

PENNING

POWERS



APRIL 2015

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EDITORS' NOTE

The theme for this edition – Powers – proved a fruitful one, eliciting a wide range of thoughtful responses in poetry and prose. For example powers of different kinds are reflected in the edgy dynamics of a meeting of New York financiers in Ricky Brown's 'Chicken Liver', the evocation of pre-Reformation tranquillity in Donald Adamson's 'Late Summer, Sweetheart Abbey', and the effect of laughter in Fauzia Mohammed's 'Cheap Medicine'.

Fauzia Mohammed is one of a number of writers with whom Moira McPartlin has worked recently. They are members of the International Women's Group, a network of women from many different countries, based in North Glasgow. PENning was originally established to offer writers from such communities a platform to tell their stories alongside those of Scotland's professional writers, so we were particularly pleased to receive so many pieces of writing, all of them powerful in their way. Our featured writer is Goran Simić who co-founded

PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1993. He now divides his time between his homes in Canada and in Sarajevo. His poetry has been translated into 12 languages, and has been included in several anthologies. He is currently working on a collaboration with Nigel Osborne, Reid Professor of Music at the University of Edinburgh.

PENning invites entries by residents of Scotland whose first language isn't English, Scots or Gaelic, as well as entries by Scottish PEN members. Scottish PEN members' entries are considered anonymously.

Our guest editor for PENning Powers is Allan Cameron, of Vagabond Voices. He was joined by Linda Cracknell, Lindsey Fraser, Moira McPartlin and Liz Niven. Thanks again to Anne Clarke for her careful collation of the entries, and to Christina Neuwirth and her colleagues at Scottish PEN for their support in making PENning available on the website.

FEATURED

Goran Simić was born in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1952. A major literary figure in the former Yugoslavia, during the Bosnian war he was caught in the siege of Sarajevo. After the war he moved under the auspices of PEN to Canada where he taught at the University of Toronto and was writer-in-exile at the Banff Centre for the Arts. In 1993 he was co-founder of PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2013 he has lived in Sarajevo and continues to work in poetry, drama and puppet theatre. His latest book of poems 'New and Selected Sorrows' (Smokestack, 2015) has been described as a book about passports and borders, rats and wolves, soldiers and ghosts. It is a record of the realities – and the unrealities – of life in the Balkans, narrated by 'an ordinary man with ears of ordinary silk'.

His poetry has been translated into more than 12 languages, and included in several international anthologies as well as numerous anthologies in Canada and the former Yugoslavia. The poems featured here, are written by the poet in English, and this is what he has to say about this transition:

'If twenty years ago somebody had told me I would continue my writing in some foreign country, far from my native language, I would consider it pure surrealism. But the Bosnian war happened to me and I faced the worst life scenario. The major reason I embraced English lay in the fact that I was curious to check how comfortable I felt in that language, not to mention a second practical reason: I was tired of asking English-speaking friends for favours. Actually the first challenge came when Scottish composer Nigel Osborne invited me to write a libretto for the opera, "Differences in Demolition", for a British company, Opera Circus. Later my first poetry book written in English "Sunrise in the Eyes of Snowman" got a Canadian Author Association's 'best book'. Of course in that transformation I lost some nuances but got a lot of pleasure decoding myself and my mosaic of thought in a new field. Good poetry has the ability to live in the cage as much as in the sky but it needs language as ambassador. Anyway my major credo was always "Only dead fishes swim backward".





I GOT TIRED OF VICTIMIZING MYSELF

Empty perfume bottles overgrow
The pile of my mistakes
And a gigantic pen with its lame heart overpowers
My simple need to record
My little self.

I got tired of punishing myself,
Of apologies because the pigment of my skin can stand
Only moonlight,
Tired of myself looking like a dog,
Howling like a wolf,
Hidden in an immigrant services file.

Banned book covers inhabited me in the form
Of paper plates in the hands of Sunday park protesters.
I turned into kitsch,
A sweet monster who no longer hides a wedding ring
Made of barbed wire.

I was ashamed because I allowed bank clerks
To tune their beggar-producing machine
To my blood pressure,
Because I let my sorrow be measured
And packed in the same colourful boxes
Left unopened under
Last year's Christmas tree.

It was nobody's fault but mine,
The maple tree started drying after I engraved the name
Of my forgotten homeland.
Now I am collecting dry leaves for my pillowcase,
For my ancestors who still bribe me with ampoules of
blood.
My back turned to my chest,
The basement ceiling bent my spine
Into a hunch.
I buy shoes in the children's department
And can't remember how to stand tall

When bullets fly
Or the difference between soldiers and heroes.

I got tired of the whispers I was sending myself
From countries I never memorized,
From cities that taxed me for eyes too big,
From beaches where old mocking turtles
Walked over a new old man covered with sand.

In those whispers
There is no return address,
No name.
Just the sound of a roaring garbage truck in the
distance,
Grinding perfume bottles like an anthem,
There, a few blocks away,
At the place where my sorrow starts.

Goran Simić (written in English, not translated)



WARM ME UP IN YOUR STOMACH

Before I notice your pimples soaking the morning light
From my liver spots,
Before a messenger from above
Leaves the ice cube tray on your doorstep,
Before you learn to sing silently.

Warm me up before your bathroom mirror
Soaks you and spills you
At the nursing home's gate,
Before your mother
Gets you back in her stomach.

Before your passion became incurable illness.
Before your breath became measurable
By the size of my liver spots.

Goran Simić (written in English, not translated)

THERE IS A WIND

There is a wind that bows to the government
By flapping the flag
In front of the Parliament building.

There is a wind that runs through the gut
Of the steel plant,
Gnawing at hungry workers
And exiting through the chimney
Like a black angel of smoke.

There is a wind that blows
In front of a pauper's house
Where a mother hangs freshly washed clothes
On a line
Before the factory's smoke
Settles on her children's white shirts.

There is a wind that tears an umbrella
From the hand of a retired factory bookkeeper
And deposits it
At the door of a woman
Waiting for her husband to come home from the plant.

There is a wind that blasts through the pub's door
Quivering the blouses of girls
Who simply smile at the bar
Only on the workers' payday.

There is a wind that shamelessly lifts
The skirt of the steel plant supervisor's wife,
Holding her husband's hand
As he informs the workers
That the plant's about to close.

There is a wind
That smothers the sound of children weeping
In the corner next door
As they pack their toys in moving boxes that will get smaller
Each day, like bad memories,
When they abandon the apartment.

But there is also a wind that spoke
In your voice, warm wind,
When you dragged me from the pub,
Brought me home,
And washed the plant's thick metallic
Smell from my body.

That wind told me that you love me,
And it's the only wind
I would like to name after you.

LOVE POEM, ALMOST

My beloved wife, where are you going
So early in the morning
With a black rose in one hand
And a shovel in the other?
Judging by your frozen smile
It seems that watering the hyacinth,
Choking on the smell of gasoline for days,
Is not on your mind,
Nor saving wallflowers suffocated by exhaust.
The road in front of our house eats itself.
It has morphed into a cloud that now spews
pebbles
Onto our small, shy roof.

My darling, I am going to bury you
In our garden,
So I won't have to look for you
In others,
Where you'd get devoured and digested
In the bowels of military trucks.

These are the same boys who,
Until yesterday,
Had their friends' names inked on their shoulders.

Now they tattoo their ranks.

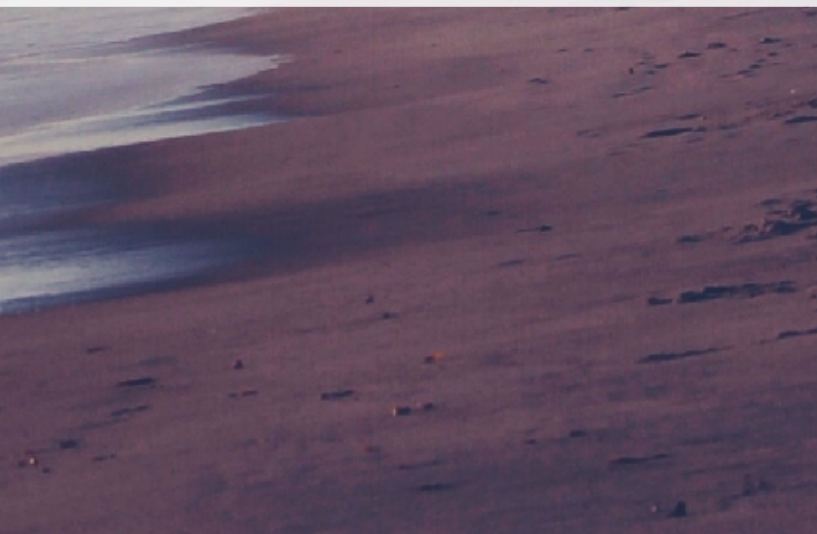
My beloved, do not leave the house.
It is a dear grave.
Within its walls the aroma of brewing coffee
Blends with the smell of baking bread,
And the cigarette smoke
Kissing the inside of the window
Rises from the basement,
Where Grandpa reads measuring tape and counts
How much we have lost.
God bribe us with silence, again.

There is nothing to see outside
But the shining eyes of strangers.

I only ask you to stop those workers' boots
That keep marching
From our bedroom to the children's room
And back.

I am afraid the children will wake up
Too early for school,
Only to find their teacher
In the classroom crucified.

Goran Simić (written in English, not translated)



THOSE LIGHTS IN THE SKY

Are not stars from unreliable textbooks.

They are the lamps in front of

The refugee center.

There, the suicidal, preachers, and the rich

Eat the same dinner

And politely smile at each other over a spoon

Sharp as the knife.

They have easy conversation, complaining about airplanes

That frequently fly too high

And only occasionally crash.

The pilots' wings have been clipped

And they walk awkwardly now, like chicken.

Washed-up heroin kings now deal soil

To politicians

Who monopolize people's desires

And curse the bygone rock stars

Plastering concert posters on election billboards

And selling tickets for shows

Cancelled last century.

Diabetics mercilessly fill their stomachs

With food that used to be forbidden,

Cardiac patients are regulars

In the red-light district

Where virgins serve cheap wine

Poured in condoms.

No one is thinking about how to patch the big hole

In the middle of the united flag after

A satellite ripped through it

On its way to some invisible planet.

Nobody even remembers the symbol

That flag used to carry with dignity,

The New Republic of Refugees

Functioning perfectly with no one showing a need

To be recognized by anyone.

All that's missing in that perfect nation of the dead
Is fear.

Fear that perfection will vanish someday,

Like distant planets vanishing by the minute,

Fear that someday they will have to come back

To earth

As refugees.

Goran Simić (written in English, not translated)



DONALD ADAMSON

Donald Adamson, poet, translator from Finnish, co-founded the Scottish arts and literature magazine *Markings*; he is a winner of the Herald Millennium Poetry Competition. Collections: *From Coiled Roots* (Indigo Dreams 2013), *A Landscape Blossoms Within Me* (from the Finnish of Eeva Kilpi, Arc 2014), *Glamourie* (Indigo Dreams, forthcoming). He is a member of Scottish PEN.

EEVA KILPI

Eeva Kilpi (b. 1928) spent her childhood in Karelia, the part of Finland ceded to the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War. She taught English during the 1950s, before becoming a full-time writer in 1959. She has been Chair of Finnish PEN, and has received many state honours.

Her work deals in particular with the experience of evacuation from Karelia, human relationships and nature. Her commitment to the poetic possibilities of everyday language allows her to include so-called high and low elements – bawdy humour, sexual comedy, as well as delicate expressions of love and loss.



LATE SUMMER, SWEETHEART ABBEY

Perhaps the monks, surveyors of the site,
had no regard for beauty –
they had a checklist: pasture, timber, stone,
a stream to drive a mill, a port not far...

Yet I imagine how, before the end,
before reformers spat on beauty's soul,
a ploughman leading his horse
on the high path by Landis might have paused
and seen a butterfly alight
on knuckles scarred and skelfed,
more soil than skin –

seen it spread its wings
as if it wanted to be sure of something
and in the seconds it was there become
like stained glass, casting a rainbow light
on fingers, veins, and all the land around –

the heights, valleys, shorelines,
Criffel to Nith, Knockandoch to Solway,
all set out for him –

and in their midst the abbey
whose red walls
had felt the butterfly-touch
of the summer
and were letting it go free.

Donald Adamson

IN THIS MOMENT I OWN

In this moment I own all those I have loved,
it's that kind of day:
so old I have become,
so old are they –
except for you my dear, my late-born one.
In you they have all been waiting for me
and thus, at last, I fall into their arms
unconditionally,
thus at last I forgive
and beg forgiveness.
That's the power of love.
I return them to their boyhood
as if I had never hurt them.
But you, my dear, I command
to desire me
like knowledge,
insatiably.

Eeva Kilpi translated by Donald Adamson

JIM AITKEN

Jim Aitken was formerly an English teacher who now tutors in Scottish Cultural Studies in Edinburgh. His last collection of poems was a CD 'Our Foolish Ways,' produced by First Reel Target in 2013. Last year his play 'Letters From Area C' was produced by Spartaki and they will also be producing and presenting his new play 'Leaving George', a drama where the main players in last year's independence referendum meet up on a chat show, at this year's Leith Festival in June. He is a member of Scottish PEN.

CLAIRE ASKEW

Claire Askew's poetry has appeared in numerous publications, including *The Guardian*, *Poetry Scotland* and *The Edinburgh Review*. Her work has been thrice selected to appear in the Scottish Poetry Library's *Best Scottish Poems of the Year* (2008, 2009 and 2014), and was featured in *Be The First To Like This* (Vagabond Voices, 2014). Claire has won several awards for her poetry, including the International Salt Prize for Poetry in 2012. In 2013, she completed a PhD in Creative Writing and Contemporary Women's Poetry with the University of Edinburgh. Her first collection, *This changes things*, is forthcoming from Bloodaxe in 2016. She is a member of Scottish PEN.



THEIR FREEDOM

Untethered and with no brake pads
deregulated, on the loose
like a pack of unruly hounds
a touch like the runaway train
or the bull in the china shop
or like a Grendel for our times
like being subject to King Kong
Moby Dick of the unconscious
Godzilla of our greatest fears
a Jurassic Park revival
or Dr Frankenstein's monster
a reincarnated dragon
with great flames ravaging the land
on which we gave free rein to growth.

Jim Aitken

IN DEFENCE OF THE PAGE

The page is the white square of the one-horse town at noon: everything right-angled and shadowless, the men gathered for the hanging.

The canvas panels of the big top stretch their stitching in the weather's grip. Each one is a page from a screenplay about rain.

The page is the doorframe the girl with the black eye will always walk into. When she was young she sewed a quilt with hexes cut from childhood skirts, and the quilt was a page, and the bed she's made is a book about bodies and old regrets.

The page is a pale house with lime-wash and chipped slates, the swifts pitching out from its gutters like words. You could live in the page: your jangle of thoughts made tangible, your fears laid down and disarmed by its good cop, bad cop shtick.

The million windscreens pricking the tarmac with brilliants are pages in the story of the road.

The blotting-pad page of the sky is a cipher of flight-paths and powdered lightning.

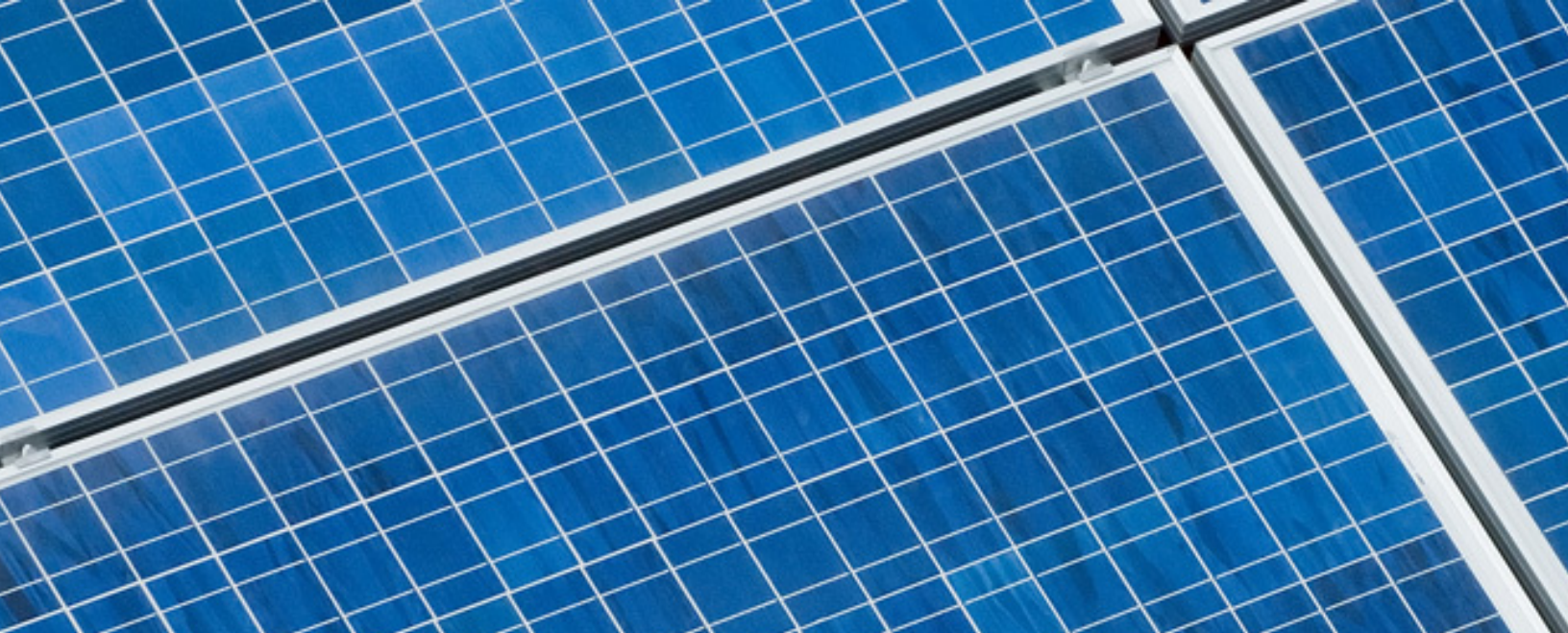
Every tree is a stack of good pages just waiting their turn to be made.

Just wait.

Long after we've snuffed ourselves out, our newspapers' pages will waft on the toxic smog.

The wind can always find a page to wave: a flag from the last known nation that's still truly free.

Claire Askew



STEPHANIE GREEN

Stephanie Green has an Irish mother and an English father. Born in Sussex, she was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Kent University and has an MPhil in Creative Writing from Glasgow University (2004). She lived in London, Cornwall and Wales before moving to Edinburgh in 2000. Her novel for teenagers *The Triple Spiral* was published by Walker Books, 1989. *Glass Works* (Cat's Pyjamas Publications, 2005) was shortlisted for the Callum Macdonald Award. Her most recent poetry pamphlet *Flout* (HappenStance) launched at StAnza, Scotland's Poetry Festival, 2015. She is a member of Scottish PEN.

ANITA JOHN

Anita John is a poet and short story writer, and teaches creative writing for Edinburgh University's Office of Lifelong Learning. *Child's Eye*, her debut collection of prize-winning stories and poems, was published in 2013 by Biscuit Publishing. She is a Live Literature Scotland author and in 2013 was chosen as a Borders Showcase Poet by the Scottish Poetry Library and Creative Arts and Business Network (CABN). She is a member of Scottish PEN.



WHAT MUST NOT BE SPOKEN ON WATER

Peering into the water the line man
sees light in the chimney.
We haul in silence another white, and another.

When the glider sets and the gloamer rises,
we'll set the cloot and steer
by the blessed house of the upstander
back to the helpmate, feeding
scraps to the hirki, milking the boorik.
At last she'll light the bright one.

The light-footed, playful one, the wailer,
will see off the bone-biter, then wash
her own face and dab behind her ears.

Stephanie Green

Note: This is a 'found poem' based on phrases or words used by sailors in Shetland. It was considered unlucky to speak too directly whilst at sea, hence cloot (lit. a 'cloth' - a sail) and the invented words boorik - cow and hirki - pig. I will leave the reader to work out what the rest of the poem refers to.

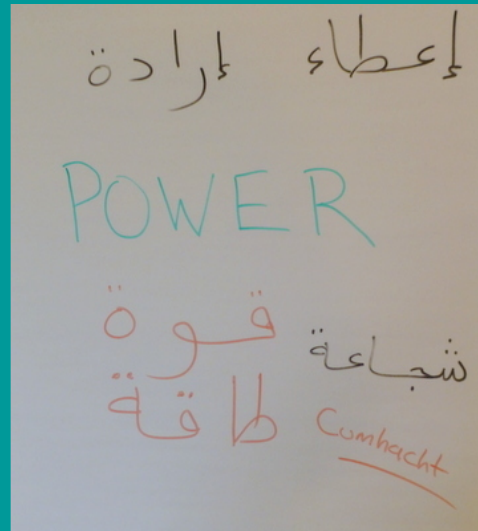
WHEN AUTUMN COMES

There's something about the baling of hay,
the threshing machine's keen urgency.
Something about the tied arc
of the swallow to September's knife.
Like the something in your eyes.
I reach out my hand to find the skin
of yours and falter. The oystercatcher
throws his broken cry into the night
and I turn pebbles in my dreams,
fix the fields in their first green flush,
the lapwings in their flurried tumble
between space and hard surface.
I hold it in my mind but not my hand,
this power to stop the season's turning.

Anita John

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S GROUP

**THESE WOMEN ALL
LIVE IN GLASGOW
AND THEY ALL
SPEAK ENGLISH AS
A SECOND
LANGUAGE**



NAJAT ABDULLAH

Najat Abdullah is from Libya. Her husband is a lecturer at the University of Strathclyde. She came to Scotland in 2013. Her children were born in the UK when her husband was studying.

SOUAD A

Souad A is a refugee from Algeria. She came to the UK in 2002 and gained British Citizenship in 2010.

FAUZIA MOHAMMAD

Fauzia Mohammad is an asylum seeker from Libya. She came to Scotland in 2010 where she lives with her 3 children. Her husband worked as an engineer in an oil company in Libya.

DHUHA MOHAMMED

Dhuha Mohammed is from Iraq. Her husband was a lawyer in Iraq. They have been in Scotland since 2013 with their children.

ALIENATION

It is hard to describe what my country means to me. It is everything for me. It is the land where I grew up, and it is the beautiful childhood memory which has been still kept inside me. It is the fresh air I breathe and the inspiration and future I live for. When I am at my home country I would be filled up with all the happiness.

My country is the wonderful home I always wish to be in. separation from home is distressed and whatever you do away you always feel you miss something, which is hard to find outside your country. I wish to go back soon, and meet the people I love, and walk in the streets I love, and enjoy every moment there.

My hope is my country to return as beautiful as before.

Najat Abdullah



NO PAPERS

Oh Mum

When I heard you were ill

I cry

I feel depressed

I panic

I can't sleep

I don't want to eat

All these things affect my heart,

My eyes

I say "OK - You are the light of my eyes

The light of my life

The light of my sun."

I worried

Got to see you

I can't

I have a barrier

No papers

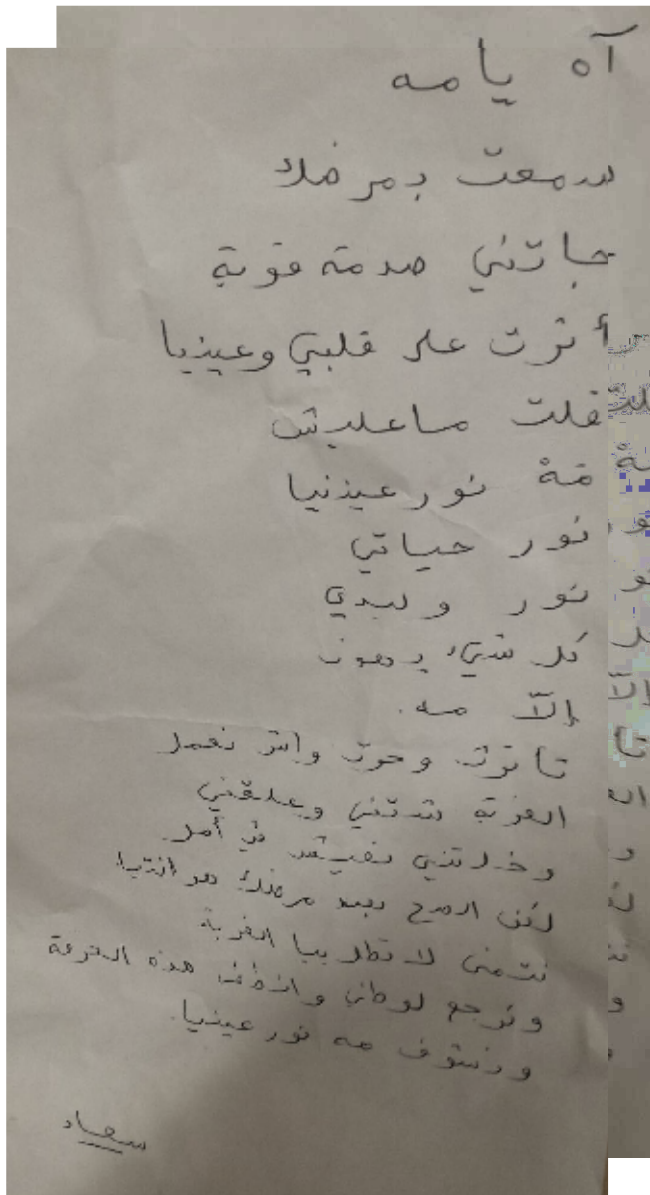
I pray

I ask my God

To break the barrier

To see my lovely Mum

For long time waiting



Souad A



CHEAP MEDICINE

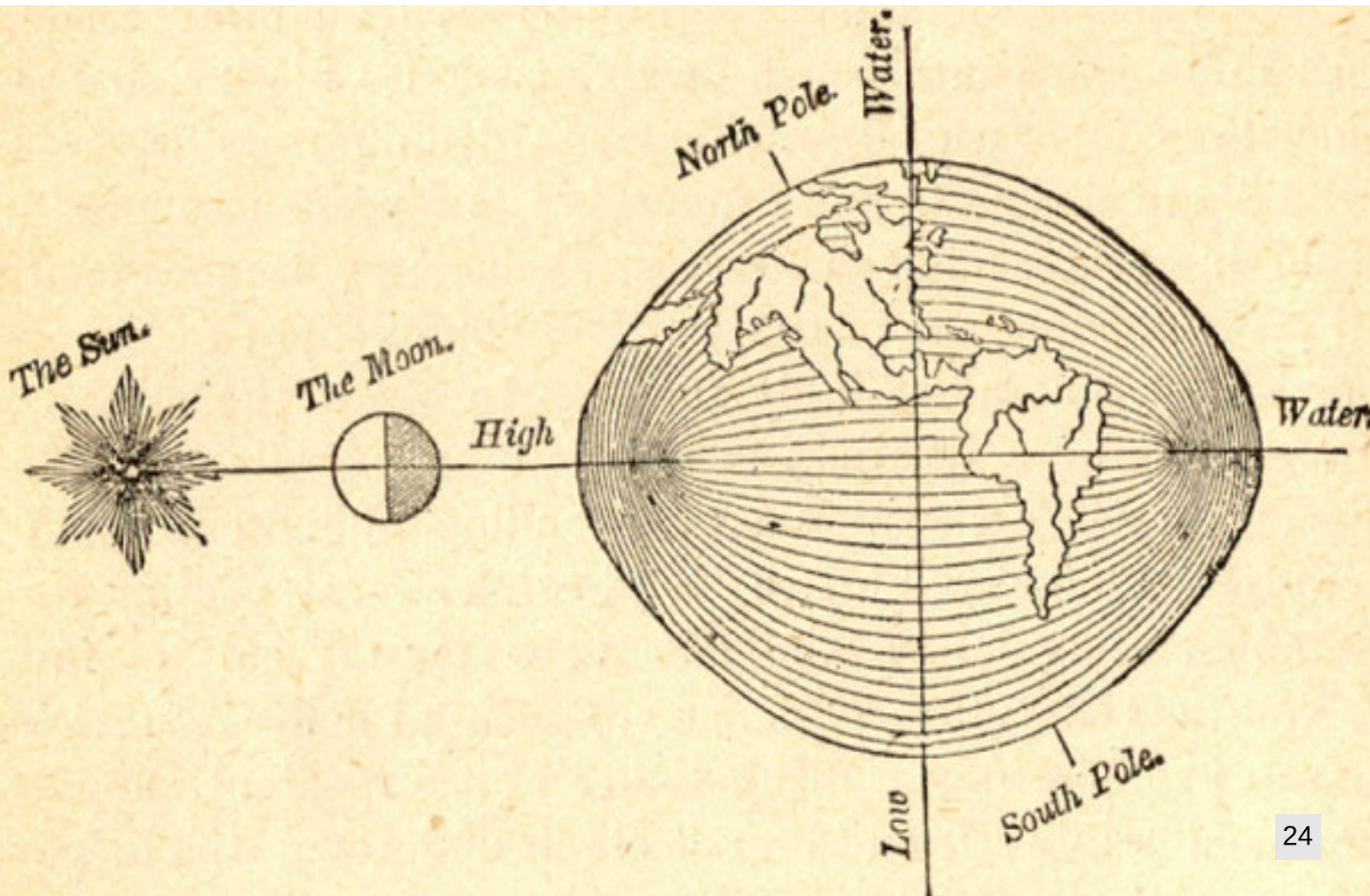
Your laughter is an explosion
A ticking time bomb
Counting down each second
Until my grin begs its presence
Always laugh
When you can
It is cheap medicine

Fauzia Mohammed

HOMELAND

Homeland,
My homeland, my homeland.
Glory and beauty, sublimity and splendour.
Are in your hills, are in your hills.
Life and deliverance, pleasure and hope.
Are in your air, are in your air.
Will I see you? Will I see you?
Safely comforted and victoriously honoured.
Will I see you in your eminence? Reaching to the stars, reaching to the stars,
My homeland, my homeland, my homeland

Dhuha Mohammed



SHORT STORIES

RICKY BROWN

Ricky Brown is a Scotsman who, like Robert Louis Stevenson, took up with an American and settled in New York state, and more specifically, Brooklyn. As part of the band Nerd Bait, he is working with Stephanie and Paul on their modern expression of Lieder, *Das Brooklinburgh Liederbuch*. Ricky now lives and writes in Edinburgh, with two cats and his healthcare proxy and muse. His short stories have recently been published in *Brain of Forgetting*, *Far Off Places*, and *PublishED*, and his non-fiction work has been published, together with an interview, in the magazine *Brain Injury Journey*. He is a member of Scottish PEN.

CARIN PETTERSSON

Carin Pettersson is a writer, journalist and communication professional. She is a Swede who grew up in Norway, studied in the US and currently lives in Fife. She is pursuing an MSc degree in Creative Writing at University of Edinburgh.

OLIVIA VÍŤAZKOVÁ

Olivia Víťazková is a restless writer and a photographer. She was born in a country that no longer exists, grew up in Bratislava, Slovakia and studied in Glasgow. After a brief stint as a starving artist in Paris, Olivia moved to back to her beloved Scotland to pursue a Masters in Creative Writing at the University of Edinburgh.

Withoot leukin up, James gestured vaguely at the seat opposite. He wis gettin readie fir his fuid, an since the lassie wuid be seein tae Rab's order, he didnae hiv tae make oot that the lawyer existed in his world.

It wis jarrin that such a stoatin big slab o a man hid fingers that wir sae delicatelie manicured. Roonded. Buffed. Polished. It wis as if the nail technician hid performed an act o illusion, an the sharp edges o James's talons were somehoo hidden in plain sicht. And wi nae clairt unner his fingernails, nae fingernails under which dirt cuid gaither, the silent steel tools o dissection cuid scream o power.

Finally, Rab's client finished tappin awa on his Blackberry an the meetin cuid begin. He took a napkin tae cover the natural oils on his fingertips — aye, he did secrete, excrete, extravasate — an slipped the business caird case from his breast poaket without leavin any mark o violence. The case didnae lower itsel tae competition wi the hoi polloi. Nae engraved pattern. An certainlie nae monogram. The onlie message etched upon it wis, "Do you not know who I am? Oh, no. If you'd have to read the papers to know, then you have no idea."

As the lid opened, the case didnae seem tae reflect the licht gently diffused by the canopy o mid-century icicles and stalactites. Aw external licht wis snuffed oot an the stainless steel exuded its ain unruffled aura. Of course, it didnae contain the detritus o onybody else's personal or professional details. That wuid be a concession. Rab did expect the minimalist representation o the details of James Forbes deemed suitable fer dissemination. On a white card. *Sans serif*, o coorse. Unfussy. But why wuid James be presentin ane tae him? A wee token o some pretended esteem fir services provided, mibbe?

'You'll need this when we have to speak over the weekend.'

Then thae perfect fingers slid a razor blade oot

CHICKEN LIVER

BY RICKY BROWN

o the case. James carefullie arranged it atween finger an thumb, an proceeded tae slice wafers aff the chicken livers. Each translucent offerin wis placed oan the tongue, no to be replaced by new flesh until it hid melted, an the eftertaste hid faded beyond a whisper. It wis a delicate, serious task, an James still hidnae leuked up.

'You look like shit. Chicken liver? The girl will bring you some.'

Rab slipped withoot thinkin intae his Wall Street voice. His words hid changed first. Trashcan. Pants. *Tomayto*. An noo his accent shifted automaticallie, tae.

'No thanks, James. Still vegetarian.'

'Robert. Not to cast aspersions, but this was never alive. It was a chicken, for goodness' sake. It's only different to this table by dint of its cellular complexity. Like you. Like the pensioners in those funds that invested in the bonds you were reviewing for me. You're done with those, right?'

Rab pictured the twa-fit-high stack o offering memoranda, trust indentures an purchase agreements piled up next tae his desk. 'High Grade Structured Credit Enhanced Leverage Fund?' he asked.

'Right. And High Grade Structured Credit Strategies Fund.'

'Yeah, I'm more or less done.'

The glowerin leuk told Rab that this wisnae the time tae hedge his bets. So he ploughed oan, assurin James that there wis nothin tae worry about in the topplin tooers o paper. The bonds issued by the vehicles wir fullie-insured, and therefir AAA-rated.

'Good. I want the bank to divest itself of the SIVs this week. The guys on Sixth Avenue are desperate to do something the money they can't lend, so they'll buy them. You can use the usual forms. And I need you to finish up the disclosures for those other CMBS we're working on. Remember: they match the rating agency criteria perfectly; S&P, Moody's and Fitch think they're golden; I think they're golden; you personally have hammered the certificates into gold leaf.'

Rab demurred. 'I don't know, James. Aren't we being a bit... gung-ho about this new package? How is it different to High Grade I and II?'

'Don't get all holier than thou on me, Robert,' James warned. 'We're only going to be selling to QIBs. The bank's senior equities advisor said on Wednesday that we're back to happy days again. There's going to be a lot of new work coming down the pipe. Let's not make this like that time you recused yourself from the Avareon deal.'

Rab reflected that it hid taken him nine years o haird labour an bringin the sledge doon on his conscience tae get back on the partnership track efter Avareon. Noo there wis anither ten years o payin down the loan he'd hid tae take oot tae pay in tae the partnership aforehe cuid retire. Aw cos he hidnae wanted tae be involved in financin fouk aspirin tae be the maist admired defence an aerospace company in the world. A company that hid helped enable coontless missions by remainin

committed tae customer success. Then James's tackety bits kicked doon the red velvet door o reverie.

'Robert. Wake up. You look like crap. We can't have that. You're invested with my authority, and look at you. You're flushing it down the shitter.'

Rab thought it wis time tae reassert his talents as James's attack dug. He'd bin practicin the speech in his heid fer a fortnicht. The wan aboot whit they were daein with James's authority. Aboot hoo takin thoosands o crappy subprime mortgages an slingin them in a poke taegither didnae make them magic. It made a big, double-scooped pokey hat o shite that wis goin tae give a haile lot o people indigestion somethin chronic.

Bit James wisnae listenin. He'd returned his attention tae the organs oan his plate. Below the civilised chatter o the diners, Rab heard the muffled loudspeakers doon in Zuchetti Park. But he couldnae make out onie o the wurdz up here oan the thirtieth floor, behind triple glazin an surroounded by heavy cotton napkins an heavier oak tables. He'd taken a dauner through the Occupation wi wan o the summer associates at lunchime on the weekend. It wis too late fir him. Wan decision has led tae anither hid led tae another, an here he wis. But it didnae hiv tae be too late fir her.

'Do you want to hear a poem?' an occupier wi a stragglie beard hid asked. 'I can do the environment or the minimum wage.'

Jenny's résumé hid included her experience helpin some MBA students dae an environmental case study oan the toilets at Fordham Law School. She beamed at Beardie Weirdie.

'Oh, the environment sounds neat! Do that!'

Tae Rab's great surprise, Mr. Weirdie's poem hid been haufway decent, and he an Jenny hid clapped thair satisfaction as it drew tae a close.

'Thanks, guys. I've got some pamphlets, if you'd like one.'

Twa bucks seemed a wee bittie steep for a stapled-together sheaf o photocopies. Rab cuid o knocked up somethin better on his Mac. But the recital hid ben a crakin bit o live entertainment, an he'd bin present at a historic moment. The rumours wir awready gathering that the NYPD wuid be sweepin up the park afore the weekend wis oot.

'Gie's two,' Rab said, holdin up twa fingers. He fumbled in his poaket fer some change, but jist came oot wi a bundle o yuppie food stamps. He hauned wan o the twinties oer.

'Ye can keep the change, pal. Keep up the guid work, awright?'

Back above the stour o the tented toun, James's surgical implements tinkled decorouslie oan china.

'Robert. Talking about mortgages, how are you getting on with that penthouse in Brooklyn? It can't be easy while you're maintaining the rent on your midtown

apartment so you can pop home and have a shower and change your suit.'

James leaned back fae the table. Aw friendly, lik.

'As I was saying, when was the last time you did that?'

Rab kennt James wis alludin tae the Dickensian logic o his existence. Annual income \$300,000, annual expenditure \$299,500? Result, happiness. Annual income \$300,000, annual expenditure \$439,857.37? Result, a vital need tae generate mair deals. Itherwise, the god o day wuid go down upon the dreary scene, an he wuid be firivver floored. An Rab's client hidnae even mentioned Dani's education. She'd be going intae middle schuil next year, an there wisnae a single public middle schuil in Brooklyn that Rab's ex-wife wuid tak a second leuk at. An education inflation runnin at a muckle twintie per cent a year? Mibbe things wuid leuk better wi a few hours kip. They wir onlie goin tae be selling tae Qualified Institutional Buyers, efter aw. Insurance companies. Ither banks. The occasional pension fund. Mibbe a schuil board in Kansas.

'OK, James. I'll get cracking on the new package. But I haven't slept in sixteen days.

'No. Wait. Fifteen.' Rab hid awready been anticipatin the sixteenth day runnin into nicht running intae et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But he kennt ye cuid be beaten tae death by an inaccuracie, an embellishment. Hoisted by yer ain hyperbole.

'That's right. If you clean yourself up, we can be done in another three days. Get yourself a shower. Jesus, get one of those Asians on the East Side to do it for you. Don't scrimp. Get the nooks and crannies done.'

Rab demurred, again.

'Jesus.' Even he could tell his words were a sleep-deprived slur. 'I've got a...'

"Girlfriend" didnae cerry enough weight. Lover? He dozed aff fer twa seconds.

'Partner!'

James smiled. Ay, it wis the smile o a shark, bit this shark wis creasin itsel up.

'Aw, you've got a special someone to tell you she loves you?' The shark puffed itsel up, revealin rows of piercin spines. The pleadin in Rab's heid wis directed at the charmin James he hid met years ago at Penn.

Please, James. Please dinnae unspool yir divine knowledge. No the noo.

An sae it began: 'You've got a special someone at home. And she tells you she loves you. Because you're special.

'And you ask her, "Why? Why do you love me? What is it about me that you love, exactly?"'

James's ergonomic hunk o heid wis awready ahint a watery aquarium wall. Rab used the last o his will tae suck his tears back intae thair ducts. But James wuidnae stoap. He wuidnae ever stoap.



He wuidnae ever stoap.

'That's enough fun. Call us a car. Let's get back to work.'

Ricky Brown

The smooth, polished surface of snow-white marble does nothing for you. Instead you wish you were running your hands over my pale, naked body, caressing me, running your fingers through my thick, red hair. You used to burry your nose in my hair and insist it smelled of evening roses. You were the man, who with your gentle fingers made my body betray me, giving away all my secrets. Your hands memorized me, the length of my spine, the strength of my legs, my shape, the curves of my breasts, the roundness of my hips, but the feeling of my skin, its warmth and its softness, is denied you. It remains outside your reach and haunts you.

The marble is cold, though this place enjoys many hours of sun. It's located on a little hill with views of the gentle green fields that surrounds it. In this evening light, the hills look like they're burning. You like to think the marble is always cold because it gives all its warmth to me. You don't want me to freeze now that I can't seek the warmth of your body at night, but you know I will never again feel warm or cold. You think we're the same because all you feel is numbness, but trust me darling, this is different. The nothingness you feel now will one day let go.

The white rose you brought me is slowly dying, its flower opened too wide, the pedals heavy, falling apart at its seams. You're careful to avoid the rose's sharp thorns; you can no longer stand the sight of blood. You replace the dying rose with a new one from the rose garden that I so loved to tend. How often didn't you find me there among the roses?

You claim you feel closer to me here than any other place, even closer than at our home where you see me in all things. It's my touch, my effort, you see, and you realize it was I who made your house a home. You enjoyed playing host to all our visitors, but you know now it was because of me they came. It was I who filled our house with life, with laughter and with music.

AS MY LOVER SLEEPS

BY GARIN PETTERSSON

Your house is no longer a home, it's just a building, a shell, hollow and lifeless. You walk as a ghost through the rooms of your house while the memories haunt you, invade and assault you. It's pain you feel when the silence makes you want to scream because you know the silence will never again be interrupted by my voice, my laugh, my music. It's pain that blinds you when you look for me and only see empty space. It's pain that makes your body ache when you cannot sleep because the bed is too big without me. I see you in the chapel, kneeling on the cold stone floor, forsaking yourself, your land, your livelihood. You pray until your knees are sore, your mouth dry, your body dull with hunger. No power can change the past, my love. People in the village have started talking about you, about us, about the large empty house where the music stopped, but you cannot find the energy to explain, to protest, to attack. They stop talking when you arrive and their dark, sad eyes follow you, seeking answers you cannot give. They miss me, and you want to scream at them because you do too.


You kiss the cold, unyielding stone.

The accident keeps replaying itself before your eyes. If only you hadn't lost your temper. If only you had reached me in time. If only I hadn't lost my balance. If only. I screamed your name. Your name that had passed my lips so many times before, in declarations of love, in breaths of ecstasy, in hard words of anger. Your name was the last thing I said before the crack. The sound you will never forget.

You ran after me down the stairs. I came to a halt at the bottom, laying still on the white, marble floor. My red hair covered my face. Kneeling next to me, for a moment, you forgot how to breathe. You gently brushed away my hair from my face and saw there was blood on my pale lips. My body was a tangle of arms, legs and clothes. My long, graceful neck which you so often kissed, was bent in a strange angle. You gathered me in your arms to kiss away the hurt. When you bent your face down to meet to mine, my head rolled over to the side as if I wanted to avoid your touch. You gently turned my head and looked into my blue eyes. They were expressionless, staring without seeing, unblinking. With shaking hands, you closed my eyes. You wiped the blood off my lips with your thumb and kissed me. My lips still soft and warm under yours.

You lifted me off the hard, cold floor, held me close against your beating heart and carried me up the stairs again. You were surprised how light I felt in your arms. Our warm bedroom was filled with the fading light of the setting sun. You carried me to our bed, like you had done on our wedding night. That night had been the beginning of our life together, this was our end. I had made our bed and stretched the sheets tight across the mattress just hours before. Lying on the bed, it looked like I was sleeping, and you didn't want to disturb me. You collected the winter quilt from the wardrobe. You laid down next to me as so many times before and spread the quilt over us to protect us against the night chill. You fell asleep holding my hand as the warmth left my broken body.

You come here night after night. You lay your head on the white, cold stone and close your eyes.



You're a large man with a powerful build, but you look so small lying there sleeping on my grave. I watch as your chest raise and fall, and I remember the sweet feeling of lying next to you, our bodies intertwined. How safe I felt with you. I watch you sleep. I always do. I so often wish you could see me here, watching over you. Your eyes never linger on me anymore, and I miss their steady gaze. You're as handsome as ever, but it looks like you have aged, my love. There are fine lines around your eyes and mouth, and dark circles under your eyes. I want to trace these signs of age and sorrow. I want to claim and erase them with my fingertips. I don't want you to age without me.

I wish I could touch you, feel your warmth, your skin, the beating of your heart. What would you do if I whispered in your ear the sweet nothings of days gone past? How would you react if I kissed you now with the promise of life?

Darling, I love you. Please go. Live. I have nothing more to give you.

Carin Pettersson

In a small town in a little big country you may have heard of but have immediately forgotten about, since apart from the averagely beautiful nature in the averagely beautiful mountains and the availability of decent, yet inexpensive beer, brought to you by decent, yet inexpensive girls, there was nothing extraordinary whatsoever. Until there was.

Now, in this small town that was in fact the capital of the little big country a statue was built of the current Prime Minister by a certain financial group as thanks for the government's continuous (and generous) support. The statue however, was not just for the Prime Minister but mainly for the People who despite not being able to afford the beautiful glass houses or even the beautiful clothes and trinkets sold in the voluminous glass shopping-centres built by the financial group, were still faithful to the Prime Minister. While this was no Western land of milk and honey, frankly things could have been worse than they were at the moment, you had only to look East to see that; so, you might as well stop complaining and get on with your job — just make sure you don't look too enthusiastic about it lest the people you're serving drinks forget that while they're enjoying themselves eating their overpriced dinner made with the cheapest cut of meat that even stray dogs would turn their snouts at — you are working. The statue proved a success — almost everybody in the Capital came to the unveiling and others travelled for hours in order to become a part of such a historical moment. The Prime Minister himself stood up on the podium and after expressing his modest gratitude clutched and pulled the veil off the statue. The audience emitted a collective gasp before putting their hands together. The sound of their applause was carried by the river and through to the other side, momentarily confusing the citizens of the neighbouring countries. "The resemblance is uncanny," clapping spectators whispered to each other, "it's almost as if there

BY OLIVIA VÍŤAZKOVÁ

THE LITTLE BIG COUNTRY OR THE STATUE-QUO



were two of them.” Indeed, the statue had the same square forehead, with bushy eyebrows hiding the deep-set eyes and pudgy body with almost no neck, so apart from the iron colour of the statue there was no difference between the two. The snapshot of the grinning Prime Minister and the proud statue standing next to him made the headlines of every newspaper in the little big country (even the sole independent one, yet to be bought), which instead of satisfying citizens’ curiosity only made them even more eager to see the wonder with their own eyes, so much that the civil servants decided to move the statue from its dedicated park to a more visible spot. Out went the rusting statue of a bearded man on a horse that people were tired of looking at, in came the new father of the nation to rule from its pedestal and look upon the river and the Capital below from his new place in the courtyard of the city’s castle. As night began to fall over the city, covering the sun with a dusty blanket a curious thing started to happen. A ratty pigeon flew over from the West and zoomed around the statue’s head, ignorant of the man’s importance before it lowered its filthy body and landed on the pristine statue of the Prime Minister himself. We can only assume what kind of atrocity the vermin was about to conduct when an iron fist closed round its frail neck. A faint snap could be heard and a few feathers fluttered down on the ground, followed by the rest of the pigeon. The Statue blinked a few times and then a wide grin spread across its face. It stepped down from its pedestal burying the sole of its shoe in the pigeon corpse as it walked across and through the castle gate eager to meet the admiring droves of voters in person. It walked down the brightly lit path into the crooked streets of the Old Town as the sun began to rise, with a light step and eyes filled with wonderment, thinking — this city, no, this country is mine. The Capital woke up into another overcast autumn morning. The buses were more or less on time, the woman in the kiosk selling papers and cigarettes pocketed your change without as much as a smile or a “Thank you” and kids were smoking in front of the school — in other words, everything was just as usual. None of those people had any notion of the fact that the Statue of the Prime Minister has come alive, not even the Prime Minister himself. But he was to find out, even before breakfast. The Prime Minister was presently stood in front of the mirror in a shirt and his underpants. He was about to fasten a red tie around his neck when there was a slight knock on the door. Before he even had a chance to respond, or put some trousers on, the door opened revealing the iron Statue. The Prime Minister stared incredulously at a mirror image of himself in cast iron. The Statue greeted him politely. “What are you doing here?” the Prime Minister spat out.


“What do you mean? I am you and you are me,” said the Statue and walked into the Prime Minister’s bedroom.

“You’re my *statue*.” “That’s rude,” said the Statue, its expression unchanged.

“Well, what do you want from me?”

The Statue’s tiny grey eyes zoomed in on the prime minister, “I want to *be* you.” The Prime Minister expelled a strong sigh, “We’ll talk about this over breakfast. Hedgehog’s violin, I need some god-damn coffee.” The parliament of the little big country was in uproar, since for the first time in the history of the little country





an event of enormous significance had occurred. While some claimed the Statue should be placed in a cage at the Capital's Zoo in order to boost tourism, others booed such inhumane treatment and said that there being two Prime Ministers is only beneficial since the current one is being spread too thinly — party politics, running the country and all those foreign visits... perhaps one of them could stay at home while the other one travels? Oh but gentlemen, why put so much trust into something made out of iron? It's a stubborn metal and who knows whether it can rule a country properly? No no no, if the Statue wants to rule it should rule some town in the central or eastern part of the Country where everything is broken so there's not much more to break. Hear, hear! Motion accepted.

The Statue was delighted and excited to call in a press conference, whereas the Prime Minister himself furrowed his brows until his eyes seemed to have disappeared. He didn't mind sharing his responsibilities, indeed he never had any desire to attempt to improve the situation of the hungry-valleys in the east of the country (though he never forgot them in his pre-election promises) what he did not like was the sharing of the popularity. Indeed the novelty of the Statue seemed to inspire more awe and devotion than he ever did. But looking at the Statue next to him, in a passionate argument with one of the opposition politicians he berated himself for his irrational fears. The Statue, though they've only truly met that week, was himself and as amazing as he was, it made no sense to be jealous of oneself.

That evening, before the press conference the Statue of the Prime Minister received a phone call. It was a man who spoke in code, saying they'd very much like to meet with the Statue Prime Minister to discuss important issues. There's a taxi waiting outside the building that will take you to the meet, said the man before the line went dead.

Curious, and by nature fearless, Statue walked down the flight of stairs and after determining that the air is clear, opened the taxi door. It got out on V__ Street and walked up to the private flat, as indicated by the man on the phone. The door opened, revealing several men and a woman sitting around a kitchen table. "Welcome" said the voice from the phone and the statue entered into the open arms of the Shadow Government. After their deliberations with the Statue, an unanimous decision had been agreed upon. A national painter has been called up from prison in order to complete a masterpiece — paint the Statue with flesh colours, give it a dark suit and a red cravat, in other words to transform it from its current drab form into a semblance of a living, breathing politician — making the look acceptable for the ordinary close-minded folk, before being thrown back into prison. At the same time the sculptor was called upon. He was to receive the great honour of meeting the Prime Minister again and then, with the help of already prepared molten iron the worthy task of transforming the man into a statue. For the Prime Minister had grown much too comfortable in his role, making human errors out of pride and vanity, often refusing to help his friends, forgetting everything they've done for him. Oh how he screamed as the molten iron was poured over him until he could scream no more, move no more. The



Statue smiled as it watched the act together with its new friends. And when the late Prime Minister, now in his new iron suit, was put upon the old pedestal in the castle courtyard, the Statue walked past to its residence, whistling and smiling at the citizens' pleasant greetings, admiring its new colour in the shop windows, increasingly excited to work for its country and ready to uphold the status quo.

Olivia Vítězková

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