



Paper Swans

ISSUE 1

Foreword

Welcome to the first issue of Paper Swans, an iPamphlet to showcase emerging poets and writers of flash fiction.

Issue 1 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

Helen Braid

Helen Braid is 37 years old and lives on the Scottish West Coast with her husband, their young children and an over-active imagination. She is a graphic designer and illustrator who started blogging and has been unable to stop. Helen has grand designs on a stone built cottage by the sea. Watch this space...

Find Helen via her blog <http://allatseascotland.blogspot.co.uk>

twitter: @EllieAllAtSea

A. B. Cooper

Anna is a recent convert to poetry writing, enjoying the challenge of crafting form, structure, narrative and language in such a condensed form. She also enjoys writing short stories for both adults and children and is about to embark on writing her first full-length novel. She can be seen sharing her work on YouTube,

Here at 1:26:

<http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=LBEgIfnYU9w>

And here at 1:28:

<http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=PjvWOWBhOM4>

twitter: @MonochromeThief

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>

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Judith Kingston

Judith Kingston is a professional language nerd and general know-it-all. She makes time for writing by completely ignoring the housework. More from Judith can be found at <http://secretsofthesandpit.wordpress.com>

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Sarah Miles

Sarah lives in Sussex with her husband, three children and two dogs. She writes poetry and flash fiction and has been published both in print and online. More of her work can be found at <http://supperandsyntax.com>

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Elizabeth Savory

Elizabeth lives in a little cottage at the foot of the Malvern Hills where, after many years, she is re-discovering her love of writing. Her collection of poetry and stories can be found on her blog, <http://waitingtoblossom.blogspot.co.uk>

twitter: @waiting2blossom

Psychedelic Love

I dream you in colour;
Rainbow fantasies of summer days,
Hands held and kisses sending me so high
Our hands reach to the sky and surrender to the sensation.
My fairground ride;
Coaxing me with the promise to fulfil,
Flying me higher and higher until you take my breath.
The world is blurred beneath us as we spin and cling and
thrill.
Giddy with your touch, morning heralds our descent
I peep through my fingers
And the world is grey.

The Flood

You rain kisses
On me,
Until I am saturated
In you.
And drenched in desire
I dance
In your stormy eyes.

Your love floods
Through me,
Until I am covered
By you.
On hungry waves of lust
You seep
Uninvited into every thought

Your hands wash
Over me,
Until I am submerged
In you
Beneath dark clouds of need
I'm pulled
Helplessly away on your current.

But what, when the sun comes
Once more?
For a while like diamonds will
We shimmer?
And catch glimpses of rainbows
We'll seek
Treasures always just out of reach?

Or will wordlessly your waters recede
From me,
Until parched and thirsty,
I wilt.
So all that remains of the deluge
Of you
Is the foul, brown, rotting silt.

Ellis Hall

I rather like endings. The last steep straight hurtling towards the inevitable swift fall into something altogether new. The opportunity - once again - to reinvent.

New year suits me well in that respect. I'm young enough, yet, to see a plethora of opportunity laid in wait. I'm waiting, I think, for the absolute, unexpected twist.

Eleanor says I must find a way to be content. That those possessing of an ill unrestful nature as good as let the devil in - that I am lucky in my home, in my position and in my wealth.

She is wrong about that - and on leaving this house and its garden I am increasingly and wholeheartedly intent.

It's been the easiest decision to make - in the small hours of the past 3 months while I've seldom slept. It's where I go from here that fills me with apprehension if not dread. I'm known in these parts - by name and by face. Estranged from the house I possess neither family, income, nor estate.

But I shan't remain. For I'd lose my sanity here - amongst god-forsaken walls where the past keeps its grip on the present day. I'd go mad in such a place.

Should you glance me in my haste to be gone - hold your tongue. I invite you not into my tale of woe. We know evil here at Ellis Hall. Stay off the road, stay off the track, and should I pass by - bolt your door.

Another Life

This is not the future I imagined.
It's not the debonair cocktail party-
dinner party-brunch affair
I had in mind back then.

It also lacks that academic sheen.
Where are the eyebrow-knitting afternoons
in lunchrooms swapping papers
that will change the world
using only our superior logic
and five syllable words?

This house full of love and life
the garden and the dishes and the job,
the husband and the child –
My teenage visions scorned this life
as far too humble and too tame.

I knew everything then, I knew best.
My mind sharp, racing at speed
ahead, always ahead
to the next horizon
getting there first, getting there faster.

Love was a trope
Love was an equation
a tricky hypothesis
a treacherous drug
a rumour
a whisper
a lie

When you hold me I know
that we live in the landscape
I used to thunder past
in my train en route to glory
and fame.

Thank you for these colourful days
for the music, the sun through the curtains,
for your arms around me,
for your wit and your wisdom –
thank you for your love
and for our child.

This is the only future
that can truly change the world
for good.

Power Cut

Lights gone out,
4 o'clock or there about,
power cut and getting dark and find the candles now.

Find the torch,
find a book and cuddle up,
tell him stories of the dark and wait for power on.

But knew it then,
dullest ache and cramping pain,
solid, heavy, broken heart and happening again.

I would like to flick a switch and wake up someone else.

And it was like,
your leaving turned the street lamps out,
took the life and took the soul and took an inner fight.

Stood and wept in darkened hall in last of fading light.

And there and then,
smashed to million smithereens,
I decided love could only break and bleed and end.

Yet heart and beat, consultant screen, I watched it start again.

The Unspoken

First glimmer of life flares in darkness.
Floating grain settles,
Probes,
Leaches.

From that very moment it has you:
Protector
Provider
Host

The twisted cord binds, bonds,
Strengthens day by day.

You make r o o m;
You make a room.

It expands,
You contract:

Your space,
Your life,
Your ambition.

Your body.

You labour to push it from you,
Coruscating and shrieking,
Inevitable and necessary separation
Of two
Bodies,
Minds,
Selves.

Neatly pruned apart.

'Would you like to cut the cord?'

The taking back of wife and life,
Loaned for a period to another.

But binding cords remain:

Creeping ivy,
Inextricably twisted,
Enmeshing your brain.

Every emotion.

Every decision.

Every ambition.

Every day, hour, minute, second:

Taken.

Until you are the grain,
Floating silently in darkness,
Binding cords twisting far away,
Still nourishing
Until your last glimmer is

Extinguished.

Tiger Mother

There she melts into the lonely rock,
on my side of the invisible wall
grass marinades in human smells. I follow her
glassy gaze fixed on reveries
of jungle beats, her estate, prey, days spent.
Six cubs drape a comet round her head,
skulk behind bars of tiger nature.
Her chest swells while mine ebbs
with my baby's breath.

I inhale her silence on this afternoon
caught in a net of broken plates.
She shields a cub caught in my lens.
Shadow of her tail bites my hand.

Dinner

We were going out to dinner.

Hors D'oeuvres

I rifle through my wardrobe, my fingers lingering over anything black. Jonathan prefers me to wear 'something cheerful', but I want funereal black. I happen upon that dress, you know, the one I wore when we first met. I smile as I pull it from its hanger, my memories of your hands on it. I haven't worn it since, leaving it anchored to the rail in sensuous guilt. As I slip it up over my body it smoothes my thighs as your hands did and rests gently upon my breast.

Starter

'Christie! Darling, you look gorgeous. Come on in. Edward and Sal are in the lounge and Adam's here too. He works with John and Martin.'

You stood by the window, nursing a whisky. Jonathan introduced us and I recall you mispronounced my name.

'Lovely to meet you, Christine.'

'It's Christie, and likewise.'

'Christie...' The word lingered on your breath.

Main

I felt your leg lean against mine; I didn't pull away. We chatted, discussed the untimely death of Eddie Cochran and our faux-shock at the recent unabridged publication of 'that book'. But we had both read it, mine secreted from Jonathan's disapproval in an envelope in my bureau, yours by your bed.

Dessert

You had a deadline to meet and I had a headache coming on so we left them to it and you drove me home. You said I tasted sweet, like chocolate and I let you over-indulge. You swept aside my hair and kissed my neck whilst you unfastened the zip of my black dress. As it fell to my ankles your hands followed and you scooped me up and took me to your bed.

Coffee

We lay together, tangled. You brought me coffee and we giggled as you read that book to me and we re-enacted page 138. I had never felt like that before. Or since.

Brandy

I look at myself in the mirror and wonder if you will be there. I feel the familiar flutter of nerves and longing and slip a valium into my mouth to numb them and chase it with a swirl of brandy.

I physically flinch as Jonathan comes in, 'Christie? Oh, you went with the black. Well, come on or we'll be late. I'll meet you downstairs.'

I call after him, 'Sorry, dear. I'm almost ready, let me just finish putting on my face. Who's coming tonight?'

'The usual crowd. Oh, and Adam, do you remember him? You met him a couple of years ago, at Jane and Martin's.'

My cheeks flush brightly as I emerge from the bedroom.

'Ah, that's better,' said Jonathan, 'you've got a bit of colour in your cheeks!'

I smile. For the first time in two and a half years, I genuinely smile. And we leave.

Snow Day

Ink dark hush.
Sliver of silver pierces, eerily bright.
Unnaturally silent.
Promising.
Whispers of breath condense briefly,
Ghosts vanishing in darkness.

Padding to the window,
Stomach tight,
Curtains pool darkly at my bare feet,
Draped with weighty expectation.
Fabric parts reluctantly, hanging heavy in my palms.

Frigid air presses in:
Stealing breath,
Prickling skin,
Shrinking,
Contracting.

Soft silver glow suffuses silently,
Seductive.
Unseen.
Occluded glass teases:
Overgrown with
Ferns, fronds, tendrils,
Scattered with stars, illuminated with moon's refracted glow.
Icy crystalline beauty a sheer, brief veil,
Soon to slip forgotten to reveal soft shapes beyond.

A finger licked and pressed melts a tiny porthole.
Eye to glass,
Spying nervously - as if through a keyhole -
Undulating, shimmering white curves are revealed.

Delight explodes from my core,
Bubbling up my throat...

Swallow sound.
Lock it down deep.
Embrace joy silently.

Slipping back into a womb of feathery warmth,
I watch as sky leaches its ink to turquoise and pale lemon.
A curled, soft blonde shape shifts and sighs beside me:
The first cry of joy belongs to them.
No need to hurry.
Stolen snow day stretches with promise.

Fighting the Thaw

The fire crackles and dances in your eyes,
Fast flicker flames mimic my heart.
Clouds of breath whisper 'I love you',
We cosy up and are knitted together
In jumpers and sock and scarves.

A brandy. Another, and to bed we go.
Crisp sheets envelope us, two bodies warming the frigid cotton.
Moulding to our shape, they succumb to our yearning.
Chill winter nights, fusing frozen bodies,
We Eskimos of love.

The Decision

Life is punctuated by moments such as these. Cross-roads if you like, where maybes and what-ifs stretch out for miles ahead of you. And you stand rooted to the spot, at the cross road, looking to the horizon in each direction, searching, desperately trying to catch a glimpse of the ‘right way’ to go. But the elusive happiness you are chasing is just too far away for you to see.

There’s no one to ask for help at times like this. Only you can make the decision. Of course people will have their opinions; they will tell you the should do’s or the ought to’s. But all that fades into soft white noise when the moment comes.

It’s too hard, you whisper to yourself. You think about giving up..but you can’t. Or you try to hand responsibility over to destiny; what will be will be. But fate doesn’t play ball; it blocks your view, takes down all road signs and drums its fingers while it awaits your decision.

It’s up to you. You have to decide.

This is where we find Anna. At one such cross road. Here, on this crisp, clear winter’s evening standing beneath the gnarled oak tree that is naked but for one tiny leaf glimmering orange in the glow of the streetlight. The bitter cold pinches her cheeks, making her look flushed. Yet the blame lies not solely with the weather.

Time slows, at it always does in these moments, and gives her the chance to look back at the road that has brought her here. It is littered with memories and experiences; each one significant, each one shaping and moulding the person she is now. The person she is yet to become.

She has long since given up on living a life without regret, for such a life does not exist. Time was when she would look back on her years fearfully, thinking of the things she hadn’t done, hadn’t said, hadn’t listened to. But regret is something we chose to feel in the present. And every decision, every step along our path, comes with a regret of sorts - regret for that which we have done, or for that which we haven’t. We just have to chose which is the lesser of the two.

So as Anna looks up at the stars that peek from between the silvery moonlit branches, she and she alone must decide the road to take next. Her eyes smart in the icy wind that blows and sets her hair dancing behind her. She blinks away full, warm tears, that begin to roll from her eyes, before wiping them from her cheek with a black woolly glove.

Her heart is pounding and she feels intoxicated by the cocktail of excitement and trepidation. How is it possible that she can yearn for the safety and security of one path, and yet, at the same time, ache with desire for another?

He stands behind her, waiting. She can feel him without even touching him such is the pull of these two souls on this dark, frosty night.

Slowly she draws her gaze away from the stars, and clocks and pendulums around the world speed up once more, bringing time right again.

She has made her choice.

And as she turns to face her decision, as if it dare not look, the last leaf finally breaks free from the clutches of the branch of the old oak tree and skips away on the breeze into the night.

After the Rain

The house underwater is an echo,
wallpaper peeling like burnt skin
and reflected in the muddied water
my face after you.

I twisted the rag of me dry,
released every drop of your moisture
but still I carry the stain of your river mouth,
the wet lick of you, dark by the front door
sandbagged fierce against the rain.

I have mastered the art of camel,
cactused myself against the need
for even a dripping tap.

Come summer the house will empty itself,
but the brick's water scars
will shine in the winter sun.

One Year Gone

First summer closing, streets returning
from languor-filled summer spaces
to the frantic thorough-fare
that busy generations share
now with hopeful hearts and faces
new start, new dawn, new time of learning

First summer gone and the world is turning
from sunshine lingering and delaying
sharing evenings with the moon
back to early bedtime soon
chill on the wind and colours greying
so nature keeps on turning and returning

Your first summer gone and you are learning
to stand, speak, walk, never slowing,
expert now, you've seen it all
one year gone, now back to fall
I mustn't, cannot, stop you growing
As you run on, never turning or returning

The Daffodils were in Attendance

The day you gave my hand away in love
the daffodils were gathered like spring rain.
Ballerina's poised in yellow dance
like easter kisses painting the damp earth.

Years later trumpeted in feathered gold,
we scattered you in clouds of ashen grey.
They skirted sorrow, yellow, butter soft,
and stood with us, their gentle heads held low.

Sarah

Apple dapples
Broken beams,
White heat spots on soft brown skin;
Green shadows shifting, cooling,
Shimmering across
Four shins.

Ice tinkles; condensation beads.
Conversation leaves
Beneath the leaves.

Sun flares ember-red through closed lids.
Stillness.
Peace.

Sometimes we examine meticulously:
Literature,
Art,
Theatre,
Religion,
Politics,
Education,
Gender:

Engender free spirits;
End gender limits.

Words tumbling like
Otters riding rapids,
We cook, drink, draw, read, write, dance, sing, play, laugh,
Share.

Confide.

Hurts.

Fears.

Rage.

Children.

Marriage.

Sex.

Hopes.

Dreams.

Ambitions.

Wooded trails,

Cocktails,

Dim bars,

Parched grass,

Warm kitchens,

No bitching.

She nourishes.

Long arms,

Rivers of dark hair,

Aromas envelop me.

She fills my belly,

Feeds my soul.

My Venn friend:

Part of me; separate entity.

Dear Katherine

I do remember her from those years. Hair the colour of chestnuts and lipstick a vivid smear. She was taller than you are today, but the same smile. Laughed in that way of throwing her head back and shaking from the inside. Wore a perfume the tracks of my memory can no longer find.

Tucked you in tight. Chased you in pyjamas and pulled you to her lap - come that time of evening you wanted no-one else. Sang you lullabies, stroked your face, and closed the door running tired fingers through her hair. Complained to me there were not enough hours in the day. She sat late at night, columns and letters - diaries for a time - at a scored wooden desk drinking tea, and of the weekends, wine.

Moved us from a semi in town to the edge of the land. Stood by the window in that cottage only metres from the sand. Whistled, she told me, to the tide. Walked on the beach and lit a fire in the blackened iron grate come night. We danced there sometimes - on the tiled floor of the kitchen by refrigerator light.

She loved me, I'm sure of that. She loved you with an ease I had never witnessed around anyone else. Dressed you in your apron on a Sunday afternoon. Made you cakes and watched you lick the bowl and baby wooden spoon.

It broke my heart to lose her - and it utterly bewildered you.

Letters came, in the first few months, elaborate apologies and rambling words. Time and space and excuses I've long since forgot. I didn't keep them, I'm sorry for you that I tore them up - but try and understand how their very existence ripped me apart.

Its been over 20 years since I saw her handwriting land upon the mat.

And the urge to stamp, to burn or tear or shred the thing apart. Toss it to sea and wash my hands of ink and salt and decades now of hurt.

But this time it's your name I read in her curling, handwritten font.

And more than plain resolve, more than days and nights and years of coping on our own. It takes every ounce of love for you that I have ever known.

Against my better judgement, against the brother and son that I've become,
against her late incoming tide -

I give you back our Mum.

When all is said and done

and we have dealt the insults,
laid down our decks of grievances,
I am like a jug
that carries water to the well and back,
not feeling its handle broke.

I decide my best bet is to bluff: *Darling,*
no point in crying over spilled disappointments.

Skeletons at Midnight

behind the door was not
the shallow grave of dead secrets

but Narnia

Deeper now, and richer
are the colours of your face
against this backdrop.

These chords I hear
for the first time
change the meaning of the melody
that you are to me.

And here, for you, is my symphony.

These former selves are not us
just trailing shadows that lead
to now
and who we are
and will be:
two women
on a couch at midnight
with a cup of tea.

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Dear Katherine**

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