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Paper Swans

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ISSUE 2

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# Foreword

Welcome to the second issue of Paper Swans, an iPamphlet to showcase emerging poets and writers of flash fiction. We have enjoyed submissions from a variety of writers and hope you enjoy the diversity of style and subject included in this issue.

## Issue 2 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

### ***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

### ***Kirsty Fraser***

By day, Kirsty is a student finishing a media degree. By night, she is a music blogger and writer, contributing to various music blogs and magazines based in Scotland. She has been a partner and contributor to Glasgow based music promotion company NHC Music for the last two years.

As well as this she regularly reviews music for *Is This Music?*, contributes features to Scotland's biggest student magazine *ScotCampus* and has been known to wax lyrical about album artwork for *Sabotage Times*. She also runs her own blog – *Suffrockettes* - aimed at promoting the women who make the unsigned and independent scene rock.

Last year, Kirsty's short story *The Diving Belle* was successfully published with Irish literary magazine *The Bohemyth* and she continues to write short stories and flash fiction, though most of it ends up in the recycling bin of her desktop. When not agonising over the placing of a comma, Kirsty enjoys watching old movies and daydreaming about marrying Bruce Springsteen.

*twitter:* @KirstyFwrites

## ***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

## ***Kristina Metcalf***

Kristina lives on the south coast of England with her partner, three children and two cats. She writes novels and novellas for fun, regularly participates in NaNoWriMo and has a great enthusiasm for technology. She blogs: [www.kristinametcalf.wordpress.com](http://www.kristinametcalf.wordpress.com) and [www.muddledmanuscript.co.uk](http://www.muddledmanuscript.co.uk)

*twitter:* @rantybeast and @muddledms

## ***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\_

## ***Jane Roberts***

Jane Roberts is a freelance writer living in Shropshire, UK. She has been published in magazines, ezines and anthologies – including: “Subtext” (2009), “100 Stories for Haiti” (2010), “New Sun Rising: Stories for Japan” (2012), “Dark Clouds by Collective Unconscious” (2013), and “Stories for Homes” anthology (2013). Litro Magazine (Victoriana Issue, 2013). Cease Cows Magazine (August 2013).

Long-listed for Fish Publishing Flash Fiction 2013, Shortlisted for Bridport Prize Flash 2013, Winner of Writers and Artists Flash Fiction 2013. NFFD 2014 - Micro-Fiction Competition Shortlist.

<http://janeehroberts.wordpress.com/>

*twitter:* @JaneEHRoberts

## ***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

## ***Madelaine Smith***

At the age of four when asked if she wanted to be a hairdresser or a nurse when she grew up Madelaine answered that she would rather be a poet. Now that she has grown up she thinks she ought to get on with it.

*twitter:* @MadelaineCSmith

## ***Tinman***

Tinman is Alan Owens and he is from Greystones, a town about 20 miles south of Dublin. He has a blog called Worth Doing Badly ([www.tinman18.wordpress.com](http://www.tinman18.wordpress.com)) which he's had for six years now. He writes under the name Tinman, which he chose after he had to get a pacemaker in 2008.

On his blog he writes some personal anecdotes, but mostly he writes what he hopes are funny stories.

*twitter:* @TinmanDoneBadly.

## ***Bart Van Goethem***

Bart Van Goethem, 41, Brussels, Belgium, is a father, a copywriter, a drummer and the author of the self-published and sold out 'Life's too short for long stories', a collection of micro-fiction (2012). The one word story 'The Meaning of Life' was published in 'Scraps', the anthology for National Flash Fiction Day 2013 in the UK. In 2014 several one sentence stories have been published in e-zines. Follow him on [facebook.com/lifestooshortforlongstories](https://www.facebook.com/lifestooshortforlongstories).

*twitter:* @bartvangoethem.

# A History of Rockets

Let me tell you this: history is a nonsense.  
They blanked me out of their books, their stories,  
their minuscule minds but here is the truth:  
Take a pinch of stolen black powder,  
a man in a moon, a love of the light  
and the blackest of nights -  
this is the real history of rockets.

And me? I was a lamp makers daughter,  
girl of the light before stars were born,  
who felt the pull of the moon embrace her  
like soft silver, luring her up, up and beyond  
the once smooth surface, to the man inside.

‘You can not marry the man in the moon’  
they warned, but his light was a silver dawn,  
and his face like white glass, he turned me  
like a tide, towards his shore.

I would like to pretend the next part was hard,  
but it was as easy as falling up.  
I tunneled through that town like a mole  
in the dark, stole every lamp, paper lantern,  
each burning clay pot. They called me Light Thief,  
spat at my name. Their darkness made it so easy to see.

I cradled that first born rocket like the baby  
I would never have until his face shone across  
the water, the rocket, my eyes, the match  
and boom. I missiled my way to the moon,  
my man and my love.

And here is where I wish to let go.  
Be a history book instead of a truth.  
But some of us don't get the privilege  
of rewriting the facts, the lies of the past  
are the presents we gift ourselves.

He saw me coming, his light was so strong  
I closed my eyes a moment too long,  
landed the wrong side of him, the dark side.  
Here there is no light but my tears  
which I scatter into the night sky hoping to see a flash  
of his face, but I never do. I am a shadow girl now  
and shadows do not get redemption  
not even in the history books.

# The Girl who Tastes Colour

Picture this: me in cute little flats – red; just above the knee dress – royal blue; hair – black, long, flowing, no fringe - never suited one; my necklace is tat, worth less than I paid for it and that was next to nothing, but I love it just the same. It's a red stone buffed up all shiny and new, hanging off a piece of red velvet that fastens on a dull, gold clip at the back.

When I first spoke to him I was top to toe in black - having a dark day. Grey clouds had literally gathered over a sodden skyline and I always dress reflecting my mood. I guess it gave him the wrong impression.

He's a rocker. All washed out jeans and belt-buckle angst. I'd already seen him around, he was a regular in a pub I frequented from time-to-time. Always the same three t-shirts on rotation – AC/DC, Black Sabbath and Dio. It was sweet, you knew what you were getting with him.

When we started going out I left the red dresses and the green tops on the hangers. They didn't seem appropriate next to his sullen, rocker ways. But I wanted to play Linda to his Paul or Yoko to his John, the black couldn't last. Spring blossomed into Summer and with it came the floral prints, yellows and reds. He said I looked good but why was I making so much effort just to go to the shops?

We'd talk late into the night. I asked him what he thought the sky would taste like on a sunny day. The question baffled him. I explained: 'To me the sky would taste like hot blueberry pie with soothing, cool vanilla ice cream.' I told him how much I loved poetry and he laughed, said: 'How can it have more than one meaning?' All the while the same three t-shirts were on rotation. AC/DC, Black Sabbath, Dio...

Leaves fell, scattering on the ground in sways of browns, rich reds and burnt oranges. I opened up to him more, told him about the connection I could have with a song just from hearing the opening bars; how I liked to pull apart the lyrics and figure out what was really going on. He replied: 'What was to understand? It's only a lyric; the guitar solo was what it is really all about.'

I wondered at night how we could be so different yet love each other still. We had a fight. I told him everything I felt. He looked wounded: 'Yeah, well you live in a bubble where you can taste colours, and everything means something else.'

I mulled it over.

Ice formed on cracked pavements... We forgot the fight and stayed up late watching re-runs of Wonders of the Solar System, amazed at how big the Universe was and how little our lives meant by comparison.

We watched as Nebulae formed - beautiful clouds of dust and gas that lit up the sky. He was as transfixed as me - that dust could transform into these shapes and patterns. We learned that the bigger the telescope lens, the more light and colour would be seen by the eye. I smiled at this.

He didn't get it.

# Dining with You

Your tasteless indifference  
Burns my throat  
As I swallow your unthought of assurances.  
A small chaser of apathy  
On the rocks,  
And my head freezes with unmet needs.  
I dab my lips with your insouciance  
And realise I have gorged  
On unheard hopes and dreams.

I go  
And leave you to pay the bill.

# Prey Squared

It's because she dresses herself up that he can't identify her – it – at first; her fault, or his?

On nocturnal pursuits she might display: the exotic plumage of a racy boa; the feverish hedonism of tiger print; the beguiling transparency of the efforts of Oriental silk worms. Costumes full of such concealment, such wile.

Her actions are appropriate to her disguise. Empowered, she tracks and stalks, relentlessly tailing till she ensnares him, her prey. Lacking the energy to resist, he succumbs to her ravenous need. His will ebbs away – taciturn – into the small hours.

But when the wooing of the moonlight is replaced by the stark rise of morn, he looks across the pillow to her somnolent face. Eyes-closed, she purrs with tender contentment – a smile crescents as he strokes her compliant torso. Her talons grip his hair-sprouting forearms in quite a different manner. Then her eyelashes shutter-open: awake, the two people gaze at each other – naked – concentrated fear mirrored in their lenses, glazing ever-widening pupils – as they both become prey.

# Self Harming

The first time you cut me I bled.  
Heart sliced open, agony flooded out to tattoo my virgin skin.  
Remorse kissed me better, soft lips sealing the wound;  
Whispers soothed me and your breath became resurrection.

I allowed it again; a scratch, a stab, clawing me apart,  
Haemorrhaging my severed soul to a scornful world  
You laid your hands on me and healed with caresses,  
Exorcising the pain and renewing me with the rhythm of your body.

All I have left of you are scars. Ugly reminders of misguided love.  
They are a part of me, a testament to what we were.  
I trace them as your tongue did and dwell on their memories,  
With the need to be punctured once more.

# The Dancer

She could capture her audience with a single exquisite movement. Thread together a series of such motions and she'd weave a cobweb of such enchantment it would render those watching her helplessly spellbound.

She sensed them drinking in every contour, every stretched sinew, every curve of her body. Yet somehow, when she was dancing, that sense was all she could grasp of the real world; the rest simply evaporated like a mischievous will-o'-the-wisp.

Perhaps that was why she loved to dance - to escape. Or maybe she needed to escape in order to dance; it was hard to unravel the knotted mess of cause and effect.

She was nearing the end of today's performance now. Her back arched, and she heard someone gasp. She smiled appreciatively, suggestively, in the gasper's direction: And real life began to condense before her once more, with every £10 note that rained down on the stage at her feet.

# Ghost Story

# Curtain Call

She sat in the empty theatre, alone with her thoughts.

She closed her eyes and could hear the sounds of a life spent on the stage – applause, laughter, even the appalling crash of brass and woodwind the night she fell into the orchestra pit.

And the silences, too, of an audience rapt, or holding back tears, for these silences are also the sound of the stage.

Eleanor Wall was eighty-two years old now, and had spent seventy-six of those years acting. Ever since she'd played the youngest VonTrapp for the Teamplayers Amateur Dramatic Society in Bolton she had wanted no other career.

In her time she had played a ghost, a French maid (she used to bring the outfit home at night, to the delight of her then husband) and, in a strange avant-garde play, a talking vacuum cleaner. She had played Lady Bracknell, My Fair Lady and Lady Macbeth, whom she always referred to as Lady Scottishplay. She had been naked in *Equus*, murdered in *An Inspector Calls* and barefoot in the park. She had been told to break a leg before her Juliet in *Middlesborough* in 1953 and had done so, when her balcony had collapsed onto a startled Romeo.

She had been Mary-Beth Walton in a stage version of the *Waltons* in 1955, then Ma Walton in 1968, then Grandma Walton in 2000. There was no role old enough for her in the play now, unless she was to play the Mountain.

She had acted with some of the greats – Ophelia to Olivier's Hamlet, Anna to Gielgud's *King*, and in the pantomime *Dick Whittington* she had played Eliza to Terry-Thomas's Dick.

She had received some wonderful reviews (“Eleanor Wall's Blanche Dubois is a powerful tragic heroine”), and some less so (“Eleanor Wall's Cleopatra is the most wooden thing since Forrest Gump's bench”). She had met these triumphs and disasters both the same – with hysterical over-reaction and heavy drinking.

She had occasionally moved into TV and film, appearing in six episodes of Coronation Street as a Mike Baldwin girlfriend, and playing a tennis ball in an ad for Robinson's Barley Water. She had appeared in one of the Harry Potter films, but then who hadn't.

She had been sometimes wealthy, and more often poor. She had had four husbands, because actresses are not easy to live with. She had never found time to have children. But now, as the theatre door opened and she was no longer alone, she reflected that, for all its sacrifices, no other job could have made her life as happy.

The operating theatre was hummed with activity now. All the world is a stage, she realised. Today she was going to be an old lady facing a heart operation, and to the surgeon and his team she was going to act calm, unafraid, and stoically accepting of whatever might happen.

If she could pull it off it would be her greatest performance ever.

# The Eloquence of Dust

In the sunlight as you swirl  
around the room,  
dust leaps into the air  
joining your dance in a  
frenzy of excitement –  
calming, as you do, taking  
on that serious air of thought.

In moments of illumination  
your thoughts disturb  
galaxies.

My unspoken words beat  
upon your consciousness -  
Quiet - you urge me and  
dust settles in patterns  
newly created. I am  
in the dark.

You have disturbed  
the equilibrium of  
my heart.

As you pound  
at the littleness of life,  
and people, and all that  
does not captivate you,  
challenge you, entrance you,  
I make myself small.

I would not change you one iota;  
would rather live a life  
shooting for the stars  
or scrabbling

in the dust with you  
than remain  
alone on a clean  
and even plane.

At times, taken up  
with elements no bigger  
than motes - to you  
larger than suns -  
you do not see me.  
Yet when they settle  
I whip them up again -  
hide my self from you.

You have disturbed  
the equilibrium of  
my heart.

The beauty of your mind,  
your richer dust,  
holds me in thrall -  
your eloquence makes  
all so simple, so elegant.  
Not a speck is overlooked;  
not one atom  
of your thought wasted.

What lives in me  
is sparked by you,  
you are my touchstone,  
my inspiration –  
yet when you fill the room  
with your intelligence,  
I am no more  
than dust disturbed  
by your flying thoughts.

In moments of illumination  
your thoughts disturb  
galaxies.

# Samsara

The blossom spreads in cancer pink  
A new bud blooming speaks the word  
Two beats that scarce are ever heard  
But whispered lest we stop to think.

New life bursts forth as passers-by  
Watch gravely from their honoured perch  
Their pennies chime to fund the search  
The what and wherefore as they die.

Yet still the harvest reaps its due  
As fresh green stems grow underneath  
The chaff is shed 'midst blackened grief  
And life is born anew, anew.

# Maiden Flight

It really was a long way down. He shuddered, and huddled down deeper in the nest.

“You’ll love it,” said his Mum. “It’s the most fun ever. Watch.”

She plummeted out over the side, his heart plummeting too as he watched her. She arrowed down, down, then soared, scorching an almost visible U in the sky as she swept back to land gently beside him.

“I don’t know,” he said doubtfully. “Can’t I just walk around?”

“You’re a bird,” said Mum. “We don’t walk.”

“Ostriches do,” he said desperately.

“Ostriches. Seriously? You’re picking as a role model a creature who sticks his entire head into sand. Can you imagine the state his nostrils must be in?”

“I think I might actually be an ostrich. Perhaps I’m adopted.”

“You aren’t,” she said firmly. “I laid the egg that you came in, and that’s not an experience you forget in a hurry. Trust me on this.”

“I’d still rather walk,” he said.

“Suit yourself,” said Mum. “Once you climb down the tree, you can walk where you like.”

“Oh,” he said.

“Exactly,” said Mum. “When it comes to a list of things you can hold on to a tree-trunk by, wings rank somewhere between a spatula and the rubber bit at the bottom of a chair-leg.”

He still shook his head.

“Look,” she said softly. “I was afraid too, at your age. But I’d listen to the dawn chorus, of birds just thrilled to be alive, and I’d think ‘it must be great’, so I tried it. Please, just come out onto the branch with me.”

She held his wing, he climbed from the nest, and they stood side by side.

“Most fun ever?” he said.

“Definitely,” she said. “Well, pooing on humans is the most fun ever, but it’s bad parenting for a mother to tell her son that.”

He closed his eyes, really tightly, and leaned over sideways until gravity took him.

And dropped him. He shrieked as he fell, frantically stretching out his wings, trying to grab the tree, his Mum, anything.

Then the wings flicked a feathered slap across gravity’s face, caught the air, and lifted him.

He shrieked again, this time in sheer delight. He saw his Mum’s grin and wave as he shot past, like a child on a merry-go-round glimpsing a parent.

He stayed out until bedtime. He swooped and soared and dived. He flitted. He weaved in and out between trees like a Star Wars fighter pilot. He bounced up and down on telephone wires, feeling the electricity thrum beneath his feet. He tested the saying “a bird never flew on one wing”, and found it to be untrue, though you do just fly in circles. For a while, a wonderful while, he just floated on an air-current, resting on the sky.

When Mum called him for bed he was giddy with tiredness, and chattering excitedly as she tucked him in under his grass duvet.

“Ostriches?” she said.

“Idiots,” he replied.

# Extraordinary Creature

Lying beneath a late summer sky, cocooned  
in picnic blankets, you look into the star-filled  
night. Moonless, late and still.

Wanting and wanting, waiting to emerge  
yet afraid to leave the safety  
of your homespun fortification.

On the edge of the universe,  
on the edge of the world,  
on the edge of life.

Looking forward, you feel the gentle  
push and hold of those you love -  
who will be the first to drop the silken thread?

I watch you emerging from your chrysalis.  
Almost to my surprise you transpire  
fully formed - long legged, gossamer winged.

Exquisite. Beautiful. Extraordinary.

# The Last Pyjama Party

“The gun isn't loaded, I think.”

# Tuba

“Look, the thing’s got legs,” some wise-guy sniggered. With a sinking feeling, Shaun recognised the voice of Michael, his arch-nemesis from Church Lane.

Shaun couldn’t see where he was going, and his tuba kept getting stuck as he made his way down the bus. As soon as he got to a group of four seats he sat down with a sigh of relief. He carefully placed his tuba on the seat next to him and wedged his bulky leather shoulder bag between his legs. His mum had told him to keep his belongings close and he knew from bitter experience that this was better advice than even she knew.

It wasn’t long before Michael’s spotty face appeared over his shoulder.

“He looks lonely,” Michael said to his friends in a stage whisper. “I’d better go and cheer him up.”

A fourteen year old boy shot out from the seats behind Shaun, his jacket zipped up to his chin, baseball cap pulled low over his eyes, swaying to a beat only he could hear. He knocked the tuba off the chair with his knee. It fell on the floor with a heart-breaking thud. Michael took its place.

“Yo Shaun my boy, my brother! You brought this thing for a little show and tell?” He gave the tuba another nudge with his toe, as if it were a dead animal.

“Music lesson,” Shaun mumbled - his vocal chords had seized up with dread.

Michael grinned, then bellowed in the younger boy’s face: “Speak up!”

“Tuba lesson, after school,” he squeaked. He tried to wipe the drops of spit off his face without it looking like that was what he was doing. The older boy’s fingers started patting Shaun’s pockets now, feeling them, one by one. Shaun looked on as if there was a spider on his clothes.

“There’s a fee for that, my friend. A tuba fee,” Michael remarked casually, pulling a flat, childish wallet from Shaun’s jacket. He opened it and shook it out.

Two pounds and thirty pence fell out. Michael grimaced – not a great haul. He dropped the coins into his pocket anyway and tossed the empty wallet on the floor.

“Bring more next time,” he warned, and returned to his seat.

The view from the window was more urban now. Terraced houses lined the street. They passed a row of shops and the bus stopped to let more people on. Shaun picked up his tuba with care and held it on his lap, his arms hugging the enormous instrument tightly. Six more stops till school. Nine more bus journeys until the weekend. Eight more weeks until the autumn holiday. Two more years until Michael finished school. Shaun gritted his teeth.

# The Underachiever

Even in the first year at school they could see she was something special. She had a spark that many of the others, her teacher thought, regrettably lacked. Her mother was odd. No, odd wasn't the right word. Her mother made no attempt to hide her own demons and sometimes you could see them waging war in the child's eyes. And yet she carried on with sheer determination, although always managing to somehow become invisible at the last minute, pipped to the post by a brighter star.

She was pushed, firmly, but not aggressively. This should have driven her. Should have.

The girl sat firmly at the top of average for her school years, never quite reaching the dizzy heights of fame or recognition.

She could have reached them, if only she had the confidence. This could have made her.

Could have.

Adolescence was hard on her. It gripped her tightly and tore her apart, making her wish she had never danced with her mother's devils. Now they were her own; there to torture her and burn her down when she allowed herself an uplifting moment. They destroyed everything they touched; her talent, her intelligence, all of it handed to them merely because they asked.

Beaten, destroyed and destructive she caved in on herself, only to realise that then she would have nothing.

Would have.

Nothing to lose.

## Tate Exhortations Part III

Timid little lady,  
You can't divine meaning from  
Regimented rows  
Of tiny black soldiers  
Marching on snow.  
They're commanded by another.  
They want to help but  
You: You  
Must do the rest...

Challenge the order,  
Discard the intelligence,  
Rip up the route;

Reel through white spaces,  
Drink in the kaleidoscope mounted there,  
Let it fill you.  
You infer the meaning.  
Fuck what the label says.

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