

Volume 2: September 2011

ISSN 2045-189X (Print)
ISSN 2045-2144 (Online)

£1.00 (where sold)



Coventry
University

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Published by

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Letter from the editors

Dear Reader,

Welcome to Volume 2 of our creative writing magazine, *Coventry Words*. Firstly, we offer our congratulations to all the talented student writers who have successfully contributed to this volume - we are thrilled to showcase their work. Secondly, we hope you enjoy reading it. Our readership has now increased thanks to the magazine's beautiful and edgy new look.

The magazine showcases the very best writing we receive, and all students from Coventry University are eligible to submit their short stories, flash fiction, poetry, travel writing, creative writing news articles/features and ten-minute play scripts.

Our editing team consists of second year students who enjoy the publishing experience. This year we received hundreds of high quality submissions, and unhappily we cannot publish them all in the magazine; however, we can publish more work on our website, so do take a look.

The website (online *Coventry Words*) is full of resources for students with literary interests. Apart from displaying creative work, it has links to our Facebook and Twitter sites, tips on writing and how to get published, careers advice and much more. The site is accessible to students and staff, please take a look: <https://students.coventry.ac.uk/coventrywords>. Those outside the University can access some examples of work on our main website: www.coventry.ac.uk/coventrywords.

We urge you to keep writing about anything you know or wish to explore and express. Also, please join our Facebook account, and send some creative tweets!

Good luck with your studies this year, and enjoy the magazine.

Submissions

If you would like to contribute, send us an email with MAGAZINE SUBMISSION or WEB SUBMISSION in the 'subject line' (please do not send attachments). Please include the name of your degree course. Email your submissions to coventrywords.bes@coventry.ac.uk. For more detailed guidelines and word counts, please see the *Coventry Words* website for students and staff on: <https://students.coventry.ac.uk/coventrywords>.

Website for students and staff:

<https://students.coventry.ac.uk/coventrywords>

Temporary access for non staff and students available on request from coventrywords.bes@coventry.ac.uk

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Editorial Team

Chris Barry



I'm on the editorial team for two main reasons: I want to help other students coming to study at Coventry to realise and showcase their talent, and have a platform to do so. On a more personal level I want to enhance my own experience of writing and publication.

Emma Raymont



I'm an editor because I want Coventry Words to be a place where students can find information about careers, tips on writing, how to get published and lots more. My main aim is to increase usage on the website, and for it to become a place where people think of to find information on English and writing.

Ben Sweatman



I'm an editor because I enjoy sharing my enthusiasm with others. The Coventry Words website and magazine are another way of sharing and I hope that whether your involvement is passive or active you will enjoy reading, and who knows, maybe there is a hidden spark of inspiration waiting within.

Clare Whyment



Since studying at Coventry I have been able to realise my ambition of being published through Coventry Words. I joined the team to aid other writers in achieving this goal. As part of the team, I would like to heighten interest in the site and to encourage people to get involved through our Facebook group. Hopefully, this creative work will serve as an inspiration to many new writers.

Abi Cox



When I first heard about Coventry Words, I was very pleased that there was finally an outlet for students who enjoy creative writing, as well as providing a place online to find information. I think Social Networking sites are already popular, but they are still growing, thus I believe the future of Coventry Words depends on its Facebook and Twitter.

Alyson Morris



My editing role is Executive Editor and Literary Agent. I am the Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Coventry University (Department of English and Languages), and over the year I read lots of exciting creative work from students. I have a keen interest in promoting good writing. I have a BA Ed. teaching degree, an English as a Secondary Language teaching qualification and an MA in Creative Writing.

Contributing Writers: Volume 2

Caitlin Alborn
Jonelle Bradley
Patricia Clinton
Matthew Greer
Kirsty Hewitt
Rizwan Irfan
Stephen Kailey
Fahima Khan
Emilie Lauren Jones
Daniel Moseley
Tyler Murray
Akachukwu Okafor
Nicoleta Popa
Thomas Power
Hannah Pereira Sgroi
Charlotte Stanley
Thomas Swift
Lyle Weir
Megan Wright

poetry

The Spider and the Flies

by Emilie Lauren Jones

Inch by inch
It abseiled down and crawled back up,
Creating chains of sticky knots,
With eight black legs and
Eight black eyes
It dreamed its spidery dreams all night,
And crocheted its cartwheeled masterpiece
like perfect washing lines.

Next day I saw ensnared,
Three clumsy flies with web-like hair,
Clawing and clamping them there.
I stood and stared,
And could not bear,
The suffering they must be feeling.
What if they had a mother?
Or another who wanted them
Back home?
Whilst they were here just waiting
To be ripped apart.

So with one quick swish of hand,
I tore the work of genius down.
Their faces, I think,
Were filled with glee
As they realised I had set them free!

A few days later
After dinner,
I wandered past the webbed remains
And saw the spider clinging in vain
To what was left of what he'd made.
I noticed he was looking thinner
And tried to raise him from his slumber.
But as I poked and blew as well,
I realised he was now a shell.
I told him of my kindly act,
But he just stared, emptily back.

Incomplete

by Hannah Pereira Sgroi

A drunken dose of daydream sipped,
sweet as a daffodil on a dew swept day,
washes troubles
clean away,
but still
left empty,
hollow,
sad,
fully crazy,
completely mad.

Sometimes I think to myself
that I'm not
quite good enough.
No, not
quite mature enough
to handle the world
like a rustle in the wind
blown,
failed,
sinned.

Only my false mind
can truly banish thought,
as when the battle's fought
then can this world
be kind.

There is Some Thunder in Her Heart

by Tyler Murray

There is some thunder in her heart
With all the lust and divine power
Of fifteen million works of art.
Her beauty could provide the strength of a tower
Or could rip the same man apart
With skin so fragile to feel
That one is scared to do so in haste,
In dread that you would reveal
A beauty to be feared encased.
Her eyes swim in an ocean of green,

They tell tales of memories old,
So many sins for only eighteen.
If caught off guard, their deaths do surely unfold.
So strap y'selves down to this engine now
And embrace the peace, underwater.
Those eyes born of evil do allow
The eye of the storm, the devil's daughter.

14/25

by Lyle Weir

If I jump high enough tonight,
Pluck a few satellites from space
And bring them back down to dirt;
I could conceivably hear all your conversations.
Playbacks engaged and her mouth runs
uninterrupted.
Beautiful words painting inside my cerebral box,
Saying this evening we'll engage in skin and sweat.

Out of a flying machine with nothing to break my fall,
Picking up speed and the wind is making it hard to
breathe;
Eyes closed but the rush does not subside,
As the sky turns, flesh and fear turns to passion.
I will consider this a privilege, one attained by so few
And admired by anyone who is truly alive.

I am floating on the ocean's mass,
No intentions of sinking I remain aware of everything.
Life beats beneath the surface;
Clouds of colour and danger chasing the current;
I'll dive deep without breathing apparatus
For the water provides oxygen
In the steady beats of organic bubbles.

I enter the orbit of a supermassive black hole
And the galactic centre becomes my resting place.
Here in her presence the inner workings make sense.
Stars dance around her form in chaos;
A mis-step from annihilation,
But the existence is worth the threat.

The Rock That Chose To Crumble

by Fahima Khan

Destroying all that is left
I move on in agony.
Each new step I take
I walk through fire; the angry flames rupturing
my veins
With trepidation of a new beginning lying ahead.

It is dark and cold; the chill biting my nerves,
I wrap myself with a moist blanket; swamping
myself with misery.
The damp air slowly choking me to a premature death.
I hear the muffled laughter; an echo of my inner joy.

My final moment of watching her crumble as though
a battered rock.
Watching her being swept away by the irregular tides
of emotions;
The unexpected burst of tears:
I hear her helpless cries drown beneath
I hear her silently choking to her premature death
Watching her final moments of struggle against her
own emotions,
Her final moments of struggle and the desperation
to set her free.
I panic seeing her pale face, vivid eyes freeze in the
centre of time,
That was the battered rock that gave up hope; the
rock that chose to crumble.

There Was No Glory In Their Death

by Nicoleta Popa

I do hear you Mr. Churchill.
Uttering famous words
Trying to convince
Of glory in their acts.

But in a land of aching love
The dead are breathing gas,
And the living bathe in tears.
Toy soldiers have
Spare parts...Warranty:
2 years.

And there are those who stay at home
Struggling to breathe air
Love returns as pain
And then despair.

You're sorry now? Are you Mr. Churchill?
You clothed facts
But in the end
There was no glory in their death.
And they can't hear you now
No words can raise the dead.

A Rose is Finer in a Vase

by Akachukwu Okafor

The air is mystery that we breathe
Just like the way we met
Two unmatched people
Made equal by love
A difficult process I must say
We willed ourselves to each other that day
Worked hard to keep it that way
Until death took the floor
And you walked through that door
Now I am a lonely African
Tortured for playing egalitarian
When you could have been better off
Without me
A rose is finer in a vase
But you chose to live among pines

Casting your pearls before this swine
Cleaving, believing for better times
And better times we had making babies
We could only give liabilities
You could have been better off
Without me
Alive and well had we listened to truth
Though bitter
A pine and a rose cannot walk hand-in-hand

All The Rage

by Patricia Clinton

I asked my daughter why there were children crying
beneath bloody sunsets and firework stars,
Why London was burning to keep people warm
despite how the snow had now melted,
Why dub step was now a marching beat and half
naked youths took Che Guevara poses?
She told me it was all the rage.

I asked my daughter why animals on horses were
charging mercilessly like in medieval battles,
Why paint splatter was now seen and spoken akin
to blood splatter,
Why homemade Nazi grenades got less screen time
than grown men fainting?
She told me it was all the rage.

I asked my daughter why she was for so long denied
sanitation, food and water,
Why her classmates wouldn't leave admin to file
death warrants without a second thought,
Why her teacher cut their talks short to take a little
walk in front of council houses?
She told me it was all the rage.

I asked my daughter why her boyfriend froze at
night in lecture halls,
Why millionaires swinging from flags and looking
shocked in classic cars took an evening to report,
Why she held candles outside a hospital for a boy
she never knew and may never know?
She told me it was all the rage.

So when Christmas time came and my daughter
was at home again,

With a black eye and a fat lip and blood stains on a self-decorated t-shirt which she wouldn't wash,
With a look of sparkle I hadn't seen since that Christmas she got her first bike,
I asked her one more time why it all happened.

She sighed and nearly cried, for there was no belief that she had ever lied,
And told me it was all the rage.

Slave

by Thomas Swift

Hanger. Then Rail.
Hanger.
Then Rail.
Did you get that?
Clambering through the mounds of abandoned clothes, shall I find refuge to ongoing worshipping of consumerism?
Dare I say that amongst the repetitiveness of folding and putting away
Lies the fragile state of a human being.
A flash.
Here!
There!
Boom boom boom, from every angle.
A jumper, a t-shirt, a cardigan, a sock, a shoe, a blitzing of every garment coming from enemy lines!
I run run run run, faster faster faster,
this rage, this profusely ongoing rage
leaps and bounds, the mountains cascading ever more.
I seek refuge.
Silence.
It breaks.
Another load of wild beasts clamber at shelves over contents,
every colour, material, splashed amongst the innocence of a newly mopped floor.
Ferociousness entices
Tearing me between rails, a woman at each end of my arms
"Get me this, get me that. Does this come in the next size up? What do you mean you're out of stock?"
Breathe for a moment before being submerged to and fro of an 'honest living'.

I shatter the visage of customer etiquette,
forget the manners, the solitude of passiveness.
Never, have I EVER forecasted heavy beatings of customer troubles.

I am not a slave.
Did you hear that?
Not
A
Slave.

My Room

by Thomas Power

A single ray of light
Fights its way through
The crooked curtain
And into my room.
Reflects off the empties;
Bottles and glasses
Growing larger in number,
As time swiftly passes.

A lonely six string
Perched in the corner.
Safe in its place
Of absolute boredom.
Perfectly still,
Alone and waiting,
The only object
Left untainted.

Clothes on the chairs
And under the bed,
Past a point
That I could resurrect.

Finally the sink
Filled to the brim
With mugs, and plates,
And bowls with noodles in.

This unearthly scene
Does tend to worry me.
Until I pick up that old six string
And create a melody.

'How do I create good dialogue?' the student asked. by Jonelle Bradley

If you're a creative writer, writing dialogue is an important aspect of the process, no matter what your genre or writing form is. Whether you are writing stories, scripts or even poems, it is imperative that you get the dialogue right. Here are some tips which will help you to produce creative works with great dialogue!

To start, you need to create strong character voices. The voices of your characters should be so distinctive that, when you take their names away, they can be clearly defined by their speech alone. The voices also need to divulge traits about the characters' personalities.

CHARACTER A: 'How about this dress?'

CHARACTER B: 'It looks too small, and that colour clashes with your hair.'

CHARACTER C: 'I kind of liked the red dress best. But that one's okay too.'

CHARACTER A: 'Oh I don't know, let's go and have a coffee and chat about it.'

From this example, CHARACTER B is clearly not afraid to project her judgement while CHARACTER C seems to be less willing to share her opinion. CHARACTER A is indecisive which is shown through her inability to decide what dress suits her and from the need for her friends opinions.

Not only should your dialogue be strong and make the personality traits of your character known, but it should also reveal something about their immediate surroundings – such as sounds, objects, location etc. It gives readers the opportunity to use their imagination, letting them become involved with your story.

'This restaurant is rocking like a boat... just look at that view!' said Sarah.

'If you listen carefully, you can hear the waves,' said George.

If you want to include a particular accent or slang, be careful as it can become difficult to read. A hint of an accent is better for readers.

'Where are you heading, John?' the teacher asked.

'I ain't in no trouble, Sir!' said John, 'Miss Johnson said me Mum was waiting in the Head's office.'

Lastly, try to make your dialogue quick and snappy rather than using long sentences that can become convoluted. If your character can say the same thing with fewer words, then let them. Take a look at the following examples:

'Jack, I'm leaving now. I'll lock the front door behind me. Remember that you need to clean the mess in your bedroom and do the dishes in the kitchen.'

'Bye Mum. I'll remember to clean the mess in my room and the dishes in the kitchen. Can Robbie and Mark come over to play the X-Box when I'm finished?' Jack asked.

'Yes but only after your chores, and the house needs to stay clean because Nan is coming over for tea,' Mum replied.

Or:

'I'm leaving, Jack,' Mum hollered.

'Okay, Mum.'

'Remember to clean your room and do the dishes.'

Can Robbie and Mark come over when I'm done?' Jack asked.

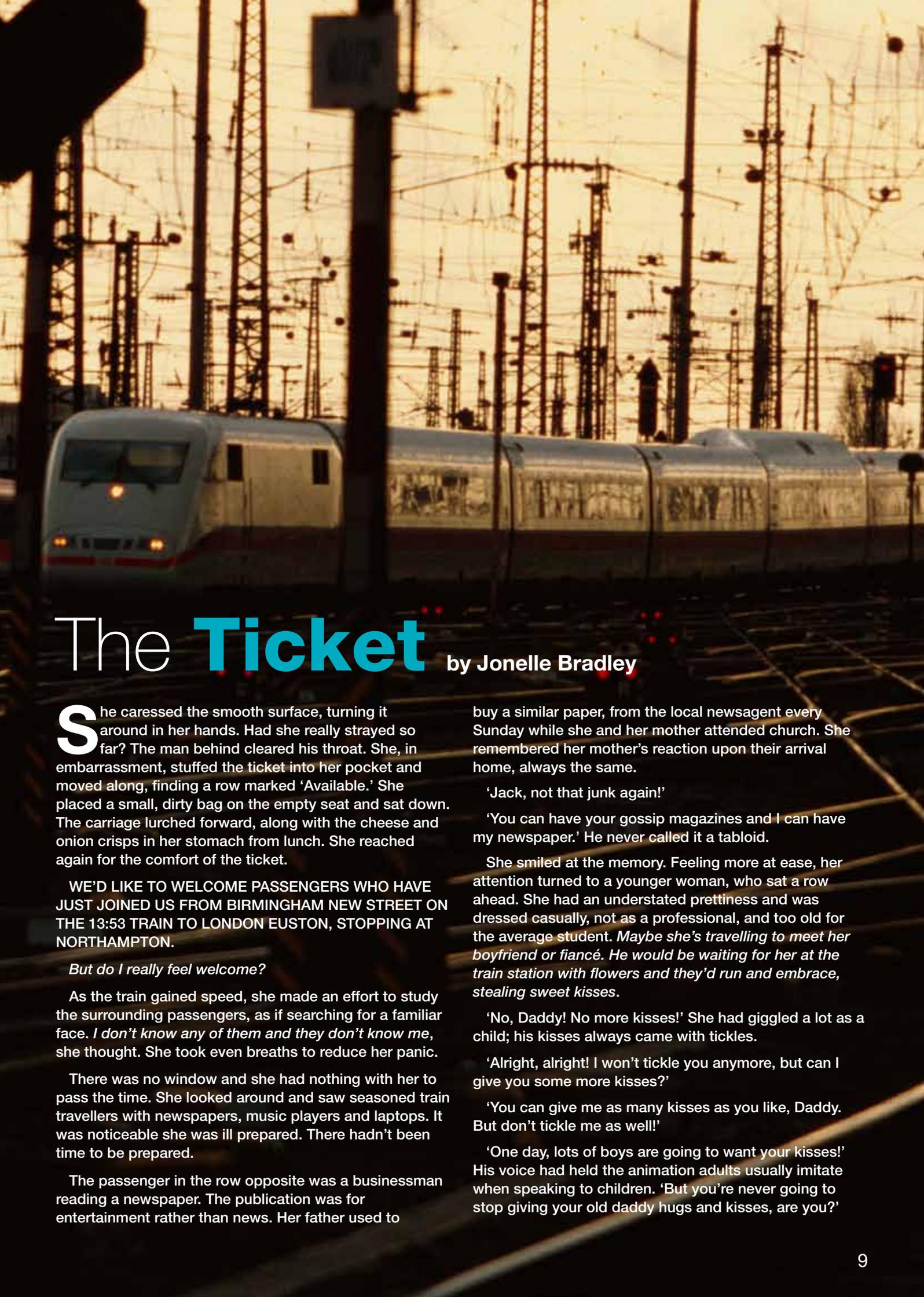
'Just keep the house clean. Nan's coming over for tea.'

'Okay. Bye Mum.'

'Bye.'

These are just a few guidelines to help you get started. Above all, remember that creative writing is about being creative! So experiment with your dialogue but stay true to your unique writing style and to your characters' differing personalities.





The Ticket

by Jonelle Bradley

She caressed the smooth surface, turning it around in her hands. Had she really strayed so far? The man behind cleared his throat. She, in embarrassment, stuffed the ticket into her pocket and moved along, finding a row marked 'Available.' She placed a small, dirty bag on the empty seat and sat down. The carriage lurched forward, along with the cheese and onion crisps in her stomach from lunch. She reached again for the comfort of the ticket.

WE'D LIKE TO WELCOME PASSENGERS WHO HAVE JUST JOINED US FROM BIRMINGHAM NEW STREET ON THE 13:53 TRAIN TO LONDON EUSTON, STOPPING AT NORTHAMPTON.

But do I really feel welcome?

As the train gained speed, she made an effort to study the surrounding passengers, as if searching for a familiar face. *I don't know any of them and they don't know me*, she thought. She took even breaths to reduce her panic.

There was no window and she had nothing with her to pass the time. She looked around and saw seasoned train travellers with newspapers, music players and laptops. It was noticeable she was ill prepared. There hadn't been time to be prepared.

The passenger in the row opposite was a businessman reading a newspaper. The publication was for entertainment rather than news. Her father used to

buy a similar paper, from the local newsagent every Sunday while she and her mother attended church. She remembered her mother's reaction upon their arrival home, always the same.

'Jack, not that junk again!'

'You can have your gossip magazines and I can have my newspaper.' He never called it a tabloid.

She smiled at the memory. Feeling more at ease, her attention turned to a younger woman, who sat a row ahead. She had an understated prettiness and was dressed casually, not as a professional, and too old for the average student. *Maybe she's travelling to meet her boyfriend or fiancé. He would be waiting for her at the train station with flowers and they'd run and embrace, stealing sweet kisses.*

'No, Daddy! No more kisses!' She had giggled a lot as a child; his kisses always came with tickles.

'Alright, alright! I won't tickle you anymore, but can I give you some more kisses?'

'You can give me as many kisses as you like, Daddy. But don't tickle me as well!'

'One day, lots of boys are going to want your kisses!' His voice had held the animation adults usually imitate when speaking to children. 'But you're never going to stop giving your old daddy hugs and kisses, are you?'

'No Daddy, I shall always save lots and lots of 'em for you!'

She had promised. The memories were gradually calming her down. She loved to remember her father like that.

Her eyes went to a passenger in front. *He must be a student*, she thought, for his book bag, casual clothes and age gave his identity away. He must have felt her gaze, he raised his eyes to meet hers - they were filled with curiosity and she awkwardly looked down. He had nice eyes, she decided, they were a nice shade of brown and his expression was intelligent. She began fiddling with the ticket in her pocket. And at a quick glance upwards, she saw his interest in her was but a fleeting curiosity. She envied his education, the fact that he was doing something with his life.

'Tickets please. Tickets everyone!' the conductor shouted.

She pulled the ticket from her pocket. It said: *from Birmingham New Street to Northampton, price £11.90, single.*

'Ticket please, love.'

As she handed him the ticket, its shiny surface reflected a familiar looking face, a simple trick of lighting.

'Thanks, dear, you have a good journey now.' He passed along, unaware of the dark memories invading her consciousness.

She remembered holding hair back from Julie's face as she puked into a

dirty toilet. The apartment was littered with junkies pumping drugs and passing out. The apartment belonged to Tony, he specialised in dealing and had an open house policy as long as you paid.

'Sorry Sara,' Julie had said.

Julie's stomach didn't agree with the drugs yet. But she kept coming back for more; regardless of how many times her stomach retched.

'Don't worry, I'm here,' Sara had said. She saw a mirrored image of herself in Julie, of how she had once been, but no one had helped her out.

'It gets easier.'

Another hurl racked Julie's frail body; the thick blonde hair was already showing signs of thinning out. Sara couldn't forget the stabbing guilt. It never got easier. The vomiting did but the cravings only intensified.

Julie had wiped her mouth while Sara wrapped her arms around the younger girl.

'Thanks, I'm feeling better now you're here,' Julie had said.

'I'll always be here.'

Sara should have stopped her. At first, she had felt like the Good Samaritan from her childhood Bible stories, until she realised how attached Julie had become.

'God, I'm sorry.' The rattle of the train windows muffled Sara's whisper.

She took the few coins she had from her jacket, desperate for

something cool to soothe her throat and take the memories away.

The unsteady walk to carriage C left her back exposed. Sara was aware of all the passengers with blonde hair, Julie's blonde hair.

She returned to her seat with a can of Sprite. She couldn't recall the last time she'd spent money on something so frivolous.

'Any rubbish? Any rubbish?'

Wasn't that the best way to describe herself - as a piece of rubbish? Sara rushed to the toilet, where cheese and onion crisps and Sprite emptied from her stomach.

The toilet and sink were made of steel, the mirror was cracked and the room smelt of urine. Sara tried to avoid the mirror while washing her hands and mouth.

'Do you think I'm pretty, Mummy?' Sara had asked.

'Why, you're only ten, Sarah.'

'It's Sara. But am I pretty?'

'Well, you're still young; you have plenty of time to grow pretty.' Her mother had said.

She never grew into a beautiful princess. The drugs left their mark; her once healthy skin was now sallow. Would her parents even recognise her?

She stared at her reflection, unable to identify the dull grey eyes. Her straight nose was now slightly dented thanks to a blow from an ex.

THE GAA

Could her lips still pucker into a seductive smile?

'You know your lips really are your best feature.' Julie had told her once.

Back in her seat, Sara sipped a bit more of her Sprite. It had an unexpected bitter taste which made her choke.

My cravings are getting worse, she thought, *I'm so weak*.

The train began to slow; they were approaching Northampton, her stop. *Am I ready for the journey to end?*

'Sara.'

She knew that voice; it was the one she was trying to escape. Sara wasn't sure whether she felt more guilt or fear, had she been followed? Julie took her hand and guided her towards the toilet.

Sara recalled when it had all gone wrong. It was the night she had confided in Julie.

'I want out. I'm going home to my parents. I'm going to beg them to help me.'

'You don't mean that. You can't mean that, Sara.' Julie had said.

'But I do. I can't live like this anymore.'

'But... but you're hooked!'

'My parents will help.'

'You're a dropout, a druggie. You've stolen for your habit; you've even sold your body on occasion. You're a failure, Sara, just like me.' Julie had said.

'I'm gonna change...I can change. I've been praying and well, I know this is what I ought to do.'

'Don't leave me, please don't leave me! It's your fault I'm like this.'

'But you can change too, Jules, you can come with me.'

'No! You promised you'd always stay here with me.' Julie's voice had turned cold; she pulled a knife from her pocket.

Sara had run away. She had done what she could to get money for the train ticket.

'Come on!' Julie's harsh voice brought Sara back into the present.

WE WILL SHORTLY BE ARRIVING IN NORTHAMPTON. PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ALL YOUR BELONGINGS BEFORE LEAVING THE TRAIN.

Sara swore, and began to pray. Julie guided her into the toilet and pushed her onto the seat. The lock clicked.

'What are you planning on doing?' Sara asked.

'The smack I put in your Sprite will do most of the work for me.' Julie laughed.

Sara recalled that bitter taste. She felt a calming coldness; she'd only had a sip of the drink before throwing it away - was it enough to make a difference?

'You and me, we're gonna go somewhere. Just the two of us, that's how it's supposed to be,' said Julie.

'No.'

'Come on, stop being so stubborn. Do you really think your parents are gonna want you back?'

'Either way, I can't go with you.'

Julie slapped Sara, then her mood quickly changed. 'I'm so sorry, so sorry. Can't you see? They won't want you, not like I want you.'

The train had come to a stop, and Sara stood up, causing her body to press into Julie's and pushed hard. The suddenness caught Julie off guard and her head crashed into the mirror.

Voices were outside the toilet door, people were waiting to disembark.

'Just leave, just go away!' Julie screamed.

There was nothing more Sara could do. She left, closing the toilet door, closing that world and Julie's sobs behind her.

Passengers were still stepping off the train. Sara saw the casually dressed woman. A man was waiting for her. A smiling man who didn't care about crushing his gift of flowers as he swung her around the platform. *She's not just pretty, she's beautiful*, Sara thought.

Sara was last off the train, practicing a speech to her parents, of how sorry she was and how much she loved them -

'Sarah?'

She turned. They were there. *Thank you, God*, she whispered.

flash fiction

Emily

by Matthew Greer

Emily Trawler was 38, single, and over the legal limit. She'd left early and alone and was driving back towards the city. All she could think about was flopping onto her bed, which was just as well she thought with a half snigger, half sigh. She was lonely. It was pitch black now, but on this journey time was nowhere - a slight daze prevented her from glancing at the clock. Ahead hazard lights blinked.

As she approached, the size of the vehicle became apparent. It consumed the whole single-track road. No way around, only hedgerows. Headlights would be noticed immediately, so she waited.

No movement. She hit the horn. A vile smell was now drifting through the air vents. No response. What is a bin lorry doing here at this time anyway? It's strange, but not worth stepping out of the car for...And as soon as that thought hit, of safety, her mind state was turned. Lock doors. She could reverse, but that would mean going deeper into the country, and her fuel light was on.

Suddenly the hazard lights stopped. But nothing else. The rear of the lorry now looked far more menacing lit only by her headlights. It leaned with the camber of the road, like an old haunted house. But metal and filthy, and out of place. Verging on panic, Emily reached for her phone and began scrolling through her contact list - she wasn't sure why. No fearless boyfriend to vault to the rescue. Nobody, really.

Something heavy and cold came through her window with such dazzling speed she thought whatever it was, it had to be cheating. It was a brick. It struck her cheekbone and ricocheted into the dash. A man in a fencing mask swiftly leant in over her lap and unfastened her belt, mask rubbing against her face as he reached. She tried not to look at him, bathed in the red glow of the readouts. She instead focused on the liquid crystal from the smashed centre display oozing

down the console, dim red with retained charge. Hands indiscriminately gripped clothes and flesh, dragging her through the driver's door window.

The stench outside was thick. Emily watched, crumpled on the ground, as the man pulled a lever on the lorry's side. With the refuse cover rising slowly, her headlights flooded in. A smooth wave of stench escaped. It was so strong that she wanted to keep her eyes shut for fear of the smell damaging them. But looking now, stars appear to twinkle around the inside of the cavernous lorry. The cover rises further, and now they're glistening, dense bubbles of light. But it was the sound that confirmed it. Of things slipping from the cover's ledge as it lifted, slopping onto other things below. Organs, yellow from rot. They had been incinerated to the point of melding together as one mountainous form. The lighting setup made it almost look computer-generated.

The man comes over to her and kneels. He thrusts his face towards hers. She doesn't scream consciously but rather lets one escape, like a vomiting reflex.

The following afternoon a bin lorry surges through a busy Newcastle shopping precinct. It turns onto a road, where it continues its journey in a polite manner, as if nothing had happened.



Matt is a former BA English and Journalism student who tragically died in 2010. He enjoyed creative writing and we all felt he had an aptitude for it. He particularly liked mixing horror with comedy. He is greatly missed.



Asexual Ploy (Poor Little Boy)

by Daniel Moseley

If you were there you'd agree.

Youngsters, in a field no bigger than a football pitch. The middle, a difference, a mound of earth, a face looking at the heavens, aged with grass. When we stumbled into the field, its destiny had been decided, our trophy to be held.

Like monkeys in wheelbarrows we stole it, our emerald, our turf-tortoise. The only place we could be. We could see everything, the whole lot. We were safe.

Hours were spent playing games. We were boys, girls, young princes, princesses, kings, queens, planes, ponies, fresh from a day of education. Rotten from the moment we gathered. Terrorise the little, run from the big. That was then. This was summer.

Six weeks of freedom. Most kids went places. Little to do when your parents don't want you around. Kick your feet, kick a ball, crawl the curb, hope the ice-cream man will take pity, climb, spit, draw willies on the pavements, swing, scout, gloat, hide from strangers, find a tree, find a wall, wee on it, wee off it, trudge through ditches, cross your legs, peel bark, snap sticks, eat sweets, creep about, sleep late and wake early - six weeks of freedom. Occasionally luck came to me. I wasn't the only one.

She was thin, tall for her age, with jet-black hair, big boobs, ripped jeans and a hoodie fit for an ex-boyfriend. A young woman, rebellious to all senses, in all senses. Older than me, could have been my sister. I wished she were. No idea what she was in my eyes but there was fascination, succulent fascination. I found her on The Green.

It was a peaceful place to smoke, to dream, to remember. 'To practise my spells!' she told me.

Terrified, I asked, 'Really?'

'Like hell I do!' She was completely amused by her joke.

I had innocence. Which cannot be obtained, only lost. 'Cute' in her words, naive in mine.

I hung on to every word she uttered, every new swear, every philosophic slither. She seldom talked down to me. I sat and listened to all the troubles an adolescent could vocalise.

We sat together. Her smoke polluted the air. The shrine of my youth was tainted. I'd forgotten the importance of The Green. My conscious was occupied by an alien mood and it wasn't interested in playing.

It was getting late. She spoke about her boyfriend and girlfriends, who kissed who, who slept with who. Never understood what she talked about, but I knew sex was important. I didn't understand what I was feeling. It was new.

She asked if I had kissed anyone. I replied with little clarity, 'Yes.' Everyone has played doctors and nurses, mums and dads.

'No! A proper kiss?' she giggled.

Like a deer in the headlights, I froze up, 'Proper?'

She smiled, lifted her arms and cradled my head. I closed my eyes, pouted my lips, I'm overtaken. A rush of emotion, urging a slight whimper; her tongue had prized its way in. The mouth was anything but a dentist's secret now. She explores every crevice with absolute course and kindness. My tongue rests on her soft palette. My confidence drops and she dominates. I retreat to a sustained kiss. I open my eyes, like an echo I see hers. The kiss is over.

'Feel strange?' she said, like I've been told a secret that was best kept. My words are languid, my mind is alien.

'Yeah.'

My eyes to the floor, I taste foreign saliva. I linger on it.

An Unsuitable Boy

by **Stephen Kailey**

Jamie caught the whisper of a faint thrumming up ahead. His gaze fixed on a parked hatchback, half angled on the pavement under the dim yellow wash of a streetlamp. Both engine and lights were switched off but a faint glow of cigarettes could be made out under the outward reflections of the windscreen. Muted voices carried on tails of pungent marijuana smoke as it corkscrewed out of the partially opened windows.

This was a white neighbourhood. He had been foolish leaving his journey till such an hour. The streets were now in darkness and he knew that goodness rarely lurked amongst the shadows and for a moment, his mind flitted to the residents tucked up in their beds, cocooned from the perils on their doorstep. In the distance, police sirens teased a faint illusion of order but Jamie knew even they would not venture here. He forced a casual glance skyward where the moon looked down from its distant perch amongst the clouds- his only witness, oblivious.

Vulnerability rose like a bubble in his chest, wrenching on every sinew, stunting the rhythm of his faltering gait. He became obsessed with his own body language - where too little or too much attitude could only invite aggravation. Crossing the road would afford him some time but it would also indicate fear - something his pride could never entertain. He forbade himself another look at the car, yet he felt the weight of attention tip towards him.

Apprehension chipped away at his backbone, urging him to retreat but instinct had disengaged his limbs and his movements were now somehow not his own. Hubris had gripped him and was shepherding him ineluctably towards his fate. He felt his heart quicken to mimic the deep rhythmic pulse of the car stereo that thumped mightier with every step.

He felt queasy. A stench of paranoia laced the cold sweat that dampened his brow. His mind flashed with a growing fantasy where the occupants of the car would allow him to reach the comparative safety of the next street.

He pressed onward, though his rising hopes dissolved with the whine from an electric motor. A window slid open, illuminating the outline of the hulking figure in the passenger seat. A deep voice boomed, tugging at the already fragile tatters of Jamie's resolve.

'Yo stop! Where ya from?'

Jamie concealed an anxious breath. The voice was Asian. A white voice would be simpler to comprehend. The voice wanted to know if he was Sikh or Muslim; the wrong answer would be disastrous. A lie could help but only if he was sure of the threat. He decided to play dumb.

'West Town,' he replied.

A momentary pause gave way to raucous laughter. The shadows threw glances at one another. His inquisitor edged forward. Jamie winced as he beheld a deep scar slithering down a hardened tangle of features that appeared to have been arranged in a cement mixer. He scanned nervously for a defining clue to the stranger's ethnicity but there was nothing. It was too dark to search their jewellery for religious symbols and the car, infuriatingly, displayed no stereotypical signs of faith or nationalism - probably to catch him out, he thought. He dismissed the Punjabi accent, as he knew it spanned both cultures, as did the pulsing Bhangra music. He had run out of ideas.

Jamie had, until now, avoided the turf wars that plagued Sikhs and Muslims - a malodorous relic from the motherland that still lingered in the vile figures before him. It did not even matter whether he was religious; all that mattered tonight was his origin, something completely beyond his control. It was yet another indelible brand upon which his existence was to be wagered.

The spectre of Jamie's forgotten faith had returned to pass judgement. He was helpless. He had always been helpless.

'Don't be cleva, you know wha' I mean.' The scowl reddened and nostrils flared to eject hypnotic plumes with the intensity of a maddened bull. Jamie jolted as his tormentor exploded with fury, 'WHAT RELIGION ARE YOU?'

Both doors opened a fraction, poised in anticipation of his answer.

Stuck

by Charlotte Stanley

'Look at the painting. Look at the eyes. Can't you see the fear in them? Study the faces. They have the quiet wisdom only the old can achieve. Concentrate on the wrinkles, around the eyes and across the forehead. Now I want you to study the photograph on my left. It depicts Carrie Hobbs and John York. They are both students from Massachusetts. Carrie is twenty-two years old and is a post graduate in Colonial Studies. John is twenty and is an undergraduate in American History.

Three weeks ago we advertised for humans wanted for scientific experiments. After a long and tiresome selection Carrie and John were chosen. Now I am telling you this information because it will not be released to the media. The government has chosen to keep this classified information. I beg to differ. I believe that you as tax-paying law abiding citizens of the United States of America have a right to know what this country is funding.' The scientist paused.

'Now I ask you again to compare the photograph and the painting. In particular pay attention to the faces.'

The scientist felt the crowd begin to understand. There were shocked squeals and united groans of 'No!'

'This Ladies and Gentlemen is America's first example of time travellers being stuck in the past.'

Carrie turned silently to John and studied his face. The skin was as old as the peeling paintwork on the white wooden house. 'John,' she whispered, 'do you think anybody will come to find us?'

John turned slowly, 'It's too late Carrie.'

The time machine had attracted a lot of attention in the 17th century. The pulsating crowd moved like an animal towards John and Carrie breathing one unified word, 'Witch!'



Molly's

Television

A story for teenagers
by **Caitlin Alborn**

EastEnders? No. The Culture Show? No. Emmerdale? Definitely no. SMASH.

Where's the Jaguar Adventure with Nigel Marven? SMASH.

I'm flicking through the channels trying to block out Mum and Dad's shouting match. Mum's throwing plates again. They've been doing this a lot recently. They won't tell me why though. You're not old enough to understand, they say. Well, I'm thirteen. A TEENAGER and they still treat me like a child. The door has just slammed shut and Dad's driven off somewhere. I don't know where. I never know where.

Mum's coming up the stairs. This always happens too. Mum and Dad argue. Mum smashes china. Dad slams the door. Drives off. Then Mum comes upstairs to talk to me. She knocks on the door.

'Come in.'

'Molly?'

'Yes Mum?' I turn my TV off. She always gets annoyed when I leave it on when we're talking about serious stuff.

'Me and your Dad are...well...'

'Breaking up?'

'No!...Well. I don't know yet. I still love him. Very much. Just your Dad has found a new lady friend and for this reason it will be better if we're not together any more. We will both be a lot happier.'

I don't get it. Why would Dad need another lady friend when he's got Mum?

Mum looks at me and rests her hand on my shoulder. Bowing her head, I see tears roll down her cheeks.

'I'm sorry, Molly,' she says, rummaging around in her pocket, producing a scrunched up tissue. 'I promised myself I wouldn't cry!'

I throw my arms around her neck, I can smell her perfume. Pulling me onto her knee, like she did when I was little, Mum holds my head in her hands, looking directly in my eyes and says, 'I just want you to know that whatever happens, we still love you very, very much! You'll always be our Molly muffin.'

I giggle hysterically when she starts tickling me, but our fun soon stops when we both hear the front door slam. Mum dashes out of the room and the shouting starts again.

Gardening show? No

Cooking show? No

SMASH

Holby City? Wait.

What's that?

There's a cat in a fur hat in Holby City, just like the one my Dad wears. That's certainly not right! It's looking straight at me. Heading towards me, I press my nose against the screen, the static prickles my skin.

Wind blows through my hair, colours sweep past me. Blue, green, red, pink! I'm leaving the warmth of my room and I can hear water, loud water. I land with a bump. A brightly coloured parrot is sitting in a tree above, a river glistens next to me, and in front of me is the cat.

'Where am I?' I ask him, assuming he'll respond. After all, cats do not generally talk.

'In a jungle.' He does respond.

'Oh. Er. Why?'

'Because you're unhappy.'

'I'm unhappy?'

The cat approaches, his bright yellow eyes, ginger fur, and my Dad's fur hat hypnotises me. He is right, I AM unhappy.

'Can I ask why you're wearing my Dad's fur hat?'

'I get cold ears. Don't you?' he says readjusting his headwear, 'Now follow me.'

He reaches out, takes my hand in his paw and guides me through dangling vines, tree stumps and exotic flowers. I stop suddenly. There in front of me is, 'The man off the telly! The one in the Jaguar programme! Are we...are we inside the television?'

The cat nods.

I look above me; a gibbon is hanging from a tree. His black fur and white face seem so real. This CAN'T be real? Surely? I hear a growl. I turn round quickly to see spots. Yellow fur, covered in spots. His teeth are showing so I take this opportunity to start backing away.

The cat grabs my hand and starts running. The vines brush against my face, scratching me slightly, the damp jungle floor soaking my trainers. I can hear the sound of large paws chasing close behind us, so the cat heads towards a small gap between some trees.

'Red or green?' he shouts while running.

'Pardon?'

'RED OR GREEN?'

'Errr. RED!'

He pulls out a red glove from underneath his hat, puts it on and then claps his paws together. We fly through what feels like a tunnel of red light and land with a thump

on a cold floor. He picks himself up, plucking leaves from his fur and offers his paw to help me.

'I don't understand.' I say, getting up from the floor. 'The Jaguar programme isn't showing on TV at the moment. Why didn't you take me to Holby City? The hospital, I mean.'

He looks at me like I'm silly. 'People would see you! We're safer going to programmes from the past. Then we won't be discovered. Pffts.'

'Oh. I -'

'Are you happier?' he interrupts.

'Pardon? Oh. Yes.' I was. Much. I'd escaped the arguments.

'Right then. Time to go!' He produces another glove. This time it's green.

'Home time.' He claps his paws together once more, and we travel through a tunnel of green light and we're back in my bedroom. It's not Holby City on the TV anymore. Now celebrities are eating bugs. 'I'm glad I'm not there,' I laugh.

I look towards the door as I hear footsteps coming up the stairs.

'What was that noise? I heard you talking.'

Panicking, I turn round but the cat in Dad's hat had vanished.

'Must've been the TV, Mum.' I smile. 'I hope you feel happier.'

Mum kisses me on the forehead, 'I do. Well I will do now it's just you and me, sweetie. Go to bed, you have school in the morning! You can finish this programme, but that's it for tonight.'

She leaves the room and I climb into bed. I glance at the TV and among the camp of celebrities is a ginger cat, without the hat.

The **Ten Minute** Play - **Fab** or Fad? by Kirsty Hewitt

Type 'ten minute play' into Amazon and you will be confronted with a wealth of collaborative collections. But what exactly is this new phenomenon sweeping theatres across the globe, and will it catch on?

In an increasingly fast-paced world, shorter-than-usual forms of writing have been given a new-found popularity in recent years, and encompasses all types of literature. We have the novella, one-verse poems and even flash fiction, which aims to tell a story with a beginning, middle and end in as few as fifty words. It is obvious, therefore, that a shortened form of drama would be hitting the headlines, and what could be better than performing a play in ten minutes?

The time constraint imposed by the ten minute play has in no way limited the power of the genre - on the contrary, such a short period of time forces the writer to keep the play fast paced and full of action. Actors are also encouraged to showcase their own talents by playing multiple roles, and audiences can be exposed to a broad spectrum of drama in a single sitting. There are no set rules, but ten minute plays generally include one single act, the use of one to three characters and an extremely simple set design, if any. They follow the structure of the traditional play - the establishment of a setting and situation, the occurrence of an event which throws the protagonist's world off balance, the struggle to restore order, a further complication and, finally, the main character either succeeding or failing in his or her quest. The plays also still adhere to Aristotle's 'Elements of Drama', and include plot, theme, character, dialogue, music and rhythm, and spectacle, which predominantly include the scenery, costumes and special effects within a production.

The first anthology of ten minute plays was published by Pierre Loving in 1923, and numerous widely recognised literary names have contributed to the genre. The best amongst them are Willa Cather with 'The Sculptor's Funeral' and Robert Frost, with both 'The Death of the Hired Man' and 'The Housekeeper'. Some authors have even tried to condense the ten minute play - most famously Herman Melville, author of 'Moby Dick', who managed to pen a two-minute long piece of drama titled 'The Lightning-Rod Man'.

Many of the most prominent playwrights of modern day theatre have also turned their pens toward the ten minute play, including David Mamet and August Wilson. Along with numerous printed compilations, a wealth of websites offer scripts pertaining to the ten minute play, by authors both contemporary - for example, Sam Post's complete collection 'An Actor's Dozen' - and classic - Oscar Wilde with 'La Sainte Courtisane' and Anton Chekhov with 'The Swan Song'.

Ten minute plays themselves are extremely popular in America, and many alternative literary venues and festivals showcase arrays of popular short plays each year. Schools and universities alike have adopted the genre of flash dramas, as a wide variety of characters and situations can be shown in any one performance. The world-famous Princeton University in New Jersey holds a yearly ten minute play contest, which proves incredibly popular with authors, students and audiences alike. The Spare Change Theatre in Manhattan has even perfected performances of plays which are over in less than one minute!

On the other side of the world, the annual Short+Sweet Theatre Festival, which aims to create "a more creative world ten minutes at a time", deals solely with ten minute shorts, and is the largest showcase of its kind in the world. Ten-minute-long musicals, cabarets and dance theatre numbers are nestled between plays which have launched the careers of many Australian actors and playwrights alike.

In the United Kingdom, although these so-called 'flash dramas' are still something of a rarity, two festivals dealing with the art of the ten minute play have graced our shores and put down permanent roots in the last few years - the JB Shorts Festival in Manchester which annually showcases six new plays, and the Pint Sized Play Festival which takes place in Wales. Events such as 'The Big Bite-Sized Breakfast' at this year's Edinburgh Festival also dabbled in the new craze.

Ten minute plays are no longer a fad; they are a legitimate and exciting form of theatre that has proven highly popular with audiences around the world. They enable us to find the best new talent, get involved in a wide variety of different plays, and, most importantly, to be thoroughly entertained. Whether you prefer comedy, tragedy or sheer tomfoolery, there is a ten minute play out there for you!

A Best Friend by Megan Wright

Character List

- NICOLA:** Late 20s with short brown hair, wearing a winter coat, a colourful woollen scarf and matching hat. She has an upbeat and happy demeanor.
- HOLLY:** Late 20s with curly blonde hair, wearing a thick jumper and a dress underneath.
- LISA:** Late 20s with long brown hair, wearing a bright red coat. She appears very confident and glamorous.
- WAITER:** Mid 20s, he is handsome and tall, wearing plain clothes and an apron.

[**HOLLY** sits at a café table fiddling with a menu. **NICOLA** rushes in and unravels her scarf as she sits down.]

NICOLA: Oh Holly sorry I'm late, I woke up late, then the car just wouldn't start. Have you been waiting long?

HOLLY: Yeah like five minutes. Thought you were coming with Lisa?

NICOLA: No she's meeting us here instead so I guess she's on her way. It's freezing today, well done on getting us a table by the radiator.

[Enter **WAITER** stage right.]

WAITER: Can I get you gorgeous girls a drink?

HOLLY: I'll have a hot chocolate, with skimmed milk and none of that cream you put on the top of it.

NICOLA: You do live on the edge. I think I'll have... the... caramel macchiato today please.

WAITER: I'll get those now.

[**WAITER** exits stage right. Sound of a coffee machine plays briefly in the background.]

NICOLA: Holly, I need to get something off my chest. I probably shouldn't but I'm in a bit of a dilemma, pickle, kerfuffle... whatever you want to call it, I am definitely stuck in the middle of it and I need to tell someone.

HOLLY: Oooh spill, is it something juicy?

NICOLA: It's something bad Holly, really bad, extremely bad, so bad that –

HOLLY: – Okay it's bad, what is it?

NICOLA: Greg is having an affair.

HOLLY: What? Er, I... Lisa's Greg?

NICOLA: Yes Lisa's Greg. The only Greg we know.

HOLLY: He can't be.

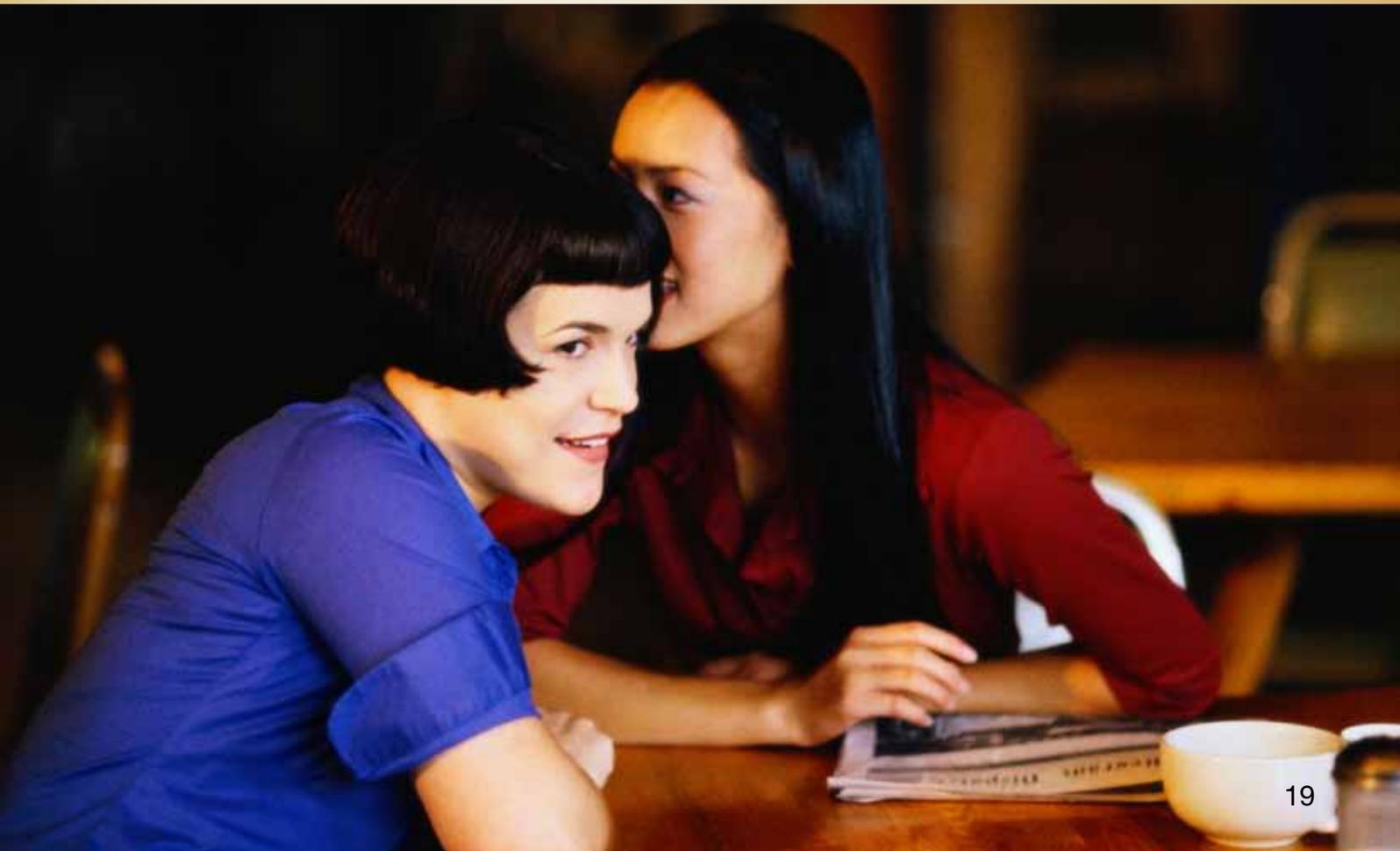
NICOLA: That's exactly what I said.

HOLLY: Well how do you know he's having an affair then?

NICOLA: A friend of mine works at this hotel and saw him there with this mystery woman, holding her hand, kissing her neck. Can you believe it?

HOLLY: How can she be sure it's him?

NICOLA: Well he checked in with his real name for a start. He's never been the brightest bulb let's face it.



[Pause]

HOLLY: Yeah that was pretty stupid.

NICOLA: So, how do we tell Lisa that her seemingly wonderful boyfriend of nearly four years is actually a cheating scumbag?

HOLLY: I... er –

[The WAITER enters with a tray with two mugs on and places them on the table.]

WAITER: Okay lovely ladies. Just shout if you need anything else.

NICOLA: Thanks. Look, she's on her way now, what do we do?

[Exit WAITER stage right.]

HOLLY: Is it just me, or was that waiter totally hot?

NICOLA: Holly, stay focused.

HOLLY: Oh right, so what did your friend say this mystery woman looked like?

NICOLA: Well she didn't get a very close look but just the usual boyfriend-stealing slutty type. Long blonde hair, tall-ish, curvy in all the right places of course, without the tight dress and push-up bra I doubt she'd be anything special. How do we tell Lisa?

HOLLY: Why does she need to be told anything?

NICOLA: What about when she finds out her two best friends knew all along?

HOLLY: Hey you dragged me into this. I didn't ask to know what Greg was getting up to on his weekends.

NICOLA: But I needed to get it off my chest. [Pause] How would you feel if your boyfriend cheated on you?

HOLLY: Well I don't have a boyfriend.

NICOLA: I know, but if you did?

HOLLY: Then I'd keep him happy so he didn't have to go looking elsewhere.

NICOLA: Of course you would. Look, how are we going to break this to her?

HOLLY: To be honest, I don't think it's our place to say anything.

NICOLA: Who has more right than her best friends?

HOLLY: Greg for a start. How about I meet up with him, tell him we know and then let him take it from there.

NICOLA: That's a terrible idea.

HOLLY: Wait a minute Nic, how do we know he's even cheating? He could have been on a business trip? The mystery woman could be a friend, or maybe his sister or a cousin?

NICOLA: He doesn't have a sister.

HOLLY: What I'm saying is, we could get her all upset over nothing. At least if we tell Greg first maybe he could explain if it's just a mix up.

NICOLA: But apparently they were booked into some fancy, expensive suite.

HOLLY: That doesn't mean anything does it?

NICOLA: With a king size bed.

HOLLY: So what?

NICOLA: And a 'Do Not Disturb' sign hanging from the door knob. Those things can't be explained as a simple business trip and I really hope he wasn't with his cousin or we might be dealing with something worse than we first thought!

HOLLY: But what if he isn't cheating at all?

NICOLA: Come on, she knows we wouldn't make it up.

HOLLY: Wow it's getting warm in here.

NICOLA: How are we going to do this?

HOLLY: I think I've got too many layers on.

[Holly takes off her jumper and fans herself with her hands.]

NICOLA: Do you have any ideas?

HOLLY: About what? Do you think anyone would mind if I turned this radiator off?

NICOLA: Holly it's like zero degrees today. How are we going to tell Lisa?

HOLLY: Oh I don't know. Did I tell you I have to meet some people from work? I've just remembered so I'll probably have to leave in a minute anyway.

NICOLA: Surely it's not that important if –

HOLLY: - It is Nic. Let's not tell Lisa anything yet. We don't know for sure what he's doing anyway.

NICOLA: What kind of proof do you think we need then?

HOLLY: I don't know do I.

NICOLA: So you really think we should wait?

HOLLY: It's about time someone listened to me.

NICOLA: I've got a better idea, how about we dress up in disguise and hang around the Travelodge waiting for Greg to appear with his other woman.

HOLLY: It was just an idea.

NICOLA: Well it wasn't a good one.

HOLLY: I know she's our friend but now isn't the right time.

NICOLA: She'll get hurt no matter when she finds out.

HOLLY: I definitely think we should wait, trust me on this one.

NICOLA: I chose the wrong person to confide in didn't I!

HOLLY: Maybe you did because I have my own stuff going on.

NICOLA: More important than your best friend?

HOLLY: Oh Nic just give it a bloody rest would you?

[Pause]

NICOLA: No, no I won't. She'll be here any minute and – [HOLLY shouts and then lowers her voice to a whisper.]

HOLLY: - IT'S ME ALRIGHT... It's me. Just leave it. I don't want to tell her yet because–

NICOLA: - What? [Pause] I know you can't be telling me that you're cheating with Greg because friends DO NOT do that to friends.

HOLLY: Nic, technically it's not cheating, we love each other. He just happens to be in a relationship.

NICOLA: Yeah with Lisa. I knew you were a bitch but I at least thought you were loyal to your –

[Enter LISA stage left, smiling broadly. She walks to the table and sits down between HOLLY and NICOLA.]

LISA: - Hi guys. Sorry I'm late but hey... do I have some news for you!

NICOLA: Lisa we need to go –

HOLLY: - Oh I love a bit of gossip. Sit down Nic, don't be rude, Lisa's only just got here.

NICOLA: And now you care –

LISA: - I'm engaged!

[HOLLY'S jaw drops slightly, she stares at Lisa.]

NICOLA: What? To who?

LISA: Who do you think? Greg asked me last night.

[Pause] I walked in from work, there were loads of candles, he had this whole speech prepared and got down on one knee. It was just so... What's up with you pair?

NICOLA: Er, nothing. I just can't believe it.

LISA: Well don't overwhelm me with congratulations.

[NICOLA stands up behind LISA's chair then puts her hands on LISA's shoulders.]

HOLLY: Greg proposed to you? [Pause] He actually got down on one knee to you?

LISA: Yeah. Look at the ring... it's just perfect isn't it.

HOLLY: What? No. It's not perfect at all. He doesn't love you.

NICOLA: Holly, just go -

HOLLY: - He loves me. This is such a mistake. That ring... I bet that ring was meant for me. You just assumed he was proposing.

NICOLA: You're determined to get what you want no matter -

LISA: - Hold on. Is this a joke?

HOLLY: I didn't want to hurt you; we just can't help how we feel. I know it's painful now but he can move into mine straight away to make things easier on you.

LISA: Er, what?

NICOLA: Holly, you need to leave right now!

LISA: Nic, it's fine. I didn't realise... I just thought... Holly I thought you knew. He said you didn't mind.

HOLLY: Didn't mind what?

NICOLA: Lisa, you're in shock. I'll get you a tea. Holly, get out of here.

LISA: Nic please, sit down. [NICOLA sits back down.] It's just this thing we like to do.

[Pause]

HOLLY: What is?

[LISA laughs to herself.]

LISA: Oh it seems so silly to other people. We just have these casual things every once in a while... Just little flings, it's an agreement we've had for ages. Just to keep things fresh and electric.

NICOLA: Lisa, I can't believe you're saying this. He's in the wrong; you don't need to defend him.

LISA: I'm not defending him... I tend to go with this bloke from work and... Greg said he quite liked the idea of Holly.

[Pause]

HOLLY: What? This is so pathetic. Just give it up Lisa.

LISA: I honestly thought you knew.

NICOLA: Wait, you're being serious?

[LISA nods and NICOLA shakes her head in confusion.]

HOLLY: I know this is hard to understand Lisa but me and Greg have been together for nearly a year.

LISA: Holly, I'm so sorry I thought you were okay with this. If I'd have known you were going to fall for him properly -

HOLLY: - Me? Fall for him? Other way around love, he wants me. He approached me first. We stay at hotels and he comes to mine -

LISA: - Twice a week, Monday and Thursday? I just thought you knew the arrangement.

NICOLA: You let Greg sleep with Holly for all this time? I just... I don't get that.

LISA: Oh, it's not just Holly, there's a girl from the gym he sees on a Wednesday.

[HOLLY pushes her chair back and stands up then slams her hands on the table.]

HOLLY: You liar! He loves me.

NICOLA: Er, Holly, I don't think she's lying.

LISA: It just keeps the spark... sparking. You know, adds a bit of spice. We both get three days off a week.

NICOLA: Lisa that's so wrong.

LISA: I get my fair share of fun don't worry.

NICOLA: That's not what I was worrying about!

LISA: It just works Nic. I wouldn't expect anyone else to understand -

HOLLY: - NO... it doesn't work because it isn't true and you know it.

NICOLA: I thought we were all friends.

LISA: We are Nic. Please don't be like this.

NICOLA: Holly was cheating with your boyfriend. You let him go with your best friend whilst she thought they were in love. I don't know which one of you is worse.

LISA: Technically it's not cheating though because I knew about it.

HOLLY: No, this just isn't happening.

LISA: Don't worry, it all ends now. Greg said that proposing was his way of saying he wants me and only me.

[HOLLY sits back down in disbelief.]

NICOLA: Oh well that makes it alright then doesn't it.

LISA: It just works for us. We get the freedom of being single and the comfort of a relationship. I didn't know Holly would get hurt.

NICOLA: I can't understand this; I just don't get how either of you could do this to each other.

[NICOLA picks up her things and hurriedly exits stage left.]

LISA: Oh Nic wait. Holly I'm sorry, I just thought you knew.

HOLLY: I obviously didn't. I can't believe I felt guilty for going behind your back with Greg.

[LISA exits stage left with her head down. As she leaves, the WAITER approaches the table.]

WAITER: I think the whole place overheard that conversation. Are you alright? Looks like you've been given a bit of a rough time.

[He sits down next to HOLLY.]

HOLLY: Just a bit. How could he do that to me?

WAITER: So you thought he was the one then?

HOLLY: Yeah, well most of the time. I just can't understand Lisa, she calls herself a friend? What happened to having mates you could rely on?

WAITER: And what about the fella?

HOLLY: Oh believe me, I'm over him already. I just want to meet a nice bloke, or at least someone normal.

WAITER: In that case, maybe I can help?

HOLLY: I don't see how.

WAITER: Well, do you fancy a drink with me tomorrow night?

[Pause]

HOLLY: Oh...

WAITER: I'm just talking a couple of drinks; nothing serious. You could do with a good night out.

HOLLY: You're so right; I think I deserve to let my hair down after today.

WAITER: So? I'm a nice guy I promise.

HOLLY: Yeah, okay, why not? What's your number?

[The WAITER writes his number on a napkin.]

WAITER: Great! Well my girlfriend will be at the gym all night, so I can do any time after six. Call me.

[HOLLY watches the WAITER as he exits stage right. She folds the napkin up and puts it in her bag. The lights fade to black.]

END

Adventures Through Pakistan

by Rizwan Irfan



Imagine a place where tradition meets modernity; where wealth and poverty intermingle, where nature and technology signed a peace treaty and now coexist. Vivid villages stand victorious amongst the hostile habitat, where many market stalls bandy for your attention as you stroll on past. Just imagine luscious landscapes abundant with wildlife. Monkeys chatter away in the trees, like cheeky children, heard but not seen. Exotic birds call from high above, the excitable

Chukar partridge shouts up at them whilst the Greylag Goose gossips with its neighbours by the water's edge. Rich smells and scintillating colours overwhelm you in the Friday bazaar, where traditional dress is sold alongside the latest "designer" clothing. Imagine all of the above, but enveloped in a cloud of dust. And there you have Pakistan.

Our flight touched down at Islamabad International Airport roughly sixty miles west of our home town Ghorghushti. Typical of most small villages and towns, Ghorghushti is not found on many maps. Ghorghushti is situated in Punjab province, near the border with North West Frontier Province. In recent years, the once small village has grown into a modern town, with a major hospital, schools and five banks. As little as ten years ago, the only modes of transport were either by horseback or by seldom used cars on long, dusty trails. Journeys by car took up to seven hours, and on horseback they could take a whole day. This differs greatly with today as the airport now runs a taxi service which will get you to Ghorghushti in around two hours. The new multimillion pound Benazir Bhutto International Airport has replaced the old Islamabad International Airport.

So, feeling adventurous and somewhat swayed by my father's enthusiasm, I opted to travel by horseback, or in my case,

donkeyback. The jetlag after a fifteen hour flight may also have affected my judgement. We set off on the dusty track a few hours after arriving at the airport. My father managed to obtain transport from a guide he recognised to be from the same caste as us. This may seem irreverent, but caste and ethnicity are still significant in all aspects of Pakistani life, for better or for worse. Belonging to a particular caste made all the difference between being questioned at the airport or obtaining goods at a low price at a market. You could feel accepted or be ostracised in Pakistan, depending where you were.

As the smallest member of the group, I was given the smallest "mode of transport", a remarkably dejected looking donkey with the charisma of Eeyore - though nowhere near as cheerful. This miniature beast of boredom bore me almost sixty miles to my hometown without changing pace; although it moved so slowly it was hard to tell.

Our group arrived at the first village on the way just as motion sickness was setting in. The gentle swaying of the haunches is akin to being rocked on a boat. I felt for my father, who must have passed through all seven stormy seas on his camel. Camels are the 4x4 of the animal kingdom: loud, uncooperative and arrogant.

The landscape of my home country was remarkable to gaze upon. At



the first village lush vegetation surrounded us and we saw many wonderful creatures. There were tall cranes at the water's side, standing as still as soldiers. The haughty flamingos stood in the middle of the pond, looking down their beaks at the drab waterfowl in their work clothes, scurrying about in search of fish. Once or twice I thought I glimpsed a leopard with its long black tail, darting into the undergrowth. Or maybe it was a snake. My father later told me it was probably just sheep.

Suddenly, our guide stopped, frozen. There was a bear ahead of us, loitering by the woods. Our animals pawed the ground nervously, birds flew from the trees. Time seemed to slow to the speed of my donkey. And then it saw us, and there was a tense standoff. Finally, the bear decided to leave, and we could carry on again. The incident was a sobering reminder of the dangers of living in the country.

As the initial awe wore off, the monotony dawned on me. Each village we passed was the same, rustic and sleepy, with the same curious faces lining the streets to see the visitors from another land. Some politely begging and some more demanding.

The wildlife and villages were all strangely familiar, as if I had seen them before. It was as if God had hoovered up an African village and dumped it west of India and south of Afghanistan. Huge mountains loomed on the landscape, never getting closer or further away. They stood next to each other saluting the sky, standing to attention as we ambled past.

Finally we arrived. Waiting for us was the family I had never met. Dismounting my noble steed, I went to greet them. It had been a long but exciting journey. It had taken eleven hours, and I was somewhat sad that it was over. But as much as I had enjoyed it, next time I think I'll take the car.

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www.cazart.co.uk

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www.flash500.com

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www.saltpublishing.com/prizes/poetry/crashawprize.php

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www.writers-forum.com

The Writers' Forum has monthly competitions for both poetry and short stories.

www.bridportprize.org.uk

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