



Flash Fiction Competition 2013

Image 3 adult entries

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The White Peacock by Sylvia Telfer

Glenda shut the drapes of her Glasgow flat, and switched on the computer.

“I’m inspired to sew after seeing the Great Tapestry of Scotland.”

Ken moved behind her.

“What are you looking for?”

“Something to flow my creative juices.”

He glanced at the onscreen image.

“Uh? A satyr stepping into a frame?”

“Or stepping out. The satyr’s lust, and the peacock tails symbolize pride.”

“It’s trees, or plants, not peacock tails.”

“You’re as thrawn as your cousin.”

“Jack? Can’t mention his name? Getting a good divorce settlement from him?”

He stared at the medieval script illumination.

“Glenda, if peacock tails, where are the eyes?”

“In your soul.”

“Uh?”

“Spiritual growth relies on a change, gaining the All-Seeing Eye if you like. Everyone must pass through the crow, swan, peacock, pelican, and phoenix, stages to see clearly.”

“God, is this from your crazy New Age days?”

“In the peacock stage, you enter the astral, which is shifting weaves of colour signified by a peacock’s shimmering tail. Your self-image alters.”

“Clear as mud.”

“In plain words, those five birds are a blackening, a whitening, shimmering colours, a distillation, and a sublimation.”

“I don’t get the colour bit. Anyway, white peacocks exist.”

“What a *non sequitor*. Well, in a normal peacock, its colours are seen because its dark pigment absorbs light. In a white peacock, colour is washed out by white light because that mutant lacks dark pigment.”

“Deeper mud. As a biologist, that’s your field. Ken and I are mere maths teachers.”

“I’m Annie Oakley? You and Jack were childhood rivals for family glory.”

“Why did you split from Jack?”

“His adultery, as you bloody well know. Just think the peacock only ever mates once.”

“Dare I ask about dinner, Glenda?”

His mobile rang, and, with an inane excuse, he abruptly left, forgetting his mobile. She had heard him muttering her name into it. She dialled into his voice messages. Luckily, he had switched off his mobile at the exhibition. She gasped. Jack had been trying to get in touch with Ken throughout the day, attempting to ferret out what case she had against him, scared she could grab the family home.

In the tapestry, James Clerk Maxwell of electricity and magnetism fame had anachronistic details; a television, and a mobile phone, in his beard. Ken had been blind to the satyr image, but science was something he understood. For her, arcane knowledge, and a mobile, was a winning fusion. In that, no grey area existed.

She looked at the image. It was lustful Jack. Odd how the peacock tails were wavering, and Jack strutting.

Rain rattled the window. Yes, the peacock dances, when rain is near, and, according to a Hindu myth, has the walk of a thief.

Suddenly, she felt free. Jack had stepped out of the frame, and, with that, darkness had left

the tapestry of her Life. She was a white peacock about to sew a brilliant new tapestry.
The End

Mr Dalziel's Gift by Pamela Shand

If the devil offers you something; you should refuse it. Unless, of course, it is something you have waited a long time for; then perhaps you should take it and hope for the best. Mr Jones was a dentist. One night while he and his wife sat chatting in bed about the day Mr Jones remarked.

"I met the most extraordinary man today. He had perfect teeth although a little sharp."

"That was nice for you dear."

"I found myself jabbering away to him like I had known him for years. I was quite disappointed when he left and yet the bugger didn't even pay, he walked out past the receptionist, bold as brass."

He kissed his wife and settled for the night when Mrs Jones noticed a glow under the bedroom door.

"You have left a light on again."

Mr Jones knew he had not but rather than argue he got up to deal with it. Light streamed out through the open living room door and as he entered the room to his astonishment, the very same man was sitting in his best chair drinking a glass of wine.

"What the hell."

"Now that's a good remark for hell is indeed my home. As we are to be on close family terms I should ask your first name?"

The man was so charming, just as he had been earlier that day. Mr Jones found his mouth forming words.

"Malcolm."

"Well now Malcolm I have a present for you. You informed me today that you are childless and I who have many children decided to give one of them to you."

"What?"

Malcolm stumbled to the opposite chair just in time to see the man pull out from behind his own chair a bassinette. He pushed it towards him and lifted the cover. Inside was what appeared to be a small monkey, but on closer inspection was a baby. Malcolm gasped and at the sound, the child yawned and opened his eyes. They were as black as coals. Malcolm shivered and started as his wife entered the room.

She stopped in her tracks at the sight of them, then seeing the baby instantly came towards it: intrigued. She did not appear to be horrified at all at the small downy child. In fact, she lifted him from the crib and cradled him in her arms. The man looked at Malcolm and smiled.

"Its love at first sight it would appear, how satisfying."

He rose to go and Malcolm rose too.

“Where are you going, I don’t even know who you are.”

“Don’t you, don’t you really Mr Jones. Had you thought of a name for him?”

Malcolm looked back at his wife, now smiling radiantly down at the little monster left in their care; she cooed caressing the tiny horns protruding from his head.

“We could call him Colin after your brother.”

At this the man roared with laughter as he headed out of the house.

The Value of the Image by Ewan C. Forbes

People pay attention to the letters. There are those that think that letters have a special power, that they can enchant the mind. This is not true. Words can have such value, their own magic, but letters are merely the medium, and the medium is not the message. You will understand this in foreign lands. There, unknown combinations of letters have no power other than to frighten you with your newly discovered and geographically bound illiteracy.

The past is such a foreign land. The carefully inked letters that have been scratched onto this parchment will elicit no more recognition than the clumsy runes of barbarians when the as yet unknown future rolls over these territories.

But the image has a special power imbued in the form, a universality that can strike at once the prince and the pauper, the monster or the saint, with an idea that is immediate and visceral. The light that hits the image I ink now will bounce from the page, through the eye, to the mind. It will not follow the same path in every viewer. It will not prompt the same thoughts, but it will stand in memory as an approximation of itself, something more than the indecipherable letters of a language on its way to being lost.

In my dreams I see the beast, all horns and fur. The sceptre it carries commands respect, but as a symbol of a sovereignty beyond my ken. It stalks my sleeping thoughts, and has made its way into my waking mind too. The image is not a captured beast, but instead a source of endless regeneration as it is born anew into the minds of all who see my work. For as long as the image exists the beast will have new interior spaces to inhabit, while those who can translate the accompanying text grow fewer in number until finally they are no more. And without context, the beast will take on an air of mystery that could reinforce its power.

But without the words the beast could just as easily become irrelevant. The colour the beast is committed to the page amidst, those blues and reds and golds, they hold a power of their own

that is tied to the seasons. The sky and seas aside, there are months of the year that those colours have no presence in, and so seeing the beast forever in their context brings an additional magic to the viewer. But this will change. Already, there are dyes and polished stones the availability of which tarnish that magic, detract from its specialness. And the future will bring further treasures, greater distractions.

And so I hope that there will always exist a place where these words will be valued, a place where the image can exist alongside the word, so that the beast can be born anew in the minds of those yet to be born.

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“JUST THE DEVIL IN ME POPPING UP TO SAY HELLO” by D.Bruton

He was a teacher. Religious Studies. And he made it fun, you know. Like no one wanted to do Religious Studies before Mr Fordell came and after, his classes was all filled up. What he had to say was important, he said. He talked of what was right and what was good, and we thought about his lessons when they was over; mostly it was the jokes we remembered and the nice he could be, even to Smelly Sandra, and he never called her ‘smelly’. He had his own names for us and Sandra was Sugarplum. It was soft and sweet at the same time.

He was older than my Da, creepin grey in his hair and his face all crinkled and creased when he laughed, and he was always laughin. No, that’s not true; he could be serious sometimes. Like when Andy’s Mam died from breast cancer and we raised money for the charity and it was all Mr Fordell’s idea, and in a way that cheered Andy and helped him through. We loved Mr Fordell and we laid all our problems at his feet knowin he’d pick ‘em up and carry ‘em for us, ‘cause he cared.

He pulled coins from behind Martin-Be-Bashful’s ears, and he made Angela-Delight take her coat off in class at the first askin, and Toots-Miriam always wore her tie. He took an interest in who we was and he kept sayin as how he was ‘down with the kids’ and makin a gesture with his hands which he thought was cool and which was just silly.

He’d a facebook page and we got to know about it and a picture of Mr Fordell there dressed in a red devil costume with horns and a forked stick. Underneath it said ‘just the devil in me popping up to say hello’. It was funny, like everythin he did was funny.

Then we was on a trip to Blackpool and Tommy-Tickle-Me-Pink was kissin Mary-Mary-Quite-Contrary when he should’ve been kissin me. Mr Fordell took me into his hotel room and he said I was special and he put his arm across my shoulders and he kissed my hair. I know teachers ain’t supposed to do that and so I did feel special and I forgot about Tommy and Mary.

And that was the start of somethin and maybe it was wrong and bad like the papers say and maybe Kev - Mr Fordell – should’ve known better. He was married, see, but he was lonely and he said he was only with *her* for the kids. With me it was different. He said he loved me. He said he loved me once, he loved me twice, he loved me more than beans and rice.

Then it was suddenly all the dirty talk of the school, what we did, and a policewoman came to speak to me and Mr Fordell was not a teacher no more. The papers call him the devil, and now I just don’t know.

Fear by Clara Ross

There's something to be said for bringing beasts to their knees and watching them cower with wide, fearful eyes.

Fear.

I hate fear.

Fear is a weakness of the mortal flesh and I have no time for it.

I like guilt. Even the word *guilt* can make you squirm. It can strike you anywhere. All it needs is a trigger. One tiny, unconscious trigger. It comes in clammy waves that ebb at your soul for as long as it likes. Sometimes even a lifetime. People who are dripping with guilt either give up and drown, or fight the current and let the waves twist them out of shape. People are dangerous when they're twisted. Fear has never twisted anyone. Fear bores me. It comes in a burst and stays until your safe. It is both dutiful and faithful- things that I despise. They are predictable and no fun at all. Everyone knows that fear is only fun when it's not your own.

When beasts are brought before me I wonder if they recognise the other side of fear. They wince when I smile and their eyes cannot settle. They dart around, they move, they want to run right out of their sockets, but they always return to me.

Everyone huddles under a blanket of fear in front of me and stares at the beast. I know how they see him. They see the monster that has terrified them for months. They see the horns of the devil and eyes that gleam with the evils of hell. They see sharp teeth which are either blackened by blood or his rotten soul. They see knives on the ends of his fingers. The very imaginative might even see scales or fur instead of skin. Perhaps even a tail. Anything to make it demonic. Anything to remove him from them. It is only I who sees him for what he is. I see his foot. It was injured when he was caught and somehow that scrapes away the façade. There is no fur or scales on the foot he limps on. He is as human as the rest of them, but they don't want to know that. It is beasts who carry evil in their hearts, not humans.

He is led to my altar and marched up the stairs. He looks at me on his way past. Pleading. I smile.

They turn him around to face his crowd. "Adam Stirling." The beast jumps at the sound of his name.

"You have been found guilty of four counts of murder and will be hung by the neck until dead."

The beast shivers and the blanket of fear thickens. A bag is placed over his head. A noose is lowered around his neck and then he is mine. I reach for my little lever and I pull it. He whimpers. He drops.

His neck does not snap. The blanket vanishes and the only fear left is his. Kicking. Choking. Twitching. The last thing to leave him.

Failure to plan by Marka Rifat

Motes danced in the golden air and Barnabus, shivering in the scriptorium, ached to go beyond the stone walls and run about in the sunlight.

He shifted on the narrow bench and tried to concentrate on the panel he had been allocated – *sinister* and near the bottom. Better than days of drawing ivy leaves as line fillers, where the scribes failed to reach the margins, but oh, for the prestige of a *dexter* panel, or the freedom of a *bas-de-page*. He cupped his downy chin and smiled. Brother Cedric pounced. “Work!” he hissed into the boy’s blushing face.

Barnabus hunched over the vellum. What to do? Sun? Moon? Portent. Yes, a shooting star like Brother Anselm described, then the rest of the panel could be dark, with a palace diagonally opposite and job done. He inked in the star and started the tail when a cough seized him and his pen swept south instead of west. He groaned, then inspiration struck – paint a *De Bestiis* phoenix and the comet could be a flame. The other flames were quickly outlined, then he sneezed, splattering the wet lines. He fumbled for his cloth to protect the linear foliate “S” and nearby script. By the time he had done that, the mess in the panel had dried.

He stared at the smeary shapes. They *could* pass as trees, with foliage in the blobs. Then what? He felt Cedric’s eyes willing him to depict what God created rather than some fancy. Alright, a cockerel. One of the flames could be a lovely tail, echoing the curve of the “S”, and the bird would have Cedric’s fat belly. The boy grinned and went straight for the pigment. In his excitement, his cockerel acquired a long left leg. He frowned. He painted in the feathers while he pondered. The smell of soup rose from the kitchens and when he refocused, it was clear that the feathers resembled fur and the bird was more of a kneeling, headless bear. No matter, a right leg would fill out the left corner, add the face and there, a bear in the woods. He was finishing the ears when his nib caught a ridge in the vellum and skidded, leaving a long horn protruding from the head. In a despairing rage, he drew another horn, then a lumpen face, made the star a club and scratched in claws and talons.

He looked up to see the abbot. “Forgive me,” implored Barnabus, spreading his inky hands .

But sleek Abbot Geoffrye walked on, smiling. The boy’s drollery had the exact lineaments of the former abbot, an irritatingly saintly man who, to his last sanctified odorate breath, unreasonably fought every effort to devote some of the abbey’s substantial tithes to the earthly comfort of senior clergy. Now he was mocked for eternity. *Perfectio*.

A Welsh Incident by Richard Bennett

It's a pair of shoes I find first. They're a very good make. Good, old-fashioned, quality brogues. They've been properly cared for, the uppers fed with polish, a darker shine above the toecaps and the welts where trouser-bottoms have buffed them. Leather soles, worn, with curved metal studs in the heel and toe of each. The shoes are sitting, dusty, half-concealed by trailing hessian, under what remains of a tartan armchair. They're about three inches long. I'm nearly six foot, and my shoes are about a foot long.

The house is a 1970s bungalow. Windows are broken. The door scrapes and screeches on the threshold as I push my way in. Wallpaper hangs loose. Plaster, blackened with mould, runs with water. There's a gap where a fireplace has been torn out. Bottles and cans lie around. Graffiti. Broken furniture, an office desk. I struggle to open its drawers. At the back of one, I find, tied neatly tight with thread, a little pack of business cards. They read:



*Jas. F. Ellwood
Manager
Barclay's Bank
Abergavenny
Monmouthshire
Telephone: Abergavenny 7360.*

Another room: a double bed, wrecked, and a wardrobe, heavy, Victorian mahogany, mirrors tarnished beyond reflection. Then, suddenly, in corner shadow, a scabbling and a scuffling, and I see a quivering shape, about the size of a breeze-block. Sparse hair, brick-coloured, four legs, a reptile tail. The feet have four blunt claws. Head and face are pushed hard into the corner. I go over and touch it. The skin shrinks under my fingers. I gently lift it up, turn it in my hands, and hold it up to look into its face, as you might a little dog. It's heavy and limp. Its limbs might be lead, its blood mercury. The features are human – flat, hairless, white, the face of a man in late middle-age. The mouth opens. The teeth – there are gaps – are human. It makes a throaty chattering sound, like a monkey, or a magpie, or an angry cat. Then it sneezes three times. Human sneezes. A man sneezing. Now, its nose needs wiping. I put it down. More noises, almost like syllables, forming units that might be sentences. Pitch and volume vary: querulous, matter-of-fact, angry. It looks at me – disappointed, helpless, hopeless, contemptuous. It dismisses me, turns away, moves rheumatically, leaden-footed, tail twitching, to the wardrobe and clambers in.

Time passes. I leave the house. It's dark now. In this part of the village there are few lights. Stars shine in billions above the bulk of Skirrid. I look up amazed into the dark pool of the night and, suddenly, I am seized by vertigo and feel myself, as if torn from gravity's grip, flying, like a diver, down into the depths.

The Flungry's tale/tail by William Simpson

Soft, billowing wooliness. Always a comfort in times of need; the Flungry gave his magnificent tail a little squeeze. The luxurious cloud of fleece was such a contrast to his coarse leathery fingers, but it felt lovely. He gave a great sigh as he wiped away the cold morning dew that had collected on his horns, 'another day' he thought to himself.

He dragged his unwashed body out of his cave and went in search of some breakfast. As always at this time in the morning, the Flungry was very hungry. By chance he stumbled upon the carcass of a hare, which must have been recently slain. But this didn't appeal to him at all as the Flungry was a strict vegetarian. He satisfied his needs instead by having a simple mushroom soufflé with a wild garlic and chevre sauce using ingredients found nearby in the forest.

He continued with his morning amble and finally reached the river. He liked to gaze at the flowing water, and try to catch glimpses of the small fish darting between the reeds. He lost himself watching the ripples of light dance joyously upon the surface, but his attention was cruelly refocused upon the reflection of his own hideous face. Now, he had grown to live with his appearance, and was once in fact considered quite handsome amongst his own kind. But they were all gone now, and he was just left with the callous jibes from the other creatures echoing in the sausage shaped hollows of his ears. His focus returned to the gentle lapping of the water, and he began to notice that his legs were becoming slightly stiff from the cold. He continued with his walk.

Before long he was at his favourite point along the riverbank, among a patch of rushes that are unique to the region. Their thick blue stems give way to a bulbous scarlet head, not dissimilar in shape to a globe artichoke, but the texture was quite different and velvety smooth to the touch. As he passed they whispered to him, as they usually do, but there was something in their haste at that moment which made him pause. There, gleaming at their base mounds, was a rather unusual silver object. The Flungry knelt down to inspect it further, brushed off the slimy reed from the river that clung to the handle and gave it a polish. It buzzed ominously as he held it to his ear, and he guessed it must have floated down from the castle. But what was it? 'How strange!' he spoke aloud, and his voice was magnified tenfold by the item. It was some sort of microphone. Startled, but intrigued he decided to do something he had not done in nigh on twenty year. He began to sing the folksongs of his ancestors in the most beautiful falsetto voice. The animals soon gathered, with wonder in their eyes, and the blue rushes swayed with delight at the sweet sweet music.

“Ernest The Hairy Goat-Man With A Leopard’s Face (Part 1 of 1)” by Steven McKinnon

Ernest The Hairy Goat-Man With A Leopard’s Face reaches the Foreboding Forest, his body numb and his brow sweaty. His quest for the Shiny Diamond of a Million Promises has begun.

The fate of the world rests with him now - for the Diamond, as everyone knows, emits Cosmic Radiation™, the life force which prevents planets from imploding.

‘I’ll retrieve the Diamond, save the world *and* impress Princess Pomegranate!’ he says to himself because he has no friends.

A rustle in the treeline prickles Ernest The Hairy Goat-Man With A Leopard’s Face’s senses. He unsheathes his flute and adopts his favourite fighting stance, ‘Drunk Flamingo’.

‘I-I’m warning you!’ he says. ‘I have a flute – *and I’m not afraid to use it!*’

A cloaked hunter appears, as in a man who is wearing a cloak and not Predator. His eyes are as narrow as his head is bald, which is to say, very.

‘What, pray tell, are you, funny-looking imp-thing?’ he says. He clasps his crossbow, which is unfortunate because Ernest has been allergic to crossbow bolts fired into his face ever since he was a boy.

‘I’m a hairy goat-man with a leopard’s face,’ says Ernest The Hairy Goat-Man With A Leopard’s Face.

‘Intriguing,’ the hunter says. He strokes his chin, which is the universally-accepted sign of being evil. Also, he has a goatee. ‘Tell me, hairy goat-man with a leopard’s face: Why do you navigate these woods? And why do you stand like a drunk flamingo?’

The hunter takes a step forward.

'Back! Back I tell thee!' says Ernest.

'I mean you no harm, unusual faerie beast!' says the hunter, who by the way is played by Sean Connery.

'*Back!* I can play "*Achy Breaky Heart*" on this!'

'*Christ!* Alright, I won't move an inch.'

'G-good.'

'I'm doing as you asked. See? Now tell me... You're after the Shiny Diamond of a Million Promises, aren't you?'

'...No?'

'Why else would a miniature goat beastie negotiate these woods?'

Ernest remains silent, but the eyes in his big leopardy face betray him.

'Yes, I can see it in your eyes, young feather-featured flamingo thing who is like a rubbish version of a griffin. It so happens that I am journeying to the Cave of Suggestive Adjectives – *the last known resting place of the Shiny Diamond!* Accompany me, and I'll see you fulfil your quest. What say you?'

Ernest The Hairy Goat-Man With A Leopard's Face thinks for a few seconds. 'Okay then,' he says, because his mum never warned him about this sort of thing. 'But don't you betray me!'

'Of *course* I won't betray and eat you!'

And so, armed with his flute, Ernest the Hairy Goat-Man With A Leopard's Face sets off with the hunter.

The hunter is using the flute to pick out the charred remains of Ernest The Hairy Goat-Man With A Leopard's Face from his teeth. Before he can wrench a particularly stubborn eyelid out, the world runs out of Kosmic Radiation™ and everything ignites.

A tail tale by Nathalie Vanballenberghe

'Quick, quick!' thought Jeremy. He had to be at a party in less than half an hour, but noticed only just a few minutes ago that it a fancy dress was required. Of course, how could he have missed it? Luca, his colleague, had always been someone with eccentric ideas. Themed parties, weekends away to far-flung places, sleeping under the stars in mid-winter,... you name it, he would do it.

Jeremy ruffled through some cupboards in the attic to find something suitable. Last year's orange Halloween costume was worse for wear. He would just have to improvise. With about twenty minutes to go, he dashed down the stairs. He tore open the kitchen cupboard and found his mother's *plumeau*, just a fancy French word for an ordinary duster. 'That's a good start,' Jeremy mused. Hairy extensions! At the back of the shelf, something drew his attention. It was an old rag dotted with paint. Yes! That was it. In the garage, he still had an old brownish coverall he had used to paint the ceiling. Disastrous result on the painting job, but the paint-blotched coverall would be perfect for tonight.

With these two items, he rushed back to the bathroom upstairs to put his disguise together. He attached the duster to his coverall with some tape and safety pins. A colourful tail! Glancing in the mirror, he observed his five-day old stubble. How glad he was he did not shave this morning. With the orange hair dye he still had from a previous event and some hair gel, he could easily change his appearance, and the colour would match his coverall! This was all coming together very nicely. Just then, he remembered he had run out of gel a few days ago. What now?! Did egg white not have the same effect as the gel? He would surely still have an egg in the fridge! So he stumbled half-dressed down the stairs, *plumeau* in tow. No wonder evolution got rid of this addendum, he thought, when he almost caught his tail between the washing machine and the radiator. He quickly took out the egg, cracked it open and separated the yolk from the egg white. With his hands, he applied a little on the left, then on the right, and succeeded in making his hair stand up straight. Impeccable... two horns! He zipped up his coverall all the way and checked himself in the hallway mirror. A decent result, he thought, dashing out the door with his mum's semi-automatic umbrella in his hand. Make way for Jeremy the faun!

A Rising Fall by Gala Pouzanov

A wild wood of blue trees where the beasts and hopping leaves, dancing to an invisible beat the home to lost songs and souls with a mulchy dancefloor underfoot for you to drop your gilded surfaces. Peel off the gold leaf, scrub off the red stains and shaded hairs, stepping deeper into the woods. You pluck off your sleeves, pluck off handfuls of passing feathers for your hair: oh how ornate your headdress now!

Soft toes press into muddy earth, clots beneath the nails: exchange feet for cloven hooves, those soft lips for an open moan. No long loping, nor slouching under books and bags, you raise your furred hands to accept a horned crown. Linking hand in hand in claw and claw and lift your faces to the rain, to the drizzling sunlight. The hum carries you in cycles of living steel, north to west to south to east.

You have been singing, you have grasped rods and command the dance. No orderly patterns, only chaos with wild eager hearts grasping at wings. Brisk your steps, the sound is everyone at once. Chorus electric birds and bright coloured sandhills and the hiss of a seashell at your eye.

Blood sings, you were born to answer the call, the stresses of the rising call. Your eyes linger and followed the lead of the inked signs, dancing while sitting completely still, relaxing into a lonely library's sigh. Hardwood, dust, turning pages grasp and tug and tear you away, folding over your ears and eyes. You shut your book and rise.

At once the song is ended, you have strayed from pictures and black liens of text. Step an orderly march to a crowd in a train, sway to the rhythm of dank underground air. Your cold bare hand opens the door with a bare cold key. A burst of warm air echoes back (a hint of a melody with no notes) and you recall your furred body, your tangled wings – the microwave pings and you open a tin of peas.

You sit and watch a couple of adverts, then a show and the news. A hot mug of tea, a blanket across your lap. The phone rings: you answer and talk. Not a sound stirs your blood, you cannot fling yourself into this rhythm with any hope of its throwing you back.

Asleep, you stumble in the dark, grasping an empty hornless crown; the revelers absent and jeering at your silk sheets and the ribbon around your middle. You step delicately across a cobbled path with toothpick heels lodging in the gaps, watching them dashing through knee-high grass that you cannot really see through the fog and smoke and the blaring alarm that lifts you out and will not drop you back.

A Body in Motion by Patrick Christopher Kavanagh

She thought it was a fox at first, standing there at the bottom of the garden, the evening grown dim about it; poised as though to dart away should she prove a threat.

The fur, golden and lighter than the heavy shadow of the bordering hedge, had misled her. She saw now - her eyes adjusting to the dusk - that the thing had horns.

She'd come out to empty the mop-bucket. She'd been cleaning all day.

Of course, the landlord said the flat had been 'deep cleaned' by a professional (or was it 'industrial') cleaning firm, but landlords always said such things; all part of the theatrics of property rental: a small lie now, so that when it came time to return your deposit they could tell another: a certain percentage to be deducted - blu-tack on the bedroom walls, carpet wanting shampoo.

The place looked fine too; rentals usually did during that initial showing; her desire to quickly find a new place having blinded her to the speckled mould above the bath, the loose window panes, the wine-stained rug, that dark cupboard beneath the stairs full of broken house bricks, a rusted pram, badminton rackets, odd shoes.

She decided the place might need an *actual* clean on discovering a neat pile of fingernails on the arm of a chair, lying there like the skeletal remains of a mouse, that, and the ancient, greying, hair-tangled sponge wedged beneath the grill tray, as though, overcome by a sea of spent grease, it had drowned there.

Bleach, she loved the suffocating choke of; the certainty that surfaces were rendered clinically hygienic by its application. She bleached everything.

Small though the place was, the job took all afternoon. She wanted tea now but had binned the kettle, its element fur-lined, its cord gaffa-taped several times over. She'd filled the mop-bucket using the hottest setting on the electric shower, which, due to its limp trickle, had taken an age. That was another thing you didn't discover till you moved in and you were unlikely to ask, Do you mind if I take a shower before signing the contract?

Finally, aching all over, but happy to have marked her territory, she finished.

She saw now that the thing stood upright, bi-pedal, like a monkey, and that it held some kind of staff, or sword in its- yes, *claw*. The thing had claws.

Her bucket fell.

The thing let out a startled shriek, something like a barn owl's ragged call.

She froze.

The thing seemed slowly to dance then, shifting its weight from one foot to the other in an odd, pendular motion.

The movement sickened her; there was menace in it.

She backed along the wall toward the door, feeling her way against the dry pebble-dash. She slammed the door and turned the key, bolted both end-locks.

The creature was like others she'd seen, only worse. Much worse.

It was no good. She would have to move - again.

Any Moment Now by Gary Alexander Stott

He's coming. He's definitely coming. Just you wait and see. I'm sure he'll be here any moment now. Any moment. I mean, he's quite a busy chap, after all. Things to do, people to see. All that jazz. In the meantime, I'll just wait here and enjoy the scenery. Admire the leaves. Oh yes. He's running slightly late, but that's fine. As I said, he has a very busy schedule, and I get that, I really do. I often lose track of the time myself, I can hardly blame him. If I know him – and I do – he'll be on his way back right now. He promised, after all, and a promise is a promise. The deal has been struck, the contract signed. Now all I can do is wait.

Then again, there *are* things I miss, you know. I mean, not to put a negative spin on the situation – there's no point being pessimistic, now, is there? But I miss my home, my bed, my studies, my desk, my friends, my mother, my father, my head, my – oh my, look at me, rambling away! I do apologize – where are my manners? Some learned man, this! Do forgive me. Returning to the matter at hand, I'm afraid I can't say much more. As I said, he'll be here any minute, and I simply don't have the time to spare. Well, perhaps a little. All right, then, I'll indulge you!

So there I was, scribbling away at my desk, reading from my books, when all of a sudden – *poom!* – an apparition appeared before me! It was *him*, and he had a deal to offer me: a tome containing *all the knowledge I could possibly desire*. All I had to do was dedicate my time to its study. Excellent, I said! I took him up on his offer straight away, and he offered a delightful smile in return. With that, I shook his hand, and the offer became pact. He said he'd take me there straight away and return me home once my side of the bargain was fulfilled. That was that, and by whatever witchcraft – *poom!* – I found myself here, *within* this book! For years, I've studied its contents, learning everything I ever wanted to know and everything I never knew I did. I have all the knowledge I could possibly desire!

So there you have it. That's my story. Now if you don't mind, I have someone to meet. I bet he'll be here any moment now. Very busy chap, you see. I'd probably be running late if I were him, too. Maybe not six hundred and fifty nine years late, but late nonetheless. I sometimes wonder what's taking him so long, but then again, I probably wouldn't want to know – otherwise it would be in the book, wouldn't it? Any moment now.

Days of Creation by Elena De Wachter

The sky was a crispy red when he crawled out – blinded by the light he was all fumbling joy and eager scurry. The newborn sun hung just a bit too close in the sky, and the earth was streaks of okra and iron in a golden desert. He found it beautiful. Tracing small patterns in the sand with his toe he dared a small skip. Incidentally no one had done so before and his tail twitched with pride.

The First Day was turning out to be a good day. Padding across the desert on hairy feet the creature took time in his stride, and had no concern of it running out. He admired the descent of the sun and gasped at how prettily the moon blushed when she made her first entrée. Streaks of minerals were lovingly painted onto the sand; riverlets of garnets, pools of quartz, sparkling swipes of salt, all part of the great process of absorption into the crust of the earth.

The sun rose confidently for the second time when he reached a small valley, a spring in his step – the soil was simmering with an energy that tickled the sensitive soles of his feet. Before the day was over plants would sprout in fecund abundance. The creature sensed something was akin, and while he knew not what, all he knew was joy in its prospect. He followed a trickle of sapphire down into the valley, then froze completely. The thing in front of him was large, perhaps only because there was nothing else to compare it to. Its tip was creased in a symmetrical type of fold which balanced on a curiously thin stalk disappearing into the soil. Its color was reminiscent of the sapphire, and it breathed of life. The creature was in awe. He crouched down for a closer look, his nostrils revealing to him that some things had a scent, and this thing in particular. It was a very pleasant realization. Slowly the creature opened its mouth, the beauty of the thing in front of him sparking a deep desire to contribute. To make something of his own. To... speak.

“..f....flow...er....” The word was a clumsy newborn that eagerly scrambled to its legs. “F-flower. Flower. Flooweer!”

The new world shivered, and somewhere something latched into place and anchored it safely into existence. The creature looked around and spoke again. And again. The words were Sand and Sky and Sun and Something Soft between his toes. And while he leaned forward and smiled at the flower once more, the creature found on it the very first drop of morning dew, reflecting the world in transparent hues.

“M-me.”

It was a whisper while the creature learned what a question was. Then he turned to his Maker, who had been watching quietly, and asked it.

“Lucifer.” Was the answer, gently.

Satyr by James Carson

When I click on your icon you'll flirt with me, and say my little beard is cute. I'll say your picture is different from the rest, and is it a goat, and do you have a real picture of yourself. You'll tell me it's not a goat, and you'll send me a photo of yourself on the beach in Mykonos.

We'll meet for the first time at The Parthenonas. I'll have the mousakka and you'll flirt with the waiter. I'll say you look more like a polar bear than a goat. You'll tell me about Silenus, the chief of the satyrs: his drunkenness, his fertility. The waiter will take forever recharging our glasses. When he leaves, we'll share our first joke about drunken orgies. In the morning, I'll ask about the tattoos on your back.

We'll discover a mutual fondness for Spanish movies and Indonesian food. We'll go to the latest Almodóvar. I'll buy the popcorn; you'll flirt with the guy checking the tickets.

You'll colonise my apartment with books on mythology and fill my walls with centaurs and minotaurs. We'll spend afternoons beneath the clipped yew trees by the river, and you'll read *The Cyclops* to me. You will promise me odysseys.

Our first odyssey will be to Amsterdam. We'll hire a houseboat near the Rembrandtplein. On our first night, we'll go to an Indonesian restaurant and I'll have the rendang sapi. I'll return from a smoke break in time to see you passing a note to the waiter. Afterwards, as we turn into a street of curved gables, you'll tell me you want to stay out longer. I'll say sure, I'm not tired yet. You'll say, no, I meant... When I wake up, you'll be making breakfast.

We'll settle into a domestic rhythm, like two old queens. I'll get a new hip; you'll have work done on your eyes. Every weekend you'll go out, saying don't wait up.

Doreen in soft furnishings will ask why do I put up with it.

When you start to lose weight, you'll come home from the doctor, white to the lips. You'll retire to bed for a week. I'll go to the doctor and come back with a card. You'll say what's this and I'll say it's an appointment with the nurse to get your ears de-waxed, because the doctor will have said age-related, not AIDS-related. We'll go to the park and you'll say I'm never going with anyone else again. And you won't, for a while.

Margaret in electrical goods will ask why do I put up with it.

I'll go to the hospital the night you're mugged in the park. Your eyes will look worse than

when you had them done.

After the service, Doreen and Margaret will tell me at least I won't have to put up with it any more.

In the park, I'll read *The Cyclops*, and listen to the river. I'll close my eyes and live it all again.

The Satyr's Case by Martin Sinclair

Orange torchlight licked the dry stone walls of Sir Alwin's chamber, throwing spindly shadows of its arguing inhabitants onto the floor. One of these shadows sat at a desk, massaging its temples; the other paced back and forth, a pair of curved horns shaking in stubborn unison with its shaggy head.

'Look Alwin, I *must* be included. How can you fulfil your commission without me?'

'I've told you,' said the young knight, 'the king wishes a record of all *known* animals in his kingdom. He, like most people, does not believe you exist. I'm starting to wonder myself, you know.'

The satyr lowered his face in line with Alwin's, and waved emphatically at him. 'Hello! You're talking to me now!'

Alwin looked past his charge, to the empty bottle of nepenthe lying beside his bed. He rubbed his eyes as he considered the dark green gloop, and looked back at the satyr. 'Am I?' he croaked, almost whispering.

The satyr sighed. 'Not this again. Look, I've told you, I don't *like* humans. That's why I don't let them see me. They're a gaggle of bellicose nincompoops.'

'Ahem.'

'Oh please, did it sound like I included you in that reckoning?'

Alwin ground his teeth. 'And why don't you? I could do with the peace and quiet.'

The satyr pondered for a second. 'Well, I need to stay sane, don't I?' He continued, over Alwin's replying laughter, 'I don't exactly have much... *like* company, so I pick a few in every human generation to entertain me.'

'Every *generation*?' Alwin started. 'How old *are* you?'

'How rude,' the satyr snorted, 'and they say *I'm* the beast.'

'So, you hate humans; why exactly do you want to be in this book? I think it's just to make me look like a madman – and if you only listened to the gossip around town you'd know your work is done.'

'Who are you to try and comprehend my motives?' huffed the satyr, and then, softening, 'Look, I told you, there aren't many of us left. I might be the last one now. Your kind has inherited the Earth, *congratulations*. This is my kind's chance not to disappear completely. You idiots owe us this much.'

Alwin thought for a moment. 'Why don't you just present yourself to the king? Then everyone would have to believe you existed, otherwise it would mean the king is mad!'

'Hmm,' the satyr lampooned Alwin's display of thought, 'why wouldn't I be interested in meeting the king of a people I have already, in this conversation no less, referred to as bellicose nincompoops? Perhaps to try and prolong my own actual life, Dullwin?' He stepped close and rapped on Alwin's head, at which the knight pushed his chair noisily back from the desk and made to stand.

'There's another bottle of nepenthe in it for you,' the satyr said flirtatiously.

Alwin sat back down, cracked his knuckles, and took up his quill.

'Let's do this. Strike a pose, demon.'

'The Fall of Man' by Melanie Farquhar

When God made man he dressed him in a coat of downy feathers so he would always feel warm, comforted and secure. He swathed man's hands and feet in skin so sheer and delicate so that he might be kind and gentle and show compassion to others. He blessed man with a beating tail to keep him balanced in his views and judgements, and adorned him with two pearly horns pointing straight to heaven so he would always have direction and find his way home. God saw all that he had made and it was very good.

Man lived harmoniously with all living creatures, and all life on Earth prospered. The land was rich and bountiful and he was content. But not everyone was pleased. One day a serpent spoke to man, but he spoke falsely and played a trick on him.

"What a splendid coat!" said the serpent. "God does not look so favourably on me! Each night I lie amongst the cold, hard rocks with nothing for warmth or comfort."

Man took pity on the serpent and plucked the feathers from his chest and limbs to make a bed for the serpent. Man's skin was angry, swollen and sore, but he took comfort in his act of kindness.

The following day the serpent spoke again to man. "What a glorious crown!" it said.

But man could not see his magnificent horns; he could only feel their sleek, sharp form. The more he stroked them, the more he longed to look upon them. Man could think of nothing else and held his horns in despair. The serpent slid up man's naked calf, over his raw back and coiled himself round the smooth horns.

"Snap off your horns and you will also have the pleasure of beholding your beauty." hissed the serpent into man's ear. Man did as he was instructed and was dazzled by their grace and lustre. He carried his precious horns close to his heart, but he could not put them down and they became a

hindrance.

The following day the serpent spoke again to man. It laughed at him and mocked his beating tail.

“That tail is not befitting for man,” it hissed. “It is a leash held by the hand of God as He does not trust you to make your own decisions.”

Man was proud and in a fit of rage he snapped his tail off at its base. The serpent laughed again and man saw that he had been deceived.

When God saw that man had squandered his gifts he was angry. He drove him from the land with only his ornaments for company.

Man was ashamed and knew he had done wrong. God saw that man repented and knew that there was still good in man. He saw that man was vulnerable and lonely and he took pity on him. God made a companion for man and called her woman. God saw all that he had made and it was very good.

Ooga Wooga Jug by James G. Leonard

Ooga wooga jug jug

Ooga wooga jug

Ooga wooga jug jug

Ooga wooga jug

Ooga wooga booga juga

Ooga wooga booga juga

Ooga wooga boog juga

Ooga wooga JUG!

CHUG CHUG CHUG CHUG CHUG CHUG CHUG

The men grabbed their jugs, downed the contents and chanted passionately. Their hands pound out the rhythm on their drums, their feet on the stones and they dance and drink as men possessed. The more they chant, the more they drink and just as their influential supply starts to run low more men arrive laden with liquor and the jugs are refilled, the new men join and the dance leaps ever on.

Any onlooker would undoubtedly think that such debauchery would even put devils to shame; men drank until they could no longer stand, nor act, speak or think. Drink was their mentor, guide and passion and drink and drink they did. Working themselves into a bestial frenzy they formed circles and chose their two most passionate hogs to charge at one another, cheering for their favourite until the two combatants lay bloodied and bruised in the mud where they would be abandoned only for another circle to spring up with the lusty roars of fighters and spectators alike.

When the sun rose their fury was spent and even the hardest of men would gratefully sink to the ground. There they dreamed, that is who could still dream, of chanting, dancing and jugs of liquor and when they awoke they would turn their heads to each other and grin like maniacs. For them the dance was everything and it would not stop or could be stopped by anyone or anything and so the men would begin to make the preparations for the night of ecstasy ahead.

“Dad, are humans really like that?” asked the devil-boy

“Of course son. In fact-“ he was interrupted by the sound of a door slamming.

“Oh no! It’s your mother. Quick! Put the Ooga Wooga Jug back on the shelf.”

The boy grabbed the jug and sprinted towards the kitchen only to trip and watch in horror as the jug shattered on the floor.

“What do we do dad? What do we do?!” panicked the son.

“You’re on your own son.” The father replied and disappeared in a circle of smoke.

“Dad!” the son wailed.

His mother walked in the door and her face turned violent red when she saw her shattered jug.

“Mum!” the son squeaked.

“What’s happened?” she roared.

The little devil boy looked at the last trails of smoke and then at his mother.

“Waaaa!” he said and burst into tears.

The maiden and the devil by Judith Masthoff

A long, long time ago, almost six hundred years ago, there lived a beautiful maiden in Aberdeen. She was the daughter of a fisherman. One evening whilst gathering fire wood, she came upon the devil. He was 6ft long and loomed over her. He had horns, a hairy body and a long bushy tail.

‘You will marry me’, he said. ‘I need a pretty wife to look after me’.

‘I will do nothing of the kind’, she replied. ‘I do not care that you are the ugliest fellow I have ever seen, but that is no way to ask a girl to marry’.

‘You will marry me’, he said, ‘or I will kill you, slowly and painfully’.

‘I will do nothing of the kind’, she replied. ‘I do not give in to threats, and certainly not from somebody who has not combed his hair recently’.

Admiring her courage, he said: ‘You will marry me, and I will give you anything you want: gold, silver, you name it’.

‘I will do nothing of the kind’, she replied. ‘I do not obey orders nor take bribes. There is nothing you can tempt me with. Besides, you do not seem to have anything worth having with you, nor do you have any pockets that could contain a treasure’.

Appealing to her charity, he asked: ‘will you marry me? Life as a devil is really hard and it would make me the happiest devil alive’.

‘I will do nothing of the kind’, she replied, ‘before you ask me properly on your knees and show me that you really care’.

He knelt before her then, offered her a flower, and asked her again: ‘Please, please, please, will you marry me? It would make me really happy and I promise to look after you forever. I have a nice wee cottage ready for us in hell. Our children will be cosy and warm; you will never need to gather fire wood again’.

On the thought of hairy, horned, and bushy tailed children, she hit him on the head with the wood she was holding, just between the horns, and fled. The devil felt so ashamed at being outwitted that he was not seen in Aberdeen again.

On hearing the story, Bishop Elphinstone wrote a letter to the pope, asking to be allowed to start a university to educate the wild men of the north. The women clearly did not need his help.

Almost Human by Ana-Maria Dragomir

That year, it's what they've told me, the rumour of a goldmine spread quickly throughout the town. All men left their homes to look for it, and never returned. It's said that they grew beards down to their waists and long hair, and still live there in dreadful filth, mating with the infamous foxes, apes and other creatures of the woods. They never found the promised gold. And they gave birth to a generation of children who all looked alike, covered in hair from head to toes, our teeth not sharp enough to eat raw meat like our mothers, our legs not swift enough to run when noblemen discovered us during a hunt.

Today, on the day of Hilda's engagement, I have the honour of wearing her collar, with an 'H' embroidered in gold: I'll serve the lord's daughter. No less than two hundred and fifty-four of us raised here (only the King is known to own more apes), still when I do the Mating Dance, the whole court shakes with laughter, and the clerics almost get choked by their collars. 'Good heavens, he's funny, the wee bastard!' 'Hell, I've stained my robe with wine!' I still stutter sometimes when I speak Human, but I'm not dim. When I make up rhymes, noblemen write them down and say 'Oh, that was so witty, I'll have to use it at the next party!'. When I eat with a knife and fork, children giggle so much they get their sleeves pulled by embarrassed nannies. I've got to say, not many apes here can eat with a knife and fork. From now on, I'll wear a velvet jacket with golden stitching. I will be almost human! As a matter of fact, a strange thing has happened recently: the hair is receding on my right leg. The ankle looks human.

So, here I am, curled up in Hilda's wardrobe. Tonight she'll be mine, and I'll be long gone when they learn they were foolish. As the maids wash her body with cloths, Hilda looks so sad. Why is she sad on a day like this? Her father found her a worthy fiancé. I can see her reflected in the mirror, her complexion paler than ever. Could there be a dress in here that she fancies? She lifts her limp arm to be washed, her eyes fixed upon the wardrobe door - and I am stunned by what I see. Hair. Bushy hair on Hilda's underarm, which I've always imagined so smooth, so white, like her entire body. And I no longer see her in a mirror - I see myself. Hilda's my own kind. I was born from a filthy, vile creature, it's what they've told me. Indeed. That was my father.

But I'm not vile and filthy. My heart's pounding like war drums in my ears, and I run. Hilda is safe. The bat I carved will keep me safe from them. My mother's there, in the woods. The night's so bright with lanterns set for Hilda's party, I know I will find her.