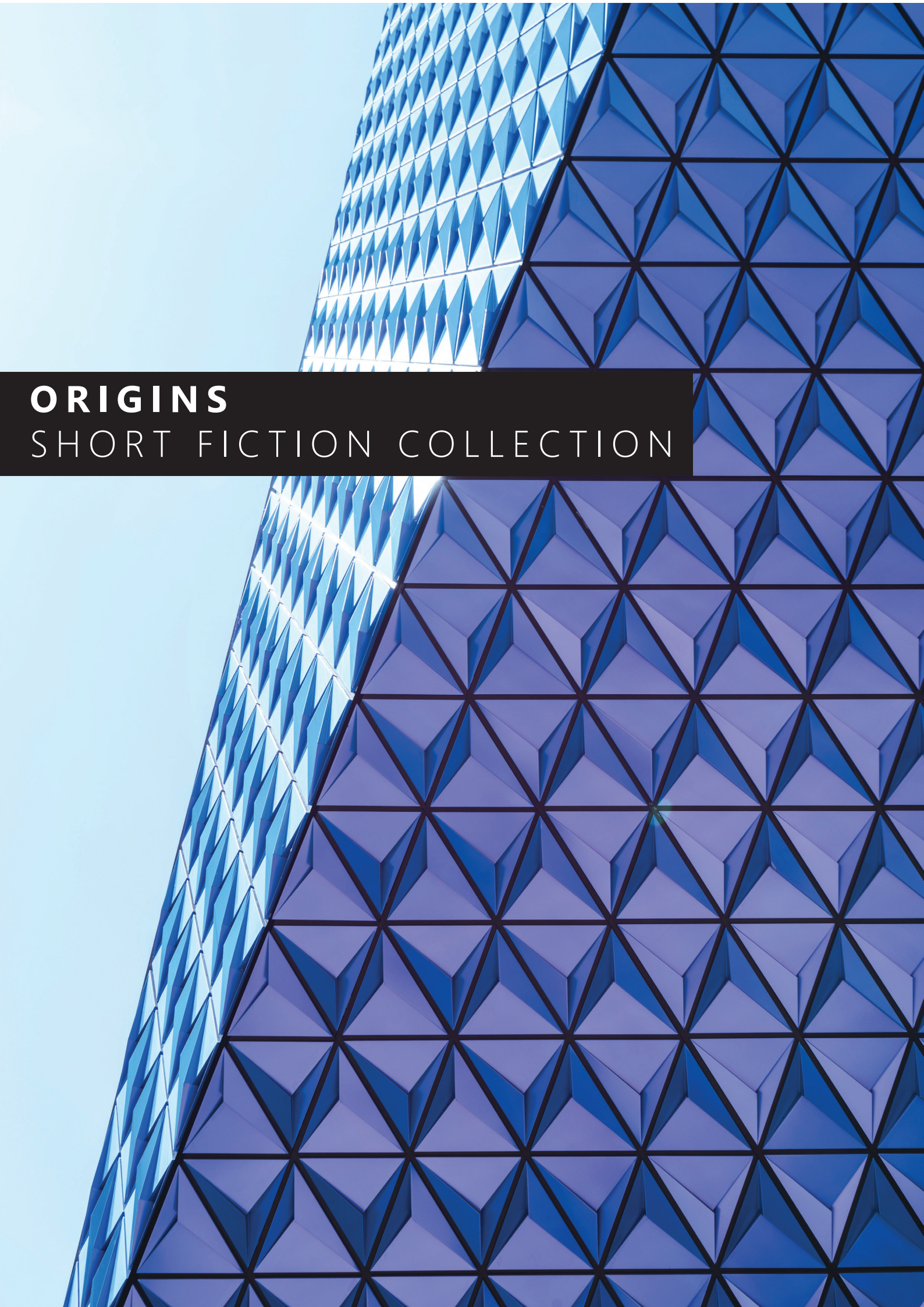

ORIGINS
SHORT FICTION COLLECTION

www.creativeindustriestrafford.net
@CITrafford
cit@watersidearts.org

Waterside Arts Centre,
1 Waterside Plaza, Sale,
Manchester, M33 7ZF

Design by Jen Hingley
www.jenhingley.com

Adaptation and continuation by Circée Ferrer

Introduction

Origins is a collection of flash and short fiction commissioned by **CIT** (Creative Industries Trafford).

The collection is about starting points - either thematically, or professionally - for those writers featured here whose work has never been published before.

We are delighted to feature ***The DNA of Bats*** by Jane Rogers, a co-commission with Manchester Literature Festival, alongside work by authors who submitted stories to **CIT**'s annual flash fiction competition.

The competition is judged by a panel of published authors and offers publishing opportunities to writers of micro-fiction.

Our thanks go to David Gaffney, judge for this collection and we are grateful to our funders at Arts Council England and Trafford Council along with the wonderful team at Waterside who support the **CIT** project.

Our hope is that Origins will become an ever-expanding and eclectic anthology that intrigues and inspires.

Richard Evans,
CIT April 2018

CIT CREATIVE INDUSTRIES TRAFFORD
Manchester Literature Festival
WATERSIDE
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The DNA of Bats

Jane Roger

I have been a failure all my life. Ask my mother. Well, you could have asked her, if she hadn't died last month. Ask my daughter. My lovely, beautiful, clever daughter Anya. Just ask her.

My mother was Lucy Gilmour. You may have heard of her. She was a costume designer; she was responsible for some of the most marvellous, fantastical, gorgeously colourful creations to be seen onstage during the second half of the 20th century. Swans, firebirds, trolls, princesses, icemen and dancing bears, vampires and chimney sweeps, mythical beasts and twinkling stars, my mother costumed them all. I am not artistic. My mother, being kind and forbearing, never articulated her disappointment to me – but disappointed she surely was, to have spawned such an ugly duck. She hoped for hidden depths, I think. But I have hidden shallows. The first time it truly came home to me, my failure to be the daughter she was wishing for, was at the grand age of 8. We went to County Cork on a family holiday. It was the sort of self catering place my parents always took, remote and ramshackle, draughty, picturesque. While my father brought in the bags, I ran up to the bathroom. I was stopped in my tracks by something disgustingly black and rubbery splatted in the sink. I called my mother. 'A bat! Oh Rachel, it's a beautiful little bat, look at its ears, they're almost translucent. The fragile bones in those wings – how marvellous to see one up close like this.'

My father came in and pronounced it dead; he wanted to wrap it in newspaper and put it in the bin. But my mother needed to sketch it; it was so perfect, the outstretched wing especially, she could use the design for a cloak. The bat with its crunched grimace of a face was left in the sink while we unpacked and made tea. When the pressure in my bladder forced me back into the bathroom I saw at once that the sink was empty. But my father denied moving the bat. 'It must have gathered all its strength and flown away to roost! Isn't that wonderful, darling?' enthused my mother. She laughed, she clapped her hands, she darted round the bathroom peeping into

corners to see where the bat was hiding. And I remember standing there woodenly, the hot urine starting to trickle down my thigh; inadequate, embarrassed, ashamed. She harped on the bat all week; a magical omen of rebirth, it might flit past our sleeping faces in the night – how lucky we were to have seen it! When we went home she told friends how I had discovered a darling bat in the sink. She didn't tell them I wet the sheets twice that week because I was afraid to get out of bed. It was on that holiday that I understood really, how much I let her down.

My childhood of course was filled with treats. Outings to ballet and opera, beautiful people to dinner, artistic trifles adorning my walls. Gorgeous frocks. But I am not a fan of live theatre; I find the quality of entertainment on TV to be less uneven, and my armchair considerably more comfortable than being jammed in the middle of a row of narrow seats with someone's head blocking my view and a miasma of crowd germs infusing my lungs. Similarly, I prefer staying at home to making expeditions to London, Paris and Berlin where one must stay in hotels with unfamiliar food and beadyeyed staff and windows that cannot be locked. I like to dress inconspicuously. I am dull and unadventurous, no two ways about it, though my mother always tried to put a nice spin on things. When I was promoted to store manager she said I was a roaring success. When I married Jim and we bought a house she was quite desperate to find compliments. 'Jim has a heart of gold, darling, what a lovely dependable man.' 'Your house is so new! So clean, so – so tidy!' My house is decorated in shades of beige, its tones are light and neutral. Anyone could be living here. A nonentity. A person with no taste, a person with a taste for nothing.

You think I am putting myself down in the hopes of being contradicted? Not at all. It so happens that I think neutrality, anonymity, the withholding of the massive ego, has its place in the world. It doesn't make me likeable, but I am not interested in being charming, in smiling at strangers, at flirting. I despise superficiality in all its forms. Am I saying my mother was superficial? Not necessarily. The most I am saying is that, to be like her, I would have

had to make myself superficial. An obvious lie, of course. The bitter retreat of the unloved and unlovable. If I had had the knack of making complete strangers like me, why on earth would I not have invoked it?

And yet there is an honesty in dislikeableness. Isn't there an honesty in keeping yourself to yourself, in repelling the world, in revealing your indifference to your fellows? The fake smile is ugly; hypocrisy is ugly; lying is ugly; the unvarnished truth, however unpleasant,must always be preferable. That shared belief lay, or so believed, at the heart of my relationship with Jim. We were undemonstrative, but honest. I thought.

When Anya was born, my mother restrained herself for a while. I sensed a kind of caution. She gave grandmotherly gifts, of course, but they were, on the whole, practical: a lambskin rug, a quality pushchair, a bag of bath toys. It was only when Anya was old enough to stay overnight at my mother's, while Jim and I conducted our minimal social life, that my mother began to show her hand. She put Anya into my old room. She painted it deep turquoise and dotted it with glowing golden stars. A Persian rug on the floor, sequinned curtains, beaded muslin swathed around the bed, fairy lights draped from corner to corner, Venetian masks and Indian marionettes and paintings of a couple of her own most fantastical creations, covering the walls. In one corner an easel with paints and pastels; on tiered shelves an array of treasures and figurines, ammonites, shells, ivory elephants, painted wooden horses, inlaid jewellery boxes, crystals, teddies, tiny enamelled vases and cups, Russian dolls, Chinese pincushions, bells, tambourine, flute, miniature dolls' house and beautifully costumed Edwardian inhabitants. Anya was in heaven. How lovely for her to stay with grandma. How lovely for them to bond.

Who am I trying to blame? Correction, because there is no blame, none. There is nothing to blame for, after all. No crime, no offence, absolutely nothing wrong. And wasn't it my own dark horse of a husband who was first to observe, 'Anya has your mother's eyes'? How natural. She is, after all, genetically one quarter my mother. How nice that it should manifest in those green and sparkling eyes, instead of my own insipid blue. How nice that it should manifest in openness,

in bright curiosity about the living world, instead of the ill-formed and muddy dread which haunts me, obliging me to sterilise for germs, to double lock doors, to start awake in terror at the bumping and flapping of dark shapes at my window. Anya is 20 now, and at university. Coming top in exams and breaking hearts all round; her grandmother's grandchild.

My mother left Anya her house. I was expecting it, naturally. There was nothing underhand. My mother with her customary tact raised the topic as I was packing her case for the hospice. 'You've always hated this house darling, haven't you. So dark and cluttered and – and -' I waited while she struggled to find a critical term she could bear to apply – 'so gothic! I've been thinking it would be sheer wpurgatory for you to have to clear it. And of course you'd never live here. So, I've decided to leave it to Anya, if you don't mind darling. I think she's rather fond of the old place. It's more her, somehow, isn't it?'

'Have you told her?'

My mother, gaunt and yellow-skinned but still beautiful, laughed her tinkling laugh. 'I thought it would be a nice surprise!'

My mother had a history of nice surprises for Anya. Of presents both exotic and expensive. As her birthdays approached Anya would become frantic with excitement. 'D'you know what Granny's getting me, Mum? Do you? Do you?' A ride in a hot air balloon, a working microscope, a tree house, a pony. I give utilitarian presents.

But what I should add, what I should admit, is that the presents, nice as they were, did not buy Anya's affection. What bound her to my mother was something more visceral: it was in the blood. It was a way of regarding the world as a sumptuous feast laid out specially for them. When Anya went for a walk with my mother, she came home with armfuls of bluebells or pocketfuls of shiny conkers. With tales of lost cats returned to thankful owners, rare orchids in overlooked ditches, a farmer who gave them a bagful of plums, a baby bird rescued from the middle of the road. Everything was a drama, and when they got home they looked up orchids or how to care for

fledglings or why the bees are dying; they had the same insatiable curiosity. It has made Anya into a scientist.

I saw that I had been the dry run. For the pinnacle of mutual adoration achieved in my mother's relationship with her grand-daughter. A potter works with the materials available. I was dry sand, my daughter fine china clay. What could my mother do with such poor material as me? Bide her time, and hope that I would at least pass on the genetic baton. Anya is the daughter she should have had.

It is a dull and unpleasant fact that those of us who are dull and unpleasant also harbour deep resentment to the rest of the world for not spying out our hidden talents, for not coaxing a smile from us, for not loving us for our unlovable selves. My squirreled stash of memories is almost entirely of moments of exclusion. Anya and my mother crouched bright-eyed together over a game of cards by the fire; Anya jumping from my car and running into my mother's arms without so much as a goodbye peck on the cheek; my mother requesting Anya the moment I pick up the phone, and Anya, giggling delightedly, retreating with her call to the privacy of her room.

I am aware that it is unreasonable to envy someone else enjoying what you yourself reject; my mother's effusive attention is what I spent my childhood armouring myself against. Yet when her searchlight beam shifted entirely to Anya – when I became merely Anya's mother, instead of my own mother's daughter – I took offence. Illogical, mean spirited, dog in the manger: acknowledging my failings does not set me on any route towards remedying them, contrary to the wisdom set forth in self-help manuals.

What my mother's loving care produced in me, I believe, was a stubborn resistance to enthusiasm of any kind. But she learned from that, she was always learning. She gave Anya space, and where she detected a lead in Anya's enthusiasm, she helped the pair of them to follow it. Anya's life was a great journey of discovery upon which they embarked together, leaving me dry on the shore, prisoner of my own discontent.

When she decided to will her home to Anya, my mother was unaware that Jim had left me. I told noone. I was humiliated.

Ashamed, and ashamed of being ashamed. Lovely dependable Jim with his heart of gold; left me for a man. A man he has loved for more than 10 years, he tells me. He can't live a lie any longer.

'I never asked you to live a lie,' I said.

'It wasn't a lie when we had Anya, Rachel, believe me.'

' But how soon after?'

'I don't know.'

I realise that any distress I may feel could all too easily be misconstrued as homophobia, as lack of respect for my husband's difficult and courageous decision not to live a lie. Since I appear unable, curmudgeon that I am, to 'be happy for him', the safest course of action is to keep my silence.

But practical problems arise. The house for example. Jim needs me to buy him out, so he and Mr X can set up together, Mr X apparently being penniless. I could not have wished my mother's cancer upon her, but once it was a fait accompli, the possibility of inheriting my way out of our financial crisis had occurred to me. When she was installed in the hospice I went through her house. It was filthy. With typical generosity she employed an old theatre friend who was half blind but needed the money, as a cleaner. There were dusty papers, drawings and sketches, bills, letters, theatre programmes, newspaper cuttings, piled high on every surface; there were long grey cobwebs dangling from her rainbow glass chandeliers; there were mice droppings in the pantry. There were damp patches in two of the bedrooms, and active woodworm in the banisters. Outside the guttering, and many slates, had come away from the roof.

In my contemptible and plodding way, I considered the options. Anya has 2 years of her Biology degree to complete. She hopes to go on into research. She will need money. She will not need to live in a dirty old ruin 10 miles from the university, I reasoned. And while Lucy is alive, I have power of attorney. Is anyone aware that I know the terms of her will? No.

My mother's house stands on a generous patch of land, a wilderness of overgrown roses and apple trees. I decided to get it valued, looking at the option of demolishing the rickety old house and

building two or three new ones upon the land. If there was as much profit in it as I suspected, then Anya's years of study could be provided for, alongside my own purchase of Jim's half of our house. My mother's will – assuming she lived long enough for me to set my plan in motion – would become irrelevant.

I acknowledge that self-interest played its part in my thinking. I acknowledge – why not? it's not as if anyone on earth imagines me to be a kind or decent person – I acknowledge that I felt a certain satisfaction in the idea of thwarting my mother's desire for her beloved granddaughter to cheat me of my inheritance. Doubtless you find me heartless and grasping. But one could argue that I desired to provide sensibly for Anya's future: Anya who is, as my mother was, so prey to the vagaries of her own warm and loving nature, her sentimental attachments to people and things, that she would be incapable of selling that white elephant of a house, and that she would sink into financial ruin trying to live there according to her grandma's dying wishes. And if I borrowed from her a sum to keep my own roof over my head, who, I ask you, would have inherited that roof? I shan't leapfrog a generation, to leave my house to any child that Anya may produce. No. In my dull and conventional fashion, I have no thought of doing anything other than leaving my house to my daughter. Whichever way you spin it, Anya's inheritance from her grandmother would have been safe.

And so I busied myself, visiting my mother in the hospice, where they cared for her nicely and kept her happy; and getting valuations from estate agents and builders, for my mother's property. Naturally, I kept Anya up to date with her grandma's decline, and just as naturally, Anya came home from York to visit her.

'What did you talk about?' I enquired casually.

'Oh, everything. She wanted to know all about my course. You know I'm doing this special paper on genetics. Well there's been some amazing research into the bat genome -'

'Did she talk about her will?'

'Oh god, no. Oh mum, don't. She can't be going to die. She's so

– so full of life, she's so interested in everything still, it's just not possible . . .'

I nodded. 'So, the bat genome?'

'Well she wanted to know all about it, really, you know, the detail.'

I do not usually ask about my daughter's course in detail. Perhaps I fear I will not understand. Like all petty minded people, I do not like to appear stupid. But I was heartened by her lack of knowledge of the will. 'Tell me.'

'I'll just tell you the shortened version, but it really is interesting Mum, I promise you. They've discovered that bats are amazingly immune. You know they carry all these diseases?'

'Rabies.'

'Yes. Also Ebola, SARS, loads of others. They carry these diseases but they themselves don't catch them. And they live really long – for such small creatures. I mean the little ones, no bigger than a mouse, live to 20 or so, and the bigger species can live 40-80 years.' I could imagine how happy my mother would have been, to hear of the longevity of bats.

'Now they can map the genome they have found this extraordinary thing. You know bats are the only truly flying mammal? Well they should be worn out. They use so much energy flying, they put their systems under incredible stress, which creates lots of free-radicals, which in any other creature would cause rapid aging, tumours, liability to disease. But bats are incredibly ancient and over time they have evolved something which minimises the damage caused by free-radicals. The P53 gene, for example, is implicated in cancer in humans. But in bats it plays a role in their immune system!'

'How nice for bats.'

'Oh Mum - use your imagination! If they can isolate these genes and work out how bats have evolved this symbiosis with pathogens, they should be able to come up with something humans can do to produce the same effects.'

'What, resistance to disease, immortality, and ability to fly?'

She laughed. 'Maybe not flying. But the others, yes.
Look at Grandma. If it had been possible to prevent her cancer – well, she's healthy in every other way. If they can develop a treatment from this research, it could give someone like her 20 more good years.'
Her boyfriend phoned then and she danced off into her room to talk to him. Leaving me with a head full of bats. Carriers of the deadliest diseases known to man, but themselves immune; resistant to cancer, resistant to aging. I visualised that black beast I had stared at in the sink; the vicious needles of its teeth, its beady alien eyes, the clammy, dirty, webbed-foot stretch of its wing. It was probably still alive.

The last builder I spoke to was the most encouraging. He told me he would fit 6 new houses onto the site. He could offer me over a million. He was in a hurry to get started, and we signed a preliminary contract so that he could get on with applying for planning permission – without which, the deal was worthless. My mother remained relatively stable. She was increasingly frail, but not relinquishing her grip on life for a moment. The nurses at the hospice fell in love with her. 'Anyone else would have given up by now,' the matron told me. 'But your mother has such a passion for life, she's living on spirit alone.' How like my mother, burning bright to the very end. I was, naturally, glad.
Still the vision of Anya's bats gave me trouble. For once, an image appeared to have taken root in my shallow imagination. But my mind, unlike the minds of Anya and my mother, did not allow the idea to sparkle with inviting possibilities, beneficial to the future of humanity. No. The concept evolved instead into something slow, torpid, unchanging, a weight impossible to shift or lift.
And when I slept it filled my dreams. I saw a great manshaped bat, his needle-sharp teeth protruding over his bloodstained lips, his odious black wings folded around him like a cloak. He was asleep but could not die, his face was pale but he was never ill; he was a creature of bad omen, of vileness, and stacked like shadows behind him were a thousand other such creatures, undead, selfrenewing, with bony leather wings that might brush past you at midnight, with foul deaths-head breath. I saw Anya in a laboratory unlocking narrow

metal lockers like coffins, and in each one stood a man-bat, deadly and immortal, ready to mutate under her hands. I cried out at her terrible danger – and woke myself.

You do not need to tell me: I saw at once the triteness of my vision. Even my subconscious, even my nightmares, are unoriginal: worse than that, they are the nightmares of an hysterical teenage girl. The noble ends of genetic research, upon which my daughter is fixed, are transmuted by my pathetic subconscious into phantoms of gothic horror, Dracula in a black cloak, cheap Halloween tat.

The next day, in a bid to exorcise the nightmare by ruefully telling the story against myself, I mentioned to Anya that I had dreamed her disease-resistant bats into vampires. As an attempt at humour it failed signally.

'Bats have the intelligence of dolphins, did you know that Mum? Bats eat 3,000-5,000 insects a night. Mosquitoes, for example. Which carry malaria. The benefits bats provide to humanity are incalculable.'

'It was a dream, for goodness sake -'

'Vampires are a disgusting myth, generated by primitive fear and ignorance. They suck people's blood and take their souls. They feast on living people. Right. I gave up trying to defend myself. Nor did I point out to her, that she herself was formed in my belly from my own heart's blood, feasting on my body until she was so gorged that my womb expelled her, whereupon she clamped onto me with her lips and sucked her living from my breast. I did not point out to her that it was through the agency of my living body that she grew into a sweet cuckoo big enough to oust me from such small part of my mother's affections as still remained to me.

'Why must you always see the worst in things?' she asked.

I drove her back to York. She told me that as a result of hearing about her research, my mother had gone online and found a Bat Sanctuary website, where she had, on Anya's behalf, adopted an orphan Pipistrelle bat for £14 a month. It would receive medical attention, nutritious food, and a safe roost. My mother and Anya had seen the bat's photo online, it was adorable, with its bright eyes and pointed nose, and they had decided to name it after me.

When I got home the builder phoned to say there was a hitch. 'It's the council,' he said. 'I didn't know the building was a site of special scientific interest.'

'Well as far as I know, it's not.'

'They've found evidence of bats.'

For a moment I thought I had gone mad. But nothing so dramatic ever happens to me. 'Bats?'

'Bats. If they find that bats are roosting in a house and breeding there, that's it, if they find that there's a colony – well, forget it.'

'But bats,' I said, 'they're not endangered are they?'

'Christ knows. Bats and bleeding crested newts, if they can prove either of them, you can kiss goodbye to your planning permission.'

'What if I poisoned them?'

'Too late. If you'd poisoned them a week ago, before the council sent their inspector, you'd be in with a chance. Now they know they're there, they'll slap on a preservation order, see?'

My mother died five weeks later. Her house, her garden, had not been sold. There was no planning permission, and the builder backed out. My daughter was devastated by her grandmother's death. But took some comfort, when she learned of the will, from her grandmother's nice surprise.

'I love her house, I'm not going to change a thing. It's like a part of her going on living, isn't it? I can feel her presence when I go in the front door. It's like she's hugging me.'

When I raised the cost of the upkeep of the house, a look of irritation flitted across her face. 'Some things are more important than money, Mum, you know?

Money isn't the be all and end all.'

'I didn't say it was. But there's woodworm in the stairs and – and leaks in the roof, and if they're not repaired the whole place is liable to collapse in a pile of dust.'

'Well you don't have to come in, if you're worried about it collapsing on you.'

Anya took her father's departure surprisingly well, and I believe

he and his boyfriend have already visited her several times, at my mother's house. Perhaps they watch the bats together.

My house is on the market, since Jim has urgent need of his half of the proceeds. I am looking at a bedsit in town. A small, mean place, suited to the size of my spirit.

Notes on this story

This grew out of an interest in recent research into bat DNA, and the coincidence of its appearing to point towards vampire-like improvements in human health. For several drafts it was written from the point of view of Anya, passionately enthusiastic researcher into the bat genome, and great optimist over the benefits it could bring.

But the story only really came alive when I transposed it to her mother's much darker and more primitive take on the research. Obviously the bitter and self- destructive first person voice is key, in the story as it stands. I guess it could work as an Alan Bennet Talking Heads style monologue. But what I hope very much is that a theatre piece might open it up and use both characters' sides of the story – perhaps by giving Anya a voice of her own. Rachel here contains her own self-criticism, but there is no reason why this can't be thought or voiced by another character; indeed, there's every reason, in a drama, to externalise this conflict.

I worried about the story being depressing/negative, as a basis for drama, but I hope that a theatre group might be interested in developing the positive side of the story as well, through the joyous voices of Anya and her grandmother. And of course I hope that the bats will find a role onstage!

Ref: 'Comparative Analysis of Bat Genomes Provides Insight into the Evolution of Flight and Immunity', Guojie Zhang, Chris Cowled, Lin-Fa Wang, et al.

Science, 20 Dec 2012, http://www.sciencemag.org/content/early/recent

About the author

Jane Rogers has published eight novels, written original television and radio drama, and adapted work (her own and others') for radio and TV. Her novels include Mr Wroe's Virgins, Island, and The Voyage Home. She also writes short stories and was shortlisted in the BBC National Short Story Competition 2009. Writing awards include the Somerset Maugham Award, Writers' Guild Best Fiction Book, BAFTA nomination best drama serial, Guardian Fiction Prize runner up and Arts Council Award. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

http://www.janerogers.org

CIT Flash Fiction Competition 2013

First prize 2013

Bluebeard's Daughter

Frances Gapper

After Dad forbade me to enter a certain room, I simply waited until he'd gone out. Then I unlocked the door and found my dismembered mother and sisters. Luckily I've always been good at jigsaws, so I began putting them in order. Anna wore a blue-stoned ring, I recalled, while Jane had a long second toe. Some bits were missing – I made do with objects fetched from nearby bedrooms, e.g. substituting a lampshade for Nora's lost head. Then having pricked my finger I scattered blood, restoring them to life. Assembled, they made a fearsome army. Together we awaited Dad's return.

About the author

Frances Gapper's flash fiction booklet The Tiny Key was published by Sylph Editions in 2009 and her story collection Absent Kisses by Diva Books in 2002. Other stories are in the London Magazine online, the Reader's Digest, The Moth, the Twelve Winters Press anthology [Ex]tinguished and [Ex]tinct, and Plymouth University's Short Fiction.

Commended: 2013

Presence of Absence

Stephanie Pemberton

Eyes open, body naked, I stare at the ceiling through a trellis of fingers. In the adjoining room, with a rush of water, he flushes away an hour of my life. I sit up at the sudden thud against my chest; followed swiftly by another on my belly. Clutching my blue Doc Marten boots like a comfort blanket, I swing my legs to the floor. He looks away his voice barely audible, 'Get dressed.' The denim mini skirt dampened by his sweat drags at my skin. A salacious smile pumps hollowed cheeks, as sleight of hand he moves from shirt buttons to fly. I struggle into my red tee shirt; daring to breathe when I see the toothy grin of his closed zip.

I reach down and wind each bootlace into a bow. Across the room he tightens the knot of his old school tie. To him I am the vulnerable girl who boarded the train without a ticket. To me he is the monster who killed my best friend.

My presence spent he strays to the mirror. Murderous hands brush dark hairs, my hairs, from his collar and straighten his tie. I stand at a distance, and I will his eyes to mine.

He turns, his face contorted and his voice louder,

'Get out.'

I stride towards him.

He swallows hard and then drags a wallet from his pocket. 'Ten, twenty, is that what you want?'
I shake my head.

'OK thirty. That's all the cash I have on me.'

I watch the notes flutter to the carpet as I sweep my hair into a high pony tail. The way I used to wear it. Eyes flecked with recognition search my face. He knows who I am, but not why I am here.

'I remember; now,' he says, pulling on his suit jacket.

'You're one of the two little tarts from the wrong side of the track.'

Fist clenched I reply, 'My real name is Jeannie. Sarah you killed three years ago.'

He shrugs. 'Hmm Sarah your absent friend. I was never in the frame; people in high places...'

I disguise the tremor in my voice with a sharp intake of breath. 'I'm going to the police, and I'm taking your DNA with me.'

'So what. I picked up a hooker. Slap on the wrist.'

'I'll say that you raped me.'

He stiffens.

'They'll swab you this time, and your DNA will match that on Sarah's body.'

I edge away, brave enough to turn my back when my fingers fold around the door handle. A sudden bolt of pain dulls my senses. I feel the carpet, coarse against my cheek as the room spins out of control. The bitter taste of blood crowds my mouth. Unable to scream, I crawl away from the dull tips of his polished shoes. Our breath fills the void between silence and whispers into a mobile phone.

The light fades.

His words resonate. ‘Big problem; get a car around here, now.’

About the author

Stephanie Pemberton is a freelance writer and poet. Her story, Presence of Absence, was awarded joint second place, in the CIT Flash Fiction competition 2013. Other published works include: First Blood on Virgin Snow, 2013, Leaving George, 2012, The Grass Widow, 2009 (Wordsmag). A familiar face at Bristol Crimefest and Harrogate Crime Writers Festival, she braved and conquered the ‘Dragon’s Pen’ with her work-in-progress debut novel, The Lost Truth. Stephanie, lives in Manchester with her husband, Allen, and three pet hens, Charlotte, Emily and Anne. She confesses, ‘I’m a workaholic, life’s hectic, loud, but I love it.’

Commended: 2013

Dolphin

Sue Crowder

Delphine is tall for fourteen. 'Gangling,' her mum says. Her knees strain to look at each other, instead of straight ahead. Chocolate freckles make a dot-to-dot pattern on her downy cheeks. She's pretty, but Delphine isn't interested in boys, or clothes or music. She likes to swim, and she wants to swim the channel.

From her bedroom, on the 9th floor of Ocean Heights she can see the Dover Straits. In the English Channel, the container ships stretch like a daisy chain threading their way all the way to China and back.

Her mum says, 'swimming is in your blood.'

Her name is Delphine, but the girls at school call her Dolphin. After swimming class, they follow her home and chant. 'Dolphin, Dolphin swims like a fish. Dolphin, Dolphin your mother's a bitch.' Delphine likes this new name they've given her more than the one they shouted before: Coco Pop. These girls they are stupid. Delphine pays attention in the science; she knows dolphins are not fish. Dolphins are related to humans, their genome is almost the same, except people have two extra chromosomes. These girls, they are missing more than two chromosomes.

Last month, on the day the local swimming pool closed forever, her mum's new boyfriend, Tony, moved into the flat. He stands too closely and sniffs the air. Today Delphine escapes to the sea. She takes the bus to Shakespeare Beach and leaves her trousers, shirt and shoes in a neat pile at the water's edge. Shingle pebbles warm her soles, and tiny waves roll in welcoming her toes. The hair on her arms and legs lift to trap the brisk air. She plunges in and the water bulges beneath

and around her. She rises to the surface and heads southwest towards Gris Nez; the grey nose of France.

Her braided hair, the colour of Weetabix, melds to the contour of her spine and takes on the shape of a dorsal fin. With each and every long stroke she pulls, her gnawed fingers grow to form webbed pectorals fins. Her eyes are level with the waterline as she swims towards the horizon. Her lungs fill with briny air and expand like balloons. I can hold my breath a long time. She turns once. The sun bounces off the white cliffs and dazzles her. I am dolphin. Up she rises; a fleshy torpedo and then down a depth charge beneath the cat paw waves. I am Dolphin.

'Where will we bury her?' Delphine's mum says.

'You can't afford no burial, girl,' Tony says. 'That's serious money you're talking.'

'Yeah and anyway she'd want to be scattered at sea.' She takes photos on her phone, and stands cross-legged, sthe way she always does when she needs to pee.

Tony has his hand on her shoulder, 'Come on it's time to leave.' Delphine is still punctured by the tubes that fed her body, heart and lungs.

Her mother wipes her nose on her coat sleeve.
Delphine drifts away on the tide. *I am dolphin.*

About the author

Sue Crowder has recently completed her MA Creative Writing at the University of Manchester. She has studied Creative Writing at Masters level at UEA. In 2014 she was short-listed for the Poetry Republic short story prize, longlisted for the Fish flash fiction prize, long-listed for the BBC Opening Lines programme and she has won a place on the 2014 Writing West Midlands development programme.
http://www.suecrowder.co.uk

CIT Flash Fiction Competition 2014

Commended: 2014

Dina

Shze Hui Tjoa

Dina was a wave that lapped and stroked, melted across countertops and into people's arms like a warm and liquid madonna. All curves and the first to get engaged, aged fourteen, the ring on her coffee-coloured hand like a silver smirk.

At work we arched our eyebrows but nobody blinked except me. This was the Palestinian part of town where worse thing exploded than news.

Pictures showed Dina puddled in her fiancee's lap, tabby-cat's smile under kohl-blitzed eyes. Cute, begrudged the other girls, wrinkling their own peepers as they dashed from the kitchen with coffee-topped trays, glasses of yoghurt, kitten heels clicking.

It was my first and only Jerusalem winter and my hair went limp; everyone's hair sloughed off fat beads of moisture but Dina's, which remained perfect. When it rained after work we stayed in the cafe and picked off leftovers, chewed over pictures of boyfriends like two-day-old meat. Redoubled makeup. Someone put on Tamer Hosny and clapped their manicured hands, hips and fists rolling. Later we walked home together.
Fourteen to eighteen years old; virgins by necessity and smokers by thinly-concealed choice. In my country they would have been trashy, but in the holy city with Dina its mazes and temples they were brilliant as they scoured dishes under long stickered nails. They wore foundation-plied faces and fake vera wang perfume; the light seeped out under their sweaters and the blood ran hot gold in their veins.

And of them all it was only I, the foreigner on a gap-year pass, who could walk clean away when the summer came down with its

blood and bad news and unburied bodies. When all the beauty and brightness went to pot.

*

At college now I have new friends who wear A-line skirts, keep neat faces and talk about passing the bar, adept at pick right angles out of the city skyline and steamrolling them into the schedules they keep in tiny, corporate notebooks.

But when the first rockets hit Gaza all I can think about are those other girls with the loud ruby lips and neighing laughs. Their bodies are on all the television shows, their voices en mass on the world service broadcast.

Then one day I do see someone I know- Dinaher face peeling off the corner television set in some big-city cafe.

Her eyes are still black but her arms are no longer soft, her lips are all lines, her hair is a straggling creature and the water runs down her face. The child in her arms is hysterical but that's not the sound she's trying to mask by talking too fast to the camera; it's that other one in the background, common to all the war videos.

The ocean of her has run dry.

The camera cuts and Dina is no more, replaced by a wide-angle shot of more bodies, more women. None of them named, and all of them her.

About the author

Based variously in Singapore and Oxford, **Tjoa Shze Hui** has deposited fiction and short essays in several obliging journals. Read more or get in touch for writerly projects at **http://about.me/shzehui.**

Second Prize: 2014

Haibunation

Eleanor Parsons

Coventry, one of the lonely cities I have lived in, it is where I fell in love, down inside the concrete, between the walls, where breathing sucks like distant ocean mud and is hard to do. I was never good at smoking bongs. We married in the concrete, we made salads inside the concrete and we loved each other more and more despite, or because of all the concrete. But it was lonely after all, because the other side of the wall wasn't working so well for me, all shiny and new like baby spit, the sky, boringly infinite, and whenever I was out there, acting life-like, buying eggs and butter, I wanted to be sick and I dreamed of being back inside the walls, to feel each bubble of the insulation, wrap myself in Styrofoam and stay awake forever, inside the husk of winter, like a warm vole lively, deeply nesting, him and I crawling over each other, lonely and together, crumbling away the morning.

Eyes grow used to the interior landscape

About the author

Elly Parsons is a singer-songwriter and short story writer based in South East London. Since graduating from the MA Creative and Life Writing at Goldsmiths College last year, Elly has also been shortlisted for the Bare Fiction Award for Flash fiction. She performs her music regularly around london. To find out more, please visit **facebook.com/EllyParsonsMusic**

Third prize: 2014

The Glove

Peter Kalu

She had worn it once and now it was mine. I waited till night, till my phones stopped ringing, till the generators finally ceased their incessant clatter, and there was no light nor any possibility of light. Then, as air warmed and thickened in the room, I eased open the evidence bag, took hold of it, and, finger by finger, slipped it on. She'd had large hands, mine were small (that joke we had when we had walked hand in hand through the market place – the practical impossibility of walking like that). I raised the glove to my face and breathed. She was still there.

About the author

Pete Kalu is a novelist, playwright and poet. He currently loves Dostoyevsky, Patricia Highsmith, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Cheryl Martin and Raymond Carver In between writing, he has sung opera in German, translated computer manuals from French to English, water-ski-d and windsurfed in Mid West America, eaten fresh crab in Black River, Jamaica, been detained by a street crowd in Calabar, Nigeria, busked near Islamabad, Pakistan and felled trees in Canada. He has second and third degree burns on his torso from messing with fire, beginning at age two. He is on his fourth passport. Some of this is untrue.

Third prize: 2014

Everyone in heaven is waiting to see what you will do next

Benjamin Judge

This will happen to you.

You will find a box of photographs in your mother's empty house; snapshots of a forgotten holiday. There she is, and there you are, smiling in bad tracksuits, eating beefburgers and drinking improbably coloured mocktails, sitting on BHS beach towels, waving, dancing, laughing.

The buildings are thin, lilac and grey. The sky is wrong somehow, too cold, ashen. You stare at image after image and feel nothing: you have no memory of this jigsaw city. Toward the bottom of the pile you find the mermaid, drowning. A crack-scaled thing choking on air, grasping and terrified.

And you don't remember. And your mother is gone. And this is lost now, this time, this place. Just another photograph in another box of photographs. And you'll never know. And this not knowing itches. And this not knowing clings. You watched a mermaid die and you don't remember.

This will happen to you.

About the author

Benjamin Judge graduated from the Centre for New Writing at The University of Manchester with a master's degree in Creative Writing. His blog, Who the Fudge is Benjamin Judge? won the Best Writing award at the Manchester Blog Awards. His favourite small orange is the satsuma.
He does twitter **@benjaminjudge**

CIT Flash Fiction Competition 2015

First prize: 2015

Digging a Grave in the Shopping Arcade

Lydia Unsworth

My son has decided he wishes to be buried with his distant ancestors, on a plot of ground now occupied by the city's main shopping arcade. He wants to rub his shoulders against the soil that grew out of their shoulders. I tell him I understand: our relations have been strained at best. He's looking for a strong arm, a great-great-grandparent from another time, to whisper him sweet lullabies about typhoid and the bitter winters.

We apply for planning permission. We appeal to humanitarian groups, showing them birth, marriage and death certificates. We plead our right as a family, as descendants, to be with our own. It is no good. My son sinks into a heavy depression. Months pass and he stares away his days eating pasties and pining after the ground in front of the German shoe shop. I struggle to bear it. My parental heart knocks against my ribs. Hollow, a failure.

I quit my job as an astrophysicist and take up employment in the German shoe shop. A step down, I say to my first customer of the day, as they stand with one leg on the ramped podium, looking in the ankleangled mirror and admiring. I tell my son I will dig his grave, that the world is his, he should go and live. I don't see my son again after that. He takes a flight to India and eventually the emails stop. I become quite deft at selling shoes and start to look forward to the contours and odours of the public's feet. I rise to a managerial role and begin to feel comfortable.

Every day, I tread the tiles by the shop front, stepping harder

where the grave will be. Kicking with my heels. Repeatedly, I drop my keys down onto the same tile, waiting for a crack. When it finally comes I dig and turn the sharpest edge of my shoe down into the cavity. The crack becomes two, three; radially connected. I feel proud and wish my son could see me now, providing. Bending down and picking away fragments of material from between the cracks, power surges through me. Tiny lightning forks of action.

Seven years pass before the announcement reaches me. My son has died in Canada, burnt down in a house fire in Newfoundland. His ashes are to be repatriated. I take a day's compassionate leave, which I spend smacking my forehead against the tile outside the German shoe shop. At ten-thirty I am taken away to be given hot drinks, grievance counselling and a blanket.

To this day, although now demoted, I continue to work at the German shoe shop. Before leaving for work each morning I take a few spoonfuls of my son from his box on the dining room table and transport them to the portable tin in my pocket. At every available moment, especially in the quiet seasons, I dash outside and pour and press pieces of my son into his fissure in the shopping arcade.

About the author

Lydia Unsworth has had short stories published in Pank, KillAuthor, Mudluscious Press, and Rainy City Stories among others, and prose poetry published in Sentence: A Journal of Prose Poetics. Her first novel was shortlisted for publication by MudLuscious Press, however, to date remains unpublished/self-published. She is currently studying for an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Salford, and works as a Communication Support Worker across the universities of Greater Manchester.
www.pippiinthedoghouse.tumblr.com

Second prize: 2015

The Fly Kitchen

Finn Jackson

After a day spent cooking with sugar and agar, Susan strips off her latex gloves and returns home. Over the past four months, since starting at the lab, her appetite for culinary adventure has increased: jars, boxes and packets have sprouted from her kitchen counters and the cupboards are grown earthy with root veg. Her fridge is a menagerie of animal and plant produce. Susan picks her ingredients for the evening and the air fills with the sizzle of garlic in olive oil. She tears through fresh basil and dashes dark lines of balsamic across two plates – one for herself and one for Tom. They share a bottle of wine and for dessert they suck manuka honey from each other's fingers. In the night, Susan dreams of a man with wings and bulbous brick-red eyes. He offers her his hand but the way his malformed head quick-twitches side-toside sickens her and she turns away.

The next day, surrounded by grey steel pans and the cataract-sheen of industrial plastics, Susan tries to push the dream from her mind. She thinks back to the night the spice rack burst and Tom made vigorous love to her on the floor – paprika and turmeric dusting their skin. She smiles, pressing a hand to the soft swell of her stomach – not caring if it's food, baby, or both. The timer pings, prompting her to read the temperature of the drosophila mix. At 65°C she adds the nipogen and propionic acid, then pours the liquid into vials. She leaves the batch to set at room temperature and hangs up her lab coat, wondering what she should make for dinner.

The fruit-fly man crawls into her dream again. His body is sunk low to the ground and he has six limbs all ending in hands. She tries to run from him but he follows, alternating between scuttle and flight. Susan wakes up sweating. Moving quietly, so as not to disturb Tom, she tiptoes downstairs. The food she finds she eats cold, raw and with her fingers. Tinfoil and cling-film wrappings fall – shrunk and

withered as winter leaves to land at her feet. She hears Tom tread into her fridge-light shadow and she wills him on, eating all the while. The fruit-fly man lingers in her mind. But then Tom is there, his hands on her hips, his teeth on her neck. She closes her eyes – a sun-dried tomato on her tongue.

About the author

Finn Jackson has an MA in Creative Writing from Lancaster University. Previously Editor for Cake Magazine (poetry / flash fiction / comment and review) she has recently joined the editorial team at The Cadaverine Magazine (an online platform promoting work from young writers). As well as writing she likes to draw, paint and take photographs – you can find her at **www.paperscreens.wordpress.com**

Third prize: 2015

Dust

Abi Hynes

The morning after her wedding, you wake up to find your house is empty. No alarm has woken you; your mobile phone is missing, and so is the bedside table where you left it. In your bedroom, only the bed remains, and the sheets and pillows are coated in a layer of dust.

You go downstairs, and all the furniture is gone. The light switches ignore you. You try the tap in the kitchen, and it sputters, like it's drawing water from very far away. There are no glasses in the cupboard, so to drink you bend your head and lap from it like a cat.

You put on your clothes from the night before, and go outside. The street feels unfamiliar, and as you walk your usual route into the village, you see nobody you recognise. The air is very still. The warmth of it on your skin makes you feel invisible.

You keep walking. You pass a house you feel like you remember. You can picture the shape of the rooms inside; the satisfying gleam of the wooden floors, the narrow staircase leading to the attic. In the large garden, visible through the gate, are two bright girls with her eyes and someone else's distinctive jawline. They're absorbed in a game they wouldn't be able to articulate if you asked them to. The lawn beneath them has become a desert, transformed by the touch of their bare feet. One is being patient with the other; you can see it in the furrow of her forehead; in the smile she's learned from grownups.

The house beckons you, but you walk on. The lane is neglected and overgrown, and the hedgerows hang heavy and thick to bursting with their unplucked fruit. Your footsteps make no sound, and the soon-departing swallows swirl and dip too close above your head.

Third prize: 2015

As you approach the farmhouse café, the memory of Cream Teas clings sickly to your tongue. You know the paisley pattern of the table cloths, clashing with her skirt; the gleam of her rings and polished nails resting by the sugar bowl. You remember noticing that her hands were older, and dare not look down at your own as they swing loosely at your sides.

You feel watched as you reach the crossroads, but though the sign is out, all the windows are dark. A figure passes quickly behind the cowsheds… But perhaps not, because there's no one, when you blink.

You unravel your tie and put it in your pocket. You want to shout, to rouse someone, to ask them 'Can you see me?'. But you fight the urge, afraid that if you try, you'll make no sound.

When you find her, she's an old woman. She's sitting on a bench outside the library as if she's been waiting for you, all this time. Her hands are pale and cold, and you hold them for a while.

About the author

Abi Hynes is a drama, fiction and poetry writer based in Manchester. She runs theatre and film company **Faro Productions** and cabaret collective **First Draft**. Her work has been featured in a range of print and online publications, including The Molotov Cocktail, The Fable Online, Spelk Fiction and Foxhole Magazine, and she regularly performs at live literature nights around Manchester and beyond. Follow her on Twitter: **@AbiFaro**

CIT Flash Fiction Competition 2017

First prize: 2017

The Things We Don't Say

Andrew Edgeworth

She said to meet her at the national in an hour.
I find her sitting on a bench in front of a portrait of Iris Murdoch painted by Tom Phillips. I sit next to her.
"What are those figures in the background?"
"It's a backdrop," she explains. "From Titan's painting, the Flaying of Marsyas. She adored it so the artist put it in his portrait for her."
She knew I didn't know what she was talking about.
"It's from Ovid. A contest took place between Marsyas and Apollo. Marsyas found a set of reeds abandoned by Minerva. He learned to play them so well that he challenged Apollo to a musical contest. Apollo agreed – but on condition that the victor will be able to punish the loser. Marsyas lost. Apollo flayed Marsyas alive, stripping his flesh from his bones, inch by inch."
She looks at me briefly.
"She was from Dublin you know, Phibsborough. The only two famous things out of the place were her and the Mountjoy." That wasn't true but I'd said it now. James Joyce and Eamonn de Valera lived there too.
"I've not read much of her work." She says, still looking at the portrait.
Someone enters the room. Two people in fact, with young, quick steps.
She stands up and I follow her. Her rucksack is too big; the straps make it hang too low.
We are in the photographs collection. I like photographs. I'm not sure how much she does. I recall she once said she only likes photographs of herself when she's looking away.
She stops at a portrait of James Loy MacMillan. It's in black and white and casts shadows of the notes of one of his compositions over the left hand side of his face.
"Why do men have to be so stupid?"
"It's in our nature I suppose." I just said that. Vocabulary I'd never use.

Why?
She holds my hand. I think about the last time I saw her. It was a long time ago, maybe a year. We went for dinner in a French restaurant and drank too much red wine. We kissed in Euston Station before I boarded the train. I sent her stupid text messages, the type a teenager would send. She didn't respond.
I go to the toilet. When I wash my hands the water is too hot and it hurts.
I find her in a room staring at a portrait of Edith Cavell.
"They stuffed her dog, Jack, you know. It's on display in the Imperial War Museum."
She says nothing. We stay for a while. She ruffles the hair on the back of my neck, then kisses my cheek and leaves.

About the author

Andy Edgeworth is a journalist and PR professional from Sale, Manchester. He has been writing flash and short pieces of fiction for about five years and is currently working on a novella. This is his first published work of fiction. Influences include *Roberto Bolano, Don DeLillo and Orhan Pamuk*.

He works in healthcare communications and also writes about the beautiful game. For more information, find him on twitter **@RogerDisma**l or visit **https://www.thes-portsman.com/contributors/andy-edgeworth**

Runner Up

Defining Gravity

Angela Neville

"Stay with us," someone says. They're very close. Each word a distinct hot breath in my ear. But then they repeat it and now it's muffled as if I'm submerged.

I remember being a kid bobbing under water at the local swimming pool. The sensation of buoyancy reminded me of the film of men walking on the moon. A liberating lack of gravity. And I was fascinated by the changes in sounds. The clear mad jangle of excited voices above water and the rumbling incoherent chaos of going under.

Like a child's idea of how Hell might sound.

But that's kind of morbid and it wasn't like that.

Stay with us.

I intend too, but I don't think I've got much choice anyway. I can see my leg lying just over to my left. From the knee downwards it looks fine but sort of abandoned, like it's just been casually tossed there. Now it's detached, I think of mannequins in shop windows; a tangle of limbs waiting to be arranged in commercially desirable poses.

I don't like the idea of it looking so discarded. I want to ask someone to pick it up, put it somewhere safe. I know it doesn't belong to me anymore but it's been a good leg to me.

I hope it knew how much I appreciated it, depended on it.

In an explosive flash of blood and gold my old life had ended. I see myself in the past tense. I am now those random mannequin parts, waiting to be reassembled.

Now my mind goes back to the swimming pool. Learning to adapt to a different element; the buoyancy of flying in a lucid dream, the languid grace of slow motion. And that adjustment of climbing out of the water, feeling gravity restored with the momentary weight of the whole world. Almost unbearable. Mercifully brief.

Stay with us.

Am I being given a choice? I need to concentrate. I feel myself

sinking, being pulled down into a kind silence.
"Still with us?"
The voice sends a hypnic jerk through my system. It brings me bouncing up through the surface. Dazzled by droplets, gasping. And I remembered they were the same sounds after all. It just depended on how you listened to them.
Something between fear and joy. A scream of angels.
Like a child's idea of how Heaven might sound.

About the author

Angela Neville enjoyed success in young writer's festivals for BBC Radio 4 and the Royal Court Theatre. Since 1994 she has been a member of ***Essex Audio Theatre*** as a writer, director and actor for independent radio drama.

In 2012 her fantasy novel ***The Season Saga*** was published. In 2014 she collaborated with writer's Angela Howard and Jackie Bartlett to create ***Can This Be England?*** a theatre and radio drama project.

www.beechleaf.net

2nd Runner Up

Coffee

Yasmin Inkersole

08:00. Underground. Northern line.
The handrail is loose. It takes him 14 minutes and 8 seconds to walk from the station to the hideous building on the Southbank, his face reflected in every window on the lower levels. He looks tired, despite a solid night's sleep.
Lucy nods at him from reception as he enters, like every morning. His shoulders tense as he walks past. They are "just friends". They are "looking for different things."
He takes the stairs, ascends three air-conditioned levels, crosses the corridor and enters his office. His cactus is dying- he should water it, but there's something satisfying in watching it turn slowly grey, as though the colour of the room is bleeding into it.
He has just logged onto the Tokyo account and is staring at rows of numbers all of massive significance to somebody, somewhere, when Dunya brings him his coffee. She won't be here long, he thinks to himself. Her type- the type that always gets your milk and sugar right, and pushes the trolley along without spilling a drop- never stays long. The way she smiles unnerves him; Lucy's smile is practiced, brief, restrained. When Dunya smiles her crows' feet crease up, and he can see right to the filling on her back tooth. A faint coffee stain obscures the words: "Dunya Ogrenkoy" printed on her name badge- it is the only smudge in his office.
On every weekday besides Thursday he is home at 17:58. Today is a Thursday.
He stops to buy a lottery ticket, and is home 4 minutes later than usual. The TV has been on all day; he can't stand silence. He pours a glass of red wine and opens the fridge.
08:00. Underground. Northern line.
The handrail is still loose. It takes him 14 minutes and 8 seconds to

walk from the station to the office block. None of his numbers came up, but the lottery ticket is still in his pocket. Lucy nods, Dunya smiles, the cactus is dying. Lots of little numbers.
08:14. Underground. Northern line.
"We are facing delays due to-" the Tannoy voice pauses - "a person on the train tracks".
He arrives at his desk at 09:43. His cactus is grey.
A large white envelope lies on his desk. The letter inside is brief; its words screaming off the page. Liquidation. Human error. New York account.
Gossip pervades every floor of the building.
"It was Brentworth, he input last week's figures this morning-"
"It's thrown the whole market out of kilter-"
"They found him asleep at his desk-"
"Started raging about not getting his coffee-"
11:03. He unlocks the front door, steps into his living room. The TV is on.
"The suicide of promising photography student Mehmet Ogrenkoy, who was hit by a train this morning, has prompted questions about the treatment of young immigrants-"
The news anchor blinks out of existence as he hits the power button. He stands in the silence, and thinks of Brentworth's coffee.

About the author

Yasmin Inkersole is a 2016 Foyle Young Poet of the Year and spends much of her time working on novels or poetry. She always enjoys a chance to explore new modes of writing and this story is her first venture into the realm of flash fiction

Social media: Instagram yasmin_inkersole


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