

Issue 2 Editorial



January 2016 inaugurated a new team of editors for Flight Journal. With it came a new look, but we wanted to keep the journal's fundamental purpose intact: to publish bold short fiction of no more than 2,500 words. We were excited about discovering fresh voices, and we found many amongst the 250 submissions. Narrowing these down to only six was no easy task, but we are so thrilled to publish this fantastic range of writing talent.

When we were selecting the stories that eventually comprised Issue 2, we were looking to be surprised, and even challenged. These pieces all achieve this by casting what is commonplace in a new, unexpected light. Chris Torry's *Trauma* blends poetry and prose to illuminate a world we might think we already know: a hospital ward. Only here the author encourages us to slow down and look again, and, reading it, to paraphrase the author, something deep is brought closer.

Across many of the stories, we also found another theme speaking to us: placelessness. A feeling of being unrooted, or of struggling to find a place in the world. It's perhaps not surprising to find this common thread in light of recent world events, and, closer to home, a young generation struggling to secure permanent homes for themselves. Some of the stories handled this with great wit. In Janet H Swinney's *Moving In*, we witness a home that resists its new owner at every turn, denying comfort or settlement. It is a gravity-defying story brimming with exuberant flights of the imagination.

Bronwen Griffiths' *The President's Cats* examines placelessness within a dystopian setting both in the defiant babushka who goes against a tyrannical government, and in the black cats that represent the 'other' not accepted, generalised and often demonised individuals in society; a sadly timeless allegory relevant both hundreds of years ago and today.

In Abroad by Chantal Korsah looks at African diaspora, and how sometimes the home you leave behind is more comfortable than the one you migrate to. Through the realist, often comical, narrative we are taken on a journey through the different layers of London, and how this compares with the narrator's hometown Accra.

The namesake for the longest story from Issue 2 is also its coffee cup narrator. Pascal Colman's *Polystyrene Coffee Cup in a Phone Box* channels hints of le nouveau roman and defamiliarization (ostranenie). Through the personification of a household, disposable object, the idea of being left behind and becoming obsolete is explored with wit and incision.

Finally, Annie Dobson delivers an incomparably quirky slice of life with *Thereless*. Packaged as a colourful off-beat insight into Eliza's habits, this short story's underlying subject-matter takes the reader from wonder to sympathy as s/he moves through several vignettes, which flow in a manner evocative of the stages of grief. From placelessness to *Thereless*.

We hope you enjoy reading Issue 2 as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

Marianne, Sara and Shreeta

Trauma - Chris Torry



First Shift

We are in a room, roughly square, the door behind us. There are windows along almost the entire length of the far wall. The blinds are open and we can see that it is night. We are many floors up.

The room has four beds in it. They are parallel to the window, two on the left and two on the right, each bed facing another, the heads against the wall. Off-white plastic and metal painted grey, wheels on the bottom and buttons on panels on the sides.

The beds looked identical before use made them different. If we touch the plastic it is rough with scratches.

In the bed nearest the window on the left there is a man with long thin limbs. Fluid lit by a light on the wall behind him travels from a bag down a plastic tube through a pump and into a vein in his arm.

Five wires emerge from beneath the material of his gown.

Ride	Red
Your	Yellow
Green	Green
Bike	Black
Well White	

The wires meet and become a cable which ends at a monitor mounted on the wall.

Outside, red lights on the tops of cranes make a disorderly line above the city.

Second shift

Four people walk into the room. They go over to the man in the bed, pull back his sheets and lift his gown.

One of them draws an arrow on his left thigh in black pen.

Imagine his breath clouds of mist on the dark.

Ninth Shift

Stand over a bed holding a wrist, counting the beats of a heart
made fast by the
poison in the food.

Tenth Shift

Sometimes, on a bus or a train
find yourself watching the rise and fall of somebody's chest and shoulders and
counting their breaths, the length of the breath, feeling for regularity,
checking their lips and their hands.

About the author

Chris Torry is a writer, a musician and an occasional photographer. He works as a nurse, and he likes building synthesisers.

About the image

"[Hospital Bed](#)" by [Lars Ploughmann](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

Moving In - Janet H Swinney



The builder-cum-decorator has arrived with three ladders. One is too long to reach the ceiling; the other two hang from the ceiling, but are too short to reach the floor. He tramples over the curtains and retires to his van to consider what to do. This involves multiple phone calls to friends, family, a bloke in a blanket under Blackfriars Bridge and a man called George.

I lay a trail of biscuits from the van to the front door so that he won't lose his way. He returns some time later with a spirit level, a pot of coving glue and a bristling haircut. The solution is not in view.

He pronounces that he has decided not to mend the crack above the mantelpiece. 'Houses are organic, love,' he avers. 'They breathe. You don't want to get hung up on concepts such as permanence, stasis and perfection. There are no such states. Everyone from Schopenhauer on has said the same.' He screws the lid back on a jar of pickles and smokes a fag.

'It's an attractive theory,' I concede, as I peer through the crack and watch two finches fiercely stabbing berries on the euthanasia tree. But one with which I wish to have no truck.

The assistant has been left to his own devices in the living room. The colour charts have been lost down the back of someone's car seat on a trip Up North to see Leyton Orient play Carlisle FC. 'Crushed pebble' and 'muted moss' are a long way from his mind. He has selected a hideous shade of yellow. Absorbed in his task, he is applying mustard methodically to the ceiling rose. This violent hue strips the paint from the shutters, sets fire to an ashtray and causes the window box to melt. Small children passing in the street whimper forlornly as their Cheese Strings wilt. I eyeball the young man until his twisted denims fade. In return, he eyeballs me. 'Time is money,' he shrugs with the derelict air of the youth trainee, and carries on.

In the hall, the electrician is lying in the cupboard sighing heavily. The wiring he installed on Friday has been done by someone else, most probably some 'towelheads'. In any case, it's incorrect. 'The trouble is,' he swears, 'these foreign bastards do everything the right way up.' For days now, he has clumped up and down the cellar stairs between the fuse box and the boiler, but his size eleven boots have obscured his view. Now, thanks to the introduction of an arc light which came his way at a weekend garage sale, he can visualise a solution. That is: start again.

The bathroom tiles arrive. They have been shipped direct from a civic toilet on the seafront at Bridlington, not from the high class showroom of Seer Green and Jordans where I first encountered them. They are larger than I ordered, but cannot be returned. The tiler is

expected at the Casa Mila conference hall on Batllo Road the following day, and must get his skates on.

In the kitchen, the cupboards have assembled. They have three legs apiece, none of them the same. The oven is balking at the prospect of being housed. The fridge has too many handles, all of them illegally imported, and the washing machine is stuck on 'spin'. Lacy knickers and hypo-allergenic socks are chasing each other interminably round the drum. The drawers are in the cupboards, the cupboards are looking bored and the shelves are still in packaging behind the compost bin. The plumber has supplied an Irish sink with two left taps. Unfortunately, their brake discs have gone.

The house is in a conservation zone. Ceilings are being lowered and floors are being raised. Double glazing has been shaved in half, and draft inculder fitted. Reason has been suspended, and loiters palely by the door. Thorough-bred Highland woodworm graze laconically on a nineteenth century architrave.

The phone has lost its voice and rests mutely on its cradle. No-one has thought of calling an engineer. I am dependent on the power of thought and a candle stump to work out where my nearest and dearest might be. Not here, obviously.

'Never marry a man,' my aunt once told me, 'who unpacks the pans before he hangs the pictures.' I am struggling to understand her point. *My* life partner has gone foraging for saddle soap and a pair of Kookaburra cricket gloves.

The cat saunters through the house, wearing pyjamas and a balaclava helmet in anticipation of events to come.

At eleven o'clock the sofa arrives, having walked all the way from the station. Its bulky exertions have exhausted it. It leans into the wind, panting heavily, and unable to explain itself. It veers into the hall, and lumbers crabwise into the living room. Its teeth are in its arse and its arms are back to front. It gives a crooked smile and tells me it has left three cushions on the train for the benefit of passengers travelling to Croydon, Purley Oaks and beyond.

'What were you playing at?' I yell. 'Outdoing the Gatwick Express?'

The cemetery beckons, but I dare not leave the house in case the coffee table turns up.

A woman with a Primark bag full of shoes and sandals, and a copy of the Apostolic Creed appears to help me. She rings the bell and the burglar alarm goes off. She says she's from the Church of Our Lord of Miracles, but faith deserts me and I dare not let her in.

In the street, the security gates are locked. A tour bus bound for Bruges beats a complicated retreat at close proximity in the drive. Forty members of the Alliance Française, Merton branch, watch less than obliquely while I empty several hundredweight of mouse shit and ancient bottle openers into the dustbin.

I venture into the garden. Someone has walked sideways over the flower beds and screwed curtain hooks into the lawn. The bikes have disappeared from the garden shed.

On the upper floor, the empty bathroom is full of angst. The plumber has put the carpenter's nose out of joint. The carpenter has told the plumber to shut his trap. The tumbled travertine has been tossed to buggery, and water trickles down the electric cable into the dining room.

At four thirty, the workmen leave. It starts to rain.

It rains some more.

And then it rains a lot.

The window is open. I close it. It stays open.

There are no biscuits left. I find cream crackers that I cannot remember buying in a jar marked 'Moutarde de Meaux'. I decide to eat them raw, as the deep fat fryer has not turned up and the camping stove's gone missing.

It is half past seven and dark. The gully pot trap beneath the French doors is broken, and the guttering up above has bowed. Rainwater is gushing straight from the roof into the cellar. Men came and dug a hole and did not return. Then they enlarged it. Now it is gaping like an open wound, and the cellar is filling rapidly.

I step outside with an assortment of plastic bags and a shovel to devise some diversionary measure. Clothes are pointless, so I am wearing none. I have clamped a mountaineering lamp to my head, and put my gumboots on.

The phone rings unexpectedly as I perform a gravedigger's manoeuvre.

My friend lost her teeth down a drain in Musselburgh High Street. Sectioned by social workers, she rings me from the Andrew Duncan Clinic where she has been since Maundy Thursday. 'Hello,' she says. Her bed sheets have been folded like the ends of parcels and her pillows plumped. I hear teaspoons clinking, and the sound of chocolate digestives sliding onto a plate. 'It's grim in here,' she says. 'There's nothing to do.'

'You should try it on the outside!' I scream, and slam the phone down on its base.

I start stirring sewage with a stick.

About the author

Janet was born and grew up in the North East of England, and now lives in London. She has worked in post-16 education in roles ranging from teacher to inspector. She has travelled widely in India, and this experience has influenced her work.

She has had a number of short stories anthologised. Her story 'The Map of Bihar' was published both in the UK (Earlyworks Press) and in the USA (Hopewell Publications), where it appeared in *Best New Writing 2013* and was nominated for the Eric Hoffer prize for prose 2012.

Her story 'The Work of Lesser-Known Artists' was a runner-up in the London Short Story Prize 2014, and was published in 2015 in *Flamingo Land* (Flight Press). 'The Queen of

Campbeltown' appeared in *The Ball of the Future* (Earlyworks Press) in February 2016. 'The Menace at the Gate', a story set in Punjab at the time of Sikh unrest, was published online in the *Bombay Literary Magazine* earlier this year and 'Drishti', a story set in Goa, appeared recently in the online literary magazine *Out of Print*.

Janet has had commendations and listings in a number of other competitions including the Fish International Short Story Competition. In 2008, she was a runner-up in the *Guardian's* international development journalism competition.

About the image

By Shreeta Shah.

The President's Cats - Bronwen Griffiths



The President has banned black cats from the city. 'These cats bring us bad luck,' he has decreed. 'Anyone found keeping a black cat henceforth will face immediate imprisonment.'

Everyone knows that the dungeons below the President's palace are as black as night, blacker than the fur of a panther. Not a single shaft of light pierces the cold and the damp. And the cries that emanate from that terrible place are like the howls of cats. After all, in this city, who knows what happens to the people who vanish from the streets between dawn and dusk, in the hours when the bells toll?

Seven days after the decree was announced, an old babushka from the city had the audacity to write to the editor of the national newspaper. In the letter, which I will not print in full here, she asked, 'Does the decree allow me to bleach my cat's fur white?' People were shocked. Many thought she was crazy. Because no one criticises the President. No one.

The editor of the paper did not respond to the babushka directly. Instead he wrote an article titled 'When is a cat white?'

'Our blessed President has done a wonderful thing for our city. The black cat is not like other cats. Not only does the black cat bring bad luck, but also it cannot be trusted. Readers – only last week a black cat jumped in through an open window and tore the limbs off a new-born, and today this newspaper has received news of yet another attack, this time on a young woman. What will tomorrow bring?' The editor concluded with: 'Bleaching a cat is against the law. Bleaching may change the colour of its fur but it can never transform its evil, black heart.'

All the newspaper's readers agreed. They were angry with the old woman for suggesting such a thing and demanded punishment.

The President soon ordered soldiers to the babushka's apartment. His soldiers found the old woman sitting on a red armchair knitting a white coat. It was a small coat such as something a grandmother would knit for her grandchild.

'Where is the black cat?' the officer in charge demanded. He was wearing shiny black boots and carried a large black gun.

The babushka smiled. 'I have no black cat. May I offer you tea while you are here? Black or white?'

The officer's face grew dark as a thundercloud. Perhaps it even grew dark like the fur that lined his winter hat. 'I do not tolerate impudence,' he spat. 'Where is your cat?'

The babushka rose slowly to her feet, leaving her knitting on the chair. 'Dear sir, my cat is all colours of the rainbow. And he is outside, sir.' She plucked at the officer's sleeve. 'If you would be so kind as to look out of my window perhaps you will see him below, stalking the birds.'

The officer peered down. He could see nothing but the snow falling, the winter trees dark against the pale sky. He turned back to the old woman. 'If we discover you have been lying, you will pay a high price. Do not think your age will save you.'

'Of course,' the babushka said, crossing herself. 'I understand the President's decree. He must be obeyed by all means.'

The officer glowered at the old woman. The old woman smiled and bowed her head.

'Attention! Attention!' The officer growled at his men. The soldiers stood tall and clicked their boots. No one said goodbye.

The babushka listened to the soldiers tramping down the concrete stairs.

When she could no longer hear the sound of their boots, she sat down on her chair and picked up her knitting again, and all across the city the black cats, dressed in their knitted white coats, padded through the snow unseen.

About the author

Bronwen lives in East Sussex, England. Her novel, *A Bird in the House*, was published in 2014. She has worked in heritage and arts education and has also taught creative writing to adults and children.

About the image

"1824 The Black Cat" by [Nebojsa Mladjenovic](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

In Abroad - Chantal Korsah



The first time I came to London to stay with Kwame, I was dazzled by the strangeness of it all. In Accra I was used to seeing yellow taxis in various states of disrepair, often with licence plates and mirrors missing, but here in London I saw shiny black cabs running briskly down the roads like beetles running to the floor cracks. I was also used to strong smells in Accra: the putrid smell of sewage waste from an open gutter; the hot sweet smell of freshly fried kelewele being sold on the street by a generously bosomed market woman; and the pungent mix of exhaust fumes released by different vehicles from Mercedes Benz to tro-tro buses. In London, however, the smells were very faint, just a hint of fresh dough being baked by the Domino's pizza chain on the corner, or a whiff of the fresh grass lawn in one of the city's massive parks.

And the difference in atmosphere was the most startling of all. Every Saturday night in Accra, the youths would crowd to whatever club was the 'in' thing at the time. Usually starting off in Shisha Lounge in Osu, where the fumes would get us giddy, we'd hop into our Range Rovers and BMWs to take us down the road to Firefly, the hub of expatriates: mainly Arab sheiks, European aid workers and American dudes. You never quite knew what they were doing in Ghana, but every few minutes they would loudly proclaim: 'This party is dope, man!' We would then inevitably end the night in the Gold Lounge near Kotoka airport, where strong alcohol and a sighting of our favourite actress at the VIP section had us buzzing till dawn.

'But chale, this London ooo, it dey craze, it dey craze!' Kwame kept exclaiming on the way home from my first night out in London, where the club of honour was an abandoned warehouse with a techno rave; the strobe lights and pulsing beat of the music had set my heart pounding.

'You see how everyone was on fire there! Kai, the DJ was spinning the tunes like how the house girl spins the fufu! As for Accra, die the DJs are lazy, just standing there mixing afrobeats with plenty of girls pressing their breasts on them, eh?' I agreed with him profusely, loudly insulting the Ghanaian DJs even though my good friend Sammy, aka DJ Black, had hosted plenty of club nights where the expats and indigenous Ghanaians had danced all night long.

For it was not the words of Kwame that I agreed with, but this version of him. It was the original Kwame who made wild gestures with his hands, and regularly tapped the walls to

emphasize his stated points; the one who was straight out of Accra. In contrast, the Kwame that I came to meet in London was a caricatured Bounty Englishman who greeted everyone with a false, chirpy, 'Good morning!' tamely accepting the security guards at Debenhams who followed him stealthily. But it was this Kwame, original Kwame, my Kwame, that I was able to laugh with all the way home on the crowded night bus. I pushed all comparisons with my father's Range Rover out of my head.

Even when we got home to Kwame's apartment block to find both lifts were out of order, he was able to raise my spirits by describing each and every woman that he'd been with in graphic detail on the long climb up to the 7th floor. 'Eeiii as for this blonde one, kai, her arms were like octopuses, going up and down, and round my dick eh, but the one with short haircut, mehn she had some tongue ...'

The rest of the three-week holiday passed in a tourist-induced blur, with weekend day trips to Buckingham Palace interspersed with nights spent in the rooftop bars. In between, during the weekdays when Kwame went to work in his array of pinstripe suits, was an interactive world of talk shows, soap operas and music videos gained from the 200 Sky channels. I rejected the meals of Ghana, the comfort of plantain and the regularity of rice dishes, jellof and waakye, and began indulging in the sophisticated cuisines of the world: a croissant for breakfast and Chinese fried rice for dinner.

By the time I stepped off the plane at Kotoka airport, my heart had been left in London town, and my head was furiously plotting how to join it.

The second time around, when Kwame called me with his new address, it did not register to me that things may be different on this trip. I arrived to find that instead of the rented, self-contained flat which had comfortably fitted the two of us, Kwame was now residing in a shared house with five other roommates.

'Eeiii my bro ... It's not been easy paaa ... Of course the bank went bust, and could only retain half of their employees ... So of course who went first but the African boy from Timbuktu?' Kwame bitterly kicked the wall. 'This nonsense job at McDonald's won't even pay for my Sky.'

'So why don't you come home?'

'Come home to what? Dad telling me that eh, I told you so, and all that glitters is not gold and all of that? In ten years, when everything has changed, and I have property here and a good job, you and Dad and Mum will be bragging about Kwame in abroad who always shops in Harrods. You will be laughing about this conversation.'

However correct Kwame may be in the future, unfortunately I could not laugh then, with mould on the walls and him constantly stinking of fast food. There was no more Sky, no more Chinese food, and no more day trips. Kwame was always tired from standing all day, so I ended up scouring the clubs by myself, chatting up the obroni ladies and hoping they would not ask for expensive drinks. Eventually I ran out of pounds, and Kwame begged me not to ask Dad for more in case he found out about Kwame's changed circumstances.

I was very happy when my holiday came to an end. Even my mode of transport for my journey to the airport had changed; instead of getting a taxi, I was forced to scuttle onto the Tube with my heavy 23kg suitcases, constantly apologising to people I bumped into. Eventually I grew tired of saying sorry, and kept my eyes down whenever my suitcases ran over people's feet. Kwame had declined to see me off in order to work a double shift, and I knew, even with his ebullient goodbye, that secretly he was wishing he was coming with me. My mind flew to him briefly as I sat in the aeroplane seat, before it was chased away by the remembrance that my father had bought a new BMW to celebrate my coming home.

About the author

Chantal Korsah is a London-born Ghanaian writer and playwright, who has had several short stories and poetry published in literary blogs and anthologies. She is currently working on her first novel and on producing her first written, biographical, play about Yaa Asantewaa, the famed Ashanti Queen Mother.

About the image

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Polystyrene Coffee Cup in a Phone Box - Pascal Colman



The night was dry, warm dark increments sat amid spots of tungsten luminescence and a day's stale smog left a little taste in the air. The lone phone box had a window defaced with some arching illegible tag, scratched in with a knife or a pen – the BT man looked up disapprovingly. Devon shut the door and placed me on top of the box, his hands delving into the pockets of his parka for the right change. I steamed; my coffee was of the instant kind, the kind you drank as a necessity rather than a pleasure.

‘Hey ... Look ... I’m sorry –’

Then Devon was silent, his eyes scanned his toes, his right ear was glued to the receiver. I continued to steam, my white polystyrene seemingly glowed, looking almost angelic in the booth's even light. I proudly shone in front of the phone box women – Dirty Lisa's predatory eyes almost pierced me with their intensity as she inserted her finger between a pair of vibrantly rouged lips.

‘I really didn't mean it, I –’

There was a sort of eruption of static from the receiver. Devon's head seemed to nod ... No, rock rather – ‘nod’ sounds like an affirmation. He looked like he was reeling from a blow in the most listless way possible, like a comatose man being punched in the head, taking without resistance, without energy. Devon glanced up at me from below the peak of his tan flat cap and I saw a pair of eyes that looked very empty. Like a light was out. He took me firmly, and sipped. I tried to catch a word spilling from the speaker ... and there was something, but it was veiled by such a mixture of what was equal parts tears and static that it was rendered utterly beyond my comprehension. I caught a glimpse of his watch (23:25) before he re-shelved me.

That night was so quiet you could almost hear a tear roll. The low hum of the city was the only sound that permeated and even that seemed subdued.

A fox paused opposite us, frozen in motion, its eyes reflecting the streetlights like a pair of cautious fireflies. We weren't a threat; all that was in the box was sad and broken, the fox stalked off into the night. My steaming was beginning to subside and I could sense my girls losing interest. I focused on insulating as best I could, tightened my fibres (if only I had a lid

...). Devon's slouch became more and more pronounced as he leaned against the scratched panel, it was as if he were trying to compress himself (does sadness make you shrink? I couldn't think, I didn't know, maybe he was trying to keep the heat in?). It was getting cold.

By 00:30 I was only half drained. Now I was trying to keep the heat in, for Devon's sake.

'Look, I'm really sorry that it happened and I can promise you that it won't –'

(White chipmunk static)

'... If you let me –'

A pair of limp fingers picked me up and dry lips drank me down a sip, by now my acrid contents were about as warm as dishwater; I wanted to say something like 'sorry' but couldn't.

He placed me back on the box and left at 00:55.

This was the only night in London where I didn't see a single car drive past.

The dawn had a different character: the metropolitan hum rose with the sun's glow, it harmonised with the escalating traffic burr and street vendor chatter, all building to a rush hour crescendo. Many strutted past: women with straightened blackened hair in long flowing coats, businessmen with prematurely balding crowns and skinny kids with 1920s haircuts, denim shorts and Hawaiian shirts done up to their chins. It was a kaleidoscope of commotion and I watched, unnoticed in my box sitting stately off the road side, deep set in the pavement like some fossil from another age.

Time flies when you've got nothing to do. Actually, no ... I lie. Time flies around you. Each Perspex panel was like a screen to a different reality TV channel, all moving too fast, and I knew I'd never find my place on the tape but at least if I could pause I'd be able to find some kind of perspective. But I couldn't. The sun danced on.

It must have been school closing: droves of grey-blazered kids arrived, kicking footballs and tins, and being louder than anything. A black kid with a head of neatly picked hair dropped an empty chicken box at the base of my booth, laughing at some 'in joke' with his friends that I didn't care to understand. The smell emanating from the greasy box seeped into my sanctum – Mika ('Will-Lick-You-In-Every-Hole')'s hand was poised disgustedly over the lower half of her face. Dirty Lisa didn't seem to mind, licking her finger as if to say 'delectable' or some word of similar meaning. I cared for the smell even less than the joke.

The day dragged on into evening and beyond. The sun downed and by 21:00 the evening rush ran to a halt too. Some time not long after that the fox reappeared. It circled the booth and probed the box with its olive black nose, fireflied eyes glinting with suspicion (easy meals didn't come for free). Growing confident that it was alone it circled closer and closer, eventually moving in for the kill. Its sinewy neck and bony shoulders shook as it ate, chewing aggressively till the greasy bones were nothing more than stains on the pavement.

The night was quiet. Cars came and went but no one ventured near. The remainder of my contents had evaporated to a sliver and a slight discoloration ran up my sides. I felt like a solitary pawn in a chess game that had been long concluded. A girl in a short sequined skirt burst in at ... I don't know when. She had on the kind of makeup that only looked good on a club night in the club's light, though now her night was definitely over; she was staggering around inside a phone box. She fumbled in her alco-perfumed purse and produced a mirror. Arm outstretched with mirror clutched – both swinging as if she were on an ocean liner – she tried to adjust. After a few sloppy pats and one awkward stroke of her hair she'd achieved nothing. She put the mirror away, hitched up her dress and with that precarious stilted high-heeled stutter, made her way off into the night.

When the day broke again I was busy, lost in thought: what was it that had made phone boxes such barren, forgotten places? iPhones, Wi-Fi? Probably both.

The ease of 21st century communication meant that the payphone was outdated, with their antiquated boxes just left standing for the nostalgia, left standing for the dirt, the dust and the rust to accumulate. I felt sorry for my ladies, phone numbers and private parts laid bare, legs spread wide like fishermen's nets (landlocked, so many fish out in the sea but none here). They were lonely and alone and I was beginning to understand just how they felt.

It was lunchtime when we had our first caller. A stout older woman, rain hat propped on a curly bob of grey hair, a patchwork dress and about 13 shopping bags of assorted crap in her hands. She spat words to herself and giggled inanely. Dialling in a number – that consisted mainly of sixes – she put the receiver to her ear and launched into conversation.

'Hello Aunty Darlene ... Darlene, let me tell you ... Fred Griffiths said to me the other day ... He got cold Corn Cob ... Freddy Griffiths' Got Cold Corn Cob ... I just ... I honestly don't know sometimes I ...'

She talked for about an hour. 'Fuck Me' Madeleine had an eyebrow raised, echoing my sentiment. She also had her right hand determinedly probing at her crotch, her meticulously manicured fingers sinking just under the waistband of her thong.

It was nice when evening's quiet came about again. The fox prowled by, later this time. It poised motionless, its nose scanning for chicken bits before it left, disappearing into an undercar shadow.

There was a breeze and the young oak rustled its leaves above us, making a sound much like the bag lady's load but without the antagonism. The hushed rustling possessed a soothing quality only something of nature could. Streetlights danced in the leafy mirage, the empty roads looking like a peaceful apocalypse; no life bar the very occasional passing car.

Dawn the next day was overcast; a spring mist defiantly clung to the cityscape and (about) seven o'clock London looked like a daydream. Pret A Manger got packed (as it did every morning) and the roads snarled up (as they did every morning) and as the slate-grey suits and the sharp black executives and the desperate-to-impress interns and the 'Metro get your

Metros' and the man with the dog and the *Big Issue* (smiling but with the lines on his face carved into a sad statement) and the Black people and the White people and the homophobes and the bi people and the God-fearing people and the people who were utterly convinced they were God('s equal or otherwise) emerged onto the street (as they did every morning). And I sighed.

The clouds burbled up above. In spring, on misty mornings like this, the weather can develop in two possible ways: either the sun burns off the vapour and unveils something almost resembling a summer's day, or the vapour extends itself into the heavens and a tumultuous outbreak of rain occurs. Today was the latter. Roaring thunder shook the cumulus and heavy droplets of rain began drumming on the tarmac and pummelling the roof of my box. Londoners ran for shelter, umbrellas blossomed like watertight orchids. A pinstripe-suited man flung himself into my box and proceeded to check his hair. He slung out his iPhone and raised it to his ear: 'I'm gonna be late. Sorry, shit weather and my broolly's back at Sandra's.'

Why would you come into a phone box and talk on your mobile telephone? The monsoon outside would probably yield a few clues. Jemima's eyes shimmered with excitement: she liked watersports. But still, I was a vessel of principals and this barging into my box to talk into another mouthpiece rang a clear insult to injury – a kind of infidelity was occurring but it was one that was difficult to articulate, for reasons beyond that of me just not having a mouth with which to say them.

I squared up as best I could, tottering on the dusty ledge. The plan was to swan dive and spill the remnants of my residue all over his dry-cleaned, striped and padded shoulder just at the right moment when the fucker leaned back. He was casually swanning around down there with the kind of arrogance only money can buy and I hated it. I felt empowered by the gaze of my girls, all imploring me (silently) to come on, step up and mete out some moral exactitude for them, for me, for us. I felt this as I steeled myself for the breeze that would instigate my heroic leap ... But none came.

The suit had hung up and produced a comb, which he ran through his – probably more Brylcreem than – hair. He checked the weather; gauging it was safe before tentatively edging his way onto the pavement. The man looked like a parody of an MI6 agent as he stealthily dodged his way around falling swollen droplets and sidestepped puddles, all glowing gold in the intensity of the post-shower shine.

The city reanimated itself and the air was filled with that wet tarmac smell. I felt sticky in the cloying air; the rising vapour and the fumes seemed to stick to me. The last of my coffee evaporated along with the rain. A geezer and his Terrier stopped by, the panting beast seemed to grin as it raised a hind leg and pissed against the glass. I was growing wearier with every hour. Clouds of carbon and a near-collision resulting in a nonsensical fist fight signed off for the day and again all was quiet.

Dirty Lisa's unfaltering gaze was still resting on me, although I felt like a 1950s motor car, once glorious and now too uneconomical to even scrap. Her hair was this brilliant flaxen and the points where her paper had begun to lift actually managed to accentuate her curves. Maybe in another life, another time we could've been. It would've been marvellous. But sadly – in this dirty scratched up phone box that was coated in about a half inch thick layer of dust with its strip light full of dead flies and the faint smell of dog piss slowly rising – it wasn't to be and it wasn't. If a coffee cup could cry ... but I won't go into that now.

The door swung back into the night's quiet breeze and a man with a flat cap, a parka and a smile on his face propped himself against the glass, and began fishing around for the right change in his pockets. His fingers seemed sprung as he hit the digits and unhooked the receiver. His head very gently swayed as if he were listening to invisible music ... drum and bass or some music of a similar sounding.

‘Hey ... Yeah ... Yes.’

The fox waited by the parked car over the road, attentive, sat down like a pupil in a classroom. It studied us from a distance, its eyes crystals of amber, each with a firefly suspended somewhere inside. The night felt suspended; the air was still and the oak leaves didn't dance tonight, even if Devon did.

‘Yeah ... listen ... thank you ... really ... thank you so, so much.’

And he hung up. He flipped back the door and was about to leave when he paused – something had caught his eye. I had.

With a half-crooked smile he snatched me up and strode with me outside the box. The air felt vivid as I swung with his stride. Without even pausing he flicked me loose and I descended into the dark oily canvas of a bin bag. Last glance of his watch placed me at 21:05 before I landed softly, and nestled with my kind.

And finally, it was all still. I breathed a sigh of relief, even if on the air was the unmistakable aroma of chicken bits.

About the author

Pascal is a London based contemporary artist, musician and writer. Heavily involved in the south and east London grass roots art scenes he has participated in and put on a variety of shows in unconventional spaces, sometimes as an individual and sometimes as a member (and co-founder) of the esoteric art collective.

Running parallel (and often penetrating in) to his art practice is his involvement with experimental sound and new music; performing free improvised/atmospheric sound work with a collective and working different ensembles in the capacity of an improviser.

He has written critically on music and sometimes on art but much prefers to keep his writing personal, informal and strewn with too many colloquialisms for any self-respecting art writer to tolerate. Through it he has generated short stories about coffee cups, milk men, angels with erection problems and enough bad poetry to fill a library.

About the image

By Sara Jafari.

Thereness - Annie Dobson



Ness said 'you can't avoid the thereness of it'.

Firstness:

It is the first of June and the first satsuma of the day. Eliza is the first person to wake up in the world and press two satsumas to her cheeks. The skin of the satsuma feels like a cold baby and then a man who has forgotten to shave and then the skin on the top of the arm of an old woman. She feels like two old women's arms are on her forehead because she has now placed the two satsumas on her forehead. She is the first thirty-year-old in the world to put two satsumas on her head today and squeeze them. Her two hands and one face are sticky with the juice of the two satsumas. She likes the feeling of the orange juice on her eyelashes. She likes that the orange juice droplets look like tears so it looks like she is crying orange tears. She thinks regular tears will look uninteresting or too clean now. If someone were to smell her face they would smell her and the smell of two crushed satsumas. She rubs the satsumas into her face and the white bits and the skin stick in little clumps because of the juice. She holds one satsuma in each hand. They look like two deflated balloons with cracks down their middles. She has killed them. She puts them in the bin and then takes the bin out and washes her two hands, one face.

Whiteness:

Eliza and Oliver are having sex to Barry White. They have taken the tape out of a Barry White cassette tape and are tying it round each other's previously un-taped bodies and tying knots round each other's legs and arms and draping tape around each other's faces and putting the tape in each other's mouths. The more tape there is around her and Oliver, the more she likes herself and him. She feels filmy, she feels like a film. The walls are white so the tape looks extra black and it looks like her and Oliver are on paper and scribbling in black biro. There is nothing in the Year 12 music cupboard except a box of cassette tapes, a box of vinyls, and some sheet music. Oliver throws a Barry White vinyl at her and the vinyl splits in half on the wall. Eliza asks if there is any sellotape to tape up the broken vinyl. He says 'yes but it wouldn't be able to play again and the same goes for the Barry White cassette tape'. She unties the tape off of herself in silence. Oliver says:

'You can't ignore it.'

Togetherness:

Eliza is together with two hundred people in a concert hall. The seats are itchy velvet and make her (bare) legs itch. She scratches her (bare) legs with both (gloved and then un-gloved) hands. A jazz band is playing. There are two hundred people in the audience and six people in the band. Eliza is together with two hundred and six people (friends). People are talking and the instruments are talking. It is nice to be around a lot of different noise. The jazz band leave and a singer with hair down to her waist sits neatly at the piano (together with the piano). She slots in like her body was meant to fit on the stool facing the piano. It is like she is a doll that comes with a piano and stool. Everyone is quiet when she sings because there is only one of her and only one piano (together). She starts singing a sad and slow (together) song but Eliza can't really make out the lyrics because the singer's voice is all warbly and the words cut and melt into and slip over and hide underneath each other. She can only hear the words 'can't ignore, can't ignore, can't ignore' over and over again.

Lovelessness:

Oliver is loveless with the dog. If the dog got bone cancer and had to be in hospital and then a hospice and then died Oliver would not care. Eliza is very sure of this and can tell in the way Oliver feeds the dog. Oliver feeds the dog out of duty and not love. He talks to Eliza or looks at something else when he is putting the food down. He doesn't look at the dog when the dog eats to see if he likes it, he doesn't speak to the dog about the food like Eliza does. Eliza assures the dog that the food is coming now and it is his favourite (the beef) and asks how his day has been and how much sleep he has had and tells him he has made a bit of a mess of the sofa with his fur. Oliver is asking Eliza how the concert was and putting the dog food in the bone shaped dish when Eliza tells him he is loveless.

Loveness:

Oliver has cut up two bananas and put them in a small blue bowl. He has poured her a mug of milk. Her favourite programme (a fictional TV programme about people in her hometown all living on one street) is on the TV. He has put the dog's blanket on her lap. These are the things that calm Eliza down.

Newness:

Eliza is watching the TV in bed for the first time. The TV in the bedroom would not be there if something had not gone in its place. Oliver had said it would be a waste to throw away the TV and now Eliza supposes he was right but it still feels quite wrong. The bedroom was a different bedroom entirely before the TV was here and Eliza thought of herself as a different person. They are watching a film neither of them had seen before, the film is called *Ignorance*. When Oliver asks if she is ready to go to the place tomorrow and see the person Eliza says 'in the morning'.

Morningness:

Eliza had always thought of mornings as yellow. This morning was completely yellow and Oliver made her pancakes with yellow squares of butter. She drank mango juice out of a yellow plastic cup, the dog was extra golden. In the car (the car that was yellow and even

more yellow today) she felt very yellow and calm. Oliver asked again if she was ready to go see person at the place. She said:

‘Can’t ignore it anymore.’

Thereness:

Eliza and Oliver are at the place, which is the funeral parlour. They are seeing the person that is Eliza’s mother. Eliza’s mother’s place is in the coffin. Eliza and Oliver are standing over the person in the coffin in the place.

Thereness:

There was a time when Eliza had a mother and her mother was alive and called Ness. There was a time when Ness had a mother and her mother died and Ness said to Eliza ‘you couldn’t avoid the thereness of it’ when Ness had to be alone with her mother (dead) while the ambulance came.

Thereness:

Eliza touches Ness’s face and it feels like a satsuma, cold and rough (together).

About the author

Annie Dobson is an English and Creative Writing student at Goldsmiths and a member of The Writing Squad. This is her first published short story.

About the image

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