



Paper Swans

ISSUE 3

Foreword

Welcome to the third issue of Paper Swans, an iPamphlet which showcases emerging poets and writers of flash fiction. Should you wish to submit anything for our iPamphlets, you will find details on our [website](#).

Issue 3 Contributors

Stephanie Arsoska

Stephanie lives on the east coast of Scotland with her husband and two children. She has been commended in competitions and has had work published both online and in print including with Word Bohemia and The Emma Press. She is the poetry blogger for Word Bohemia and runs the Virtual Open Mic Night, an online poetry event. You can get in touch with Stephanie via her blog <http://beautifulmisbehaviour.com>

twitter: @StephArsoska

Jacki Donnellan

Jacki has been writing flash fiction for about 18 months. Her work has been published in various places online including 1000Words, Synaesthesia Magazine, Paragraph Planet, FlashFlood Journal and Opening Line Literary Zine, where “My Grain of Self Awareness” was first published. Jacki was the winner of the Flash!Friday 2013 Flashversary contest. She currently lives in the Netherlands, and you can find her more often than she likes to admit on Twitter.

twitter: @Donnellanjacki

Ellie Danak

Ellie Danak is a poet and occasional cartoonist, with a background in researching modern Swedish crime novels, skiing off hills head first and stuffing her face with tiramisu. She lives in Edinburgh and divides her time between her keyboard and/or notebook and Peanut (her toddler-son powered by dried mango). She blogs at <http://poetryandpandemonium.com>

twitter: @PoetryandPandas

Emily Greentree

Emily is a 30 yr old learning disability nurse and Mum to Nancy (16 months old). She lives in Bristol with Nancy and her partner Dan. She has always loved poetry as a way to express herself and even more so since her daughter has been born. Her blog is Tealady Mumbles, where she posts her poetry, book reviews and writes about subjects close to her heart. She loves books, films and cups of tea.

twitter: @ladyemsy

Jade Kennedy

Jade Kennedy is a writer of poetry, prose, flash fiction and a collector of borrowed expressions. She lives in East Yorkshire, UK. Her poetry has been included in various zines and she is now looking to find more homes for her flash fiction and prose. She writes a blog - 'Poetry Musings' at www.jadekennedypoet.blogspot.co.uk

twitter: @JadeJo_Ann

Judith Kingston

Judith Kingston's problem is that she finds it impossible to settle to doing just one thing. Currently she is a writer, poet, translator, illustrator, set designer, teacher and mother of two. Her other talents are rearranging the washing up so it looks as if there is less of it, and stealthily snacking on forbidden items while the kids aren't looking. More from Judith can be found at <http://secretsofthesandpit.wordpress.com>

twitter: @judithkingston

Sarah Miles

Sarah lives in Sussex and writes poetry and flash fiction. She is slightly addicted to Twitter and is loving writing micro poetry in 140 characters or less. Her work has been published both in print and online and her website, <http://supperandsyntax.com>, was listed as 'one to watch' 2014, but she'd prefer you to read it instead. Sarah also enjoys photography and procrastinating.

twitter: @_sarahmiles_

Orla McArt

Orla McArt is a secondary school English and history teacher. She lives on the west coast of Ireland.

twitter: @omcart

Pam Plumb

Pam has had various flash pieces published including the Reader's Digest website in 2013 and most recently in the National Flash Fiction Anthology 'Eating My Words' with a story called 'Seven Breaths'. She also had two stories published online on National Flash Fiction Day, one on the Flash-Flood website (Game Changer) and one on the Writein BlogSpot (Apple Spy). Her website is <http://pamjplumb.wordpress.com/>

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Linda Sprott

Linda is finally returning to her first love of writing, trying out flash fiction and returning to poetry. She has had a piece selected for a pinterest prompt in the past and is working on a crime novel.

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Poppies in the Snow

If only she wasn't the only one who could see the rip in the sky, if only others could see and wonder at it as she had for such a long time. It appeared suddenly on a morning heavy with ice and snow, she had been creating shapes on the glass from her breath when in the corner of the garden a small rip appeared in the sky-line. It was so close to the ground that it parted the snow as it ripped and a small ruby red poppy fell through the gap bringing with it enough warm sunlight to melt a puddle into the harsh overnight snow.

Of course no one could see it or feel it and passed it off as a fairytale so this became her lifelong secret. The days turned to weeks and still the rip was there, never witnessed or talked about by anyone else - she started to doubt herself and took to drawing the fraying rip in the sky every week documenting its change

As that hard winter turned to a wet but vibrant spring the small poppy withered away to be replaced by a scattering of rusted leaves that fell through with a persistent rain. It was then she realised that beyond the tear this world lived in the opposite season and that even night was day - she could sit and watch the full moon rise by the light of a breaking dawn. When she ran through the garden in summer disturbing the dandelion seeds, they would float softly on warm currents and mingle with the delicate snowflakes blown across from the ever growing rip.

It grew higher and wider as she grew up, until as a grown woman, she could stand in front of it watching the winds from both worlds pull and warp the sides tearing it further. It grew to resemble the shape of a lock and it was only a matter of time before she saw another looking back at her.

In The Woods 1

They lost the trail when those pesky birds ate the breadcrumbs. They found the house made of sweets a long time ago. It is sadly in need of repair, greedy pair.

The witch is also long gone. Not in the cooking pot, they are not that barbaric. After having tortured her for her secrets they turned her into a rabid dog, howling through the woods and scaring any trespassers.

Hansel wants to go home. She tells him that they will return soon, they can turn their wicked stepmother into a statue and place her in the garden where the birds can cover her with their droppings. She lies, she has no intentions of going home. Here she is free to do what she wants to do. What spell to use on Hansel?

Small is Beautiful

Take little steps.

Smile. Don't speak.

Do not fill rooms

with the weight of your words.

Breathe the little breaths

of a doll. Make your waist snappable

as the crisp-bread you lunch on.

Be insubstantial as the cardboard breakfast
you might want to skip.

Pray each day to the Scale God.

He will weight your worth at birth

and never stop. The only way is down

baby. Cram yourself into that corner.

Cross arms, legs. Keep hands off

the arm rests of chairs. On stairs

always move out of the way.

Listen, if you must speak calm down dear.

Don't frown, shriek, be shrill or hysterical.

Apologise often, don't interrupt.

Keep manners, move over, make room.

Be fast, fill your plate last and least.

Police each other.

Your brother is watching.

Be a good friend.

Don't end up like her.

Look for the tiniest,
shiniest,
object
in the room and pray
that it is you.

My Grain of Self-Awareness

I have a grain of self-awareness. And I think it's beginning to sprout!

It was planted after we'd been to the art gallery. I liked it there. It was like stamps on envelopes, in the warm. And I bounced, and sometimes, I laughed the paintings out loud! A head in a rock!

I snorted, a bit.

Then my dad came over. He put his hand round my wrist, and told me into my ear that People would think it was very odd, a thirteen-year-old boy laughing and talking to himself like that. He said that perhaps it was time to go home.

So we went home, and I watched telly, and in the quiet bit between the adverts I heard my dad saying to mummy in the kitchen, "But he doesn't have a grain of self-awareness, Jean!"

And I'm sure that in that moment -plop! - my grain of self-awareness was planted!

A teeny green snake's tongue of a shoot must be poking out of the top of my grain now, and a weeny white root is probably sliding out of its bottom, like a little white comma, or a threadworm, which live in your guts and they wriggle in your poo, but they are really not to be

discussed at the table. I know that. It must be because of my grain.

And I expect I'll know more and more things of that nature, because my grain's going to grow and grow. The shoot will stretch fatter and higher till maybe one day, it won't even be a grain of self-awareness any more. It'll be a tree!

And I bet the tree will fill me, so I'm big and strong and rigid, just like any other tree. And I shan't sway in the breeze, not if People can see me. And I won't

laugh out loud, not even if my blossom flies like a thousand pink butterflies in the wind!

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But, for now- I just have a grain.

I'm going to tell my dad about it soon. He'll be really pleased!

But I shall wait till the shoot has grown bigger, and the roots have gone way down deep. Because maybe then I won't dance when I'm happy, no matter who may be watching, and wherever I happen to be.

In The Woods 2

The air is still as if holding its breath. Snuffles break the silence and then tiny footsteps. A flash of red, a tinkling laugh, a gunshot. Little Red Riding Hood has been visiting.

She has a pocket full of money, Granny's pension. Fair exchange she thinks for a basket of cookies and a bottle of gin. She has left her humming and smiling at her imaginary friend in the corner. Old age is not for the weak Red Riding Hood muses.

She reaches the large oak tree in the centre of the wood and there is the fox waiting for her. He takes her money and gives her the pills that makes life bearable, that adds colour to her existence. Growing up near the woods, home schooled, she has never mixed with her peers.

The only other contact in her life is the woodcutter, waiting for her in the wooden hut deeper in the woods. He has taught her about life, about love. They very rarely venture out, him being wanted for crimes of cruelty against animals. He taught her to be the hot shot that she is, the Annie Oakley of the New Forest.

Marching Band

“Emma, you can’t.” It was the skirt. Emma had only got as far as three steps down the stairs before being sent back up to change into her trousers. “I don’t care what you wear when you go out with your friends – I mean, I do, but you know – this is the marching band. People will see.”

“You mean the neighbours. The neighbours will see. And think you’re a bad mother. And then what will happen?” The ice cold analysis of the fifteen year old mind.

“You’re too clever by half. Just do as I say and change into your nice, neat trousers.” Elizabeth dashed a stray curl out of her eyes and quickly turned off the gas under a pan of potatoes. Dinner was late. And probably not very nice. And she wished her daughter had more sense of decorum than brains, instead of the other way round.

When Emma reappeared, five minutes later, her outfit could only be described as ironic. Elizabeth didn’t know anyone else who could be sarcastic and compliant at the same time, but Emma had managed it. She was impeccably dressed, in a white shirt and black trousers, her sash neatly ironed and arranged exactly as it should over her left shoulder, her badge polished, her hair in a neat bun, pins holding back any wayward strands. She was not wearing any make up and her shoes were neatly polished. Her flute was tucked under her arm.

“I’m ready to go,” Emma announced calmly.

“Well, let’s have dinner first. Where’s your brother?”

“Probably getting beaten up on his way home,” Emma mused as she took her seat at the table. “You might want to see to the pork chops. They’re curling at the edges.”

Elizabeth bit her lip and launched the chops onto three plates, where they bounced and skidded in an unappetizing way. She was beyond caring. They only had about five minutes to eat it now anyway. As she ladled mealy potatoes and an

amorphous mush of carrots and peas onto the plates, the front door opened. It was Shaun, preceded by his tuba.

“I can’t play.” his muffled voice came from behind the instrument.

“What was that? Speak up, boy!” his sister jeered.

“I can’t play!” Shaun wailed, dropping the tuba on the couch and revealing a muddy, tear-streaked face, a swollen lip, a black eye and worst of all – a missing tooth.

Elizabeth rushed to his side and swept him into her arms, muttering expletives and reassurances alternately. Shaun sobbed in heart-breaking abandon, only managing to reveal between wet snorts and snuffles the name of his assailant, which did not surprise either of the two women. It was Michael, of course.

Finally, Shaun calmed down a little and announced: “I’ve still got it.” It was said a little proudly, as if this made everything better.

“You’ve still got what, squirt?” Emma asked.

Shaun dipped his hand in his trouser pocket and fished out a handkerchief. He unfolded it carefully and held it out for his mother and sister to see. In it was a small, ivory, bloody tooth.

They all stared at it, mesmerised, while dinner became increasingly inedible on the table. In the churchyard, the marching band waited in vain for its flute and tuba players to appear.

Alphabodical

A is for apples of my cheeks, I stole them from your tree.

B is for bat wings that carried me through bottomless nights.

C is for C- scar, what do you think of Joker's smile?

D is for diets, go on and go hungry if you please.

E is for endless plains of undiscovered terrain, let me take you there.

F is for fool, out of the two, Hardy's suit fits me best.

G is for guilt wrapped in silver cellophane.

H is for heart, mine has 85% cocoa content and the rest is history.

I is for illusionist and mine lives behind your rear view mirror.

J is for jelly, would you like a spoonful?

K is for kilograms, but I would rather talk about key lime pies.

L is for lines in my face that I slip on every day.

M is for milk, I used to squirt out pints.

N is for not your business, it's between the scales and me.

O is for octopus, just because I can put it in a poem.

P is for perfect when the legend is dead.

Q is for queen, so be ready to catch your head.

R is for Romeo, for only he knows my true name.

S is for stretch-marks, admire my tigress' stripes.

T is for thighs, or tree trunks, either way, give them a hug.

U is for universally unique as unicorns are.

V is for vengeance of the slimming creams.

X is for Xerox, yes, I am the only copy.

Y is for yes, I was born like that.

Z is for zero that I'll never squeeze into.

Light Shadow

We are taught that we are blessed - too far away and all life would never have begun, the earth would have become as cold and lifeless as iron. Too close and our planet would have raged under clouds of toxins and withered under its own suffocating heat. We live perfectly, travelling through a green and vibrant celestial sea around our young sun.

We saw our fellow traveller early in the 1700's through a modern telescope, a work of art sculpted out of bronze and glass by an avid Irish stargazer. Best seen at dusk, close to the setting sun it was named 'Scáth Éadrom' meaning 'Light Shadow', we were suddenly not alone in our tranquil green sea and this planet faced us, as our shadow from across the stars. Many poems and stories followed its discovery and its magic worked its way into our fairy tales and myths.

Some said the people living there were giants of fortune and abundance, they lived and breathed in silver and gold, every wish cast during a waxing moon upon Light Shadow was sure to be granted. In some tales this was a planet of red and deep madness, of a people that lived in caves with no eyes or mouths and knew nothing of their own or our existence and that wishes cast, could not be seen by blind eyes or that blindness itself would befall the hopeful.

As the years carried us forwards technology shone a curious light on 'Light Shadow' and it was discovered to be a fruitful Eden, green and lush like our own, with land and sea, a large atmosphere, even more curiosity was created by these discoveries. Scientists wrote book after book of theories, meanings and predictions, gave heated and grand debates. Technology could not evolve fast enough, we were falling over ourselves to find a way to finally speak over the void of space. When the time came to broadcast our voices to our long unknown neighbours it was greeted with uncontained joy and time consuming preparation. Our world was for once deathly silent as the greeting was carried into space, breath held, heartbeat quietened, children silenced, history was waiting. We received nothing more than white noise and a heartbreaking quiet.

Wounded

Wounded, she was attracted to darker places- dingy pubs, tucked behind the bright lights of more civilised establishments- where the toilets were grimy and there was a blue haze in the air.

Biker's helmets were propped against the bar. Barstool occupant's drunken eyes glistened in expectation and thoughts of her bare young flesh focused their minds. In the world of drunken men, she was a wounded gazelle in hyena territory.

They bought her alcohol and stared intently into her eyes. She soaked it up; vodka, bourbon, gin. Through slurred words she made the one with the bulbous nose promise to love her and she brushed her heart from her sleeve and pinned it to his lapel. There it burned bright, or perhaps that was that the lights of the on-coming cars they passed on their unsteady feet. Her lucky night, she thought, and with the love of a drunken man she leaned on his elbow, needing a little support.

Sorrow

He poured his past into a tumbler.
Full of regret he drank it down,
wiped his mouth on his sleeve
and belched out his future.

In The Woods 3

There are three of them looking through the window. A broken chair, an empty bowl beside two others. On the floor, a woman lay crying. Upstairs a tiny bed had been slept in. Every day this scenario, when will she stop?

It should have been hers, all this. Until the blonde had fluttered her eyelids at daddy bear, nuzzling at his chest. He didn't stand a chance. She had tickled baby bear until he had screamed at her to stop, giggling and smiling at her.

She wants her life back, her routine, the porridge, the walk in the woods, coming back to eat. She wants to be the one sitting in daddy bear's lap, the one who baby bear cries out for in the night.

Her eyes are closed tight. Perhaps when she opens them again it will all have been a dream, no Goldilocks and she would have her family again. There are three of them looking through the window.

Escape

All alone
You wait

A white room
No friendly face
You want to leave this place.

Hope glimmers faint
Unseen or heard
Promises made
Broken
Mistrusting of the word

Home
Where is home
There with your wife
If you can't be with her
What is the point of life?

Days drag on
Pull you to another morn
A way to escape
Your only means
To say no, to scorn

Your voice it goes
A silence deafens
No need to say again
You've found release
You've let it go
Float high into the heavens.

Quarry

The quarry is almost empty. Just you and him and some birdsong you don't recognise. In the vastness your footsteps echo his as you climb the shaley side. Sunlight darts through the thin canopy of the silver birches, making you dip your head and look at your feet that tread on sharp-edged slices of discarded slate. You breathe in tandem, but you only hear his rasping ins and outs so that it seems he's taking each breath for you, whether you like it or not.

Near the top you think you hear voices. And you stop. Yes. Shadows of laughter chasing themselves round the old minings. He stands in front, hands on hips, the sweat bleeding through his t-shirt and you try to remember how it felt when you raked your fingers along his spine. For pleasure.

'Look.' He turns and smiles at you. 'There's water.' He stretches out his arm and reels you in as always, whether you like it or not. You lean over the edge. A deeper, deep pit is below. Within pushing distance. Aqua-green water fills the bottom of this giant dirty basin. Slimy lichen limes the grey slate in places and other rocks show off their copper heritage. The sun bathes the cavern, illuminates the dregs of the sluice as if it is the Great Barrier Reef.

You look for the source of the voices. Like a hall of mirrors, the laughter bounces off the rocks, playing hide and seek. You lean further, holding onto a silvery branch, its bark peeling at your touch. He grabs you, hard by the elbow. 'Steady. We don't want any accidents, do we?' You look at him. He is smiling. He is still happy.

Pulled back from the edge, you continue the walk, crunching the slate beneath your boots. Whether you like it or not.

Reconciliation

I see, my love, that all those years gone by
Have made no change to how we intertwine.
With ease I sat and oft caught in your eye
A flash of longing similar to mine.
We talked of times when, lost in love, I wept
And, unbeknownst to you, my salted tears
Would wash away the freshened hope I'd kept
Until your silence reaffirmed my fears.
But time has passed and soothed away the pain,
And in its wake what's left is you and I.
To meet afresh, to laugh and to remain
In harmony together, 'til we die.
So bid me welcome with a lovers' kiss
And let my mind be void of all but this.

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