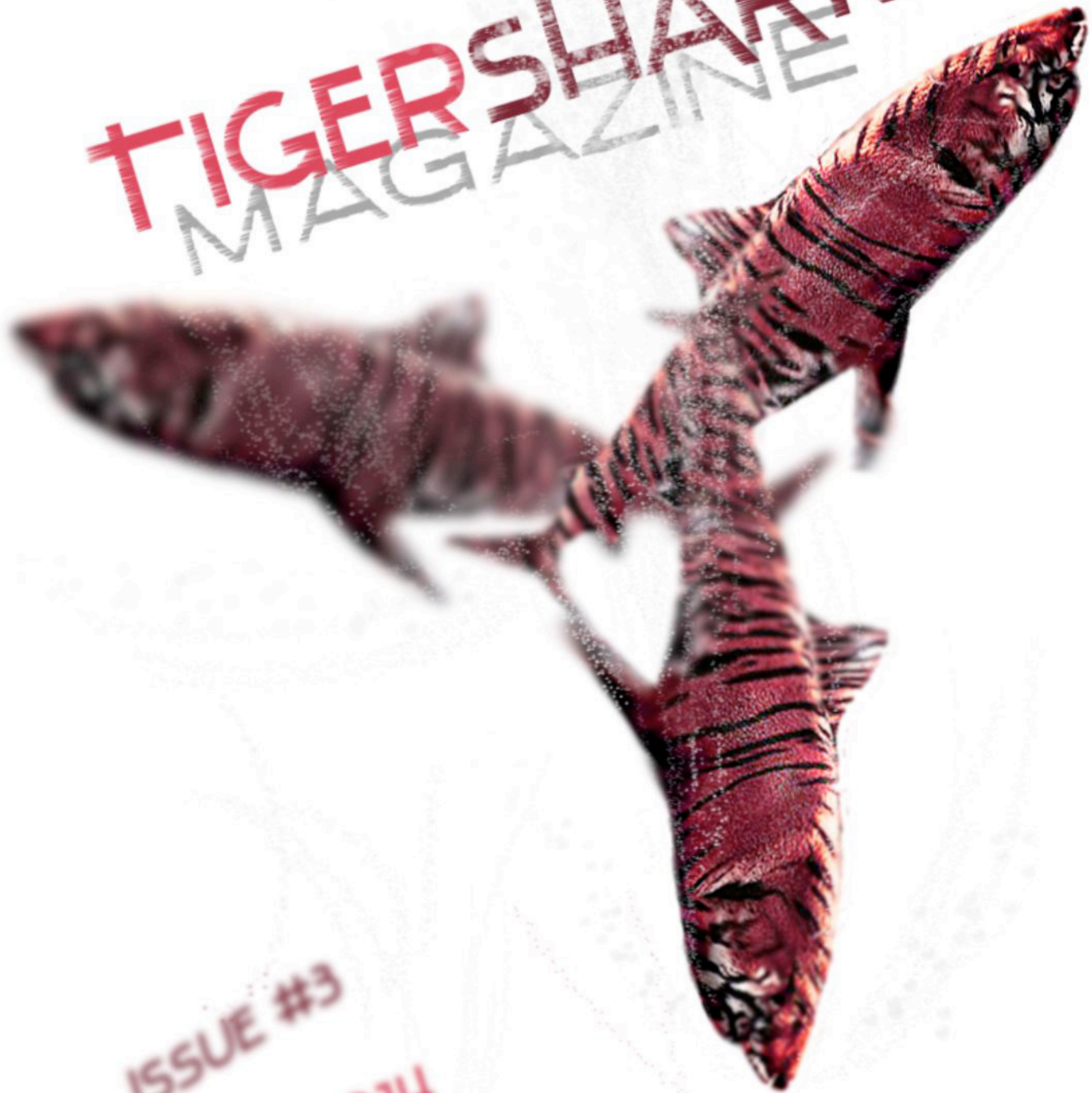


TIGER SHARK[®] MAGAZINE



ISSUE #3

SPRING 2014

LOVE & ROMANCE
... AND HATE

TIGERSHARK MAGAZINE ISSUE #3 SPRING 2014

LOVE.
ROMANCE.
ALL KINDS OF
RELATIONSHIPS.
... AND HATE.

Editorial

It's that time of year when thoughts turn to that most powerful of emotions, love, and we hope that you will love this third issue of **Tigershark**.

Romantic love concerns many of the stories and poems here, while others describe very different sorts of relationship – *very* different, in some cases! Hate, of course, is the inverse of love, and you will see a little of that in this issue, as well. But, what you won't see, I trust, is indifference.

Keep your eyes on the website for announcements of future themes and other releases...

Best, **DS Davidson**

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Contents

FICTION	
OLD BONES	4
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE	7
<i>Eric Mwathi</i>	
THE FAMILY	8
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
CHOCOLATE HEARTS	11
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
A REBELLIOUS PUPIL	17
<i>Eric Mwathi</i>	
PLUM TOMATOES	19
<i>Neil K. Henderson</i>	
THE STRANGE LAUDANUM DREAM OF BRANWELL BRONTË	30
<i>Andrew Darlington</i>	
KUMIHO JUSTICE FOR LOVE	40
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
POETRY	
AMONG THE SLEEP-CAPSULES	3
<i>Phillip A. Ellis</i>	
LOVE HIDES IN STRANGE PLACES	3
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
THE ONE	3
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
DIVINE CHOCOLATE	3
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
GENIUS LOCI VENUS	5
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
A DEPOSIT	10
<i>Christy Hall</i>	
LOVE WAYS	16
<i>Amanda Valance</i>	
DEVOTION	16
<i>David Norris-Kay</i>	
RACISM	25
<i>Arthur C. Ford, Sr.</i>	
HAIKU	25
<i>DS Davidson</i>	
LOVE'S STRANGE EMBRACE	26
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
TELL ME YOU LOVE ME	26
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	

POETRY (cont.)

LONG RANGE LOVE	27
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
SKETCH	27
<i>Eric Mwathi</i>	
MISTAKEN	28
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
UNREMITTED	28
<i>Eric Mwathi</i>	
UNSUITABLE	28
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
CRAZY COLORED CRIMSON COITUS CREATURE	29
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
KISS HAIKU	29
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
LOVE IN CARCOSA	37
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
ABOVE AND BELOW	37
<i>Arthur C. Ford, Sr.</i>	
THE FLOWER WALTZ	38
<i>Ross Balcom</i>	
I AM THE DEATH OF LOVE	38
<i>Neil K. Henderson</i>	
DARK BUTTERFLY	38
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
DEATH & SURF & SAUSAGE ROLLS	39
<i>Neil K. Henderson</i>	
HAIKU	53
<i>Amanda Valance</i>	
"THE FREE VERSE BALLADE FOR MY LOVER"	54
<i>Phillip A. Ellis</i>	

ARTWORK / PHOTOGRAPHY

<i>David Leverton</i>	
BLOOD IN THE WATER	Front cover
CROCUSES	2
TERMINUS PARTINGS	10
CHOCOLATE HEART	15
MIRROR SWANS	16
'PLUM' TOMATOES	19/25
PALE ROSE	26
SUNBURST	27
SUNSET	28
BRANWELL'S BEE	36
THE SPIRIT IS LOVE	37
SEASCAPE 2	39
SUMMER COMES	54
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
GENIUS LOCI OF AN AFRICAN TWILIGHT	5
CRAZY COITUS WOMAN	29
KUMIHO	41



AMONG THE SLEEP-CAPSULES

by Phillip A. Ellis

Cables snake, and robots stir,
among the sleep-capsules
in which the greater part
of the colony have repaired
for the duration of our travel.
How the frosts form within,
the frosts of dreams undreamt.
There is no consciousness
sneaking in here,
for all they know is a moment
of nothingness, easily forgotten,
quickly limned in ultimate darkness
and a brief sensation of coldness.

How cold were our hearts
when we parted from Earth.
The day was overcast,
the ocean stretching west
from the launching-field
muted blue and green,
an aquamarine more
than sorrowful enough,
and muted into melancholy.
There was no birdsong, then,
just the echoing discourse
of the shuttle-field,
readying for the take-off.

And our families,
they said their final farewells
to us as we went
to enter into the shuttle.
We were ready,
we were willing,
we were prepared:
for orbit, for sleep,
for a hundred thousand
dreamless hours of travel
into the unknown,
uncounted, uncountable,
never aging
as those we left behind
aged and faded to memories.

Yet we few on duty
see to our tasks,
as we monitor them
that sleep amongst us.
And the hours I have spent alone,
I have spent sketching
among the sleep-capsules,
she whom I love
who sleeps my life away.
And so it is,
and so it has been.
And still the cables snake,
and still the robots stir,
among the sleep-capsules
in which the greater part
of the colony have repaired
for the duration of our travel.

LOVE HIDES IN STRANGE PLACES

by Frederick J. Mayer

The snake in its eyes
is always in love.
This reptile feels
and stares.
So in love
with some compassion
a stone can need.
The snake loves
and pays its price.
A diamond is ice
to be a lady's love.
A snake desires
such warmth,
found within a soul
so hidden
in his eyes.

THE ONE

by Aeronwy Dafies

More enigmatic than the Lost Ark
Like a killer at a butlers' conference
My own personal Holy Grail.

Still, seeking is such a lark!
Trying to pinpoint your preference
Just hope I don't fail...

*First published in her booklet I Close My Eyes,
Atlantean Publishing*

Divine Chocolate

by DJ Tyrer

A gift from a Valentine
An Easter Egg delight
Something to share with friends
Or to comfort you on a lonely night
A little taste of paradise
It can even make the world more right
By dealing fair as you enjoy
Every gorgeous bite!



TIGERSHARK

OLD BONES

by
DJ Tyrer

"I call him Old Bones," he said, pulling out the long, wide drawer to reveal the complete skeleton of a man, the bones yellowed and tarnished. "You can see why, of course."

"Where did he come from?" she asked.

"Now, that is a funny story. He was living behind the wall of my study. Well, I say living..." he laughed and she echoed the sound. "We discovered him when the extension was being built and we took down the wall. He had been bricked up in here: whether alive or dead, I have no idea."

"Imagine that: being walled-up alive!"

"Yes, a terrible way to die, indeed, trapped in darkness and yet knowing that everyday life was going on mere inches away from you – that everyday life would continue in proximity to your tomb for years, centuries, even, to come..."

"Horrible!"

"The contractors broke the wall down and Old Bones came tumbling out, scattering himself across the floor in the most shocking manner!" He laughed again, more heartily. "The police were called, of course, in case there had been a murder, but it was soon established that he was very, very old."

"I hadn't the heart to evict him, our sitting tenant, so had this cabinet installed to keep him here, provide him with a more comfortable resting place in the years to come." Reaching down, he lifted up the skull and held it towards her. "Like Yorick, he provides inspiration from beyond the, ah, Wall of Death. Old Bones is my friend, my advisor, and my confidante. Yes, friend; we are become firm friends, him and me."

"Friends?" She rolled her eyes. "How can you become friends with a skeleton?"

"Why not? After all, when you get down to it, he's the very core of a man. A man without the fleshy frailties of living. Old Bones is the perfect friend." Gently, he replaced the skull. "Quiet and understanding – and never in the way."

"You sound as if you prefer it to the living!"

"Oh, I do; I do! Old Bones has never let me down and, if he's no conversationalist, he's a great listener. Yes, I do prefer him..."



TIGERSHARK



GENIUS LOCI VENUS (OF AN AFRICAN TWILIGHT)

by Frederick J. Mayer

Rain falling into jungle green,
pain calling forth in flora's scream,
eyes not so round staring
crys into mine, sharing
love's heart beat,
melted by heat
in lonesome jungle twilight dream.

I use to date and kiss frogs,
wet arousing cool skin
the sensuous long tongue,
pre-sexual awareness within...

Before death of lovers
I was found under sun
of scarlet blossoms bright
of flame tree in bloom night.

The Dark Butterfly alight
tree top, it utters lamentations
of a disease so painful -
Tree will always be crying,
Memories always lying,
Hearts are always sighing,
and Lovers always dying.

Moon in supplication
to Love's caressing fingers
of plants who know
past memories linger;
I'm embalmed within jungle womb.
But, I claw for birth's liberation...
Spirits' heart drip through sultry air,
merge; after rains scheme.

Dusk reveals upon flora fair,
bloody stains, blood "dream."
Before the steam
of rising dawn,
through the dreams
of forgotten gods,
are spirits' lasting scream
amidst jungle dark.

Yet,
Primal hearts beat
to the sound,
that ears never meet,
of rhythms' pulsating ground,
as jungle twilight
create the ever stream;
Lost Love's delight.

The rain touched wind
through the hearts it blows true;
Smell the fragrant purple flowers
of the frangipant tree -
Leopard-woman
comes
prophetic
as heat arising from Obokpa land
bringing an ancient poem to me.

Taken in living fur
to
a place, like Nigerian underworld,
eternal,
the great tribe village Ibo.

There within old flame,
reality's fearsome mirror
in that no one is ever the same:
Wavering, my "ikinga,"
personal shrine, broken, lame
this man's life force,
his own "right hand."

Under the strange oil palm,
I sit and see the start
of a ritual ablution
Around the totem/shrine, udus,
thoras, and imperial drums sound
a startling complex rhythmic
effect
that weaves spells
about the heart
like heat wisps
from fire hot who,
like lovely fingers, reach into
ground.

Voices of Iboland:
oko jo kpo io elo?
(where is your heartbeat?)
oko jo kpo io elo?
(where is your heartbeat?)
aki yo kpo io elo?
(how does your heart beat?)

It touches like some mystic hand,
I stare deeply into majestic flame.
I speak too much about my shame.

Tribesmen dance masquerades,
Afikpo-Ibo masked ritual,
Nigerian twilight ceases to fade.
Offerings on masks,
of egg shell's remnants,
Percussion pots and slit drums mingle
with making sacrifice and chants:
"I have your face.
You take mine,
I'll take yours,
And, see what we will find."

After village initiation,
the former world is not to be,
the totem changing to moonswift night,
bringing a deeper complicity.
This is the sanctification,
a totem beyond all taboo,
It's Ala,
great goddess of the Ibo,
earth mother, figure of fertility.



TIGERSHARK

From rain trenched earth,
as image of a beautiful Ibo-Ukwu bronze,
She speaks melodically:
"Flesh and fur are near of kin,
once freed from thoughts
of original sin."

Death-head snake comes from sacred fire,
Lady stands behind him as shadow,
she whispers, "Even shadows dream."
Flames as crimson as twilight start
to perspire,
as the darkness arrives like steam.

I have lost it.
Still, in the night, there's hope.
Flame tree in night shaded hues
shades in tears flora and fauna
at rest upon dark evening slope.
Nok village fires a flame blue.
Twilight jungle maze,
emotional haze,
pierced by lunar orb
and sorrows soon absorb
the peace of twilight's shadow.

Not all at rest, beasts of night
stalk the midnight fallow
where the shadows of memory
become solid luminaires.

Beasts at feast.
I lay alone and awake here,
now void of broken mirror's light
and lacking reflections' fear.



Genius Loci Of An African Twilight
(Frederick J. Mayer)

Author's notes

This was written in Nigeria; I was influenced by Clark Ashton Smith's 'Genius Loci' having picked up the British, Panther edition of his collected stories en route to there. The setting is Nigeria's delta area and the poem incorporates real experiences with dream, as well as 'spirits' of the area. Some of the areas mentioned still exist while others do not exist anymore – nor did they when I was in the area, but they existed in its ancient past.



TIGERSHARK

Children are our future

by Eric Mwathi

"Children are our future, or rather the lack thereof, now that we have another mouth to feed," remarked Arthur, slouched next to his wife, in a hospital. She irritably cried, "Oh, shut up, Arthur. The child can hear you."

To that Arthur shrugged his shoulders and replied "Seeing that it's not even been born, I heavily doubt that, Marge."

To that she replied, "It still can hear you from the womb, which you would have known if you had read that book on babies that I gave you."

To that he replied, "Even if it could hear me, most children do not understand English, at the time they are still in the womb. So, if you had more common sense, then *you* would know that."

To that Marge rolled her eyes and replied, "Never mind; in this situation I must say that I have never wished more strongly that the nausea that I have felt in the morning had come from some sort of sickness, and not from another human life inside of me that you can also make miserable."

To that Arthur replied, "I totally agree with you, for a change. The only consolation of having another child would be to know that it is making your life just as miserable as mine."

To that Marge went, "Hush, the doctor is coming. "

Then the doctor said, "Well Mr and Mrs Pageant, you will be relieved to know that your concern about a possible pregnancy was unnecessary, since it is not a baby that you have, *but a tumour.*"

To that Marge replied, "Maybe you should check me up again, to see if it is not a child, instead. Apparently at the early stages of development, tumours and babies look awfully alike."

Then the doctor replied, "Due to the infrequency with which I confuse the two, I always make such important tests twice."

Then Arthur said, "Well, is it male or female?"

Then Marge added, "And what health risks are there involved in taking it out?"

Then the doctor replied, "Though the gender of the tumour has unfortunately not been determined, the health risks are as such that you may die on the operating table when taking it out. The operation is expensive too."

Then Arthur nodded and said, "Well in that case, if we do nothing about it, how many years will I have to live?"

The doctor shrugged and replied, "It's your wife who's sick, and not you."

Then he replied, "Yes, but it's my life I'm more worried about"

Then the doctor shook his head, and shook his fist at Arthur and said, "Well you won't have very long to live, if you keep making such insensitive comments about your wife's health. So I suggest that you two make an appointment with my assistant, for a time that is best suited for the operation to get that thing out of you and for now that will be it." Then walked off, when shaking his head, whilst leaving the strange couple staring at one another in confusion.

Eventually the odd couple scheduled an appointment for the operation mentioned, so that on the day that it took place Arthur and Margaret Pageant happily brought a tumour into the world that weighed half a kilo, though its gender was still undetermined after the point of its birth.



THE FAMILY

by Aeronwy Dafies

"Excuse me," James asked me as he turned off his PC, "why on earth have you arranged this meeting at seven tonight? I mean it's not as if it's very important anyway – come on, don't you have a life, Lisa?"

"Of course I have! It's not my fault I could only schedule it for tonight. We're all very busy and, while it might not seem important to you, it's *vital* to some of us!"

"Huh. If you say so," he muttered.

I was glad James didn't push it; to be honest, he was on the right track: I was severely lacking in a social life. In fact, that was precisely the reason why I was calling the meeting. It was the commencement of stage one of Project: Family.

Project: Family. I'd been planning it for some time. It was, I hoped, my ticket to happiness and contentment, or, at least, an end to lonely evenings eating soup for one. I planned to create a little 'family' for myself through the liberal scheduling of late-night meetings, forcing some of my single colleagues to join me in the evenings and keep me company. Eventually, by the end of stage three, we'd be one large happy family...



Three months later, I'd progressed from stage one to stage two. I'd increased the frequency and banality of our meetings until my colleagues, weary of attempting to refuse to attend, were willing to acquiesce to my demands for regular get-togethers. They'd also got used to my requiring them to bring food or drink to provision us, as well as getting used to what passed for cooking in my home – after living alone for several years, you get out of the habit of the way of cooking anything that doesn't require a microwave.

Now, in the second stage of Project: Family, I'd begun 'conditioning' them, introducing the word 'family' into casual conversations as a reference to our little gatherings. Only cynical Keith had realised that they were being moulded into a surrogate family and, aside from snide comments, was too cynical to try and resist progress.

We were nearing stage three, my colleagues having proved exceptionally malleable, during which I'd consolidate our kinship, bring them finally past the point of no return. It had been a slow journey, but not quite as slow as I'd expected. I decided to splash out and celebrate.

"I've got us a family cat," I told James as I let him into my flat; he'd been the first to arrive. "Oh, and how was your day at work, darling?"

For a moment, resistance flickered in his eyes, a last vestige of normality, then died. "Oh, so-so," he replied, non-committally. Of course, I knew he'd had a stressful day – my cubicle was next to his in the office – but the pretence was all-important in reinforcing the illusion.



I picked up the purring cat to show him. I was quite pleased with it, a little tabby; it nearly completed our little family. A dog would make a suitable end-of-project prize. We were so nearly complete.

The others arrived soon after. I greeted Keith as 'dear', Julie as 'darling', Ronald as 'bro' and Dan the intern as 'son'. Each had an imaginary position to fulfil in our imaginary family. I was the mother, James was the father, Keith was a sort of secondary husband (he had only ever grudgingly got into the spirit of the enterprise), Julie was my surrogate sister, Ronald was my brother and young Dan was the son I'd never had (alright, I couldn't have a son quite his age, but he was the best there was). Now, we had the cat and soon we'd be complete with the addition of a canine companion of some kind.

Julie had brought some pre-prepared salad from Marks & Spencer, Ronald some lovely Carte d'Or ice-cream and James a large bottle of Chablis to compliment the almost-exquisite steaks I'd prepared. Our meals had always been a bit of a pot-luck, though, as my cooking had gradually improved and supper had superceded business, they'd generally got better.

Proudly, I showed everyone the new feline addition to our family. Yes, everything was going according to plan.



It all fell apart. That evening, over dinner, the 'family' self-destructed. Maybe I'd overestimated the cohesion I'd created; now I think about it, the smiles they wore were somewhat false; the illusion was no more than surface deep.

Keith criticised the cat. That was how it all began, with that single comment. Not that it was a great surprise: Keith often made snide comments, always had. But, this time, he set off a chain-reaction; perhaps it was because he did it without his usual apathy. Quickly, more complaints followed: the steak was tough, the lighting inadequate, the meal was stopping Keith from doing his overtime, our 'meetings' had kept James from working on his project and he was behind schedule. Moan, moan, moan. Soon, the entire charade was shattered.

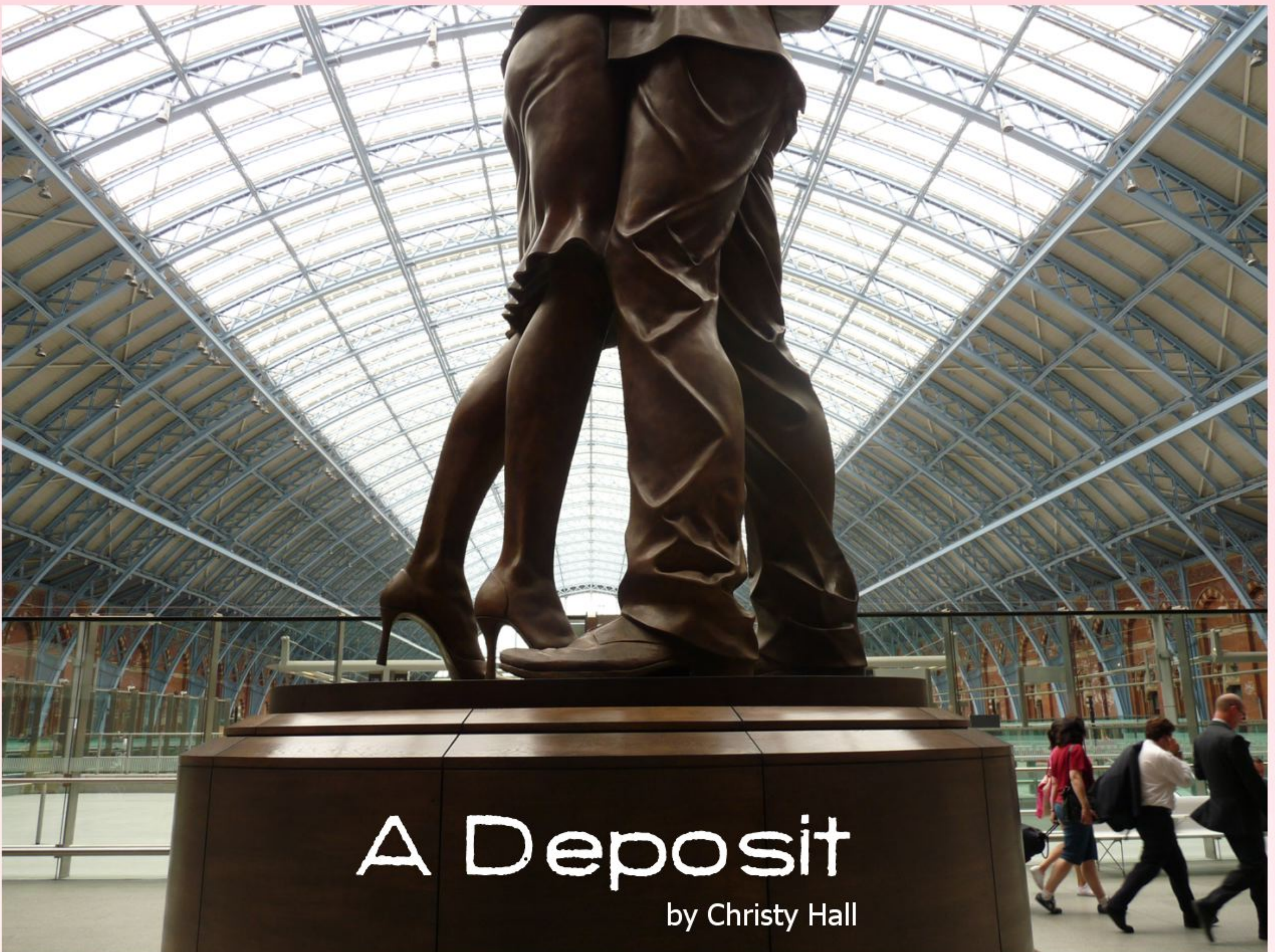
"This is just so *stupid!*" exclaimed Ronald, standing up, turning away from the table in disgust. "We're just providing Lisa with a social life, wasting our time for this selfish slut. It's just nonsense! I'm going – I'm not wasting another minute here!"

He went and, pretty soon, the others followed. Eventually, I was left alone with just the cat for company. It came over to me and tried to rub against my leg, but I kicked it away. I'd get rid of it soon; I didn't want a reminder of my failure.

Of course, nobody was likely to be speaking to me now, and my evenings would, once again, be lonely and soup-filled. I guess I'll quit and look for a job elsewhere, start Project: Family all over again. Always the same results... Maybe I'm doing something wrong? Or, maybe you really can't choose your family?



TIGERSHARK



Terminus Partings (David Leventon)

What of a sub-seventy quid room in Victoria, London?
The usual 2 star everything: couldn't-swing-a-cat shower,
one pillow per-person, freeze-dried coffee sachets
and thimble-sized milk shots.
But there was more than that; we needed the reckless
privacy of walls, the horizontal-ness of a bed,
even that bed.
It was there that we were first born, lived out our entire
existence as a formed one and then died.
You died gradually; curling the ball of your shoulder
inside the tuck of my right arm, stick-legs knowing the
meaty-cut of my right thigh.

Somewhere in the distance that night was a clouded
vision of a city airport; I am taken there
over gritty underground struts.
Ugly-green to Chelsea-blue as I cross the platform
from District to Piccadilly:
Hammersmith, Acton, Ealing, Hounslow.
At the terminal, our early-rise chatter gives
way to mournful silence – a knowing calm.
As we proceed through the usual goodbyes –
a brief embrace, a longer kiss, five or six
different promises – I'm not sure when I'll
next touch those lips – if at all, again, ever! –
but I pad away, hoping I've made just any kind
of a deposit.

CHOCOLATE HEARTS

by DJ Tyrer

Mr Jackson's voice was a tedious drone. He was waffling on about Shakespeare and I just couldn't seem to concentrate on any of it, no matter how hard I tried, hoping for distraction. It was boring; I'm not sure if Shakespeare itself was boring or if it was just how he taught it, but I really I couldn't have cared less. But, still, I tried to focus on his words. I was doodling idly, but that was no distraction either; it was just random patterns. The problem was that my attention was firmly fixed elsewhere.

No matter how hard I tried to ignore him, I couldn't help but keep looking over at Jack. Well, the back of his head, but that was enough. I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was falling in love with him. Maybe it was just a crush. I really hoped it was just a crush. He really wasn't the sort of boy I ought to fall in love with. I kept telling myself that, but it didn't stop me from staring at him. His presence had my full attention.

Jack was a bit of a thug, a bully. He wasn't malicious, as such, but his fists were always his first recourse and he had no respect for anyone significantly weaker than him. Maybe that was a rationalisation on my part, trying to excuse his behaviour. Maybe he was just a scumbag, but I couldn't see it. He was more rough diamond than stone cold, to me.

Admittedly, being in class made it easier to like him. In the playground, his idea of fun was to go around punching the other boys in a perverse sort of survey to rank them in a league table of toughness. Those who flinched too soon or burst into tears most readily and who failed to outrun him were destined to be the subject of further blows as he sought to assert his superiority over the schoolyard. He was rather less endearing then!

When class finished, I trailed after him. It was lunchtime and I had a packed lunch, so I could eat as and when I wanted, allowing me to watch him. I leaned against the school wall and munched on a chocolate bar as I watched Jack going through his ritual of punching anyone who came to hand. I felt horrible to be enjoying it.

Suddenly, I noticed that he was walking towards me. That wasn't meant to happen; he wasn't supposed to notice me. I looked around for an escape route, but he and his coterie of second-tier toughs had me cornered. Quickly, I swallowed the last of the chocolate.

"What are you staring at, freak?" he demanded as he approached. Yeah, that was me, the outsider.

I didn't answer. I didn't want to admit the truth and have him laugh at me; Jack had dated Jolene and Emma, the best-looking girls in our year. That he could ever have feelings for me was an impossibility.



Silence seemed to baffle him. He repeated the question, then, when I again failed to answer, decided to do what came naturally and punch me. He hit me in the arm. I didn't flinch. Okay, it was as much shock as anything, but it was impossible to go through school as the perpetual outsider without getting used to pain: there was always somebody trying to trip me or pinch me or punch me. Nobody had hit me that hard before – not even that bitch, Kirsty, who liked to bash the back of my head with a ruler in design class – but, I just took it without tears or a murmur. That seemed to baffle him all the more.

“You're tougher than all of them,” he muttered. I wasn't certain how many boys were included in that ‘them’, but I could tell he was impressed. Even with pain throbbing in my arm, I was strangely satisfied to realise that fact. I was even more pleased at his next words, spoken more certainly, if still a little confused: “You're alright, you are. If anyone gives you any trouble, tell me and I'll sort them for you.”

As he turned and walked away, scratching his head, I felt a warm glow of pleasure. As well as a nice thing to hear, I realised that his promise, if it held true, would come very much in useful in future.

Ignoring the pain, I smiled. This was proving to be an excellent day.



I had been a little doubtful about Jack's promise, but in the weeks since he'd made it, he'd come to my rescue when a bunch of boys had grabbed my bag and started throwing it between them, warned Kirsty off me and beaten up Luke when he started slagging me off. It was strange not needing to feel nervous all the time. It felt good.

Presumably acting upon his promise to look after me, I found he was spending more time around me. He would tend to hang around near me in the playground and even invited me to sit at the same workbench as him and his friends in science; I think they were even more surprised than me at that development. It all seemed a little too good to be true and years of ingrained paranoia told me that it had to be the prelude to some horrible joke at my expense, but none followed and Jack seemed to mellow and become all the more friendly. Spending time with him, I realised he was even further from the violent stereotype he sometimes seemed than I might have imagined. He was actually very likeable, if not all that bright.

Yes, I was falling in love. That really wasn't meant to be happening at all. My parents wouldn't approve; I knew that much. I just continued to cling to the belief that he couldn't fancy me in order to avoid facing the possibility of what might follow.



“You want to go see a film on Saturday?” Those were the words that both made my heart give a thrilling lurch and which sent a chill of horror down my spine. I wanted to say ‘no’ and evade the issue, but, when I opened my mouth, out came a “Yes” that committed me. Was this to be the moment when the other shoe would drop and I would be the victim of some prank? That was the fear that consumed me for the rest of the day, but listening to the excited way in which he discussed what we would see and do, I came to the conclusion that he was serious. Come Friday, he was even referring to it as a date. I'd never been asked on a date before.

Even knowing that this was real, I felt as much trepidation as delight. I had absolutely no idea how to behave on a date. I didn't even really have anything to wear. It was with a sigh that I looked through my wardrobe on Friday evening: everything seemed baggy or ugly. I was going to look awful. If only I'd accepted the reality of the invitation sooner, I might have ordered an outfit online. I was going to have to make a last-minute visit to a store and I was dreading that: frumpy, ugly me in a fashionable shop!

Make-up was absolutely forbidden by my parents, but I'd got some stashed away behind the *Gallagher Academy* novels on my bookshelf for just such an occasion, as impossible as it had seemed. I could, at least, try to make myself look nice. I hoped.

I'd told my Mum that I would be out with friends, which was technically true, in the singular, at least. Sometimes, being boringly obedient had its advantages – nobody asked too many questions when obedience was way off the agenda! Dad would be at work, as usual, so I didn't need to worry about him.

We were meeting at noon for a burger before the film, so I had time for a little clothes shopping, although I was short on cash.

I'd gone light on the make-up – a little blusher and eye shadow; bright red lipstick would be applied later. I didn't want Mum to stop me; besides which I wasn't used to applying make-up and didn't want to end up looking clownish rather than attractive. I had on black leggings and a scuffed pair of old, off-white trainers that I'd much rather not have had on, but were the best of a bad selection. I stopped to buy a top, picking out a dark-blue sequined one that hung almost to my knees, and also picked up a black alice band to hold my unruly hair in place. I felt surprisingly good as I exited the shop in my new look.

"You look nice," said Jack when I met up with him by the fountain. That realisation seemed to confuse him all the more, but gratified me nonetheless.

"Thank you. So do you." He was in jeans and tee-shirt, nothing special, but I wanted to repay the compliment and, anyway, he did look nice.

"I got you a present."

"Oh?" That was unexpected. It really was like a date.

"Here." He handed me a small plastic bag with something in it. I wouldn't really have expected Jack to wrap a gift and he probably had only just purchased it. But, in this case, it really was the thought that counted. It was a lovely gesture.

Carefully, I removed the bag and discovered a chocolate heart in red foil within.

"Thank you!"

"I know that you like dark chocolate, so I got it for you, special," he explained.

“That’s so thoughtful of you!” I was genuinely impressed. “I’m not sure whether to eat it or keep it...” I laughed.

Again, he appeared perplexed. I always seemed to have that effect upon him. “You’re supposed to eat it...”

Suppressing a giggle, not wanting him to think I was mocking him, I unwrapped and ate it.

“It’s lovely, thank you.”

He gave a sheepish grin and scratched his head. “I like you. I don’t know why. I wanted to show you.”

“I like you, too...” Daringly, I slipped my hand into his and he gave it a squeeze. “Shall we eat?”

Burger and fries was nothing special, but his company made it feel as if we were sharing a banquet. The movie passed in something of a daze spent in Jack’s firm embrace. The afternoon passed in perfection.

Leaving the theatre, we paused a little way down the road, in the mouth of an alleyway where we had some privacy. Jack pulled me towards him and tilted my chin upward. I hadn’t been kissed before and must admit that I relished the unexpected sensation.

“I love you,” I whispered, nervous lest I’d overstepped the mark.

“I think I love you, too...” he replied, his voice and expression telling me that the concept baffled him more than anything else so far.



Jack had offered to walk me home, but I’d managed to persuade him to only go halfway. I didn’t want to risk Mum seeing us together. I also made certain to take off the new top and alic band and hide them in my bag, as well as wiping off the make-up. I wanted to raise no suspicions.

Our little romance blossomed in secrecy over the next few weeks. It was one thing to look after me as if I were some kind of curiosity, but he wasn’t comfortable with announcing to the school that he was dating the oddball. Likewise, whilst I was anything but ashamed of dating him, I couldn’t risk my parents learning about us. I just knew that they wouldn’t approve. So, we restricted our openness to hanging out for a short while after school and our Saturday dates. It was frustrating, but exhilarating.

Unfortunately, as the proverb puts it, all good things must come to an end, and our secret relationship proved to be one of them.

It was my fault. I had kept on using my friends as a cover for our Saturdays, but our relationship had become all-consuming and I was careless in not putting in appearances at their homes. There was an inevitability that my lie would be uncovered. Whether deliberately checking up on me or the coincidence of parental gossip, Mum had discovered that I hadn't been to visit my friend's house in weeks. Naturally, she was concerned and began to ask around and there were parents more than willing to pass on the juicy gossip they had about Jack and me. We had thought ourselves discreet, but had still been observed.

As I'd imagined, my parents hit the roof. Dad had been outraged at my behaviour, calling me disgusting. He didn't understand at all. I thought he was going to belt me, but Mum had persuaded him to leave it to her and he had stormed off for a drive to cool his anger. Mum told me that we would discuss the situation the next day, when she'd had a chance to calm down herself. I was most definitely grounded: no going out on Saturday and Dad would be driving me to and from school.

The next day, after I'd told Jack during break about what had happened, he disappeared and bunked off the next lesson. At lunchtime, he found me and pressed something into my hand.

"For you. So you know how I feel."

It was a chocolate heart.

"I think I'll keep this one for now, as a reminder."

He shook his head, still unable to understand me.



Chocolate Heart (David Leverton)

"I'm fine with it, honestly, I am," said Mum, her voice calm. "There's nothing wrong with it."

Yeah, right, I thought to myself, knowing what was to follow. We had been going around in circles for over an hour.

"If that's what you want, it's okay." She paused. "All we ask is that you be a normal gay."

"Mum, I'm not gay, I'm a girl."

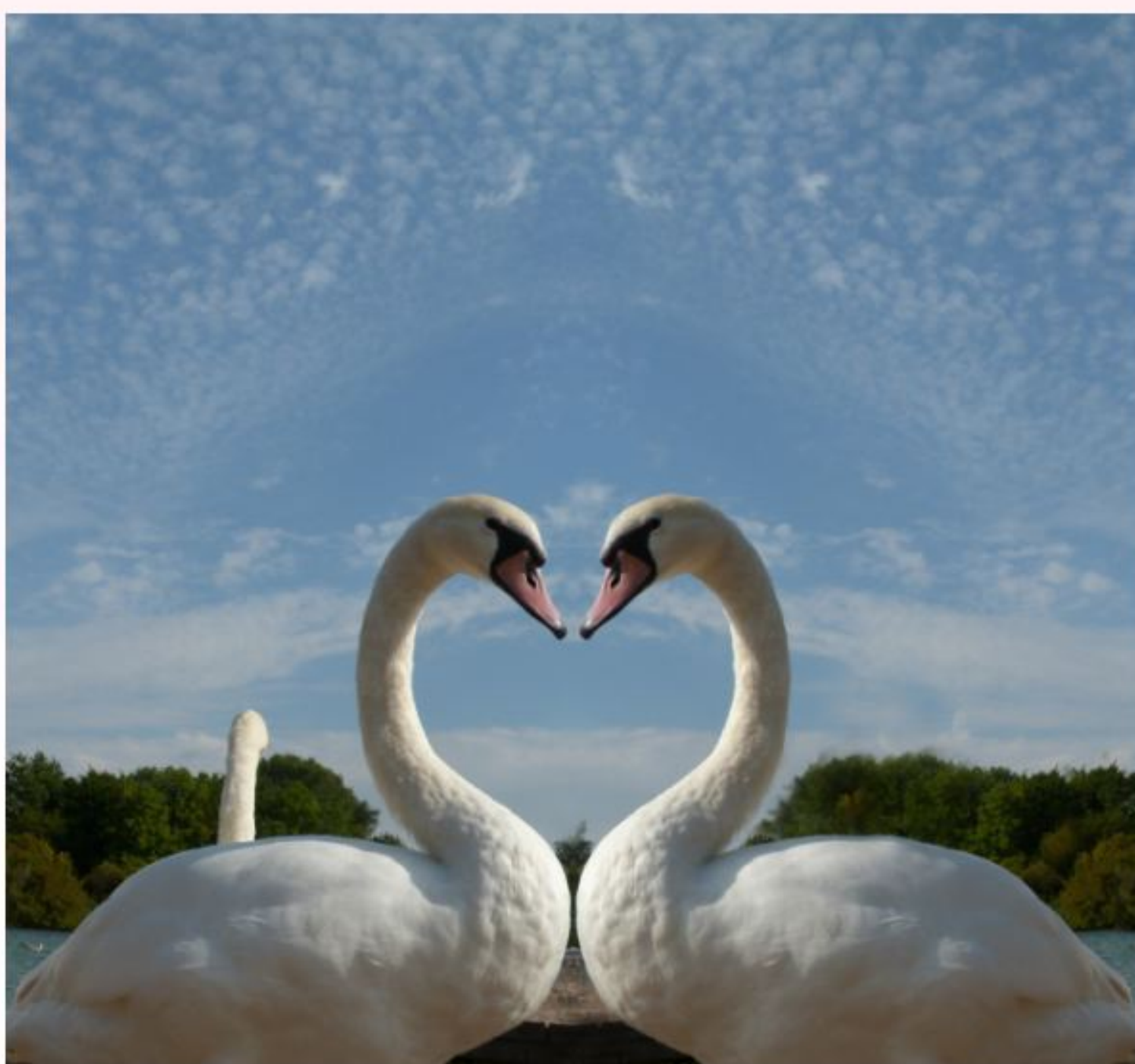
She shook her head in confusion and began to explain once again that 'it was okay'. With a sigh, I slipped my hand into the pocket of my jeans to feel the reassuring shape of the chocolate heart. Jack understood, even if my identity bemused him, and that heart symbolised my hope that I might yet achieve my happily ever after.



Love Ways

by Amanda Valance

Love has meant different things to me
Every time that my heart has been struck
Sometimes transient, sometimes permanent
Arriving most often with a bang
Less often with a whimper
Insinuating itself sideways into my heart
On occasion physical, other times spiritual
Perhaps the two in perfect balance
Or in raging conflict
Rarely certain, more often uncertain
Tentative and wary of being hurt
Variable in intensity
Sometimes easy to overlook or ignore
At other times overwhelming
Blazing like an all-consuming fire
Preferably delightful and affirming
Once in a while confusing
Or even peculiar and disturbing
Some crafting a permanent home in my heart
To survive even if we are long apart
A few purely imaginary, ideals
A myriad of ways to wander
Guided by the mystery of Love



Mirror Swans (David Leverton)



DEVOTION

by David Norris-Kay

What love the world cannot destroy
Is linked between our eyes?
What door leads to the garden
Where true devotion lies?

No greater understanding
Can lace our darkened years:
No mystery more eternal
Than love's abundance here.

Embracing all, in quiet words,
When first your shadow touched my heart,
And still remembrance here beheld
Of painful moments thrown apart...

And if fate's destiny is death,
Devotion still remains a whole,
Uniting love and life beyond,
Unbroken thought which binds the soul.

And when prayer fails to bring solace
From troubled words and jest,
I seek devotion harboured in
The hollow of your breast.

Unchanging in affection,
This love, eternal lies,
In the shallow of our sunlight,
And deepness of our eyes.

Previously appeared in Heart Shoots (Indigo Dreams Publishing), an anthology in aid of the Macmillan cancer charity.

A Rebellious Pupil

by Eric Mwathi

“Seriously, you need not pay the bill, Harold, especially since a decent spell checker would be a far wiser investment for you, if you are still serious about being a writer,” said Doctor Abrams.

A slight smile formed over those mean, narrow, lips of Doctor Abrams, at the sight of the surprised look of his pupil, Harold, before that pupil replied, “Well my new work was checked by both myself and by the spell checker, as well as by my friends who all said that my work is fine. So it does make me curious that you see flaws in my work that nobody, even professional editors and computers, do not seem to be able to see.”

Doctor Abrams avoided eye contact and said, “Just one or two verb confusions were in your work.”

Then Harold shrugged his shoulders and replied, “Well that clearly explains what you think gives you the right to insult my work, even when I have kindly offered to pay for the coffee and pastries that we have just had.”

Then Doctor Abrams shrugged his shoulders and said, “Those poems of yours were alright, Harold. As your mentor and friend, however, I must say that my positive attitude only applies to those poems that were actually written about life.”

Then Harold shrugged and replied, “So the poems on life are alright, as opposed to the poems I wrote on death, I suppose. I see, but that is confusing, especially since I hardly recall writing a poem on such subject as death, Doctor Abrams. Maybe you can help me remember such a poem that I had apparently written that was not connected to life in some form or other.”

Then Doctor Abrams shook his head again and replied, “I will certainly not do that if you ask me to do so in that kind of tone, Harold. However, if you ask me to do so kindly, you can bring some poetry right by to me, during my office hours, like you used to when you were still my student. There I will tell you if they’re good or not.”

Then Harold’s eyes darted up with surprise and he said, “Well that is strange, because I had thought that the opinions on my poetry that were really important had been the ones of the editors who decided if my work will be published or not. Now, since they did decide to publish my work several times, as opposed to your work, this actually made me believe that my work could *not be so horrible*.”

Then Doctor Abrams shook his head and replied, “As happy that I am that your work is *not so horrible*, as you wonderfully put it, it should be good. It must be excellent, in fact.”

Then Harold immediately took and opened the briefcase that he had dropped at his feet, after sitting down, opened and presented a blue folder to him, and handed it to Doctor Abrams, which Abrams received with a smile.

Then Harold replied, “Seeing that you’re such a great, yet obviously undiscovered expert in poetry, I have a better idea. Take my list full of journals that publish poetry, send your work to them, and, try to publish yours. Surely that would be more constructive than to try to rip mine apart.”

Then Abrams grabbed the folder, opened it, took one look at the long list of literary journals listed within it, closed the folder, tossed it back at Harold and said, “Their standard is not high enough for my work, unfortunately.”

Then Harold shrugged at Abrams and replied, “How interesting that is, because once I had published my poetry, you were the one who had wanted to know where you can publish yours. Now that I have provided you with a long list of where you can publish your work, I am surprised that you can be so picky as to where to send your work to or not.”

Doctor Abrams just shrugged his shoulders and replied, “Well, not every writer is ready to stoop down to your level, in search for any pathetic paper to publish his work.”

Then Harold replied, “As opposed to the high standards of those literary journals that are dying to publish your work? Come on, you have published no literary work at all, despite your strong efforts to do so. You cannot be picky as to where to send them.”

Then Abrams waved his index finger at Harold and said, “You obviously do not appreciate my views or appreciate me as a person, so I suggest that you just don’t show me your work at all. In fact do not even contact me. As for now, our friendship is over.”

Then Harold’s mouth opened to sarcastically pretend to look surprised and replied, “I cannot believe that you feel insulted for my telling you where you can publish your verse, for once. Maybe the fact that you do not want to send your work off is a sign that you do not think as highly of your literary talent as you try to make me believe, by arrogantly insisting I come to you for advice on how to write. A person, who thinks that his work is really good, tries to send them off to be published. A few rejections will not stop him from doing so even when they come his way, unless they believe the discouraging nonsense those teachers like you gave to them. Real writers do not limit themselves to telling other writers what to do with their work, to create the false impression that they know what they are talking about, when critiquing fiction. Real writers get their work published.”

From those words Harold pulled out some notes out of his wallet and placed them onto the bill, that the waitress had left a long time ago, as Doctor Abrams pointed to the notes and had said, “On that note, I think it is best that we part.”

Then Harold nodded before both of them stomped out of the café, though different exits.



PLUM TOMATOES

A fruity concoction

by Neil K Henderson

Say what you like about genetically modified crops and environmental consequences, I have had much to celebrate. My life has been enriched beyond conception by advances in this field. It's amazing what a spot of modern alchemy with DNA can achieve. Take Solana for example. She and I would never have... connected... had it not been for all that DNA interference research. Solana would have stayed perched primly on her twig, and – who knows? – I myself might have remained a wallflower all my days.

Of course, they'd been doing things with tomato genes for years before it began to interest me. I'd always found science in itself rather boring. But once I saw the relevance to my personal life, well – it refreshed the parts the drier disciplines couldn't rouse. As the saying goes. I say tomato genes, but it would be more accurate to say the genetic makeup of solanaceous plants in general. They've always been particularly susceptible to jiggery-pokery with their DNA – and jiggery-pokery is where my interests and the interests of science coincide.

I've never been one for the Internet. I've always valued my privacy, for a start. And you never know what sort of things you can catch from... unprotected contacts. Who is to say these viruses will stay confined to *computer* software? No. When it came to one-on-one interaction, I was never going to go computer dating. Indeed, were it not for a certain... *natural inclination*... I would have been happy enough just to potter about in the conservatory and leave all that *earthiness* to the more animalistic in the community. *My* desires have ever been of a more *vegetative* proclivity.

I suppose I began to appreciate the rounded contours of certain savoury fruit from an early age. The colours would have attracted me first, of course. The reds of the tomatoes, purples of the aubergines, greens and yellows of sweet peppers all entranced my toddler's eye in that Eden under glass. But as I grew, I became the more discerning in my preferences. The aubergines and tomatoes drew me to their fulsome roundness all the more, while the capsicums quickly lost their angular appeal. (As for *cucumbers*, those usurping non-solanaceous creepers in the shade, there was something distinctly sinister in *their* extended shapes.)

I suppose it was inevitable that puberty would rear its ugly head and – let us not say *distort* – but *concentrate* my already burgeoning inclinations into a more forcefully directed lust. It was also, after all, more or less inevitable that I would be caught in the conservatory, my instinctive *sanctum sanctorum*, when my pubic arousings first... arose. My God, those aubergines can make a right mess when handled roughly. I had a lot to learn in the practice of *amour*. (Or should that be *veneris*? Apart from horticultural Latin, languages are not my strong point.)

Well, I concluded aubergines were not designed for... certain things... and reserved them for less strenuous finger-fumblings. I sought for something more robustly protuberant to withstand my lusty onslaughts from the hip. There were pumpkins there a-plenty, but their furrowed texture proved too rough for my boyish loins to tame. As for marrows – well, I have to admit they were just *too* robustly protuberant for my inexperienced lungings. It isn't much fun at that age – I'd be about fourteen then – to be laid up for a fortnight with groin strain. I had to tell the parents I'd been lifting bags of phosphate.

I tried melons next. They were smoothly rounded OK, and just right in the robustly protuberant department. But those tough skins just turned me off. These were the fruity equivalent of mutton dressed as lamb. Such leathery maturity could make a meal of one still green behind the ears. I already knew what I wanted, you see, but at the time there seemed no way of getting it. I was a tomato boy at heart, but they just didn't make 'em man-sized for the likes of me. What I wanted was some horticultural Arcimboldo to come along and make me a woman out of solanaceous fruit. Impossible, you might say. But not with genetic engineering.

I went to university at the right time to make the most of the new advances. I was like a young Frankenstein, absorbing information through my cells by day and working away at night in my own laboratory – I mean conservatory – to put in practice all I'd learned. And it wasn't all DNA enhancement and fiddling with genetics, I can tell you. You might think I'm sex mad, but I had to learn a lot about mulching too.

I called my first creation Atopygia, short for Tomatopygia, meaning 'tomato buttocks'. (I didn't like the 'Tom' part, so I cut it off.) She was beautiful to behold, if you like that kind of thing. Functionally basic, of course, at this stage – I didn't bother with the arms and legs, and the head was vestigial – but perfectly formed, and succulent and sweet. I stuck with my fondness for aubergines and gave her eggplant breasts, firm, plump and pendulous. As for nether quarters, the huge bifurcated tomato breed I'd managed to engender was superb. Fragrant and firm, yet yielding as required when 'come on' from behind.

Of course, nothing lasts for ever, least of all unstable prototypes like this, and Atopygia was burst to buggery in no time. Those were the days! I was at it like a bull at a gate in my impatient zeal, but thankfully I'd cloned the willing Atopygia several times, and so had plenty of partners to help me with technique. I managed to introduce a modicum of restraint, but even so, the dainty damsels had a terribly short shelf-life, and there's a limit to what you can do with all that inseminated tomato juice. My freezer was already overloaded with specimen jars, and you can't get anyone to drink the stuff, highly nutritious though it is.

I had to work on something altogether more robust, while still sufficiently pliant... where it matters. Alicante was a marked improvement. I named her after a hardy strain, and it must be said she weathered several stormings before her defences collapsed irreparably. All things considered, I was sad things didn't work out. To paraphrase Bob Dylan, "she feels just like a woman, she appeals just like a woman, she looks a bit like a woman, but she bursts pretty much like a tomato".



Then I begot Bloody Mary. I tried introducing a tot of vodka into the genetic cocktail, in an attempt to produce an altogether tougher cookie, but only succeeded in creating a lush. I don't deny I had quite a time with her, and undoubtedly sowed a few wild oats – there's still several pips in the seed-bank somewhere for future rakes to scatter. But I quickly grew uneasy as the initial excitement wore off. She could be very unstable to deal with, might well be habit-forming and was quite possibly inflammable. I hastily extracted myself from the relationship and left her to stew in her own juice. At least we got an interesting ravioli sauce out of her.

I must not overlook Alberginia, my dark-skinned beauty made entirely from aubergines. (I had learned to treat them with respect by now.) She amused me for a while, her nether portions disproportionately pronounced like a lady of the Hottentots. She was certainly more durable than her predecessor, if something less of a looker. But no matter how I tried, I could never fully enjoy her. My mind always strayed, at the zenith of delight, to the redder, softer, sweeter globes I had known before. I needed a tomato-based lover. I needed solanaceousness with *soul*.

And that brings us to Solana. She was my first true love. She was my absolute pet. For all my vegetarian appetites, it was nevertheless the human female form which inspired my amorous fantasies and laid the blueprint for my hybridisations. And the human female form was so much more enduring, so much less obsolescent than the transient flesh of perishable fruit. The next stage in my quest for genetically modified perfection was clear to me. I must insert the essence of woman into my creations.

But where to get this essence of woman? The only female forms I had any actual contact with were my mother and my sister, and I am happy to report that they have never held any physical attraction for me. I am not unnatural. Nor would I wish to introduce any element of – let's not beat about the bush – incest into my implanting activities. I was going to have to go out and find this essence elsewhere. I was going to have to go on the hunt for... girls!

Well, I think I've made it pretty clear I'm not the most sociable of persons. Pubs and clubs were out, after my experiences with Bloody Mary, so I had to make the most of local events. There was a 'bring and buy' at the church hall up the road which might attract the unattached (they say those vicars' daughters like to hang a little loose). I decided to tag along with Mother and the Sis. The chutney on sale was interesting, but I knew I could do better at home. They had some battered books, but nothing suitably *specialised*. I did come away with an interesting knitted kneeling pad, but that's rather by the by. It was Mother's insistent elbow in my ribs which finally alerted me to Sally.

Of course, Ma'd been dying to see me settled with Miss Right for ages, so she did all my scouting for me. Sally was possibly quite bonny under all the frizz and layers of makeup, though as to whether she was really my *type* would only be known when I turned her into a tomato. Fortunately, from a legal and moral perspective, I did not require to do anything to her physically. Extraction of the DNA could be done without any compromising contact, given the right set of circumstances. This is where Fortune stepped in on my behalf, as though it had all been destined.

First of all, Mother spotted the keen interest I was displaying, and invited Sally round for tea. The poor girl accepted with such enthusiasm, I can only suppose her life must be unusually uneventful. I hoped she wasn't going to land me with a load of underactive genes. However, I needed all the practice I could get, and wasn't going to turn down a willing subject. Extracting DNA from actual women was a new one on me, but Fortune kept on smiling.

Without wishing to nauseate you with nostalgia, this was the heyday of the 'Damson's Distress', and Mother had bought a big bag of damsons at the sale especially. For those too young to remember, the 'Damson's Distress' was the brainchild of one Spelbin Pheff, amateur inventor, who caused great social conflict and chaos with his device for *very slowly* lowering damsons into bowls of hot tomato soup from an elaborate set-up of weights and string. He later confessed, in the newspaper article whose headline gave his dipping device its name, to inventing the contraption because "I'm evil and I want to spoil people's enjoyment of their dinner". By this time, however, the damage had been done. The 'Damson's Distress' had become a national craze, and husbands and wives were poking each other's eyes out in exasperation at it all.

Now I come to think of it, that was probably the reason Father wasn't present at the soiree. He'd be down the Eye Infirmary getting seen to. Anyway, we were having damsons in tomato soup, *de rigueur*, which provided an ideal opportunity to use up all that inseminated tomato pulp left over from the Atopygias. It curdled wonderfully on the plate, transfixing Sally's gaze as the ladies of the house manipulated the pulley arrangement to align all the overhead damsons with the correct dishes. The secret of the device's success was this very tardiness of execution. There was a big public health initiative at the time, encouraging people to slow down.

Well, this gave me the opportunity of dropping a few hints to Sally on the general nature of inseminated food, while the others were thus distracted. I believe the phrase "slimy tomato giblets" also proved of interest as she sat and watched the pulp congeal. Suffice it to say that by the time Sally's damson descended she had turned the colour of ripe greengage. An innocent comment from Sis on the saltiness of the soup was enough to make her spew her load. Ever the solicitous host, I whisked the plate away, transferring its contents into specimen jars in the kitchen. She was gone when I returned, following an altercation about hygiene.

What did I care? I'd heard the police got DNA from saliva, and all that puke must be more than partly spit. I had what I wanted, and Sally was rendered surplus to requirements. The succeeding days in the conservatory were among the happiest in my life. Everyone needs a mission, and I was on a mission of love (or something in that area). The only thing to cast a downer on my merry experimenting was the dream that started impinging on my nightly rest. It was always much the same: I found myself looking at a huge pit or enclosure with giant beetroots (and even white globe turnips) herded there like animals. Some of the beets stood up on rudimentary 'legs' made from slices cut into segments. Some had whole bodies composed of slices, yet each was held together as a living, moving whole. A demonstration was in progress, and the 'beasts' were made to do as bidden - pulling things and generally working like



farm animals. Meanwhile, inanimate white turnips were being cleaned off in some sort of bath, manure or root dirt clogging up the plughole of the drain.

I didn't need Sigmund Freud to tell me what the dream meant. My animating principle and the laboratory conditions for my work were clearly represented. The beetroots were a subconscious code for tomatoes in the process of being turned into women. (The white turnips were probably buttocks, but let's not dig too deep.) There was a pleasing air of submissiveness in the 'beasts' which seemed to augur well. Fortune had been with me so far, and surely here was an omen of success. But I was uneasy. Beetroots hadn't interested me before. There had always seemed something *base* about them. But now, peeled as they were in my dream, they held a certain forbidden attraction. I was unsettled upon waking, but soon forgot such thoughts on resuming my grand project.

The day finally came when I was ready to unveil my new creation - or, to be more accurate, pull out the little hairy stalk thing on the top. Solana stood before me in all her naked redness. I named her from the *Solanaceae*, the family of plants to which tomatoes belong; she being the undoubted queen of the whole tomato tribe. And, oh what a palace I had prepared for her - for *us*. The parents had been a bit surprised when I said I wanted *another* garden shed for my birthday, but what a feathered love-nest it became. What's that famous line from *Antony and Cleopatra*? Oh, who cares - what did Shakespeare know about tomatoes anyway? We had a period of perfect bliss lasting much of that summer, but as the leaves began to fall, our zest began to pall. Well, mine did anyway. The trouble is, I'm such a fickle chap. No sooner do I get the thing I want than I want something new. I may not be too hot on the Bard of Avon, but one quote I do remember was from Jerry Syboe's TV confrontation show. There was a broadcast round this time headlined *I Was Such A Tosser, I Turned My Wife Into A Salad*. I guess that just about sums me up.

It all goes back to that beetroot dream. Solana and me were great together, don't get me wrong. The family said they never saw me since I got that new shed. If they'd known, they'd have got it for me sooner. The sex we had in there was out of this world (don't expect me to spell it out). We were insatiable. Yet, even the insatiable can be sated in time. I began to yearn for something else. To crave the rawness of the new. The beetroots in my dream had been peeled, and peeled was the way I wanted Solana. I wanted to feel the juice beneath her skin against the hot throbbing pulse of my... veins.

Well, when you make your own girlfriends, you can do whatever you like with them. Solana peeled was the most sensuous entity in the whole of God's creation. If Adam and Eve had peeled their apple instead of eating it, original sin might not have happened. Or if it did, it would have been a hell of a lot more worth it. But of course, it did bring death into the world, and Solana's shelf-life was much reduced. The DNA from Sally's puke had given Solana a human femininity beyond any tomato-based woman I had known. But it couldn't make her immortal. She was still ninety percent tomato, after all - or where would be the attraction? Once the air got at her tender flesh, she began to decay before my eyes. I was such a tosser, I chucked my girlfriend on the compost heap.

I was bereft. It had been love, after all. The love that dare not speak its name on *Gardeners' Question Time*. I had many a sleepless night, though I caught up during the day in the shed. I didn't want to court enquiries by changing my routine. Needless to say, my dreams were filled with guilty scenes of betrayed *Lycopersicons*. Oh, how I wished I could somehow change the destiny of our ill-fated star! But what was the use? I could create an endless stream of new Solana clones, but if I left the skin on, none could match the peerless state of she who came before. Yet, if I went all the way and stripped them off, I would only be re-enacting the former tragedy.

Then I had that dream of the evil woman trying to nest on my bald spot. She was knitting her hair into mine, like an invisible weave. Samson and Delilah never even entered my mind. But when I awoke, I knew what I had to do. I was going to have to resort to witchcraft. Tomatoes, you will know, are closely related to the nightshade group of plants, and one such plant is the 'Enchanter's Nightshade', *Circaea lutetiana*, from which essence I transformed my vulnerable Solana into the ruthless Lutetia. She was perfect when peeled. The poisonous qualities of the nightshade killed all putrefying germs stone dead. She kept her looks to such an extent that had I risked stealing any of my sister's clothes, I could have taken her out for walks at night. Difficult explaining the juice stains, though.

As it was, when my parents and the Sis went off on holiday, I had the place to myself, and Lutetia somehow... *insisted* is the only word I can use, though I still don't know how she exercised her influence. Lutetia somehow insisted that I bring her indoors and treat her like a real woman. I can't deny I was thrilled. She was certainly less predictable than dear Solana, what with the slightly narcotic effect of her kiss. I can't pretend to remember everything that happened next, but I know we had a ball like the Swinging Sixties never stopped. In fact, it's only because I can't remember that I know I was there at all.

I remember offering to make dinner, which was odd because my other girlfriends took nutrition by osmosis. Then it all went hazy and I found myself in that farm in my beetroot dream. Only now it's me who's the animal mandrake. Kind of pig-like, in a postmodern dangling anther way. In fact, I was particularly well-endowed in the red-hot chilli pod department - which was so inflamed, I had to keep bashing it against my trough for some relief. Talk about a wet dream! This was the full Tabasco tango.

When I awoke, the gal was gone and I had mushed my walloper. It was all up with me. That is, *it* may never be up again, but *I* was all up in the air. As the opiate clouds wore off, the agony of my situation took hold. I found myself suspended from the ceiling in a tangle of ropes and guide wires. *Knotted* would be the appropriate term. Not to mention *highly strung*. It was going to be a long fortnight, hung like this with my plums in the 'Damson's Distress'. One false move spelled seedlessness. Undoing the knots just wasn't on.

God knows what the neighbours thought when they came and cut me down. I may have to emigrate when I'm discharged. Meanwhile, here I lie, legs in a sling, writing down my notes for posterity. If I've learned anything at all from this affair, it is never offer a tomato-based woman a tomato soup starter. Especially a vindictive one like

Lutetia. I still don't know what's become of her. Maybe she made for South America, botanical home of the tomato clan. She was just the type to try her passage at the docks. (I hope those sailors kept their hammocks rolled, if they didn't want to end up trussed.)

For the record, I'm sticking to the story that a damson dip got out of hand. That should spare the family's feelings, and who knows? Maybe I can sue Spelbin Pheff on the safety of his contraption. Set myself up as a specialist abroad. After all, there's not much I don't know about tomatoes – and I hear Amsterdam's more laid-back than here. No need to hide my talents under a bushel, or my produce in a garden shed. I could open a new window on the Continental shop front. Make a bright splash in the shady streets of commerce. One way or another, I could really light up the red fruit district.

*First published in
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November 2005.*



Tomato Plums (David Leverton)

RACISM

by Arthur C. Ford, Sr.

Whether white as light
Black, or still another,
Only painters have the right
To be, biased toward color.

Haiku

by DS Davidson

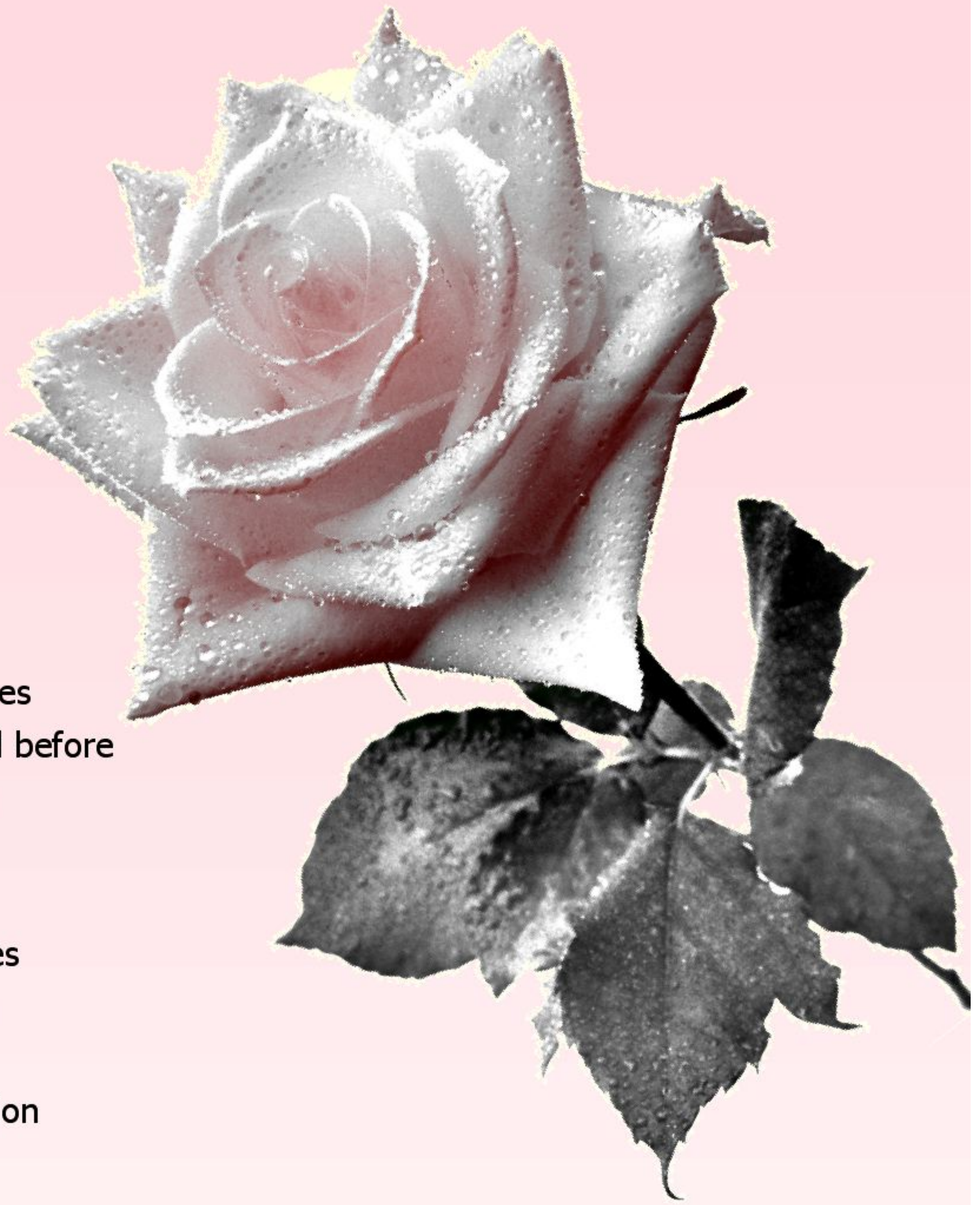
In Life's tapestry
Love was never on the cards
Hallmark or Tarot



Love's Strange Embrace

by Aeronwy Dafies

Surprised and delighted
By the unexpected
Love's strange embrace
Enfolds my soul
In warming comfort
Taking me to new pastures
I have never experienced before
Sharing with me delights
Of the rarest novelty
Until like a cut rose
The beauty fades and dies
Leaving me with nothing
But ashes, a bitter taste
And memories of perfection



Tell Me You Love Me

by DJ Tyrer

There are three words I long to hear
Three words that I wish you would whisper
Three words I know I will never hear
Three words neither proclaimed loudly nor vouchsafed in a whisper
Three words that are forever silent:
I love you.

Pale Rose (David Levertton)



TIGERSHARK



Sunburst (David Leverton)

LONG RANGE LOVE

by Aeronwy Dafies

In my life you are a constant presence
Via letter, email and instant message
Despite our physical separation by distance
That threatens to destroy our love
Stillbirthed before it can be consummated
Unless absence can indeed fondness nurture
And physical proximity be proved overrated!

SKETCH

by Eric Mwathi

I do not own,
One thing below the sky,
Though I have grown,
Quite old; about to die.
I have not met,
The perfect woman yet,
To make me tea,
After she's married me;

And if I did,
Then I would not know where,
We'd have a kid,
I'd have the cash to bear.
Besides, I wish,
No more to flirty-fish,
But live in peace.
My siblings want no niece.

Assistant editor's note

The juxtaposition of the poems on these two pages is my own and not the poets', chosen merely to allow a different interpretation of these verses by reading them as a 'sequence'.

MISTAKEN

by Aeronwy Dafies

I really thought you were the One
The One whom Destiny had marked for me
The One with whom I'd spend my life
Only to discover that you weren't
Only to discover I'd been mistaken
That love wasn't on the cards
Or written in the stars
But was a misleading mirage
That faded with the dawn of realisation

UNREMITTED

by Eric Mwathi

I knew that I won't hear from her,
Once she ignored my mail,
That I sent half a dozen times.
Until my thumbs grew pale,

But that simply had no effect.
She still refused to write.
I cared, so much, for this strange girl.
She could not stand my sight.

I did not have the things she'd want,
Whatever they might be.
She never told me what she wished.
It's clear it was not me.

UNSUITABLE

by Aeronwy Dafies

Parental dislike
A spring-winter love affair
Is unsuitable



Sunset (David Leverton)



CRAZY COLORED CRIMSON COITUS CREATURE

by Frederick J. Mayer

In ruby dream,
the flame encircles
creamy red eyes
under fired mists
reveal tinted with vermilion
teardrop alcohol
feminine water
sodomites' elixir...

From within the blood
hear her calling,
Pain and Heat
a wound in Time,
watch for that transformation
erotic mutation
caught up in flaming flood
decaying memories.

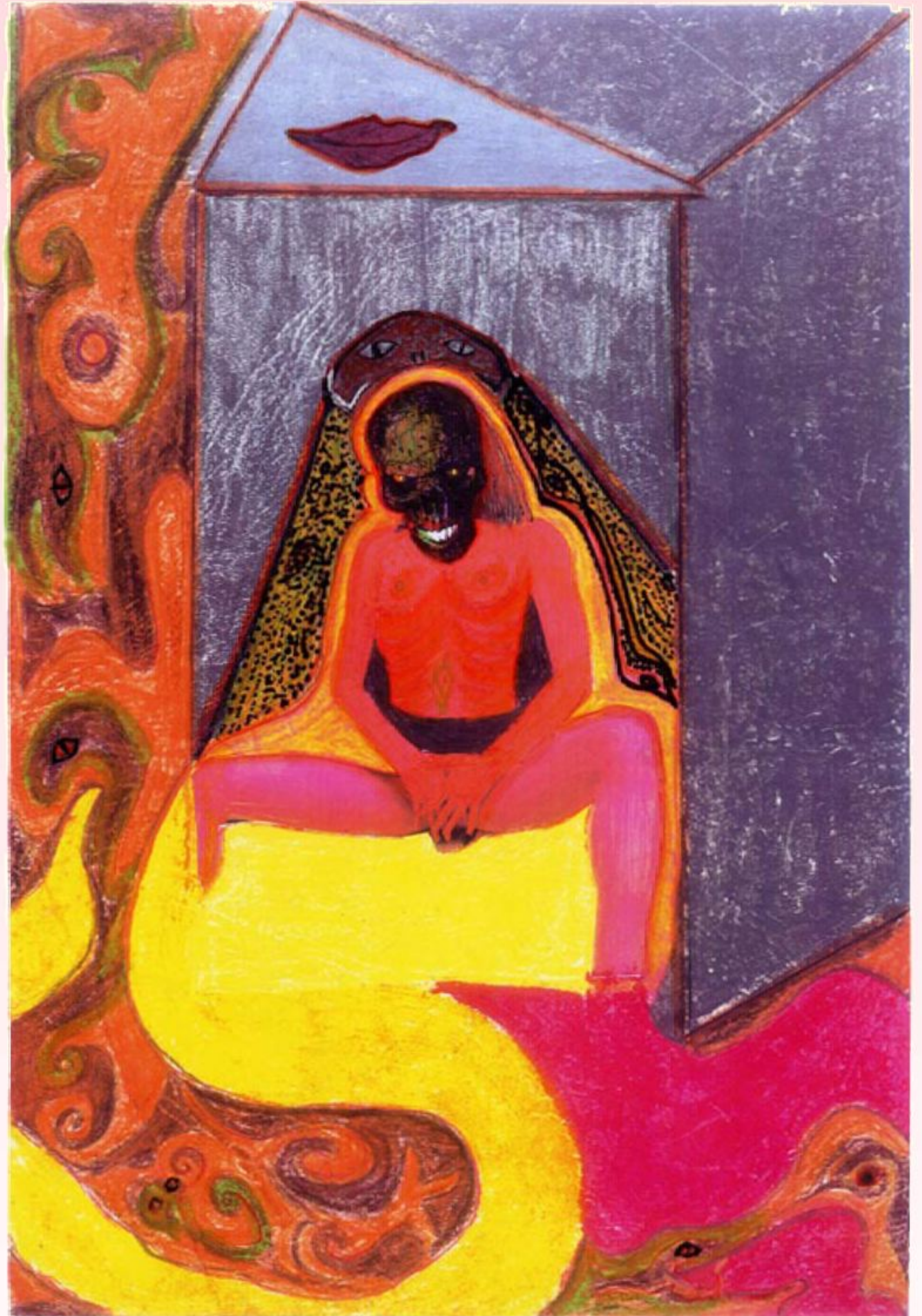
Chinese dragon with scarlet crown
reads from Book of Love,
Leopard-woman changes for dinner;
Burgundy drips like blood
as the beast spreads its thighs.
Dreams turn real in passions
that pulsate through soul,
Moonstone shone in your catatonic eyes.

This "Love" turns darkest day
into the bright Violet Night,
Unlike true love's masquerade
Under the Midnight Marquee
red she-cat screams

"You won't know nightmares
till you're deep inside me
where angels wouldn't dare!"

Rose raven caws and claws
the rainbow now from your eyes,
Feline so in reds smiles
as she doesn't chase birds of sighs...
Tainted ecstasy purred under crimson moon.

Purple snapdragon grows, blooms, dies
Bestial pleasure joins purest of kisses
Did She rent your illusion of Love?



Crazy Coitus Woman (Frederick J. Mayer)

Kiss Haiku

by DJ Tyrer

A forbidden kiss
Love is just not meant to be
Winter of the soul



THE STRANGE LAUDANUM DREAM OF BRANWELL BRONTË

by Andrew Darlington

It was the snowstorm – the highly localised snowstorm that first intimated to him that all was not well. It was a warm day, albeit a little oppressively humid. Penistone hill casts tall shadows across gorse and wilting yellowing grass. There should not have been snow. But the poet was too lost in contemplation to take much notice. Neither did it resemble the snows of winter ‘fast whitening o’er the flinty ground’, when it blizzards down from lowering skies to blanket the village and isolate it, sometimes for weeks on end, from Keighley or Oxenhope, and the towns beyond. Rather, it was a dry snow that falls on the folds of his jacket for a moment only, before fading away to nothing. And, having fallen, it leaves no trace upon the footpath or the grass verges where groundsel, speedwell and chickweed ignore its intervention.

It was the briefest swirl of snow. Stepping through into the brightness beyond he brushes his coat irritably, although there’s nothing to brush away. He knows this path. He knows this path too well, it is a route he takes as part of his constitutional whenever the pressures of time allow. And there have not been too many prior engagements recently. Far too few of them for his ease of mind. A new portrait commission would be welcome. Dependent upon the subject being sufficiently interesting to justify the investment of his creative effort. The poet stands rather below middle height. His auburn hair brushed back from his forehead, as if in boastful exaggeration of the mental powers contained within. His spectacles perched upon the bridge of a nose a little too prominent for his liking. It wrinkles with evident distaste. His previous familiarity with the footpath does not allow for its sudden blockage by the metal sphere.

As if for the first time, with his forward direction denied, he paused and looked around him. The strangeness of the snow at last registering. And now, this. There is no logical reason why there should be a metal sphere at this precise location. No logical explanation at all for such an annoyance. Should he progress around it to the left, up the slight incline with the possibility of losing his footing and suffering a grazed shin or worse, or to the right where a patch of particularly virulent nettles discourages such an option. For a moment he merely stands without any conscious thought process at all. Then compromises by advancing one step only, before halting, to reconsider again. The sphere, taller than he is, is obviously artificial, girded by a series of studs that probably serve to bolt segments together, for there are also hairline patterns indicating it to be made up of hexagonal sections. But as for who is responsible for its construction, what their purpose might be, and most specifically why they have chosen to deposit it here to inconvenience the poet are questions for which he’s unable to furnish a satisfactory response.

To retreat back the way he’d come is something not worthy of consideration. There are projects, ambitions and dreams aplenty which, having been commenced upon,

he'd abandoned, leaving them unrealised. To add yet another failure to his accomplishments, even in so trivial a matter, is something he refuses to contemplate. Nevertheless, retracing his steps would hasten his return to the inviting hospitality of the 'Black Bull', convivial company and another glass of gin...?

It is at this point of deliberation that he becomes aware that he's no longer alone. A loose swirl of snow drifts past his shoulder. He hears the rapid beat of gauzy wings. Feels its soft flutter against his cheek. Half-turning, he does not believe the evidence of his senses. He closes his eyes determinedly. But when he re-opens them, the giant bee is still there. Even in his wildest laudanum dreams he could never have conjectured such a being.

Standing on the footpath beneath Penistone hill he finds himself positioned midway between the metal sphere, and a man-tall bee. Well, not quite man-tall, for it is hovering at a point knee-high above the dried-mud path, but even that puts it level with the poet. Its giant wings flit almost faster than his eyes can trace, suspending the bizarre creature so close that – should he reach out, he could touch it. Although he doubted that such contact was possible. You cannot touch a nightmare. Such a phantasm is by nature untouchable. Reach out, it will surely dissolve as mist touched by sunlight. Yet it stubbornly continues to exist.

A startling miscellany of disturbing sound erupts, seemingly emanating from the creature's mid-point. From its lower thorax. He draws back, fearing a dreadful sting that will surely kill or paralyse him. Instead, it emits a burbling and a buzzing, sometimes resembling that of an electromagnetic telegraph device, oscillating in volume. Then words. 'Heus.' 'Ba'ax ka wa'alik.' 'Salaam.' 'Hola'. 'Guuten takh.' And finally, 'My greetings, sir.'

'So you are a talking manifestation?'

'Imperfectly I'm afraid. Forgive my pitiful inadequacy in this respect, Mr Brontë.'

Which is the stranger? A giant bee? A giant talking bee? Or a giant talking bee that knows your name? 'You know my name?'

'Please forgive my tactlessness in startling you. That was not our intention. Not our intention at all. Quite the reverse. In truth, I fear I was distracted. Distracted too long by the gorse-nectar. But as our subterfuge has obviously failed, I can at least hope to extend reassurance.'

'Only the other night as I lay abed I was startled awake by the skeletal apparition of death itself, which reached out its bony hand to claim me. I have a sketch of it, 'Summoned By Death', should you care to see it? So I am not unfamiliar with horrors. Anyway, as I understand it, eminent scientists who have investigated the subject have declared it impossible for insects to exist beyond a certain limited size. Hence you cannot exist. Therefore I refuse to converse with that which is contrary to nature.'

'Oddly enough, our scientists long insisted that hymenoptera-sized anthropoids were equally impossible. Clearly both learned parties were mistaken. Perhaps you would care to step inside our machine?'

He focused his gaze through his thick spectacles, into the mosaic compound eyes, seeking to find some evidence of expression. But could find none beyond facets glittering as wondrous gems. True, the antenna twitch with what seems to be a purposeful manner, although what that purpose could be he was unable to guess. But more than that, this monstrous mutation knows his name! That prompts fascination beyond unease.

‘May I enquire of you sir, if – indeed you can be addressed as such, what aspect of my work has attracted the admiration of the bee-people? Although I try to make myself a name in the world of posterity, as yet I fear I have done little either great and good.’

‘Answers there will be...’ The coiled proboscis twitched. A panel set into the metal sphere shifts in response. For the first time the poet experienced a shock of unease. Step into my lair...? A portal had opened in the sphere, unleashing the overwhelming fragrance of wax. He was tempted to peer within. Into an illogical honeycomb, polyhedral in its geometrical regularity. A yellow gloom in which there are other bees, two at least, perhaps more. Operating strange devices with their mandibles and bristly forelegs. Two steps takes the poet over the threshold, into what the creature has termed the machine. Maybe a mistranslation? After all, isn’t the being speaking through some kind of voice-box animated by an electrical power-source? A degree of error could be expected.

The floor is spongy, and sticky. Resembling molasses. It adheres to the soles of his boots, while its viscosity oozes up over the welds and stitching. The bee-thing enters behind him. The portal closes. It’s already too late to escape. He’s trapped within a druggist’s mad dream. There should have been fear. There should have been terror. But had he not seen greater horrors in the depths of drugged intoxication? He was still unsure if this encounter is anything more than some hallucination prompted by an opium-residue in his bloodstream.

The poet had sought, and entertained commissions as a portraitist. These creatures have rows of animated pictures, pictures that move in jerky blurs of colour, then flicker and darken. They pore over the shifting images as though they are invested with some special significance. He watches with incomprehension. ‘Where are you from? Some hidden valley in Brazil? A place in the clouds? Or an imaginary realm such as the Gondal and Angria tales we conjured as children?’

‘You will not understand. Beg my presumption. But if you imagine an onion. The layers of an onion that you shim away to reveal the layers beneath. Now think of each onion-layer as a world, one within the other, each a slight variant different from the others. We merely slip from one layer to another.’

The portal winks open. Nothing has changed. As if he ever expected it would. The bee leads the way back out. He follows, through a brief swirl of snow. The sticky substance makes his first few paces adhere to the packed-mud of the path, but soon, as he walks, the effect wears off. The creature is leading him back towards the village. Yet, if that should have been reassuring, unease rises like an unpleasant bile in his gut. It’s one thing to hallucinate demons, quite another to share them with his neighbours.

The main street slopes down past the Post Office, the apothecary, the Parsonage, and the 'Black Bull'. It is familiar, how could it be otherwise? Except that within the usual drift of villagers, those he recognises, there are giant bees moving freely, murmuring, rustling, buzzing or chittering. Some of them wear colours. Others are harnessed with devices. Yet in every other respect, they are regular bees, two body-segments, upper and lower, in soft gold stripes. Their fuzzy cheeks beneath their bulbous cranium tufted with bristles, their wings vibrating tremulously. Only of giant size. How can such monstrosities even take flight? But they fly.

The poet turns to his winged guide questioningly. It explains 'here, we are closer to a dimensional overlap, where bees and humans share the world amicably. Further this way are bee-continuums. Further that way, human ones. This is where they merge one into the other. But we bring you here for a specific purpose. A little further, if you please.'

The parsonage. His home. But not quite the same. There's a statue constructed of polished Pennine stone. A figure in heroic stature, swirling cloak trapped in dramatic flourish. He does not recognise it. But bends to read the inscription. It says 'Patrick Branwell Brontë: 26 June 1817 – 24 September 1848'. Something lurches deep within his gut. No, this cannot be. This is surely his night-vision of being 'Summoned by Death'? The skeletal figure of nightmare transfigured into this eloquent bee? He stumbles backwards sobbing aloud.

'My apologies, Sir. We should have protected you from this knowing. But I implore you to read the full inscription.'

He reads on. '...author of 'Jane Eyre' (1847), 'Wuthering Heights' (1847), 'The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall' (1848) and other works of great literature'.

'I do not understand.' His voice little more than a whimper. A formation of giant bees angles above him, the low-pitched hum of their wings drowning his stammered words. They are heading towards a row of towers rising beyond the Parsonage cemetery. Hexagonal structures resembling the fever-dreams of derangement. There are bulbous airships navigating the fleecy clouds still higher.

'Sir, your novels were originally published under the pseudonym Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Following your demise, it was your surviving sister Charlotte who revealed the true authorship of the books, and so created the literary cult surrounding your works. This is surely something that you would wish to know? Is this not the case?'

'Yes... no, I don't know, I don't understand.'

Further discussion was instantly curtailed by a loud popping squawk from the voice-synthesiser. 'Ah! Slithy Toves. Hasten if you will, sir...' after which his bee-companion moved with agitated speed back up the cobbled main street. The poet does his best to keep up, repacing the way they'd come. His stolen glance back rewarded only by a confusion of images. A group of man-tall lizards...? A squadron of armed

reptiles...? A military formation of saurian-beings brandishing projectile-weapons striding or waddling up from the lower extremity of the village towards the statue.

Safely back within the sealed sphere he stares curiously at his companions. 'When we converse, who is it I am speaking to?'

A moment's pause, as though considering the question. 'We do not have the same sense of individuality as you. So no, when we converse, you are not exactly speaking to the bee you see before you. Although our collective sense means that yes, at the same time, you are. The drone has no individual consciousness, other than as part of the colony, which is a collective hive-intelligence. So these words originate from within this sphere. But one trait we do share with you is curiosity. That is the motivation for the project on which we have embarked. We seek to resolve the legacy of various questions left by history. The fate of the Roman Ninth Legion after they marched north from Eboracum into Pictish Caledonia. The nature of the Nazarene's death. And, if you will excuse our discourtesy, the contested authorship of the novels the statue attributes to you. Unfortunately this entails a degree of intervention in other dimensions that the Slithy Toves forbid. In fairness, they are simply enforcing an inter-dimensional prohibition that we are... contravening. A ban that has some legitimacy in the face of trans-continuum Time Wars that are devastating worlds further down the layers. But we are a curious species. So we seek out inconvenient truths.'

Familiarity has rendered the sickly-sweetness of the sphere's waxy aroma less offensive. While his companion's bumbling whirring strangeness in its golden ambience is no longer quite so disturbing. The bee's purring drone is even curiously hypnotic. 'My demise. I witnessed my own death. I am but thirty years old. And I know the very day when approaching death will quench life's feeble ember.'

'Nothing is certain. In the infinite cascade of levels the possible variations are endless. That is but one outcome. There may be others more favourable, or yet more disagreeable. There are worlds in which you are a mere footnote in the illustrious story of your sisters, Charlotte, Anne and Emily. In which you are considered little more than a feckless dilettante. Please, we make no judgement, we seek only truths.'

The portal opens into chill darkness. They step outside into a world without motion, a land of dark abnormality silvered by a bright moon. But a moon from which a bite has been taken from its upper left portion, the familiar lunar face breaking into a spray of smaller moons. In its light he can barely discern a ruin-bedecked horizon of broken architecture. The path on which they stand is fractured with a crackling crispness of ice. The poet's breath leaves his open mouth in visible exhalations.

'In our urgency to depart it seems we have come further than we intended. The moon has suffered asteroidal impact, inducing climate change. We should not tarry here.'

There can hardly be a weirder fate to befall a hapless poet. To be brought so thoroughly into confrontation with blind uncaring nature. Yet it is his introspection which predominates. 'It is true that my sisters walk round and around the kitchen

table, reading excerpts from their latest tales out loud to each other, so they can suggest changes and additions, so they can debate plot amendments and perfect the conversations between their characters. I have watched with amusement. When younger I would also participate. And yet...'

The phrase remained unspoken as a sudden squall of snow announces the materialisation of a second sphere a little way away. With every evidence of alarm the bee retreats back into the machine, the poet hastily following.

'The Slithy Toves pursue us.' Another pause between worlds. Again they emerge into fragrant summertime, with drifts of pollen tinting the richness of the azure sky. But looking down the Dale where the village should be, there are towering buildings of buff millstone. A savage Byzantium. And beneath them, teams of enslaved humans hauling massive stones for the construction of new edifices, their labours supervised by hovering bees armed with electrical whips.

'Again, my apologies. You should not have seen this. We overshoot yet again, further into bee continuums where, as you see, the relationship between worldlings is less equal. Yet I would suggest that in your own familiar time, humans enslave and steal from bees in just such a ruthless fashion.' Within moments of orientating to its oddness the sudden reappearance of the second sphere sets off another leap.

'So we are doomed to roam without control o'er present hours and through futures wide?' says the poet, quoting one of his own works. The portal opens into sweltering tropical heat. They step out into a rainforest raucous with the roaring of unseen monsters. Through its dense vegetal entanglement the poet can barely discern the contours of hill, pathway and vale. The undergrowth has a thick-piled springy texture, and it trembles beneath him, as if from the stomping of monstrous feet, in an unsettling manner.

He is about to turn and speak to his host when there's a gust of snow. And interposed between himself and the sphere is a Slithy Tove. For the first time he has the opportunity of observing its foul physiognomy. The unblinking lidless yellow slit-eyes. The green-scaled snout, parting to reveal rows of slavering fangs. A crocodile, or lizard. One that wears a uniform of hinged armour, and carries a musket of hideous design. All this glimpsed in less than a moment, for blind panic speeds his feet, and he crashes away through the undergrowth with nothing more than flight in his mind.

The pursuing sphere has outmanoeuvred them. It had arrived here first. They were prepared, and awaiting the bees' arrival. The breathless poet scrambles and slithers up what should have been Penistone hill, suffering a grazed shin and worse. The Slithy Tove in close pursuit. Reaching the crest of the hill he careens down the slope at the far side, each panicky step taking him further from the sanctuary of the bee's sphere. Here it should be possible to circle around the base of the incline, and reconnect with where the footpath should be. And so return to the machine. But this is so confusingly strange he can no longer be certain in which direction his frantic steps are taking him.

The stench of decay is intoxicating. The sun glimpsed above the tropical treetops is more vast than it has any right to be. Dull red, and extending halfway across the sky. Even the air he's inhaling has a toxicity as strong as gin. Logic fails him. Is he lost in a vision of primeval Earth, or in its far future senility? His legs are weakening. Bursting through a barrier of tall reeds he's shocked to immobility. His forward escape barred by a herd of monstrous reptiles cropping the treetops. The nearest of them turning giant heads slowly in his direction. Involuntarily he steps backwards, and turns. The Slithy Tove raises its bizarre musket. Aims it at his head. And pulls the trigger.

Death. Or something very like death.

The sign above his head, moving imperceptibly in the slightest of breezes, is the familiar 'Black Bull'. He sits beside the wooden bench, a pint of ale in his hand. For a long moment he sits perfectly still, allowing the pounding of his heart to steady, the rasping of his breath to return to something like normal. From where he sits he can see down the slope of the main street. The people are people, nothing more. So it has all been delirium tremens, nothing more? His dream of being summoned by skeletal death, only infinitely stranger. Or perhaps not. The reptile pursuer was not killing him, but returning him, resetting the infinite layers of worlds back to their correct configuration? If there is poetry here it is of a kind far more exotic than Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Dare he write it? Are there rhymes sufficient to tell such a dream?

He lifts his glass. Glancing down he sees a drowning bee scudding in the dark alcoholic tide. He extends his finger into the beer, feels the bee's soft touch as it crawls onto his skin. He lifts it clear of its impending doom. Holds his finger up close to the end of his prominent nose, squinting at the bee through his thick spectacles.

Its gauzy wings dry. It prepares to take flight. The poet whispers to it. 'You. Yes, you. I know your secret...!'



Bramwell's Bee (David Leverton)

LOVE IN CARCOSA

by DJ Tyrer

Love in Carcosa

Will never die

Love in Carcosa

Brings a tear to the eye

Love in Carcosa

Ends with a bitter cry

ABOVE AND BELOW (LOVE OF WOMAN)

by Arthur C. Ford, Sr.

Six feet above you

spiritually lift me!

Release me down upon you,

Let me penetrate you

All the way through you

Absorbing all of you

Then,

I will eternally pine for you

Six feet below you!



the flower waltz

by Ross Balcom

drowned in the river
at the hands of a fiend

the flowers dance
yes they dance
on the Danube's glad banks

you didn't have time
even to scream

the flowers dance
yes they dance
on the Danube's glad banks

your lovely young body
is floating downstream

the flowers dance
yes they dance
on the Danube's glad banks

our lives and our deaths
are only a dream

and we dance
yes we dance
on the Danube's glad banks

yes we dance
with the flowers
on the Danube's glad banks

I AM THE DEATH OF LOVE

by Neil K. Henderson

Which type of black hole do you prefer?
The kind that sucks in memories,
but leaves no trace of warmth?
The sort that seeks things only for itself?
The empty kind – the void that cannot heal?
I am all of these.
My gravity lets no light escape.
My centre is a wall of jet
around a soundless well.
I am the death of love:
don't come too close.

Previously published in Voice & Verse no. 12, Summer 2001 and Candelabrum XII/2, October 2005.

Dark Butterfly

by Frederick J. Mayer

Love is passing,
Is it going your way?

Love is passing,
See the Dark Butterfly flying by?

Love is passing
away.



DEATH & SURF & SAUSAGE ROLLS

by Neil K. Henderson

*And therefore never send to know
for whom the sausage rolls;
it rolls for thee.*

*

The salt in the sea is a siren,
Remorselessly drawing your soul,
But you're strung like a kipper in Fish Street
On a whisper of hot sausage roll.

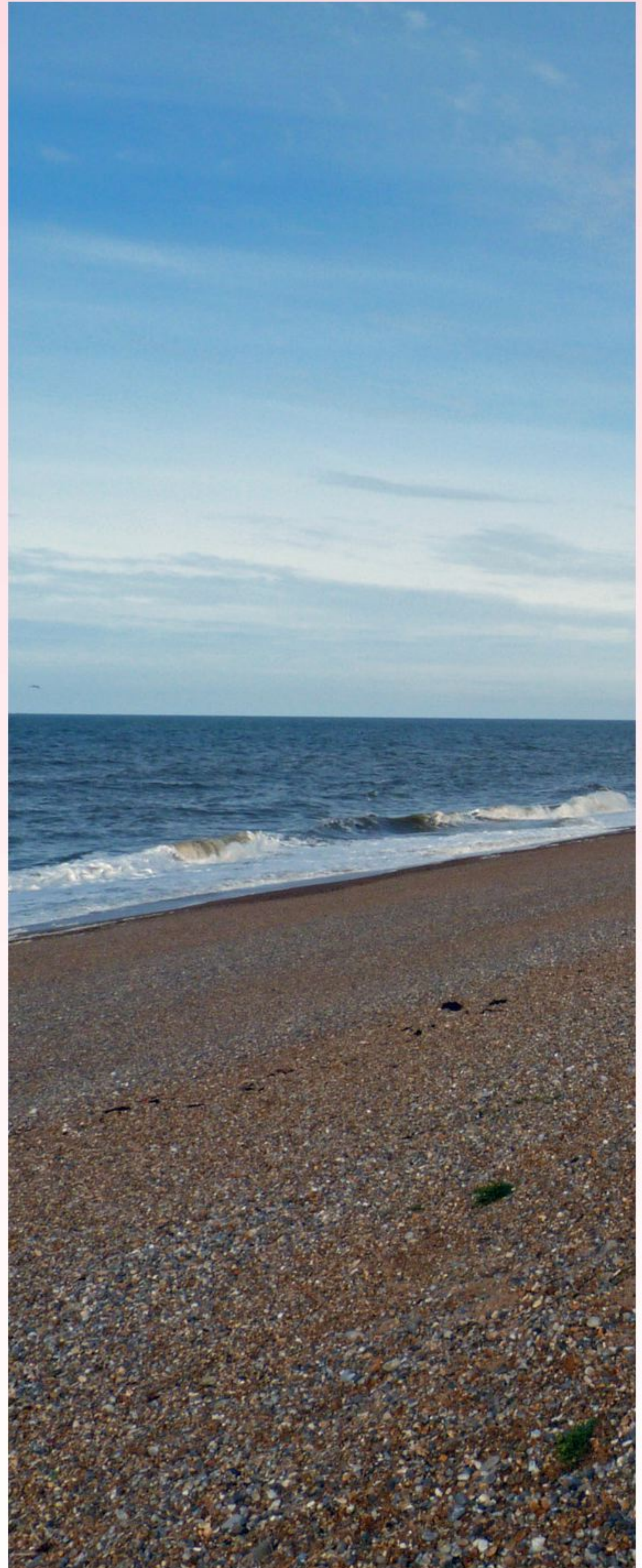
*The sea is a bastard,
It weighs fifty tons.
It weighs on your breastplate,
It presses your lungs.*

And you take in a lungful of childhood,
And remember the safety of home.
The roll of the breakers yet beckons,
Though you cling to your handful of bones.

*The sea is a bastard,
It rolls on for years.
It drowns you by inches
In bitten-back tears.*

And you have to set sail on your journey,
And your known destination is death.
But the sapid aroma still lingers,
To be sucked from you slowly, like breath.

*The sea is a born again bastard,
It stretches for mile upon mile -
Till earthly connections are sundered
In a surge of unsavoury bile.*



Seascape 2 (David Leverton)



KUMIHO JUSTICE FOR LOVE

or 'Sfatliclp's Rules'

by Frederick J. Mayer

*"Because science has lit a few artificial lights
Amid the darkness of things,
Modern man tends to forget
That the darkness still exists."*

— Clark Ashton Smith

"She moves like a dragon reeling to strike," gasped an awed admirer.

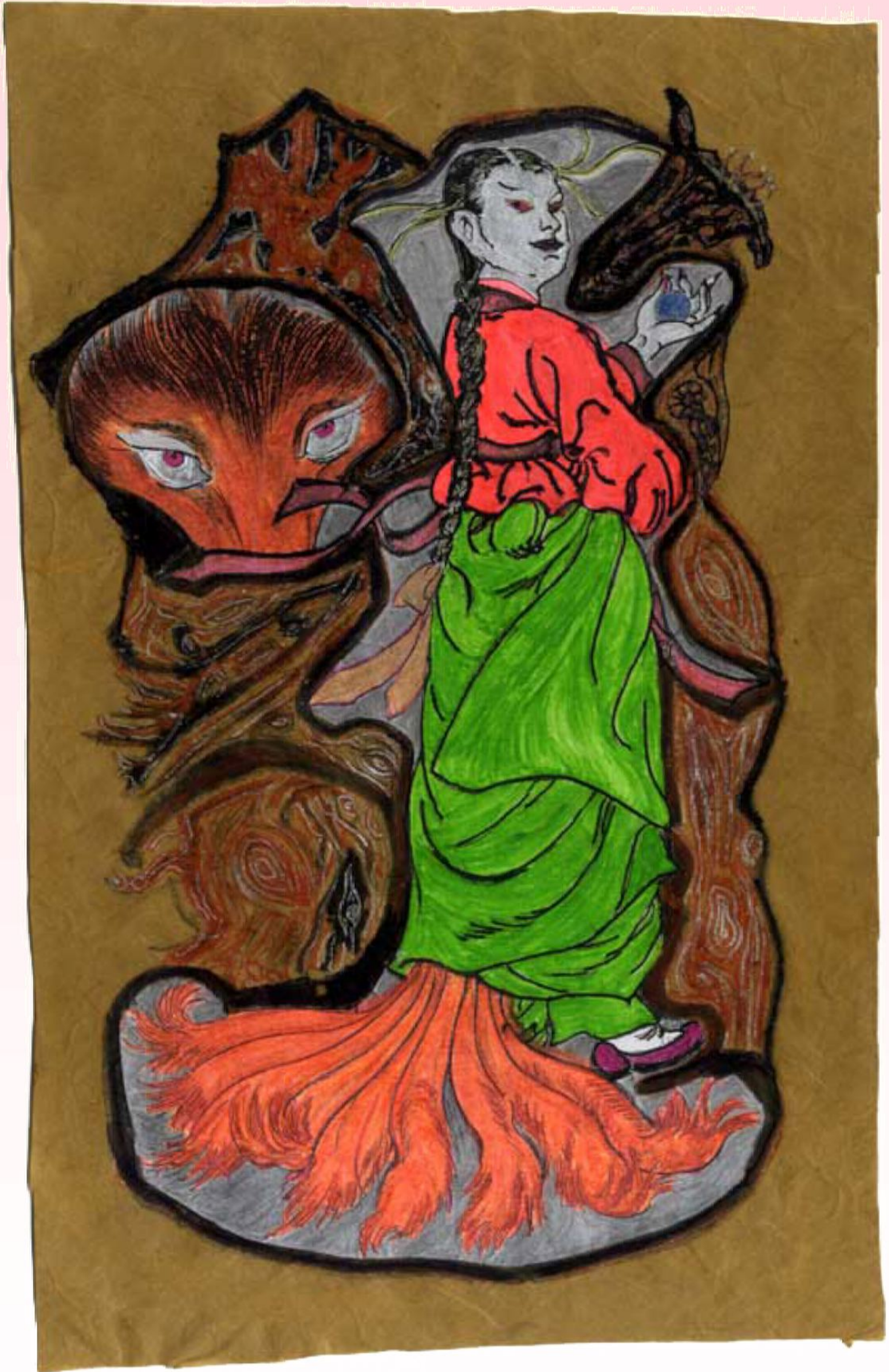
Seoul-si's jaundiced Itaewon-dong ('district') was fulsome in its self-coruscation and it was amorously embracing Libby Liberation Lim, a supple yet strong, sensually fluid 'exotic' dancer renown, for she was executing a sublime performance, in its sublimation and suavity, at the notoriously grand 'juicy bar', the Red Fox.

Surrounding the pulchritude entertainment edifice, looming all around and above was the cold blackness of the gigantic pother that is a Seoul city nightscape. This shroud of pollution encompassing Itaewon was bedaub with seething shearing chromatic neon sheen, a steady and unwavering artificial luminosity.

The Itaewon district, a disreputable mecca for foreigners of all persuasions in South Korea (interestingly enough, also, the residence of Korea's only officially sanctified mosque, Moslem temple) seeking, in the daylight hours, touristy boons and paraphernalia, traditional Korean meals crafted with a Western palate in mind, not to mention, some more esoteric dishes. Past sundown, Itaewon becomes a glimmering gathering waterhole for those in search of an exit, escape or two from their quite mundane Korean existence (more often than not, Koreans themselves are found amid its swarming streets and dark alleyways). Leisure libations and liberations of every conceivable mode and form can be 'experienced' inside this nightlife realm as for Romance affairs.

Just a jaunty stroll away from the Red Fox, up the somewhat steep euphemistically called 'Hooker Hill', there exists, near its crest, nestled tightly among the numerous low scale juicy bars, the den of lubricities, Ole Stompers. Reaching this home of alcoholic libations can be fraught with queer titillating encounters, mainly after dusk, for one must in their ascent of that nefarious hill, pass the myriad of 'bars' and their ever present 'juicy girls' beckoning, all alluring, as trap-door spider's lairs...entering such abodes will create speculative, perhaps, lovely results.

"She's such a Femme Fatale of the mind," murmured the engaged voyeurs of the elegant enigma Libby.



Upon an intimate inspection, there can be discovered a diminutive icon or statue that resides over the entranceways of the Hooker Hill's salons. These insidiously intrinsic pieces tend to be representatives of some long ago Korean sex god, such as the Harubang of Jejudo ('Jeju Island').

However, it must be pointed out, to the discerning eye, some of these sweetly dingy and jaded establishments contain over their doors a figure that possesses an uncanny seductive resemblance to Shub-Niggurath (a fabled fertility goddess, a sophisticated Astarte, who sometimes swallows worshippers, then regurgitates them as satyr-like beings, beings believed to be the origins of the 'Men of Leng'. Introduced onto the Korean peninsula eons past during the great exodus migration of the Tcho Tcho people from Central Asia led by the legendary Shaman-Queen Zee Rei, as it is recorded in the fourth volume, chapter eight, of the seven cryptical *Books of Hsan*. The vast majority eventually relocated on Tamngak, present day Jeju Island of Korea).

These particular decadent juicy bars' figurines are described by Abdul Alhazred in his forbidden tome of knowledge and awareness, the *Al Azif*, "...consists of a small stone idol in the shape of a dancing woman, her breasts and vulva exposed..." These otherwise known as 'hostess bars', mini-temples of worship and sacrifice, however, bear no solid connection to the worshippers/owners aligned with that which holds sway within the Red Fox.

Outwardly, for the general public's consumption, the Red Fox's patron spirit is the famed Korean entity KuMiHo. The name literally translates as 'Nine Tail Fox' and it is recounted that for the ever Romantic KuMiHo (there can be more than one of them) to achieve its (typically portrayed as female, though can be of either gender) greatest desire, which is to become a human in reality (it can temporarily shape shift into the human form), 'she' must either marry one hundred people at different times without 'her' true self being discovered or consume one hundred living human Hearts. In actuality, the sacred deity of the Red Fox fane is Sfatlicllp, the Devourer, one of the Great Old Ones, daughter of Zvilpogghua, the Feaster from the Stars.

"O Eibon, how long wilt thou worship false gods?"

"Until someone showeth me a true one to worship."

'The Apophthegmata of Eibon'

THE BOOK OF EIBON

"We are powerless against

this terrible multitude

that will come against us."

THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES

Through the sweaty, teeming, milling crowd's various crude utterances at Ole Stompers, there came, "The word 'ghoul' itself comes from the ancient Arabic word ghul, which was derived from their word ghala, meaning 'to seize'. It is etymologically related to Gallu, a Mesopotamian demon." The loquacious voice belonged to miscreant Dr. Byron T. Marsh, a globally recognized linguistics expert.

"What of the verity of the alleged enchantment involved with the book?" responded the sotto voiced Lord Thomas Eng III of Great Britain.

"Words are all powerful beyond their own meanings, province and their literal form. They are in and of themselves, do more than define. They can alter and change reality, sometimes, simply by the quality of their tonal vibrations," waxed poetically Marsh, who, at the present time, acted as a senior professor of Linguistics at Duksung Women's University.

Lord Eng, world famous metaphysician and outspoken skeptic, was a wilful recipient of Dr. Marsh's sonorous commentary. The intellectually primed duo were casually ignoring others as they sat on their wooden bar stools inside Ole Stompers, where they were each enjoying their individual alcoholic drinks. Marsh diligently downed a bottle of his Korean favourite O.B. Lager while the perspicacious Eng gently sipped from his cut crystal glass the microbrewery concoction Halla Mountain Golden Ale.

They congenially discussed and pondered Lord Eng's exhumation, a quasi-preserved copy of Comte d'Erlette's baleful planturous *Cultes des Goules*. A book whose unsavoury reputation had spawn the dire belief that possessing the work would turn its holder into its text's subject matter, if said possessor, as they read, spoke aloud its substance.

"It truly stretches the imagination that any rational thinking man would honestly accept the notion that merely speaking the written word can cause any real physical transformations, a metabolism of the flesh," commented the pedantic Eng.

Marsh requested another beer and mentioned, "There is the recorded belief that there are occasions where the ghoul will take the form of the one it previously ate."

"Belief"? smirked Eng.

The British lord, older than his years, paused to partake of his specialty aphrodisiac snuff which had been developed through an intricate process devised by his ingenious friend Dr. Marsh. A process that included homegrown tobacco plants whose leaves were thoroughly mixed with certain and peculiar herbs indigenous to Bukhansan. The mixture is eaten by the cautiously carefully raised herd of Marsh's two stud gerbils Filthy and Stinky (rumoured to be in a same sex relationship). And, after passing throughout the animals' intestines' chemical make-up, the end product from these specialized gerbils is harvested and turned into a peppery desiccated powder.

The erudite, older Marsh quietly stated, "If you say something aloud, it's a release of

sorts and it becomes something living, in a manner of speaking, that is free to intercourse with anything it may encounter. Its properties are physical. There are the confirmed scientific research results, take for example, the 'Thigpen Treatise'."

Thomas just sneezed.

The venerable Ole Stompers' interior was dimly lit with aged alcohol fetidity and its ripe bathroom would put a North Carolina outhouse to shame. Still, despite all of these 'attributes', the place was a comforting and friendly sanctuary for expatriates, the nearest proximity to a 'neighbourhood bar'. Stompers was, also, celebrated as a focal point for many outstanding, outrageously creative 'musical' groups, local and from abroad, such as the Korean Go Go Star. In fact, the latter draw of this drinking reservoir was the real reason the learned twosome selected Ole Stompers to go to for their little get together in the first place.

Lim's imperious sublimations and salivary salacious moves caused many to scream forth, "Oh Hell's Heaven Devourer, I'm forever yours, take me!"

Ole Stompers' opening band on that certain evening was the foreign rock group Sfatlicllp and Thomas had long sought to hear a live version of the band's 'Black Goat of the Woods'. Seoul was the first stop on Sfatlicllp's all Asia tour. Byron, on the other hand, came to experience Steve Morrison's latest incarnation of his fab band, the Kimchi Cowboys, which was composed of various nationalities including Korean. Prof. Marsh had most certainly come because he had a profound lust (his latest) for the band's female vocalist Song Dae-Soon. The Cowboys were performing at that moment on Stompers' small, elevated slightly from the floor stage.

Composing himself, Lord Eng raised his long angular body straight and stiff, slowly releasing an indignant sigh, "Why is it that those bloody high and mighty disgustingly sneer, look down their oversized regal noses at this type of snuff?" Halting to dangle his kid skin pouch full of Byronic snuff in front of Dr. Marsh's distracted face, an even more dignified Eng continued his tirade, "Truly, it's not very different in compositional concept from the connoisseur's beverage Civet Cat Coffee. Granted, the animal used isn't really a feline, some sort of marsupial, I believe."

Here Eng III chose to swallow some more of his Golden Ale, "Anyway, this highly prized drink is produced by feeding prime coffee beans to these 'cats' and, after the beans pass through their internal organs, the transmuted beans are deposited out of the anal end of the animal. These results are turned into that coffee delight."

Turning from facing the stage to look at Eng, a slightly petulant and inebriated Marsh slyly replied, "I know all of that...that's why when others of that drinking set spy someone indulging themselves, the observers enviously say, 'They're drinking some good shit'."

Marsh's persiflage went on, "Ever wonder how someone came up with the thought of making a drink out of some animal's poop?"

“And I need all the love that I can get through,” soulfully, hypnotically Song sang the Kimchi Cowboys’ own take on the Sisters of Mercy hit ‘More’.

Morrison’s band was widely known for its group sense of fashion, but the ageless Song Dae-Soon (her first name coming from the name of the Korean moon goddess) had such a presence that her simple dark pink silk ensemble caressed her divine form in a way that enhanced her effulgent sable dark eyes. Song’s shades of darkness mane framed her angelic predacious face, with it all being punctuated by her wearing the Rose of Sharon (Korea’s national flower) over her shapely left ear. Spoken within the shady, murky corners of the Itaewon community, it is fearfully said that the awesome animal magnetism Song’s petite body manifests, exudes, is caused by the fact that she is, in truth, a KuMiHo.

The very blond, bleary blue eyed Thomas, now entertaining his sixth Halla Mountain brew, sarcastically slurred, “Pedagogue, paedophile, be ever so careful of what you crave Byron, she looks,” Eng burped, “so youthful that you very well may be charged with robbing the proverbial cradle.”

The muscular 5' 11" Marsh’s slate hued eyes just gleamed as he spoke, “Be careful, my English friend, about accusing someone of being a paedophile. Remember, the Greek root word in that label refers to animals.”

The fastidious Eng ejaculated, “You’re kidding!”

The Professor had a sardonic leer.

*It is dark only to those souls
who cannot perceive the Light
And those who can see the light
become part of the Dark.*

GUMI-GAN-OK CHAEK

The late night party crowd at the Red Fox had solicitously dispersed into the neon glowing Itaewon surroundings, fugitives from themselves. From the Red Fox’s lowest level floor, descending below its bottom opening, downward into the bowels of the hill upon which the top tier juicy bar sat on its westerly side, through arcane passageways, there were sharded minerals and broken stones suggestive of scoriac remains adumbrating the imminence of a vast cavern carved by virulent creatures. Here the dedicated sanguine satyrites who remained travelled onward into dank darkness as part of some interdicted sexual ritual until there shone with torrid splendour thousands of tapers made from the fat of every animal, visually reminiscent of flaming prehistoric stalagmites.

The brilliant heated light unveiled a luxurious temple altar of finely combed pelts designed into a tableau starkly suggestive of obscenely posturing bodies of no specific species. There standing before the befurred altar, lustrous in her lustily manner, was statuesque Libby Liberation Lim, High Priestess and Sacred Daughter to Sfatlicllp. Lim snug, bemused, in her knowledge that this holy sanctum of Sfatlicllp lay far yet directly below the Itaewon mosque.

Draped in vermilion vixen fur and tanned flesh, High Priestess Lim intoned with an elocutionary voice, “Welcome, you searchers of true selves, worshippers of the great Devourer, those whose hunger for the starry feast and seek everlasting eros.”

The clustering human bodies numbered more than a hundred, all in garbs of furs, hairs and skins, all from kaleidoscopic origins. The booming, commanding Priestess’ voice was magically seductive, soothing, as she proceeded with her infectious oration, “Our metorgasmic Sfatlicllp, who interbred with animalistic hairy Voormis, displayed, with Her actions, that the bestiality of the soul is ecstatic in its efflorescing malignity.

Thus, for all true believers, this is Sfatlicllp’s temple of love.” Rapturous screams resounded throughout the mammoth cavern.

So the time passed till all was said, chanted, performed, acted out, prepared upon and before the even more resplendent Sfatlicllp temple altar, now hosting life. Priestess Libby Liberation Lim led the reverberating requiem:

*“This is our offering of flesh,
This is our sacrifice of blood,
This is our hecatomb of pain,
Accept of us, O Hungry One!”*

Inside the Ole Stompers dwelling, senior professor Byron T. Marsh was enthralled with ebullient Song Dae-Soon’s rendering of David Bowie’s ‘Jean Genie’, “Keeps all your dead hair for making up underwear...”. The libertine at heart, as his aristocratic ancestors were before him, Lord Thomas Eng III was elegantly lost to the world.

State of Grace, state of Sin

Inside looking out

This is how it begins

Hunger and Eros with no doubt

Within and Without.

‘Broken Jade Sutra’, Queen Zee Rei

GUMI-GAN-OK CHAEK

“Have you noticed that the Hindu god Ganesha looks a bit like Chaugnan Faugn?”



asked the vivacious C. Vixeela Foxx, universally acclaimed performer. She was curiously gazing out the Starlite cafe/restaurant's storefront window at the popular Indian eatery across the street, the Taj Mahal. "East Indians of the Hindu faith seem to consistently place a statuette of that pump god somewhere on their business' premise," mentioned Foxx as she lifted her steaming porcelain cup of imported Tazo Chai tea to her lithely parting lips.

"It's because the elephant-headed Ganesha is believed to bring prosperity to any business that honours him so," replied rakish Ryu Rei-ho, a spiritual seer and resident 'star attraction' at the famous/infamous Red Fox. "There are discrepant distinctions, such as Chagnar Faugn's trunk is more akin to an extended lamprey." Ryu thought for a second, "If you want to equate a Hindu deity with a resembling Great Old One, then you should compare their Kali with Shub-Niggurath." Then, quipped, "You know the Taj Mahal restaurant is named after a Moslem mausoleum." Ryu returned to masticating her boshintang ('dog meat soup').

C.V. gave a throaty chuckle, "Let's not forget the personal temperaments and dispositions of the two. Talk about your distinctions." Seriousness dawned on Foxx, "Rei-ho, don't you have a personal attachment to Chagnar Faugn?"

Foxx leaned, smelled a pungent odorous aroma wafting up from Ryu's bowl sitting before her on the traditional red stained wooden table, where they sat cross-legged on the clean tile floor. She sampled some of her friend's meaty soup, then, "If my Asian historical heredity studies were any good, Chagnar Faugn from amphibians of sorts created the Miri Nigri, who, in turn, mated with pregenerate humanoids, thus producing hybrids that evolved into the Tcho Tcho people." C.V. grinned from the residual taste of the fleshy, saccharin canine portions now floating around in her gastric juices.

Ryu had a consanguinity that was part of the royal Tcho-Koreana bloodline. She started a subtle expostulation, "No. If you wish to know the actuality of our Tcho Tcho lineage, you must begin with Mother Shub-Niggurath. Our holy codex, the *Gumi-Gan-Ok Chaek*, you probably know it as the '*Book of Cracked Jade*', instructs us that She gave life to the eponymous twins Lloigor and Zhar..."

Foxx brashly interrupted, "It's rumoured that there was a third twin."

Ryu with a controlled passion stated, "Yes, that begotten one who behaved so blasphemously from birth. Who was obscene beyond all cosmic objurgation. Indeed, a wondrous goddess. She is even mentioned in the *Al Azif*, from memory Ryu quoted, '*Among those that have revealed themselves aforesaid, there is one which may not openly be named for its exceeding foulness.*'"

Rei-ho eloquently resumed, "These so-called 'Twin Obscenities' had carnal knowledge with early earth pre-humans and their progeny became the founding race of the Tcho Tcho. As our codex plainly tells us, we are 'Star Spawn'."

"Speaking of twin obscenities," interjected C.V., a Native American of the Pequot



tribe ('The Fox People') who many Koreans assumed was Asian, "The Norwegian death metal band Twin Obscenity is playing later tonight at our favourite club, the Big Electric Cat. And, I hear from the owner that this will be the Asian debut of their album 'Where Light Touches None'. Care to go?"

"Certainly," cried Ryu.

As the duo rose to depart Starlite, Foxx quipped, "Why don't we ever go to the Taj Mahal?"

Ryu parted her predatory strong lips, showing finely honed, twinkling under the lights, teeth, as she simply said, "I like meat."

The gifted friends walked away from the quaint fusion restaurant Starlite toward the side alleyway, wherein, one would soon find the eccentrically eclectic Big Electric Cat club. "Weren't you suppose to be performing tonight at the Red Fox?" queried Foxx, who nearly danced as she walked on the perpetually stained pavement of Itaewon's walkways.

"I'm afraid not tonight," the visage of an Asiatic Auguste Rodin model Ryu replied. "This night belongs to the really amazing, mystifying Libby Liberation Lim, an exotic dancer extraordinaire and more." Rei-ho's compelling ebon eyes glistened as she spoke, "Tonight, she holds court at the Red Fox fane."

"Didn't you receive your university degree in 'Modern Dance'?" Ryu proudly nodded, adding, "It was a double major actually with the other subject being 'Cultural Anthropology'." A sudden awareness struck the strangely natural rubian haired Foxx, "Rei-ho, do you know anything in detail, which you can share, about this third twin?"

Ryu Rei-ho stopped walking so to distinctly make her point, causing Foxx to respectfully pause as well, "The *Gumi-Gan-Ok Chaek* says the actual name of this being is never to be invoked or even spoken of by us. She was spurned by her mother and even shunned by her own twin siblings!"

Ryu's voice wavered, "Her exile of being banished from living memory was caused... Her unbridled objurgational lustful intercourse for humanoid sacrifices, many self-performed. Some acts, like a large animal's excessively pounding heart, burst tenuous bonds of virtuality."

Something occurred to Ryu, "One of Her physical descriptions may be the origin of the Vagina Dentata lore. In my studies, I came across tidbits as Chinese patriarchs' proposition, back in the times when the Tcho Tcho people still inhabited Central Asia, that 'women's genitals were not only gateways to immortality, but executioners of men'. Forgetting men's ludicrous fear of women's sexuality, I believe the archetype of all those demonic larger than life female entities is our secretly sacred Third Twin. Who, as recorded in our chronicles, is currently 'imprisoned' inside the fathomless depths of the still uncharted lava created labyrinth of chambers deep within the former volcano Mt. Halla of Jeju Island."

After a deliberate pregnant pause, “Tell me C.V., how is your Diamond Dogs band’s gig coming along at that lugubrious dive of a nightclub Starbutts?”

“It’s really not that bad of a place. Just that it caters to the more salacious and sanguinary types, who would rather keep their activities and ‘behaviour’ cloaked from the ever so sensitive public eyeballs, so to speak, or maybe, not speak.” After Foxx’s perverted sneer faded back into her more normally luscious grin, she gleefully spoke, “Happily, we’ve become the club’s house band, thank you very much.” After a curt bow to Ryu, C.V. finished with a wicked smile and a cutesy pout of the lips, “So, this sacrosanct being makes Sfatlicllp seem demure.”

Exactly at that point in the conversation, as if on a theatrical cue, the ever so fabulously un-demure Song Dae-Soon roared up along side the sidewalk, where the conversing twosome had paused, on her massive Harley Davidson motorcycle, dressed all in black leather and wearing a death-head helmet, not to mention, with Dr. Marsh enthusiastically holding on to her from behind. “Rei-ho, C.V., are you still using all those ‘big’ words? Anyways, where are you two nocturnal creatures off to this time of night?” queried Song after lifting her helmet’s face visor.

Foxx gave an opened mouth smile to her sinuously sexy bike riding friend and former band mate, “You’re as educated as we, if not more so. We’re off to catch the late show at the Big Electric Cat, who’s featuring the Twin Obscenity from Norway. You groove on death metal, don’t you Dae-Soon? Of course you do, come on and join us...that includes the fellow on the rear of your bike, especially since he doesn’t seem likely to be letting loose of your waist anytime soon.”

“I’m afraid not my friends. I definitely have other plans tonight, which involve taking the prestigious professor here out to see my ‘lair’ on Choansan.”

Ryu coyly, “Song, isn’t it also known as ‘Eunuchs Mountain’ because of all those Joseon Dynasty royal eunuchs buried there?”

Song with a beautifully sinister smile replied, “You nailed it.”

As Song Dae-Soon noisily sped off on her Harley, looking hell bent for leather, with her fanatically grasping passenger, either out of some lustful intentions or merely unmitigated fear, Foxx turned to Ryu, who was distastefully dusting off her trademark modernized suede hanbok, and quizzically asked, “Don’t you find it a bit amusing, if not outright ironic, that Duksung University owns Choan mountain’s land and everything in it? A women’s university owning a mountain full of dead eunuchs. Or, better still, possessing a site specifically created to honour eunuchs?”

All living creatures are but embodiments of hunger.

Man is a hollow tube ingesting

food at one and excreting waste at the other...



*This pattern (of the gods/beings) or ideal shape
is then made tangible by the accretion of matter,
organized and held together by the will
of the lord whose body it becomes.*

ALAZIF

The sky was blind to the moon. The trees' cherry blossoms were not in bloom, but looked as large gnarled fingers vainly reaching out from their graves. Song's home had been discreetly designed to emulate the eunuchs' gravesite mounds. She was poised before it, her leather outfit made her musculature explicit, diabolically sleek odalisque. Dae-Soon elucidated, "I have observed your disgusting depredations of women soiling the name of Love, a word you often use but have no respect for its meaning or effect." Marsh was a few paces before her. He couldn't help himself for her posture caused him to both give a third arm salute and soil his expensive underwear. "You're loathsome, lacking any worth in aiding my personal life's ambition, but I must bring forth an act of justice" Song Dae-Soon's sable dark eyes turned feral.

II

"We're having this meeting because I know Professor Marsh, however, you look like something a dog unburied," Ryu forthrightly stated and continued sipping her Mt. Halla Dimija Tea, made from a fruit singularly found on Hallasan. "I indulged too much last night, please forgive me," a plaintive Eng replied and bowed his head. He imbibed his recently brought potent Hongju ('red soju'), and then politely questioned, "How do you know Byron? I mean, we're close, but when it comes to women, honestly, he's an unscrupulous rogue."

The twosome was seated within Itaewon's premiere jazz establishment All That Jazz, whose decor was comfortably dark, full of ferns and teak embellishment. "It's through our acquaintance with his explorer ancestor Eric Marsh, who uncovered our sacred city Alaozar." Ryu paused, "From that initial encounter, Byron Marsh traced our language family tree finding a branch here."

Eng's blood-shot, bulging blue eyes were on Ryu, "He comes from the North Carolina Marshes, noted barbaric pirates of their day. They established the coastal town Nags Head. Its name derives from the fact that said pirates would decapitate a horse and place the head on a pike stuck into the shoreline. Supposedly, the blood dripped into the seawater, floated out, becoming a warning to ships to stay away."

Ryu laid down her traditional tea cup, "The Marsh clan has always been 'sea merchants'. The selection of that animal is significant. In classical Greek culture, others before and after, the horse symbolized a sea god. Those 'pirates' were actually offering to those within the sea, who for so long their benefactors, the repugnant Deep



Ones.”

Lord Eng placed some Byronic snuff into his nose, sneezed, and said, “Speaking of such, the *Cultes des Goules* mentions Sadogu’s grand-daughter.”

Ms. Ryu turned her nose in distain, returned, “The star Algol influences Sfatlicllp. Its name comes from the Arabic term ‘al-ghul’, meaning ‘the ghoul’.”

The two got to the meat of their meeting and continued on into the evening.

Eng abruptly questioned, “Why here?”

“All That Jazz is an international jazz venue. You might enjoy hearing Korean jazz icon Malo jam with the group Yog-Sothoth from France, homeland of that book we’ve been discussing.”

“Jazz is a bore and I definitely dislike the edible offerings here.”

“Starbutts it is, where my friend’s rock band plays. C.V. does incredible interpretations of Doors songs. For an epicurean as yourself, Starbutts serves succulent Ingangogi (‘human meat dish’) with a touch of Korean red ginseng and a smattering of rambutan, mistakenly called ‘Tico berries’ on television.”

“She’s a ‘20th Century Fox’?” Eng joked.

“In more ways than one,” replied a devious Ryu.

Ryu’s customized cobalt red Tico, Korea’s first mini-compact created by Daewoo motors now produced in Egypt, waited outside All That Jazz. She drove Eng up Itaewon’s tallest hill, where the mosque squatted, as they passed it going down an unlit street toward sordid Starbutts manse, Thomas quipped, “Ingangogi is?” Responding without twisting her head, “Try it, you’ll like it.”

Foxx’s haunting version of the Doors’ ‘Strange Days’ greeted the duo as they entered Starbutts, “You may talk of sin, and you know, this is it.” The interior embodied a Beardsley grotesque erotic nightmare. From a warped corner’s table, beneath ruddy electric candlelights, Ms. Lim tantalizingly beckoned Ryu and Eng.

Lim’s convivial consumption of the huge hefty snakehead fish mesmerized Eng though his Ingangogi boiled before him. He downed his somak (soju and beer mixture), asked, “What is that thing?” “A valued delicacy in Korea, sometimes called ‘Fishzilla’. This creature devours fish, ducks, even mammals. What’s so delightful about eating this dish fresh is discovering what morsels are included inside.” Ryu smiled while consuming her connoisseur concoction of raw Ingangogi Korean style.

The two women congenially conversed over simmering green tea after realizing Foxx was a mutual friend while carrion Eng ravenously consumed his second bowl of Ingangogi. Lim commented, “C.V. was once part of the French zeull band Shub-

Niggurath, performing on their 'Les Morts Vont Vite' album.”

“What is ‘zeull’ music?” asked Ryu after glancing at Thomas, who gurgled, “Honestly delicious.”

“It is a mix of mostly minimalist trance and symphonic rock. The group’s demise came when founder Allan Baulland died from an unknown cancer. It's still a mystery. They even influenced Japanese and Korean alternative music...your acquaintance seems enraptured with his food.”

The Diamond Dogs played on as Foxx aurally wove beautiful depravity.

Later, during her break, Foxx joined the threesome, listening while relishing her pre-ordered boshintang and Civet Cat coffee.

Ryu’s long, black as a Korean fox’s ‘socks’ hair swung forward as she spoke, “He’s quite intrigued with inscriptions involving Sfatlicllp in his discovered book...even read pertinent passages to me.” The prim Englishman daintily sneezed, inquired, “It’s said you're a savant of this deity. Why is it in *Cultes des Goules*?”

Imperious Lim’s sultry cold eyes stared at impertinent Eng, “She,” the Priestess enunciated, “is primordial reality. The Queen of morphology’s grotesquerie. Of the Twin Blasphemies, spawn of Shub-Niggurath, some say Nug, properly Naggoob, is the god of ghouls. False and that’s the blasphemy. Sfatlicllp commands the hungry of the grave through things underground, by gifts inherited through Her grandsire Tsathoggua, whom the ancient French called Sadogua.”

Foxx injected, “Among my people, they're called Sadogowah and Sfatlicowah.” Beauteous Lim languorously impaled uncooked offal with a Gigeresque toothpick, and then impassively spoke, “Your dear friend Marsh knows Sfatlicllp first hand thanks to his blasphemous betrayal of Ryu's people.”

Eng blinked, gulped his Starbutts’ specialty spirit, a spiked Korean Absinth, served by pointedly toothy transgender waitresses, “I've read parts involving Sfatlicllp that are mimics of Christian belief.” The Englishman withdrew d'Erlette’s vade mecum tome from his ever-present satchel and recited verbatim:

*In The Light of the Mistress’
holy Presence all desire
dies, but the desire to be
like Her.*

Lim licked her lips as stated, “You certainly know that ‘early’ Christians and other bogus faiths commandeered so-called ‘pagan’ liturgies, rituals as their own, like Christmas. Are you curious about who influenced the pagans? Truth concerning Sfatlicllp adoration lies in the arcane *Voormis Tablets*, *Tripitaka Koreana*, original Buddhists knew, and *Noctuary of Sfatlicllp*, developed from the *Tablet*’s remains by my ancestors.”



“According to the eponymous *Noctuary*’s scripture, this year our planets align, the erratic planet Nibiru enters, setting into action the full freedom of Sfatlicllp.” Ryu whispered, “Why reveal so much?” “I smell human soul corruption, a votary in him.”

Lim’s cranial panther black fur cascaded into rivulets, braids ending entwined with ferine fangs, swaying like fluid whipping cat-o’-nine-tails as she led Thomas outside, out beyond artificial lights. The Priestess’ sub-ophidian fluidity of motion was reminiscent of arch ancient Knyathin Zhaum’s evolutionary brood.

As they departed, Foxx, back on stage, sang ‘Party in the Graveyard’, written by the phenomenal Kimchibilly band Rock Tigers, “You’re gonna resurrect as pure life. Eat your brain. Zombie, zombie night cold bloody beautiful night.”

III

A swelling sun rose, perfidious Marsh’s body was drawn from a freshly formed funeral mound and ravaged by a ravenous necrophagical Eng. Magpies joined the gluttony as sunlight shone upon the lord’s slate hued eyes.

The official police report stated that the unknown assailant seen by early morning hikers gnawing, humping, gormandizing the decomposed body of Professor Byron T. Marsh of Duksung University on Choansan simply disappeared. However, forensic results revealed cause of death being massive blood loss from emasculation done via a vulpine animal’s ferocious selective feeding.



Dedicated to Clark Ashton Smith

&

Charlene Ungstad

Author’s notes

All of the band names and their albums/singles titles mentioned in this story are real and existed at one time or another, especially the ones with Lovecraftian names.

All of the Korean place names and items are real and exist.

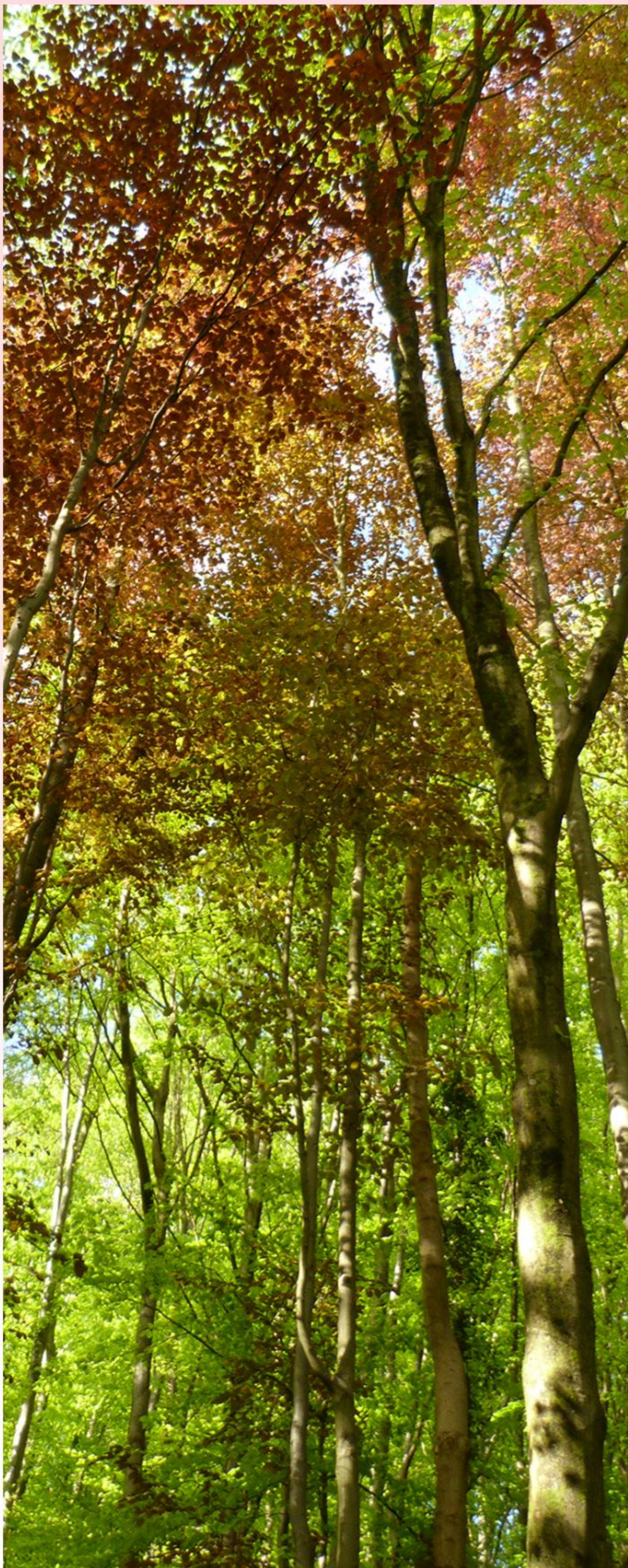
Only the characters’ names have been changed to protect the "innocent".

HAIKU

by Amanda Valance

A fleeting feeling
Delightful as spring blossom
Vanishes away





“THE FREE VERSE BALLADE FOR MY LOVER”

by Phillip A. Ellis

Let me remember
the first time you slept by me
with your head against my shoulder
in the train that far September...
I will remember
whether you do, or, forgetting,
whisper of something,
something like sestets of summer.

I will embrace it,
the memory that murmurs,
enrobe it in rhythm
and metaphor's garments,
and bring you before it,
whether or no you adore it,
and I will whisper
something like sestets of summer.

Nothingness beckons,
time is swift-treading,
our lives shorten,
and tear at our breathing,
but I will still write this,
this poetry alone yours:
this ballade composed here,
something like sestets of summer.

Remember, lover, clearly
the mountains will brighten
as the dawn awakens
something like sestets of summer.

Summer Comes (David Leverton)



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