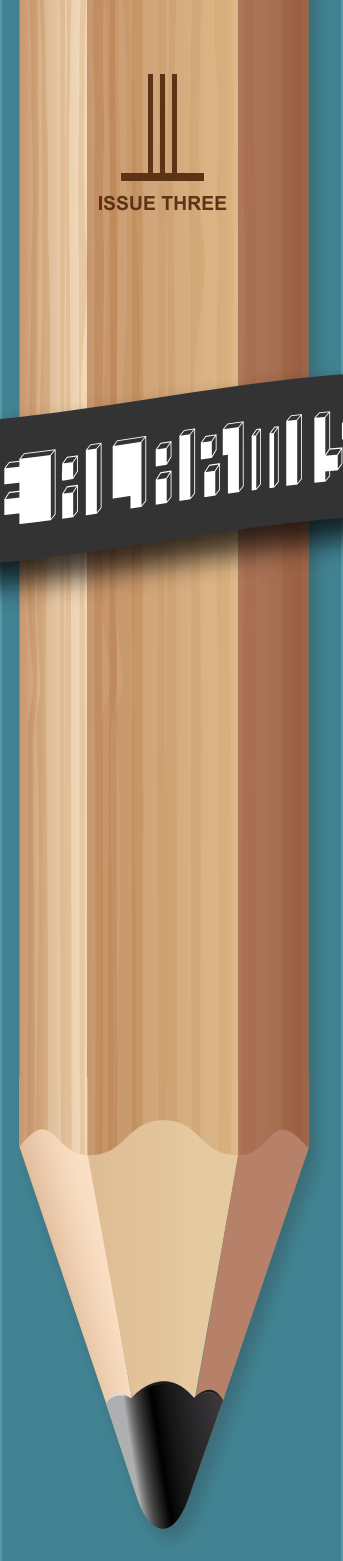




ISSUE THREE

A black ribbon banner with a 3D effect, wrapped around the pencil. It contains the title 'The Journalist' in a white, stylized, blocky font.

The Journalist



AUTUMN | WINTER
2013

IN

OUT

IN

OUT

J D Wetherspoons Haiku Cycle

by Andrew James Brown

i (spring)

damp leatherette seat
slowly dries under air-con.
special offer drinks

ii (summer)

a beer and burger
served on a sticky table
j d wetherspoons

iii (autumn)

aromatic spice
a taste of the orient
it's raining in hull

iv (winter)

at opening time
the loyal flock through the doors.
they are there at close

Cartography

by Bobby Carroll

Some of the children grew up and got over it, led normal lives.

We all know more than a few killed themselves. The first half dozen were national news. At least until the story became stale about a decade in. Others eventually succumbed to comforting addictions, and with those opportunistic infections from that numbing use, or the desperation of being brought up then abandoned again by social services. About a third of the children's subsequent deaths could be traced from the initial scar of May 1992. The route that particular night eventually took them down was not difficult to follow back to that month. The landmarks were always mental health problems, homelessness, poverty, an inability to engage with society and a tattoo gifted on them over four unprecedented weeks. As a civil servant began the final administrations of another victim, the familiar tattoo would be mentioned as soon as reports were started. Everyone around the strip-lit council office would tell their embellished tale of being assigned one of those poor kids at some point, usually near the very start when it was a big story or the very end by which time no-one cared. A newer social worker, often near enough the same age as the latest long-term casualty, will be brought in on all the details hidden from them in their youth and all the theories of what happened. What happened up and down the country during May 1992 that would have terrified any child growing up.

The ones who did not commit suicide or slip through the cracks did grow up and got over it. At least a third. They found new families: adopted, foster; new relations, gangs. They went through school. Some excelled and some rebelled but in no different ratios and with no greater or lesser force than those who did not wake up one spring night to find him on top of them, mapping out their life. As they became adults they started unspectacular careers or went to university to achieve unspectacular qualifications. Few of the survivors are married yet and none have children of their own but their interaction and sex life with the unaffected offer no anomalies, no matter how expected. Bouts of depression are common and many have trouble sleeping.

All are shy about showing their tattoo to new partners or even close friends. If they expose the markings and are asked, naïvely, about its origin they often lie, making up an explanation of some lost bet or a wild holiday impulse they now regret. A few have invested in laser surgery to eradicate it from their skin, others have redacted it with their own designs and ink overlay, until it is unrecognisable. Some tattooist, well versed in the legend, refuse to draw over an original seeing it as a sacred text or at the very least bad luck to fuck with. An original has become

his storm at bay, but even the best steel is no match for a nuke.

And then it was time. Tobias had been watching the clock's second-hand, his eyes spinning with it, and its passing that final "12" cued "Hallelujah" in his head. Soundlessly, he placed the video camera on a post, turned it to the middle of the courtroom, and pressed record.

He'd expected hesitation when the time came, but he was only too glad to unburden himself. Without the slightest inhibition, he trot right up into the middle of the court. One of the lawyers was talking, and he silenced as if a plug had been pulled. Every eye screwed toward dapper young Tobias, the judge included. Jaws went slack. You could hear heartbeats.

Tobias said nothing as he raised his elbows and extended his rear, in the classic posture of the flatulent. Then, on its own, his body let go.

The report echoed ten times over. Tobias lost three waist sizes. Somewhere, a Richter scale ticked.

A big, stunned second followed. Had Tobias birthed a Martian, the shock would be no greater. Then the smell registered, and all hell broke loose.

Faces crumpled and noses were held. More than one person cried, "Oh God!" the defendant spontaneously wept, fluttering her hands. "No, no, no!" yelled one juror, shaking his head in outrage. A frail old gentleman fainted outright. The judge banged his gavel, but not to bring order.

"It burns!"

"Jesus, save us!"

"It's a terrorist attack!"

Chaos. Running. Shouting. The victims mobbed the exits, but Tobias was ahead of them. After doing his job, he'd been off at once, snatching the video camera from its perch. Thus emptied, he felt like he could run a marathon.

But he had company: the bailiff, keeping pace, his face poisonous and vigilant. Out in the hall, the man drew his sidearm and popped off three deafening shots, screaming curses with each. Tobias zigged and zagged, as he'd been trained. A sandstorm of wainscoting and cinderblock opened around him. He was thankful for his bullet-proof vest.

And then he was out the back, right by where he'd parked. Banging car-door, an unhealthy amount of RPMs. As he peeled off, the bailiff was just coming out, shaking a fist like a foiled movie-villain.

A search party was formed, and the FBI summoned, and mugshots circulated, soon culminating in a nationwide manhunt and a six-figure reward. But Tobias had expected this. He was out of the country by noon.

The office was small, but its TV was big. The three men sat luxuriously, smoking cigars and sipping beverage alcohol, with Tobias at wing. When the video reached its hideous climax, the laughter was a bomb.

"My ex," one of the men kept saying, referring to the defendant in the courtroom scene. "My ex!"

The men laughed for no less than thirty minutes, pausing only to cough and imbibe. They held their stomachs as if injured, their feet kicking out. Only a clearing of the throat made them remember Tobias, their employee.

"Good job, son," the biggest man chuckled, red from drink and joy. The others agreed in earnest.

"I would like to be paid," was all Tobias said.

After a disconcerted pause, one of the men barked, "Well, get the boy his money," and the mirth returned.

A briefcase slid down the table. Tobias cracked it, saw bricks of bank-wrapped notes, and closed it.

As he left, the men were replaying the video, and frantic all over again.

Pigeons

by
Darren Simpson



Gran was a funny one. I remember the time she became obsessed with dead pigeons. “They’re everywhere!” she’d slobbered, eyes all trembling and pale. “Evil things. It’s a terrible omen when carcasses litter the streets. Mark my words: darkness is coming!

Serves us right, too.”

“Leave him be,” said Mum, pulling me away. Gran could only reach out with her bony claws, a thread of drool gathering on her cardigan. She scared me sometimes.

She once told me that you can tell the future by the state of a dead pigeon. A wing separated from the body meant good luck, but all else foretold doom. A pigeon with no eyes meant a rainy summer. A missing leg meant heartbreak; two meant sorrow. Ants in the feathers meant illness. “And worst of all,” she warned, “is a bloody pigeon – that means betrayal.”

And she was kind of right. Shortly after that I saw a pigeon getting popped by a car tyre. The pressure bore down on its back, causing its insides to squash forward and explode from its head. The blood was a bright metallic red, and the smell was so strong that it made my stomach cramp. When I got home Mum told me we’d be visiting Gran at the home that night.

She looked even older, somehow. She seemed tired and sad. “Take this,” she said. “Take good care of it. Whenever you see it, think of me, my beautiful child.” She gave me a brooch and tears dribbled down her blotchy skull of a face. I said goodbye.

The next day I went to a pawn shop and sold the brooch for a pound. I used the money to buy some bread and fed the pigeons in the square.

bunny ranch

by elison alcovendaz

We're cutting through the dark Nevada desert on Highway 80. My father tells me how his grandfather did it for his father, and his father did it for him, and now he's doing it for me. It's about time you learned about sex and women, he says. I'm playing with the cotton balls on the sleeves of my St. Joseph's High School sweater, he had insisted I wear, when he yells There! and points at a pink light flickering off the highway. He hits me in the shoulder and smiles and winks and nods his head as though he's just about to deliver the punchline.

We stop in front of a chain-link fence, underneath a pink neon sign that reads: World Famous Bunny Ranch. Remember, my father says, if they ask, you're eighteen. Then he winks again and rings a bell on a gate. A female voice crackles through an intercom, and a moment later we're walking into what could be the boudoir of an old Victorian home. Only it smells like a cage and something like green bird crap stains the coarse carpets. Thirty women in lingerie line up in front of us. Your pick, my father says. They lean a little and lick their lips. Come on, he says, nudging me forward. Don't be shy.

I choose the one who looks least like my mom.

She's a tall blonde dressed in an America-colored thong and two silver stars over her nipples. Whatever he wants, my dad says to her as he plops down at the bar. She rustles my hair and grabs my hands and leads me down a dim hallway. I can hear my father bragging about me to the bartender. I can hear little footsteps in the walls. The ground creaks under my feet.

Her name is Amber. She's probably in her late thirties, but her bedroom looks like my sister's. Pink and white everywhere. Stuffed bunnies on a white wicker chair. Flowery patterns and fluffy pillows on her bed. The room looks nice, but it reeks of animals. Little hairballs litter the carpet. She sits on the edge of the bed and pats the spot next to her. I don't bite, she says. I only nibble.

I sit down beside her. What's your name? she asks. Peter, I say. Peter, she repeats, but slower. What do you want to do tonight, Peter? I shrug. We can do anything you want, Peter. Your dad said money's no object. Okay, I say. Do you think about sex often, Peter? I shrug again. She's caressing my thigh now. You like that, don't you Peter? She's having fun saying my

Wife and Mother

by Esther Cleverly

JUNO:

Women say, "How can you stand it? Him cheating on you, always off with someone else. It's like a compulsion with him. He's always trying to stick it into something. How can you let Jupiter treat you that way?"

Men say, "You're a good-looking woman, Juno. It's a crying shame, Juno. You could do better, Juno. My door's always open. My wife doesn't understand me. We've got a lot in common, you know."

Me, I don't say anything. I gave up caring a long time ago. We're quite good friends now, me and Dione and Semele and Maia and all the other ones he's gone through. Our kids used to play with each other, but then it led to unsuitable crushes and we had to keep them apart.

I know you're not meant have favourites, but Vulcan is mine. My second son, my youngest boy, and such a good baby too! Slept like an angel, fed like a demon, all you could want when you've another one under five. I used to take him out of his cot and bury my face in his fine, fine baby curls those nights when Jupiter didn't come home and I was lonely.

God, I got so lonely. Especially after Mars went to school and it was just little Vulcan and me alone in the house, waiting for his Dad to come home after another skirt-chasing bender.

"What were you this time?" I'd ask him when he finally staggered back in. "Bull? Shower of gold?" Anything, literally anything to get a girl, and when he's had his way he dumps them like disposable nappies. Disgusting.

Then Vulcan started to toddle. Limp, I should say. When he was crawling I hadn't noticed his foot, but as soon as he started to take steps it became obvious. My perfect little boy wasn't perfect after all. Lame, he was, badly. Couldn't run and fight like his brother, who'd always been boisterous: a bully, almost.

I took him to Homerton Hospital and I'll never forget the way the nurse looked when she asked what'd happened to him.

"Don't you *dare* look at me like that!" I said, "he must've been born that way!"

The doctor came in, examined him, gave me that same look: careful, reproachful, horrified.

"I love my son!" I told her. "I don't know how it happened!"

I dunno if they believed me. Started muttering to each other: "Munchausen's by proxy". Meant nothing to me, till I got home from the hospital and Googled it. How could they think that? How?

Silver lining though, it meant me and Vulcan stayed close. I thought he'd never leave me, not like his Dad, till Venus came along. Well, who could blame him, a girl like that? I thought, my boy'll be a good husband, faithful, not like Jupiter. None of us was to know what a handful *she'd* turn out to be. Still, his Mum's always there for him. For my little man.

VENUS:

Sweetheart. Baby. Honey. Darling. Gorgeous. Sexy. Beautiful. Just some of the names she's sick of being called. Just some of the games she no longer wants to play.

Bitch. Lezzer. Stuck-up cow. Fuck you. Cunt. Other names she's used to hearing, from men she ignores, from women whose men ignore them when she's around. It's not easy looking like Venus does. Half the time it's not even nice.

The Haunting

by Glenn Halak

The alley was old brick and the walls were slimy wet and smelled of crab shells even if drought was drying up the little towns and the plains between. The alley restaurant was the last surviving business and inside customers kept their mouths open like fish about to drown and their eyes couldn't rest and their faces were slipping off their skulls. The ghost hunters had brought their cameras in hopes of recording the dead ocean visitation. Why it had chosen Elmville no one bothered to ask. The mysterious wet took up all their attention. Electromagnetism was ruled out as was pranksterism especially after a cameraman was found in his motel bed drowned, salt water in his lungs. As the drought spread that summer evidence of other paranormal activity was reported in towns as far away as the coastline, the wet, the salt stains, the smell of coral reefs basking in the sun, the songs of whales in the basements of derelict movie houses, even the upper turret of a WWII gunship next to a set of swings in a roadside park. By the time of the first wave of mass suicides, what had begun as lovers leaping into the empty Pacific, there was no doubt of the spectral authenticity of these events and the belief humanity would meet up with the ocean in the afterlife became a global religion promising remorse, regret and redemption. A bit too late for by then the rain had died.

HAPPY EASTER!



Dancing With Myself


by Jess Sweetman

Jess had been sleeping off a heroic weekend when it happened, which didn't help. In fact the comedown threatened to out-weird the one she'd faced after the Glastonbury where they'd run out of pills and approached the boy with the thousand mile stare for extra. Now she had this to contend with. No, she decided, this headspace definitely wasn't the best one to inhabit when your 33-year-old self decides to pop by for a visit from the future.

She'd also run out of cigarettes and apparently at some point in the next 14 years she had quit. "You should eat some fruit" added her older self, pulling her fitted leopard print jacket closer around herself against the student house chill whilst surreptitiously kicking a pair of discarded knickers away from her gold converse: "those pills aren't doing you any favors." It was time to go to the shop.

Jess squinted at herself, desperately trying not to look for laughter lines and silver in her roots whilst berating her shallowness in noticing that her ass was still fat. "Can you at least go downstairs whilst I get dressed?" she asked, self-consciously grabbing her t-shirt from the lampshade over which it had been abandoned in a previous fit of fake Woodstock nostalgia. She also noted that the lava lamp was still going.

"I've seen it all before" she sighed back to herself, shoving a pile of VHS's aside to settle down onto the knackered chair bed.



As they trudged out into the concrete-colored street under a plasterboard-colored sky she narrowly avoided an arm link by pretending to struggle with her coat buttons. The older her clearly had issues walking at such a slow pace (five years of London apparently. Jess tried to stifle a wince, hating the idea of cheating on Manchester with the capital. Wankers lived in the capital.)

The usual rain was trickling down, soaking into her fuzzy birds nest of a hairdo and dripping down into her concealed pajamas, the slippers had probably been a bad idea but it was too late now and the shop was only down the road. Her 33-year-old self pulled out an umbrella. "I don't think there's room for both of us," she said.

In the shop they stood for ages staring blankly at the scant rows of snack products in varying hues of out-of-date. It wasn't a very good shop, almost definitely a front for something more successful, at least she hoped so. Otherwise it was run by someone who had never visited another shop before in their life and had only followed Coronation Street to the letter for business advice.

33-year-old Jess squinted and pushed at her contact lens with her finger whilst she struggled to read the ingredients on a faded pot of low fat yoghurt, whilst the 19-year-old settled on a picnic bar,



THE MACHINE by John Boisvert

The doctors wheel in their machine. Glorious, they say of its many long arms & voices. But when they are unable to capture my baby's spirit, they become angry with his brilliance. They write in their report that he leaped from the gurney & went crashing through the window into the snow, even though he is right below them, & far too small yet to crash through windows. Still, they pass the report around town, & the townspeople, sorry to hear the news, set honey pies & whiskey in jars at my door.



A Marriage of Electrons

by L. C. Bullivant

Martin watched the colours changing in his wife's face. What he would usually describe as pale sawdust had faded through squashed tomato, bile and into a khaki pallor. It seemed to have settled on the khaki. Sat in his large, beige velour chair he watched her as she lay on the floor, clutching at her stomach. He wondered if her face was actually green or if it was just so pale that it was reflecting the carpet. His thumb and index finger caressed the page of the Radio Times that he was halfway through reading.

"Martin, call me an ambulance!"

He rolled his eyes away. It was probably nothing. Best not to waste the ambulance people's time, that would be embarrassing. He found himself looking at the cat; a large male, white with rough patches of striped brown fur on his shoulders and tail. It looked as though the white had been ripped off like wallpaper, revealing the tabby inside. Martin liked cats. As the cat began to groom himself, Martin thought how he'd like to come back as a cat. Their world seemed like such a peaceful one.

"Please, Martin!" Her shout made the cat jump and run out. Martin heard the cat-flap in the kitchen. He probably wouldn't be back till morning now.

She was hunched over on the floor, gritting her teeth, which made them seem too big for her face. He thought that she looked like a cross between a horse and a mouse. He laughed a little to himself, but he didn't say it out loud as it would most likely upset her. Mainly she had her eyes clenched shut, creating veins of white and grey in the khaki skin. Every now and then she would look up, straining, into his eyes. It was making him very

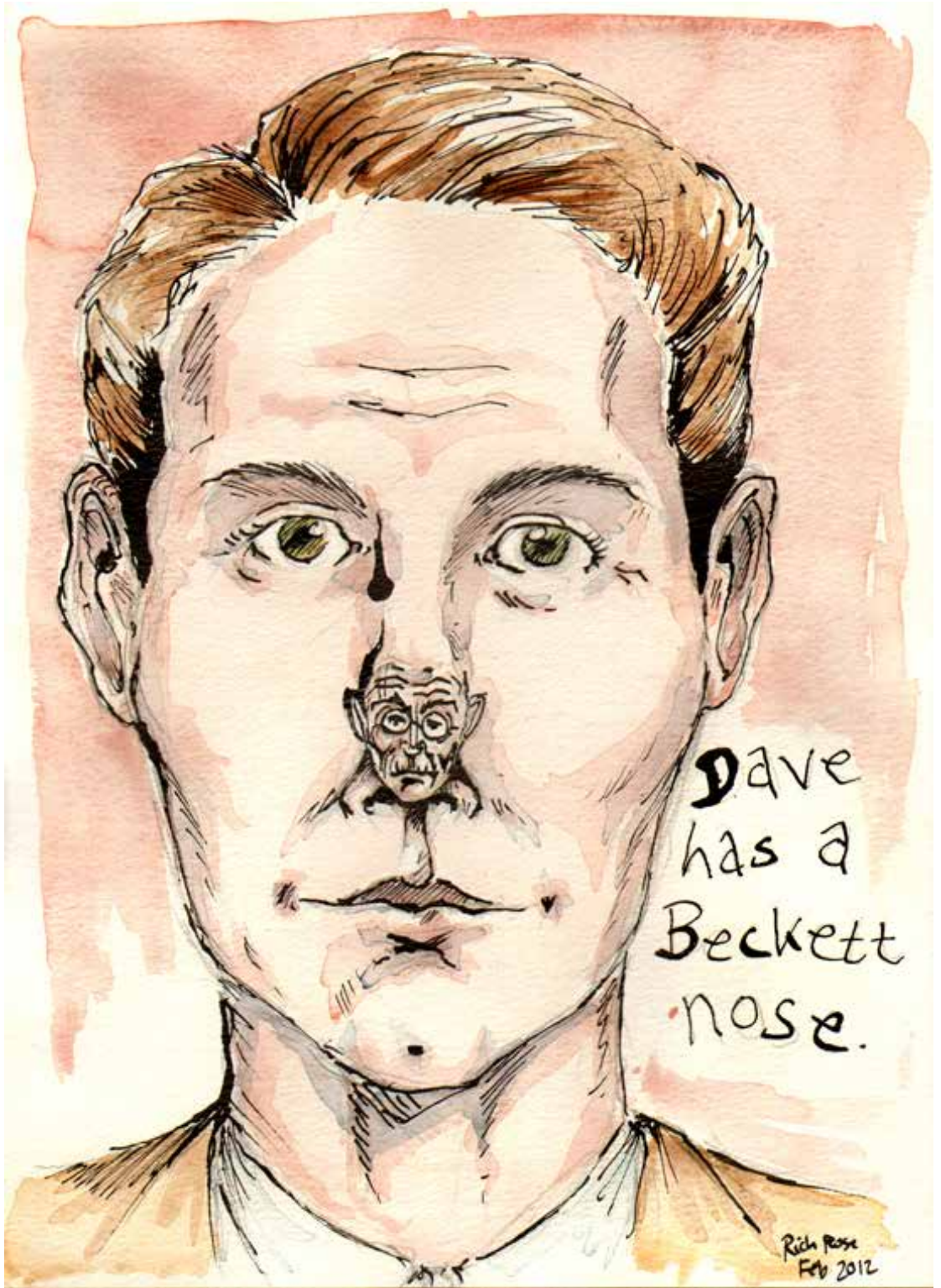


ILLUSTRATION | Dave Has a Beckett Nose | Richard Rose ●

FAKING IT

by
Meg Johnson

Do you ever feel like faking your own death just so you wouldn't have to read your work emails? My parents would probably help me hide out if it meant I would move back to Iowa. *They've really lost it* people would say with pity when they saw my parents getting three dinners to go from the local barbecue joint. *Trying to feed a ghost.*

Millwall Territory

By

Niall Foley

Turn left out of my brother's flat and the landscape is offences, broken glass, dog shit and hungry souls.

Turn right, however, and you're in the new square with a bistro, wine bar, and independent cinema. Cocktail glasses will clink in the organic evening air and women will smell sweetly. Copies of The Guardian will flutter coyly in the breeze.

I hadn't seen Simon in a year and we turned right and drank from pub to pub, each time saying the next would be our last. The crowd we drunk among were confident and loud. Everyone spoke with a rising intonation, as if each sentence was a question, even when it was not? We drank all the way from Tower Bridge Road through Bermondsey to the Borough Market, the aroma of fine dope never too far away from anyplace. The pubs were packed but we found a quiet back room in one.

Simon got a text. He checked it. Said nothing. Put his phone away. Necked his pint.

I interpreted (correctly) that the text was from his girlfriend, and that they were fighting.

"Are you not going to text her back?"

"Later," he said and took another swig.

I had wrecked enough relationships of my own to know that my brother was in the process of thinking too much about things and building up a host of resentments. She, no doubt, was currently doing the same elsewhere. Later, following a series of ill mannered and passive aggressive texts the pair of them would actually talk to each other and recognise their misunderstandings and misperceptions. Animosity would fall like shed skin, leaving them privately worrying why they had got so worked up in the first place. In the meantime, my brother would be sullen and quiet.

I poured Simon's remaining drink into my glass.

"Go outside and phone her. I'll get the pints in."

"I'll text her later."

"Just go outside and phone her."

anthropomorphic firefly tales

by
Patrick Griffiths

"The Ugly Duckling does not sit pretty with me. Its very title is a lie. There is no duckling in the story at all, ugly or otherwise - the protagonist is a cygnet. A swan. A completely different species. The author deceives the reader for the majority of the story and, come its ending, he turns everything on its head with the revelation that it was actually a swan he was referring to rather than a duck. A swan. Not a duck. All along it was a swan.

"It strikes me that this deceptive approach to storytelling has come to be considered acceptable because these tales are written for children. But I would argue that it is quite unacceptable; how can we hope that children will grow up to be fine, trustworthy, virtuous adults when they are lied to at such a young age? And how can we be surprised by the awful pain and terror we witness around the world when today's adults were taught how to deceive so 'harmlessly' in the years that have passed?

"The problem with The Ugly Duckling is further compounded by the fact that it simply isn't realistic. It isn't at all believable, to an adult, at least. I cannot imagine that any intelligent person would believe that while, somehow, ducks have the mental capacity for eloquent language, not to mention the mechanical ability to express it, they can't tell the difference between a member of their own species and that of another, completely different lineage. This is preposterous. If a woman, a human woman, gave birth to a gibbon, with its gangly arms, thick fur, and a hundred other rather obvious traits, would she accept it and assume it was merely a slightly strange looking human baby? I don't think she would.

"Hans Christian Andersen's 'talent' is dangerously overrated. And the likes of Charles Perrault, the Grimms, and Walt Disney, for that matter, are no better. They have a lot to answer for - it is no exaggeration to suggest that their prolific lies are, in no insignificant way, partly to blame for many of the problems we face in the modern world. It is about time that these 'fairy tales' were rewritten, for intelligent people - young and old - with the harsh realities of contemporary society in mind, for the very sake of humanity."

There was a timid man, the kindest, most sweet-natured man you might ever meet, who married a woman whose characteristics were quite the opposite. She had two daughters, claimed following an acrimonious divorce and aggressive custody battle, who were almost as vacuous and spoiled as their mother. Ella, the daughter of her new husband, however, was very

time without music or cuts for four hours. Near the end a drone sound rises in the soundtrack. In a forest, the primitive humans discover a speaker from which the music emanates. They crowd around it and say "hello" in different modern languages as if expecting it to recognize one of these languages and respond. Until this point in the film they have spoken only in grunts. The movie ends.

The instructor says: "I don't have to tell you what this has to do with childbirth."

10

One day our class starts on a Saturday morning and ends at noon. Afterward I go with a group of students to a beach on the inlet that divides our city. Later I need to cross the inlet, and think to take a boat rather than the bridge - a suspension bridge - that runs overtop the beach. It is a somewhat secluded beach, somewhat shaded by a canopy of trees. The boat is called the SS Beaver. There is a small kiosk, at which a vendor sells tickets for the SS Beaver. I ask the vendor when the boat leaves, where it goes, and the location of its berth. The vendor claims not to know these answers, and says: "I just sell tickets."

One of our group - a lithe and hairless woman who does not look pregnant - starts doing cartwheels in the nude. I can see her sensitive parts, and notice also that the vendor looks unimpressed. On weekends, the cartwheeler tells us, she often performs as a living statue. Today she is nude because she plans to take part in the World Naked Bike Ride. From her valise, she produces silver body paint, and some of the students help paint her entirely silver.

The cartwheeler, who now looks convincingly like a stone sculpture, poses for photos. I, too, take some with my mobile phone. I think the cartwheeler is in the prenatal class to discover what inspires making babies. In some poses she expose her vulva, parted and cup-like, undifferentiated in tone from the rest of her painted body, each labium like the crest of a wave.

Noticing this detail, I am reminded of a painting in the maritime museum in the city in which I live. It is an ornately framed painting of a small boat - perhaps a tugboat - ascending the slope of a menacingly large wave. Minute veins of sea-foam can be seen on the wave, which is stage-lit before a darkened sky.

I start to feel a sense of 'stage fright' in my performance as photographer. I can only snap a few more photos or risk portraying an unhealthy interest. And I must take these photos as casually as possible, as if

15

The instructor says: "One thing I advise is to feed your baby sugar water. But whatever you do, never tell your doctor you're doing this. They'll tell you it's all wrong, but I assure you it is right."

16

I dream that I lose my wedding ring, but can replace it only with a cheap, unsatisfactory facsimile.

17

Telephone.

18

The instructor invites a "breast specialist" to class, to privately "assess" the women's breasts.

19

The instructor invites an "interpreter" to class, to "interpret" his lessons. Her eyes protrude from her face like interior lining through tears in the cover of an overstuffed pillow. When she is enthusiastic about the material she interprets, her eyeballs roll up and protrude even further, like those of a terrier struggling with a bone. Her breasts are large and unwieldy, and I wonder if she is a wet nurse. I think that life can be very cruel.

20

In the waiting room for the prenatal class, there is a poster. It is a photo depicting a chair - something like an Adirondack chair with a canopy of billowing fabric - facing the horizon on a tropical beach at midday. Beside the chair is a pistol. I imagine myself sitting in the chair with a bottle of wine, or two. It doesn't matter what kind of wine. A cheap wine will do - perhaps Wine O'Clock, a brand I recently discovered. (Slogan: "It's wine o'clock ... somewhere".) I imagine myself getting slowly drunk - merging with oceanic clouds and a beautiful sunset. And then evacuating my skull because life has just two goals: birth and death.



bloody, knocking into this, banging into that, I'm a bull on wheels, O Picasso. But it is big, big and strong, strong, throbbing, throbbing, throbbing, strong, nagging, nagging, calling, reminding, reminding, always reminding me. It has sucked the life out of me, the parasite. It has drained me. I sleep on my back, I rock like a seesaw, the fulcrum is the coccyx. The bastard ...

10. I have been here the longest, I do not recall when or how or why or if or that or this. I will never leave, never leave. They come and go, Lucy, Jane, Mary, Jean, Elizabeth, May, Wendy, Lilly, Fanny and Viv, the names change they tell me, but they will always be my Lucy, Jane, Mary, Jean, Elizabeth, May, Wendy, Lilly, Fanny and Viv, they say they look different, but within the nebula they will always be my Lucy, Jane, Mary, Jean, Elizabeth, May, Wendy, Lilly, Fanny and Viv, nubile, coquettish, blonde, blue eyed, long legged, big titted, frosty knickers. Wilson's Heavenly Home, the irony. I sit in my wheelchair, in the penumbra, not a stir, not a zephyr, I still possess the fancy words, and watch, watch my Lucy, Jane, Mary, Jean, Elizabeth, May, Wendy, Lilly, Fanny and Viv, my legs, my arms, my neck refuse my orders, I was an officious man, verbose, I always got my way, I always had my way. I will never leave, nobody will ever come for me, take me away. In my room, I have whiskey, gin, vodka. When Lucy, Jane, Mary, Jean, Elizabeth, May, Wendy, Lilly, Fanny and Viv walk past me to the games room, to the dining room, when they are heading to bed I whisper to them, I tell them about the luxuries in my bedroom. Their eyes coruscate, the dull skin blazes with color, their mouths drip with saliva, they wet themselves. However, women of our age can no longer hold their booze, two sips and they are asleep.

THE MAN WITH NO FEET

BY

S. SLODKOWSKI

The man with no feet army-crawls everywhere he goes.

Sometimes, when he has to turn around,
the crawling is made easier by the slick trail of blood
that seeps out from his jagged stumps.

The man with no feet always wears the same blood-soaked grey suit.
He also has a once white shirt, a once grey tie, and matching once
grey pants.

Wherever his feet are, they are comfy in black cotton socks and black
leather shoes.

When people refer to the man with no feet
as "the man without feet,"

he gets angry and bites their ankles
because he can't reach their faces to slap them.

He tells these people that he is the man with no feet,
not the man without feet,

because being with no feet is at least possessing something:
even if it's only possessing the absence of something.

Before the man with no feet became old news,
He had given several televised interviews.

In one such interview he had been asked:

"Aren't you worried that you might die any day from the blood loss?
How can you cope with this?"

The man with no feet had been lying flat on his belly at the time,
He had smiled and responded:

"The second you're conceived the clock starts ticking—keeping time with
your pulse."



Tom Cruise

by Sarah Chapman

of all the
women he
starred
opposite of
which did he
love!
and they look
at me, exhausted
between
breaths,
when will
you ever
change
tom cruise
women
are like
blue
diamonds
hanging
from a
French man's
lamp and
under the
light a
woman will
ask is there
anyone
you love

remember me

by Tamara Rogers

This is not love, my sweaty lollipop.

Feathers of light drift from the metal spider looming over your cradle, dance in the pudgy folds of your shining skin. Kaleidoscopic patterns paint lurid strokes joining the dots between your black eyes and the thin curve between your nose and the tip of your round chin. Winnie the Pooh sings sickly songs over your bedside.

No. This is not love, my deflated dirigible.

My fingertips touch prickled coarse blanket, alternately red and gold under the spinning orbs, as my hands pull threadbare corners closer around your neck. Your bonnet is askew, you clumsy thing. You've been wriggling, straining against your cushioned bonds. Your tiny left hand, five puffed caterpillars exploding from a pale baked potato, waves a frozen greeting.

The front door cracks loud through the house. Its thunderclap growls along painted plaster walls, happy picture-frames manically swaying. I guess you're now privy to his final farewell. Do not blame him, your father. He loved you in his own way. But it was not love. Not real love.

A trickle of hair, free from the guard of your crocheted hat (courtesy of Honorary Aunty Margaret), reaches defiantly into our shared stale air. It drifts one way then the other, twitching as a sniffer dog that discovers the path of a murderer's stinking boots across a brambled forest. I pat it down for you, my baby. Just for you.

Did I show you these? Such lovely cards. Written with ink siphoned from the dredges of purity we adults still find lurking within us, even now. The pink one, signed in flowing fountain pen by Aunty Simone, decorated in purple hearts and milky stars, glitters roughly. Others: one pale green with a cartoon rabbit from Aunty Eva, one egg-shell blue with raised cardboard cloud cut-outs from your Grandpa John. You'd have liked Grandpa John. He keeps a Werther's packet with your name on it locked in his desk drawer. He's been waiting to meet you.

And then there's the gifts. All the shiny, sterile gifts. They're all here. Carefully arranged around your cot. Building blocks of well-wishes and happy-birth-days grow like tumours of Lego walls, garish and flamboyant, reaching ever higher to hem the hamster in. And you, its oblivious prisoner, my sweet eructation. My bundle of burden.

A tissue, softly entwined around my forefinger, mops the quiet trail of saliva traversing your previously full cheek. Its fibres drink crimson.

This is not love, my furious pheromone.

Why were you shouting? What brought you to a place where you would force your fresh, innocent chords to play so shrilly, gadding through the air and racing to crash against wearied drums? What did you possibly want for?

Paul McKenna's Wet Dream

by Wesley Cooke

Super high-tensile animal penis, super high-tensile animal penis. SUPER HIGH-TENSILE ANIMAL PENIS!

She had said those five words over & over in her head so many times & in such a short space of time, they would have lost all meaning if it hadn't have been for the indelible moonlit image of a Reynard fox dragging his screeching vixen mate backwards with his engorged member – across the back garden & scaling the fence in about three seconds flat as she watched in slack-jawed wonderment.

It wasn't this odd & obstreperous coupling that had her awake & looking out from her bedroom window at two o'clock in the morning; it was the half a photography degree & new clit piercing – the latter at that moment in time was throbbing like a blind cobbler's thumb & had bled so much that her bedsheet was stained with a mini claret map of Madagascār.

Then there were the words of her tutor still ringing in her ears, "Art for art's sake," he'd drawled at her. Art for art's sake, indeed! Surely, if you put a question mark over every work of art ever made, thus reducing it to its lowest terms, every piece of art was & is & will always be purely for art's sake? This coming from a man who looked, walked & talked like some kind of diminutive Gok Wan was for her just too bitter a pill to swallow.

She was very fond of her picture: The captured image of the collision of two naked women of same age & build, hypnotised & placed at opposing ends of an empty Lido & commanded to run, heads thrown back & at full pelt towards one another – the mere thought of the brutal beauty of it brought a papercut smile to her lips.



ILLUSTRATION | Buffalo | Isa Farfan





I Know There Are People Who Wander in the Night

by Zachary T. Owen

The window is open and I take a fleeting glance at the full moon and it hurts my eyes. The children's room smells like strawberries (I don't like the smell of strawberries) and both Jill and Kevin sleep very heavily, lids twitching, bodies heaped with blankets, despite how warm it is. I know they are safe here, with my protection, with their mother asleep only just up the stairs, but I look at them and know if something were to happen, if somebody were to slip in the house and put his hands around their throats, jostle the life from them, my life would lose all autonomy—I would lose a sense of purpose. I would have no love left to give.

I run my right hand playfully through Kevin's hair, which is silky and pleasant, now that he has been washing it again (after having to be scolded by his mother). I leave his side to sit on Jill's bed. She looks so much like her mother these days. I peck her on the forehead and stand up. The door is cracked, the way Jill and Kevin prefer, though I really wish they would keep it shut and locked at night. I slip through the doorway quietly, not wanting to wake them. I will check on them again in the morning.

My thoughts return to the idea of an intruder coming here

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IT
ALL
ABOUT**

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