

Eemis Stane



ISSUE 3, 2024

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Wha We Are

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Juist Bairns

Hannah Nicholson

Whan me an de first turned eighteen
We haed wir nichts tagidder,
Juist da twa o wis, an sometimes
Hit felt lik hit wid lest fir ivver.
We got comfy idda Lerook pubs,
Drinkin vodka an mixers, catchin up
An haein gaffs, pittin wir wirld
Tae rights. We made da maist
O da time we haed, keenin fine
At come da end o simmer, we wid
Be separatit be new life paths,
Less joined at da hip. But I nivver
Stopped lovin de as much as I did den.

Nort Sea Air

Hannah Nicholson

Whin I first win hame, I feel it,
Dat first breath o air
At you juist dinna gulp
Ony wye idder,
I catch da first taste o it
When I step aff da boat or plane,
Eftir I'm clear o fumes dat is.
Hit turns fresher da closer
You win tae da shore line,
An in amongst it dir notes
O saat an tang. In toon
Hit's no quite sae fresh,
But I still lik tae tak a moothfu
On Victoria Pier
Juist afore I pay fir me parkin.
Farder inland oot in da country
Is at best a mixed bag,
Sometimes da girse an few trees
Kin add a green sweetness.
Idder times you come by da crofts
An da less said aboot yun pong, da better.

This Way

Hannah Nicholson

No dat lang ago, whan we
Took wir dug oot fir a waander
Shö wid tak aff on her ain
Trow da fields, sniffin oot
Rabbits an onythin idder
At shø could git her paws on.
As shø guid, me midder tried
Tae keep her at heel, callin oot
“This way, this way!”
As if shø wis a teacher
Keepin track o an unruly class.
Da dug wid nivver anse, though.

Noo, we tak her oot fir a waander
An shø bides on her lead,
Wi wis haein tae pull her alang
Whan shö wid raedir be hame
Sleepin on da cooch, or Mam’s bed,
Comfy an cosy at hame
Lik ony peerie auld sowel.

As we geng, me midder tries
Tae coax her alang, sayin gently
“This way, this way,”
As if shø wis a teacher
Encouragin a nervous bairn.
Da dug anse, but reluctantly.

The Haar

Rob McClure

The night aighed with the thrum of trams
bunging along the miles.

Rain spitting, a scarrow tae the east,
and oan the horizon the withergloom.

That night deep casket black.

The step-over saugh-shaded and oan the cleuch the bank,
fir trees close-planted, casts its ain darkness,
yon lightening-daggered scrab askoy and eerieful.

The sad man blatters the bundy clock
and the tram whines and sparks its spray of orange
flecks across the wires at the Whitehill fare stage.
It is blusterous thenight so it is.

Dreich, jaups of rain dinging stanchions.

Dreeping wet and scunnered, thinking
only two seasons here, June and Winter,
but in yonder cloudbreak the sparklit ellewand!

Copacetic, the man lets the grey ash dreep,
pinwheels the dout across sparking cobbles,
pulls his coat closer about him,
and walks oan intae the haar.

Camas Eilean Ghlais

Jacqueline Tweddle

faur awa waves thrum

blitheness beeks in soolin glowe

dilers' cheerlins echa/roond the camas

dookers coud i' the bay

otters slidder throu stane an currack

nesting malliemoke greet

yowes ramsh new gress

cheeperock cheep frae hame bergs

clouds gaither at easins edge

Northren Licht

Derek Smith

I came to wirk here

whaur the haar hings

grey as an auld semmit

on Monday's waashin line

we hae made oor hame here

amang the gulls

an' the linties peekin

at the denner-time crumbs

we nicht jist bide here

our love's borealis

spiers a rare licht

frae the granite faces

aye, I'll bide here

wi' you

A Vendetta

Translatit frae Guy de Maupassant by James Robertson

Paolo Saverini's widow bade alane wi her son in a pair wee hoose on the ramparts o Bonifacio. The toun is biggit on a craig o the mountains wi some pairts o it hingin richt oot abune the sea, and looks ower tae the laicher shores o Sardinia across a channel that breeshles wi skerries.

At its fit, fae the tither side and gaun maist the wey roond it, is the cleuch that serves as its harbour, cut intae the scaurs like a muckle vennel. Efter makkin a lang circuit atween the heich stane waws o the cleuch, wee Italian or Sardinian fushin-boats sail richt up tae the first hooses and likewise, ilka twa weeks, the auld service steamer comes pechin in fae Ajaccio.

The rickle o hooses mak a splatch that's whiter still nor the white ben they're biggit on. They seem like the nests o wild burds hingin there on the rock, faur abune thon fearsome channel that gey few ships ever risk gaun through.

The wund niver ceases herryin the sea, herryin the shore that's nakit but for a wee bit scruf o gress; it breenges intae the cleuch ripin and reivin at it on

baith sides. The wisps o white faem trailin roond the black jags o coontless rocks that prog through the waves, look like canvas cloots floatin and flichterin on the face o the water.

The widow Saverini's hoose, weldit on tae the very edge o the scaurs, opened its three windaes ontae this dreich and sauvage scene.

She bade there alane wi her son Antoine and their collie bitch Sémillante, a muckle but shilpit craitur wi lang, tousled hair. The young lad used her for huntin.

Ae nicht there wis a rammy, and at the end o it Antoine Saverini wis deid, slain by a sleekit dirk thrust intae him by Nicolas Ravolati, wha won awa tae Sardinia that same nicht.

When the auld mither took in the body o her bairn, brocht tae her by fowk that were passin by, she didna greet, but for a lang while stude still, contemplatin it; syne, raxin her runkled haun ower the body, she promised him a vendetta. She widna hae onybody tae stey wi her, and steekit hersel awa wi the body and the yowlin dug. The craitur yowled wi

nae devaul, staunin at the fit o the bed, heid raxed tae her maister, tail ticht atween her shanks. She wid nae mair shift hersel nor the mither, wha leant ower the body wi a siccar ee, and grat wi great silent teardraps as she studied it.

The chiel lay on his back, clad in a thick serge coat wi a hole torn across the front o it. He nicht hae been sleepin; but there wis bluid aw wey; on the sark torn aff tae mak the first cloots; on his weskit, his breeks, his face, his hauns. Lappert bluid had jeeled in his beard and in his hair.

The auld mither begun tae speak tae him. At the soond o her voice, the dug wheeshtit.

'Dinna fash, dinna fash, ye'll be avenged, ma wee yin, ma pair laddie, ma bairnie. Hush ye, hush ye, ye'll be avenged, niver doot it. Yir mither sweirs it. And weel ye ken yir mither aye keeps her wurd.'

Slowly she bent hersel ower him, pressin her cauld lips on the deid lips.

Syne Sémillante begun tae yowl yince mair. The cries that cam oot o her were lang, dreich, hert-sair, oorie.

They bade there, the twa o them, the auld wife and the dug, aw through the nicht.

Antoine Saverini wis laired the nixt day, and soon eneuch there wis nae mair speak about him in Bonifacio.

He had nae brithers nor ony close kizzens. There wis nae man tae cairry oot the vendetta. There wis jist the mither, the

auld wife, tae pense upon hoo tae dae it. Fae morn till nicht she watched, on the tither side the channel, a white speck on the coast. It wis a wee Sardinian clachan, Longosardo, whaur Corsican bandits wid rin for bield when they were ower haurd-pressed. They made up jist aboot the hail population o this clachan, forenent the shores o their ain country, and there they bade, waitin on the richt moment tae come hame, tae return tae the maquis. It wis in this clachan, she kent, that Nicolas Ravolati wis hidin oot.

Jist hersel, sittin at her windae through the lang day, she looked ower yonder and pensed on revenge. Hoo could she dae it athoot anither's help, dwaible as she wis and no faur fae daith hersel? But she had promised, she had sworn upon the body o her son. She couldna pit it fae her mind, and she couldna pit it aff. Whit wis she tae dae? She couldna sleep at nicht, she hadnae mair sleep nor she had peace o mind; but in her thrawnness she searched for a wey. The dug dovered at her feet and whiles, liftin her heid, yowled intae the distance. Wi her maister awa she aften yowled like this, as if she wis cawin tae him, as if her animal sowl could neither be soothered nor dichtit clean o the mindin o him.

Ae nicht, wi Sémillante stertin tae peenge again, the mither had a sudden idea, the idea o a dour and ill-gien sauvage. She thocht on it tae the mornin, syne, risin at the keek o day, she gaed tae the kirk. She

prayed, prostrate on the flagstones, bowed down afore God, beggin Him tae help her, tae uphaud her, tae gie her puir, taigelt body the strenth it needit tae avenge her laddie.

Syne she gaed hame. She had in her coortyard an auld barrel wi the scowes hauf-staved in, that gathared water fae the rones. She turnt it ower, toomed it, and fixed it tae the grund wi stobs and stanes; syne she chained Sémillante in this kennel and gaed ben the hoose.

She paced noo in her chaumer, takkin nae rest, her een aye watchin the Sardinian coast. He wis ower there, the murderer.

The leelang day and the leelang nicht, the dug yowled. The nixt mornin, the auld wife took her some water in a bowlie, but naethin else: nae soup, nae breid.

Anither day passed. Sémillante, forfochen, wis sleepin. The day efter, her een were sheenin, her birse up, and she ruggit at the chain in desperation.

Yince mair the auld wife didna feed her. The craitur, wild wi hunger, gied raucle barks. Anither nicht passed.

At the neb o day, Mither Saverini gaed tae her neebor and spiered him tae let her hae twa turse o strae. She took oot some auld claes that her guidman had worn and stappit them wi the strae tae

mak the likeness o a body.

She plantit a stob in the grund forenent Sémillante's kennel and tied the bogle tae it. It looked noo as if it wis staunin up. Syne she made a heid for it wi a roll o auld claith.

The dug, conflummixed by the man o strae, fell silent, even though she wis faimished.

Syne the wumman gaed tae the flesher and bocht a lang piece o black pudden. She cam hame, lichtit a widd fire in the yaird, close tae the dug's kennel, and grilled the black pudden. Sémillante, radge wi hunger, wis lowpin aboot and faemin at the mooth, her een aye on the meat whase flavour raxed richt tae the wame o her.

Syne, the mither made a collar o the reekin sausage for the man o strae. She took a lang while wappin it roond his craig, as gin she wis ettlin tae stech it richt ben. When aw wis done, she lowsed the dug.

Wi a muckle spring the craitur lowped upon the bogle's thrapple and wi her loofs on his shooders begun tae rive at it. She fell back wi a daud o the prey in her mooth, syne flung hersel at it again, sank her teeth intae the cords, tore awa a wheen mair pieces, fell back again, and lowped yince mair, she wis that stervin. She took the face aff it in muckle chacks, till the haill o it wis in

taivers.

The auld wumman watched, still and silent, a glent in her ee. Syne she chained up her dug again, sterved her anither twa days, and stertit the haill exercise ower.

For three months she accustomed the dug tae this fecht, the winnin o a meal by the use o its fangs. She didna chain her up ony mair, but lowsed her on the bogle wi a wag o her fingir.

She had learned the dug tae rive and devoor it athoot pittin food in its thrapple. Efterhaun she wid reward the dug wi the gift o the black pudden she had cooked for her.

Whenever she seen the man, Sémillante wid trummle, syne turn her een tae her mistress. 'On ye go!' she wid cry in a whustlin souch as she wagged her fingir.

When she thocht the time wis richt, Mither Saverini gaed tae confession and took communion ae Saubbath mornin wi a sherp-set fervour; syne, pittin on a man's claes, sae she looked like an auld gaberlunzie, she niffered wi a Sardinian fisherman tae cairry her, wi her dug, tae the tither side the channel.

In a canvas poke she had a muckle daud o black pudden. Sémillante hadna had food for twa days. Aw the time the auld wumman gart her smell the sneyster, kittlin her hunger wi it.

They cam tae Longosardo. The Corsican wumman wis hirplin a wee. She gaed intae a baxter's and spiered whaur Nicolas Ravolati steyed. He had taen up his auld trade, that o a jiner. He wis warkin his lane at the back o his shoap.

The auld wife pushed at the door and cawed on him: 'Hih! Nicolas!'

He turnt. Syne, lowsin the dug, she cried, 'On ye go, tear intae him, intae him!'

The roosed craitur breenged at him and claucht at his thrapple. The man pit oot his airms, grabblin wi the dug, and fell tae the flair. For a meenit he warsled, batterin the grund wi his feet; syne he didna move at aw, while Sémillante howked at his thrapple and tore it tae taivers.

Twa neebors, sittin at their doors, mindit weel seein a puir auld gadgie comin oot wi a shilpit black dug which ate, as it walked, some broon thing that its maister was feedin it.

In the forenicht the auld wife returned hame. Soond wis her sleep that nicht.

Gliff (Owersetten frae Wisława Szymborska)

J. Derrick McClure

I dauner alang the side o a green brae.

Girse, an wee flouers amang the girse
like a pictur for weans.

A roukie lift, nou brichtenin tae blue.

An ither knowes kythe quaetlins tae my sicht.

As gin thare hed never been Cambrian age nor Silurian,
craigs grummlin thegither,
cleuchs whumml't tapsalteerie,
never a nicht alowe
nor a day smuirit in mirk.

As gin the lawlands hedna shoggit thair wey here
in ill-hertit feems,
in ice-cauld chitters.

As gin ithergaits jist, an no here, the seas hed been jowein
an rivin the yondermaist shores.

Here by the nock it's hauf-ten.

Aathin in place, gentilie reddit up.

In the howe, a wee burn at's like a wee burn,

A roddin at's bein a roddin frae aye tae ayebidinlie.

Wuids guisin as wuids for aye an for aye – amen,
An abuin them birdies aflocht in the pairts o birdies aflocht.

As faur as the ee can rax, here rings the gliff.

Ane o thae warldlie gliffs
bidden tae bide.

Dubs (Owersetten frae Wisława Szymborska)

J. Derrick McClure

Richt weel dae I myn o't, yon fear fae my bairnheid:

I wadna gae near a dub.

Maist o aa, fresh yins, efter an onding:

Thare micht be yin at hedna a bottom til't,

tho it leukit jist like the lave.

Ae stap, an richt aff, doun I'll be gollop't,

doun I'll gae risin,

doun, deeper doun, syne I'll gae,

doun tae the clouds' reflections,

or deeper stull.

An syne the dub will dry up,

steik itsel ower my heid,

sneckin me in for aye an for ever — whaur?

wi a never-tae-win-tae-the-surface skraich.

It wesna till efter I managed tae unnerstaun:

aa mishanters disna

fit wi the laws o natuir;

an een gin thay ettl't tae,

thay cuidna happen.

A Lassockie Ruggs the Brodclaith (Owersetten frae Wisława Szymborska)

J. Derrick McClure

Jist a year past she's bade in this warld,
an aathin in this warld hesna been scanc't
an pitten in its ain neuk.

Nou, whit's gettin vizzi't
is things at canna muive by thairsels.

Ye hae tae help thaim wi't,
gie thaim a shog, a dunch,
tak thaim awa fae thair place, muive thaim.

Some o thaim's no awfy keen; thare the aumrie,
the dresser, the unbosome waas, the brod.

Aye but the brodclaith on the thrawn brod –
gin ye tak a guid grup o the edge o't –
seems tae want tae gae a wee dauner.

An the glesses on the claith, an the dishes,
the mulk-joug, the spuins, the bowie:
thay're that aiverie thay're fair chitterin!

It's richt interestin
hou thay'll decide tae muive
whan thay're shooglin on the edge;
wull thay gae stravaigin ower the ceilin?
fleein roun the licht?
lowpin ontae the windae-sole, an affae it ontae a tree?

It's naethin adae wi thon laddie Newton.
He can luik doun frae Heiven an waff his hauns.

This prattick maun be feinish't.
An it's gaun tae be.

The Herd's Tale

June Gemmell

The Ettrick Valley near Selkirk is full of wee hopes and howes, scattered with grey stone farmhouses tucked into faults in the land. Watters fed by hundreds of wee burns are nicker about the land, and they burble and sing their way down the hills. Fitstaps and shades of the past are about.

Abody has a tale to tell, around the fire on a winter's evening. This is the shepherd's tale. And he will swear it's true.

The day started just like any other as John clattered his tackety boots over the cobbles in the courtyard. This could be mornin he gathered his jacket tighter about him, and pulled his cap hard down, to keep at bay the biting wind. He tramped toward the hill to look over his flock, his stick tap-tapping on the frozen ground. His dog, Fleet

stuck close to his master, stopping when he stopped and going on when he did. On a day like this the sharp twinkle of instruction would carry far over the hills, jabbing through the still air.

His goodwife Elizabeth's kiss was still on his cheek, and she had knotted his scarf tighter as he went away. Their wee laddie slept on, not yet old enough to work with his father. In the summer when the boy was at school they were always on the hills together, and some of John's happiest moments were walking back home, his wee son's hand in his. He went on, passing the kye in the barn, their dragon breath rising, steaming into the air.

He thought of his father then, and glanced at the graveyard down the hill, the tips of the tallest heid-stones peering out from the early morning mist which lay like a sheet in the valley. He

thought of the newly dug grave in the corner, the green of the grass not yet claiming the bare earth.

The wind flung sharp knives, and dog and master hunched, shoulders down against the weather. As they followed the line of the old dry stone dyke, Fleet stopped, front leg hanging in mid air, scurrying about something on the path ahead. This was a good working dog, one of the best John had ever had, but awfully sensitive to what folk called the 'otherworld'. Here in these Border hills there were things no man could explain. Every herd had his own stories of ghosts and bogles, and John himself had seen antril lights, and sounds in the hills that made him believe in a world beyond his own, kenspeckle yin.

Of course, there was nothing on the path ahead, and they made their way up the west side of the hill to find the sheep. John eyed the sky as he walked. The clouds were alight with a pink glow and he knew there would be snow before the evening was done. He minded bad winters they'd had in this

valley, when the snow had been so deep it buried the sheep and they had to be dug out.

There had been some awful years, but the winter he turned ten had been the worst. Snow had started early that year, and had just kept coming. It didn't let up day or night for about a week. Some beasts were found alive in the first few days of rescue, but after that only dead animals were pulled out of the deep snow-drift. His father was out for hours at a time, coming home soaked to the skin, and silent with the grief of it. John never forgot that time.

He did his rounds at speed now, but still snowflakes had begun to spin out of the gloom as he headed home. He stopped on the hillside for a moment to study the sky.

He made a decision. Here and there it was icy underfoot, but he opted to take the short cut, by the wee waterfall and save twenty minutes on the journey home. The path was always wet and it had frozen overnight. John was awfully careful, picking his way

doonhill, but the sole o his boots met a sheer surface and his feet slid away fae under him. His hands scrabbled at the hard grund. He grabbed at the big rocks tae save hissel fae fallin doon the big drap, away below. Hands cut tae ribbons by the hard granite, he couldnae say how, but he foond a handhold an managed tae pull hissel ontae the soft grass away fae the edge. Below him loose stanes crackled their way doonhill tae the unforgivin rocks at the bottom.

His dog licked his face and whimpered. He felt battered and bruised, but the thocht o a plate o hot broth an a roaring fire brought John tae his feet. He made his way doon the stony path, bloodied hands punched deep intae his pockets to keep wairm.

The dug stopped as they reached the yaird, looking at something John couldnae see. He wis in nae mood tae delay his entry intae the warm kitchen, so he tapped the dug gently wi his stick. But still the beast stood there, transfixed by somethin. A strange leam lit up the yaird an the

snow wis fallin mair heavy now. John shook his head at the dug, then moved forward. But somethin caught his attention o'er by the barn. He thocht he saw a figure leanin against the wall an gasped aloud, wonderin who would be about on a day like this.

He opened his mooth tae greet the stranger, as a blast of snaw blew into the yaird and a tirl o large flakes screened the figure fae view. When he reached the spot whar the man had been, naebody was there. He shook his heid to empty it o daft ideas. He was as bad as his dug. But, as he reached the kitchen door, he felt a tug oan his sleeve. He turned aroond.

A few feet away the stranger had reappeared, and now, in the chyngin hauf-licht John could see who he wis. The auld woollen jaiket wi patches at the elbows, the troosers held firm at the waist by an auld black leather belt, worn smooth by the years. The heavy workin boots laced up tight.

And the bunnet. A flat tweed bunnet with the greens and broons o the hills woven in. A bunnet that was barely aff

his heid in any weather. So inseparable was his faither from his cap, that he had been buried wi it.

A lump caught in John's thrapple. He struggled tae make sense o what he could see wi his ain eyes. The figure in front o him smiled, and knocked his cap further up his heid wi a lang-kent gesture. The snaw-bree made John's clothes damp, but it didnae seem in ony way to affect the man who faced him, who stood in his ain cloud of silvery grey-licht.

A'hing was still. John didnae want tae breathe an break the spell. There wis days up in the hills he had thocht he could see the familiar bent back o his faither walking ahead, but with the blink o an ee he vanished. Or, in the shed at lambing time there was times he felt his faither staundin at his side looking on, but then he took a second glance and there wis nae one there.

The kitchen door clicked aff the sneck and oot stepped his wee son who spied the skirlin, whirlin snaw and whooped and clapped his hands wi joy. John scooped him up, and turned taewart the spot where his faither had stood, noo just an empty space o birlin snawflakes. Heavy hertit, he turned

back to the kitchen door, to the warmth of his ain hearth. As he did so, his son bent doon and picked up somethin lying on the doorstane. An auld bunnet with the greens and broons o the hills woven in.

Wi a smile he placed it on his son's heid. It was dry, and still wairm.

Evolved for flicht, but no much

Karen Macfarlane

(at Dundee Botanic Gairdens)

A wee tousle-heidit laddie in reid trainers
flees ower the grass under auld sycamores,
airms strecthed oot, like the wee plane
that's cheatin the wind ower the firth,
soarin and devin,
ingine drone rummlin under his breith.

A whirligig skitters doon afore him,
a blithe, birlin wheech tae a chance berth
on wings evolved for flicht,
but no much;
jist ae giddy meenit
in a life lang-rootit in earth.

Chap it aff

Karen Macfarlane

You're a' squint in your chair again.

I lift your airm tae shift the wecht;

the orphaned limb hings hivvy,

your pain ower much fir me tae haud fir lang.

Jist chap it aff, you say, near every day;

and I push a pillae in tae prap it up,

like the branch o an auld oak

that has tae be preserved.

e wildcat lowpit ower wir dyke
yalla een aa firey an keen
luikin richt ferocious like
bit hurdies were creukit an lean

puir cat wis daein badly
an wis sair famishit
stealt frae e dugs bowl glaidly
an wantit mair o it

grim terror o the hill
by aa wee beasties feart
silently fir yeers ye'd kill
an girss wi bleed wis smeart

but noo death wis huntin ye
fa naebody kin ootrin
births fee is ayewyes at ye dee
an suin yir time wis duin

nails in a velvet glove ah felt
fan ah gied ye a gentle clap
an carrit ye up at hill far yid dwelt
tae e grave ahd dag at e tap

Tooth Fairy

Shane Strachan

1994

Ye said tae yer stepdad Zander that anither tooth wis wobbly as ye made yer wye back fae een o his cousins in Rosehearty one calm autumn wknicht. Ye were fleein along the road in the second-hand car he'd nae lang bought aff his mam and dad. Twa o yer teeth had faan oot so far, and noo there wis this third een wobblin. For each tooth, ye'd gotten a fifty pince piece fae the Tooth Fairy. Ye thought o the sweeties and lucky bags ye micht buy fae the shop across fae school once this next een fell oot.

Woah-ho! You'll be loadit again, Zander said as yer wee brither scraiched in his baby seat next tae ye in the back. Can ye nae get it oot?

Nah, it's nae ready yet.

Ye'd tried wrappin the fold o yer wee Ninja Turtles wallet roon it and haulin, but it widna give muckle mair.

Pish! I'll get it oot tae ye fan we get hame. The car seemed tae speed up, the fields on the right and the North Sea on the left blurrin as they wheeched past.

Back at the hoose, Zander said he kent

a trick that would help get the tooth oot. He opened up the mirrored cupboard above the lavvie sink and taen oot the box o dental floss. He unraveled some and then tied it roon the metal handle o the bathroom door. He pulled the box o floss so that mair unspoolt until it stretched just past far ye stood, then he snapped the length aff and put the box doon on the sink.

Richt, let ma see, Zander said as ye opened yer moo wide and lifted up yer tap lip. His fingers stank o fag smoke as he fiddled wi the floss and started tying a couple o knots roon yer tooth as though he wis mendin a fishin net. Now, he said, Tak a step back until the string's ticht.

Ye did as ye were telt and moved awa fae the door until it started tae come ajar wi the force o yer tooth haulin at it, the floss cuttin intae yer gums.

Noo, bide ere and bide as still as ye can. I'm gan tae ging on the ither side o the door and slam it shut, an ye'll hae seen hae another 50p.

Ye were shakkin a bittie as ye pit one fit back and one forward tae steady yersel. Zander squeezed roon tae the

ither side o the door and began coontin doon.

Three... two... one...

Just as quick as ye were halt forward, the cotton floss snapped midwye.

Och, shite! Zander said as he came back intae the room. Yer een were watterin, the hale side o yer face aching.

Haud on, I ken fit tae dee. Look up at ma.

He placed a hand on yer shooder and then wrapped the length o floss still tied tae yer teeth roon his thumb, winding it tichter and tichter until he might as well have been grippin ontae the tooth itsel wi his fingers. Withoot warnin, he gave it a massive tug. Ye couldna help but let oot a scream as ye felt summin snap inside yer face ablow yer nose.

Ye looked doon at the tooth lying on the grun – drips o bleed fell fae yer moo doon until it. Yer een were sparklin as ye turnt tae look at yersel in the mirror on yer tiptoes. Ye forced a smile at yer reflection and could see that, smert wi bleed, the wobbly tooth wis still there.

Ye've teen the wrang een oot, ye spluttered. Zander snorted wi laughter.

Ah, shit! Oh well, that's anither 50p for ye.

He disappeared oot the bathroom, howlin wi laughter as ye rinsed yer moo. Ye bent doon and picked up the tooth aff the fleer. Ye rinsed it under the sink and then made yer wye ben tae yer bedroom wi it, yer heid still spinnin. Ye tucked the tooth under yer

pilla afore pittin yer heid doon tae try and calm the dizziness.

The next time ye opened yer een, it wis early mornin, the sun nae lang risen above the Spider Swings outside. The pang in yer gums reminded ye on the tooth. Ye flipped yer pillow ower tae find it still sittin there, noo caul and dry. Ye picked it up and sniffed it – it smelt o birthday candle smoke. Maybe the Tooth Fairy didna come for teeth taen oot afore their time?

Ye made yer wye oot yer bedroom jist as yer mam came oot the lavvie in her fluffy white dressin goon. She looked sleepy, her hair aa tangelt at the back o her heid.

Mam, ye whispert. The Tooth Fairy didna come last night.

Eh?

The Tooth Fairy didna come.

Ye held up the wee tooth in the dim light so she could see it.

Oh no! Yer mam's eyes swallt up. That's bad o her in't it. Silly Tooth Fairy. I'll tell ye fit – will mam gie ye a 50p tae mak up for it?

Aye! Thank you. Ye ran ower and hugged intae her leg and she clapped yer heid. Then ye made yer wye doon tae breakfast tae see hoo ye'd get on eatin wi three o yer front teeth missin and anither wrigglin aboot.

Birthday Roses

Blair Center

An, inhalin, at eence, at last, the sweet
scent o ma ain grandparents' Tarves hoose,
I name it finally: a simple rose.

Tae me, these plosive petals' perfume brings
back—resuscitates—ma grandfaither's vyce
an the square back room wi its radio,
an the black backroads an bleat-broken nicht,
an villages, flocks huddlt, mirrorin
the twinklin constellations fa gazed doon
wi patience like if an auld shepherd watcht.

Ma bronchioles are breathin nostalgia.

I snip, clip short, an cut awa at green,
ma shakky hauns on the stem as I try
tae maintain this bouquet o gowden life.

Yet, cannles blacken, an leaves fa awa,
an auld heids dryin oot—like eyelids, kyne,
like exhaustit wi tears—shed their petals.
The withert beerial shrouds peel tae show
nyakit survival hidden doon aneth
like black clouds pairtin for the sin's bricht rays.

Thus, a quill, restin in the hammock curve
that runs fae finger tae thoom, in ma hoose,
refresht roses author thochts as I pluck.
The flooers whisper tae me, final, fresh,

*We forfochen live still. We weary bide
files breathin in these layert swaddlin bands;
we wait—there is ay time for renewal.*

Ayont the Fringe: the Empress' Tale o the Fleein Spiegeltent

Dorothy Lawrenson

This is the story o an emperor an a king, an it aw happened right here in Auld Reekie. An Aa'm the wan tae tell it, because Aa'm an empress masel. Whit dae ye mean how? How no? Aye, it's true, they cry me the Empress o Hunter Square, cause Aa'm like the senior citizen, the godmother, o aw thae radges an bams thit hings aroon on the steps ootside the Tron Kirk – aw thae day-drinkers thit you walk past wi yur nose in the air, wearin yur fur coat wi nae knickers unnerneath. Och, dinnae be feart, Aa'll no eat ye! An Aa'm bein straight wi ye: ma nem's Mary Stewart, an that's a royal nem. Bit back in the day the Stewarts were ayeweys wan or the ither: kings or travellin folk. So Aa may be royalty bit Aa'm a traveller tae – leastweys, ma address when Aa come before the judge is 'nae fixed abode'. My pint is thit we're aw Jock Tamson's bairns, whether royalty or jakie, an if ye

pretend itherwise, ye're settin yursel up fur a big come-doon. Onyweye, this story Aa'm gontae tell ye is the story o twa rivals fur the upper haun in this city, an how the greed o wan o thaim an the corruption o the ither led tae the doonfaw o the Edinburgh Fringe. Dae ye mind the Fringe? Ye've mebbe heard the auld yins talkin about it. No? Well, see, nooadays Edinburgh's sich a peacefu place in August, wi nae crowds, nae noise. It stinks tae high heaven right enough, an maist folk has went tae the countryside or tae the coast tae get awa fae the stink an the stoor. Bit that wisnae ayeweys the case. When Aa wis a wee lassie – Aa'm talking fifty year ago – there yaised tae be a massive pairty here fur the hale month o August, wi folk fae aalower the wurld comin here tae see plays an comedy shows an concerts. Aye, it's hard tae

believe, bit thae kin o hings yaised tae happen back then – after the third pandemic bit before the fourth, ye ken. Ivery August the city yaised tae be stowed oot wi pairty-goers, an the streets wis thrang wi folk, queuein fur shows or staunin in a big circle roon buskers daein jugglin an fire-eatin an sword-swallowin acts.ither eleven months o the year. This boorach o tourists wis bringin in cash right enough, bit the dosh wis mainly bein raked in bi a haunfu o Fringe bosses, the venue owners. An the gadgies thit wis in control o hings fae September tae July, the toon cooncillors, wis awfu jealous o the gadgies thit owned the Fringe venues an cuid rake it in durin August.

Noo, the biggest o thae bigwigs thit owned the venues, the high-heid-yin o the Fringe if ye like, wis an impresario they yaised tae cry the Emperor o the Fringe. This guy hud hud his fingers in that many pies he wis barred fae Greggs. Ye'd see'm struttin about toon in his rid troosers, tweed jaicket an

bow tie, bein hale-fellae-weel-met wi onybody he reckoned hud money or influence. Wan year, he wis mindit tae promote a new venue thit wad be the epicentre o the hail shebang. So he built a kin o big top they cawed the Spiegeltent. This wis a tent-lik affair, bit wi wooden sides an wooden pillars, an aw decoratit inside wi hunners o mirrors an bells an stained gless, an aw trimmed wi gold an silver an paintit wi rich colours. It wis lik a miniature palace, ken, bit mair than that, it wis lik bein inside a cathedral, or – or a kaleidoscope. Steppin inside this Spiegeltent affair wis lik steppin intae anither, better, mair beautiful wurld. It wis mind-expandin. Bit mair important fae the Emperor's pint o view, folk wad pye hooiver much it cost fur a ticket, because a trip tae the Fringe wisnae a trip tae the Fringe wi'out a visit tae the Spiegeltent. Ye juist cuidnae hink o wan wi'oot the ither, ye unnerstaun? This fancy tent became sich a symbol o the Fringe, thit efter a few years rumours an prophecies an conspiracy

stairtit tae go roond. Like wi thae big metal birds in Liverpool, ken? Folk thought thit if onyhin happent tae the Spiegeltent, the Fringe itsel wid soon be kaput.

So, the Emperor's plan hud wirked: his fancy venue wis noo essential tae the Fringe, an he's rakin in the profits ivery August. This med aw the toon cooncillors hoppin mad, an nane mair sae than the high-heid-yn himsel, the Leader o the Cooncil, a man wi sich megalomaniacal tendencies thit he wis known tae awbody includin himsel as the King o the Cooncil. This man hud long ago sellt baith his ain grandmithers tae get where he wis, an he wad huv nae scruples aboot sellin yours tae get tae where he wintit tae be. Back then, ye've goat tae unnerstaun, getting a joab as a cooncillor came in juist behind winnin the lottery or bein a mafia boss in terms o opportunities tae line yur ain poackets. An there wis nae shortage o weys this cuid be duin: bribes fur grantin plannin permission, backhauners fae contractors, various

sorts o mutual back-scratchin an turnin o blind eyes – aw that kin o hing. Bit here wis the King o the Cooncil no gettin even a wee slice o aw the takins fae the Spiegeltent. Well, if the King cuidnae get a share o the Emperor's dosh, he set aboot schemin how he cuid tak doon the Emperor's tent – aye, an the Emperor himsel, fur this toon wis clearly no big enough fur the baith o thaim.

At this pint, the King minds o a gang o guys he's hud dealins wi before. These were four sleekit con men wi much mair brains than scruples. The King says tae thaim, Aa want yous tae kybosh the Emperor bi destroyin his Spiegeltent: whit's yur price? Efter some negotiations aboot the fee, the King hauns thaim ower a heap o bitcoin.

Mind noo, this wis before the bitcoinisation o the economy. In thae days, folk still yaised poonds an pence. Bitcoin wis jist takin aff, an it wis lik catnip tae awbody thit winted tae get rich pronto – especially oor greedy Emperor. So noo this gang o four go tae

see the Emperor, an thur aw dressed up in hi-vis vests an hard hats, an they spin him this line thit thur oot-o-wurk archaeologists luikin tae pit thur expertise tae guid yaise. They ask him, wad ye like us tae search fur treasure aw roon yur big tent? Mebbes we'll turn up some chynge thit's bin dropped bi aw thae well-heeled folk thit come tae yur shows? Ay right, the Emperor says, dae ye hink Aa'm buttoned up the back? Bit then he hinks well, he's goat nuhin tae lose. He's that money-grabbin thit he wullnae say no tae hoardin washers thit's fawn oot o punters' poackets. So he says on ye go, an ye can keep hauf o whit ye find if ye dinnae tell the cooncil, since it's their land.

So the gang o four get oot these metal detectors an start goin beep-beep aalower the manky grass in amang the dogshite an fag-ends. An guess whit? As well as a bunch o shrapnel, they've turnt up a USB drive wi a fortune's worth o bitcoin on it! Course, they'd pit it there themsels, an the Emperor shoudae kent it wis too guid tae be true – bit he wis blindit bi the dollar signs in his eyes. An noo, he's totally taken in bi the con, an he says this is magic like, keep luikin. Would ye believe it, the next day,

anither USB stick! An the next again day, anither bloody wan! Noo these sae-cawed 'archaeologists' say tae the Emperor, oor researches huv led us tae believe thit if we dig inside the tent, unnerneath thae duckboards ye've pit doon, we'll likely turn up the biggest treasure yet. The Emperor hums an haws a wee bit – he kens hoo important the Spiegeltent is, it's the hert an saul o the Fringe – but he's huvin a hard time seein clearly through thae dollar signs he's wearin lik contact lenses. So he says on ye go then, juist caw canny wi yur diggin an dinnae damage ma tent.

That night, they go in wi thur spades an pickaxes, an they dig aw aroon the central pillar o the tent, till they find whit thur seekin – the gas main thit the King o the Cooncil tellt them wid be there. They dae a nifty bit o sabotage on that, then fur guid measure they find the fuse boax an kill the lights. Near dawn, the Emperor turns up tae check on thur progress. They meet him ootside an they say tae him man, ye'll niver guess whit we dug up in there! The Emperor's eyes light up an his mooth draps open – he luiks lik a puggie thit's juist hit the jackpot. Whit is it, whit is it? the

Emperor says. Go in there an see fur yursel, says wan o thaim, oh but tak ma lighter, the leccie's no workin. Ye can imagine whit happened next. Click, click, boom! They cuid hear the noise in Dundee an smell the smoke in Fife. The Emperor an his fancy tent went fleein hauf a mile intae the air an back doon again, an aw thae bonny mirrors an bits o golden fretwork fluttered doon on top o him, so it wis lik he wis buried unner the weight o his ain greed.

Well, that wis basically the end o the Fringe. When the Emperor an his tent went fleein, that wis lik the Liver Birds takin aff, an the hale jing-bang went rapidly doonhill. The verra next year thur wis anither lockdown, an then the Fringe wis cancelled fur guid. Lik Aa said, thur's plenty folk thit disnae miss it, an it's guid tae huv taken back oor streets. But Aa huv tae confess, Aa miss the excitement of aw thae shows. An Aa like a bit ae a sing-sang. But we've juist tae mek oor ain entertainment the noo – so here goes:

Well thur wur twa high-heid-yins in the city of Auld Reekie:

the Cooncil King wis crooked an the Emperor wis greedy.

The Emperor pit up a tent that wowed the punters, but the King wis discontented cause he didnae get a cut.

He foond a bunch o con men an he gied thaim the finances

tae cairry oot a ploy that wad confoond his rival's chances.

These boys unearth the treasure they've bin given bi the King;

the Emperor says that's magic lads (aw he can hear's 'kerching').

So this daft auld Emp'ror met a premature demise,

aw because he listened tae some treacherous advice.

He wis that rich an covetous, the con men took his measure

an sent him aff wi quite a bang, alang wi aw his treasure.

Noo the moral o this story is tae ayeweys keep the heid;

dinnae faw fur scammers or ye might end up brown breid.

Who wad you believe: a chancer who spins you a pretty tale

or a trusty storyteller? Well jist weigh that on yur scale.

A Prayer Beuk

Reyzi Grace MoChridhe

Gin ye luik atwixt the richt twa pages
in the rare beuks room at UBC Vancouver,
there's a flouer. Nae tellin nou whilk spring
or simmer o the seiventeent century
gied it intae the haund o the Puritan lass
wha left her name inside the hymnal kiver,
as tho trokin syllabs tae history for a bluim.
Cliver quean, sae pittin aff the corruptible
for the wark o the Laird's ain haund.
Her haunds are gaun, the veins whit war
blue as the cloak o wir Leddy eelit
wi the roadside shrine and the meidaie
whaur this blossom growd. The colour
o her cheek and the hue o the petals

passit frae this warld thegither, yet ilka vein
o thae same petals bides incorruptible
as a relict. Nae tellin nou hou she'd hae taen
the compare, ony mair as A cud knaw
the spraing whit catcht her ee. Whit's left
is the haw o the pressin pages growen
translucent ower centuries, as tho this
bittock solit warld haed leart something
o worldlessness frae the wirds aroond it.
It wad suit me, lue, tae be presst atween
yer letters sae, till the colour A turn
whan A read thaim is aw whit remeens.

The Birk

Reyzi Grace MoChridhe

A brainch o birk

feezit intae the snaw

like a brin o muinlicht

or a vyce cruived in the Sheol o a lug...

Hou the whiteness myndis o deith,

and the snaw o dist,

and the wind o a dervish waddin feist

and a vyce bleized on the birlin o the erd an the gloamin.

Nou ma days is nocht but ratches wrate on a furlin bark,

whit peels awa afore a lithesome finger.

God grant A shud see it faw afore the daurkness comes,

tae shaw something livin unnerneath

—aw the wirs A cudna scribe bit maun can read

whan the vyce says again, “Receet!”

Eemis Stane

Scrivein that maitters

Eemis Stane furthsets poetry, fiction, essays and polemics in Scots o ony and ilka variety, frae ilka airt and pairt. The kind o Scots ye scribe in is faur less important tae us than the thing ye're yaisin it tae say.

Eemis Stane is rin by Matthew Fitt, Thomas Clark, Ashley Douglas, Sara Clark, Paul Malgrati and Eilidh Douglas.