethe and think about all the traits they had that he lacked. He'd wonder what other version of Sara wanted these other men. Now he knows her a little more.

It is 5 a.m. when he stands at last, and gets his beige overcoat from the wooden hanger. He smooths out the creases, and puts it on slowly.

His trudge to the lift is weary. He presses a button to descend to the ground. He waits for a taxi as rain beats the glass front of the foyer. He picks a scab on his thumb until it bleeds and wonders if everybody else always knew.

The empty office is left behind. It sleeps until 13 minutes before 9, when the first man arrives.

More men and some women follow, and life begins all over again.

The Jewellery Box

Róisín Kelly

Róisín Kelly was born in Northern Ireland but has mostly lived south of the border. After completing her MA in Writing at NUI Galway she moved to Cork City. Her poetry has featured in Wordlegs, Crannóg, the Bohemyth, Skylight 47 (2014) and the Raving Beauties Anthology (Bloodaxe 2015).

Why we chose this piece:

We loved the evocative language in Róisín's poem and thought it played wonderfully into the Box of Tricks theme. As each piece of jewellery elicits a new memory, they work together to build a picture of a beloved mother-figure.

Discarded bindis that you wore
when you sang in pubs at night.
You would have my father searching
on hands and knees when the glue gave out
and they fell off your forehead.

The key to your grandmother's cabinet.
She promised me the contents
because she said she is dying
although she has been dying
since you were eight years old.

A tiny Claddagh ring of mine
long outgrown.
The enamel brooch you fastened
to your wedding dress.
Your red prefect pin from St Dominic's.

One gold ring, one diamond.
A guitar-shaped pin that belonged to him.
The jewellery box is slim
and wooden, inlaid with gold.
I hold it to my face, and inhale
your sweet, familiar scent.

The Dog Story

Rex

So here I am, sitting in the pound with an enthusiastic idiot sharing MY cell. He was dropped in earlier by the airhead kennel maid—the one with the wide arse. I say ‘maid’ because I suspect she has not been overburdened with other offers. Enough about her, you came to hear my tale of woe. Bottom line - I have been screwed up by humans so now I bite them. That, it seems, is not acceptable. So here I am in dog-jail.

If I get a hearing before I get drop kicked through the goalposts of wherever unwanted dogs go, I would tell how, as a pup, I burst onto the scene as a SURPRISE from Santa into a loving family for the principle entertainment of little Maggie. I was great. Peed a bit here and there in the early days, but learned quick enough that it was better to go outside (it’s a bit confusing though when you get a bollocking for peeing inside, and a bollocking for going out and coming back with muddy paws. Humans. I should have read the signs early on).

So things were good and I got bigger, less floppy; played fetch and chased birds and cats (nasty critters cats, never give chase if they don’t immediately run away, and above all else - never, ever actually catch one! Cars are another story, but you should always chase them from behind). I digress. For a while at least things were pretty good.

Then Pat and June, the big people, started to shout at each other. A lot. Doors were slammed and a dog has to be careful of doors and bad tempered humans. Maggie was ok. I think she was on my side. Maybe I was on hers. At least, we tried to be on the same side - no side - if you know what I mean.

Pat left. Pity; he was good fun, used to throw sticks for me to chase. It was fine for a while; quiet. Then a new guy, Frank, started to come around. I got to chase sticks again for a bit. Maggie sulked. I think she didn’t like me chasing the sticks for the new guy. How is a mutt supposed to know all the human rules? This situation worked for a while, but it was never what you would call peaceful.

Some days, Pat would come back to take Maggie out

Rex is a ten year old labrador-retriever mix of dubious parentage. When not rehashing the unfortunate circumstances that lead to his unfair incarceration, he likes to spend his days licking himself and sniffing the backside of that lovely poodle down the road.

Why we chose this piece:

Silver Apples Magazine is an equal opportunities publisher, open to submissions from all walks of life... even from those that walk on four legs instead of two!

and they often brought me along for the ride. It was like the old days. Sometimes when she went I had to stay behind. Not as good, but okay for a dog.

Maggie grew up. She went away. Came back some weekends and for holidays (I never fully understood what holidays were all about, but we used to go out more then).

One day when Pat arrived there was a row. He had a new human and wanted Maggie to go to his place to stay. I was up for that, Frank was no good at throwing the stick (straight up in the air, no distance, not much fun). Hysterics and door slamming again, this time over who takes the dog. Now there were four big ones involved and Maggie and me, where would we live?

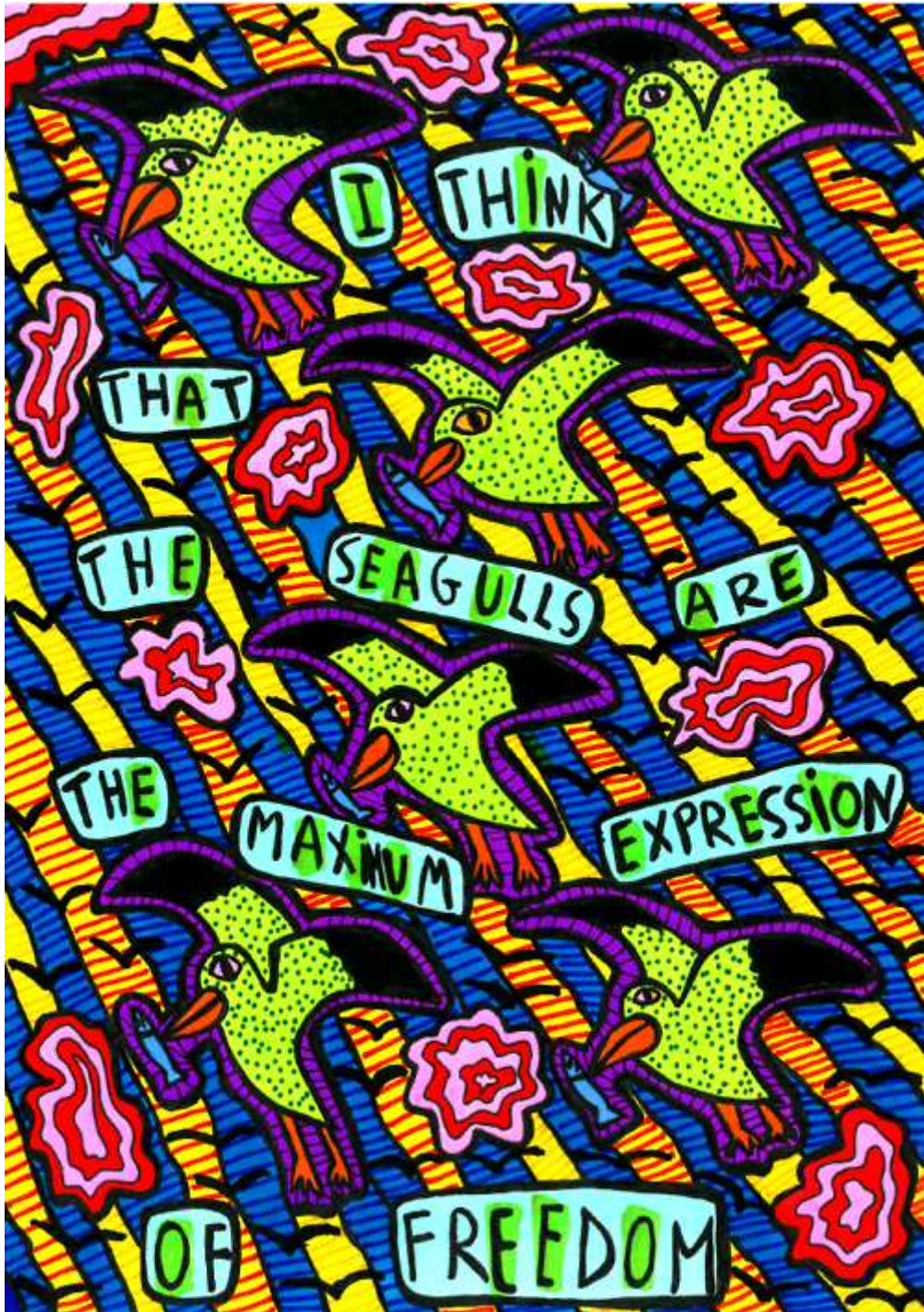
Another day, another big row. Maggie said there'll be no more talk with her original mother and moved in with Pat and his new lady Doris (she's no oil painting but she can open a tin, I can live with that). I moved with Maggie and for a while life was good again. But it wasn't long until Maggie and Doris were at it like cats; meow hiss meow hiss. The odd door slam thrown in for good measure. Dangerous for dogs. Maggie left for someplace else, Doris turned on the dog and since Pat's a patsy, I wound up in the pound. Frank and June turned up and sprang me. Life improved; no more kennel maid. Maggie came to visit. She says she is going back to live with Pat and Doris (that's Doris with a hisss).

So what about the once sane and lovely pup? Well it just so happens that June, (you remember June?) claims she has a sister who has a "farm" that the mutt is to be sent to. Now, dogs might be fun, but we're not dumb. Being sent to the farm is not good unless you were born on one. Dog DNA screams 'DON'T GO THERE'. The only sensible choice it seemed, while this discussion and its associated door-slamming were at their height, was for this mutt to do a runner.

Divorce, separations, mood swings, and dopes I can deal with but 'the farm', no chance. I took my chances in the wild. Life was good for a short time. Followed my nose, marked new territory, chased new critters, and romped. Met new friends and had my ass sniffed by some lovelies. Great for a day or two but there was nobody around to open a tin.

Once I followed some small humans home. One of the street dogs told me it was the way to go. You turn up, act friendly and look sad. Hang about a bit, it works, but you get some odd things to eat. After that I spent a while wandering towards Pat's place, I was never sure where he stood on the farm issue. I knew Doris had problems, but I had vague hopes that Pat had finally grown some balls. Sleeping out doors is fine on a good night, but it gets old real quick when the rain sets in. Learned lots on my road trip - not to howl at the moon in a built-up neighbourhood, any number of double back dodges, and ten ways to knock over a dustbin.

Pat and Doris were surprised to see me. I did the friendly sad number on them and they bought the whole package. Then they had to go and call Maggie, Frank and June to tell the 'dog came back to the one he loved best' story. That's when the shit hit the fan. I now became part of what the humans call a custody battle. I'm a dog for God's sake! They couldn't resolve it and I wound up back here in the pound. I admit it I did take a bite out of Doris en route which, it seems, is why I am here in the pound on death row with a wide kennel maid and a dumb Dalmatian...have a nice day my ass. Wuff.



Ana Pallares is a 20 year old artist from Barcelona. She started her studies of Fine Arts and History of Art but she quit and now she's autodidact. She has had three group exhibitions in Untitled Bcn (Barcelona), The Brick Lane Gallery (London) and Feeding Art (Madrid). She has some upcoming exhibitions; her first solo show this November in Cincómonos (Barcelona) and other exhibitions in London.

Why we chose this piece:

We loved Ana's use of colour in this piece and we have to say, we kind of agree with the sentiment...seagulls really just do whatever the heck they want!

Confucian Gentility: 4 Floral Haiku

Changming Yuan

Changming Yuan, an 8-time Pushcart nominee, grew up in a remote village, began to learn English at 19, and published several monographs before leaving China. With a PhD in English, Yuan currently tutors and co-edits "Poetry Pacific" with Allen Qing Yuan in Vancouver. Since mid-2005, Yuan's poetry has appeared in nearly 900 literary publications across 30 countries, which include "Best Canadian Poetry", "BestNewPoemsOnline", "London Magazine" and "Threepenny Review".

*Why we chose this piece:
It was high time we
Chose a Haiku to publish
Refrigerator.*

*Thankfully, Changming Yuan
is quite a bit more talented
than we are at this sort of
thing!*

1/ Orchid

Deep in the valley
Alone on an obscure spot
You bloom none the less

2/ Lotus

From foul decayed silt
You shoot clean against the sun
Never pollutable

3/ Chrysanthemum

Hanging on and on
Even when wishes wither
You keep flowering

4/ Plum

Your brave bold blood dropped
As though to melt all world's snow
Before spring gathers

The Biography of Euan Redmond

Michelle Coyne

Euan stood in front of his grandfather's dust-thick desk in the family library. He pushed his hands deeper into his trouser pockets and resisted blowing his fringe out of his eyes as he waited for the inevitable reaction to his announcement. Euan's father, Henry, was somewhere behind him, his sunbed skin blending in with the leather book spines stacked from floor to high ceiling. He'd allow Euan's grandfather to have the first say. He would think it only proper.

Alexander Redmond eventually looked up at his grandson with a tight spectacled sneer. "Is she of old stock?" he said, and though Euan knew precisely what the old codger meant, he gave a contrarian answer.

"She's not stock at all. She's a person, if you'd believe it. Fancy that." Euan rocked on his heels.

Henry Redmond emerged from book stack, and circled Euan to stand next to Alexander, making his loyalties crystal, before confirming it by saying, "You intend to marry below your station, Euan, is what you're telling us."

"Yes," Euan said, "to put it simply."

"You're aware we forbid it?"

"I am."

"And the purpose of your visit?"

Euan picked up an old tome from the desk and flipped violently through the pages, sending dust and ancient paper particles flying. "I thought I would give my dear family the opportunity to surprise me."

Henry reached across and snatched the book from Euan's hands. "You should know better than that."

"I should."

Alexander raised a liver-spotted hand. "And when did you meet this...Penelope?"

"Penny. I met her six months ago." A necessary lie: It had only been two, but Euan thought it better to exaggerate, considering his audience.

"I thought as much," his father said. "You've been this way since you were a child. You've never taken time over any important decision, and as such you've lived a life of regret."

"Regret? I don't regret a single moment of my life." Euan stood straighter, his fingers itching to rub his left hip and the wretched dolphin that was tattooed into it. The one he'd pointed at in a flipbook of designs in an Ayia Napa tattoo parlour when he was twenty-one. The one that had made him pass out when he attempted to remove it. He'd never been able to look a dolphin in the eye since. He imagined they were mocking him from

Michelle Coyne has been writing intermittently since she learned to pick up a pencil, but only began in earnest in January 2012. She lives in Galway with her family of boys, where she works with computer software for pay during the week. When she is not being distracted by short story writing, Michelle works on her debut novel. She has been published in "Ropes", "Crannóg" and "wordlegs."

Why we chose this piece:

This piece raises so many questions, not least of which is why the heck Euan managed to let his friends convince him to get a dolphin tattoo on his hip?! A clever story with a sting in the tail.

their pools and enclosures. Blackguards.

His father finished checking over the book Euan had damaged and placed it carefully down. "If you haven't regretted a single moment of this life you've been leading, then I fear you're nothing short of an imbecile. You deserve to be disinherited."

Euan laughed. "It's lucky for me then that neither of you have that power."

"Perhaps, not," his grandfather said, polishing his spectacles on a filthy yellow handkerchief, "but there are other steps we can take."

Henry slapped the desk. "No, there are not!"

Euan looked at his father, who for the first time in living memory had uttered a word of defiance against the family patriarch. He almost admired his old man in that moment, shaking with rage, the wiry hairs poking out of his mahogany nostrils shuddering with the mad huffs of his breath. "Steps?"

"Get out, Euan," his father said, without moving his glare from Alexander, who was nonchalantly perching his spectacles back onto his nose.

Euan, feeling a little peckish, decided to leave the pair to it, and go charm cook into making him a roast beef sandwich.

A half hour later, the sandwich was consumed, and Euan was playing a second hand of Twenty-One with the kitchen boy. Losing, as usual, but it was always better sport to lose when challenging the help.

"Euan." Henry's voice startled him at the doorway. It wasn't like him to venture behind the scenes. In fact it was always a sure-fire way to escape his father, to come muck about downstairs with the staff.

"Father—?"

"Your grandfather and I have come to a decision."

"Yes?"

"You have our blessing to marry Penelope."

"Penny."

"Quite. You have our blessing to marry her, provided you wait a year. Prove to us that you are not entirely feckless, and take time over this one decision, and we will gladly welcome her into the family."

"That's all? And what if I don't?"

His father put his hand on Euan's shoulder and squeezed it fondly. "You will."

Euan looked down at his shoulder just to be sure that his father had indeed initiated physical contact. "All right," he said, "I'll wait."

Twenty-three days later

Penny squeezed his arm with giddy delight as the cool waves washed over their feet. Euan loved how naturally she fitted next to him, like a toddler's two-piece jigsaw puzzle. She had small sprigs of jasmine tangled in her hair, and he was wearing the best pair of shorts he had hurriedly packed two days earlier.

Penny was waiting for an answer. As was the diminutive dark skinned pastor standing two steps further up the beach with his black trousers rolled up to the knees. Euan wasn't going to keep them waiting. "I do."

"And do you, Penny Lang, take Euan Redmond to be your lawfully wedded husband?"

"Yes," she said, and gave Euan one of those dreamy looks of hers. The type that promised they'd float through life on a tropical breeze; she really was remarkable. "I do."

After the register had been signed, the bride well and truly kissed, and the pastor paid, Euan scooped his new missus up into his arms to carry her back to their rented beach house. Eloping had not been the plan. The plan was a romantic getaway to the Bahamas; Penny had never been. Euan thought that criminal and set about

righting the situation immediately.

He had every intention of keeping his promise to his father, but there was just something about the air, or the profound blueness of Penny's eyes that did him in. And it wasn't as though his family didn't consent to the marriage, in theory. He had just brought it forward a month or eleven.

Anyway, he didn't have any intention of telling them until the year had passed. Until then it would be his and Penny's little secret. Secretly married. It sounded perfectly thrilling.

"...it wasn't as though his family didn't consent to the marriage, in theory. He had just brought it forward a month or eleven."

Euan kicked the door to the beach hut open and carried Penny across the threshold. She kissed his throat, and then squealed as he tossed her onto the bed. He let her recover for a second, and then launched himself after her and gathered her in his arms to kiss her. "Hello, wife."

"Husband."

He grinned at the weight of the word as he worked open the buttons of her sundress. He pressed a kiss to her stomach, and was overcome

with an idling thought.

"I think we should put a baby in here as soon as humanly possible."

Penny took him by both ears and eased him back up to look her in the eye. "Whoa, whoa, whoa, sailor. What's the rush?"

"I thought you liked the rush," he said, rolling her over on top of him and squeezing her bum.

She raked her fingers through his hair. "I think maybe we need to slow things down. Just a little."

"What? Now that we're married?" His voice betrayed a hint of disappointment.

"*Secretly* married. Don't you think it might blow the lid of our little charade if I were to get enormously pregnant?"

"Suppose."

Penny poked at his lower lip, which had taken a fit of jutting. "We have all the time in the world, my love." She pushed herself up and sat astride him. "Just think of all we can do for the next year without a baby getting in the way of things."

She had that look in her eye—the one that first attracted him to her in the clubhouse after a hot afternoon stomping divots on the polo field. "Take off your bra," he commanded.

She cocked her head. "What's the magic word?"

"Take off your bra, wife."

She chuckled and shook her head, but snaked her hands behind her back all the same. She stopped at the sound of a knock on the door.

"Come in," Euan said, and Penny hopped off him, cursing, as she ran for the en-suite. "Damn. Sorry," he just managed to say, before the Maître d' entered and stared at him lying flat on his back on the bed. He sat up quickly and cleared his throat. "Hello."

"Mr Redmond, this package was delivered for you this morning."

"Oh. Sorry. Yes. Thank you. You can leave it on the table."

The Maître d' placed it down neatly on the table, and Penny came out of the bathroom wrapped in a white towelling robe. "What is it?"

"Dunno," Euan said. "A package."

"But who knows we're here?" She turned to the Maître d' who was patiently waiting to be dismissed with his white gloved hands folded in front of him. "Who is it from?"

"I don't know, madam, but there is a card, which I'm sure will explain where I cannot."

Penny stalked over to the package, and Euan patted his shorts pockets for a tip. "No need, sir." The Maître d' said, and slipped sideways back out through the door.

Euan got up and went to tug the tie of Penny's robe loose and kiss her shoulder. When she didn't react as he'd hoped, he looked to see what the matter was. She was frowning at the card from the package. "What is it?"

"Look," she said, and shoved it at him.

*Congratulations on your nuptials, Euan and Penelope. Considering your impulsive nature, we think you'll appreciate this wedding gift.
Alexander and Henry Redmond.*

"Oh."

"Who are Alexander and Henry?" Penny said.

"Grandfather and Father." Euan read the card for a second time.

"How did they know we were getting married? We didn't know ourselves until three hours ago, and the Maître d' said that this was delivered this morning."

"Maybe they sensed it. They're slippery like that."

"Should we open it?"

The box was robin's egg blue and tied in a cream ribbon. Euan picked it up and shook it hard. Something inside banged about heavily. The ribbon draped itself over his fingers, inviting him to untie it. But that was exactly what the scoundrels wanted. They could sod off. "Nah. Leave it to the chamber maid, whatever it is."

"Are you sure? It could be important."

"Pffft. *Important.*" He slid her robe sideways, and set about kissing her shoulder.

"A compelling argument." She turned in his arms and began nipping on his earlobe in a way that really should have been more of a distraction. The box, it seemed, had first dibs. "Just a mo," he said, stepping past her.

Penny put a hand on her hip. "You are going to open it, then?"

"Never." Euan scooted the box off the table and into the bin before wiping his hands together. He looked down. The light cream ribbon was no less inviting than it had been on the table, so he picked the bin up and put it outside the door.

Penny was shaking her head at him as he returned to her. "Where were we?" she said, laying her hands lightly on his shoulders.

He tapped on his earlobe. "Here."

What better way to begin married life than with breakfast in bed? "Order room service," Penny had sleepily said, but that wasn't the same thing, was it? Not the same as putting together a spectacular breakfast for your beloved with your own two hands, and carrying it back from the buffet to present to her on bended knee.

Tray in hands, he turned to finagle the beach hut door open with an elbow, before spinning into their room with a flourish.

Penny was not still dreaming, as Euan had expected. She was sitting cross-legged on the bed with the pale blue box open in front of her and the ribbon draped out across the sheets. She was weeping.

It struck him then that he'd never seen her cry in the three months he'd known her, and he wasn't sure if it was that realisation, or the sight of her tear skewed face that was making his chest hurt. "What's wrong? What's happened?" He nudged the breakfast tray onto the side table.

Penny didn't speak; she held something out to him: an old book of some sort. He took it, and Penny buried her face in her palms. Euan turned it over in his hands. It was beautifully bound, navy blue with gilt-edged pages. He flicked through to the title page.

EUAN REDMOND

Ha.

He flicked forward two more pages. There was a lithograph drawing of his family home, and in colourful illuminated lettering, he read.

Once upon a time, a baby was born. His father named him Euan. He was a very special baby, just like his father before him, and his father before that. Euan's family planned tell him what precisely it was that made him different to the other children when he grew up. If he grew up.

“He was a very special baby, just like his father before him, and his father before that. Euan's family planned tell him what precisely it was that made him different to the other children when he grew up. If he grew up.”

Euan laughed. Five sentences in, and already a dig. He thumbed forward in the book, and found the style and font size completely changed.

Dorsey and Phillip snickered outside the shop door as Euan sent the blue-haired shop lady to fetch the toffee down. Her hand skimmed the top shelf as she teetered on the wheeled ladder. “A little further left,” he said, trying to sound helpful.

He eyed the sherbets his friends had requested. He could afford to pay for them, but that wasn't the point of this game. At the doorway he heard Phillip clear his throat: the agreed upon signal to hurry to flip up. Euan felt a sudden annoyance with his friends. He felt like their patsy. He would be the one to get it in the neck should he be caught, not them, so why should they profit from his risk?

The shop lady Aha'd as her fingers found the toffee and its little metal hammer. Euan's hand shot out, and on instinct landed on a liquorice pipe. He stuffed it into his pocket just as the old lady turned. He'd tell Dorsey and Phillip that he couldn't reach the sherbets, but first he'd buy eight ounces of toffee as penance.

Euan frowned at the page. “They've got a story in here about the time I stole a liquorice pipe from the sweet shop. I told no one about that.”

“Just read the last chapter, Euan” Penny said, turning to bury herself in the bed sheets. He turned to the last chapter and began to skim through.

It was love at first sight there on the polo field, as far as he understood the term at least. Penny Lang, almost a Beatles song, but even better. Long legs, huge hat, cheeky grin. Yes, this was it. If ever there was a woman made for him, it was Penny...

...Henry had always been a cold father; Euan had grown accustomed to it. It was unnerving to hear his voice soft and fond, and to feel that hand laid kindly on his shoulder. He'd never before made a promise that he intended to keep regardless of circumstance, until right now, looking into his father's red-rimmed eyes. Henry Redmond didn't cry, and if he were to come close, it surely must be over something of grave importance...

...Euan justified it to himself like this: Penny was the love of his life,

and what his father didn't know couldn't hurt him. Soon he would discover how very wrong he had been about one of those two assertions.

Euan looked up at Penny's quietly weeping form in the bed. He steeled his jaw. He didn't know what he would do if he discovered she'd been deceiving him. Drive into the ocean, probably. He traced his finger down over the words, searching for evidence of Penny's betrayal, and then stopped.

The box sat primly on the end table, begging to be opened, to have its ribbon slowly coerced into falling undone and its well-fitting lid removed with the satisfying groan. It had to go... Euan slid it into the wastepaper basket, and then put the whole lot outside the door for good measure, before offering his earlobe up to Penny once more.

Euan could see his pulse, hear it drown out everything else, feel it tick-tick in his scalding cheeks. He didn't understand it—this book—but somewhere deep inside his veins there was some form of understanding. His body knew what it meant, even if his mind couldn't string that meaning into sense.

He wanted to stop. Close the book. Burn it, and be done with it. This was the last chapter, that's what Penny had said, and only a slim stack of pages remained. Goodness knew how many of those were blank.

Dread crept, but still he held the book open, staring at the words ending mid sentence at the bottom of the page. He turned it and felt a tittering relief that there were two more full pages of words there. His eyes fell to a passage.

Penny lay silently weeping in the bed. She knew—even if Euan didn't yet. The truth was, that he had been right about her. She was his perfect match, and a long and happy life would have lain ahead of them, if only Euan hadn't broken his promise.

He felt his tongue die in his mouth.

As Euan skimmed through the story of his life, the realisation percolated slowly along with his growing dread. Each paragraph, each sentence, each word, was truth undeniable. His truth. And as he approached the end of the second to last page, he knew the outcome even before turning over that final sheet. This was how...

"...his story ended."

La Caja

Adam Chappell

On the twenty-fifth of October each year the town of Santiago El Menor would find that La Caja had come. The townsfolk had called it this because the solid stone cube, with its sheer sides of rough, unmarked granite, had offered them no hint of a better name. It would simply appear unobserved in the dead of the night and sit silent and immovable in the town square for seven days. Then, when that week had passed, a small group of people would gather before it. Nobody knew how these people were chosen, or why they would flock so willingly to La Caja, but come the morning both they and La Caja would be gone and no trace of either was ever left behind. So it had gone since time beyond memory and so it would follow long after.

Santiago El Menor nestled high on a crag in the mountains, with coarse rock and thin soil as its foundation. The lives of its people were shaped by this hardness, cut off as they were in their nook by the stars. They felt themselves far stronger for it as they eked out their days on that mountain. The world far below them had nothing that they wanted, offering only its corruption and vice, and so they toiled on, happy in their righteous isolation.

It was late on Saturday morning when Carlos Molinero first heard La Caja calling to him, though he did not understand it at first. The sun wavered high in a swaddling cloud as he tended the maize patch on the ridge above his house. He stood and looked out over the sister crops that grew on the terraced slopes below, shading his eyes with the flat of his hand. Then a tune, low and sweet, began to drift through his mind and he hummed along idly as he walked through the tall fronds of corn, making his way slowly back toward home. Somehow, he felt as if he knew each note before it came, though he was sure that the tune was a new one. Then it was gone, lost on the breeze, and likewise it fell from his memory.

That night, as he dined with his wife and two daughters, the music returned. He sat, lost and chewing, as the melody danced through his head. His wife cleared

Adam Chappell is a thirty year old software engineer, living and working in Limerick. He is married with two young daughters. In the narrow slip of time that he is left with, once the family is done with him, he writes fiction and has been doing so for almost a year.

Why we chose this piece:

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No! It's a...giant cube? Why has it appeared, and more importantly, what does it want? Read on and let Adam's lyrical tale of the mysterious La Caja unfold.

her throat and with that the tune fled from him and he blinked as if stirring from slumber.

“La Caja is back” she announced, addressing no one in particular, as she gathered a forkful of food. “It was in the square this morning.”

Carlos nodded at this and found he had already known it. Though this worried him, he decided against saying so to his family. He was quiet for the rest of their meal and that night he slept poorly as the music kept coming to him in the darkness, wafting on the air and bringing his thoughts, always, to La Caja in the square. He saw it when his eyes closed, looming against the night sky, and he tried to ignore how it plucked at him.

On Sunday he was miserable, jaded and listless. He moped amongst his family all day. The music had become an almost constant intrusion into in his mind now. He

“The music had become an almost constant intrusion into in his mind now. He found it would scatter his thoughts and leave him standing, lost and confused...”

found it would scatter his thoughts and leave him standing, lost and confused, or it would drag him out of a conversation even when he was the one doing the talking. After dinner that evening, his wife came and asked him, almost begged him, to tell her what was wrong. He said he was tired and slunk off to bed. All that night he dreamed of La Caja. He saw himself kneeling in the middle of the town square while the people who had shared this place with him for all of his life,

counting even those long since departed among their number, stood in a wide circle watching him. The great cube of stone stood tall and silent before him as the air filled with the music. His hands stroked La Caja. He caressed all its faces and ran his fingers along its rough rounded edges, and in that dream he knew the huge stone and he loved it, deep in his soul.

On Monday he went to work, walking with the other men up the mountain to tend to their crops and their animals. The music was growing now and he was often confused as his thoughts became less in the face of it. He tried to push the music away and force concentration but his efforts were in vain. As the sun reached its highest point, the other men sent him away with concern and an order to rest. He walked down the slope but soon he was muddled again. He strayed from his path and got lost. The streets and the houses that he had known since his childhood made no sense anymore and he wandered, afraid and alone, until he found himself in the square with La Caja. He sat on a low wall of granite and stared at it until the sun had sunk low in the sky. The lantern man found him there and brought Carlos home to his wife and his children, who had been frantic with worry for hours. His wife embraced him and helped him to bed where, again, his dreams strayed to La Caja. She sat down beside him, on a chair by their bed, and wept quietly until morning.

On Tuesday the music had grown to crescendo and his thoughts were as smoke on the wind, always drifting away from him as he desperately clutched at their form. All that was left to him was injustice and anger and he raged at the cruelty of fate. He was a good man. He was loving and truthful. Why then should he suffer like this? What reason did La Caja have for choosing him when the wicked carried on unmolest-

ed? As the hours drew by and the music got louder, so fury began to seep through his bones until, that night, he could stand it no longer. He slipped from his house and fetched the axe that he kept in his garden before striking out into the night. The streets were deserted as he crept toward La Caja, darting from shadow to shadow as the low light of the lanterns glinted on the head of his weapon. He wound his way to the square, taking care to stay hidden, though nobody else was around, until he halted, alone with his tormentor. There stood La Caja, immense and impassive as it towered above him. He lifted his axe and swung. He bellowed aloud as the steel met the granite and he battered and shouted until his axe lay in pieces at his feet. He slumped to his knees as La Caja looked down on him and cried softly in its benevolent shadow. The moon was sitting high in the night sky when he finally rose and trudged home in silent defeat.

On Wednesday he spoke to his family. He told them of the music and the call of La Caja and they were quiet together for a long time afterward. Then his daughters spoke to him, in the softest of whispers. They asked him to find some way to stay with them. Perhaps if he asked, La Caja would spare him and take someone else in his place or, with enough money, they could pay someone else to take his turn when it finally came? They could hide him, maybe, or lock him up and stop him from going to La Caja at all? They could flee down the mountain and keep running forever, or perhaps if he promised dedicate his life to some cause it would let him be? Try as they might, they could not plot an answer and by the time the sun rose they knew there was nothing any of them could do. Carlos was going to La Caja.

On Thursday he went and he sat with La Caja, staring at its tall grey façade. The music swirled in him as he attempted to speak with it but, somehow, it felt useless to try. Despair bubbled up as he thought of his loved ones and all he was leaving behind him. He thought of his life and how poorly he had used it, of the losses and the failures he had wrought. Then he thought of his virtues and his moments of pride. It was that which broke him in the end. He fell to his knees as the tears began streaming and he ached and shook as he sobbed. He cried and wailed, not caring who saw him, until there was nothing left in him at all. He fell forward, his forehead pressed against the ground, as his crying gently faded away. In the cool of the evening he rose and returned to his home and his wife and his children. That night he slept more soundly than he had done for many years and no dreams interrupted his slumber.

“That night he slept more soundly than he had done for many years and no dreams interrupted his slumber.”

On Friday the music was gone. Carlos awoke with a clarity he had not known for a long time. He felt lighter and fresher. After breakfast with his family he spent the first hours of the day with his youngest daughter, reading stories and joining her games, and he wondered at her brightness and her beauty. In the afternoon he walked with his eldest daughter and he told her of his life as a young man and of her birth and how it had changed him and he listened to her as she spoke as well. He held her close to him and felt proud of her caring and kindness. That evening he spent with his wife, relaxing in the love that they had shared for so many years. They

lay together, embracing and kissing and speaking of old times until nightfall, and in that sweetness he remembered why he had always loved her and why he always would. Then, in the darkness, he knew the moment had come. He rose and he made himself ready. He kissed both his children and told them he loved them before embracing his wife once more. He left, stepping out into the empty street, ready to face La Caja and his fate.

The street was dark, with low lamps lit along one side that flickered in the breeze as he walked. The air was cool on his skin and he felt refreshed by it. As he moved through the streets, the music began to swell in him once more and almost unconsciously he began to sing. His voice echoed against the buildings as it rose and fell with the tune. He strode lightly across the paving stones and soon he saw others, singing too, as they made their journey with him. They looked at him and he looked back at them. Their melodies met and melded to give new life and body to the music. Before long the chorus could be heard far into the night as the summoned arrived at the square and they stood before La Caja in the darkness.

The great stone loomed, cloaked in shadow against the night, as it waited for the called to arrive. Twenty then stood in a circle around it and they sang all together until, on its surface, a pinprick of light appeared and became a widening oval. They continued to sing as the first of them moved forward, stepping into the light of the stone. Another of them went and another thereafter and still the singing continued. Soon Carlos knew that his turn had come and he advanced without any hesitation. The light was all around him and it filled him with glory and he knew then that all would be right.

When he opened his eyes he was standing in a glade of tall trees. A warm sun glowed on him through the branches, their leaves throwing shadows to dance in the grass at his feet. Strange fruit hung from the boughs and he picked one and ate it, sure before it touched his lips that it would be sweet and refreshing. He turned and looked behind him to where a meadow rolled, lush and green, and dwindled into the haze of the distance. Here and there he saw splashes of colour as flowers turned their faces to the clear sky, and all around him people drifted, or lay in the soft grass, reveling in the beauty of the place. There was no going back to where he had come from, but he knew then that it was as it should be. He was where he belonged and besides, the others would follow him once they were ready. He smiled and turned away, sighing contentedly as he walked on into the forest.

Imagine

Nerea Marquez



Nerea Marquez is a wanderer, a restless creative spirit, illustrator and lover of different cultures, has a Bachelor of Fine Arts, finds her pleasure in filling notebooks with a myriad of shapes and colours encountered along her globetrotting journey exploring childhood memories and everyday experiences. Her curiosity and creativity has found itself deployed in different parts of the world including Spain, England, Chile, the Czech Republic and now Mexico, where the tequila seems to have become the ideal stimulant for her never dull musings about life.

Why we chose this piece:

This artwork is quite simply, mind-blowing. Every time we look at it we pick up on a new detail. We like the way your mind works Nerea!

Silver Apples Presents...

The winners of their illustrious Flash Fridays Competition!

A lot of our readers will already be familiar with the tale of Ernest Hemingway and the six word novel. The story goes that Papa decided to make a bet with a group of friends that he could craft an entire novel in just six words. The result?

“For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

Now, whether or not the story is true, you have to admit it’s pretty damn cool. Those six words produce a range of emotions and raise questions for the reader, the same way a great novel would.

We at Silver Apples Magazine love flash fiction. We love the challenge it offers - how do you convey a story and make your reader *feel something* in a mere handful of words?

In that spirit, we decided to launch our very first Flash Fiction Friday Competition.

Every Friday for four weeks we provided a prompt (‘Labyrinthine’, ‘Denouement’, ‘Epiphany’, and ‘Libertine’ respectively).

We challenged our readers and Facebook/Twitter followers to take that prompt and let it inspire a work of flash fiction in 400 words or less.

Four winners were chosen, one from each week, and their work was automatically accepted for publication in this issue.

But wait, there’s more! We pitted the authors against each other in a fight to the death. Or you know, for money, which is basically the same thing.

Only one emerged victorious.

Congratulations Erma Kiely—you have been crowned Grand Master Flash! Not only is your piece, “Shrubs”, about to grace the pages of this very magazine, but you have also won 50 euro to spend on as many issues of Silver Apples Magazine as you like*!

Without further ado, let us present to you the winners of ‘Flash Fridays’.

**You can buy other things, but why would you want to?*

'Labyrinthine'

Shrubs

Erma Kiely

I'm morto. Who would have thought you could get lost in some shrubs? Admittedly, they were very pretty shrubs, with bright pale purple flowers and a heavenly fragrance, but still, lost was lost.

It had seemed like a good way to spend one of those rare, sunny Irish Saturdays. When the stars aligned and pigs flew and the sun shone on Saturday it was time to head for the hills, hills covered with pale purple flowers.

Of course, once the enthusiasm had worn off and I was out of breath after walking a couple of miles more than I had planned, taking what seemed like a perfectly straightforward shortcut back was a great idea. Look, the part of the path that curves around the lake is only on the other side of that, admittedly rather large, expanse of bushes. Why is it that in your head you always have inflated ideas of your own capabilities? Of course I'm brave, of course I'm smart, of course I'm fit? Ha, the mind is again writing cheques that the body doesn't have any intention of honouring.

So, back to the shrubs. Admittedly, once I was up close, the plants did look a little bigger than the rhododendrons in my back garden, but they were still only shrubs, right?

Wrong. Monumentally wrong. After thirty minutes of pushing my way through the thickly growing stems I was no longer sure I was still heading for the path. Of course I know which direction I'm going, of course I can navigate by the sun when I can't see more than five feet in any direction. It was as if the labyrinthine field shrubs had been planted by King Minos himself, and I was no Theseus, I didn't even have a ball of thread in my rucksack.

I slogged on for another quarter hour before finally giving up; I just couldn't go any farther. My feet were sore, I had run out of water and I was sure I was suffering the first signs of heat exhaustion. Luckily I had mobile coverage. Dialling 999, I waited for the emergency operator to answer and explained that I was lost in some shrubs. She calmly asked if I could be any more specific on my location, maybe give her the GPS co-ordinates from my google maps.

"No need," I said. "I'm in the Botanic Gardens."

Erma Kiely was granted the title of Grand Master Flash, not only for her excellent flash fiction above, but because she entered the competition every week with amazing pieces each time. Go forth and brag Erma!

'Denouement'

Wounded

Orla McArt

Wounded, she was attracted to darker places; dingy pubs, tucked behind the bright lights of more civilised establishments, where the toilets were grimy and there was a blue haze in the air.

Biker's helmets were propped against the bar. Barstool occupants' drunken eyes glistened in expectation, and thoughts of her bare young flesh focused their minds. In the world of drunken men, she was a wounded gazelle in hyena territory.

They bought her alcohol and stared intently into her eyes. She soaked it up; vodka, bourbon, gin. Through slurred words she made the one with the bulbous nose promise to love her and she brushed her heart from her sleeve and pinned it to his lapel. There it burned bright, or perhaps that was that the lights of the oncoming cars they passed on their unsteady feet. Her lucky night, she thought, and with the love of a drunken man she leaned on his elbow, needing a little support.

'Epiphany'

Violence

Catriona Power

Frustration boiled in his chest as he slammed his fist down on the table causing her to jump and knock over her can of Diet Coke.

"For fuck sake Ben, look what you made me do." She leapt up to get a towel from the kitchen.

"No! Don't you fucking move. You are not leaving this table until you get this right."

The dark sticky liquid was flowing over the table, inching its way closer to her phone and his laptop, as if it was trying to seduce them, the way an older man comes after a young innocent girl. It moved slowly, with the threat that once it touched them they would never be the same. It had already tainted the loose papers that Ben had used to draw her a few diagrams hours earlier. Maybe it just seemed that long ago to him.

They had been abandoned when he decided she needed more help than that.

She bit her lip. He knew she afraid to fight him, of making him lose his temper again. It was her own fault, she knew that too. She deserved whatever she had coming to her.

"Now," he said, his voice quivering with barely controlled anger, muffled through his hands from his head buried into them. His right elbow was about to be lapped gently by the bubbles of the Diet Coke, coming to get him at last.

He sighed and gritted his teeth, resolving to explain it one last time. One. Last. Time. After this, he was done. He was leaving her and her sticky messy table.

One more time...

"You put the lime IN the coconut..."

'Libertine'

The Libertine of Lansdowne Avenue

Dave Bryant

He stood at the top of the street where the road began to slope gently downwards and surveyed his domain. The sun had dipped below the rooftops and the street lights emitted a low buzzing sound as they flickered on. He took a deep satisfying breath. The night was upon him and who could say what might yet unfold?

He ran his fingers lightly over a car parked haphazardly by the pavement with one wheel mounting the curb. Perhaps he would steal it.

'And why not?' He thought.

Wine, women, cars; all could be his this night if he would just reach out and take them.

He strolled down the hill at a leisurely pace contemplating his next move, allowing each outrageous idea to roll around in his brain and gain mass. He smiled, teeth glinting in the moonlight. It would be a good night.

Suddenly, a shrill cry cut through the serenity of the evening.

"Paddy! Get your arse in here! It's past your bedtime."

He paused, dismayed. "But Ma--"

"Don't you 'But Ma' me! Now get inside before I get the wooden spoon to ya!"

He cast one final look of longing over his shoulder before sprinting toward home.

It was hard to be an eight year old libertine.

Thank you for reading Issue Two: 'Box of Tricks'

Submissions for Issue Three: 'The Naughty List' will open October 1 2014, closing November 12 2014.

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Creativity Worth Consuming

Confessions from the Back Page:

I used to have a PJ & Duncan poster on my wall