

THE

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ISSUES

A NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY PUBLICATION

OUR THANKS, AS ALWAYS, TO

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to issue eight of *The Edge* magazine, the final magazine for both this academic year, as well as for many on our editorial team. Third year has come to a rapid close and for many of us this magazine marks the final end to our university lives. For that reason we have decided to include extracts of work from two editors, both studying Creative Writing, as a tribute to the work put into the magazine throughout this year, as well as efforts towards final year dissertations.

A special mention must also go to another on our editorial team for the amazing cover image featured in this issue. The image, affectionately named 'Stevie Snake Eyes,' was created by Phil Wall and we can only thank him for his remarkable contribution.

For me especially, Issue eight marks the culmination of an important part of my own university experience. I have been with the magazine since its creation in my first year, and I am proud of how far it has come in that time. *The Edge* magazine is organised and created by students who surrender their free time and offer their services to its production. I am truly thankful to those who have committed themselves to this magazine, and will continue to be thankful to those who persevere with its construction.

Rather than a call for submissions for our next issue, we are asking for any student who has a passion for writing, reading, editing or design to join the team next year. If you are interested in the role, please email kaye.kossick@northumbria.ac.uk for information on how you can become involved.

We hope you enjoy *The Edge* magazine, issue eight.

All the best,

Chloe Patricia Beale

& The Edge Magazine Editorial Team

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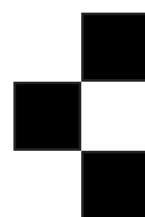
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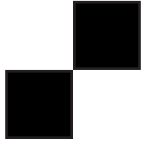
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Shall I compare thee to a sausage roll?
Thou art more sweetly cured, the proper pork.
This pig was worth its sizzling weight in gold,
And now its smoky taste begets all talk.
O! How my mouth enters its reverie;
A scene of nature's worst neglectful slip,
I see my taste buds climb a bacon tree
And pray to Pork that somewhere it exists.
But I preach not unto the baconless,
The way I see it there's just more for me.
But if you "eat their flesh" despite your faith,
Then you cannot impose views on the best
Ten ways to crush one's sexuality;
If so I thrust this doctrine in your face.





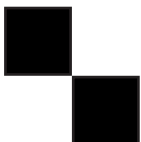
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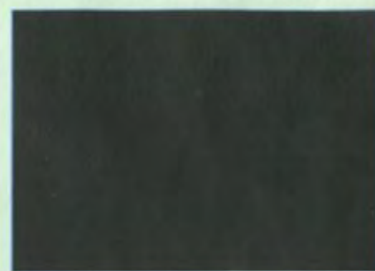
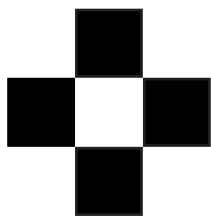
Condemned are those who stop to ponder, sit
And just allow their minds to amble, stroll
Through fields of questions; this seems to befit
The plague of grey concrete that smothers all.

This world rewards no self-contemplation;
Mere individuals comprise The Whole.
As leaders design their own re-election,
Each oblivious prole plays their vacuous role.

Driven, mass panic, to rapturous doom,
One person stops to study, consider
The worth of the journey from cradle to tomb,
And is trampled by cattle that must get to work quicker.

Sleeping is cheating, that wonderful phrase,
That infiltrates minds through recycled TV,
And scarce are those that, in the maelstrom of days,
Wake up to discover that thinking is free.





8. The Art of Japanese Flower Arranging

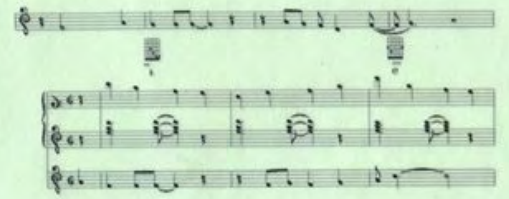
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花の愛は現在まで、過去から続いている

POPPY MORONEY

The order of treatment is as follows:

1. To select the materials; to determine the direction of the vessel; to cleanse of dirt;
2. To determine the direction, the slant, and the length of the branch; to affix it to the vessel by binding the prop to the root;
3. To arrange, adjusting the direction and cutting off the unsuitable.



14. Principality in the Pyrenees

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EMPEROR

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Holding your breath
you willingly cling to a weight
and descend
to where just .5%
of light reaches.
Where pressure
is ten times greater,
where your lungs compress
and fill with blood,
crushing them to the size
of a child's fist.
Your heart rate
plummets
as you reach
the depth of a
drowning Big Ben.
Go any further
and you will
lose oxygen
or black out
or both.



HANNAH
JOHNSON



JOHN RIDLEY

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In wisps of what ifs, she
sat smoking amongst smell of crisps,
transparent pop bottles,
collected ash and myth.
'Are you okay?'

'I'm fine.'

We do this to pass the time.

Moon light and sunset meet,
Over trailing embers of night,
Forever burning into a sky of
faded bodies of moving clouds.
These clouds show an open path,
endless road through all things.
I stand up in pieces like
a puppet with string joints.
'What is this silence I never hear?'

But I just come back home,
Stanley miners without family,
In our room I watch you
Sitting alone.
Her eyes like the insides
Of planets, sliced core of
Ancient copper, sacred
Ring born from the green stone
Of her sea, changing and
Turning, forever orbiting
That timeless black we avoid.
But when I wake, we watch
The sea that's above us now.
I'll sink till I'm blind.

(Find me sleepwalking at home.)

'Are you free tonight mate?'

'Can we go to
McDonalds?'

In my house ghosts leave their
Bodies like derelict ships.

We stare for something,
A gaze into nothing,
What will come in that gaze?
Symbols and dead men come

JANE BURN



These two pictures are from a series of paintings featuring a character named Mr Amberine. He was invented in order to ask seemingly pointless, possibly unconnected and probably random questions and make comments that reflect doubt and other feelings. The stylized, decorative backgrounds use colour and pattern to convey levels of emotion.

Produced using mixed media - acrylic, watercolour, ink and collage.

Why?



B I G D E A L

Eric's attention was drawn, naturally, to the coffee station, which made up three of the four walls of the waiting room. He read above the north wall:

'A good coffee is like a good relationship: Rich, warm and strong.'

It sounded good. The entire front wall of Big Deal Advertising Inc. comprised of a single sheet of glass, suggesting transparency from the outset. The weather outside was grey and cold, and the thin pane provided little insulation. Eric cupped his hands over his mouth to warm them up. He had expected the world's most successful agency to keep the place a little more accommodating – it couldn't be good for business to keep potential clients shivering. It saved on valuable electricity though, he supposed, as even on a grim day such as this the narrow strips of lighting embedded in the ceiling were not required. The white marble floor and porcelain surfaces glistened with still daylight, and the flesh on Eric's neck prickled. The red and green lettering of the coffee station slogan stood out as the only instance of colour in an otherwise – Eric had to admit – fairly bleak environment, and he suddenly thought of Christmas. He bought a latté with extra cinnamon, and felt better.

Glancing around at the cross-section of other waiting room occupants, Eric could quite easily pick out his competition. Potential apprentices followed a general type. There were six young men, all early-twenties like himself, sat with shirt collars poking out of neutral cardigans. Eric inspected his own attire: clean white shirt beneath a pine-green cardigan, black fitted trousers and brown leather shoes with a slight heel (it could never hurt to be a little taller). It was professional and entirely appropriate for the surroundings, but also casual enough to convey subtly his hatred of all things corporate – an essential perceived quality of any advertising apprentice. One of the young men to Eric's left crossed his legs, then uncrossed them as quickly as he had done so. Eric smiled to himself, mentally erasing this indecisive boy from the list of real competition. The prestigious Bruce Barton would flush him out in a second. Eric hoped no one had seen him warming his hands.

The click of high heels on marble caused everyone in the waiting room to look up as one, like startled rodents. An uncommonly attractive girl, no doubt equipped with the very latest in Corporeal Synthetics, appeared at the doorway. She was clutching a clipboard worriedly across her chest, but her precise smile was confident and encouraging. So much better than Annette, Eric couldn't help thinking to himself. He had thought it before.

"Mr Barton will see you now." She spoke in a clear and precise tone, speaking to everyone, without actually addressing anyone in person. Eric and seven others stood up. There was an older man of about thirty who Eric had not even considered a candidate. He wore a full black suit with brown shoes. He looked his age – past his best, thought Eric, pityingly. The candidates filed out of the waiting room one by one, each taking care to let one other person out before them, so as not to appear competitive, but no more than one, so as not to appear weak. The girl indicated that they should go through a set of double doors across the foyer. The wall here was not glass but a continuation of the white marble floor tiles. Eric thanked her, and told her that she was uncommonly pretty. She thanked him with a deferential smile, and the next



man, and the next. One candidate, keen to demonstrate his attention to detail, agreed that she looked above par, but added that her ankles were a little plump. She laughed politely, and agreed. In this year of progress, 2101 CE, constructive criticism was always appreciated, and she would become a better person for it.

The troop of candidates, each more nervous than their exteriors betrayed, sat in silence in a smaller room, awaiting further instructions. The next figure they would meet, Eric told himself, would be Bruce Barton. CEO of Big Deal, and almost single-handedly responsible for the now-taken-for-granted acceptance of Corporeal Synthetics, Mr Barton was truly a pioneer. Less an advertiser than a god. Eric surveyed the new waiting room, this was more like what he had expected; armless sofas of invigorated leather ran parallel along the walls, which boasted a selection of large, presumably important, works of art. The floor appeared to be formatted-oak, preferred to the costlier and less durable regular oak. There was also a low coffee-table of the same material. Noticing a small camera in one of the corners, Eric made the calculated decision to rise from his seat and inspect a small placard next to one of the larger paintings – in case Mr Barton was watching. A number of candidates watched on curiously, but did not get up, lest they appear easily led.

‘Van Eyck – Reprinted in durable ink. Enlarged’

Eric recognised the name. Annette had mentioned it last time she had pestered him about the National Gallery. He returned to his seat with a smile, already picturing Annette’s face when he told her how much better the version he’d seen was than her little, probably peeling, original. Doors at the far end of the room opened, and in stepped a tall, deep-chested man, with a prominent jaw and lips which crept up into a wry smile. How much of this appearance was natural was, of course, difficult to say, but Eric received the distinct impression when Bruce Barton entered the room that he was looking at the real thing.

*

Annette tended to go about her daily business with her eyes down. This was not because she was an inherently sad person but because she felt that, nowadays, everything she looked at was trying to make her do something, send her a message, pursuing her wherever she went. She thought of Eric and the innovative proposal he’d be presenting to the agency any time now. Employ people to attend social events, bars, clubs, anywhere you could make friends. Pay them a small salary to maintain new friendships and influence their friends, discreetly but firmly, into buying your products, and shunning competitors. *No, Arturo’s is always full of idiots; we should try The Flying Pizza... You know where I saw the most gorgeous dress the other day? Elle’s off John Street... Did you know that McDonalds started a company called 100% beef, just so they could put that on their boxes?* The agency would love it, and that’s just what society needed: more reasons to be distrustful. Annette continued past rows of shops and cafés, interactive menus and special offers projecting out in front of her face. She dismissed them with a swipe of the hand, but more came. Simply walking through them used to be an easy escape, but the more savvy businesses now used a system whereby passing through the holographic image automatically signed you up to their mailing list

(based on the address registered on your last retina scan). She still kept a pair of glasses her grandmother had once used in the days before compulsory laser correction surgery, the days before it became illegal to wear anything that obscured your retinas.

An advert for Simon's Menswear burst to life in front of her. Socks for nine credits - so much cheaper than any of the women's shops, where you would pay twice that for the same thing. She opened the door and went in. Picking up several pairs, she set them down on the counter. A man in his early twenties, about the same age as herself, apparently recognised her.

"You're Eric Marshall's girl aren't you?"

It just didn't pay dividend to argue with men over semantic details. They were taught the language of patriarchy from such a young age.

"Yes, hello. Simon is it?"

The man chuckled. He had obviously been fat before the last Gents Torso update. He had the eyes and face of a much more rotund man, yet his arms were perfectly toned, muscular and aggressive. Why wait until he could afford the face update to show off the new arms?

"No, there's no Simon. I'm Neil. Simon is just a more trustworthy name."

Annette did not look convinced.

"Studies have shown," he qualified.

"Well then," Annette smiled with a total lack of sincerity, "I certainly trust your sock prices more than I do Madame Claire's." Simon looked puzzled at this.

"You don't buy Eric socks from Madame Claire's do you?"

Annette too looked puzzled for a moment, before catching on.

"No, I just meant that it's strange how much more women's socks cost than men's. They're essentially the same thing." Simon examined her face for a moment, a trickle of perspiration appearing above his top lip.

"These are for Eric aren't they?" He scratched his blotchy chin with a defined hand. "I can't sell you men's socks if they're for you."

"No, rest assured I wouldn't be seen dead in men's socks." Annette assured him. Not entirely convinced, Simon scanned her retinas and keyed in the credit deduction. He watched her as she walked towards the door. She had a pretty face, he thought, but the body needed some work. With the new Ladies Waist update out soon Eric could be looking at a very agreeable piece of kit. He wondered why she hadn't had any thigh-work done either; it was practically criminal to let that natural face go to waste. He caught a glimpse of himself in the customer mirror. Such excellent muscle definition, he didn't mind admitting, and all real, grown by his own body, with just a few Satellite Cell injections from Corporeal Synthetics. Massively increased muscle hypertrophy. The words didn't mean much to Simon, but he couldn't argue with the results. Why be ugly? Why settle for less? He prodded his flabby cheeks uncertainly. Just a few more weeks, he thought, until the real me is finished.

Annette's next port of call was Elle's Boutique, an innocent looking dress shop where you could spend four thousand credits on clothes for a one-year-old, if you were that way inclined. She stepped through the doorway and felt exactly as she expected she would - repulsed. The walls were lined with lavish dresses of dreamy colours, embroidered extravagantly with beads, pearls, lacing; and there were mirrors everywhere. Annette couldn't help staring straight into her own face, which looked a little rounder in this mirror than the one at home. No doubt they had a product to remedy that, a thin neckline perhaps. A tall Japanese woman with jet black hair raked forcefully back over her head confronted Annette with a smile.

"What can I help you with today Madame? Something for a special occasion?" It would have to be to drive me in here, Annette thought loudly.

“I need a new dress for a party; my husband has a new job. Nothing too expensive.” Eric hadn’t, of course, actually got the job yet, but had been organising the party for three weeks now.

“Oh, well that’s certainly worth celebrating!” She seemed to be genuinely excited at the prospect of this stranger’s husband working for a different company; she didn’t even know what his job was, for all she knew Eric could have sacked off brain surgery and got a new job picking Protein gum up off the street – although she probably assumed that he was picking up the tab today, and gumboys’ wives didn’t buy their dresses from Elle’s.

“You’ve got such a pretty face.” The spiel continued. “I think I’ve got just the thing for you.” While the clerk bustled off into a labyrinth of racks, Annette exchanged a polite smile with the other customers. There was a slender woman with a motorised buggy who, with the soft hum of electric wheels, began making her way over to where Annette stood; and waiting near the checkout was a girl of about her own age, engaged in riveting conversation with her earpiece. The little buggy practically drove into Annette, followed by the slightly flustered slender woman, who introduced herself as Peach.

“And this little treasure is Joe,” she cooed, her eyes never leaving the buggy’s plump contents. He couldn’t have been much more than a few weeks old, Annette thought, which explained why Peach hadn’t had the freckles on her face screened – it was the general consensus that Synthetic treatments were to be avoided during pregnancy, despite the agency’s insistence that they posed no threat to mother or baby.

“He’s lovely,” Annette smiled automatically. This was evidently not the response Peach had been hoping for, as she looked up from the pram for the first time.

“She’s a girl...” Peach stroked the baby’s hand consolingly, as if it would take Annette’s comment to heart. “...A beautiful baby girl.”

“Sorry. She’s lovely.”

But Peach had already stuck the buggy in reverse and was heading for the Darling Babies section – to accessorise baby Jo presumably. It was a bit careless of Annette really; you didn’t dress a baby boy in light green these days. Green for a girl blue for a boy. It was important that humans’ sexes were clearly designated from birth, Annette supposed, otherwise no one would know what to buy for them. *CKbaby pour fille or pour garçon.*

“Here we go then, give this one a try.” The clerk was back, cradling an expensive looking satin dress. She pointed out the details including plush velvet cuffs, shape-holding liner, fine stitching on the upper -

“How much is it?” Annette didn’t mean to be rude; she just couldn’t stand sales patter.

“299 credits,” the clerk said, a trace of what could have been guilt in her voice. She recovered quickly. “It’s the real thing though,” she rubbed the material between her thumb and forefinger, “Actually this is super-satin, as soft as regular but water will run right off it. Better than the real thing really.” Once again, her excitement appeared to be genuine.

“I should try it on then.” Annette was careful not to sound too eager. The dress was very nice, but she didn’t want to give the clerk the idea that she’d been talked into it.

Annette always found changing rooms an odd experience. There were angles that she so rarely saw herself from; it looked like a different person. The dress looked nice, and she looked nice in the dress. It was strange, Annette thought, lifting her hair up behind her head, that she did feel somehow happier in this item of clothing. It was an improvement. She had never concerned herself with what other people said about her appearance, positive or negative, but looking at herself in the mirror it was comforting to imagine no one having a bad word to say about her. She thought she would feel guilty, but she didn’t. The clerk poked her head through the curtain, looked

down at Annette's waist, and smiled sympathetically.

"Never mind, I think I've got a few larger ones knocking about in the back."

"What do you mean?" Annette's indignation was real.

The clerk looked nervously to her side, as if waiting for someone else to step in. Realising no one else was there to see, she came right out with it.

"For such a pretty face, you have much chunkier hips than I'd expected." It had been said before. "And your legs are a little..." she thought for a moment - "...denser than I imagined." The clerk was at a loss to explain the look of bewilderment on Annette's face, after all, her legs were much denser than they ought to be. She couldn't let her wear this dress to a party with that figure. Her husband would be in here demanding a refund.

"Have you considered Corporeal Synthetics? You know it's really not all that expensive, and everyone's doing it. If it can make a plain-Jane like me look good, think of what you'd look like. That face is natural isn't it?"

"Yes." Annette replied, curtly. "But the thing is -"

"Well then," the clerk continued, "what a waste of a good face!"

"I'm not suitable for Synthetics because I have an hereditary muscle condition." Even this was more than Annette liked to tell anyone, but she felt like really turning it on in this particular case. "I have a minor abnormality in the anterior pituitary gland, which means my muscle cell myofibrils are less responsive to satellite cells required for increased muscle hypertrophy." A fact acknowledged by Dr Atley of Corporeal Synthetics (though he added suggestively that with an increased dosage she had a ninety-three per cent chance of success). The clerk looked bemused, as expected. The dress was wrapped up and Annette's retinas were charged to the sum of 299 credits.

She was relieved to be back outside in the real world. Vulgar. Not a word you heard very often these days, but the word Annette felt best described the dress shop. She hadn't taken three steps up the road when a young woman appeared alongside her, in the process of wrapping up a conversation with her earpiece. Annette stopped where she was and turned to face her. The woman held up a finger apologetically and smiled, showing her teeth. They weren't perfect, a little crooked in places, but it didn't disguise the fact that she was obviously very attractive, although probably not many men would feel that way.

"Ok, I'm going now." She touched her ear lightly.

"Can I help you?" Annette asked.

"I'm sorry, you were just in Elle's weren't you? I don't want you to think I was listening in on your conversation, but my dad was just going on and on and on and I was trying to block him out and -" she paused for breath. "Let me try again, my name's Lita and I think we have the same gland condition."

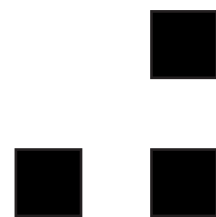
Read the rest at www.danieljoebowman.tumblr.com

DANIEL BOWMAN

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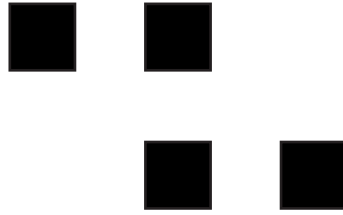
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I notice the books on the shelf aligned
To the edge. The knives, forks and spoons
All know their place. The towels hang folded
On the radiator, and shoes embrace. I catch
Words from my mouth like insects
And bottle them up:
 Puerile, selfish, neglectful --
All yours. I kept the gestures you gave me.
My hands are not my own; my language
Is yours -- they go in the box. A break.
You said to try two sugars instead of one --
The second still makes it the more sweet.
The music ... I hated jazz before its swing
Propelled me into your stride. You hated opera.
I never loved poetry, but to you I address this.
The book of sonnets will stay -- the rest will go.
Your clothes, pictures, jewellery, sprays, films,
Gadgets -- all in the box. The sonnets will stay.



NATALIA LISTASHENKOVA





Natalia is a Marketing Management student at Northumbria University.

‘With these photographs I wanted to convey a sense of irreversibility and the notion that everything has to come to an end. However, every being makes a contribution to new life at the same time.’

CROSSING OVER

I cross the border. It is early, too early for the sun to creep over the sky and cast light over the earth's surface. I am safe. The grass is knee high, thick and knotted. There is no wind to make it sway, so my movements have to be especially careful. But it is quiet, no one to be seen for miles on either side. The border of Territory Four is silent and still. I move into the woods, toward the city.

My footsteps fall on each new concrete slab as if they had never felt their cool, dimpled surface before. This is a new place, except I have been here before. Seen its lights and heard its calls. It is a city, and though the names of the buildings and the parks and the people are different, they are always the same.

'Any spare change?' Broken backed and hollow the man reaches up toward me. He is unshaven and old. His eyes trace the back of my head as I move past him, shoes still tapping the pavement. I can't help him. There are far too many with far too little, and I can't give parts of myself to all of them. That's what has led me this far.

I continue towards the heart of the city. It's never hard to find. It will be pulsating with life, people moving in and out of buildings, in and out of jobs and families and other people. It will be throbbing, feeding the outskirts of the city. Once you find the current you can find its core. In this case it is a small, dishevelled building tucked in between two cracked, grey tower blocks. The door is covered by a white arch; painted onto it are black-hand prints. The border of the building is painted a deep mould green, the uneven bricks jutting and pushing into the building's front. I walk towards it, place my hand over one of the prints on the arch. It feels warm. Living.

'Can I help you?' A man's voice drifts towards me, deep and controlled.

'These are interesting.' I keep my eyes on the prints.

'Not everyone gets one.' He moves passed me and into the building. I follow him through. 'Only a few.'

'Who gets to decide?' He's carrying a large box. He dumps it onto a counter and steps behind the desk.

'Can I help you?' He places his hands palm down on the counter.

'I need a place to stay.' My eyes remain fixed on the backs of his hands. There are smudges of colour all along the fingers, and a small silver ring on his right index finger. The nail of his left thumb has a dark blue bruise underneath.

'You have money, we have rooms.' He moves away from the counter and goes into a back room. Two small patches of moisture sit on the counter. Slowly, they disappear.

'This is a hotel?'

'A hostel, really,' he calls from the back room. I nod and glance around the reception. The tiled stone floor is cracked in places, and the pink walls change shades as your eyes move around the room, a sign of damp. The curved stairs are white marble, black veins running through the surface. A chunk of the bannister has been ripped out half way up.

'Sign in.' He emerges from the back room, and starts to rifle through some notes beneath the counter. The book is a faded red with tea stains on the open page. I pick up the pen next to it and sign a name. He pops up from behind the counter and takes a look at the book.

'Nice to meet you Valerie.'

'Val, actually.'

'Right. You have the money then?'

'That's not what I said. I need a place to stay.' His hand covers my name on the page and he looks up at me.

'I can't help you.'

'I'm not asking for your help. I'm asking for a room.'

'You don't have any money. You're asking for charity.'

'I'm asking for an exchange.' He leans away from me.

'A room isn't worth that.'

'Ever slept on the street?'

'No.'

'Then you don't know what a room's worth.' He moves out from behind the counter and steps in front of me. His arms are folded, and I can see a white scar stretching across his forearm. 'I'll work for you. I can do most things.' A statement, rather than a plea.

'Work for me? I don't own this place,' his voice is almost spiteful.

'Then ask whoever does.' I stand, and cross my arms, mimicking his posture. My eyes focus on his. After a while he lets out a short, sharp laugh.

'Shit.' He sighs and moves around the desk. 'Come,' he calls, and I follow.

'There are six main territories. This is where you'll find the largest settlements of people. The densest living areas. They're all almost identical. It's uncanny.'

I pause.

'I like the Mains, they make you feel like you could still be part of something. That you're not something that's fading away, or dying. For me, that feeling comes when you move to the Skirts. The areas that border the Mains, the slums. The places where nobody has anything but they stay as close as possible to the places that still breathe life. They try to catch the wisps that float outwards, catch the hard work and minimal pay. None of the Mains are polished or even well maintained; they're decomposing, like everything else. But I enjoy the people who live there. Their secret optimism, their willingness to attempt change. They're active. In the Skirts everybody is standing still, just waiting. For something nobody really likes to talk about.'

The room is dark and quiet. To my right I can hear a soft, wet sound.

'Generally, if you're born in one territory, you live and die in the same territory. For most this isn't an issue. The territories are huge. I was six years old when I understood that they're

cages. Even if they are unusually big ones.’

The sounds stop, and it’s just the sound of my own breath that I can hear. I can taste the stale, smoky air as it hits the back of my throat. I don’t know what to say, what he wants to hear. So, I just talk.

The sounds start again.

I’m stood behind the counter of the hostel playing with the silver band covering my left thumb.

‘Excuse me?’ The small frame of a young woman stands in the doorway. I look up as the cool air creeps in through the open door. She shuts the door and moves into the foyer silently.

‘Sorry to interrupt.’ She takes the small bag off of her back and sets it down quietly.

‘You didn’t.’

‘Oh.’ She stares down at the cracked floor. ‘I need a bed, please.’

‘Sign in.’ I head to the back room to pick up a key. I take the one that is rusting the least. I place it on the counter and stare down at the book.

‘You’re in room two, Stacey.’ Her large, dark eyes stare at me from a small face. My eyes narrow slightly as I stare. She seems almost familiar to me. She is small and pale and her face is so open it makes me want to reach out and touch it. I don’t. ‘If you need anything, let me know.’

‘Thank you.’ Her slight mouth breaks into a smile. She picks up the key and heads upstairs. On the counter a bronze key-shaped imprint appears.

I wake and sit up, staring at the exposed brick in front of me. It is cracked in places, small crumbles scatter the floor. I look beside me. The bed gently leans towards Jack’s sleeping body. His chest rises and falls three times, then I move from the bed and head for my own room. I get dressed and begin dragging my eyes over the cramped pages in my notebook. I flip through page after page of information, each headed with a different place I have visited, the name I used there, the people I met. I try to trace the outline of a pattern, to string the locations together in some sort of formation. Again, it is seemingly random. My movements are spontaneous and dislocated, and yet I feel a sense of unease.

‘Coffee?’ Jack asks from the doorway. He eyes are slits in his head, his movements slow and clumsy.

‘Tea please.’ I don’t take my eyes off of the page. There has to be a pattern. Something I can’t see.

‘I never know which one it’ll be with you. Sugar today?’

‘No, thank you.’ I hear his footsteps retreat and pat down the stairs. I keep flicking through the pages. The book is almost full, but there aren’t many places left for me to go. Re-visiting somewhere is far more complicated.

‘What are you reading?’ Stacey’s voice floats towards me through the doorway. I’m surprised I didn’t hear her boots beat along the floor.

‘Something I wrote. To help me remember,’ I say.

‘Oh.’ She comes into the room and sits on the bed. ‘Like what?’

'Your name, for example. For when you leave.' I stand and pace, trying to find a particular page.

'I don't have much time anywhere really.' From the bed her feet barely touch the floor.

'You've been here almost a week. That's quite good comparatively.' I can't find the page and the words are so close together I can barely read them. I close the book and pinch the bridge of my nose between my fingers.

'This place is a lot nicer than the last. The people are better. It'll be a shame when I have to leave.' Her legs are swinging gently to and fro. The rhythm makes me almost nauseous.

'Why don't you stay?' I look up and stare at her. Her large woollen jumper hangs loose on her small body, one shoulder exposed by sagging fabric. She has thick black leggings on similar to my own. Her legs won't stop moving.

'I would, but I can't stop. Annette said she'd find me. But she said I shouldn't stop anywhere too long.'

'How will she find you then?'

'She said she would. I don't really know how, but she has before.' Her eyes are staring at the floor and her legs are swinging and her body convulses with each movement and I can't concentrate. I wonder who Annette is.

'I'd like her to teach me. I think it could be useful. To know how to find someone like that. From nothing.' As she's talking I reach my hand out and place it on her knee. She stops moving and looks up at me.

'Stop that. Please,' I say as she stares into my eyes. She nods and looks at the floor.

'Sorry.' She grabs a handful of her hair and starts to pull on it gently. Over and over.

'I think she just knows me well. Maybe to her I'm predictable.' I remove my hand from her knee and move towards the wardrobe, searching for my jacket. It's warmer today, but I always think it's artificial. Comes from the tight, tall buildings packed together. Most days I don't notice the sun.

'Where will you go next?' I shrug on my jacket.

'I don't know yet. Maybe somewhere with a lot of water. I've never been somewhere with a lot of water.' She looks at her feet, her right sock has a hole on the little toe. I stop moving and look at her.

'Sea water? To the coast?' From Four, you would have to cross at least two borders to reach the nearest coast line. She shakes her head violently and a small laugh escapes her throat.

'No, of course not. Can you imagine? Me, a cross-over.' She looks down at that hole again and sighs. 'Besides, Annette would never find me.'

My eyes remain on her for a few seconds longer, then I move out of the doorway to the top of the stairs. I stop and turn back.

'Who's Annette?' I ask. She looks up from her ripped sock and stares at me.

'No one.'

I head downstairs, and waiting for me on the counter is a cup of tea. I take a sip, and as the warm black liquid slides down my throat I remember a woman I met in Two who had access to fresh milk. It was the best tea I had ever tasted. Jack emerges from the back, his steps quiet and his movements quicker. The coffee's caught up with him, and I can smell smoke on his clothes.

'Who's Annette?' He looks at me for a moment, his eyes narrowing slightly.

'Never heard of her.'

'Stacey's never mentioned her to you?' My tea tastes bitter. It should have been sugar this morning.

'Stacey barely says anything to me. She's a wanderer, she'll be out before I can ask her how long she plans to stay. They go as fast as they come,' he says it quickly, mumbling the end. He reaches for his tobacco.

'Do you never wonder where they're going?' I ask as I stare into my tea. Jack fixes his eyes on me for a moment, then they flit away.

'Why?' He takes out some filters and I can see his hands shaking slightly.

'I do.' I stare at him. His stubble is growing out, longer than usual, and the circles under his eyes are getting darker. His hands fumble slightly as he's trying to roll. He abandons the attempt and takes another sip of coffee. He looks at me for a long moment.

'Where did you say you were from again?' He puts the coffee mug down.

'I didn't,' I say. He nods.

'And if I asked, would you tell me?'

I look at him for a moment, my eyes narrowed.

'You already know,' I say.

'Four's a big place.' He smirks and takes another sip of coffee, turning back towards the stairs. 'But not big enough,' he calls. I stare as he climbs the stairs, his bare feet patting each step.

'I asked my mother why we could cross the borders and others weren't allowed. She told me we weren't allowed either, but we do it anyway. Because that's who we are. It's in our blood. To be cross-overs. To keep moving, and hiding. I was completely terrified for the next three years. Every time we moved anywhere, I thought we were going to be caught. I became a fantastic hider, if only through fear.'

I hear a soft laugh from the corner of the room.

'Gradually the fear faded. I'm no longer scared when I cross borders. Cautious, but not scared. When you cross enough times, you realise that they're just lines in the dirt. We're all still stuck together on the same piece of earth. I think I realised that even they would fade eventually.' I pause, and the eyes stare at me through the darkness, waiting.

'That was scarier. The only life I had ever known, the one in which I could keep myself safe, would eventually crumble. I ignored it and kept moving.'

'I think that's normal,' he says. But it doesn't make it right.

'I don't think those are really necessary.' I point towards the basket of food. Bread, margarine, processed chicken in a can, tinned vegetables, an abundance of potatoes. I'm pointing at the tin of baked beans Jack has just dropped into the basket. Full of salt, no nutrition, shit taste and expensive.

'I need something to go with the potatoes.' He's chewing on the inside of his mouth. Corned beef is twenty-five percent off today.

'Butter?' I provide as an alternative.

'It's not butter. It's also very plain.'

'And cheap. I'm surprised you're not mal-nourished,' I say as he puts the beans back on the shelf. He laughs softly.

'I'm one of the lucky ones.' We head to the till to pay. Jack's shoes are dragging lightly on the floor with each step. I want to buy him something nice to eat. But I don't have any money, and I don't think I've seen chocolate available in a supermarket for at least six years. We're heading towards the front of the shop. I spot something on the shelves and smile, before sticking out my hand quickly and stuffing it soundlessly into the inside of my jacket. Jack places the basket onto the belt and throws the items on. Our measly purchases don't look so bad against everyone else's. Makes it look almost normal.

'Thanks.' Jack pays and I pick up the bags. We wander out of the shop and head through the city. 'I need to stop somewhere,' he says to me. I nod and follow. I'm looking forward to getting home so I can show him what I've taken. I don't really feel bad. I can't, not towards a system that's taken so much from us already. Stealing is the least of my worries.

I follow Jack through the streets. Most people walk on the roads. Roads were built with tarmac, not slabs, so there's less to fall over when walking. The slabs on the pavement jut out from the ground like teeth. There are holes in the tarmac, but they're much easier to avoid. Nobody really drives anymore. It's not an option. Jack walks slowly through the city centre, unhurried. The grey buildings lean in slightly, as if they're looking at us as we walk.

We turn down a small, dark alley and Jack lets himself into the only door. I follow him into a large hallway. The floors and walls are tiled with what looks like designs from the late twentieth century, a colourful mess of patterns now smudged with dirt and mould. I wonder how the building has managed to keep this design, or even how it's still here at all, wasn't gutted during the Reform. Everything was ripped out when they made the borders. They took away anything original, replaced it with uniformity.

I follow Jack up a flight of stairs and through another door. It leads to a large room, dark and musty. There is a small group of people sat around a worn table in the centre. They glance at Jack, registering his arrival, before turning to stare at me. I think I may have interrupted something.

'She's with me,' Jack calls to no one in particular. It floats into the darkness and hangs over their still faces. I stand and wait. The man at the head of the table rises and smiles at me. The rest take this as an indication to turn away.

'Welcome. Take a seat?' He motions to one of many seats still available around the table. I nod and take the nearest to me. Jack is at the other end of the table. 'I'm David.' He smiles again. His voice leaves a bright trail in the dark, heavy air. It doesn't quite fit.

'Val.' I don't smile back. I say it quickly, quietly, hoping it will get lost.

'It's good that more people are becoming interested in the cause.' David takes his seat. The rooms falls into uncomfortable silence. Nobody moves.

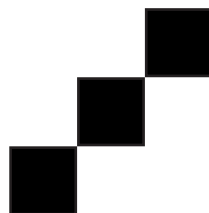
'Cause?' I ask. I have a very good idea of where this is leading, and if I sound ignorant enough, Jack may not be tempted to invite me again. Jack looks over, the barest flash of amusement on his face.

'You already know,' he says to me directly, no hint of shame in his voice. The group turn towards me.

'We're going to start a revolution, Val.' David smiles again, and I can see all of his teeth.

Read the rest at www.chloepatriciabeale.blogspot.co.uk

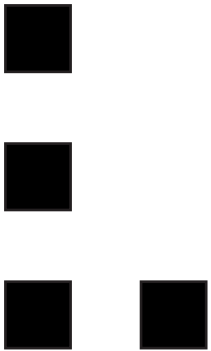
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I love you
I love you with my fist
I love you with a knife
I love you bruised, bleeding
You need me to show you you're real
Pinned down like a rare specimen
I have caught you and saved you
Without me you are hollow
Without me you don't feel
Without this
I show you your fragility
Hot breath on cold glass
The power I have over you
Your strength disabled, forgotten words on a page
This is how I love you
This is how I make love to you
Your skin spills its Turin Shroud smear
The trust you have in me
Your porcelain stillness
You are at peace at last
Exquisite pain releasing you

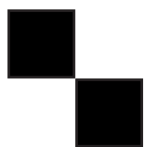


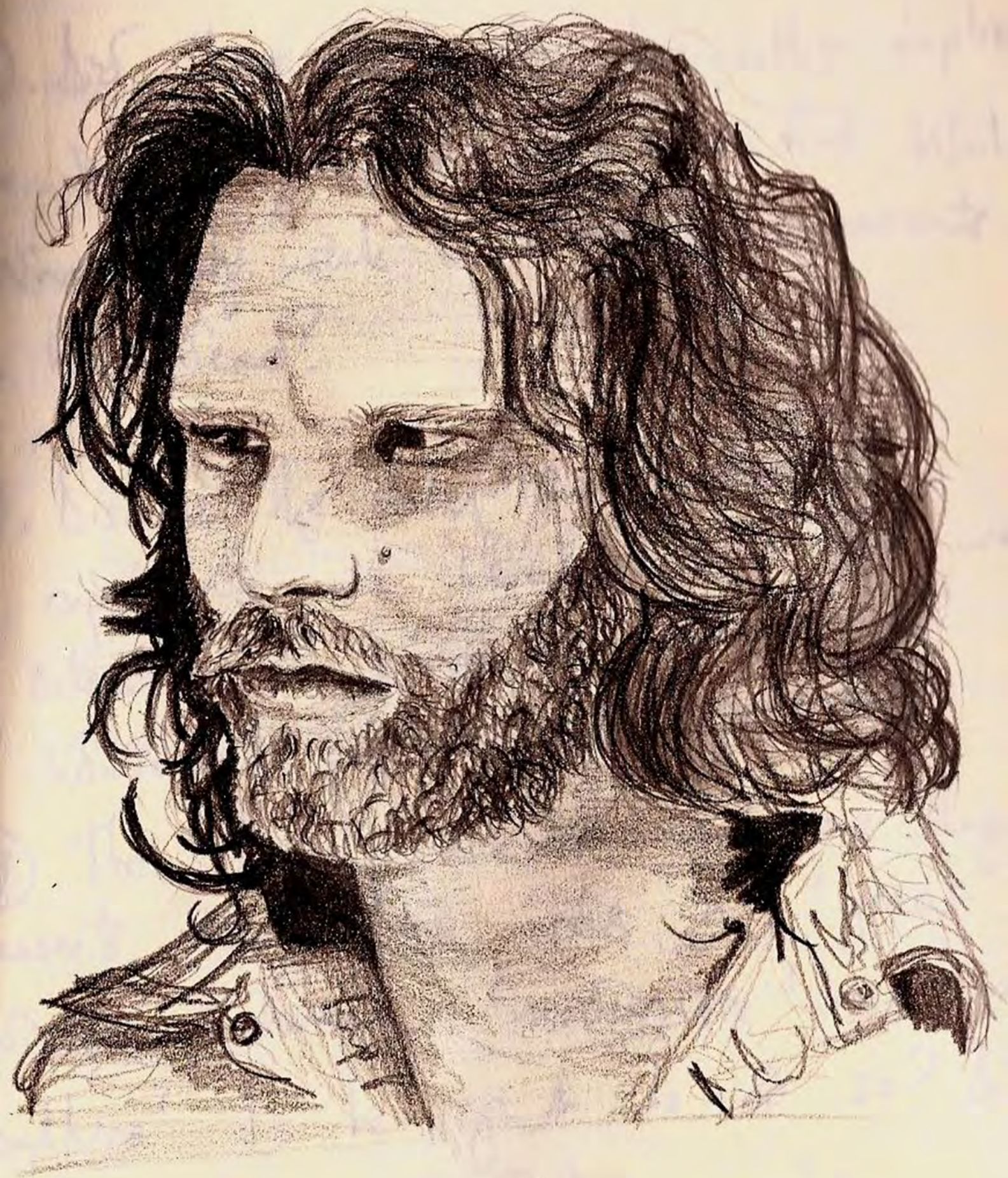
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‘This is my sketch of Jim Morrison of The Doors. As a poet and singer myself, I’m very influenced by Jim and the work of The Doors, as their blurring of the boundaries between music and poetry endlessly fascinate me.

I tried to capture the troubled poet in Jim in this sketch, as opposed to his ‘Lizard King’ years, whilst maintaining his wild and free persona through rough pencil work.

Like the majority of my work, it remains ‘unfinished’, as I like being able to see where a drawing leaves off and returns merely to marks on a page.’





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