

# The Inventive Pen



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Spring 2004

An anthology of fiction, poetry, drama and memoir.

Written and compiled by members of  
The Inventive Pen writing course.

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Contributors to this publication are all students at the Newton Abbot Adult and Community Learning Centre. To enrol on this or other courses phone 01626 206410 or call in and pick up a brochure.

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This slim volume has been produced by students on The Inventive Pen writing course. As course tutor my input has been minimal. The idea for a course publication came from one of the students. On a visit to relatives in the States he discovered a cousin was 'taking' a similar course. He was shown several of their group publications, borrowed them, brought them back across the Atlantic and showed them to us. We were inspired to follow the American example and this is the result. Students chose which pieces they wanted to include, proof read each others' work, typed up their final copies, on a variety of machines, and here they are.

Some of the students have been working with me for several terms and some only joined the class in the spring term. There are students who brought with them a long history of writing and others who had always fancied giving it a go, but had never quite got round to it - until now. As well as bringing hugely different writing histories to the group students bring a rich variety of life experiences. Combine this with varied expectations, ranging from wanting to make the switch from years of technical writing to something more imaginative, through dramatists in the making, to poets wanting to try fiction and novelists needing the discipline of class exercises and you begin to get something of the flavour of the dynamics of a writing class.

We use a lot of trigger exercises in class which encourage students to write without reflection or conscious thought. Many of these pieces, written under pressure of time in class, are then used as the basis for polished pieces of writing. By separating out the tasks of first and second drafts we learn to use the critical part of our brain as a constructive editor working in a productive partnership with the creative writer, rather than as a paralysing negative influence. Some of the pieces that follow are the result of such class exercises. Part of the joy of this shared process is the variety of work that a single exercise can produce. You will, for instance, see more than one piece written around childhood memories of first bicycles.

A ten week course gives just twenty hours of contact time, not long to explore the demands of poetry, fiction, memoir and script writing. We tried to do a little of everything, always listening for effective and less effective writing, learning from each other and from published authors. This publication is both a reflection of the wide range of forms we tackled and the variety of individual writing voices that emerge from a group of ten people. I feel hugely privileged to have worked with such an enthusiastic and supportive group of people and to have witnessed the struggles, surprises and pleasures attendant on the creative process.

Anna Lunk.

## THE CLASS HAIKU

Strangers meet to learn  
Swap notes hone skills produce work  
Not strangers, now friends.

Joyce Rawle

### Haiku

Every week we meet,  
Full of ideas to write down.  
Anna shows us how.

Tuesday nights we strain  
To drag stories from the far  
Corners of our brains.

Inspiration and  
Friendship. Unexpected depths  
And glimpses of life.

Each week I'm astounded at the quality and entertainment of the homework writing. Anna's guidance and technical tweaks and hints ease along individual talents without inhibiting our ideas.

Gill Starkey

Tuesday evenings are special because everyone at the evening class is here because they want to be. We can speak and write as ourselves, not as parents or partners, and can be totally irresponsible.

Jo Pountney

## Marion

Marion sat patiently waiting, used to the cold now. She had been lucky to get a parking spot so close to the pub tonight. Her view of the doors was clear and the windy rain made sure only the most determined pedestrians ventured out. Another half hour to go.

This would be the final night, after months of tracking and watching — since Cohn died. He had been such a strong, positive man, before their daughter had been killed. Marion needed no photograph to summon up Natalie's image, dark, curly hair, clear skin, always laughing — she would be finishing her medical training now if. . . . if. Marion clenched her hands on the steering wheel. And that monster inside had got off on a technicality, she burned with fury.

Nursing Cohn had given Marion no time to do anything; but sitting by his hospital bed, she had thought of revenge as a starving man craves food. Poison? Difficult to administer with certainty. Stabbing? Might need more strength than she had. Shooting? No access to a weapon. What about the commonest lethal weapon — a car? Find out his routine, pick a suitable time and place — hit and run. It happens all the time!

Marion knew now that he lived in a first floor Council flat, in a block with out side steps and access along a balcony. She had seen him bullying a defeated looking young woman with lank hair and cheap clothes — his wife? Sometimes this woman pushed a chair with a thin, pale toddler and big, nervous eyes. Marion's heart went out to them. Sometimes the wife was accompanied by a sturdy teenager — her sister, probably, by the similarity of colouring. But the energetic walk and aggressive manner showed an unsubdued character.

Marion wiped her sweaty palms on her skirt. It was nearly time. When this was over, she would move away, make a new beginning.

There he was! With a gang of others, as usual. Marion knew the routine — at the end of the street, gang went left, he went right. She started the engine. Slowly to the junction. There he was, tottering slightly. When he crossed the road, that was her chance. Step, step, step. Marion's back ran with sweat, eyes fixed to her quarry. The road was clear, foot over accelerator. He wavered into the road, without even looking.

Foot down! Foot down! Her brain commanded. But foot would not obey. Now! Now! But leg was paralysed. She could no more run him over than kick a kitten.

The moment had passed and wouldn't come again. Marion hung her head limply over the steering wheel. Coward! Coward! All the months of planning come to this.

He swung left, towards the block of flats. Marion slowly drove forwards and paused to see him stagger up the concrete steps. Then, before her astonished eyes, a shape rose from behind the balcony wall. Two arms wielded a stick. Contact. He lurched backwards, somersaulting down the steps.

The safety light caught the sister's face as she looked down. Then she was gone.

Marion sat stunned. Then ran, splashing through the puddles.

He lay sprawled awkwardly, neck at a strange angle, eyes staring sightlessly at the streaming rain.

A child had done what she could not.

A baseball bat lay close by. Marion stooped, and hands wrapped in a tissue, wiped the handle clear of any prints. Then she walked quickly away.

Gill Starkey

## The Bicycle

I remember the bicycle  
I had so longed for a racing bicycle  
So I could join the other kids on the street  
But this was no racing bike

My mother had told me  
My bike would be second-hand  
Though nothing could have prepared me  
For my bike was hand painted silver and green

No reflective chrome  
On handle bars or wheels  
No shining paintwork  
Just deep ridged brush strokes

I rallied and though hard  
With the odd bits of money  
Aunts and Uncles had sent  
I walked to town to the cycle shop

In this Aladdin's cave of bright shiny bikes  
Hanging from the ceiling above and mirrored  
In the rows on the shop floor  
But obviously none like my bike.

I looked through the stickers  
And handled the accessories  
New grips for the handle bars?  
A pump or faster stripes?

I handed over all my birthday cash  
For my well chosen purchases  
Ran all the way home  
Eager to lift the tired old frame

Now I was proud of my bike  
all the accessories carefully positioned  
I rode down the lane  
to where all my friends met

No comment was passed  
And I said nothing  
But eventually one friend did comment  
And said how he liked the sticker on the crossbar

I felt at ease and part of the set  
But then I wondered if I was one of them  
Perhaps they were all just being kind  
As they knew I had no dad

David H carpenter-Clawson

I remember the bike.....

When I was five years old, I was given my first real bicycle. It was a shiny red Raleigh Pavemaster, and all I could see when I came downstairs on my special day was a gleaming chrome handlebar sticking out of the wrapping paper.

It looked bigger and more grown up in our little sitting room than it had in the shop window. Except for the dreaded stabilisers. I pleaded with my Dad to take them off, to no avail. We went out into the road, and I pedalled up and down the pavement, "See, I can do it. It's so easy." He smiled and said nothing.

When he came home that evening, I met him at the corner of the street, and showed him how I could already ride it one handed, holding my guinea-pig carefully in my left hand. Gulliver had never seen the world before. He seemed happy enough. The stabilisers stayed on.

By the end of the first week, I could slalom around the mountain ash trees which lined our street, Gulliver in his usual spot. I was planning his pannier which would fit snugly on the handlebars. A straw one lined with tissue paper, with a carrot in case he felt peckish during our adventures. I had also improvised an emergency kit, with plasters, my beloved pen knife, a spanner and some Kendal mint cake. This I carried in an old leather binocular case, donated by my grandfather.

My Dad was very slow about taking off those stabilisers. It took a month of pleading, tears, and demonstrations of increasingly brilliant bike handling. Gulliver signed a certificate, declaring himself satisfied with Joanna's bike handling skills. My grandmother helped Dad to interpret the squiggles, and Dad checked the paw print at the bottom against the size of the guinea pig's feet.

He straightened up, and nodded seriously. "OK, it's time."

His spanner came out of the garage, and minutes later, my bike was free of those extra little wheels. He held the saddle as I pedalled up and down the drive, finding my balance.

After a week, I was a free spirit. Gulliver and I went on increasingly dangerous missions, and he declared himself well satisfied with his comfortable cabin, which was secured with catapult elastic.

The day came. I changed out of my school uniform, into my favourite shorts and T shirt. I found the Brasso and polished the handle bars and wheels until not a speck of dirt could be found. I packed and repacked my emergency kit. Gulliver looked at me mournfully from his cage. He knew he would not be allowed on this trip, but wished me luck.

When my mother started to feed my baby brother, I closed the gate behind me, and set off down the street. I knew exactly where I was going, and it was well beyond my usual limits. I had removed Gulliver's basket as speed was of the essence. I cycled to the far end of the street and turned left along the lane by the recreation ground. I emerged in an area surrounded by drab tenement buildings, with grey washing hanging from lines strung haphazardly between the garages.

I stopped cycling and looked around, sure my quarry would not be far away.

“Hey, Titch, that bike's too big for you. You need one with three little wheels.” There he was, Peter Griffiths, my life long enemy. I held up my bar of Kendal mint cake, and tore at the wrapper with my teeth.

I saw him lumber towards me, his face sneering at me, his nose wrinkled. My mind flickered with memories of being tripped up carrying my school dinner plate, the scribbles which appeared on my work when my back was turned, my missing Christmas pen, and all the whispered insults, I kept pressure on my left bicycle pedal. He towered over me, his bovine face leering at the bar I was unwrapping. His hand reached towards it.

As my right fist connected with his freckled nose, I said “I really hate you and so does my brother.”

As his eyes watered, and he cried out, I pedalled furiously away, shouting “and I'll be back, and so will my brother.”

As I got back to my own street, I stopped to eat my Kendal mint cake. I carefully folded the wrapper, and placed it under Gulliver's cage for safekeeping.

Jo Pountney

## ULSTERWORLD

On a cold bright afternoon in November 1974 we form up our patrol behind the metal gate of the Security Forces Base. Like all such gates in Northern Ireland it is matt green and has a vision slit cut into it. The four of us would like to see the streets beyond the gate but the hardened plastic over the slit has become opaque with heavy use. This will be our first patrol of the town so we must rely on the maps and photographs used for our briefing.

All four of us in this patrol have served in the province before. We have experienced the riots of the late sixties and have seen them escalate into the current bombing and sniping campaign. We all know how important it is to try to stay ahead of the terrorist's game.

Bob is young and fit, a physical training instructor, he hunches his shoulders and sets his feet as though in the starting blocks, keen to get beyond the gate. Beside him is Fred with only six months to do to complete a six year engagement, he has signed up for a plumbers course when he gets out and just wants to complete this tour and start looking for leaks instead of gunmen. Beside me is Jeff a slim bookish looking Lance Corporal, his job as Office Manager keeps him inside a lot but he still needs to maintain his patrolling skills. Last of all there is me, the Corporal and, on this occasion, the leader of this small patrol. I have to deploy the patrol, navigate it through the unfamiliar streets, deal with any incidents and get us safely back to base. For the thousandth time I check the map taped to the butt of my rifle and try to memorise the patrol route.

The gate opens to reveal a street in a typical Ulster town. To the left and stretching for about two hundred metres, a terrace of new white stucco houses. At the start of the current troubles thousands of such houses were built in the hope that it might provide an answer to the problems of the province, it was a futile expectation. In the centre of these new houses is a parade of shops and a pub called the "Starry Plough", all the means to sustain a small community.

The other side of the street consists of Victorian era brick houses of the type built by the flax barons to house their mill workers. Further off to the right is another street of these houses which stretch up a hill to a church. The church which has a bell tower and a steeple is built in a concrete gothic style and looks like something from a Hammer film set.

We have very little time to appreciate the architecture as we see everything in terms of cover, for us and for them. We are at our most vulnerable as we leave the base so we zigzag as we run through the gate covering each other as we go, this is known as hard targeting and is supposed to make it difficult for the snipers to take aim. One of the patrol members always has to be facing the rear whilst moving forward, this is difficult, but it comes with practice and we change over every two hundred metres.

Before we have travelled far we encounter a figure dressed as a priest in a gap between the buildings. “Ah hello lads” he calls out to us, “can I have a wee word”? I notice there is no cover and that to stop would leave us exposed and out in the open. I signal the rest of the patrol to continue and try to be as polite as possible whilst jogging backwards down the street. “Sorry Father can’t stop now, some other time”. His expression does not change so I do not know if he is offended or not. Perhaps I am being paranoid, it could be a set up, would they really use a priest?

A message comes over my radio instructing us to visit the betting shop where the owner has some information for us. On our way we pass the pub, it is a single storey breeze block construction; I have seen petrol stations with more character. Through the windows we can see the patrons gathered around the bar in animated conversation, they ignore us but we hear snatches of songs that wish us ill from the juke box.

We make it to the betting shop and I go inside whilst the others make use of the scarce cover in the street outside. The punters bent in concentration over their betting slips ignore me but behind the glass enclosed counter is a large florid figure of a man in a loud check suit. His loud booming voice which seems to emanate from his large stomach informs me that he has concerns about a car parked in Ardillia Street for the last hour. “It looks a bit suspicious — just sitting there with this wee girl in it — I thought I should report it”. I am suspicious; for it occurs to me that a local business man who is so overt with his information will be lucky to keep his life, let alone his windows or his kneecaps.

I ask him a few more questions and check the location on my map. Ardillia Street is one of the streets of old mill houses leading to the church. Back in the street I find Fred safe behind a skip, Bob lurking in a shop doorway and Jeff slim enough to be safe behind a pillar box. I brief them quickly and we duck and dive our way into Ardillia Street. The houses are neat and clean with freshly painted doors and scrubbed steps. The tell tale graffiti on the walls indicates that we are in a ‘hard green’

area; BRITS OUT— EASTER 1916 — SS = RUC. The houses with street lamps outside have their walls painted white to head height; this is done to silhouette patrolling soldiers for the snipers at night.

The street seems deserted but from the alleys and yards at the back of the houses we hear the rhythmic banging of dustbin lids and whistles, our arrival is being signalled. Our eyes are going in all directions and we try to shrink into our flack jackets like tortoises.

Dominating the end of the street is the church with its Victorian Gothic tower and parked in front of it is a scruffy looking blue Ford Escort. In the driving seat sits a young woman with long blond hair and a sulky pout. She gives no sign of having seen us but continues to stare fixedly at the steps of the church. As we get near the vehicle I signal the rest of the patrol to take up fire positions and approach the open driver's window. "What do you want you Brit bastard" says the driver's without moving her head. I am about to reply when four shots blast out and four holes appear about a foot above my head in the brick wall behind me.

I shout contact but the rest of the section have seen and heard what has happened. We need to get out of this narrow street as fast as possible. In a second Bob has kicked open the door of the nearest house and we pile through. Immediately behind the door is a kitchen and sitting at a table set for tea is a family of four. We crash through the kitchen and into the yard followed by cries of "get out you Brit bastards — who's going to pay for my door"?

The alley at the back of the house runs parallel with the street and we run forward keeping our heads below the yard walls. "I saw the bastard, he's in the church tower" says Fred. We scuttle forward to get a view of the church from a gap in the terrace of houses, Fred and Bob take up fire positions as I send a contact report over my radio. Suddenly a target appears at one of the glassless windows of the church tower, Fred and Bob fire two shots each and the target falls — got him!

We need to secure the crime scene quickly so we move cautiously back into the street, the car with its sulky blond driver is still there. I continue to organise back up over my radio but Bob, pumped up on adrenalin and success, rushes across to the car, grabs the driver's long blond hair and pulls her head through the window "you cow, you set us up". The hair comes away in his hand and the head drops with a loud clunking sound onto the pavement.

“OK end of exercise — not bad for your first time through, we make the situations progressively harder” says the Sergeant Instructor who has been following us, and then to Bob “and you leave our dummies alone — if you’ve broken it you can pay for a new head”. “Now clear your weapons and leave the range the way you came in”. As he is talking to the control tower over the radio I tell him “get them to work on their Irish accents they sound like characters in a John Forde film”. As we return through the range we see locally employed German technicians re-setting targets and replacing the explosive splat charges in the wall.

“Good effort lads” I tell the others, “a couple more times through there and next week it’s Belfast for real — let’s find the nearest Gasthauf and get some good Deucher beer in while we still can”.

Anthony Nicholson

### **Could Do Better**

In Duggleby’s window with a red shiny frame.

Silver rams horns, double bottle rack, a thumb selects three gears.

A promise, academic success is all it takes.

The snap of the flap, buff envelope on the bristles.

Not this year, try harder

Anthony Nicholson

## The Man Who Had Everything

The man who had everything  
B U I L T A F E N C E  
To keep out  
The man who had nothing  
Who lived next door.

The man who had everything  
Was afraid  
That the man who had nothing  
Would steal his everything.

The man who had nothing was sad.

Before the fence was built  
He had seen the hares running in the field,  
The tall heads of the flowers  
Bending in the breeze,  
The sun bathing the hilltops in red and gold.

Now he saw nothing but the fence.

Then a flood came and washed away  
The man who had everything's everything  
And the fence

The fence was broken into ten thousand pieces.

Now the man who had nothing was good with his hands  
And he gathered  
As many pieces of the fence as he could find  
And made a raft.

On the raft he floated to safety  
And behind him on the raft,  
Holding on tightly,  
Was the Man who had had  
Everything.

So now, the Man who had had everything  
And the Man who had nothing  
Both had  
Nothing.  
Or had they?

There was nothing between them.  
Or was there?

Nick Header

## Cissy and Ada

It's evening in a small town library. There are two cleaners at work Cissy and Ada. Ada enters the room Cissy is cleaning in.

Ada: Cissy, Cissy, where are you?

Cissy: Yes, yes, I'm over here in history of art. Are you finished already; you must be in a hurry to get home?

Ada: **No** I haven't finished yet I've only just got to psychology. I need you to come and help me, there's a man in psychology.

Cissy: Well tell him the library's closed and to leave immediately and he's too late to borrow any books.

Ada: I tried but he ignored me. Could you come and tell him?

Cissy: Oh Ada do I have to do everything!

Cissy follows Ada to the psychology section.

Ada: Anyway I won't be rushing to finish work tonight as Bert's on days.

Cissy: Oh so I suppose it's back to my place after work then. Not sure that I've got enough sherry for you to stay too long.

Ada: It's a good job I know you don't mean that otherwise I'd feel hurt.

Cissy (muttering under her breath so Ada can't hear): Hmm a really good job.

Ada: Oh one other thing he's got no clothes on!

Cissy: Oh you poor thing no wonder you want to come home with me after work. Bert with no clothes on what a bilious thought!

Ada: No not Bert, the man in psychology!

Cissy: Oh, .....He's obviously attention seeking ..... Just like all men.

They arrive in the psychology section, standing there, looking but half pretending not to look at the man on the floor.

Cissy: Now come on young man enough of this playing about off you go ... **now**.

Ada: He's ignoring you Cissy, just like he ignored me.

Cissy: Yes I can see that! He's obviously a very rude man.

They stand there for a moment apparently not knowing what to do next.

Cissy: Is he breathing?

Ada: I don't know I wasn't looking at his chest.

Cissy: Now stop that, higher thoughts. I know it can't be easy depending on Bert for your cojuragal ... contigal ... well you know what I mean.

Ada: But his bits..... they look so big.

Cissy: Haven't you noticed that a man's bits always look bigger if he's thin like our friend there? If your Bert lost some weight I am sure his bits would look enormous.

Ada: Hmm I think I'll have to talk to Bert about going on a very strict diet.

They stare intently at the man's chest.

Cissy: I don't think he's breathing.

Ada: Perhaps he's holding his breath.

Cissy: Go on astound me why would he be holding his breath?

Ada: I don't know .....perhaps he's doing a silent protest!

Cissy: **A silent protest!** If he'd been holding his breath since we arrived here he'd be going blue in the face!

Ada: No need to shout. He could be a pearl fisher.

Cissy: A pearl fisher!

Ada: Yes they can hold their breath for a very, very long time.

Cissy: So why do you think there is a naked pearl fisher, holding his breath, lying on the floor of the psychology section of the library?

Ada: Attention seeking?

Cissy: Well I think he's dead.

Ada: Oh.....so what shall we do then?

Cissy: Leave him there, just Hoover round him.

Ada: Shouldn't we tell someone?

Cissy: No we'd only end up late home and I don't want to miss Corrie. Rita's got a new boyfriend and I want to see what he looks like.

David H Carpenter-Clawson

## Pink

All pink, wrapped in a soft white blanket

All pink and muddy playing in the park

All pink, sheathed in black leather and studded with metal

All pink, and proud in mortarboard and gown

All pink in full blossom in a flowing white dress

All pink, drained and glowing with child

All pink, though now with character lines

All pink, with many thanks to max factor

All the pink is fading fast

Just traces of pink, in the grey waxen mask

Only pink ..... in the memory of others

David H Carpenter-Clawson.

## WHITE

White light shining in the darkness,  
Cold and sterile, the only colour seen in the black night.

A hard, Unforgiving, Bright light in the dark.

A dead light, the colour of death,  
White skin; White eyes, White shroud.  
In death; all things forgotten, forgiven.

White for purity, once lost never regained,  
Innocence's gone, a land never to be revisited.  
Death and innocence's lost, walk hand in hand.

The white of snow; cold unforgiving,  
A time when forgotten, that white is not pure,  
It is an amalgam of colour, bright and alive.

Every colour is hidden, within the white,  
Red, Blue, Orange, Yellow and Violet,  
All the colours can be seen in the bright, white light.

Joyce Rawle

## Revenge.

I gazed out of the window of my three bedroomed semi and reflected with some amusement on the last eighteen months and my troubled relationship with my neighbours. This reflection merely reinforced what I had often suspected in the last two years' that my total being had been absorbed in considering ways of coping with my new neighbours and their objectionable children. Day in day out I had mused on the unfairness of it all — this had been stage one and had led me inexorably to the other stages when I had been able to do something positive to relieve my nagging obsession and inward rage. It had all seemed so monstrously unfair. Ah well it was all part of a past which was worth recording and offering to my family

It began in the summer of 2001 when my neighbour after an illness of six months rapidly deteriorated into an emaciated corpse. John and Margaret, a happily married couple in their late sixties had two sons and a daughter. The children had all flown the nest but had returned in due course with partners whom they married and with whom they had children. John and Margaret had a total of seven grandchildren of whom they were justifiably proud. This happy situation came to an abrupt end when Margaret developed cancer and drifted downhill to an almost permanent sleep and frailty which left John bereft and very vulnerable. I had lost my wife seven years earlier and did what I could in practical terms — shopping lifts to the hospital, long talks and even longer silences. I knew from my own experience that friends can only do so much, but still one tries.

John was keen to move away to be nearer the children and grandchildren, in whom of course he sought solace. John never sought to cling to them. The house, in excellent condition, sold quickly. There was a demand for this type of standard house, mortgage rates were low and within six weeks the new owners arrived. This was the beginning of the obsession. I should have realised earlier or at least heeded the warning signs. It is strange how we miss tiny clues and only later can we put the jigsaw pieces together and complete the picture. Perhaps we simply refuse to accept the warnings. Anyway the new picture was not attractive.

I set to making a cake and some buns for my new neighbours as a welcoming gift. I rather enjoyed cooking and was reckoned a fair hand at it — or that was what my dear Alice used to say. By dint of peering through the curtains I saw that the family consisted of mother, father, I presumed, they were married, and four children. I like children and had

enjoyed an excellent relationship with Margaret's, despite having none of our own. The cake and buns turned out well and I decided to stroll round, introduce myself and offer this little house warming gift. The yapping dog was not reassuring as I strode purposefully up the path and rang the bell. After a second ring, discreet pause of course, the door was snatched open by a young lad of about 14 with two tone hair, who glared at me and said, 'Yeah? Wha cher wan?'

'I live next door and thought I would come round and introduce myself'.

'Mum', the lad bellowed over his shoulder, 'it's the bloke from over the fence — dunno what 'e wants'. From inside the house came a cry of 'Christ we're watchin 'East Enders'. — tell 'im ter come back later'.

'I thought you might like a cake and some buns I have baked', I ventured.

'Oh, Okay, just put 'em there in the corner and I'll tell me mum later,' the lad trailed off, as he began closing the door. This incident didn't inspire me but I realised later that it was a pattern of things to come. The three boys, Jason, Ivan and Sean were all young teenagers with all the problems of teenagers and the next few weeks were to be a rude awakening for me.

Some might suppose I had enjoyed a sheltered life — perhaps I had really — but I had served my National service in Korea in the early 50's and now wondered if all the talk of saving the world for democracy; free from Communism made any sense if it led to the barrage of abuse from the three boys on the other side of the fence. Problems began very quickly, within a few days in fact and were so upsetting initially that I stayed inside, but even here in the safety, sanctity and security of my small castle I was assailed — assailed by the heavy beat of some kind of rock music — rock or pop it was all the same to me. Walking round to remonstrate brought verbal abuse and a few vegetables came flying my way, although I was never actually hit. A quiet reminder that there were laws about constant harassment, which now included the parents and the dog, was received with hoots of insulting laughter and not too subtle threats about 'getting some good insurance for your bloody car mate'. It would have to be the Council Offices, I thought.

The following Wednesday I waited patiently to see the appropriate official. He turned out to be a young man of perhaps thirty. I wondered if he would prove to be sympathetic or just an issuer of forms to complete.

‘Do you have any proof of this alleged harassment, Mr. Richter?’ he began tentatively.

‘No, I don’t have any proof of insults and verbal abuse. How could I have such proof?’

‘Well, we have a form here which will enable you to list the incidents day by day with times and witnesses — with their addresses of course’. He smiled with satisfaction that he had coped with the situation. ‘If you could complete this over the next month then I am sure we will be able to help you’. I was ushered out. My next month was occupied with completing the form with care and not a little enthusiasm. This was the civilised way to settle disputes, by invoking the law and doing things the decent English Way.

The month passed rapidly and the original form of four sheets had now grown to nine, with very full accounts of the rubbish thrown into the garden, the vandalism of my car which I saw from the balcony, the continual taunting and the daily dog mess deposited on the lawn by Jason. This I had actually managed to photograph. The second visit to the Council Offices was a disappointment. The original official was away on holiday and his deputy could not deal with my complaints as he had not been privy to the first discussion.

‘But my conversation was minuted on the last occasion there must be a record of it somewhere’, I protested.

‘I am sorry sir, but that Information is locked away as confidential. Looking at your report here Mr. Richter I do not consider that you have adequate grounds — or at any rate we as an Authority do not have adequate grounds for a prosecution. I am prepared to send a warning letter if you wish but don’t forget this may antagonise your neighbours even further.’

‘Yes please, my health is suffering and I have sleepless nights. I can get a Dr’s certificate to prove this’

‘No, no, that won’t be necessary’.

The letter was sent and the result was an unsigned and threatening note pasted together and cut from the local paper. The tenor of the note so upset me that I reached for the brandy bottle and poured a generous portion, slumping down in the sofa in some despair. If nobody is prepared

to help then I must take action. But how and what action? The brandy worked some kind of magic and I found my brain became more active and creative. After thirty minutes I reached for the bottle again and poured another generous tot. By now I was revelling in the word revenge and thinking that it was sweet was a gross understatement. It was deliciously sweet, tangily sweet — what did I mean? I went to bed a happy man and despite the rock music pounding through the wall, slept like a top.

I woke early with that wonderful feeling that my life was going to take a turn because for the first time in months I felt as though I was in control of events. Yesterday evening came back clearly and I now saw my way. My two years as a Royal Engineer were now to be used to good effect. I approached the task methodically — that's how we built bridges — assembled all the tools and equipment, which included the aged electric masonry drill with a very long bit of 24 inches. I still calculated in inches, none of this modern measurement for me. The bit needed to be at least half an inch in diameter with a plastic tube of the same diameter which in itself needed 26 inches in length. I also needed a few pounds of fish — oh' and of course some two pounds of pig manure, preferably fairly liquid. These I assembled over the next two days so that by the week-end I was ready to move into the final operations. These were likely to be unpleasant and very smelly, as rotting fish, with heads included mixed with strong pig manure is not altogether pleasing to the nose. I really felt focussed now. The mixture remained in a sealed plastic container hanging from a tree where it brewed in the sunlight, thereby furthering decay, rot and smell. I began to develop further refinements in my mind and became rather pleased with my own ingenuity.

It was Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> of September when my revenge began in earnest. I had already taken up my own floorboards in the lounge and the whole Marks family — yes I now knew their name from the electoral roll — had taken off for the local 2<sup>nd</sup> Division football game half a mile away. Drilling a hole through the cavity walls, two cavities and three bricks in width under the floor, meant that after 23 inches I was through to the Marks' house. As the layout was exactly the same as my house, this meant that I was directly under their lounge floor. I felt a gradual build up of intensity was probably best so I contented myself with a mere four holes through the party wall. I had to chuckle at the idea of a party, which implied fun and games. Well wasn't that exactly what I was expecting? To be perfectly honest this little project had taken over my thinking and I was really enjoying the planning and the gradual refinements I had in mind. The operation was now quite easy but needed to be done outside

my own house. With rubber gloves and a full face mask I filled the plastic tube with the now appallingly smelly mixture and offered it to the hole neatly drilled to receive it. I had taken the precaution of mixing some of my own under floor soil so that detection would be that little bit more difficult. The tube, lightly smeared with butter — the best butter of course — slid in perfectly and with a length of dowelling and a little pressure from me the awful mixture was deposited. I repeated this four times and then sealed the hole in my own wall with a piece of solid rubber piping bought from a local builder. All I had to do now was sit and wait and perhaps allow myself a little gloat with a pleasant drink Well, after all this had been an exhausting operation for me and had involved much planning. yes, I had earned a drink.

At 6.30 the family returned, not in the best of moods. As I realised later their team had lost disastrously and the reaction was fairly predictable. I heard the oaths and cursing, followed by an agonised bellow, with glee. Eventually the family staggered off to bed and it was only as I sat reflecting on the day's work that the thought came to me that the family did not really deserve to sleep. Had they not ruined my sleep night after night with the raucous music? Why should I stop at the downstairs lounge? There was plenty of mixture left and it seemed a pity to let it go to waste — or even go off. I had to smile at this wonderful new enterprise I had organised. The following day was a Sunday and the family took off in their large Ford, presumably to find some fresh air. Well they better get all they can while they have the chance because there is going to be even less around here when they return. I spent the late part of the morning drilling the front room and also the two upstairs bedrooms. It was all so 'easy peasy' now I was into the swing of it. I rubbed my hands in delight and even permitted myself a little jig around the room. What would the reaction be on their return? The mixture now was even more pungent. I didn't have long to wait to find out. More bellowing and rummaging around the rooms. As the smell now came from the floor area and the ceiling it was going to be very difficult to trace.

Two days later when I had become used to the shouting and cursing I have to confess the novelty wore off, so it was quite clear that I needed a further refinement. I bought a powerful spring which would fit into the plastic tubing and could be bent to a right angle. With a thin but strong chromium bar the whole outfit could be inserted into the hole and when once through to the other side the bar could be withdrawn and the spring would reassert itself and turn at the pre-set right angle. This was the theory. I found with this new technique I could scatter the mixture over a very wide area of living space. I am not sure that by now it could be

called living any more. I found also that by simply twisting the tube over there was even further possibility for spreading the mixture. The new system worked like a charm and I spent another enjoyable night listening in to the conversation next door, where a degree of despair had set in and there was mention of drains. I had one further thought in the night. I ought to cover my tracks in case any clever mate of the family came up with the idea of looking under floor boards. Working now on my project was relatively easy as the family did not seem to want to spend much time at home — busy finding fresh air I thought. I felt I had done enough now and anyway I was beginning to suffer from cramp so the next move would certainly be my last. I mixed together cement and brick dust into a paste. This was an odourless mixture but it was a close colour match to our bricks. A new plastic tube was needed as was a clean plunger so that the brick paste could be pushed through to the very end and seal the hole just before dropping off into the under floor areas. This operation required some finesse but I had the patience and it only took a morning. I calculated that it would take a very close inspection to see those tell tale holes now they were sealed.

I gave it two more days and then decided to act. The shouting had taken on the shape of blaming each other for the smell and to my mind this seemed slightly unfair. So I went round to find out first hand how they felt. Even the dog on the path seemed subdued and watched me with a baleful eye as I rang the door bell.

‘Yeah?’ snapped Mr. Marks. ‘What cha wan?’ he finally managed.

‘I wanted to ask you if you know anything about the ghastly smell which seems to be in our area?’ I chose the words our area because I didn’t want to be seen as accusing the family of any grubby habits. Oh no that would have been far too impolite and in any case by saying ‘our’ I could give the impression that I was suffering too. ‘I thought it might be the drains blocked but I am sure you know best. The last owners had a cracked drain I believe and didn’t get it mended — that could be the problem’. I ended on an authoritarian note as though I was an expert on smells. Well in this particular case I suppose I was.

‘Yer, I bet that’s the trouble’, Mr. Marks replied excitedly, ‘I’ll av a go termorrer’.

I retired to my house and simply waited for events to develop. By midday Mr. Marks had hired a pneumatic drill and was frantically pounding and digging up the path. After only a couple of hours at this he had produced mounds of earth, paving and cement over the lawn. A furious Mrs. Marks was angrily remonstrating about the mess but he bellowed at her and she retired to the kitchen. At the end of the day Mr. Marks had uncovered

about half of the relevant drain and late in the evening he ceased. It occurred to me that it would be possible to confuse the issue even further or put him off the scent so to speak if I were to drop a little of my noxious mixture — now even more horrific than ever — into the open cast mine which Mr. Marks had dug. I did just that in the early hours and was delighted to find that now he sniffed real success he kept frantically digging for another three days. At the end of this period after much grunting, sweating and cursing Mr. Marks slumped clown and admitted defeat. I confess that at this juncture I felt a twinge of guilt at what I had done. I have to confess too that the twinge lasted about 30 seconds. The earth was back filled and within ten days a 'For Sale' sign appeared.

The house sold quickly much to my surprise. The smell which was never neutralised, brought about a large reduction in the real value and the new owners, a young couple with two small children were a welcome sight. Repeating history I took round a cake and buns as a welcome token. As the front door opened I felt the full blast of my handiwork, it was far worse than I had ever anticipated.

'Hallo, I am Alan and live next door. A token gift', I said proffering the goodies.

'That's kind of you. I'm Nigel and Laura's in the kitchen. Sorry about the smell but that's how the previous owner left it. But we are not surprised because we have run across this problem before. We bought a lovely property in Surrey where the owner had deliberately wrecked the house as the bank or building society were going to repossess. Just before eviction they usually do something to take value off the property. Now I wouldn't be surprised if we don't find fishmeal or something equally unpleasant under the floorboards. We're pulling them up tomorrow. That's why we gave the kids to my mother for three days — it gives us a good clear run. Thanks for the cake and buns. You must come round and have a drink when we are sorted out. You are obviously a good neighbour'.

It was late the next evening when Nigel called and asked me to come round. He had discovered something of great interest. I was very apprehensive because this man clearly understood about buildings. What had he now found? 'This is my wife Laura, Laura, Alan'. We exchanged greetings, had a coffee and then moved into the back room. The floorboards were piled neatly in the corner and the smell had almost vanished.

‘I scraped the floor, put down a plastic membrane and covered it all with chippings. After a couple of days airing it will be hunky —dory,’ Nigel concluded in triumph. ‘But this is what I really wanted to show you’. He pointed to the party wall and I could see quite clearly the paste of my brick and cement which was designed to cover my tracks. I sank onto a chair feeling quite faint.

‘Now what do you make of that? I think that the previous owner drilled those holes and was planning on pushing through this ghastly mixture to your side, thinking that if he was going to sink then he would inflict some misery on you too. What sort of a neighbour would do such a low down trick?’

I felt I had no answer to this.

Brian Davidson

## The Stream

Down at the bottom of the field, there is a wood.  
In the middle of the wood, there is a stream.  
A narrow stream,  
A sunken stream.

Walking in the water,  
Hidden from view,  
Thin holly branches lean down  
To comb unwary heads.

Underfoot, here is shallow, here is deep.  
With slippery clay and gripping stones.

Plopping frog and swimming snake.  
A twist, a turn, a root of fern,  
A splash of dappled light!

Where winter torrents have scoured the banks,  
Two oak tree trunks hang in the air,  
Anchored firmly to their mossy banks  
By long hand rails of roots.

And now the climax.  
We stop dead at the base of a thundering waterfall.  
A deep pool at our feet,  
Half concealed by a dark and gloomy cavern,  
Curtained with mud clotted strands.

This is a magic place, where unicorns and fairies live,  
And pixies might appear.  
Did prehistoric man walk these ways,  
And come to worship here?

Gill Starkey

## HISTORY

Joe was sitting on the boarded sidewalk in front of the bar, smoking and watching the passers-by. He had rolled up his shirtsleeves ready for work and the sun was warm on his forearms. He squinted up at the sky: nearly midday; time to go inside. Ted Murphy would already be in there seated at a table, glancing through the figures for last night's takings and sipping the strong black coffee Marie always poured for him. Marie herself would be polishing the few glasses not put away last night, concentrating on the task as if it was the most important thing in the world. It struck Joe that if he lingered long enough, Marie might come out to find him, maybe teasing him gently about his northerner's love of the sunshine that he just couldn't seem to get enough of.

Joe was smiling as he bent to stub out his cigarette, when he heard a voice from across the street call out his name. His hand froze. He did not need to look up to recognize that voice. For a long moment, Joe stared hard at the ground. Then he got swiftly to his feet and, without looking round, walked quickly, along the sidewalk, away from the calling voice. He dodged in and out of the shoppers and office workers on their lunchbreak, and after a hundred yards or so, ducked down a narrow alleyway. As soon as he left Main Street, he broke into a run. At the end of the alley, he glanced back: no one. He hesitated for a moment, then doubled back round the back of the block and ran back in the direction he had come. At the end of the block was another alleyway. Breathing heavily, he made his way along the alley until he was almost at the corner of the building. He peered cautiously round the corner onto Main Street. She was still there, her back to him, looking up the street in the direction in which he had walked off. Then she turned and looked uncertainly at the bar. Would she go in there and ask after him? Just then a group of men appeared, walking down the sidewalk towards her. It was the 'good ole boys', as Marie called them, large men who took up the whole sidewalk, talking loudly and laughing raucously. Laura's back stiffened with distaste, then she turned on her heel and walked away. Joe waited until she was out of sight before he hurried into the bar.

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'Reckon our Joe got too much sun out there this morning, Marie?' Ted winked at Marie. Marie was looking at him anxiously, 'Joe, you really don't look too good.' She put out her hand to touch his forehead. Joe dropped his head, leaving Marie's hand in mid-air. Ted looked at Joe

sharply, 'Joe Middleton! You been here six months or more and I ain't never seen you moody like this before. What you so touchy about all of a sudden, boy?'

Joe coloured, 'I had ...some bad news this morning. Fact is I need to go away for a while – back up north. Some...business to sort out.'

'Business!' snorted Ted, 'I thought you told me you was done with business.' His expression changed suddenly, 'You ain't thinking of quitting, are you? This job not good enough for you.'

'No! No!'

Ted looked unconvinced. There was a pause: 'You know, Joe, I was thinking of giving you a raise. Seeing as you're doin' the books and such like, as well as the bar work..'

When Joe didn't respond, Ted continued, 'I don't mind telling you, Joe, I've kinda got to relying on you...'

Joe felt Marie's eyes on him. 'Ted, it's nothing to do with the job. I just need to get away for a couple of days. If I leave first thing tomorrow, I'll be back before the weekend.'

Ted sighed, 'Well, I can see we're not going to get anything more out of our man of mystery, here, Marie!' He got up, glancing at the clock, 'Nearly six. Time to get back to work!' He ambled off into the bar, leaving Joe and Marie sitting at the table. Marie spoke quietly without looking at Joe, 'I guess you miss the big city life, Joe..' Joe stared at her. He hesitated, then said, 'No, I don't. I don't miss it at all, Marie.' Marie looked up swiftly and smiled.

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Joe was standing behind the bar when he saw her come in. She didn't spot him at first, but went up to Marie who was waiting on tables near the door. He saw Marie hesitate, then shake her head. Laura gestured impatiently and looked round the room. Joe took a step back towards the door out back, but he wasn't quick enough. Laura had seen him. She pushed past Marie and sauntered over. Several of the men in the bar turned to look at her. 'Nowhere to run this time, Joe Burger!' Laura said quite loudly. She flapped her leather gloves over the bar stool before seating herself, 'Bit of a comedown, isn't it?' Joe pretended to be concentrating on wiping a glass, 'I'm busy Laura. What do you want?'

'You know, Daddy had to hire a private detective to track you down. I couldn't believe it, when he told me you were working in a place like this.' Out of the corner of his eye, Joe could see Marie speaking to Ted Murphy. They were looking his way. 'Laura, what do you want?'

‘Oh, don’t look so worried!’ Laura smiled and leaned closer, ‘Joe, why do you think I’ve taken so much trouble to find you?’ She paused meaningfully, still smiling. Joe shifted uneasily. ‘You know it really hurt, you walking out like that. And the job too... I know Daddy can be a bit of a tyrant sometimes, but...well, the rewards were worth it, surely?’ Joe looked away. Laura leaned over further and placed her hand on his. She was still wearing his ring. He smelt her perfume. Her smile was dazzling. Joe let his hand rest beneath hers for a moment. He had told Marie he missed nothing about the big city, but was that really the truth?

Hilary Olek

## TOP OF THE WORLD

[Descriptive excerpt from a book in progress]

The late morning sun had burnt off the mist from the top of the mountain, leaving only a few damp patches on the higher ground.

The condor had been standing on a rocky outcrop with her wings open soaking up the warmth, judging the time to be right she launched herself into the air and dropped like a stone. Opening her wings to their fullest, she caught the thermals and drifted gently upwards, slowly passing the small waterfalls that fell majestically from the top of the mountain and the rocky outcrops covered with damp moss and lichens. She drifted like a kite on the natural warm thermals created by the heat of the sun; with slight movements of her head and tail feathers she could change direction and scan the cliff face for likely food. Slowly she drifted ever upward in tight circles.

Below her the dark green canopy of the rain forest drifted away and with it the shrill call of the howler monkeys, which drowned out all other sounds. The last remnants of the late morning mists were still clinging stubbornly to the treetops, making it look as though a thousand spiders had spun their webs over the top of the trees, looking down it was like looking onto a fine muslin blanket. The canopy receded into the distance as she lazily circled, and the thermals raised her ever higher. The steep sides became more barren and rugged, with bare rocks protruding out, anchored by little more than a few scrubby roots that grew into nothing but held the tiny orchids that inhabited such a steep barren rock-face. As she got nearer the top, the steep side gave way to scrubby sloping grassland until the top came into full view, green and grey in the harsh late morning light.

She came out of the thermals and drifted across the flat land that was the top of the mountain.

Looking down, the sight of small grey stone houses came into view; they lay in straight lines with sharp corners and cobbled walkways dividing them into neat squares. Everything was unusually silent and still, no movement disturbed the un-natural stillness that was all engulfing, not even a mouse stirred. Following the main concourse between the houses she flew towards the Temple that dominated the mountain top and circled it, rising higher and higher until she could see the whole of the flat top. She looked over the town and quivered in fear; there was no colour

except for the green of the sparse grass, everything else was grey and lifeless. The massive Temple at the end of the widest concourse sat like a spectre at the feast.

As the sun reached its mid-day point there was sudden movement at the apex; a priest had exited from a flight of stairs rising from deep inside the Temple. He was wearing a ceremonial cloak made up of a kaleidoscope of bright coloured feathers and in his hair, the long tail feathers from the red and blue parrots that lived within the rain forest. Behind him were a small group of priests dragging the sixteen-year—old Maliandia towards the central Altar stone.

At the base of the Temple people had started to silently gather in tight groups, their heads bowed in supplication. A scream was wrenched from Maliandia's lips, as her clothing was ripped from her and her naked body was roughly thrown onto the Altar.

Joyce Rawle

## In The Beginning...

In the beginning there was blackness. It filled the sky with nothing. It was everywhere and everything. Then the light came. It burnt the dark and stars were born. The largest hole became the sun. Yet even the light needed a time to rest. It was then that the darkness would return for a while. Thus night and day were made.

Once when the light returned part of the darkness stayed too long and was separated from the sky from where it fell and became the earth. Yet it was without form, so the light marked the earth and cut into it hills and caves, high and low.

From the darkness came a figure that sat upon the earth and saw it empty. At first he took his hair and put it into the earth making the land soft with grass, plants, flowers and trees. Then he took his teeth and made the land hard with rocks and stone. The world was filled with colour yet he was alone. This saddened him and he cried. His tears fell onto the ground, ran into the low spaces giving rise to rivers, streams and oceans. Yet the world was still empty of things that would fill it.

From his toes he made the fish to paddle in the seas, from his legs he made the animals to tread the land and from his arms the creatures to soar above. These filled the world finding places to live, to multiply, to die. The figure saw these and reacted both in joy and anger. His laughter made the wind and his anger the fire.

After a time the world was a wonderful place filled with sights and sounds that amazed the eye and brought wonder to the figure. Yet even with such things he was still alone. So he spilt himself into two to create men and women to walk the earth, different but equal. Together they spread across the land, laid down together, made roots and from them we came.

Peter Glyn Hopwood

## A GOOD NIGHT OUT

### THE COPPER'S TALE

In two years, three months and fifteen days PC Green would have completed his thirty years service. Retirement could not come too soon and, in the way that he had ticked off the days during a six year 'stint in the army, he continued to wish his life away. Everything would be so much better when he could devote more time to his garden in Lea on Sea.

When the call to the fight outside the Ferret and Firkin had come over his radio he had just stopped a car in Bloomfield Street - tax out of date an easy job, but he had to let the relieved minicab driver off and go to the scene. Never run to a fight was the old advice, always proceed purposefully. As usual, when he arrived, it was chaos; little groups kicking out at one another, a few individuals squaring up like dogs, shrieking drink-ugly women pulling on men's arms and only a few scattered genuine fights.

A van load of Support Group was already on the scene and had started on the arbitrary separation of the combatants, decanted from the warmth of the van they wore white short sleeved shirts and padded black leather gloves and it made them look particularly pugilistic. In ten minutes they would be back in the van, leaving the foot soldiers to sort out the paperwork and the recriminations. "An arrest would be handy" thought Green "keep me inside for the rest of the shift".

Suddenly he was aware of a stocky blond man in a torn blue bomber jacket carrying a motorway scale rubber traffic cone and hurling it into the pub doorway. The cone and the man moved so slowly that the phalanx of doormen were able to avoid it easily. This annoyed the man who tried to pick up the cone and have another go however before he could do so PC Green had stepped in.

With some difficulty but with the benefit of experience and sobriety PC Green had handcuffed, cautioned and arrested the man for being drunk and disorderly in about fifteen seconds. The man protested with a great deal of oral violence but, since all likely support had been dispersed or arrested, it did him no good. He planted his feet firmly and refused to walk to the van, but the police were old hands and two of them carried him backwards with his legs ineffectually pedalling in mid air. This humiliation made him verbally murderous.

On arrival at the Police Station there was, as always on a Friday night, a queue for the Custody Suite. Green knew from experience that he and his prisoner were going to spend about an hour and a half together waiting in the corridor. This was usually a good time to fill out his Incident Report Book but his prisoner was still at the stage of issuing threats, accusations, allegations and obstructions. "Time to calm this guy down" thought the officer. "You're a strong bloke" said Green, "I had a lot of difficulty getting the cuffs on you, I expect you work out a lot". The prisoner, who had not done anything more physical than lifting a glass in the ten years since leaving school, was surprised and flattered by the compliment. After some more mild flattery he had given his details to the PC, twenty minutes later he had reached the tearful stage of his life story and, by the time he was in front of the Custody Sergeant he had sworn his apologies to Green, the police force in general and would have included the Home Secretary if he had remembered that there was one.

Green, after handing over his prisoner, whose name he now knew to be Dean Aggatte, settled down with a cup of tea to complete his notes. Just another half an hour to go he should be able to spin it out until the end of the shift.

### **THE PRISONER'S TALE**

Me and the lads were having a night out in the City, just a few drinks. I mean we don't work there or nothing but it gets a bit lively on Friday nights. All these dealers and that, if they've had a good week they push the boat out and there's always plenty of easy birds whose drunk too much. Mind you, you need to wear the right gear to get noticed, got to have the right labels. Never pay full price though, best thing is to buy it in my local boozer at lunchtime. If the junkie who stole it is desperate enough for his next armful he'll give you a good price.

We wasn't doing so well this night, no bonus party's to slide into, must have been a bad week on the markets. So we ends up in the Ferret drinking our own money and hoping next week will be better, tell the truth I'd sunk quite a few slammers but I wasn't aggressive or nothing. Honest, my life, I was just coming out of the gents when I walked into this massive row. Seems some bloke said this bird had fat legs, her bloke decked him and then lots of other ones joined in. I was just standing there watching, well you do don't you? Then all these bouncers start chucking them out into the street - me included - and they ripped me new Armani jacket

I tried to get back in to me mates, explain what happened and get some bunce for me jacket but they was having non of it. Next thing the coppers arrive and start giving it large and me, I'm so pissed off I pick up a road sign and throw it in the pub doorway - It really shakes them bouncers up - scares them. Next thing some bloody great City Copper has got me in an arm lock. I make him work for it but in the end he gets me cuffed, not much you can do when they get those new fangled cuffs on one of your wrists, you have to go with it.

What makes it worse the geezer, this copper, was old, old as my dad, maybe older. I kept shouting at him that he was old and fat but he just says "cor! You're observant". It took six of them to get me in the van, even with the cuffs and I fought them every step. When we got to the nick there was a queue of blokes - up for it, like me. I told this old copper what I thought of him and his mates, told him that he might be King Dick here but in Canning Town he'd be shit - Pure shit. Wasn't all I told him either but it must have started to worry him cos' next thing I know he's showing me a bit of respect.

Turns out he wasn't such a bad bloke after all, we had quite a long chat and he seemed quite interested in me and my life, Says he sees this sort of screw up all the time especially after a punch up. I mean they do have a difficult job and I suppose, as far as he was concerned, I was out of order. He says he'll put a word in for me at the trial and maybe sort me out a cup of tea before he goes off duty.

By Anthony Nicholson

## The Father-Stone

The child turned the black near oblong stone over with his fingers lengthways and then sideways. He enjoyed the shiny feel slipping inside his small rough hand. He passed his thumb over its surface. It was smooth like ice but warm from the sun. He threw it from his left hand to his right, the weight of it easily cradled, before juggling it back.

Kee-paar had been named, as a toddler, after his favourite bird, the bird that he could mimic so well as to fool its own mate.

He looked up at the man and smiled and the same smile caught on the face of his guardian as they remembered that hunting trip when the young boar had turned and charged causing them both to fall over. They had let it go . It had earned that.

They had been tracking this deer for two long days, exhausting it with constant movement, catching it up, resting, before finding the warm trail again. Now it was in sight, at bay, slightly more exhausted than its hunters were.

Kee-paar handed the shiny stone to the man who was now a parent to him. A reindeer mother, crazed with wounds and empowered by maternal care had killed his natural father two summers before.

Trust passed between them with the stone.

The hunter loaded his sling and fired with the speed of arrows. The antelope fell stunned. The family would eat this week and eat well. The child's mother would be pleased.

The child had shown the hunter enough of his skills. He, Kee-paar, would lead the next hunt.

They were satisfied as they carried the deer on a pole between them back to the temporary village. They would have enough food till the turn of the moon, with this deer and the berries that the other children had collected on the way.

When they returned, in tribute to the dead prey, Kee-paar spun the stone, which had brought it down, having marked it according to custom, into the river, the father of all life. It bounced off the water surface once, twice, four times and sank.

That night was a double celebration. The hunt had gone well and the mother of Kee-paar was about to give birth. The Weather was fair and Kee-paar had passed his test.

\* \* \* \* \*

‘Where is my museum?’ The child called up the stairs

Stepfather: ‘What on earth is his museum?’

Mother: ‘I don’t know dear. Have you looked in the garage?’

Child: ‘Yes but I can’t find it’.

Mother: ‘It’s his collection of things’.

Stepfather: ‘What sort of things’.

Mother: ‘A nut opened by a nuthatch, a fir cone eaten by a squirrel, interesting feathers, discarded eggshells, strangely shaped chestnuts -that sort of thing.’

Stepfather: ‘Why would he want to keep all that?’

Mother: ‘It’s just his collection. It keeps him happy’

Stepfather: ‘Well he may not be so happy now. I think I threw his museum away.’

Mother: ‘Oh my god you didn’t. There’ll be hell to pay’

Stepfather: ‘I just thought it was rubbish: how was I supposed to know. For Goodness sake he is very odd’

Mother: ‘He is **my son**’.

Stepfather: ‘Why can’t he play computer games like normal children?’

Mother: ‘He’s just never wanted to. Why should every one be the same’.

Stepfather: ‘You can be ‘not the same’ without being plain odd.’

The child heard raised voices and then silence. He waited a few seconds.

Child: ‘Still can’t find it Mum’

Mother: ‘Never mind dear. I’ll help you make another collection if you like’

He would like. He enjoyed doing together things with his mother. There had been times recently though when she had not reacted in the way that he had become used to. And then there was the baby. His mother had said that it would be a little brother or sister for him but he was not quite sure how they would all fit in to **their** house.

To be honest, most of the things in his museum were pretty replaceable but there was one thing that was not. He had found it on a ramble with his father along a beach. It was shiny and black and had marks on one side that looked a bit like the outline of his favourite animal - a type of antelope called a gerenuk. He used it for luck, took it out of the museum when he thought he might need a boost.

Then he remembered. He went to the dentist quite recently.

He checked the pockets of his second best trousers. His tender hand met the hard surface of the stone. He turned it over, possessively, lovingly, his fingertips slipping over its surface.

‘I’ve found my Father stone, Mum.’

Nick Harder

## HOME

A bundle of fabric tumbled from the shelf of the linen cupboard and landed softly at her feet. Susan bent down and started cramming it into the black bin liner with the rest. The last cupboard was empty. Now she could lock up the house, take the bag of linen to the clothes bank and leave.

She picked up the bag and strode towards the stairs. Her fingers slipped on the shiny black plastic and the untidy bundle tumbled back out again onto the floor. Susan stopped, blinking back sudden tears. Then she sat down abruptly on the top step of the stairs. She gathered up the fabric and buried her face in it. To her surprise, the fabric still had the familiar scent of the old-fashioned washing powder her mother had always used. Susan looked at it again and recognized her old bedspread.

She shook the material out, so that the fabric fell over her knees and smoothed the soft cotton around her. The material was slightly yellowed with age and the sprigs of small pink roses and trellis of pink lines that had once been so fresh were faded. Susan closed her eyes and saw a small girl with straight brown hair, parted on one side with her head resting against the headboard of her bed and the pink and white bedspread gathered up under her chin.

Susan opened her eyes slowly. She shivered: the sun still streamed in through the landing window, but its rays were slanting now, as it sank in the evening sky. There had been no heat on in the house for weeks. Susan drew the bedspread closer to her, remembering long-ago evenings when she crept from her bed to sit here at the top of the stairs, straining to overhear what was being said downstairs.

On summer evenings especially, when she would be sent to bed while the sun was still shining more strongly than today, she would slip out of her bed, wrap the bedspread around her and 'explore'.

On fine evenings, she would often creep into the spare bedroom which overlooked the back garden and peep from behind the curtains at her parents, who liked to sit in the old canvas deckchairs on the lawn, chatting or sharing the newspaper. Occasionally one of them might glance up and then she would shrink back quickly so as to stay unobserved.

More daringly, she would sometimes tiptoe into her parents' bedroom and investigate the secrets of dressing table drawers and wardrobes – glamorous-looking make-up and perfumes which her mother never seemed to use or high-heeled shoes she had never seen her wear. Most puzzling were a number of mysterious potions and appliances, which she found in the bottom drawer of her mother's bedside cabinet. These looked vaguely medical, although since neither of her parents ever seemed to get ill, Susan had not been able to work out what they were for.

In winter, when the garden was dark and it was too dark to see in her parents' room and the garden was just blackness, she would slip out of bed and creep over to the window of her own room, which overlooked the street at the front of the house. The whole street would be bathed in an eerie orange glow from the new streetlights, which had been installed some time around her sixth birthday. Susan loved to watch people walking up the street from the tube station, imagining they were aliens, with their greenish skin and dull, dark clothes.

But most daring of all was to creep to the top of the stairs and make her way down, as far as she dared, stepping very slowly and carefully so as to avoid the stairs that creaked, and to sit and eavesdrop on the conversations downstairs.

That was how she found out about it.

Up to then she had never asked about any of the mysteries she had discovered in her evening wanderings. She had assumed that eventually everything would be explained, and she did not want to risk being too closely questioned about when she had seen this or that or how she found this or that. The evening wanderings were *her* secret and not worth trading for *theirs*.

Until this time. This time what she had heard was not something she could forget about. She brooded about what she had heard all the next day. Her mother was just tucking her in and smoothing the pink and white bedspread when Susan asked abruptly, 'When will the time be right?'

Her mothers' hands stopped their busy movement. 'The time for what, dear?'

'To tell me!' Susan shouted.

Her mother looked at her quickly. She reddened. Then she went to the top of the stairs and called urgently, 'David! David! Come here, please! Straight away!'

They had both come in and they had sat down on the pink and white bedspread and they had tried to explain to her about the adoption. Susan had cried, then she had allowed herself to be comforted. Mum and Dad had told her again and again that they loved her and they would always be there to look after her.

They had kept their promise and she had loved them in return. Susan waited, but the adoption had never been spoken of again. Presumably Mum and Dad felt that everything had been explained. And now Mum and Dad were both dead.

Hilary Olek

### LOSS

Lost forever the wry smile that mirrored mine.

A life cut short by a short cut.

And undiscovered between the sleepers.

A ring, passed on when reaching majority.

No need for heirlooms, the end of the line.

By Anthony Nicholson

## HAVE I LOST ME

“How is she today” friends ask Mike,  
When meeting in the town, or shops,  
“She’s fine, having a good day” he replies,  
“I’ve just brought her out for an airing,”

“Yes I’m fine! I’m sitting here.” I almost shout.  
Can’t you see me I’m down here?  
But people don’t or won’t, see me now,  
Am I invisible sitting in my wheel chair?

Am I different now? Have I lost me?  
I can still think, I can still talk, and I just can’t  
walk.

I still go to the supermarket and shops,  
I cook, make cards, and write books.

I wash the clothes, change the beds and feed the cats,  
But I just need a wheelchair to get around  
I’m fed up with the sympathetic looks I get  
When piled with shopping in the town,

So I poke out my tongue or make funny faces  
Until realizing, Mike asks me to stop.  
I’m an intelligent woman, so why  
When I pay for things they look to Mike not at me?

Yes the part of me that had a career is gone  
But I’m still here, so lower your sight  
I’m down here, in a wheel chair,  
I’m not someone else I’m still me.

Joyce Rawle

## GUILT/GRIEF

Now you are dead, what if, what if, and what if. There seems to be so many what ifs, unanswered questions? No questions without any answers.

What if I'd put my foot down and insisted that you came to live with us, would that have made a difference? There is no answer.

What if I'd gone with the others for a cup of tea, would that have made a difference? There is no answer.

What if someone else had been asked, would that have made a difference? There is no answer.

What if I hadn't said, I'll back whatever decision you make and will fight for your right to make that decision, would that have made a difference? There is no answer.

What if I'd said no, I won't do it, would that have made a difference. There is no answer.

Now you are dead, what have I done?

But I did do it. I'm the one who passed on to the nurses that you wanted to stop treatment, that you'd had enough, that you wanted to go with dignity in your own time.

To add to my distress one of my brothers, B says "You must be used to this in your line of work."

I'm stunned, can't speak, feel sick, have to get away. Outside I'm angry, shaking, feeling sick, chain smoking, tears streaming uncontrollable.

Why did it have to be me you asked? I'm afraid I'll be blamed. After all, I am guilty of hastening your death. Oh mum, I'm glad you felt you were able to ask me, knowing that I would do as you ask. But, oh I wish you hadn't.

Joyce Rawle

## Myth.....?

Once upon a time, a holy man appeared in a small village in the middle of the moor. He was dirty, and tired, and a silver light emanated from his footprints in the earth. His travelling companion was a bird, about the size of a raven, with dowdy feathers which dropped onto the man's coat from its perch on his shoulder.

These travellers enquired as to the whereabouts of a suitable place to stay. The local people were suspicious of the pair, but a barn was found, which was warm, and full of straw. The holy man spent some time making a comfortable nest for his bird, who then gratefully sank into the soft haven and went to sleep. The man went into the village centre, where he found a group of children playing.

“Could you tell me where I could find fresh water?” he asked a small boy. The boy nodded, took his hand and led him to the well. There was a bucket lying on the ground, which was full of holes. The man picked one of the bird's feathers from his coat, and smoothed it around the rim of the bucket. The boy watched, his eyes widening, as the bucket was transformed into a gleaming pail, which the holy man attached to the hook and let fall into the depths of the well. He carried the water back to the bird, then returned it to the well.

The small boy watched him, then tugged at his sleeve. The man realised that this little chap had no powers of speech. “Do you wish to show me something-” he enquired gently. The boy nodded and led him to a small bakers shop, which was closed. Around the back of the shop was a table covered in a clean linen cloth, upon which were half a dozen loaves of bread. The boy picked one up and gave it to the man. His mouth watered for it had been a long time since he had last eaten.

“I have no money to pay for this, my friend.”

The boy shook his head. A voice came from inside the house, a deep voice. “Ned, who are you giving my bread to?”

A woman came out of a small door. She was dressed in shabby clothes, which nevertheless were clean. She hurried to the boy's side and took his hand. The holy man smiled at the boy, and said “He was doing me a favour. I have not eaten for days, and I think he took pity on me.”

“You are welcome to take a loaf, sir, it is yesterday’s, but I think you will find it fills your stomach!”

The holy man’s mouth filled with saliva. “I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Would that I could pay you, but I have no money.”

“Money is not what we need, sir. Please have one as a gift.”

The holy man returned to his barn, and crumbled some of the loaf onto the straw around the bird. He stroked its head and said “Enjoy, my friend. I think we have found a safe place.”

Next morning, he went again to the village centre, fetched water, and carried it back to the bird. There were less feathers falling from its body, and it stretched its neck out to take some more of the bread.

“You seem to be feeling better today, my friend. Would that we could find some more food.” He went to the village centre, where the children were playing. His companion from the day before came to him, with a jar in his hand. In the jar was a beetle with a damaged wing. The little boy’s eyes were full of tears.

“This is your pet, is it, my son?” The boy nodded.  
“Come with me.”

They returned to the barn, where the bird was lying in its straw nest. The holy man took a feather from the straw, and stroked the beetle gently. A buzzing noise emanated from the jar, and the beetle was seen stretching its wings and then it took off, flying clumsily from the jar. The boy watched its unsteady progress with an expression of wonder on his face. He was not the only observer.

That night, the holy man walked along the river. He washed his face in the brown water, and strolled back to his barn. The door was open. The bird was shivering, not a feather left on its body, its water spilled, its eyes dull and filmy. The holy man frowned, wrapped his coat around the bird, and took off into the village.

He found the boy outside the bakers shop. The little fellow took his hand, and led him into the kitchen. A spicy aroma filled his nostrils, and a plate was pressed into his hand, upon which was a mixture of meat and beans in a sauce. He said, “Before I can eat this very welcome meal, I must find one feather from my bird. If I can just do that, he may survive.”

“What is the matter with your bird, sir?” asked the mother of the silent boy.

“Someone has stolen all his magical feathers. They know not what they do, for the magic will work badly for the ill informed.”

The little boy studied him gravely, then looked at his mother.

“Could it be the boy from the other side of the river, that plays here sometimes?” she asked. “I worry about that poor child - his father made him a thief before he gave him a name.” Her son shrugged his shoulders, then made signs to the holy man to follow him. They went to the river, and crossed on the rickety bridge. Along a path, and into a copse where there was a ramshackle building. Voices could be heard - one scolding, one wailing. Two figures came into view - a large man and a boy. The man was pulling at the boy’s clothing, and each pull was heralded with a scream.

The holy man strode up to the pair, and asked “How is it that this boy is covered with feathers?”

“Well, I don’t rightly know. He came home like it, and I’m trying to get them out. They are stuck fast.”

The holy man looked at his silent companion. “See if you can remove one of those feathers, my friend.”

The boy pulled at one of the feathers, which fell easily into his hand.

The two then returned to the barn, and the holy man laid the plucked feather onto the poor bird’s back. It gave a cry, and sank into the straw. The boy crouched beside it, tears rolling down his cheeks. The bird was no longer breathing. The boy’s lips trembled, and suddenly from deep in his throat came words, like bubbles reaching the surface of a still lake, “Please help him.”

The holy man laid his hand on the little boy’s head. “Watch carefully, my friend.” Smoke started to arise from the bird’s beak.

Soon it was so thick, they could not see each other. After a while, the smoke thinned, and a silvery light could be seen. Where the bird had been lying, there was a clutch of eggs. One had hatched, and as they watched, the fledgling grew feathers, and its size increased until it reached the size

of a raven. The other eggs were made of gold. The holy man picked one up, felt its weight, spoke over it, and handed it to the boy.

“Give this egg to your mother, then cross the river and pour water on our feathered friend. He knew not what he was doing, and was important to the grand plan. He should be forgiven.”

“I will,” said the boy, in his new gruff voice, and left.

The holy man put his bird on his shoulder, and left the building. He had many more places to visit.

Jo Pountney

### **I REMEMBER**

I remember the gate to the farmyard, always open during the daytime. The gate where mum would tie a thick rope to one of the posts and stand turning it for hours, so that my sister and I could skip freely. Hearing the gate close with a clang, at night.

Joyce Rawle

## **Jimmy Middleton**

Jimmy Middleton lived in a town that was not too big and not too small. His mother and father were not what one would call wealthy but were very far from being what anyone would call poor. He was generally contented, academically competent and though not gregarious had enough special friends to deny the loner tag. But Jimmy Middleton had a burning ambition. He wanted to be different.

At one time his mother was desperate that Jimmy should join the scouts. All the friends that she trusted had installed their boys in their local troop. Every cajolment and threat, bribe and plea bargain met the same raging apathy. Every one did that. Everyone. He did not think he was better than them, he just did not want to drink at the same trough, be striped with the same wide brush. Jimmy was not a herd animal and at times he thought quietly to himself that he was becoming something apart-dare he say-an eccentric.

He warmed himself with that thought until he talked to Gareth Gunton. You aren't an eccentric. My aunt is an eccentric. She drives around the country in a old car called Alouitious and cleans her teeth with urine. You are ordinary -from the top of your cap to your roast potatoes on Sunday. You are extraordinarily ordinary.

Jimmy was devastated. How could anyone say such a thing. He didn't like football and hated everyone else's favourite TV programmes.

His mother had bought him a sweater, striped with green, yellow and black. He thought it was great and wore it day in and day out. He even wore it in bed if he wasn't spotted. He felt like a rebel. He went in to town one day and before he had got to the corner where the bank was he noticed four people wearing his sweater. It went in a drawer and never came out again.

Mr Middleton wrote reviews on cars for a national magazine. Jimmy heard the word Porsche on the telephone in close proximity to latest model. He didn't know much about cars but this sounded special. Can you pick me up in the porch Dad. Can you pick me up from school in the porch. It was out of his way but Mr Middleton usually pandered to Jimmy's whim.

When school was over Jimmy waited outside with increasing anticipation. If he doesn't come soon everyone else will have gone home.

Mr Middleton did not come. Jimmy's mother had gone 'for the ride'. They put the car through its paces down the loddingsworth straits and it performed impeccably. As they turned in to the road that ended in Jimmy's school the sun was very low in the sky.

It had been an hour and half and Jimmy, though concerned, had been convinced by himself and a friendly teacher that the car had broken down, that Dad had forgotten, that any one of a hundred things had happened.

Eventually, it was granny that appeared and her wax-worked expression told Jimmy everything.

Several months later, Tilly was holding the attention of a small crowd of children with a mixture of awe, wonder and pity as they watched a figure across the road. 'That's my cousin Jimmy Middleton. He's an orphan!'

Nick Header

## ISLAND WALK

Step softly on the warm white sand  
Sparkling in the sunlight as if home to a thousand glowworms.  
Linger awhile at the waters edge.  
Listen to the gentle splash as sea meets shore.  
Harken to the gull's restless cry, watch the martins and swallows dip and  
dive in the balmy air.

Meander quietly down the gentle green lanes.  
Hedges laced with sweet smelling honeysuckle.  
Stay awhile by the fields edged with bracken and ferns.  
Tender a friendly hand to the goats feeding there.  
With their haughty stare and bleating kids.

Stand lightly on the cliff tops springy turf.  
Sprinkled with clover, sea thrift and grass.  
Rest by the rocks all aged and worn  
Covered in lichen and warmed by the sun.  
Shield now your eyes and look out to sea.  
Watch seals gently swimming in the clear blue waters.

Tread carefully on rocks that are fallen.  
Like cascading giant marbles.  
Feel the salt spray on your face.  
Hear the roar of the sea.  
Pounding the rocks like an iron fist  
As if wanting to split and smash and tear them apart.

Huge foam flecked waves towering and angry  
Hurling against the cliff face.  
As if wanting to tear the very heart from the land.  
This heaving maelstrom known as Hell's Bay  
Must surely be the devil's playground?

Dora Haigh

## LOST

Terry, Sam and Anne had defied their mother and had spent a great afternoon playing in the woods; they played hide and seek, wrestling and rolling about in the leaves. As the afternoon drew to a close, Anne had fallen head over heels down a steep bank, ending up at the bottom with a grazed leg and very hurt pride; gingerly standing she looked down at her knee and watched a trickle of blood run down to her foot. She slowly made her way to the top of the bank and sobbing demanded her brothers take her home to mother, right away.

Sam stood by her side and tried to comfort her but it was no use, she wanted mother and said she would scream if they didn't take her home immediately. Calling to Terry Sam and Anne started to make their way home but Terry was watching a pair of squirrels scampering in the trees; 'he'll follow us soon' thought Sam. It was only when they reached the front door to their isolated home, that he realised Terry wasn't anywhere to be seen; Anne marched in and told her mother what had happened and that Terry had refused to come with them. Their mother was so cross with them that she boxed both of their ears for leaving their little brother behind; but forgot to tell them off for playing in the woods in the first place. It was only as it got dark that she started to really worry and was sure something had happened to her wayward youngest son; father would have to go and look for him, just as soon as he came home; in the mean time she stood at the door and called his name.

Terry had followed the squirrels going from tree to tree, until darkness had started to fall; with his stomach rumbling he turned to make his way home. First he went one way and then another but it was no good he was lost; in the darkness, everywhere looked the same. A tear ran down his cheek as he ran this way and that but nowhere looked familiar. By now it was pitch dark and there were strange noises all around him. Sitting down in a dip full of leaves beside a big tree he sobbed his heart out, he was so frightened what if something attacked him? Or he never found his way home again; what would he do? He needed his dad, even knowing he would get a good hiding from him didn't stop him wishing his dad was here. He was so hungry he felt that he could eat anything; even his greens and he hated greens.

There was a small path going through the trees and he could see something white laying on it, he hadn't noticed it before and curiosity got the better of him; moving very slowly he edged over to the path and to his delight he found half a sandwich in a bag. Reaching towards it he was startled and frightened by a scream and a loud whoosh coming from the

treetops; in his fear he dropped to the floor and was horrified when a large tawny owl swooped down and snatched the sandwich, just as he reached for it. The owl disappeared into the trees, leaving Terry shaking with fear.

Slowly he made his way back to the dip by the tree and gathering more leaves, he buried himself deep inside them, leaving only his face uncovered. Because knowing he would never sleep, he wanted to keep a watch in case anything came too close to him in the night.

As hungry as he was, within three minutes he had fallen into a deep, exhausted sleep unaware that his father had found him and was watching him as he slept. So proud of his little boy, if he felt confident enough to sleep when he was obviously so frightened, then he would grow up to be a fine adult. Tears of pride stung his eyes at the sight of Terry's black streak of fur between his eyes and his black shiny nose, but he must warn his wayward son; when hiding in the woods or anywhere else, he must keep his bushy red tail covered; after all, young foxes had plenty of enemies.

Joyce Rawle

### **I REMEMBER**

I remember school milk, drinking from the bottles with straws in the classroom sitting at our desks, no moving around in case we broke the bottles. The one-week each term, we had no milk but were given milk tablets. Ug  
revolting.

Joyce Rawle

## OUT OF THE DEPTHS

Magador stood on the brow of the hill surveying the kingdom of Perfectus. It was a kingdom of such beauty and tranquillity. Breathtaking with its verdant pastures, many hued forests plus flora and fauna of every description. Everything existed in perfect harmony even the wild animals coexisted peacefully with the human population. Everything, that is, until reports of strange happenings in the marshes. Animals had been seen fleeing from there and the marshes themselves were blackening and bubbling, throwing up spumes of thick black viscous mud. The village elder Magador came daily to the hilltop, as did leaders from other villages - they were afraid.

Ancient folklore's told of the origin of the marshes and the possible evil hidden deep within. It was told that millions of years ago two God's, Tanas and Thefar had created a beautiful garden. When it was complete they argued over which of them it belonged to. Before long an almighty battle took place between them and so fierce was the battle that the universe disintegrated and shattered, creating thousands of small planets, one of which became Perfectus. Thefar finally gained victory over Tanas who begged to be allowed to live on Perfectus.

Thefar agreed but, aware that Tanas would eventually seek revenge for his defeat, he ordered that Tanas should be confined to live deep in the marshes forever. Then he created humans to take care of his beautiful garden. People who would know no sin or evil, envy or greed - they would live in perfect harmony with his whole creation.

Magador looked again at the marshes. They were definitely different and today a heavy grey mist seemed to hang over them. Others had now joined him from the villages round about, equally concerned about the happenings.

Suddenly the mist seemed to form into solid grey shapes. Human - but not quite human. Grotesque misshapen creatures, menacing and ugly. As quickly as they had appeared they vanished leaving only the heavy grey mist hanging in the air. No one had any ideas or suggestions except that they appeared to be the manifestation of evil. But they were so content and happy with their way of life that they could not imagine anything harming them and they gradually drifted away.

Magador however was not convinced and decided to move into a cave on the hillside so that he could keep watch. Unknown to him whilst he slept

the creatures of the marsh visited his cave - creeping over the sleeping form changing their shape to fit his own. Next morning when he awoke he was amazed to find people moving around the edges of the marshes building shelters and gathering food. He fled back down to his village and sent out messengers to the other villages. Soon crowds of people stood on the hilltop to witness the new tribe. They were definitely like themselves although their skin was much darker and they appeared to be surly and unsmiling, speaking very little as they performed their tasks.

It was finally agreed that one man and one woman from each village should go down and try to make contact with the strangers. So taking food and gifts as a sign of friendliness they approached - calling out as they went so as not to startle them. They were surprised to be answered in their own tongue, but noted that it was in a slow deep hesitant manner. The strangers held out their hands in greeting, they were cold to the touch even though the sun was in its zenith now and the warmth of their smile didn't quite reach their eyes. They seemed friendly enough however and soon invited Magador and his people to share food with them. They had never tasted such food or drink and when they questioned it the strangers laughed in a hollow kind of way and said it was unique to the marshes from where they had evolved.

Everyone agreed that it was delicious and ate and drank copiously.

Then it happened - gradually at first - slight disagreements about what the food tasted like. Who had eaten more than another? Silly trivial things, which would never have occurred to them before. But now they began criticising each other. Envyng the good life, which the strangers seemed to have. Vying with each other to tell the best stories and embellishing them for better effect for the benefit of the marsh people who they now perceived as different.

Tanas looked on at the edge of the group and smiled with satisfaction - revenge was sweet - evil had entered Perfectus.

Dora Haigh

I Remember...

I remember the bicycle that lies neglected behind our shed, vegetation wrapped around every spoke, gear and section of framework. In reflection this appears to be a sad Conclusion to a vehicle that had been bought in an enthusiastic fervour of father-son bonding, that had seen hillscape views in France and felt the boyish glee of a summer days downward hill race with friends.

Alas with the coming of university, the bicycle was retired to the garage where it slowly lost favour to ever larger freezers, antiques, a Black 'n' Decker workmate and my father's attempts to rebuild a motorcycle.

Yet with my return home, minus a driving licence and in possession of a few extra pounds, its moment was again here. Unfortunately the local gym was too appealing and my driving instructor too effective.

So now resigned to its fate as an iron oxide retirement complex, my bicycle can only wait for the day when the ivy leaves engulf it forever.

Peter Glyn Hopwood

## Gorgy The Happy Worker

Gorgy held the prize in his hand. Although the term ‘winner’ was not recognised in the vast social Soviet brotherhood, he had come first in the monthly ball bearing manufacturing competition. To reward him for his work the local party chiefs, along with factory management had presented this loyal worker with a token of their gratitude.

At the end of a daily shift everyone was ushered into the main hail. Brought to the front Gorgy stood proudly, smiles beaming for ear to ear.

“You have accomplished something great today”, said the chief.

“You have made Lenin proud”, said the manager.

“You have inspired us all”, said his colleagues.

At the celebration’s conclusion a package was presented to Gorgy. Inside was a metal object, encased in leather. It sat neatly in his hand, cradled like a songbird, bright and shiny as a semi precious stone. The buttons and dials were etched red and black on the metallic front. He turned it over and examined the factory mark — 000071. Wow, only a few lucky citizens had one, and now he was amongst such people.

On getting the object home Gorgy rushed his wife into the living room. With glee he unwrapped it and presented the new addition to their modest home.

“Wonderful”, she said, “Your work has made myself, my family and the whole collective proud.”

Silence filled the room as the couple smiled at each other. This continued for a few minutes. Then she meekly asked “So what does it do?”

“Beats me”, came the reply, “but at least it’s ours”.

Peter Glyn Hopwood

Inspired by writing about a Soviet photography light meter

## Creative Writing

Creative thoughts on Creative Writing — now there's a thought, which could in itself, produce some creative writing. Is that what was intended in the exercise?

I enrolled for this course with full backing from my family — approval from all corners for my venture — but for myself, I had serious misgivings, having twice in my life had clear indications that there was very little creative thought in me. The first occasion I shall conveniently forget but the second came from a girl friend with whom I still have contact after fifty two years. After a chance romantic meeting in Montreux at Chateau de Chillon in the early 50's it was a shock one year later to be told that my letters to her bore more than a passing resemblance to History essays. This was hardly surprising as I was then reading History at University. Actually, my History essays weren't up to much either. It was a shock but I am certain now that there was a great deal of truth in what dear Jane had said.

So, back to Creative Writing. Having enrolled for this course, all I had to do was let the Muse speak. Well I am not sure there was a Muse but there was a quiet opening of the doors of discovery, windows of opportunity to see if I had anything worth saying in either prose or poetry. What I found interesting was the way in which, once embarked on a theme, play prose piece or whatever, the pen flowed. Whether it flowed to any effect I am not sure, but it did release a safety catch within me and I have enjoyed thinking, planning and writing, bringing into play life skills which at Montreux I clearly did not have.

You cannot teach Creative Writing I think — you can give some pointers, some caveats, some encouragement but in the final analysis you the writer either have something worth saying or you don't. What I have gained from this course is the confidence to put pen to paper in a non judgemental situation which allows the pen to flow freely. Even the topics have allowed freedom, they have not been more restrictive than the obvious needs of a class would require. I have enjoyed the homework very much, even finding myself planning in the early hours, and the class work with its good natured easy banter and humour has made for happy Tuesday evenings. Now we are to be published in book form my excitement knows no bounds. I feel I have now laid low the ghost of 'The prisoner of Chillon'.

Thank you Anna.

Brian Davidson