

Flight Journal

ISSUE NUMBER 5



Welcome to Issue 5

Life is filled with spontaneity and so is the art of storytelling. With this in mind, Flight Journal Issue 5 opened submissions without a theme in the hope to capture the mundane, the everyday aches and joys, the unexpected bends and twists that complete the magic of life. With this as our goal, each editor selected their three favourite stories and explained why they felt that their choices deserved to be shared with the public.

JJ Bola found in ‘The Probably Magical Wheelchair’ by Bobby Williams, ‘Axis of Adults’ by Samuel Cole and ‘The Story of Veronica’ by Suzanne Samples, the hidden philosophy of the mundane. The glimmers of magic that guide us so that we may know, just a little bit better, who we are. It is only through understanding ourselves that we may bring light to others; passing the flame from candle to candle, illuminating our lives.

For Henry Brefo, it was the eclectic blend of colour and style that grasped his fleeting attention span. ‘The Boat’ by Victoria Richards, ‘Rabbit is My Name’ by Giselle Leeb, ‘My Father’s Fabric’ by Zain Dada is infused with irony and dark wit, granting their characters gravity and depth. Together they form an ensemble of tragic delight.

Interested in the pleasant harmony of her selected stories, Remi Lyn-Browne intimates to us that, “they say important things in beautiful ways as separate pieces but create a brand-new narrative as a triplet”. Writing from different experiences, ‘Little Brother’ by Sarah Salties, ‘Cloth Against Skin’ by Sonia Hope and ‘The Voice’ by Ellen Denton pluck at the soft timbres of the heart.

Besides the writers’ distinctive styles and the editors’ predilection, the stories simultaneously sit well together as a collection and stand out in the anthology as strong individual pieces deserving of our appreciation. We hope you enjoy Flight Journal Issue 5. But before we hit the publish button, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the wonderful writers who have made Flight Journal their home. The team at Spread the Word, for their enormous support and passion for good writing and writers. And of course readers all over the globe.

Henry Brefo



The Boat

Victoria Richards

Victoria Richards is a freelance journalist and writer. She has worked for BBC News, The Times and The Independent, has appeared on Newsnight, BBC World, and ITV News and regularly writes for Independent Voices. She lives in London where she is working on a novel, a short story collection, poetry, flash fiction and a series of books for children.

I died when I was seven. It was 1980s Apartheid South Africa. I remember the signs for the “whites-only” beaches and little black kids the same age as me getting hit by policemen carrying truncheons as they begged for ice cream.

We were renting the bottom half of a house owned by a family called Klein, in the foothills of Camps Bay. Table Mountain lurked like a headache in the distance, its halfway cloud rolling in, then out, then in again. There was a miner bird in the garden that used to mimic the sound of the house phone. I loved it when it “rang”, my dad rushing to answer it in case it was work, the dull echo of the ringtone with no one there.

The house was split-level with an annexe on the side, and a maid called Ethel who lived there with her husband. By day her smile was wide and white, her laugh rolling up from somewhere deep with-in her. At night, she would be beaten. The noise was terrible. My mother would stroke my hair and place her hands over my ears to buffet her screams.

The house had a small, turquoise swimming pool at the bottom of the garden, through trees and bushes and eleven steep and winding stone steps. There was a robotic cleaner with a long, black pipe that roamed across the bottom of the pool every evening at six. I darted from corner to corner to avoid it, swimming for my life. I thought of it as an octopus, with one long,

terrifying tentacle that would suck me down beneath the surface of the water where I couldn't breathe.

But it wasn't that that killed me, in the end. It was a cheap, plastic yellow boat with a blow-up giraffe and two holes to put your legs through. Slightly too small for me, slightly too tight. The plastic scratched as I pushed myself in, and scraped as I pulled myself out, leaving raised red welts across my thighs.

The day I died I was on my own at the pool. I'd always been a strong swimmer. My parents didn't need to worry about me; though, as it turned out, they did.

I was surprised, the moment I got trapped in the blow-up boat, upside down. It was too buoyant to flip over again, too strong. My dad had joked about how puffed out he was, how blowing the boat up had tasted of bitter plastic and made his head spin.

I remember fighting as hard as I could, still scared by the robot and its chug chug chug noise coming towards me while I had my head under the water, as the air left my lungs, as my throat burned. As the seconds passed without breathing I remember fighting, twisting my body this way and that, pulling the muscles all the way down one side, growing frantic, but with a kind of detached disbelief. I was seven. My skin was smooth, I had a light spatter of freckles across my nose and cheeks. I'd only just discovered Roald Dahl. This wasn't happening, not to me. I thought that right until the end.

I remember crying out for dad to save me but my mouth filling with water. It made my teeth hurt, made me cough, only when I drew in to clear it, a rush of cold entered my throat and lungs, filling me up, making me dizzy. It was quiet, beneath the surface of the water. It was like listening from the middle of a dream, wet space all around me. My eyes and ears foggy, my nose full of wet.

I was too disorientated to know which way was up and for a moment I stayed there, my legs above the surface, static, like I was holding a ballet pose. Then, with my eyes open with the sheer surprise of it all, my hair floating beneath me like a dark and tangled mess of algae, I died.

I don't know what happened after that, of course. I imagine that one, maybe both of my parents started to wonder where I was and what I was doing. It would have taken them a while. They were used to me disappearing, sitting in the low branches of a tree, whispering to fairies.

They most likely called out for me. My Mum would have called my name, trilling the "r", operatic-style, to make me laugh. When I didn't come, she wouldn't have thought anything of it, at first. After a while she would've turned to my dad. "Go and see where she's got to, would you," she would have said, exasperated. Dad wouldn't have been listening, caught up with fixing something, paying a bill. She would have had to say it twice, maybe even three times, each time growing more and more annoyed.

Eventually she would have barked for me, irritated that I wasn't there to help unload the dishwasher or to set the table for dinner. Then my dad, walking to some inner beat, jazz on his mind, would have walked out of the glass bi-fold doors that led to the

patio. I can see him standing there, hands on his hips. He wasn't a man to me but a mountain, to be climbed, to hang from.

He would've stood there, hands on hips, in his silly yellow swim shorts with the blue lightning bolt flashes. He would have shouted for me like Tarzan, before stamping heavily down the steps, ape-like, heavy on his feet. I imagine him clutching his chest when he found me. I don't know if he cried. I never saw him cry.

I wonder what he thought when he first saw my legs, waving in the breeze above the surface of the pool, as white and still as that sculpture of a bird in Hyde Park. I wonder if to him I was beautiful.



Rabbit Is My Name

Giselle Leeb

Giselle Leeb grew up in South Africa and lives in Nottingham, where she works as a web developer when she is not writing. Her short stories have appeared in The Best British Short Stories 2017 (Salt), Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet, Ambit, Mslexia, Litro, and other places. She has placed third in the Ambit, Elbow Room and Aurora competitions and been shortlisted for the Bridport Prize. She is an Assistant Editor at Reckoning Journal.

It has been an hour since she left the house. And now she is pretending to wait for the train. There is something about the way her hair is slipping down her back that doesn't feel right. And the thick velvet of her dress clings to her woollen stockings. She hadn't felt much about leaving in the end.

The poles beside the tracks stretch out at precisely spaced intervals, their wires glittering in the full moon. She waits next to an ornamental tree and pictures the house across the lake. Or rather, the only part of it she likes to remember—the lamp outside the front door shining a small circle of light onto the water in front of it. She had often imagined herself an otter swimming beyond the yellow circle as she stared out of the second floor window.

She stands stock-still, a statue, her hands clasped over the front of her cloying dress. But now that she is facing forwards towards the future, she doesn't really care about what might happen. And, in any case, there are no trains until 3.30am.

She borrowed her mother's rouge, went into the station bathroom and carefully applied a red circle to each of her cheeks. She has the money too, in a small pocket on the inside of her skirt. The trees in their neat pots are lined up like the poles stretching along the tracks. They are nothing like the big trees that blow softly and constantly around the

house on the lake. Mother would never have agreed to the lipstick, or the train for that matter. And even if she is just pre-tending to wait for it, would they, in any case, let her on? Mother had liked to gaze into the mirror on Sunday mornings, while Father slept. “You look like a whore,” Mother had said to her once, or perhaps even twice, when she caught her applying red lipstick in front of it.

She supposes that means she does probably look old enough to get the train. The thing is, a train would not really feel like an otter heading through water.

She returns to the restroom and stares into the mirror. She thinks that she looks more like a rabbit than an otter, with her pale face and red-rimmed eyes. A rabbit with rouge. She starts to giggle. She had been a rabbit for a few days when she was a child. She had liked to eat greens and pretend that she hated meat. Even then, she had known that she was not really a rabbit.

She goes back out and pretends to check the ticket that she does not have. The moon is huge and orange, hanging over the fields that the tracks lead into. She imagines herself a rabbit, hopping along next to the train, the people inside it looking out at her. You were my swan song, Mother had told her once, on a happy occasion. There was a full moon that night and the next day it had begun to rain.

The rabbit had only lived for a few days once it reached their house. Mother had carried it into the kitchen from the hutch. She had held it upside down by the legs and hit it hard on the head with the back of the soup ladle. It had twitched violently, then hung silent.

She realizes that everything is probably her fault, as Mother and Father had told her all along. She had been prepared to leave the house and even the lake. She had planned it. But she is only pretending to get the train. She knows it now for sure. She goes back into the bathroom to rub the red spots out of her dress, just in case.



COMUNITY

LOVE
this Park
KEEP
IT CLEAN

MAXILLA
WALK

#24 hearts

#24hearts.org
#24hearts.com
#24hearts

My Fathers Fabrics

Mohamed Zain Dada

Mohamed Zain Dada is a writer and poet based in North London. He is also the co-founder of Khidr Collective a platform seeking to create, celebrate and facilitate Muslim artistry.

The theory goes that the green patch of land in the middle of Shepherd's Bush was a resting place for shepherds. A juncture of calm before they found their way in the city.

In 1908, the area hosted the Franco-British Exhibition. The fruits of colonialism and imperialism laid bare for all to see. A make-shift Senegalese colony for the voyeurs and purveyors to ogle. Take pride in the pillaging. Own the pain you instilled. This little enclave of West London near Shepherd's Bush was appropriately named White City.

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Monsoon on the Uxbridge Road sits proud in its unfashionable black signage and decor, serving the Somali aunties shopping for weddings. An unnamed Yemeni restaurant serves home cooked meals with accompanying bananas on steel trays. The muttering and clattering can be heard as you walk past. Fletcher's in Bush Market has survived Two World Wars serving fruit and vegetables but might not survive gentrification. "We all used to finish at the market and go to the Royal Albert Hall to dance together, not anymore" says Sylvia Fletcher.

Generations escaping found the residue on this patch of land once assigned for grazing and now assigned for impromptu basketball games, basking in the week long English summers and taking your children on the newly installed slides.

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My father found this resting place in 1992. Respite from the woes of family feuds and disagreements woven into years of hardship. This was before “Che-Bu” and emerging quaint, pink coloured cafes. This was Shepherd’s Bush the undesirable. Where a £600K for a studio flat would have seemed absurd.

My grandfather found him in this city after being expelled from Uganda. It wasn’t personal. We were expelled with a whole diaspora of other Ugandan-Indians. Idi Amin Dada. Ironically he shared the same surname as us. His cultural paranoia and prejudice meant we found home in London. Built wealth, built community and ripped up and started again. Started again from nothing. Given a home by the infamous hoarder of wealth, Great Britain. We are the commonwealth but don’t share any of it. Unity for the sake of diplomatic ties. Commonwealth of nations, sharing in none of the stolen wealth from us, but as Sufi, Libyan, anti-colonialist Omar Mukhtar once said, “they are not our teachers.”

We build and we share. So my father built, following in the lauded traditions of his elders and those who came before him. Just like his great granddad who built economies for the poorest in the town of Kampala in the principality of Gujrat in the nation called India.

Silk Chiffon and Swiss Voile. The two main materials of choice for the eclectic mix of customers. Primarily Nigerian, Somali and Sudanese. Some have developed long- lasting friendships in their 24 years of bartering, laughing and smiling. A firm bond built on the common, unsaid refrains of (but not limited to);

“After I pay rent, my job leaves me with £70 a week and they (the council) want to take housing benefit”

“Halima’s weddings in August and I need to look beautiful”

“My son is doing 5 years in prison for nothing”

“Life is shit but we have each other.”

These bright, lights and bright colours detract from the little miseries. What would life be without all these colours anyway? My father’s fabrics brought them together. Many women arrived to firm the bonds of their daughters and sons. They were planning the joyous occasions of weddings and no expense was to be spared.

This visit to our shop was an occasion in itself. Zain Al-Mansoojad. Zain Textiles. Its name rung out in the Sudanese community and it was a burgeoning presence in the Somali diaspora too. Mother’s would claim they travelled from Bristol and my dad would quip that people have travelled from Hargeisa, cue laughter. Somali aunties would exclaim in one breathless note, “you-know-Somali’s” after telling them what they’d chosen was beautiful. My dad always told me to wear these smiles with pride because people visiting was an occasion in itself.

“We serve the Sufi way” he’d say.

The word “Tassawuf” derives from the word “Suf” which means wool in Arabic. It is where the word “Sufi” is believed to have come from. Thus, to be a “Sufi” in literal terms is to be a “wool wearer.” Wool as the symbol of detachment from the dunya.

As the embodiment of simplicity in a world of heightened privilege and extreme poverty. The burnt out tower block east of Bush was the sickening testament to that. Khadija Saye Mohamed Neda Mariem Elgwahry Yaqub Hashim Faouzia El Wahabi Farah Hamden Jessica Urbano Ramirez Mohammed Hamid Isaac Paulos

Under the Westway, a silent community march takes place. Ishmahil Blagrove takes the mic. He raises his solitary index finger and others follow suit, “we are One.” His voice, these reverberations are felt far and wide, “this isn’t Notting Hill, this is Ladbroke Grove!”

This is Bush. These stories are woven so effortlessly into the grand web of the unheard and unnoticed. None of these survivors of war envisioned calling this home. No capital, but we made it happen. Colourful garments and trauma. Holding onto communal healing for dear life.

JJ Bola



The Probably Magic Wheelchair

Bobby Williams

Bobby Williams is floating up in the ether, soaking up the sun—an avid stranger in search of the pop trash myth. You may read fiction and essays created by this awkward, detached sociophobe in Tammy Journal, Moronic Ox, The Montreal Review, Ben Jon-son Journal and elsewhere. You may read a novel, also written by BW, by ordering that novel, Two is for You, from the Open Books website, or a website called Amazon dot com. The author would also like to note that he is on a serious Sheryl Crow kick.

The story begins when I sit down to write it—as the factually worst song ever recorded plays, on repeat, in my head. “Barbie Girl,” by the band: Aqua. Except I edit the only lyric any of us has ever known, the chorus, by adding “You Bitch” in parenthesis after the come on Barbie, let’s go party. When I hear Barbie respond, “ah-ah-ah-yeah,” to me calling her a bitch, over and over, I add ALL-caps to the parenthetical section to see if she’ll notice. She doesn’t.

Then I think how I’d better erase this because while that is actually happening, it probably doesn’t have anything to do with the real true story—that started last week, and is, in fact, ending as I write it.

The first time I drove past the garage sale I almost didn’t notice. I pass that house every day and it’s a shabby house, one you’d look at just to find something to criticize, but I’m not one of those people. It is an incredibly short, one-story house. I feel like I could clean their chimney on my tippy toes. The yard is equal parts grass and mud and I’m pretty sure a few greying tires are scattered around back. I idly scanned the garage sale, feeling a little bad— nobody wants to put all their crap out on the lawn for judgment, they do it because they need a few extra bucks. If they needed only space they’d throw the shit away and save themselves the hassle of haggling with neighbours who are really just strangers anyway.

Just before I went to look back at the road I noticed one particularly interesting item at the garage sale: a wheelchair. “Oh...fuck, they’re selling a wheelchair,” I thought. It’s hard not to notice an empty wheel-chair. Especially one that is stuck in mud instead of on a ramp where it belongs—empty, a wheelchair is simultaneously symbolic of past and future tragedies.

Whenever I passed the house the following week I thought up some important questions regarding the wheelchair that just wasn’t selling. Why don’t you need it anymore? And who, needing one, would ever get it there? Or even think to. Can’t you just donate that to a hospital? Is it there to elicit pity from garage sale customers? After how many days does a garage sale become an open-air market?

I wanted to believe that the former wheelchair resident had at least graduated to crutches. My favourite image was of the rider finishing his or her first marathon, as a runner. I wanted the wheelchair to be there as a symbol of something good that happened.

After four days I made a note in my house with prearranged duct tape and wrote in thick black sharpie the word: WHY? And leaving room for a reply I stuck it to the wheelchair seat. I sealed it on their good and ran to my car and drove away fast.

The next day when I drove past, the paper was gone. I cursed those bastards for not playing my game how I wanted. The day after that was Saturday. I knew that if I could summon the courage to have an extremely disappointing conversation, that’d be the time. I went over at ten am sharp—the prime hour for garage sale shopping. I pulled up and saw a rotund gentleman, probably sixty-three, sitting on a quivering plastic folding chair. I worried that if the chair dumped him, he might roll all the way into the busy street in front of his house. So I parked in his driveway.

He didn’t get up from the seat when I approached him. He lit a cigarette. I lit one as well, to show him I’m a real man too. So obsessed with the purpose of my visit I totally forgot to walk around, act normal, and look at the stuff. I instead stood there smoking

and watching him smoke, about four drags when I realized how strange I must have seemed showing up in the yard like that. “Well...what is it?” he asked.

“Why are you selling that wheelchair?”

“You’re the one that put that fuckin’ piece uh paper on it.”

“No,” I said. “Okay, yeah,” I said.

“We don’t need it anymore,” he announced.

It wasn’t so much that his answer could apply to any item, at any garage sale on earth that bothered me. It was the word we, and that he didn’t seem to care.

“Why don’t you need it?” I asked again. “You thinking about buying it?”

That actually had not occurred to me. Finally, I just decided to ask him, “Were you healed? Is the person who needed this better now?”

“You wanna buy it?” he asked again.

“Can you just answer me?” I said.

He stood up. “YEAH,” he shouted, “I’m cured...it’s a magical fucking wheelchair, now you wanna buy it or what?”

“Well...how much is it?” I asked. “Thirty bucks,” he said.

“Thaaaat’s pretty steep,” I said. “I’ll go to twenty-five.”

“Deal.” We shook on it there in the yard. He helped me load the wheelchair into my car and I drove straight to the hospital. The nurses thanked me profusely.

“Oh, Bobby,” and I felt really fucking...magical.



The Story of Veronica

Suzanne Samples

When she is not writing poetry and fiction, most people know Suzanne Samples as 9lb Hammer, a small-but-fierce blocker with Appalachian Rollergirls in Boone, North Carolina. In 2013, Suzanne graduated with a Ph.D. in Victorian literature from Auburn University. She currently teaches Rhetoric & Composition and Literature at Appalachian State University and has been published by The Alarmist, Fiction Weekly, Fiction Attic Press, Dime Show Review, and Jersey Devil Press

Last night I dreamt of your twin. The one your shit killed at birth. That's the story you tell, anyway. You tell a lot of stories. This tale: at your descent down the birth canal, you had to shit. You did. It went all over your twin's face and smothered her. Veronica officially died from Meconium Aspiration Syndrome, and you came out cooing like a pink kitten. Because of her, you never feel alone. You tattooed her initials on your forearm—VM—and love to tell The Story of Veronica to girls in bars who like the way your evergreen eyes crinkle when you smile.

You wonder if Veronica would have been gay, if Veronica would have pierced her bottom lip at 31, if Veronica would have tried heroin in her early 20s. You wonder if Veronica would have turned down a role hosting a children's television show, if Veronica would have lost her agent, if Veronica would have kissed a girl in a broken elevator because the girl looked sad and even more flustered than the panicked, flashing buttons. I wonder if Veronica would have kept her promises, if Veronica would have asked me to move in with her, if Veronica would have changed her mind when her ex-girlfriend contacted her and said I miss your fingers inside of me in bar bathrooms late at night. In my dream, Veronica instructs me to forget you. She says you might be a good bowler, but you do not take responsibility for your lies. I was blind but now I see, she says with Biblical confidence. I see everything.

Veronica dresses like you. She likes red flannels, tattered Vans slip-ons, and backward hats. She pulls her naturally highlighted hair into bumpy ponytails and drinks vodka sodas after running and sweating three miles around the block. Veronica finished her degree in welding and makes keychains for friends on warm October afternoons. She likes reading Scandinavian novels and lists Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle* as her favourite contemporary book. She collects deer skulls and hangs necklaces (returned to her by frustrated girlfriends) on the antlers as a reminder that she really should try to stop breaking hearts. Veronica and I are in love.

I realize this twenty seconds into the dream. Everything I wanted from you, Veronica gives. She listens to my frustrations regarding our healthcare systems and promises to write to our senators. Veronica talks to me about how aliens already exist on Earth and enjoy making Facebook Live videos of themselves levitating in Air BnBs. She kisses my neck when I stop talking and tells me that she misses me after she smokes a cigarette on the porch. Veronica Veronica Veronica. She stretches out her arm onto my lap. She has your initials—NM—tattooed on her skin. She likes to tell me *The Story of Nicole* before we fall asleep, and I like the way her evergreen eyes crinkle when she smiles.

...WEEKEND...
...FRIDAY 23RD...
...BY HANDEL ON T...
...RISICO | FERREY...
...DONAEO | KY...
...SINZ | DIXON BR...
...FOOTBALL TOURNAM...
...FRIDAY 24TH JULY...
...HOSTED BY EDDIE KAOI...
...MAVERICK S...
...STYLO G | ME...
...DIXON BR...
...BASKETBALL TO...
...AT WWW.A...
...BOT...
...BILLY DO...
...S...
...N...
...N...



HOME
STREET
HOME



BILL!!!! Have you
out with SSOSVA again.
Drawing rallywackers
on the toilet walls in
Montys Bar ???



FRANKIE
SAYS
RIOT!

CLIPPER VILLA

Axis of Adults

Samuel Cole

Samuel E. Cole lives in Woodbury, MN, where he finds work in special event/development management. He's a poet, flash fiction geek, and political essayist enthusiast. His work has appeared in many literary journals, and his first poetry collection, *Bereft and the Same-Sex Heart*, was published in October 2016 by Pski's Porch Publishing. His second book, *Bloodwork*, a collection of short stories, was published by Pski's Porch Publishing in July 2017. His third book, *Siren Stitches*, a collection of short stories, was published by Three Waters Publishing in October 2017. He is also an award-winning card maker and scrap booker.

We were friends for five months, met during the spring scrapbooking boom of 2007. I was attracted to the minimalist design of Nicole's layouts, hair, and expression. A woman assembled by strategic effortlessness, married to a man named Brett, with similar attributes, who I met a few weeks later, a tech nerd who collected in totes and bookcases things of which I'd never waste the time or money: dungeons and dragons game boards and magazines, Star Wars coffee mugs and action figures, Sci-Fi novels, computer components, large and small, and a rack of vinyl records by recording artists unknown to my eyes and ears. I've never resided anywhere long enough to keep a collection of anything, except for credit card bills. The more I learned about their fondness for gathering, the more I stood alone in wonderment, seething and jealous. I started going to their house for dinner, once a month, sometimes twice. Nicole made homemade salsa, tomato bisque soup, and beer chicken on the grill. Brett made draft beer, soda pop, and chocolate torte cake. Together, they formed culinary completeness. Expert hosts with a flair for unpretentiousness. Welcome hugs. Liberal stories. Guest plates and goblets. Head seat at the dining room table overlooking a pond. People who easily reach the word, friend, and stick to it. People who know, and like, their position on

the planet. People who trust other people to possess the same kind of trust. How marvellous. And stupid.

They started offering to pay for gas, after I said I couldn't afford to come for dinner. "We want to see you," they'd say. "We miss your laugh and sassy zingers." Dinners turned to concerts and soccer games, prices increasing, including my partiality for their generosity. My own family had disregarded me long ago. I'd never known the pleasure of a sister, or brother, never stood close and drank Redd Apple's Ale in line in Minneapolis, waiting to see Henry Rollins be-rate American politics and Sandra Bernhardt lisp about aging vaginas. A tribe was forming, and I was the favourite sit-in-the-middle clansman.

Evenings turned to weekends, once my car was repossessed and cash-paying shifts at The Scrap Shack were reduced to part time. I could still afford a rented room a few towns over, thanks to the light-blue bicycle (with rope and lock) they bought for my birthday. During rain and snow, money for Uber was no issue for them, gladly forking over a twenty here or fifty there. "We want to help you," they'd say. "We miss your giggle and crazy sarcasm."

Their basement was cold and the bed was uncomfortable. Worse, I had to share the room (and bath) with a cat named Bernie Sanders. Bernie didn't look at me, biting my fingers whenever I tried to pet him. His disgust mirrored my own. I was glad he couldn't talk. I knew he'd yell, put this leach outside and never let him back inside. I bought him catnip, which he rebuffed. It was as if he knew my company necessitated soberness. "It's weird," Nicole and Brett said. "Bernie Sanders likes everyone."

I saw it on August twelfth, standing upright between Prince and The B52's, a vinyl record by U2: PRIDE (IN THE NAME OF LOVE) SINGLE. 1984. Featuring a photo of Martin Luther King, Jr. In cellophane. Pressed in Australia. RARE written on a yellow Post-it note. 1 OF 5 written on a pink Post-it note. DO NOT SELL written on a green Post-it note. Bernie Sanders scratched my leg when I lifted U2 from its resting place. He

paced and hissed until I put it back. On a computer at the library, I researched the record. Coloured vinyl. A remarkable single. A treasured buy. Valued between six and ten thousand. A collector's collector. Copy number three was sold in 2007 in Massachusetts for eight thousand five-hundred dollars.

Damn it. I knew what I had to do. But when. And how. And why. Was the take worth losing Nicole and Brett, people who'd opened their doors: front and back, refrigerator, bedroom, and bath? But I'd be debt free, and I was eager to move onward, the only residence I've ever known. Weekends turned to weeknights, each of us exploiting the other's strengths to subvert, and suppress, our own weaknesses. Tales took on new attachments. Food took on new courses. Friendship became fraternity and the intimacy became a threesome without sex. It should have been a happy phase. It should have been enough for me to keep my hands to myself. Bernie paced and hissed. Nicole and Brett gave (and gave). And I took U2, one midnight, the next day to a pawn shop willing to pay five thousand three-hundred dollars. Nicole and Brett never asked for a phone number. Or for a street address or Facebook site or Instagram account. The Scrap Shack could only point them to a P.O. Box number and to the police, I suspect, who never contacted me, likely telling Nicole and Brett to not be so trusting to strangers in the future. Duh. I haven't told my new friends, Kathryn and Shad, who have a cat, Elizabeth Warren, and who also collect Faberge eggs, about Nicole, Brett, and Bernie, nor about the fate of the U2 single: whether it's sitting upright in a rack between Prince and The B52's or is it tucked in a white towel underneath a mattress in a rented room in Great Falls, Montana, calculating its next move.

Remi-Lyn Browne



Little Brother

Sarah Saltiel

I'm from New York City and I'm a third year undergraduate student at the University of Chicago, majoring in English, Visual Arts, Creative Writing. Outside of academics, I'm involved with theatre on campus, archery, game design, and with my school's competitive ballroom and Latin dance team. I'm really interested in pushing the English language and breaking it apart structurally to see how to create meaning beyond the absolute value of the words.

There are some things that seem to run in the family.

I hover outside your darkened bedroom, very conscious of the sound of my heartbeat in my ears. I pause because once I pass through your doorway; I will be acknowledging the possibilities chewing on my brain. I hold my breath and listen carefully for yours. Are they slower than usual? How slow are sleeping people's breaths? I try to breathe again for comparison but the sound of my own breaths—panicked—drown out yours. The glow of my phone lights up my foot as I hold it against my leg. I consider re-reading the text open on it but I don't move because the words are imprinted on my brain: "Sarah, can u come down here ASAP???" Sent two hours ago. When five minutes ago I lifted up my phone to see the message, I didn't want to explain to myself why I sprinted down the stairs to your room. I didn't want to explain why panic swirled through my body. But you've been upset a lot lately, or so I've been told because I haven't been home a lot lately and I left you here and I... and I... and I...

My breathing becomes more erratic.

Concentrate

This isn't about me.

I step into your room, putting my feet down softly on the carpet so I don't wake you up. The dog looks up at me and wags her tail against the ground with a thump thump thump. Unconscious, your face loses that sharpness that comes from the angst of being twelve in a world that expects too much and too little of you. I feather my fingers across your neck and feel the beat, beat, beat.

You've been upset a lot lately and sometimes you close yourself in the bathroom, sometimes you let sobs wrack your body and you can't vocalize what is eating away at your insides but your sobs permeate the door, bleed through our parents' ears and... I was always the quieter child. When I cried, it vibrated not out but in and shook my body until I had to wrap my arms around my-self because if I didn't hold myself together, bits of me might start falling off and eventually they did. I started falling apart four years ago when a razor became an extension of my hand and I carved lines into my hip because there was too much inside of me and I couldn't let it overflow. Three years ago was the last time that I wrote that language into my skin but I'll never forget the day that you hugged me around my waist and pressed the denim of my jeans into the fresh wounds. You were eight. I cried that day, not for myself but for you because you should not have come so close to something like that. I cried because you didn't know all the ways that a human being can rot on the inside and I want to believe that you still don't.

I sit in the dark for a while, still feeling your pulse. It occurs to me that if you were to wake up right now, it'd be hard to explain why I'm sitting next to your bed, my fingers on your neck. It'd be hard to explain why I checked for pill bottles when I stepped into your room or checked for bloodstains on your sheets.

Two nights ago you asked me to read you my poetry until you fell asleep. As you were getting into bed, I saw scrapes on your knees, up and down your shins. When I asked you where they came from you said that you scraped them on a fence, or on rocks, or wherever else it is that twelve-year-old boys scrape their legs and I was scared not to believe you. I'd never read you my poetry before but I read until my voice cracked and by then your eyes were heavy and shuttered. I wish that the poems that I read you were like lullabys but a lot of the time, I don't have any beautiful words left inside of me and so I write with the ugly ones. I read you the ones that I could bear you hearing, but as quickly as I could, so that maybe none of the terrible, terrible words would make an impact on your brain. Your snuffling breaths turn into snores and back again. My panic has slowed in its circuits around my mind, turning to molasses. I slide off your bed and onto the floor, drawing my legs into my chest and resting my cheek on my knee. There's a certain peace in sitting next to someone who is sleeping.

In a few days, I will leave to go back to New York and in a month our mother will tell me about the divorce and in three months, she'll tell you. You'll call me and your face won't look nearly as peaceful as it does right now, but cracked and worn in places in a way that no twelve year old's face should have to look.

You'll stop crying in the bathroom. I won't be around to know if that means that you stop crying in general or if you learn to do it in the places that no one will find you.

I'll stop speaking to our mother and will visit less, but when I do visit, I'll stay at our grandparent's and you'll demand to sleep on the couch next to me so you can see me. I get up to leave your room, leave you sleeping peacefully, because that might be the only way to be peaceful anymore. I will never explain to you why I had to check your pulse, check if you were still breathing, because they aren't words that I want to have to say out loud.



The Voice

Ellen Denton

Ellen is a freelance writer living in the Rocky Mountains with her husband, three cats, and an extended family of deer and other wildlife that appear now and then outside her house. Her writing has been published in over a hundred magazines and anthologies.

I ride on the backs of dragonflies bright
or float in the halos of firefly light
in air flame wind or sea

How come you can't see me?

People have always told me how much they admire my patience and good humour in raising a special-needs child. I smile and wave my hand in a dismissive fashion, like it's no big deal. I explain to them it really hasn't been all that difficult, that Joey has his limitations, but overall, he's not that much different from other kids. He eats and sleeps. He plays. He goes to his special school each day. He reads and draws. He pets the cat and sleeps curled up beside it in bed. I smile and shake my head when I tell people that and say "Kids and their pets, huh?"

"Oh I hear you on that girlfriend" they say, and tell me again they wish they had my patience. But I'm pretending. It's all a lie. A slick social veneer I've painted and repainted over my despair like a coat. I'm not patient anymore, not for real, and I'm not in good humour. Sometimes I can't stand to be in the same room as him. I hide that from everyone. I even hide it from you Joey. No you don't, mom.

He's ten now, and has never said a single word, but the doctors say his vocal cords are fine. He writes, better than any ten year old I know, so I know he understands language just fine and he's smart as hell. I tried writing him messages, but he doesn't respond to that either.

Why won't you speak Joey, why?

I do. You're not listening.

I also never tell anyone how much he creeps me out sometimes – the way he'll turn for no apparent reason and look straight at me in this weird, intense way. I smile at him when he does that, but I'm not smiling inside. The other day, I was watching him sitting on the floor reading, looking down at the book. The cat was on the windowsill looking out, facing away from him. He suddenly, quietly looked up at the cat, and the cat spun its head around and looked at him. It was creepy.

This morning, I went into the living room where he was drawing with crayons and asked him if he wanted some orange juice. I always ask him these simple things because the guidance counsellor at his school said it's important to reinforce normal speech interaction as much as possible, even if he doesn't respond. As usual, he didn't, just looked up, then kept on drawing. I placed the glass on the table near to his arm.

I sat in the kitchen drinking coffee and thought about how much I sometimes feel like grabbing him by the throat and throttling him when he does that. It's not that I really want to kill him. I love him, but I feel like I'm at my wits end.

When I finally went into the living room again, I looked at this horrible drawing he did. It was of a person hanging, strangled from a noose, with his tongue sticking out. Then he looked me straight in the eyes with this pointed, unwavering eagerness. I patted him on the head and said "Very nice, Joey".

Raising him has worn me ragged over the years. When he was younger, five, six, even eight, I had hopes that he would come through this, but the more time that's gone by, the more distant I feel from this strange, mute, unchanging kid so isolated from the rest of the world. Will this go on through the rest of his life or mine? Will he ever be able to live on his own? God, forgive me for even having these thoughts, but sometimes I think to myself, special needs monster. I know, mom.

A bird just landed in a tree.

Before he takes off and flies

I can jump straight out of me
Into him and see through his eyes.

I thought I would try a new approach today, something one of the other parents told me she had some success with. Instead of trying to communicate with words, or even writing, she used objects and gestures. She gave me, as an example, how she'd held a beach ball up to her daughter, Hannah, who also never speaks, and who tends to sit and rock back and forth and hum when she isn't doing something.

She made a simple motion with the ball, then handed it to Hannah, who at first dropped it. She picked it up and made the motion again, and again, until the girl, instead of dropping it, made the same motion.

They continued on this way, making more and more complex motions, with Hannah laughing and copying every one of them perfectly. The girl then made new motions of her own and handed them to her mother to make back at her.

I tried this with Joey, first using a model airplane he built last year. I made simple flying motions with it, and tried to hand it to him, but he wouldn't even take it long enough to put it down. I tried fifteen more times with the plane, and then with other objects. After an hour of this, with him just sitting there looking at me intently, and refusing to even take the object when I held it out to him, I gave up.

Well, that was a lost cause. I guess I'd better go make him some lunch. What will it take for me to get through to this kid?

Oh brother, this is like talking to a chimpanzee. I don't want any lunch mom, and what is it going to take for me to you get through to YOU. All you have to do is LISTEN.

My God, did I really hear what I think I did? Joey, did you just say something?



Cloth Against Skin

Sonia Hope

*Sonia Hope is a short story writer based in London, UK. Her stories have appeared The Nottingham Review and Flash Flood. She is a Librarian at Hayward Gallery and National Poetry Library, South-bank Centre. @SunRather
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I arrive in Southampton from Port-of-Spain hoping that I'm suitably dressed for an English summer: an iris-yellow dress cinched tight at my waist. A white pillbox hat with a little net shading my eyes. White kitten-heeled stilettos that lift my feet off the ground.

The breeze, though, is unexpectedly cool; it embraces me like a shawl. I've heard about the cold of winter that drains the blood from your fingers and toes, but I haven't felt it yet.

I take the train to London where my cousin Rita is waiting for me at Waterloo station. She lives in a house with two bedrooms, one for her and Alan and one for their son Errol – no spare room, but she said I could stay.

At night I sleep on Rita and Alan's settee and dream of being adrift in the Atlantic, but when I feel furtive hands creeping across my skin I am wide awake, holding my body rigid. I keep my eyes squeezed shut and wait to be left alone.

In the morning, sitting at the Formica table in Rita's kitchen, Alan's eyes won't meet mine. They are blue and fathomless like the ocean that separates me from home. *

I meet a man called Patrick. He buys me a pearl-pink glass vase and a weekly supply of carnations until I agree to marry him. On the day of the wedding, Calvin, Patrick's best man, whispers in my ear that I am making a mistake, that I should go away with him. I say yes to Patrick anyway.

Seven months later, Mia is born. She is such a dry-eyed, hushed baby. Sometimes I feel like tipping her out of her cot just to make her cry. Every day I hand her over to Esme to be looked after I feel so relieved. I leave Mia sitting in a room full of other babies, mute while the others gurgle and scream. I catch the bus to work, sitting close to the open platform. I am unable to blend in with my surroundings but I'm used to the stares of Londoners now, their faces as bloodless as a winter sky. This is what they must see:

My stiff paper cap perched on my head, brown leather brogues on my feet.
My pale-blue dress with a starched white collar, thick black stockings.
My navy wool cape keeps me warm.
My nurse's uniform protects me, tells them who I am.

Mia drapes her coltish body across the bed and watches me get dressed for a party. I have been promoted: I am a ward sister now. I stand in front of the mirror, but she is behind me stealing its attention, her face morphing from smiles to pouts to frowns. My daughter is nothing like me. She thinks being able to suck her teeth diverts attention away from her East London accent, her love of Marmite and Top of the Pops, her knowledge of no other country but this one. I still relax my hair into waves and curls.

I still dust my cheekbones with powder that shimmers like moon dust. I still paint my nails wine-red with lipstick to match. My dress wraps around my hips and clings just so. With cloth against skin, I make myself visible. *

After twenty years, Patrick breaks the strained politeness of our marriage to pursue a girl not much older than Mia. His body is distant and heavy with answers to questions I dare not ask. When I leave our home, Mia chooses to stay with him.

I retire and rent a house in a seaside town. I don't have much to do except please myself, so I re-read all the books I own, drink strong coffee sweetened with condensed

milk, and flick through my old records, returning to my favourites: Bessie, Ella, Billie, Sarah. I sing along. Sometimes I dance, awakening muscles that are usually quiet and still.

Every morning I wrap myself in an oversized parka that once belonged to Patrick, and I walk down to the sea. My jeans are so worn the denim has washed away.

My hands feel snug in sheepskin mittens; they recall my first English winter.

My green wellingtons crunch the pebbles on the beach with each step.

Sometimes I think about going home – I wonder if I'll die before I've made up my mind?

My mother and

father only exist in my memories now, and our house will be in ruins. Bats and birds will be nesting in

the gaps of the galvanised roof, and green lizards will skim-skitter across the veranda where I used to sit

and dream of coming to England.

*

It's morning. The nurse comes into my room. She leans over me and her hands roll away the waves of sheets and blankets. My nightdress is unbuttoned and removed as if being unpegged from a washing line. She says, stand, but I can't – the frame won't catch me if I fall. She says, hold, and my fingers curl into my palms because of the pain.

She says, wash – my skin recoils from the tepid water filling the basin.

The nurse immerses a flannel and wrings it out briskly. She scrubs me as if she is cleaning a window. I am dried, and fresh clean clothes pulled on to my body. I have not chosen them: Disposable knickers and a grey polyester vest.

Navy linen trousers, elasticated at the waist.

A moss-green jumper, its woollen folds nestling against my skin.

I'm strapped into a wheelchair, pushed into the lounge and given warm grey porridge for breakfast. The sour milk bleeds into the plastic tang of the beaker.

Afterwards, I am moved to the bay window where glimmering sunlight burns through the glass. I sit here for hours, and I can almost feel the catch-fire heat of the sun on my skin, inhale the sea breeze so it fills my lungs.

On days like this, I am no longer four-thousand miles from home.

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