



THE GRIND

We exist to give writers and photographers a voice and an audience that they may not have had otherwise. As we grow and evolve our primary function will always be to showcase the best short fiction and visual art that Scotland has to offer. Our inaugural edition contains contributors from the length and breadth of Scotland who have covered a fascinating spectrum of themes, genres, and styles.

We are as delighted as we are privileged to showcase works from the kind of creative minds that make Scotland such an exciting, unique, and inspiring country to live in. Scotland's potential as a creative force is limited only by our imaginations and our self-deprecation. All too often it becomes comfortable to get bogged down in negativity and nay-saying; to succumb to apathy and passiveness. In these times it is important to remember the words, rightly or wrongly, attributed to Alasdair Gray;

“Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation”

The Grind was created by Gordon Johnstone, Declan Malone, and Louise Duffy, and produced with the assistance and guidance of John Farrell.

www.the-grind.co.uk
[@thegrindjournal](https://twitter.com/thegrindjournal)
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Contributors

TV Eye – *Photo is Memory* – Glasgow

John Farrell – *Hattonrigg Pit Disaster 1910* – Bellshill

Bryan M Ferguson – *The Scissor Bandit, Strange Cocktail, The Damaged Mannequins Trauma, Wrapped in Plastic* – Glasgow

David Flood – *Ghost Stories 1 - 7* – Glasgow

Seonaid Francis – *Dreamscapes* – South Uist

Rachel Irvine - *Redistributive / Nectar / Feared, Bedsitters / Smooth / Registered* – East Kilbride

Emi James - *Plenum, Parts for Sale* – Glasgow

Rita Johnston – *Surfacing, The Fisherman, The Bride* – Edinburgh

Declan Malone - *Gallowgate, Grey Dunn's Biscuit Factory* – Glasgow

Jamie McFarlane – *For the Love of Lomo* – Perth

Katharine McFarlane – *A Waulking Lullaby, I See Mull, A Blessing for The Bard,*
Kilmacolm

Brogan Ramm – *A Study, The Rehearsal, The Nothing, Remnants of Life* – Edinburgh

TS Rosenberg – *Bait, I Wanted to Explain Why I Was Crying, Unsent* – Edinburgh

CD Shade – *NMDA* – Glasgow

Stephen Watt – *Caterpillar, The Saltings, He Lived In The Halfway House* – Old Kilpatrick

Anthony Webster - *bigbadllama* – Glasgow

Full artist statements and further details of the works are available on our website.



JAMIE MCFARLANE
Don't Look Down



JAMIE MCFARLANE
SLEEPING GIANTS



JAMIE MCFARLANE
TIME TO TANGO

JAMIE MCFARLANE
ABOVE THE CLOUDS



STEPHEN WATT

Balconies of perfumed plants
above legions of Amsterdam commuters
express aromas of lemon and frankincense.
Muscles black out, allowing old rituals
to catapult into the nervous system, the pistils
of the mother plant tilting hedonism
as though she were Queen of Netherlands herself.

Honey-sticky, fox-tail buds
cling to thick, indicia leaves.
A dense cocktail of mint-green centipedes
and caterpillars become drowsy on white widow flowers
sprouting from litres of soil.
Light flushes out the bittersweet hours
where cursed unemployment loves to toil.

Time dilates, draining impulsive thoughts.
Skin tissue softens
while hair whitens like candlepins
wrought by lack of vitamins.
Poison cocoons me in technicolor curtains.
Euphoria bubbles inside the shoulder blades

until the rapture of wings fulminates
like a hand grenade relieved of its pin,

and arcades of meaning stencil templates and pattern.

CATERPILLAR

THE SALTINGS

Salacious waves tongue iron-silver stacks
where columns of pirate planks
splinter and shatter in the tangled rape
of seaweed and biodegradable crabs.
Dolphin carcasses are gulped clean,
spitting bones of polythene bags
like brittle teeth inside shoreline gums.

Trailer flags beckon the seabird's anthems.

I screw the lid back on the vodka bottle.
The metal bridge hangs overhead, keeping vigil
over the dead buried in the Clyde,
shawled by crayon scribbles; addict needles.
A flicked cigarette blushes, then cancels,
and my capsules tame the glass-eyed tide.

STEPHEN WATT

HE LIVED IN THE HALFWAY HOUSE

Four hours a day, he sits at his bench.
Salvation Army-donated clothes
drape round his hunched shoulders. A breath
of mace imprints the wind; chowder stains
in the white spaghetti snarl on his chin.
Already, laboratories want him.

Dogs dodge. Like a man repenting sin,
his face buries into torn, moleskin gloves,
massaging his Godless temple
with blackened ribbons of skin.
The oceanic horizons hold aloft a mirror
like an answer to atheism.

Sliced cobwebs dangling from play-park swing chairs
lets light shimmer through
like solemn prayers, perhaps;
splinters of ice caps
prolapsed from nightmares of shadowed sky.
His deep, swollen groan becomes a rover's lullaby.

Slumped on the arm, restless crows
pilfer lukewarm scraps at his feet.
Autumn leaves bleed into the nearby pond,
turning it bronze and honeysweet.
The park leaves him to sleep with his demons;
occasionally tutting
 at such
an inconvenience.

STEPHEN WATT

WAULKING LULLABY

O the hunter he is returning
Descending slowly from the mountain
Locks as dark as the bellowing stag
He carries homeward for you my child

*Oh ho ro ho my darling baby
Oh ho ro ho my only love
Oh ho ro ho my darling baby
And cry no more for he's coming home*

O the hunter he is returning
Feet fair weary from the moor
Cheek as white as the wild swan
He carries homeward for you my child

O the hunter he is returning
Homeward coming from the stream
Eyes as bright as the leaping trout
He carries homeward for you my child

O the hunter he is returning
Swiftly clambering on the rocks
Lips as red as the spear-struck seal
He carries homeward for you my child

I SEE MULL

I see the island, softly creeping
O'er wind whipped waves and sun splashed seas.
I see big mountains, gently reaching
Rock clad peaks and wind lashed trees

I see the shoreline, quietly forming
Seal splashed rocks and hoary sand.
I see the waters, brightly sparkling
Peat dark lochs, enchanted land.

I see the fireside, brightly burning
Rowan logs burn hot and true.
I see the heart-song, gladly rising
Happy I'd be to stay with you.

*Chì mi Muile, dùthaich m'òige,
Far beinn mhór' bho churraich ceò,
Eilean maiseach thar an aisig,
Nì mi fuireach ann ri'm bheò.*

A BLESSING FOR THE BARD

May the grey green ground rise up to take you.
May the wind whipped wraiths be at your back.

As you lay down words awaiting
May the stone lie heavy on your breast.

As you lay down in the grey green dark
May the stone lie heavy.

May the rushes of your bench be as a seaweed bed.
Tide rocked bringing no rest.

No rest for you. Gnawing doubt at your side
As the creatures of the sea at mine now.

As seals serve watchmen o'er my grave
May the corbie turn its bright eye to yours.

Little as I had of your soft words
Little as I had of your honey kiss

Dark eyed Alasdair. *Ò hì shiùbhlainn leat*
As the grey green rises.

DREAMSCAPES

I

I tumble into waters cold and dark, green with filtered light.
Shoals of words drift past,
red and purple.

Hampered by long skirts
I struggle upwards
through frozen ice-green phrases

sheer walls I cannot grasp.

II

I awoke with a poem in my mouth,
a ball of white tragacanth
choking me,
and I pulled and pulled,
viscid tongues of white
until my hands were overflowing with words,
scraps of sounds and letters,
unspoken,
and still my mouth was gorged
with silent sentences.

SEONAIID FRANCIS

TV EYE
PHOTO IS MEMORY







**Shining
Semi-Permanent
Hair Color**



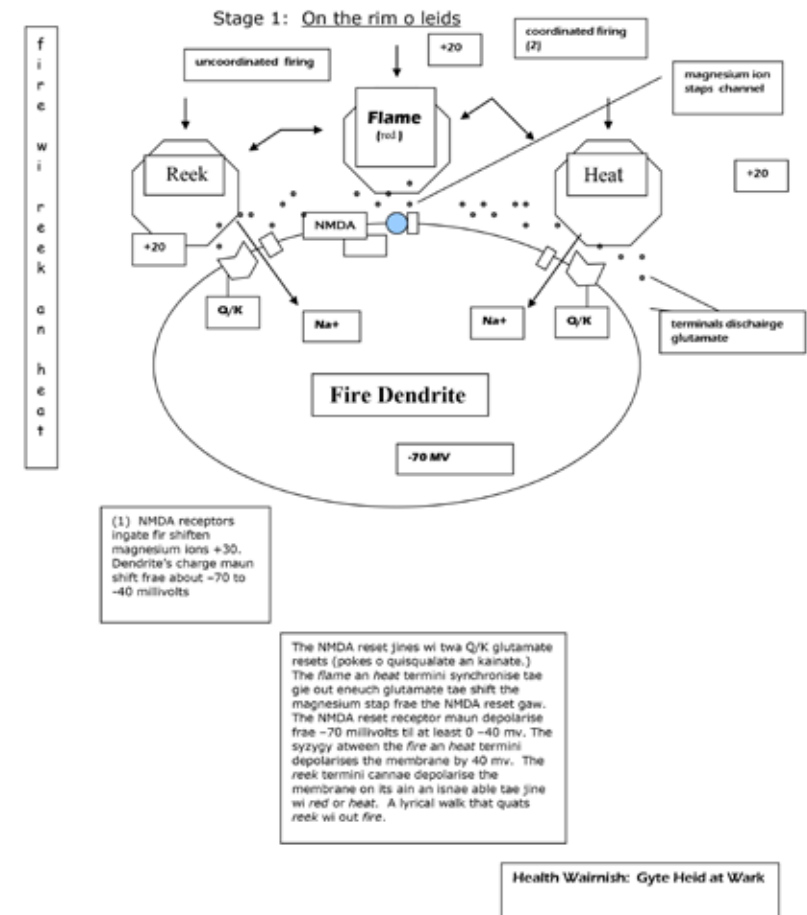
NMDA

In the begin-
In the begin-
In the begin-
In the begin-
In the begin- peace,
then there wis war,
cleansing, scouring,
cauld sillery war,
wi guns fir the dum-dums,
the dum-dums.
But thae cudnae kill us aa,
Naa thae cudnae kill us aa.

There's a chemical buzz
that's lockt in the heid
a rhythmic jigger
a synaptic rap
protein trigger
receptor
micro transmitter
N-M-D-A
N~methyl D~aspartate
N-M-D-A
N~methyl D~aspartate
N-M-D-A
N~methyl D~aspartate
aa tuned tae the glutamate.

Glu-ta-mate~
whit a glumchous ward
tae describe the substance
that nurtures our thochts.
Complex~ Naa.
It's bio magnetic simplicity
Een a poet kin unerstaun
it's chem-mystery.
It's the wallie stank o ideas
whar notions tryst til survive
an whar liberty dunts intil
the oligarchs, the autocrats
an the sel anointit meritocrats.
Meritocrats whae'd hae the lave
wi nae mind o a va.
It's war babies
anoint versels~ NMDA.

A syn-a-snap



Nae spairk, nae revolt,
Aa, aa generations maun kick agin
thir ain particular pricks- NMDA O.K.

Then thar wis war,
cleansin, scourin,
cauld sillery war,
wi guns fir- the dum-dums,
- the dum-dums.
But thae could nae kill us aa
so thae set about
colonising our heids.

'Little Johnny foreigner, yoofs,
you have no culture,
no history,
no lifestyle,
no literature: until we educate you- NMDA- O.K.

"An aft telt lie sticks lik keech til tweed."

Pictur a Westminster ante room
wi a brace o 18th century ad men,
Satchii an Vendetta.
A jolly fine wheeze wis in the air;
hou tae lift a leid- or in their parlance-
hou tae purloin a language.
Cultural colonialism; NMDA- O.K.

Havering am I?
'-Headline- August 1999
'English Dictionary seeks Scots words'
'Seeks!' brings tae mind
postcairds in clairy telephone kiosks.
'Miss Whiplash seeks raw meat.'
A Mr Reg -sic- 'Proffit'
the dictionary's principal editor
exclaimed that he expected Scotland
to be a rich source of new words,
NMDA- Oh ay?
The wards are nae new tae us,
thae're no een Inglis wards,
then agin the Inglis dictionary
is fou o fremmit wards.
Maybers wi cud cry it the Scots-
d, d, d-d-dit-dit-a-dee.
Cultural colonisation/ Liftin a leid; NMDA- O.K.

'Scots is only a dialect,
therefore there's no such thing as the
Scots language.'
Tharfir, there's aawise a tharfir.
Syne whit maun I be screivin in. Inglis?

'Yes but using Scots words.'
Gin the wards are Scots hou maun it be Inglis?
'English dialect.'
Leids the warl ower tak a loan o wards.
Then aa leids maun be dialects
If Scots is Inglis...
Whit maun Inglis be?
Latin, French, Greek or Catalan,
Single, whipped or double Dutch,
Erse Basque'd in Gallic Flem',
Welsh, Swahili or Urdu verse,
Fragrant Aramaic Mandarin,
Navaho o a Swedish source,
Songo, Sora, 'xotic Spanish
Swift clacking Swaka Africans,
Or maybers, just maybers
maybers Inglis is maybers
braid Scots? NMDA- O.K.

Flame wi out reek or is it reek wi out flame
Asteep in the harn pan
an troke o consaits,
leids, langues, lingua systems
are aa but an electro blast
in the bio nano sphere.
NMDA
N-methyl-
Methyl?
a hypothetical radical o the monocarbon series,
it's the base o wuid spirits,
absinthe, absinthe, o my darling absinthe.
D-aspartate- saut o the yirth
or asparagine; nitrogenous (4/5th air),
aa in the mynd,
it's a krystallizable compound fun esp.-
in asparagus, a primary malic diamide.
Malic acid? -get fae (malum)aipples
an berries o the rowan tree.
Diamide? -twa molecules o ammonia
whar the hydrogen has been substituted
by twa or mair acid radicals.
NMDA trickers a radical thocht;
an it's no hypothetical-
that we needs recolonise our heids.
NMDA- O.K. Flame wi reek, reek an heat.

Tak a dividual neuron
as a sampler o the ward flame.
A spairk agitates the flame
duntin it intil the neuron fir heat
whilk sets aff a notion o reek.
NMDA- an associations o wards,
flame, heat, reek.

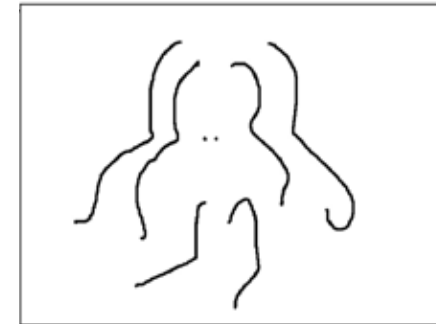
~sniff
 ~sniff
 ~must
 ~musk
 ~multiply
 an sae on
 as the mind creates
 its ain particular paradigm o the warld~ NMDA.
 Aa, aa generations maun kick agin
 thir ain particular pricks.
 Experience cannae be 2nd haun
 Evolution has ainerlie just birlt intae consciousness
 an is nae doubt still at wark on it.

Flame wi reek.
 We are aa prisoners o our ain limitations
 ~asparagus an worm wuid~.

Reek wi flame.
 As the magno/chemical buzz
 glints at thon nebulous thing
 cried consciousness
 it shaws we cannae
 be objective about oursels.
 'But the chemicals an the electrons maun be friens.'
 Yahoo! the chemicals an the electrons sall be friens.'
 Lysergic acid Diethylamide,
 LSD far out?
 My erse!
 Acid maks the green sunfish fecht~
 An causes the elephant tae 'musth.'
 thon's radge deleerit rage.
 There's a chemical buzz that's
 sneck in the heid
 Nae spairk, nae thought,
 N Methyl D Aspartate.

Chomsky's bairns

DROSOPHILA MELANOGASTER



The chromosome o the fruit flee
 Is sib
 Tae a hieroglyph o the strung universe
 Thon imprint o language
 Signifies tae us
 The nuclei is the idiom, NMDA~ O.K.

Owerset fae Francais quo
the Parisian craic o Michel Foucault.
A leid, a langue, a lingua system
is aa but a corpus o speiks
a stour o wards, a clishmaclaver o facts.

We maun describe on the steid
o this gaitherin
tae yaise as a sample,
guides tae cuddly lowp ower the dyke
tae big mair speiks.

Een gin a leid is lang syne mouth less
yow dow big aince mair on its
antrin smithereens.

A leid ay bides a way forrit
tae jalouse mair speiks.

A stent corpus o guides gien heid room
tae a stentless wheen o affcumes.
Fantice, fantice the magic makars,
tae scribe in Scots is tae pou the fruits
o our culture fae the lift...

...fizz, fizz, fizz.

Fizzing calcium ions,
electrically chargit wee haets
trauchle tae enter the NMDA receptor
complex chemikal processes
trigger aff wi in the neuron,
zap zap zappity zap;
~sniffing glue is nae in it~
~Jack up an ye jack out~
it's cognitive eroticism
an thon's mental,
a 21st fuckatye century blast.
an it's aa gaun on in the heid; NMDA- O.K.

Ay tho~
there's aawise thon bogle in the warks.

Flaming Reek (A parody)
On the teenage wintery street
The eye o his desire
Stuid in a pool o cool glamour
Her gaze far aff
Instinctively he shiftit doun wind
Tae souse in her wersh musk.
Her pals daffed...
But she did nae speik
Rinkt by his ain ardour he wis ower green

tae ken that she wantit him tae tak her
intil the wuids an tae enter the forest,
insteid she walked aff intil the sea glug-glug.

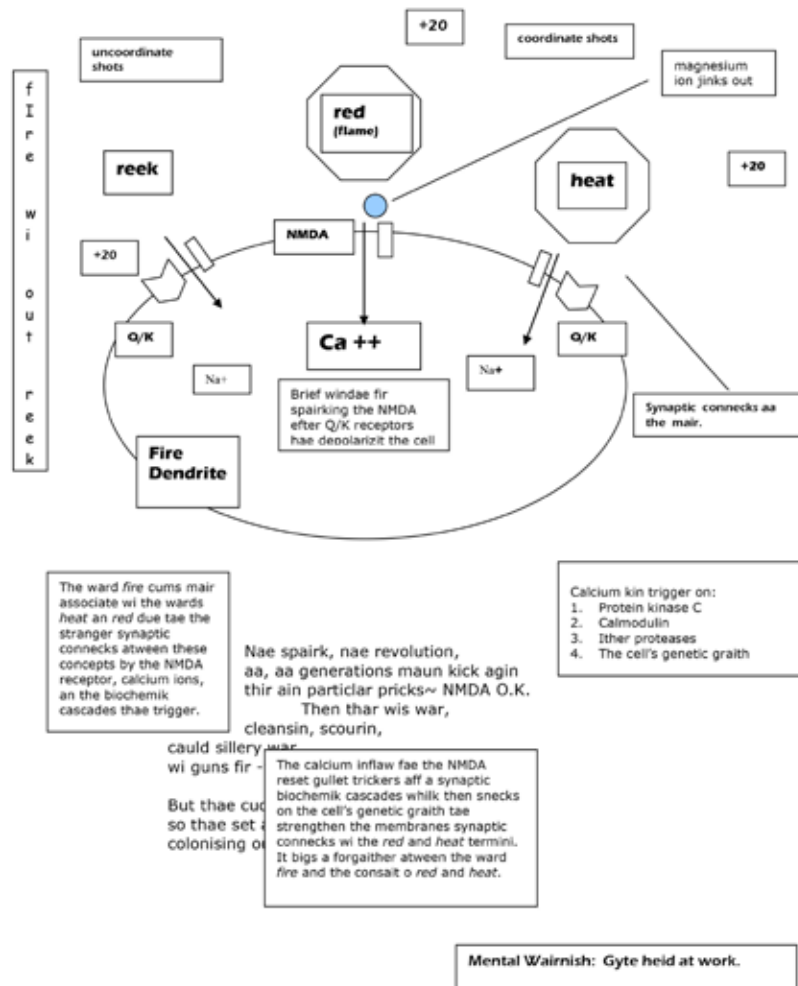
Reeking Havoc (hou it raelly is)
Doun, doun, howe doun
in the thrawn wastes
ligs a sour gowpin place
whar sharrow thochts abraide the inner sel
lik quicken flesh in burning lime.
In the fortunes o the wilderness,
the lave needs gie it nae mair credit
than anither consciousness,
in differ state o mynd.

Maist o the time the NMDA receptor
is stuck wi magnesium ions;
tae rid itsel the synapse magnetically
stimulates the neurone's membrane
an the ions lowp snap crackle an pop
in a bio chemikal cascade o
learning, memory an consciousness.
Far fucking out.
Naa mair, nae mair
rehet cauld kale as new.
Aff wi the raelist an their sentimentality.
The impressionists are back in toun
wi a nano cubist energy
tae blast us back intil a scansin space.

Mynd in, mynd on, mynd in, mynd on,
scans, scans an scans agin.
There's a chemical buzz
that's lockit in the heid
a rhythmic jigger
a synaptic rap
protein trigger
receptor
micro transmitter
N-M-D-A
N Methyl D Aspartate
N-M-D-A
N Methyl D Aspartate
N-M-D-A OK.

In memorandum o a syne-o-snap

Stage Two: The Calcium throb an ayont.



CD SHADE
NMDA

JOHN FARRELL

HATTONRIGG PIT DISASTER 1910









The man
by the window
reading The House of Mirth.

You biting
the inside of
the top of my leg that afternoon.

Back
an hour in the cafe.
A flat white.
Earl Gray tea.
Tiny glasses of honey.

My perfume.

My hold-ups.

A Chinese girl eating
Black Forest cake
and writing Mandarin with a gold pen in her diary.

Watching
the man by the window
reading Edith Wharton.

Me,
waiting for you.

Your shirt.
Your boots.
Your jacket.
Your hair.
Your mouth.

SURFACING

THE FISHERMAN

Between your fingers hours salt.
Your work has made the hands I love –
prising open molluscs for food,
parting scallop-shells,
nursing flesh,
skin wicked to a man's –
broken
knuckles and nails.

THE BRIDE

I shed the dress
and bathe
in the green glow of liquid
on lily white porcelain.
Nothing stirs
but my toes
playing with the hot and cold taps.
My mouth liping surface
fills,
the last love poem washing out,
bleeding
the water.

The blood they've trailed behind them doesn't seem to matter now. Cate tears his helmet from his head, gasping stale, ancient air, drawing it into his shrunken lungs till his knees crumple and give out, and his face finds the dust below him.

Mud. The mud below him.

"God. God. Fuck, God."

Briony's voice, maybe— that fuckwit always needs to be saying something. But he's silenced by the sharp thud of Laanderson's closed fist against well-concealed Kevlar: "Shut it." Their commander orders in a voice like he's eye-to-eye with Jesus himself, and Briony does; but Cate can still hear his disbelieving nose-breaths wheezing in the darkness.

No-one dares get any closer.

"...Is it real?" Cate asks gruffly, into the miraculous soggy dirt under his lips.

He feels its cool dampness against his skin and has to squeeze his eyes shut.

"We need to test it." Laanderson reminds tightly. Cate twists his neck and can just make out the older man straining against his own wonder like a Pointer on a leash, muscles trembling.

Cate nods. Yes. Yes.

His fingers fumble the way they never do pointing a firearm, tugging the equipment pack from under his jacket: click. Click. click. Fragile glass tubes in clumsy armoured hands. Don't drop them. Don't drop them. Beside him, Briony mirrors his movements: his will be the second opinion.

"Ten mil. Just ten mil." Laaderson warns, perhaps catching the dangerous amazement in Cate's gaze. But Cate waves him back. He knows. Hell, does he know.

The lake before them is silent. Still. Black as smoked glass in this forgotten bunker; nature's jealously-guarded treasure. Or not so much nature's: St Jobs'. But then, they're one and the same now aren't they? This planet has that forbidden fruit stamped across its western hemisphere; as did every one of those weary, hard-edged followers the three radicals brought to the ground on the way down here. They were ugly, necessary deaths, but Cate hardly registers them now that black porcelain gleams under the brash white splash of his head-torch. Fuck. It's so fucking beautiful.

"I can't touch it." Briony intones; but Cate is already kneeling-- far enough back to avoid contamination, close enough that the cold, forgotten surface plays against his gloved fingertips.

For an instant, another world blurs his vision...

A world where Laanderson and Briony lie still, sprawled in the black mud; where Cate's kevlar and canvas and layers and layers of leather and camo and steel mark a glistening trail to the liquid's edge, and his cold, naked body is submerged in molten diamond, closing over every inch of skin. He drinks deep, he holds his breath; his lungs scream, his heart seizes, but it is pure, so pure and it is his and he has found it, found it at last, found it—

“Ten mil collected.” Cate whispers, more to the tiny tube in his hand than to his colleagues. He bites his lip as the liquid fills to that thin white marker, and no more beyond.

“Ten mil.” Briony echoes, and clutches his other hand over his mouth as he replaces his tube into his PAD. The startled gleam of the tablet’s blue LED indicators is violently bright and Cate squints against them in the timeless gloom of the cavern.

Blue. Blue. Blue.

“Come on you fucker.” Cate intones, pressing his own PAD into life and watching its indicators join Briony’s in neutral chorus: blue. Blue. Blue.

“We need two identical--”

--I know what we need.” Cate snarls. Blue. Blue. Blue.

The lake seems to hold a silent smile; that thin silver gleam separating the surface from the crystal-lised stalactites above. Blue. Blue. Blue--

“FUCK.” Briony scrambles backwards, screaming in triumph. “Fuck, fuck--”

Cate shields his eyes at the sudden green light searing through the dark: green; GREEN. Then the second, his own hand suddenly illuminated in the unbelievable colour. Green: it’s fucking green, it’s—

“—H₂O.” He gasps the molecule; can hardly get those three letters out his throat. “Water. Water. It’s water.”

The last water on the planet. The last reserve. The last secret of a long-dead billionaire. The prototype for the salvation of a drought-ravaged planet.

Laanderson’s sobs echo joyously, and all Cate can see is that pinprick of green, and life for eight billion people.

“Katrina.” Ben makes a perfunctory introduction.

Howard holds out his hand, but the intimidatingly gorgeous woman —Katrina— just smiles pityingly at him and returns to scrolling her Twitter feed. Howard glances quizzically back at his friend.

“If any other guy touches her I got to fork out another fifty quid in excess.”

Ben explains flatly.

Howard’s hand snaps back to his chest like Katrina had gone for it with her teeth.

“Shit.”

“...Yeah.” Ben turns away; nods resignedly at the barman. “Can I get two more Coranas? Yeah. Cheers...”

Howard slides a fiver into the space on the bar underneath his friend’s hilariously hangdog face.

“Cheers bud. So...” He tries to glance casually at Katrina. It’s kind of impossible. “She just... follows you around?”

“She’s a Bedsitter, Howard.”

“She sleeps with you?” Howard’s eyebrows knit into a tight caterpillar in the middle of his forehead. He probably needs to adjust the incredulity meter on that sentence by a couple of notches: “She sleeps with you?”

“She’s ‘holding Lauren’s space’ in our bed.”

“Till she’s back from London?”

Ben holds three fingers up in front of vaguely frantic eyes: “Three days to go.” Howard just blinks. “Fuck... Okay, I don’t know what you call it when your wife not only knows you’re a cheating bastard, but is supplying you with birds to get off with.”

Ben was just working the laces out of his shoes when the doorbell rang— in retrospect even it sounded more highly-strung than normal. He froze. He’d just gotten back from dropping a steely-eyed Lauren at the airport— the last thing he wanted was visitors. He wanted a cold beer and to get his boxers off. Wearily, he pulled open the door.

“Hello?”

He lost control of his mouth somewhere after the second vowel. The woman standing casually on his doorstep could have stepped straight out of fucking Babestation. All of a sudden, he wasn’t holding the door open— he was clutching onto it for dear life.

“Hi there, my name’s Katrina.” The vision introduced herself in a voice that would be better suited to French porn than this sprawl of pebble-dashed Glaswegian semis. “Are you Ben Dickinson?”

Ben felt sweat breaking out under the collar of his shirt.

“...That’s me.” He confessed, trying to recompose his expression into some-

thing less pubescent. Trying to keep his eyes off her tits.

Then he noticed the badge on the left breast-pocket of her jacket.

“Hi Ben. I’ve been assigned to you by Bedsitters Incorporated. Your wife has employed me to keep you company while she’s away. I hope you don’t mind if I come in?”

Ben could only blink. “I…”

“…Hmm, she mentioned you’re cute when you stutter.” The woman—Katrina—divulged, reaching out to stroke one elegant finger against the curve of Ben’s neck. Then, just as quickly, she retracted it, indulgent expression hardening into something far more sanitised.

“You’ll know that refusing the services of the assigned Bedsitter results in the total charge of any services ordered detracted from the partner’s bank account.” Katrina’s mouth twisted sympathetically: “and of course, Bedsitters Incorporated is not responsible for any subsequent conditions suffered by you upon the return of your wife.”

Ben’s breath came out a little shaky. “Right… So you’re here to…keep me company?”

Katrina fixed him in another appetising gaze.

“I’m here to save your wife’s spot in your bed.”

Ben felt the need to clarify:

“Right. Like. Naked?”

“If you’d like.”

Ben genuinely could not think of another thing he’d wanted so badly in his lifetime.

“And my wife paid for this?”

“Yeah, she’s pretty great isn’t she?” Katrina confirmed agreeably.

Ben swallowed heavily. Katrina’s hair seemed to be soaking up the watery spring sunlight, glinting with every tiny shift of her head. The smooth curve of skin exposed under the neckline of her shirt was the colour of crème caramel. God he loved crème caramel.

Jerkily, Ben threw himself and the door back against the inside of the hall, holding out a hand to take the woman’s roller-case:

“Come on in.”

Howard swigs his beer, and listens with fast-dissolving sympathy to his friend’s tale of a week under the ministrations of this unexpected, wife-sponsored goddess.

“She brings me beer after sex, you know that? I don’t even have to ask. Beer. After sex.” Ben repeats, miming with his own bottle: “Little limes stuffed in the neck of the bottle… She puts real sugar in my tea. She drives me to work— then I can’t get anything done ‘cos she’s just texting me this hot filth all day—

Howard stares hard at him. “Mate. Sounds like a nightmare.”

Ben’s hands gesture violently at the air: “If there’s another woman even in my fucking eyeline, I get fined—twenty quid straight into Lauren’s shoe fund. I can’t escape.” He thrusts an arm out in Katrina’s direction: “She’s got my credit cards stuffed down her knickers. I can’t even go to the bloody shitter without her diarising every time I get my dick out!”

Howard opens his mouth: but before he can put his sarcasm into words, another voice interrupts; another woman’s voice, caramel smooth:

“Relax babe. How about an early night? Bubble bath?” Howard twists around.

She’s nearly identical to Katrina, except for the tight jeans and tiny diamond stud pressed into the side of her nose. The same bored, amused gaze. The same company badge pinned to the lapel of her jacket: Bedsitters Inc.

Howard gets the distinct feeling his body’s gonna start embarrassing him any minute now.

He claps a hand to Ben’s despondent shoulder:

“She got you fucking twins? Jesus… if you don’t want your wife can I have her?”

Ben’s face creases in a paper mâché rictus: “It’s two for one when you register online. October special.”

Brogan Ramm
A Study



Brogan Ramm
The Rehearsal

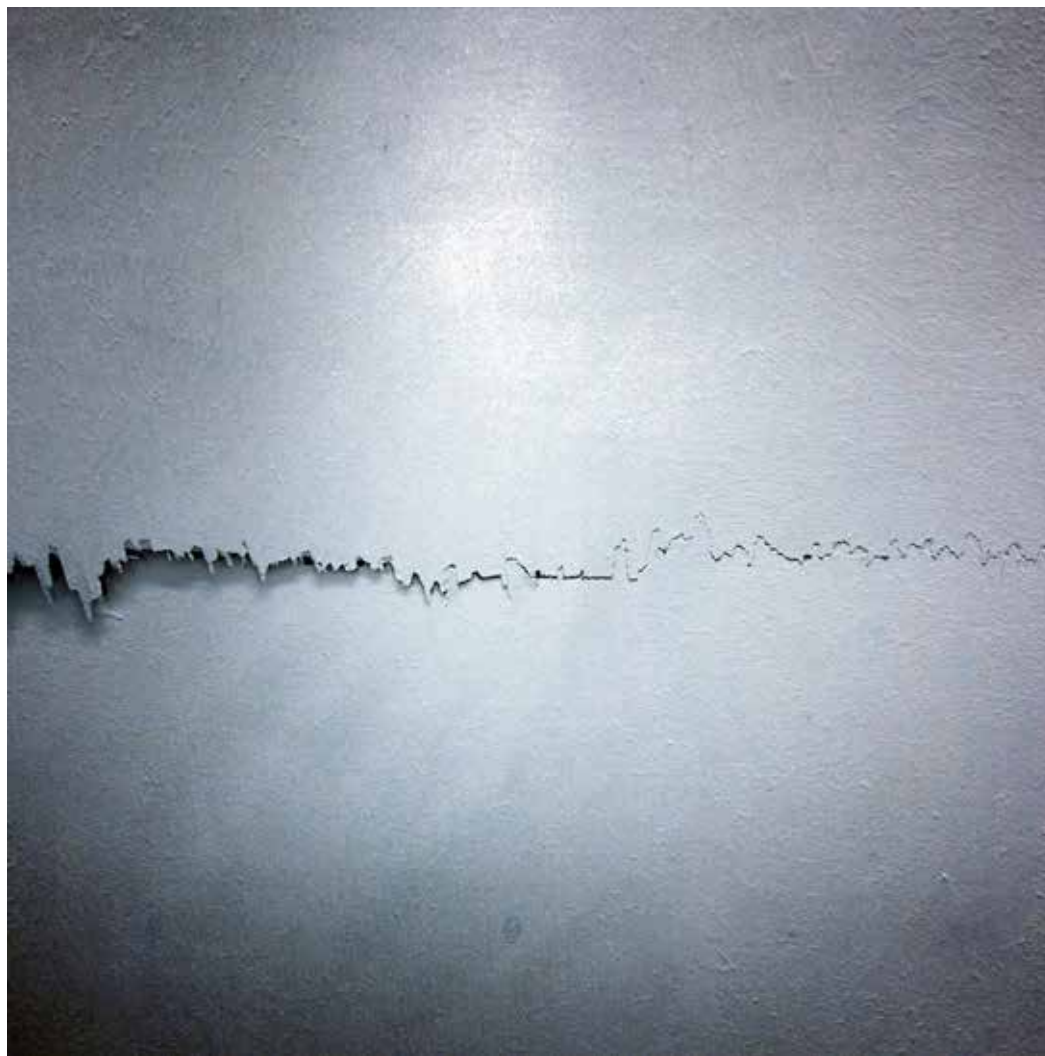


Brogan Ramm
The Nothing





BROGAN RAMM
The Rehearsal



BROGAN RAMM
Remnants of Life



BRYAN M FERGUSON
SCISSOR BANDIT

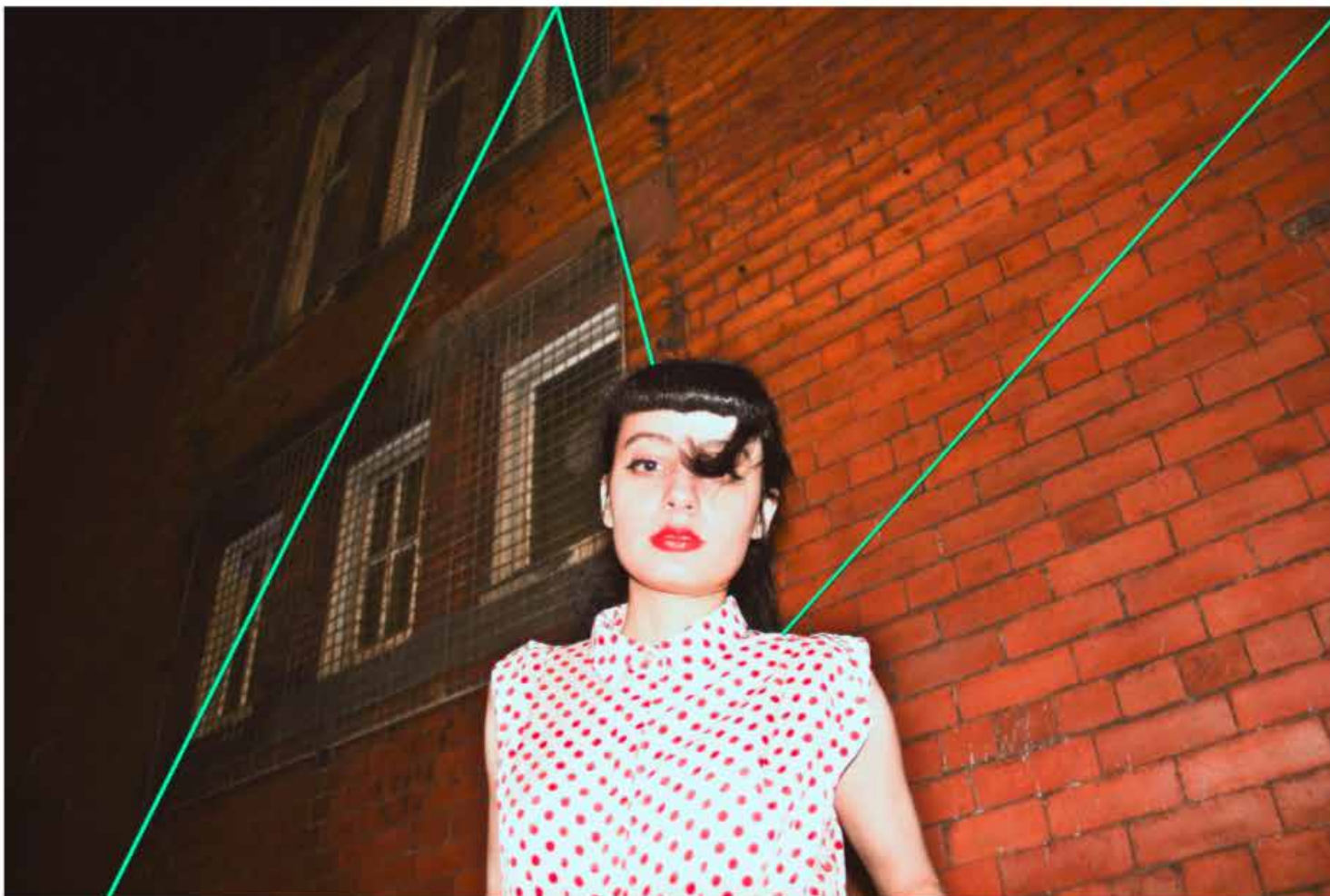
BRYAN M FERGUSON
STRANGE COCKTAIL



BRYAN M FERGUSON
THE DAMAGED MANNEQUINS



BRYAN M FERGUSON
TRAUMA





BRYAN M FERGUSON
WRAPPED IN PLASTIC

TS ROSENBERG

BAIT

His wife's silver body convulses
on the stone table
as he hacks her up for bait.

Water restores, he weeps,
nipping out her stark bare eyes,
plucking green slime from her twitchy skin.

Impatient waves flick the shore.

Clumped in her rainbow gut are flecks of seaweed
she nibbled when she felt empty,
wincing at how it tasted of the sea.

Blood pools in the nicks left by other, duller knives
that chopped up useless flesh for other use.
In the spots where poison dimmed her to dead white
his blade carves her free.

Flayed mermaids
culled from pink shells
twist and wither upon spiny rocks.

He sluices the table,
retrieves the rotten scraps,
hefts the bucket.

Bowing to the water and the hook
he cries for what he'll catch
as he restores her gray morsels
to the ravenous sea.

I WANTED TO EXPLAIN WHY I WAS CRYING

I wanted to explain why I was crying
all those afternoons when you left for an hour to visit your wife
but that would have meant explaining how much I loved
your wife, though I barely saw her in those thirteen months.

I hardly dared to push through her clear polished doors,
seeking her protection from a drizzle-and-slateboard sky,
never sure whether she'd be standing translucent
or forlorn with her stick beside her,
exhausted though it was only half-eleven.

The same thirteen months when this girl
I wanted to write off as an eccentric punk
tossed sticks at my heart, trying to yank me
out of that office with the cracked windows
where I cried till you returned every day from your wife,
praying for the downpour to begin so I could accept
the fatigued glass had given up all chance of protection
and none of us would escape the battering of the rain
and you would finally notice I was crying.

UNSENT

I'm kneeling
the tiles are blurred
I am writing so you understand
this isn't because of you
I don't want to be the sort of girl
pathetic, as if I couldn't live
quite happily
I'm not worth
too brittle and petty
uncaringly volatile
don't blame
I sicken even myself
I'm writing along the side of the tub
by touch
warm and reassuring
even you
can't soften me
trying to be that woman you love
even in disgust
if you knelt
your hands still clean
murmuring
your splendid voice
it will ease
you almost make me believe it will
be well





ANTHONY WEBSTER





ANTHONY WEBSTER

Daniel Reginald Logan struck and killed a child some 4 years ago. He insisted it was an accident and this was all found to be pretty much a fair account of what happened. Forensic evidence even went as far to determine that the child had in fact, technically, struck him. The bike having collided just in front of the fuel cap on the rear left hand side of his Nissan Juke long after he'd entered the Maryhill junction where buildings and traffic obscured his left side peripheral view. Establishing that he had always been an exemplary driver and upstanding family man and considering his swift actions at the scene of the incident to help the injured the court determined it to be an unfortunate and regrettable accident. The charges of manslaughter were dismissed and for the integrity of his own family, the Sheriff wished Reg all the best in moving on from this harrowing incident. Which is proving tough. Anytime Reg is in the Tesco he can hear other parents discuss whether or not it is right to discipline the endlessly wailing boy at his feet or remark that he must be one of these jaded parents who doesn't care and can wait out any tantrum, he even hears some say that they wish they had his patience.

Zoe Reeve carries around the body of her father. An anxious and paranoid man who spent 24 years of her life shouting himself to death at her. Now 6 years a hoarse burden he whispers 'fuckin shite, fuckin shite, fuckin shite.' anytime he's sure there's a lapse in her attention. On her better days at work, maybe she receives a good peer review or feels a friendly 'atta boy' pat on the shoulder or the time the COO pointed at the apish ghoul clinging to her back and directly addressed the busy lips behind her ear, 'You. Wrap it.' she likes to go home and sliding a cowed Arnold Reeve off her shoulders she puts her feet up on his crouched ottoman like frame and reads true crime books. She leaves the TV on to occupy her Dad. During the more jingoistic parts of the news she laughs out loud, 'Fucking Shite!'

Michael Nip's ex wife Ali (nee Anders) scratches at a mastectomy scar long devoid of any feeling to actually itch and bickers with him in his more private moments about how his new wife Olive isn't good enough for him and how if he had ever had 'the fucking gumption to get it up' their child, (Michael insists on a she, Ali knows it'd have been a he) wouldn't be stuck in 'the stupid fuck classes' at St Maurice's. Michael doesn't lie to Olive about what Ali talks about. And he knows how wrong Ali is about Olive from the way Olive always forgives Ali storming out of the dining room. Olive says she can empathise, her own mother's sister was really hurt at being outlived too.

Harriet Bell has trouble going to parties at her age. The literal life of the party, she brings too many of the dead along with her. They crowd up the hallway, the kitchen, the living room, they mingle in the garden and the streets outside. History students at the nearby University of Glasgow consider her the go to source for all local information about the area as she'll definitely know someone who knows someone who will happily swear that they were there at the time. In a minor show of gratitude for all her help over the years, the University's History department have arranged with her sons to move her 80th birthday from the Partick Bowling Club to the more appropriately sized Hampden Park.

Laura Osmanoglu-McIntyre gives a piggyback to her great great grandfather, His Imperial Majesty Mehmet VI and the H.I.H. himself is giving a piggyback to some slighted and embittered thousands upon his own back. Nobody weighs a thing of course but the height and bulk alone of that many people clinging to each other is a terrifying sight. Like everybody else she tries not to let it get in the way of her living her life although the obvious body language of baying and jeering during the homily at St Rose's and the gawping looks of the other parishioners at this mountain of muslim anger generally keep her at the quieter Midnight mass on a Sunday. Monsignor Gallagher from the Immaculate Conception has even offered to perform an exorcism with the help of the whole archdiocese but Laura waves him off. That kind of thing has never really worked out for anybody.

Mario Hines is unemployed. Every Monday he has the same argument with the same jobsworth security guard at the Job Centre about tying them up outside (like, how?) because the jobsworth security guard swears to God he can smell them as if they're really pissing and shitting everywhere and it smells to high heaven he swears to God. After flicking the V's at the jobsworth security guard on his way out of the Job Centre, he heads for the park with all 27 of his former cats and dogs. Sitting on a bench feeding the crusts of a chicken tikka sandwich to the corporeal birds he ignores the 18 medium sized dogs sitting patiently staring at the lunch in his hand and watches the progress of phantom cats which stalk under the bench, hun-ker down then spring forward, passing through their prey and landing with the same look of snappy surprise and confusion. Every single time.

On her way to the supermarket with her nephew Bradley, Jenny Foy's sister Sandra shows up in the back seat of the car. Having left for Birmingham three days ago Bradley is pleased for the surprise appearance of his mum. Jenny breaks into tears behind the wheel, stops dead in the road. Sobbing she asks what happened, 'You don't want to know, but it didn't hurt for as long as I thought it was going to,' 'Why me? Why aren't you sticking with Brad?' Sandra shrugged an apology, 'You don't really get to choose, but for what it's worth, I didn't know what I was going to tell him.' Bradley had turned around in his seat, on his knees peering through the gap in the headrest, 'Mummy I can't hear what you're saying.' Sandra smiles at him and simply mouths, 'I love you.'





DECLAN MALONE
GREY DUNN'S BISCUIT FACTORY





PLENUM

I live with headaches
My face heavy from the whisky
Another
Early
Start

An inchoate idea
Of what a person
Should
Be

My time
Not spent asleep
Is worth the minimum
Permissible by law

I sleep with little rest

I work for no reward

I dream with no ambition

Yet I'm happy despite it all

I wake up to find a goblin piling silk-wrapped lead weights onto my chest between my oesophagus and sternum while muttering unhappily to himself. His tiny clawed feet dig into my stomach where he stands. Quietly he mutters about work and hunger and suffering from a lack of one and too much of the other. I don't make much of this.

The pile is about two feet high now, enough to make my breathing laboured and ragged. I rub the sleep from my eyes and contemplate my next move. My eyes are wet, probably from the harsh halogen light screaming through my window or crying in my sleep.

With the little energy I have I roll onto my side and send the weights tumbling onto the bed. One bounces from the mattress onto the floor and smashes a bottle I had long forgotten about. Tiny, razor-sharp remnants of nights past stare up from the carpet like mountain peaks seen from an airplane. The goblin shrieks and throws his spindly arms into the air. He punches my thigh in frustration, his feeble fists barely registering on my beleaguered nervous system. The goblin leaps onto the bed and begins to gather handfuls of silk to amass his collection of worries. He drags them from the bed to the floor and laboriously pulls them to the corner of the room where he stops to shoot daggers at me, tying the loosened silk around the weights once more in anticipation of my next fitful night's sleep.

Nothing much matters here.

I rub my eyes until my fists are wet with tears and a kaleidoscope of exotic colours paints the inside of my eyelids. A deep, guttural growl from my stomach brings my morning into a sharp, painful focus. The stabbing, gnawing hunger in the pit of my stomach crawls up my windpipe until I can taste the hot bile at the back of my throat. I resist the urge to throw up, knowing that only stomach acid will come out.

Shakily, I ease myself from my bed and stand up, avoiding the broken glass underfoot. En route to the bathroom the goblin giggles and begins to piss on my carpet. A small, steaming puddle of defiance seeps into my beige carpet. A putrid puddle of one-upmanship.

My hands tremble so violently it takes me a few attempts to grasp the door handle to my bathroom and force it downwards. I am immediately confronted with my dilapidated and decrepit reflection. Walls are crumbling. Dry rot in the beams. Foundations built on sand. Water seeps in through the windows. Nobody lives here anymore.

I stand roughly five feet and nine inches tall, less when my posture is considered. My mahogany brown hair is flecked with grey, despite my age, as is my

unkempt beard. The cruel lights above the sink where I stand give my eyes a cold, blue quality; like water under a sheet of ice.

I can count the bones in my torso. My ribs protrude under my tightly wound skin and the outline of my pelvis indicates the transition from my stomach to my groin. My naked, emaciated body creaks and groans like an old house in a storm. One of the lights above the mirror fizzles quietly and burns out, leaving its colleagues to cast lopsided shadows over my thorny frame. I do not have the energy to sigh.

I shake three green ovals into my palm from the open pill bottle by the taps. I keep the bottle open out of fear of being too weak to open it again if I ever close it. I throw them to the back of my throat and choke them down, like swallowing chalk or cinnamon. As soon as they hit my stomach I stop shaking and the rats gnawing at my insides slip into a merciful sleep.

Take as and when hunger becomes unbearable. Do not mix with alcohol. Not a substitute for food. In event of overdose induce vomiting and call ambulance

I chuckle feebly at the idea of calling an ambulance for something as wretched as overdosing on hunger suppressants. My laughter turns into a spluttering coughing fit that I struggle to keep under control. Braced against the sink with my legs spread, as if being searched, I spit the blood that has collected in my mouth down the drain. I watch it stick to the exposed, corroded metal. I can imagine my oxygen-starved haemoglobin oozing through my veins at a snail's pace, drunkenly feeding my organs and lending colour to my pallid skin. I can also imagine it stopping. The dry-rot in the house spreads to the attic.

Dressed now. Stale suit. A shirt that clings to my frame like oil. I avoid myself in the hallway mirror for my own good. No need to compound the obvious. I make my way to the front door of my apartment, hissing viciously at the goblin as I pass. The creature waves its middle finger at me and calls me a cunt. It's probably right.

My name is William Scott and I am, beyond any reasonable doubt, a cunt.

Time I can truly call my own is endangered to the point of extinction. My working hours are typically from the moment I get up to the blissful moment I fall asleep, and even then my dreams are usually so vivid it hardly feels like I slept at all when I wake up to the sound of emails and phone calls. When I am not working I masquerade as someone with a social life; I go out, I interact, I have what many would call fun. I could almost pass as a real person until I am scrutinised further and it becomes apparent that I am nothing more than a person-shaped shell filled with meat.

When I am not worrying about this, I am drinking. While I am paid a moderate wage for my contribution to the world I still cannot afford real food. Few people can. I cannot imagine my ancestors would dream of ingesting the synthetic mush that we are forced to consume to sustain ourselves. I can't stomach the allocated rations and I can't afford fresh food, so like so many others I take hunger suppressants. Six a day, supplemented by a solitary meal of whatever shit they leave at my door. Today, synthetic chicken breast in a mushroom sauce with mashed potato. A veritable feast to someone who has never tasted food; an insult to anyone who has. The government food drops are the only thing keeping Scotland from going the way of Europe, but rationalising does not make the food taste any better. Adapt or starve, they said.

I eye the meal on the ledge next to my door as I leave my apartment. It stares back in contempt. Lumps of grey floating in brown. Potatoes defiantly viscous. Thankfully the pills have taken hold and I have no desire to investigate the package further. Boldly, as I have done so many times before, I step out of my apartment and into the cold, sharp atmosphere of Glasgow.

Immediately I am bombarded with messages.

William, last longer in bed!
These horny girls are waiting for you now!
Have you taken out a loan in the last five years?
Rolexxx cheap!
Fuck local slags in your area!

Each message is more insistent than the last, hovering in softly luminous boxes about a foot above my head. The boxes stoically remain until I dismiss them with a spastic wave of my arms. Recent legislation prevents companies from advertising at eye level, for all the good it does. The messages atomised and revealed the crystal-clear morning sky. The sky fades from a dark navy blue to a lighted hue as it approaches the horizon, the sun just out of eyeshot on the other side of the planet. The moon hangs precariously in the sky, perfectly illuminated. My hangover is wrapped tightly around my body and is smothering my ability to think clearly. My thoughts drift away into a dark haze whenever I focus my attention on anything in particular. My hands tremble in my pockets. I take out my phone and glance at its display. Over 300 messages, most of them marked urgent. Most of them ignored.

The main thoroughfare of the city is completely saturated with bodies of all shapes and sizes, from the emaciated many to the obese few. More advertisements hang in the air offering me a bigger penis or a better mortgage. A blimp, dark grey with a large visual display hanging from its belly tells the world "A

divided Scotland is England". I consider going off the grid for a while to escape the constant bombardment of information, but such a luxury would surely cost me my job.

The glass and steel walkways at either side of the street are hoaching with people and glitter in the winter light. The sandstone elements of the buildings flanking the street only reach the third storey of each structure; the other dozen match the walkways in material and style. Bridges connecting either side of the street, hundreds of feet off the ground, cross and intersect like neurons. On a quiet day you can feel the hum of the traffic underfoot.

I ache.

My office is like a hive and I am the queen. I am fed information by my drones until I am so engorged I cannot move from my chamber. I am information. Bits and bytes, ones and zeroes, whatever you want to call it. I am more information than man. I am watching three of my employees stand across from my desk, hands wringing and sweating, explaining something to me. I don't hear what they are saying. It feels as if my head is underwater and passers-by are shouting for help. The gentle rushing in my ears makes my employees look as if they are miming the words of a song they do not know.

My skin crawls off my skeleton and gathers in a worthless pile on the floor. Unperturbed, the employees do not seem to care that my exposed muscles twitch and quiver with every heartbeat. They soldier on. Slowly my muscles fall from my skeleton, ligaments deteriorate, bones dissolve, until all that is left in my chair is a pulsating sack of vital organs. Blood and bile seep into the expensive leather.

"What should we do, sir?" asked a young woman, mousy and frail. I blink slowly, just once, and focus my attention.

"Say everything you said to me, word for word, to Gordon" I replied, my eyes closed and burning. The three young things rushed out of my office in a flurry of apologies. Hopefully Gordon will be sober enough to deal with whatever is going on.

I can feel every rotten inch of my skin.

PARTS FOR SALE

Emi James

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Thank you for reading The Grind

Submissions for the second edition of The Grind open on the 1st of January 2014.
We will be accepting short fiction, photography, and all forms of visual art. Please see
www.the-grind.co.uk for further details.

