

# [UNTITLED]

"[Untitled], For Falkirk's Sake and Nomenclature  
spoken word gigs have reinvigorated audiences and  
performers at the grass roots levels"  
Alan Bissett, Alight Here (2015)

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Alan Bissett

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Helen MacKinven

Eddie McEleney

Eilidh McKenzie

Emma Mooney

Gary Oberg

Rebecca Smith

Lesley Traynor





Hieeeeeeeeeee,

Welcome to #UntitledSeven, the biggest, boldest and some may say best edition of [Untitled], the magazine that's aww about Falkirk, the folk within it and the work coming out of it.

Since we began in 2012 the literary scene in Falkirk has blossomed. There's never been so many opportunities for writers, musicians and artists to get involved. There are now several publications dedicated to the arts and spoken word events and writers groups are taking place more regularly. It has been a pleasure to watch writers go from debuting their work at our monthly spoken word event *Wooer With Words* to having their first novel published. Just as they have helped grow *Wooer With Words* it's been a joy to play a small part in their journey.

During our open call for submissions, we received so many contributions that we had to staple in a few extra pages to make room for them all. #UntitledSeven boasts a fantastic selection of writers from across the length and breadth of Falkirk as well as some quality work from writers from further afield who luckily for us keep coming back to perform for us Bairns at spoken word events throughout the year.

In these four years [Untitled] has quickly become Falkirk's leading arts publication dedicated to promoting writing and visual art. To date we have had the privilege to publish some of Falkirk's finest writers like; Alan Bissett, Adam Stafford and Gordon Legge, as well as publishing some of the area's fantastic emerging writers for the first time.

We produce a diverse range of open mic gigs and cabaret style shows around Central Scotland, creating a platform for emerging writers to develop and perform at a grass roots level. Shows like *[Untitled] Six Live*, *[Untitled] Now* and *Nomenclature* with *The Grind Journal* have given new writers an opportunity to perform their writing in Falkirk alongside some of Scotland's award winning like Janice Galloway, Liz Lochhead, Jenni Fagan and Falkirk icon Janet Paisley.

In September 2016 we hosted *Rhyme and Punishment* as part of the *Shindig Festival*, our first show to take place in Stirling. Featuring some of the UK's most exciting performers including Salford's Mike Garry, the event highlights our continuing commitment to bringing the best performers to areas that are generally receive less support than the big cities.

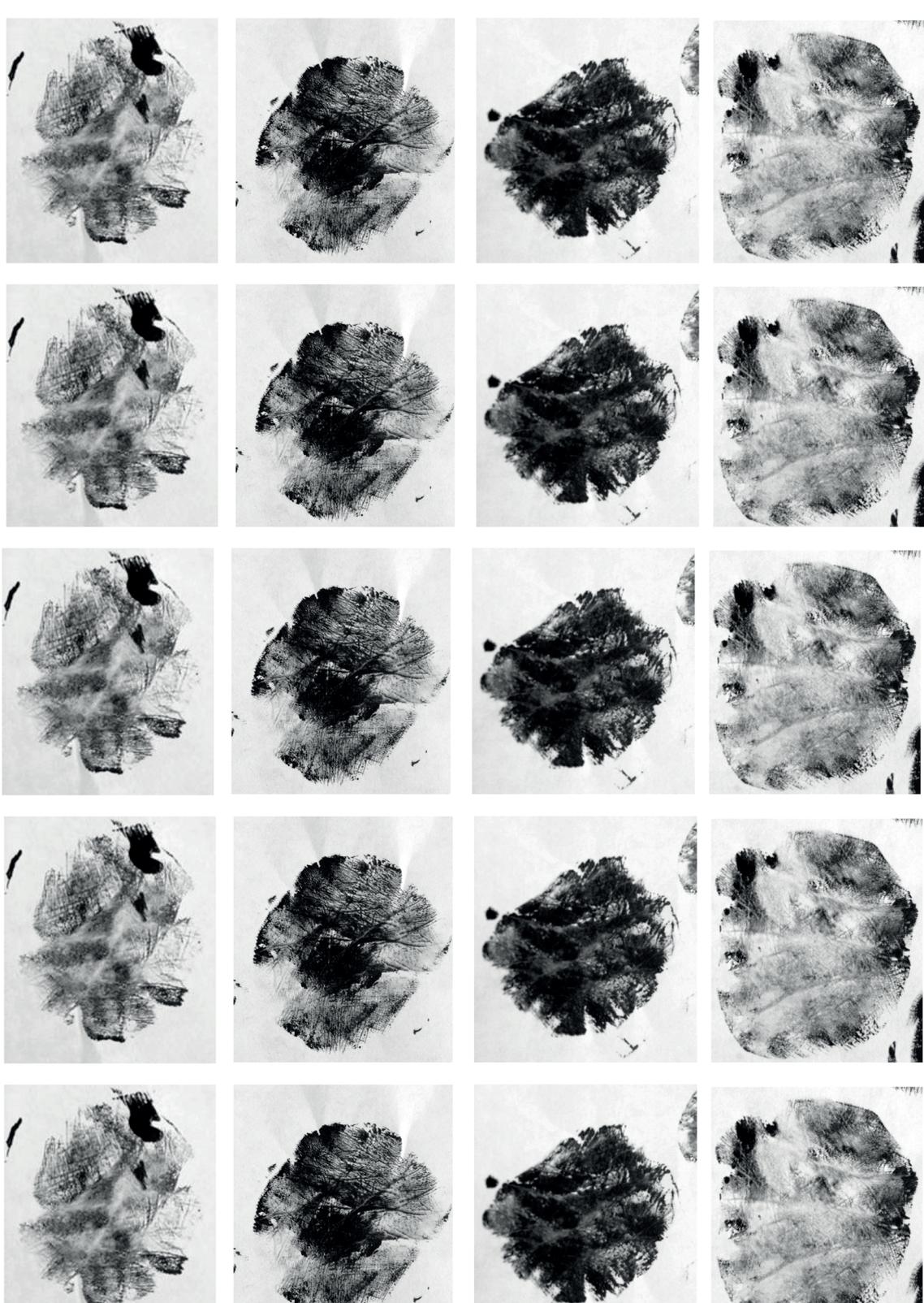
Looking forward to 2017 we're anticipating: more collaborations, more publishing opportunities and more events for you to get involved in. As always we love to hear what you're up to so follow us on yon facebook and twitter to keep in touch. We're a self funded not for profit venuture. Every penny goes back into making the publication and paying our performers what we can when we can, your support is valued more than ever.

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# Whine Of The Ancient Mariners

Matt Hamilton

“Fancy The Mariner Centre?”

“Mmmmm.”

“Mmmmmmm? Mmmmm whit? Mmmmmmm maybe? Mmmmmmm nae wiy? Am afraid ahl hae tae press Sir for a mair detailed answer. Or else ahl be forced tae batter it oot ye with ae pair of cauld, damp, shitty speedos, applied at great pace tae yer face.”

“You should be on a register. Or just locked up.”

“Never. They cannae oppress me. They huvnae built a jail that can haud the twelve and a hawf staine ae slightly flaccid muscle that makes up this boy.”

“Cannae dae The Mariner anyhow.”

“How?”

“Life ban.”

“Ha, seriously? Life ban? Wit did yeh dae, spill the wee wifie at the window’s hot chocolate o’er her knitting? How long ago wis this?”

“Bout four years ago”

“Christ, four years? Their grasp of daily reality is a bit suspect at the best of times. Too long behind the gless, like goldfish. They’ll have forgotten by now.”

“Naw, naw no this.

“Really? This ahl really hae tae hear...”

“Ok then, sit back Dearest and ahl let yeh know exactly what occurred. Feel

free to ask anythin' you feel unclear about. Are yeh sittin' comfortably? Then ahl begin... A'd been at fives and wee Polmont Joe asked me if I fancied joining him for a cheeky wee night at his mates. Talk o' some eye watering new super strong smoke or other."

"Hawd oan, is that wee Joe fae Polmont? Cleft palate, orthopaedic Nikes?"

"Naw, that's wee Tam fae Polmont. At that time he was oot of Bonnybridge anyway, although he is in Polmont noo. For a ten stretch. Wee Polmont Joe is six feet four."

"I thought that was Wee Camelon Joe."

"It is. He's relocated his entire operation owing to personal health concerns."

"Ahhh, gotcha. Continue."

"Joe drove me up tae some English mate o' his in Camelon. Hoose was a coup. Nothing in it but a rug, a battered auld settee and a pile ae grumble mags you could have used as a supporting pier for the Forth Rail Bridge. They caud him Vesuvius."

"Ok, ahl bite, why Vesuvius?"

"Nae worries, Ah had to ask tae. It was because he lays mostly dormant, surrounded by ash."

"Makes sense."

"Anyways, after quite the industrial night, Ah woke up in the morning on this scummy carpet, still totally toasted. Ah decided that Ah needed to peel mysel aff the floor and hit the vertical. Pausing only to write "Do Not Resuscitate" on the foreheid of my huge tubby new pal on the couch, I left."

"Where was Wee Polmont Joe at this point?"

"He had turned a whiter shade of pale about 2am during a hectic Pink Floyd remix and made his excuses. Anyways, Ah leave the flat and staring right at me, across the road, The Mariner Centre. Still absolutely wasted Ah decide

Ah've never needed anything more in my life than a swim."

"Aye, those post soiree desires are mighty strong right enough"

"Indeed. Ah still have my fives gear and a towel so I stumble across and pay my dues. They looked at me a bit funny but it was first 'hing in the morning in Camelon like, I'm sure they've seen much worse. Such was the extent of ma drugged stupor that I changed into ma whole fitbaw kit, the full monty like, boots and top and everything, and then sat for about ten minutes wondering why I was sitting masel on the bench and why there was nae pitch and just a door."

"Heavy."

"Oh yeah, as fucking lead. So I come to a little, take off ma boots and top and stagger into the pool. The place is empty, save for some class of bobbing pensioners. They're everywhere. Struggling up the ladders, old feet slapping on the tiles, yabbering away, pasty flesh hanging out aw o'er in white folds. Noo remember at this point, Ah was still stoked and these are giving me the fear, like seriously. All Ah see are dentures and varicose veins floating past me, cackling, mint imperials rattling off top plates like typewriters. Ah even touched wan o' 'em, it was like wet crepe paper. Ah coulnae handle it."

"So whit did yeh dae, play the joker? Leave?"

"That's the 'hing, Ah couldne handle them all, so Ah swam away and climbed oot the deep end and just stood there. And they're all staring right at me, wide eyes, horror etched on there wrinkled auld faces. Then Ah realised Ah had ma white knock off Juventus shorts fae the market on. Cheap. White. Nylon. Soaking wet. Nothing left to the imagination. Even for the short sighted wans straining tae get a better look. Single pork link. We're talking full disclosure.

Noo they're aw laughing, pointing away, clustering like."

"Oh Jesus. Clustering is 'nae good."

"Yeah, so A'hm trapped. Nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide, in the words of Diana Ross. So looking about just then, Ah noticed ma way oot. That wee ladder, the wee seat halfway along and up the wall. Like a wee birds nest. The

wave machine. So up Ah climb, all those wrinkly faces turned towards me and then Ah just do it. Ah hit the button. Bang. Heel ae ma haun.. Then ah swivel that wee red dial up to full.”

“Where were the lifeguards?”

“Lifeguard. Singular. Pasty fat lump, engrossed wae his phone, tapping away and yawning.”

“Nae match.”

“Unsafe staffing levels my friend, corners cut..”

“Indeed. Ah turn it up full, shut the wee hatch and feel the vibrations build, rumbling through ma feet. And Ah look doon and Ah see panic. Wide eyed stunned panic. Yeh can smell it. And that’s when Ah started laughing. Watching all they auld faces being spun through the surf, bobbing and swaying as the waves build and build and build. And the fear has caused the auld bladders to unleash. Wit a didnae ken wis, that The Mariner wur testin some new dye in the water that turns bright red when it comes intae contact wi pish.”

“Yer jokin’ a thought that wis a myth”

“Aye, and yon dye is pretty unforgiving, nae where tae hide there, ken.”

“Correct. They’re being whisked roon the pool, big red trails behind them aw. It wis like the red arrows. And right in the middle, wan auld yin has lost her swim cap and her wig, her wee bauldy heid bobbing up and doon in the same place. So Ah began laughing harder and harder until the tears are blinding me. And this fat lifeguard is trying to get through to me but Ah’ve got baith feet on the hatch. No way he’s getting to me. And the old faces are all swirling about, moaning and shouting and screaming, like a ghost train. The waves are breaking er the edge ae the pool which is noo like a huge purple soup with all these white croutons being thrown everywhere. This must have gone on about twenty, thirty minutes. And that whole time Ah’m hysterical, laughing as hard as fuck.”

“Then whit happened?”

The Polis come. The fat lifeguard has scrambled the emergency services and they turn up mob handed and less than amused. Turns oot one of the sergeants mothers is the bauldy pivot around which the auld bobbers spin. It took them about two minutes flat to drag me oot the building and into a van. I was still wearing those shorts, flapping about affronted inside damp nylon."

"Yeh paint quite a fantastic picture. What happened tae the auld yins?"

"Ah was told later that they fished them oot and took them up tae the Royal for check ups. Few bumps and bruises but most of the damage was psychological. Post traumatic wave disorders. Ah heard fae a pal's maw that some ae them still cannae face a shallow bath. Flashbacks o'er the Radox."

"So how come Ah never heard about this until the noo?"

"They couldn'ae decide whit exactly tae charge me wi. No one could quite decide. Plus the big sergeant whose bauldy mother was involved, broke my nose on the way tae the station. Let's just say there was a bit of a fuss and a deal wis agreed for all charges to be dropped. Plus The Mariner Centre wanted it kept oot the paper in case it affected business, cause ae aww the red dye.

So nae story in The Herald either. Aw done."

"Jesus, that's quite the tale, nae wonder yeh dinnae want tae go swimming."

"Ah never said that. Said Ah couldn't go to The Mariner."

"So yeh up for a swim then, aye?"

"Of course."

"Whit about Grangemouth then ?"

"Nae bother. Just wan thing?"

"Whit?"

"Hus it goat a wave machine?"

# The Bigger Game

## Juliette Lee

Mrs Ronson was a skinny lady with a moon face, lank mousy hair and red glasses. She started every session by tilting her head to the left and smiling in her 'I'm trying to be your friend but I'm really horrified by what you've done' kind of way.

I was twelve when they first discovered the flock of dead birds beneath the exposed roots of an oak tree. It wasn't long before they found them all over the village: the school, shops, our house. I'm not sure how many I killed but I prided myself on placing them in as many unusual places as I could: letterboxes; the trays of fresh rolls waiting to be loaded on to the van outside Fred's Home bakery; the basket of old Mary's pushbike; our cat's bag of dried food; Mrs Clark; the French teacher's special drawer of strange objects from France; the janitor's bucket; the bonnet of various parked cars.

It wasn't that I enjoyed killing birds exactly, more that I envied their freedom, their ability to fly away whenever they wanted.

I was a cracking shot with my sling and some very carefully chosen stones.

Twang. Thwack. Thud.

Getting away with it was easy. If I started sobbing, Mrs Ronson would pat my hand and tell me everything would be alright if only I would tell her what was happening at home to cause me to do such a thing. So I told her that my mum had found out that my dad was sleeping with Miss Collins, my piano teacher, but I wasn't supposed to know and my lessons had stopped suddenly. Because they were trying to put it behind them, telling everyone the real reason why I killed birds would only make things worse so I made her promise not say anything. Her final report summarised my mental state as 'deeply conflicted through recent parental relations issues, but no further threat'.

I moved onto bigger things after that.

Not straight away of course. I waited about nine months until one day I saw

Mr McDonald out walking his boxer Rex, and thought what was the harm in killing an old dog that didn't have long to live anyway? So I offered to help walk Rex twice a week and planned how I might do it.

Options: get another dog to attack him in the park; drown him; get him run over or poison him with some rotten meat.

I chose the 'get him run over' option.

All I had to do was find a busy junction, let him off the lead and see if he would follow me across the road. There was a strong probability he would be hit. And of course one day he was. He was so badly hurt that he didn't make it to the vet. I pretended to be traumatised. No psychologist this time. I was home free.

But I still waited another nine months before raising my game.

There were a couple of sheep in a small field near our house. They belonged to Jessica and Noleen Thompson who were several years younger than me. The Thompsons were one of those rich city families who wanted a change of lifestyle. Mr Thompson worked for Rio Tinto, a big mining company and stayed in Paddington in a company flat from Tuesday to Friday. He travelled a lot with his job so we rarely saw much of him. Mrs Thompson always wore lots of make-up, kept her long blond hair very straight and changed the colour of her manicured nails almost every day.

They called the sheep Lady and Gaga. With names like that they deserved to be put out of their misery.

I often saw the girls in their Joules sweatshirts and Hunter wellies taking the sheep carrots and turnip, one with a blue bucket, the other yellow. I'd read that if sheep roll over onto their backs they can't get up again and die from a gassed up stomach. The worst time is in the summer before they're sheared because they get itchy.

I bought some itching power from a joke shop to try it out.

I waited until dark and climbed into the field. The silly sheep were so used to people that they didn't budge and carried on grazing. I chose the nearest one for my experiment. Using some rubber gloves from the kitchen, I parted the

wool on her back, rubbed the itching powder into her skin then walked back to the fence and waited.

After a few minutes Lady or Gaga turned her head and began trying to chew at the now annoying itch. She became more insistent as the powder started to take effect and within ten minutes, she had rolled over. I held my breath and waited. She couldn't get back up.

In the morning, the girls found her dead.

Having a go at the other one would be too obvious so I decided to leave it and take my time to figure out how I could up the stakes even more.

I'm fourteen now, old enough to take some of the little ones to school.

# Couples Only

## Peter Callaghan

“Couples only,” said the burly bouncer.  
Dismissing my him for not being her.  
“We are a couple,” I meekly replied.  
He folded his arms, leaned forward and sighed.

“Look pal,” he countered. “Don’t try to be smart.  
Hearts and Hibs are playing today. Which part  
Of couples only don’t you understand?”  
I glanced at my boyfriend, hand not in hand.

Tongue-tied and flush-faced, I tried once again:  
“We are a couple.” But all was in vain.  
For just then, a couple, husband and wife,  
Boyfriend and girlfriend or best pals for life.

Brushed quickly past like a stiff autumn breeze  
Without so much as an “excuse me, please”  
Or three degrees from the man on the door.  
Talk about mad! I want the same, not more.

And definitely no less, human rights.  
Had I been my straight brother, prone to fights  
When the personal turns political,  
I would have nailed “thou shalt not” with “I will”.

But being gay and cautious, not out long,  
I surrendered my right though he was wrong,  
Held my tongue (not Jack’s hand), then more fool I  
Did a Dionne Warwick and walked on by.

# Stick Tae Yer Ain Kind

## Emma Mooney

Cathy feels hur welly bits fill wi water. Freezin cauld water.

She stares in tae the gapin mooth o the concrete tunnel an thinks o the lion snarlin an barin its teeth oan the circus posters stuck up aroond toun. She takes a deep breath, imagines she's the lion tamer, an steps inside.

The tunnel is some sort o large pipe an she prays it's no got sewage in it. Within a few metres it narrows an she hus tae stoop afore she can go any further. It's cauld inside. An dark. Hur back scrapes along the concrete ceiling as she squeezes forward an she's beginnin tae wish she stayed at hame an played wi hur *Pippa* dolls. She pauses an waits fur hur eyes tae adjust but very little sunlight reaches this far in.

The air in the tunnel smells bad an she remembers last summer when hur da foond the deid rat in the box o auld *Reader's Digests* at the back o the garage. It'd been deid so long maggots wur crawlin oot o its eye sockets, or at least that's whit Jimmy telt hur. She hudnae been brave enough tae look.

Thur's a flicker o movement ahead an she freezes. Any rats in here urr still very much alive. She hauds hur breath an stares intae the darkness.

The ball lies a few metres awa an she calculates she should be able tae reach it within two or three mair steps. Nearly goat it, she tells hursel an slides one foot closer. The water ripples but that's okay, it's jist the movement o hur foot. She lifts hur other foot ready tae step forward an grab the ball but stops. Suhin is movin in the water in front o hur. She's no alone.

Hur screams bounce aff the curved walls o the tunnel sendin the creature intae a frenzy as it whips its body towards hur. She screams again an tries tae turn aroond but the pipe is too narrow. Thrustin hur hands against the cauld, damp walls, she pushes but disnae notice the rock oan the ground behind hur until it's too late an she tumbles doon. Dirty water covers hur an she splutters an spits tae try an clear hur mooth. She grabs a corner o hur t-shirt tae wipe hur face an stops. There it is. In front o hur. Two black eyes stare back at hur oot o the darkness. She needs tae dae suhin quick, suhin tae scare it awa afore it swims towards hur. Afore it bites hur, paralyzin hur.

She splashes the water wi both hands but the snake disnae move. She's trapped. The cauld water wraps itself aroond hur body, grips hur tight an squeezes.

Keepin hur thoughts focused oan reachin the ootside world she scrambles backwards, barely noticin the tiny shards o gravel cuttin intae the heels o hur hands. A glint o sunlight flashes oan the ceiling an she keeps pushin, kickin at the muddy water in front o hur. She needs tae git oot o here afore the creature makes its move.

‘Whit the fuck urr ye daein? Whaur’s ma baw?’

Jimmy is behind hur, shoutin, but she disnae take hur eyes aff the openin in front o hur.

The snake might appear any moment. A hand lifts hur gently tae hur feet an leads hur awa, back tae the pile o jumpers that urr this afternoon’s make-shift goals. She pulls hur gaze awa fae the tunnel entrance an looks up tae see hur rescuer rummagin through the pile until he finds hur blue hooded top. Thomas.

‘Here,’ he says an wraps it aroond hur shooders.

Jimmy appears back wi the ball an Thomas moves awa. ‘Goat it,’ he says haudin the ball up fur everyone tae see. ‘Wisnae so fuckin hard, wis it? Whit’s up wi ye?’

‘Thur’s a snake.’

The gang o boys burst oot laughin.

‘A snake,’ mimics Jimmy, ‘in Scoatlind?’

‘I saw it. It wis in the tunnel.’

‘Ye dinnae git snakes in Scoatlind. Yer makin it up.’

‘Am not,’ she shouts. The threat of tears sting the corner o hur eyes.

Thur’s no wey Jimmy’s friends urr goan tae see hur cry. They’ll laugh at hur an call hur a sissy. But she’s different. She’ll show them that girls can be as brave as boys.

Jimmy’s wavin his hand aboot in front o hur face. ‘Och aye, Ah’m a Scoattish snake.’

‘Leave me alone,’ she shouts. ‘Ah ken whit Ah saw.’

But hur brother’s no goan tae gie up so easily, he’s enjoyin the game. ‘Or mibbe it escaped fae the circus. Mibbe it disappeared through the sewer tunnels an swam aw the wey here.

Oh, wait a minute though, snakes cannae swim.’

A voice speaks up fae the back o the group. ‘Actually you do get snakes in Scotland.’

Cathy turns tae see who is brave enough tae disagree wi hur brother an is surprised tae see it’s hur rescuer, Thomas O’Flannigan.

‘And snakes can swim.’

She could hug him right now. If he wisnae a boy.

‘Shut it, Fenian.’ Jimmy picks up a stick fae the ground an steps

towards Thomas. 'Whit wid you ken? Aw they teach ye in that skil is a load o mumbo jumbo. Ye ken fuck aw.' He presses the stick intae Thomas' chest an shoves him backwards. 'Yer only here cos ma maw said we hud tae bring ye.'

Cathy watches Thomas walk away an wishes she could run after him, take his hand like he took hurs an stand up tae hur brother. Thomas says there urr snakes in Scotland an she believes him. She disnae think aw the kids that go tae that skil urr as stupid as Jimmy says.

# Solstice

Lesley Traynor

golden light caresses  
the platinum waste land  
footfall follows silent footfall  
as they progress towards  
the stones with no shadow

higher and higher they spiral  
eagles on the thermal of life  
heat burns steady steps  
the pulse of the day still beats  
day lives in the night  
night pulls on the mantle of day  
they are one

clasped hands weave  
another year between the stones  
raised hands acknowledge  
the time of plenty has arrived  
blood is their gift of thanks  
the sun briefly bows its head  
a new day is born

# Paperback Romance

## Bethany Ruth Anderson

Every perfection and flaw was exposed to me then, even the mole on the small of his back that he hated so much. I loved that he was so skinny, that I could feel every rib and hold every sinew of his body. I could feel his breath quickening in my ear. Soft, whimpering desperation. And that was it. That was the culmination and the climax of our summer of romance.

Instinctively, he rolled over and reached for his *Marlboro Lights* on the bedside table while I reached for my pants, pulling them up over warm thighs. He tapped the cigarette on the back of the packet before lighting it with a match, shaking out the light. His lips turned into the perfect pout as he puffed, small streaks of smoke reaching out into the sunlight. There he was: my American dream. A Californian musician, dark hair and eyes that were complemented with the gentle tan of the southern sun. A joker, but sensitive and serious. Intense. I was his fantasy too; the petite Scottish girl with her Irish complexion. Brunette and all blue eyes, pale skin that struggled with the heat. We pretended to ourselves that it meant it was fate that we should meet, when really we were no more than two lost souls looking for an anchor.

"I'll miss you," he said. His eyes sought me out as dust whirled around our heads in the fading sunlight. I turned to him then, putting the sparkle that he knew and fell for back into my eyes and on sad lips.

"I'll miss you too." And we did. We missed each other like any person would miss something they enjoyed, would miss something they found exotic, would miss a good holiday. I was part of his summer, and he was part of mine. In all the heat and sunlight we liked to pretend that it meant so much more; we liked to pretend that summer extended into life.

When he reached for my hand, our palms came together; an electrifying sensation but clammy and damp. My heart swelled in my chest and I was glad that I was too choked to speak. His cigarette rested in the ashtray; the smoke and the smell drifted through the silence. He parted his lips as if to speak, as if to say the foolish words that I couldn't say.

Three words remained unspoken. Let's not pretend.

# True Love Ways

## Alan Bissett

Hink ye're hard dae ye, mate?

I'll show ye hard, ya cunt.  
I'll fuckin show ye.

Listen mate, Ah'm comin roon tay your fuckin hoose.  
Aye I'm comin tay get you, ya wee cunt.

Whit the fuck are ye phonin me fur anyway?  
I don't wantay talk tay ye. Ye're scum, mate.

Aw, ma girlfriend's a slag?  
Mate, whit about that wee skank you hing about wi?  
She's nothin but a wee slag.

She is skanky.  
Aye she is, mate.  
Aye she is.  
I don't know how ye have anyhin tay dae wi her.

I'm telling ye she's a tramp.

I don't care if ye are gettin yer ride, mate.  
I widnay go near her wi a polisman's dick.

Whit, I'm a hoormaister?  
Aye, well you're the fuckin hoor.  
You're the fuckin hoor, ya cunt.

Ye take yer arse doon the docks every night. Ye dae. Aye, ye dae. You love it.

Ha ha ha ha.  
Listen, mate, I'll make mair in ma lifetime than you will in a week.

Don't call me a fuckin hoormaister.

That lassie is a fuckin angel and you treated her like dirt.

Oh I am gonnay get you, ya cunt.  
I'll make ye wish ye were deid before I kill ye.  
I'm comin roon tay your hoose, boy.

I'll reduce yer brains tay fuckin pulp.

Listen, I am sittin on a bus fullay people here.  
You are makin me swear on a bus fullay people here.  
Decent fuckin folks havin tay listen tay your pish.  
I'll no drag maself doontay your level, awright?  
Night night, wee boy. Sleep well. Cos I am comin tay get ye.

....

Hello, Ma.  
That wee cunt's been on the phone.

Don't tell me no tay swear, Ma!  
He's got me fuckin ragin.

I'm gonnay go roon tay his hoose and kill him, Ma.  
I will, I am gonnay kill that wee cunt.

Naw naw, Ma, he needs tay learn.

There he's phonin again fucksakes.

....

Whit are you wantin, mate?  
Why dae ye keep phonin me?

No I wisnay talkin tay her, as it happens, I wis talkin tay ma Ma.

Aye she's gonnay get ye as well

Oh really? Ye're gonnay get ma Ma?

Whit are you on, mate? Threatenin sumday's Ma? That's just like you though, eh.

Ma Ma can defend hersel, mate.

Ma Ma'll get you. She'll make fuckin curtains oot yer skin, mate.

Whit?

Don't you dare talk aboot ma Da like that.

Ma Da fought for his fuckin country, mate, whit've you done?

Don't you talk aboot ma Da.

You'd die in the army, mate.

You're aboot as hard as a melted shite.

Aye, nay wonder she's gawn oot wi me noo.

You heard me.

I said nay wonder she split up wi you, ya cunt!

Cos ye hit her aboot 15 times a day that's fuckin how!

How was she supposed tay defend herself?

Her Grandda had jist died. That bring the bully oot in you, mate?

A lassie's Grandda dying? That whit made ye wantay leather her?

Caw yersel a man.

Nay wonder she wis smokin sa much weed, havin tay live wi you, ya cunt!

Shut up. Naw, just shut up.

I am getting aff this bus, mate.

And I am comin roon tay your hoose tay get ye.

And Ah've got a baseball bat an aw, so tool the fuck up.

Get aw yer fuckin mates tay stand in frontay the door. And I will still reach ye.

Aye, ye better be feart, ya cunt.

You better be fuckin feart.

Cos for every time you hit her, I am gonnay fuckin hit you.



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# Giving Up

## Janet Crawford

What could you live without?  
What would you miss?  
Could you live without chocolate?  
Could you live without wine?  
Are you joking wi me?.. I'd manage just fine

What if I asked you to leave it all behind?  
Your home, your family, familiar faces and sights?  
Could you cope then?  
Or would it feel like a blight to your senses?  
And somehow just not, quite right.

What if you were forced to be  
Somewhere surrounded by people you didn't know?  
Who simply want you to go,  
Anywhere else but here  
As instead of concern their faces show frowns

What if I called you a traitor, a coward or a chancer?  
Could you cope with the anxiety , the pain?  
The lack of common decency or love?  
Do you get the picture yet?

This is what it feels like to be a refugee or a migrant,  
An escapee from wars or brutality shown by leaders with no conscience ,  
From the threats of guns, bombs, beatings, starvation or rape  
Do you still want that chocolate, and can you give me a break?

I'm simply trying to stay alive  
and looking for an escape.

# The Tide

## Eilidh McKenzie

Portobello has a place in my heart  
As I walk past a child's swing in a garden on Great Canon Bank Street  
Socks of various white shades decorate the clothes line  
In contrast to the ivy clothed walls. Old walls with character and  
beauty.  
The cold air slaps my face as I get close to the beach.  
The hustle of the city soon disappears with the lapping of the North  
Sea waves.  
The runner in yellow, the wee boy balancing on his bike with no pedals.  
The old woman looks up for a smile with a glint in her eye  
I breathe the cold sea air.  
I feel a sense of calm and a freedom only the sea can offer me freely.  
Space. Kings place. I stop and have a soy latte at a cafe named The Tide.  
Far and wide. All I see is space. I can breathe again.

# Notes From A Colour Chart

## Morgan Downie

*13-0858- tpx*

despair, despair is yellow,  
the yellow of biohazard suits  
thorned with warning, visors misted,  
faces smeared into anonymity,

*18-4434- tcx*

luck, luck is blue, arrives on an old bus,  
wheel arches winged with chrome,  
steps itself down into the dusty street  
dancing to the rhythm of endless possibility

*12-6204- tcx*

laughter, laughter is silver,  
precious as mercury and just as quick,  
the perfect alembic to measure the heat  
of your voice and mine, blended

*16-5422- tpx*

love, the memory of love, is aquamarine,  
lives in sea-caves blushed with coral,  
verdigris upon drowned bronze,  
scallop shells rising in waves of foam

*6-ec*

and black? black is a boat,  
the colour of sleep, dreamless,  
wide as the farthest ocean, star dusted,  
and sky to the horizon

# Going To The Pictures

## Suzanne Egerton

We're here in the dark, and something's wrong. I knew he wasn't that keen to see the film. But surely it can't be that? We went to the film he wanted to see last time, and he was in quite a good mood when I suggested *Grease*, it won't be on for much longer. I wonder if he thinks I fancy John Travolta.

He won't hold my hand, he pulled it away. Now he's looking at me. It's dark, but I can feel him staring. *Has he gone off me? What have I done wrong? What's the matter?* I whisper. Nothing, he says, and it's a kind of hiss through his teeth.

The bright colours on the screen jump about. The dancers are doing a really energetic number. It's one of my favourites, one of the main reasons I wanted to see *Grease*, but I can't take it in, I'm so worried about why he's being like this. I keep looking at him, hoping he'll relent and everything will be all right. I mustn't cry, it would only make things worse.

*What's he doing?* He's picking his coat up from the back of the seat in front, and now he's walking down the centre aisle. And he never said a word. I don't know what to do. I can't follow him, I'll feel so stupid if he's only gone to the Gents, or to get an ice cream or something. Or perhaps he's not feeling well. I sit and wait, to see if he comes back. I'm trying very hard not to cry. If my mascara runs I'll look terrible.

The film is finished, and people are rushing to get out before God Save the Queen. At least he's not here to say something nasty about me standing up when it comes on. The lights are up, and people are crowding out, but I can't see him anywhere. I could ask the ice cream girl at the back, but I'd feel really stupid. It's so embarrassing.

I'll have to get the bus home. My mum always makes me take a few coins, just in case, she says, even if a boyfriend is taking me out. Not that I've had many, he's the first real one. I know some of the girls in my class fancy him, and I don't think they can work out what he sees in me, well I can't myself, to be honest. But I always knew that the first one would have to be special, and he certainly is. I wouldn't have done it with anyone else.

I wish I knew what it was. He got really angry once before, well, twice, counting the time I said I was going to Carol's birthday party, I was really disappointed to miss that, but he was so sweet straight after I said I'd go out with him instead. The other time was awful, and he didn't speak to me

for hours, and all it was, was that he doesn't like red lipstick on me, prefers pale pink, more natural he says. So he's a bit moody, but he really cares. This must be something like that. Oh, God, I hope that's all it is.

I'll have to wait in Masson's shop doorway for the bus. Nobody else is waiting, hope I haven't missed the last one. Oh, I'm being silly, there's always one after the pictures. The street's a bit empty. Not many street lights. I feel so safe when he's with me.

It seems like a long time, I haven't got a watch that works. It's cold. If he were here, he'd put his arms around me and open his coat and wrap the sides round me, and pull me against him. I shuffle my feet, and step backwards into the shadowy walk-in bit of the doorway, I'll still be able to see the bus.

Something's round my neck – choking me, it's his hands – I'm trying to scream –

Laughing. Loud laughter. It's him! He whirls me around, and lifts me in his arms, he's so strong. He's laughing, and I'm almost crying, because it's such a relief! "Had you going there, didn't I?", he says, and kisses me hard, and again when I try to ask why. But it doesn't matter because we're kissing and I want to be with him, just him, for ever. And I'm the happiest girl in the world.

# Citadel: a)

## Ian Macartney

In tribute to Pete Doherty's "*Bowhemia*"

Citadel, take another picture:

the street, coronary artery for humanity and a grit-stained kiss to man,  
where cooked cockerel makes men wake up and follow their noses  
to the nearby McDonalds,  
dawn found in the exhaust sparks  
and fires under the bridges, away.

Citadel, pass me another bottle of tarmac with metal rhinos driving towards  
corporate Mecca,  
skin dyed in it,  
gimme another broken sun, gimme an egg yolk, gimme gimme cos' the train  
lines run on money ,  
you can't just publish money like honey.  
Suit-and- tie bees buzzing around in the stress hive  
doesn't make for profit says market research  
but since when was the truth really what we want and

Citadel, watch as your bones snap into scaffolding  
over the sky-tram- line never finished,  
gotta be pretty, gotta be pretty,  
only hasty, only hasty,  
and gimme your flat-pack- crack-attack  
cos' I started to feel beyond the rush,  
lungs ain't got that lush, that smog, that pollution;

pollution-painted vomit made into ammunition.

# Sweat and Black Dust

## Rebecca Smith

She keeps walking past the workshop doors. And it's a not a short walk.

The workshop is the length of four garages. It takes a lot of muscle to push those doors closed at night. Colin and I push them together and we meet in the middle like two sides of a roll-up. Snug man.

"Where the hell is she going?"

"There's nothing but woods up that way and the road to the village the other. We're out in the sticks here. When I first got the apprenticeship, Mum kept saying, "You need to be careful on those roads Johnnie, don't drive too fast"" Country roads. They'll kill you.

The workshop sits right next to her house. I think they were all barns in the old days but some bright spark converted them. There she is again. All floaty, the belt of her brown waist, tight under her ribs. Very thin.

It's hot this summer. But the concrete floor of the workshop makes it cool inside. Not next to the forge though. Right there, see that spot? It's so hot you stop noticing. My t-shirt sticks to me with all the sweat and black dust. The smell in here makes your lungs ache. I can almost see the tiny spores of metal, red and black, clinging to the insides of my veins.

I watch Colin thrusting an iron pole into the forge. He twists and rounds it carefully and when he pulls it out, it's glowing red. All that concentrated heat. He bangs and pummels it with a hammer, his arm reaching way over his head and then blasting down at some speed. I have to watch to learn. I'm getting paid to watch.

I'm pretty strong. Course, I'm not as strong as Colin. The way he moves the iron. It's like he's scattered it with fairy dust. I try and lift it but it's as heavy as solid iron.

I'm learning the trade. It's not just horseshoes. I have to tell people that all the time.

It's all kinds of fancy stuff now. Staircases, tables, mirrors, statues. Beds! Solid iron beds.

People will pay through the nose for something a little different.

I've noticed she only walks past when Colin is busy or hidden away in the office.

I know she wants to see me. I'm hammering away, goggles on and everything. Overalls. I'm not parading myself about.

I guess I shouldn't have kissed her last week. Colin went into town to see a client and he left me to lock up. She was in there like a shot, like she'd been watching us all day. She's not shy. She walked out of the sun and onto the cool concrete floor, straight up to me and asked me what I was doing at the weekend.

I shrugged and said maybe I'd see her out in the pub. She laughed like I'd said something funny.

Then she stood on her tip-toes in her tiny sneakers and kissed me. I kissed back, but only a bit.

It was too soft. Her lips, so small and slippery. My neck hurt. She's so tiny.

I felt her tongue slide into my mouth and I thought about Colin. What would Colin do if I did this to him? if I had just walked up to him and kissed him, grabbing the two top buttons of his overalls to pull him closer. We wouldn't have to crane our necks. It wouldn't be soft.

After the kiss she skipped away, back round the corner to her house, without a word. I didn't go to the pub to see her that night. Colin invited me to dinner at his house to meet his wife. She cooked chilli. I watched her tousle Colin's hair as she carried the empty plates away after dinner. He smiled like she'd done something funny.

# Be My Teddy Bear

## Gerry Boag

Well, it all started innocently enough. I guess these things usually do. I know it sounds petty and pathetic to blame someone else, but it really was my mum's fault. When I was a child I sometimes got to stay up late on Friday nights to watch *Hammer Horror* films you see. My God-fearing Presbyterian maw had no problem with me watching Dracula ripping out some jezebel's throat, but as soon as couples started kissing or heavy petting there would come the imperious command:

“William, hide your eyes!”

I wanted to please the puritanical old crow, so I would clasp my hands over my eyes until she told me I could look. I wanted to make her proud but it was boring sitting like the See-No-Evil monkey during naughty scenes. So instead of closing my peepers I started using my hand to shield them from the canoodling while I looked down at the carpet. It was only a little change, aye, but that was how it began my friend. That was how it began.

My younger sister left toys scattered about the floor. One time when I was nine I had to look at the carpet while a Romany violinist was getting it on with a gypsy girl in a hayloft. The girl on the telly was giggling but as I looked down it sounded to me like the laughter was coming from a teddy bear lying next to the sofa. The bear had sandy fur, big blue eyes and a pink bow. It was smiling up at me but as I smiled back at the happy wee thing, the giggles changed into a series of soft, breathy moans. My face flushed with guilt as I stared into the twinkling glass eyes of that dirty, disgusting toy until the groans climaxed in a long, satisfied sigh... Wow! I felt a strange swelling in my tightening pyjama bottoms that was terrifying and wonderful. By the time mum said I could look at the gypsies getting torn apart by a werewolf, it was too late. The damage was done. I was bitten, not by a werewolf but by a teddy bear.

My bear necessity slept for years until I turned thirteen, and I read about Theodore Roosevelt's bear hunt in Mississippi. The hospitable southerners wanted president Teddy to bag a trophy so – valuing sportsmanship as much as they did racial equality – they tied a bear to a tree. The president declined the generous offer but a newspaper illustration of the cuddly bound bear inspired a New York toy maker to create the first Teddy bear in honour of Good Ted Hunting. As for me, well, it has been bear-hunting season for me ever since I first saw that cute little bondage bear's frightened

face.

My teenage friends locked themselves away in their rooms to masturbate over porn, but I had to sneak into my sister's room to indulge in my particular brand of perversion. Lucy's bed was covered in teddy bears. The collective noun for a group of bears is a sleuth or sloth, both unappealing terms. For me the name for all those gleeful, gaily-coloured soft toys was a harem of teddy bears, and just like an Arab Sheik, I took my turn with all of them.

My first lover was Broxi. My deadbeat dad had given Lucy a Broxi bear for Christmas. He hadn't got me a bloody thing as usual so I decided to take what was due me out of Broxi's hide. I took that Rangers mascot and tore the seam of its rump under the royal blue football top. I twisted the rim of Broxi's cap.

"Up the gers! Come on the teddy bears."

Cum on the teddy bears indeed.

I had three great years banging my sister's bears, and I never got caught. I learnt to sew from my mum so I always covered my tracks - and my glory holes - with needle and thread. I nearly shat myself one day though when Lucy brought down her Winnie the Pooh bear and shoved its rump in my mum's face saying.

"Winnie smells funny mummy."

My mum leaned in to sniff but I snatched the bear away. "Of course Winnie's bum smells bad Lucy." I said. "That's why they call him Pooh."

Lucy turned up her little nose and said: "He smells like fish naw pooh silly." We all laughed at that. You had to really.

Those were good times but there was one drawback. Open up a teddy bear and you will see that it is almost certainly stuffed full of white polyester. After a while I became sensitised to this filling. The fibres scratched my cock and it was red and itchy for days after every stuffing. Teddy Ruxpin gave me a rash that lasted for a month - the dirty little fucker - and as for Yogi's girlfriend Wendy, well; even thinking her name now makes my balls itch. I sometimes wear extra thick condoms now to avoid the itching, but it just doesn't feel the same. It just doesn't feel...

Anyway, I started dating girls when I was twenty-one. Yes, it was always girls. I am bi when it comes to bears, bi-polar I like to joke, but that's as far as it goes with me. Most boys like real, bare flesh but I always preferred fake, bear fur. It's softer, more tactile, just...more really. Even porn is different for me. Regular pornography doesn't float my boat, but every time I watch *Return of the Jedi* I get harder than Darth Vader's helmet. A lot of *Star Wars* fans hate the ewoks but I love those furry, sexy little bastards. I even learnt

Ewokese and I taught my first real girlfriend Abigail Sneddon a few words to say during sex, like nim nee for take me, and deej azar which means that's magic. Abi thought it was French.

I have a drawer under my bed stuffed full of stuffed bears, but my favourite is a Steiff teddy I call Stiffy. He has golden mohair plush and is stuffed with soft wool, not scratchy polyester. To celebrate their one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary Steiffs even made a bear with spun gold fur and emerald and diamond eyes. Nice aye. That's my dream bear. My Bridget Bear-doe!

That's where my dream date comes in. I found out about this place in Slovenia that can make your fantasies come true. I saved up for a while and then I set up a session last month to tell them what I wanted. It was a bit of a mare to find the place but it was worth the effort, and the money.

They set up a room for me with a king sized bed with pink sheets and a heap of teddy bears. There weren't many decent ones amongst them; in fact most of them were cheap and ugly wee things. There was not a Steiff or even a Care Bear, but squatting in the middle of the pile was the bear I had been hunting since I was thirteen. It was a three feet tall ewok with gilded fur like my Steiff pin-up bear. The ewok's big watery brown eyes watched me as I climbed onto the end of the bed. Then, it suddenly burst out of the teddy bear sleuth, scattering the stuffed toys everywhere as it tried to scamper away.

Most fantasies don't match your expectations once they are acted out but not this one. Seeing the bear coming to life like that was everything I had ever wanted. I caught it by its rear paws. I hauled it back and sat on it to pin its flailing stumpy arms beneath my knees. The bear was making muffled whimpers with its face pressed into the lilac sheet and I was breathing hard as I tied the rope round its arms and chest, just like the original Teddy bear in that Roosevelt cartoon. Man did I have fun with that struggling, squealing teddy.

Deej azar indeed!

Yes sir, that was the best bear hunt I'd ever had. You might say I saved the best fur last heh heh! An ex-Conservative MP and posh English fruit called Gyles Brandreth once said: "The world of the teddy bear is an innocent one, a world that gives delight and hurts not, a world that appeals to all generations and all nationalities."

This is so true. There would be no strife or cruelty if only everyone loved teddy bears. No strife, only Steiff eh! The world would be a better place, don't you see? It would be an innocent place where there is no sadness, no pain ... itchy filling.

# Nae Chance

## Helen MacKinven

He hurls *The Falkirk Herald* to the floor; its pages spread out and flattened like roadkill.

‘How many times has their photie been in the paper?’ He doesn’t wait for an answer. ‘Ah’m sick tae death of *The Kelpies*,’ he says, lighting up a fag.

I sigh. It’s the same moan from the same crabbit face, puffing out his rage in clouds of *Embassy Regal*. I pick up the newspaper and shoogle the pages back in order. The picture on page five is the one that’s tipped him over the edge. This time the photo shows them against an orangey sunset, as fiery as a Grangemouth skyline. They look amazing. I sigh, again.

‘Ah must be the only wan in Fawkurt that hasnae seen the *Kelpies*,’ I say, studying the photo, the closest I’ve got to the massive works of public art.

‘Ye’re talkin mince. Ye have so seen them. Every time we visit yer maw,’ he shakes his head as if I’m the daftie.

‘Ah dinnae mean fae the motorway, ah mean in the flesh.’

‘Flesh? They’d be mair use if they *wur* real horses!’

His head shook and his bloodhound jowls wobbled. This wasn’t the same man I married, not the same person to look at or listen to. He picked up the remote control, content to spend another Sunday in front of the telly. I opened up the living room window, desperate for fresh air. He flicked through the channels and his rant continued.

‘Mibbae if they were covered in solar panels ah’d see the point. But they dae nothing. They’re a complete waste of money.’

Everything was a waste of money as far as he was concerned. Going to the pictures, eating out, a new outfit, a holiday, even birthday presents. There was no point in arguing with him but he was hard to ignore.

'*The Kelpies* are free, so ye cannae complain aboot admission prices.'

'Free? Dinnae be so naïve. Nothing in life is free. It wis £5million tae build *The Kelpies*, dae ye caw that free?' he spat like a boiling kettle.

'Ah'm no stupid, ah ken they cost a lot. But they're the biggest horse sculptures in the world, and they're a feat of modern engineering. Surely that's worth some credit?'

He paused channel hopping and settled on *Cash in the Attic* but the programme wasn't enough to divert his attention. He barely paused for breath, 'Ye'll still no catch me oohing and ahhing ower metal horses' heids. Naaae chance.'

He's the only one laughing at his impression of a horse. 'D'ye get it?'

He repeats the high-pitched sound and snorts for added effect; it's enough to make me swipe the car keys from the coffee table.

'Where are ye aff tae?'

'Awa tae appreciate whit's oan ma doorstep,' I reply.

'Will ye back in time tae make ma tea?' he says his eyes still glued to the TV screen.

'Nae chance.'

# Buffalo Girls Go Round The Right Side

Gary Oberg

Ruth Elizabeth Davidson the 37-year old MSP for Edinburgh Central is credited for the revival of the Conservative Party in Scotland. The leadership of Miss Davidson a former BBC Scotland journalist and Sunday School teacher is widely regarded as being the key factor in the Scottish Conservative parties' recent success in replacing the Labour party as the official opposition to the SNP, and the leading Unionist party in Scotland.

Miss Davidson an MA graduate in English Literature from the University of Edinburgh stated that the SNP failed in their attempt "to ride two horses" to keep their supporters dream alive that 'there would be another referendum." In contrast the success of Miss Davidson, an avid dog and hill walker can perhaps best be symbolised by the image of her riding high upon one particular long horned buffalo, with her arms raised in triumph.

Miss Davidson, ex-kick boxer and current Pars pie and pint affectionado visited the *Fife Puddledub* Buffalo farm – Scotland's largest buffalo farm – back in April for this photo opportunity. However, we can exclusively reveal that Dundee born Buffalo Whisperer Shuggie McClumphertie has communed with the buffalo to discover how 007 feels about his role in the heavysset Tory heavyweight's ride to political stardom.

We asked 007 – via Mr Mclumphertie's intervention – if he was proud to provide a safe Tory seat for Miss Davidson – a camouflaged compadre of Kamikaze Cameron - and the buffalo telepathically transmitted that.

"I am just a humble Bubalus babalis immigrant from Nepal. I sought refuge in the UK as hundreds of thousands of my kind are slaughtered back home by Hindu machete wielding zealots every year during the Gadhimai festival." The Asiatic wild water buffalo declared.

“As an immigrant I feel I have been persecuted by being forced to support the buttocks of a politician from a party that condones the hatred of migrants. A party that even refused to allow three thousand refugee children fleeing war torn Syria to enter this country!”

Miss Davidson LGBT A OK MSP whose previous vehicular photo opportunities include her riding a tank like her political idol Margaret Thatcher, and her physical double Kim Jung Un, has stated that “I come from a blue collar background. My parents were raised in Glasgow council estates,” but the 007 Thunderbull finds it “odd that someone so proud of their working class roots supports benefit cuts and the abolition of free university tuition and prescription charges in Scotland.”

Davidson admitted “I smashed the reds so I could attack the black,” but that was Jim Davidson and not Ruth Davidson who is credited for detoxifying Tories for Scots with rich constitutions and poor memories, and not for making controversial, racist quips and hosting the nineties snooker television game show Big Break.

Miss Davidson smiley face, exclamation mark, exclamation mark, hash-tag existential crisis emoji who is tough on crime and herbivore spines and who quit her post as a Territorial army signaller due to a back injury herself, has not as yet commented on the unhappy herbivores comments but Forbes Farquhar-Smythe a yak tickler from Perth has reported that the Aberdeen Angus Bourne Again has been critical of 007’s revelations. The Conservative cow, Bourne Again declared earlier today:

“I have huge respect for Ruth Davidson and it would be an honour to support her huge seat.” Bourne’s identity is profoundly British and he insists. “It is disgusting that immigrants come to our country, steal our jobs, eat our grass and then have the audacity to moan about the size of an elected official’s arse.”

Bourne’s ultimatum is. “Get em out! I am proud to be one-hundred percent British beef, but this 007 black bull is a filthy foreign muckraker not a moonraker, and once we’re out of the EU all his horrible lot will get hoofed back to whatever third world herd-holes they trotted out off.”

Miss Davidson adjective, comma, supporting noun and insert

conjoining verb of choice has not revealed what vehicular transport she would choose if her Scottish Conservative party increased their mandate at the next election, but one senior source close to the MSP claims their leader would:

“Descend triumphantly from the sun astride a golden phoenix risen from the ashes of right minded right-wing Scots’ hopes and dreams. Oh how the multitude shall marvel that fateful day my brethren when the saviour shines down on the Tory faithful. Bear witness to our Boudica Regina Excelsior, resplendent in her androgynous finery as her Jacamo XXL men’s suit jacket flows at her back like a ruffled cape in the tempestuous wind that spurs on her relentless advance. The hour of judgment will be at hand at last oh fellow Euro-sceptic scions when the wretched Nationalist separatists will be smote by flaming sword and routed by inflammatory rhetoric as they cower low in their Hollyrood hellholes awaiting the inevitable divine retribution from our avenging chunky unionist chevalier”.

This is Cathy Newman reporting for Channel 4 news. Now back to Jon in the studio.

Thank you Cathy. We asked DOOMMBAT the Departmental office of Mundane and Mythical Bestial Assisted Transport for a statement on this matter, but no one at the ministry was available to comment.

Now over to Helia Ebrahimi our business correspondent in Port Talboth in Wales where Neil Hamilton was reputedly spotted earlier today flying towards the Tata Steel plant on a red dragon.

Helia?

# Never Trust A Man Whose Eyebrows Meet In The Middle

Lorna Fraser

‘Never trust a man whose eyebrows meet in the middle,’ Mother said as she put all the eggs in one basket; some creamy white, others sandy brown.

‘Now Scarlett, take these to Grandmother. Make sure you go by the market road; don’t take the path through the woods. And put your cloak on, it’s cold.’

Scarlett wrapped her cape about her and pulled the hood over her auburn curls.

She skipped down the path and let the cottage gate close with a clang. But she didn’t want to take the market road because that way meant crossing over Bubbling Brook Bridge. Trollius Green lived there and she knew he would demand a kiss before he let her pass. He was a horrible man, with a face like a frog. He surely proved mother wrong, because he had no eyebrows at all.

Scarlett liked the woodland path. There were wild strawberries and blueberries and sometimes clusters of golden chanterelles with their apricot-kernel scent. She dawdled at first and picked a purple flower for Grandmother. A breeze curled through the trees and the branches clustered together, dimming the light from the canopied sky. Scarlett began to worry, just a little. The path was overgrown and she may have taken a wrong turning. Then she remembered that tonight was a full moon. Its pale yellow glow would soon illuminate the way. She sat on a lichen-covered rock to wait, when a voice, deep and soft came from behind.

‘Are you lost my little rosebud?’

She looked up at the tall gentleman, elegant in breeches of leather and a white frilled shirt that split open at the neck to reveal tufts of dark hair. He had a trimmed goatee beard and long locks that curled over his shoulders, the colour of the darkest, bitterest chocolate. He also had thick black eyebrows; full and bushy, they just touched together at the bridge of his nose. She felt a little afraid but aimed to be bold.

‘Why do you call me rosebud, sir?’

‘Why because you are like a flower, your red petals wrapped about you in that glorious cloak of yours – a vision about to bloom. Are you going to your Grandmother’s house? Perhaps I can show you the way?’

Scarlett looked at the basket of eggs by her feet. They seemed to shimmer on their bed of straw. The moon must be rising at last.

‘No sir, I can find the right path now that the moon has come out.’

The gentleman smiled and she could see that his teeth were very long.

‘Indeed, petal, so it has.’

He raised his head upwards, his hands outstretched. Scarlett saw how strong they were, with a coating of long, fine hair, right to the fingertips.

He turned to her and smiled. His eyes somehow had taken on the reflection of the moon for they were ochre with flecks of gold. And his eyebrows had grown thicker; they seemed to curl around all his face.

‘Well, little red, since you are so sure you know the way, I must go on ahead. I know we will meet again.’

Scarlett watched in amazement as he bounded off, using his hands for balance as he leapt between the trees.

‘What a most unusual gentleman’ Scarlett said aloud to the whispering wood.

She picked up her basket because Grandmother would be wondering where she was.

A single howl split the night.

‘Oh dear,’ thought Scarlett, ‘I hope I don’t meet any wolves.’

# We Are Just Coping

## Michael Davis

You know, the problem with you is that you think only of yourself. (Hobbes, T. 1650) You say, “What good to me are all those people who don’t care about all the hardships I’ve been through? Why should I put the effort in when they don’t even notice me struggling?” Well, it seems like everyone is thinking the same thing. No one notices your struggles because they are all too busy thinking about their own. You are not special in any significant way, yet you expect to be adored. You are just another little man, living in a two dimensional cocoon. (Reich, W. 1945. & Curtis, A. 2013)

Our modernity has all but voided our social ability, our idea of community and our sense of belonging. (Cochrane, A. and Pain, K. 2004) The cultured art of conversation and humility and storytelling have become rotten and disregarded. In their place we have mass social media, emoticons, #mundane photography and an endless supply of half-writing produced in witless arrogance and haste, with the pettiest, most self aggrandising motives. Outside of this putrid bubble of linguistic scatology in public, we can only reach any depth when we are drunken to the point of producing puke. The finery and joy that comes with truly expert craft in conversation is now rare, and most do not even know that it exists at all. This is the real death of society, when people can no longer communicate.

Someone told me once that all of humanity’s problems come from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone. (Pascal, B. 1669) By which they meant that we are not able to find peace with ourselves, alone and without distraction, so how could we ever hope to find peace with anyone else when we have none to share? We are restless. We are wired. We are more and more emotionally distant with every new digital connection. Despite our technologies, our advancements, we no longer know the things that really matter, lost in a flurry of bright

sounds and fast moving colours.

In an age of social and mass-media, being anxious becomes an epidemic. When everyone is 'sharing' everything, whether its a particularly enjoyable bowel movement or just the latest atrocity to cross feed tray, it can sometimes make you feel oddly inadequate. It can be hard to see the point of doing or making anything of your own when everyone is busy producing so much noise and dribbling offal. What is the modern dream today, I wonder, what is the ideal that we as a society and as individuals strive for? Foremost, an easy life. We long for labour saving products, packaged entertainment and alcohol, where once there was the strive for freedom, friendship and free thinking. (Epicurus, circa 260 BC)

The mass infatuation and subsequent appropriation of eastern philosophies like zen buddhism, yoga, meditation, is somewhat telling. The spirituality of these schools of thought have great resonance with our materially prosperous but emotionally stunted situation. We are a society living in perpetual adolescence. The mashup of adapted eastern wisdom is commonplace in the stylings of contemporary art. Long sorrowful moving images, cyclical forms, repeating patterns most wonderful. The abstraction and minimalism of modernity has become refraction: the bending of ideas through prismatic media whereupon their interface, speed and meaning are changed.

There is a wonderful thought experiment devised by John Rawls (1971) wherein we imagine ourselves as an unborn child floating in space above the Earth. Our impending moment of parturition into the world below will necessarily be a completely random lottery. Whether we are born as a child of an Arab prince, or a end up the penniless offspring of a tramp in Calcutta, and all the lies between, it is entirely out of our control. As we look down on this world, would any of us really want to enter this lottery in its current situation? Undoubtedly we would want to make changes, and those are the things that we must undertake in our lives, now.

And yet, most of us are not screaming in the streets. We are not wondering what we work for. We are not stealing from the rich or burning their houses. We are not allowing the strong to do the heavy lifting while others do the delicate work. We are not creating a standardised living allowance. We are not sharing in our excesses. We are not living together. We are not living within our means. We are not happy, we are just coping. We are just watching the days pass.

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# Acknowledgements

*[Untitled]* would like to thank the artists, writers and groups that either directly provided help in the creation of this publication, or whose information and images were used with permission. All images are the direct property of the groups or individuals from which they were obtained from, and all copyright laws should be observed.

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*[Untitled]* would also like to thank Eddie McEleney for taking marvellous photographs of *[Untitled]* events and for donating his time to *[Untitled]*, Thanks Eddie!

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**[Untitled] Seven was edited by Craig Allan (@craiguntitled)  
& Guest Editor Dickson Telfer.**



Made in Falkirk  
Since 2012  
[www.untitledfalkirk.co.uk](http://www.untitledfalkirk.co.uk)