

Underground

<http://underground-writers.org>

Note from the editors

Welcome to the first issue of Underground, the newsletter dedicated to publishing up-and-coming writers.

We are a team of five writing students looking to provide exposure for new authors and poets as well as spreading new writing talents to the general public. The aim of Underground is to get work of a publishable standard out into the open. If you like what you read, let us know and feel free to submit your own work. Thankyou to the writers who have submitted their work for our first issue. We hope you enjoy.

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Contents

Pick of the Month—
Carriage Ride pg 1

The Man Behind the
Counter pg 2-3

A Free Verse Sonnet
for Martin Anderson
pg 2

Puddles of Bluebells
pg 3

The Garden that Once
Was pg 3

The Storm pg 4

If you still care
pg 4

Missed call 2 years
too late pg 4

Pick of the month

CARRIAGE RIDE.

By John H Lewington © 2009

A Fantasy poem of the Perth Northern Railway Line.

A tale I tell of wonders, listen well!
In Buff King Hal's carriage did I recline
Travelling England's glades so fine,
Until, by miracles, did I disappear in time
To find my soul in alien clime
Travelling on the Northern Line.

*

My faith! I do declare this carriage strange
and long
Seeing persons sitting, standing,
Strangely garbed but none in vocal song.
This silence shows me matters wrong!
Knights plainly sit in favour here
Where most maidens stand so sadly near.
No kindly care for them so fine
Travelling on the Northern Line.

*

But see a maid of some one and eighty
years,
While seated, does struggle up to offer
prime
Her seat to such an aged Knight as I'm,
Travelling on the Northern Line.

*

Ney, madam! Do not leave your seat!
For standing I upon my feet,
I do not weary but I find
Better you than me, sit on, behind.
Travelling on the Northern Line.

*

Note aged Lady that you have stirred
Some blushing knights within this time
To move and squirm in rhyme,

As all around stay not seated,
Maidens fair so long defeated
From *sitting* on the Northern Line.

*

Bold knights! Yes! Turn ye all and stare
Not at me but anywhere
Which catches not the human eye,
So you do not have to stir and try
To offer rest to damsels fine,
Travelling on the Northern Line.

*

Dear gentle knights keep comfort's soul
Reading close the morning scroll,
Or pray you doze or secrets twitter bland,
With shinning stone within your hand.
It irks me that you do not stand!
Press hand with shinning stone to ear
So all request you fail to hear.
Ye! Keep you with your fellow man's decline,
Travelling on the Northern Line.

*

But hark! Methinks the carriage loses pace,
Does mean we approach a stopping place?
Raise you now in greeting lovely Perth
To walk again upon the Earth,
To communicate with like souls on serious
matter,
Conversing loud above the chatter.
Whilst *not* travelling on the Northern Line.

*

When evening calls across the land,
Get you home in carriage grand,
But never stand.
Stay seated quiet with eyes declined,
And in that silence of the mind,
Muse what makes a knight no king so fine.
Stay *sleeping* on the Northern Line.

Underground is a not-for-profit writing 'zine published to support emerging writers around the country. Show your support and let our writers know what you think by emailing feedback@underground-writers.org

'The Man behind the Counter'

-Simon Campbell © 2009

"Petrol on pump 5, please," the elderly lady with red scarf says. "\$34.45 of premium?" asks the man behind the counter, his dark ringed eyes adding to the dreariness of his expression.

"Yes," she says, handing him a credit card. He swipes the card and places it on the counter with the signature side facing upwards. The receipt prints, she signs and is handed her copy.

Buoyant and careless she says "Thank you very much, hope you have a nice weekend".

"You too," is the mechanical reply.

Heavy rain and road warnings have kept the shop quiet this afternoon; there was no lunch time rush. The face of the man behind the counter looks worn down like an old engine. His expression seems mean, changing to theatrical smiles for customers. As he slouches against the counter reading a book, his face melts into his hands. He reads, undisturbed, for twenty minutes, then stands up straight and walks around, stretching his legs and back. From a bar fridge he takes an open iced coffee and sips.

A black sedan with private plates pulls up. The man behind the counter pulls a packet of menthol cigarettes from the rack, putting them on the till. A middle aged woman swings out her legs gracefully and heel toes around the car. The wind is blowing her blonde bob and making her diamond earrings sparkle, despite the gloom of the day. The cigarettes are put on the counter. Making a starlet entrance, she assaults the man with a "Hello darling" working in concert with napalm-strength perfume. His eyes water as they exchange emphatic shoptalk.

Trade picks up when the children are set free from school for the weekend. Three cars are filling up, and he is serving a food customer, when a woman leans across sticking a diseased lower lip in the man's face. Her dirty fingers are rubbing her sniffing nose.

"Small favour, can I use the bathroom?"

He looks at the lip, hanging there in space. Pimples of salt like a mountain range. His piercing blue eyes look at hers.

"It's over there," he points gruffly.

When the fuel customers have paid and left, he looks at the toilet door and laughs out loud, all but his eyes; he stretches, sips his coffee and goes back to his book. Ten minutes or so on, someone rings about trailer booking, and he takes the caller's details. Two customers walking up the street fighting the damp wind turn into the shop. There is a shiny rock on her finger and they steal happy glances at each other; the man behind the

counter swallows hard, frowning. The husband asks about the price and availability of a trailer for tomorrow, as they have some baby furniture to move.

"Life is busy when babies are involved," he tells the man, who is unmoved.

The wife says something about babies and smiles. They book a trailer and manage to squeeze in a few more baby references.

"Just a minute, Gavin," and she goes into the bathroom.

The wife comes out holding her hand in front of her mouth. Her husband, startled by her white face, looks at her stomach and asks the matter. She shakes her head and points to the toilet. The husband goes into the bathroom and comes out quickly.

"You had better come in here," the husband says to the man.

"It's okay, I'll sort it out soon," he says reassuringly, looking out the window.

"No; you need to come right now, Brendon", he says, looking at the man's crooked name badge on the unwashed shirt.

So the man straightens up slowly, annoyed, leaves the console through the bullet proof glass door, and sticks his head in the through the bathroom door. Next to the dead woman's head, the toilet was still leaking constantly. She didn't look dead; more like a homeless person who had passed out for the night. Her hair had flopped over her head, her chin resting on her chest. The syringe sticking out of her arm just below the elbow and the cloth strip tied tight on her upper arm told the story. Black Death again, he thought. He backs away without taking his eyes from the body, just in case it jumps him from behind. Using a five cent piece he turns the lock to 'engaged'.

"You had better stay, if you can. The police will want to speak to you, if that is okay?" he asks the couple, who nod silently, the

A Free Verse Sonnet for Martin Anderson of Gothenburg -Phillip Ellis © 2009

Sometimes, it is said, the evening
lowers to rub its darkening belly
against the shoulders of low hills
and humped mountains of the west,
counting their store of secrets as the
encroaching night grows even longer
as the year progresses even quicker
towards its end, and demise in snow.

I have not seen this, not here, not the sky
rubbing its darkening belly. Rather, it
grows even deeper, like a mind closed
in upon itself, seeking in the labyrinths
of thought a mirror in which to snatch
at seven stars, as a wain, bear or plough.

husband holding his wife. He picks up the phone and dials 000, ordering first an ambulance, then police.

A marked police car arrives first, parking under the window at the counter. The passenger with two stripes gets out. The driver makes the big patrol car look like it had been tailored to be tight around the hips. Wailing uselessly, the ambulance pulls up. Under a sheet, the body is wheeled out.

“What is your full name?” asks a plain clothed officer who had arrived later.

“Eric Cyril Oliver,” the man behind the counter says.

The detective taps the man’s badge with his pen and lifts an eyebrow.

“Ah, Brendon is just the name of my badge; you need some privacy doing a job like this,” he says, and the officer nods. A full statement is taken.

“You’ve seen this before,” says the older detective, looking into the man’s hard blue eyes.

“Yeah, heroine plague of the 90s,” nods the man.

“Anyone close?”

“Yes.”

“One more thing,” asks the detective, “You are seen laughing on the footage beforehand. Why?”

“Ah, well... she had sores on her lips, and I thought she would probably kiss the toilet seat and turn the place into a V.D. clinic. Seems really stupid now,” the man says. The detective tries to suppress a laugh but it snorts out.

The man behind the counter looks at the two cars pulling up, and slyly puts his book into his back pack. The store manager and area manager come in and stand over the man, asking him why he is wearing black jeans and not trousers. Not looking at them, he tells them he just wants to go home; after a forest of paper work, he is allowed to leave.

Caught at a red light, the rain in big drops on the windows, he punches the steering wheel and tears flow from his eyes as though they will never stop.

~



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submissions@underground-writers.org

Puddles of bluebells

-Maureen Hirst © 2009

The path through the wood,
splashed with puddles of bluebells,
opens to a vast sea
under silver birch trees.
Sun filtered by new green leaves
gives an illusion of waves
rippling the surface,
topped with the spray
of white wood anemones.
Wading amongst crushed petals
piquant scent arises.

I am drowned by my senses.

A GARDEN THAT ONCE WAS

By Barbara Gurney © 2009

I sit
Unmoveable
I see the weeds that have grown quickly through the soil, reaching up towards the blueness
Puffs of dainty seeds are ready to increase the invasion
The chosen plants struggle, and I long to grip the hose and bring relief to the begging soil
It is not possible

I look at the dry heads that once were dancing daffodils
Without intervention they soaked up the rain and sent a burst of colour to please my eye
Then yielding, withered and died
Petunias no longer show their glory
They lay hidden, shrivelled beneath the mess of tangled grass
Labour can't be enjoyed and nature is showing its strength
I turn the wheels of my confinement and shed a tear
Broad expanse of lawn no longer exist
Only flowers not wanted, and grass heads that flap in the breeze

I remember days of joy
Digging and planting with hope of new seasons

A peep of colour defies the brittle stems
They too are weeds but nature has no distinction
Dandelions bounce with colourful determination
And the bees work at the miracle that starts right here

I reach out
Nothing welcome can be touched
The weeds bend beneath my wheels
I see where I've been and am not displeased by the destruction
With thistles weaving through the thorns, the rose stands defiant
Spreading perfume of delight, and showing a spirit of which I'm proud
It is a pleasant moment
I savour it

I know my best was done when vigour and youth abounded
But now I have only memories
Of a garden that once was

THE STORM

-Lisa Lawlor © 2009

The storm whipped the trees outside and she huddled into her quilt.....

The torch spread dull fingers of light onto the pages of the journal. Writing things down had always been a way of expression; a way to look at feelings and a way to banish fears.

The cavern created under the quilt was warmed by a hot water bottle covered to look like a grey woolly sheep – childish really, but comforting and comfort is what she needed.

The crisp sheets rustled as she drew in more pillows, plumping them to rest her head and poking them to raise the quilted cavern higher allowing more space for a box of tissues.

It had been a long time since she had felt the need to return to her childhood haven, but the storm outside not only beat its fury on the trees and the old tin roof, but also on her heart.

Luckily her son was already asleep and her partner away visiting family – this was something she needed to work through alone.

Only she could understand what is going on and even if it had brought her back to that basic protect yourself instinct – no-one was there to laugh at her homemade haven.....

I have always found my bed is my safe haven - my teddy bear to cuddle and soft pillows supporting me through dreams, storms, yelling and nightmares.

I feel safe and slip away into another world as I draw the quilts up around myself – cocooning my body and my heart from what is happening outside. My soul is free to wander in my safe little world, knowing that I am protecting it.

Through high school, college and an unfortunate marriage I had weathered the storms that raged – placing my body and soul at the mercy of others.

The wind howls through the tree near my window and I huddle deeper into my safe haven.

The storm tearing through my heart and soul at this moment is one that is fuelled by mortality.

Being told that my condition is getting worse washes over me like a tepid shower – real, but not that uncomfortable.

It is only now, as the wind rages outside, that my own storm starts to brew.

The house is quietly creaking against the intrusive force of the wind.

I am alone – but I take comfort in this as I do not have to deal with another's pity. Empathy is good, but difficult to muster when knowledge is limited.

A caring, loving embrace from my partner is what my physical being yearns. The touch that brings our souls together as we search each others eyes. Tonight this will not happen.

I have my heart to heal and mortality to face before the morning light appears – not a lot of time to search emotions on something I can make so final.

My chest aches – at first I think it is the turmoil in my heart, but realize that the gentle beat continues at a regular pace and it is my ragged, gulping sobs that have brought on this pain.

Tears stream down my face and soak the journal pages beneath – it is a sweet release and I just let it flow.

I am always so stoic; brushing my feelings, wants and needs aside to accommodate the others in my life. To now be able to be myself; to love my son; care for my family and share my everything with a man I truly love is just bittersweet – *to finally return to the little girl, hidden under the quilt* – safe and comfortable with her life.

Except that now I no longer need to hide – I can express my joy, my anger and pain – frustrations that they will accept and understand because they love me. Warts and all, they love me!

I push the pillows out from this little cave, edging my hair, ears and face into the cold air of outside. I snuggle the quilt around my chin and feel the woolly warmth of my childhood friend on my lower back.

Dropping the journal, torch and tissues to the floor, ridding my haven of the storm I have just weathered, I let the tears dry on my face to remind me of my triumph.

if you still care

-Paul Harrison © 2009

remind me when i get
back from here

to eat something
solid and wholesome
for once

to stop romanticising

all this shit and piss
the shower all blocked
with spew

to empty the ashtrays

my monument to cancer

to ditch the empties

in crescendos of regret

to strip the sheets

and air the mattress

to check the bumper

for blood and bone

to get some benzos

and say my prayers

then smash the mirror

and start again

missed call 2 years too late

-Paul Harrison © 2009

you rang; missed call
left a voicemail

hey paul, want to have
an adventure, right now

the same selfish now

i remember

you were on the train

almost at midland

end of the line

but i never lived there

remember

and i thought, yea girl

we did have some times

once

five ways a day

for a couple of months

and then, you broke my

heart

must be another paul

have fun, enjoy

all the way

to the end of the line

We'd like to thank our graphic designer Chloe Griffiths for her support in designing the Underground banner. Anyone wishing to employ her services should contact us through our queries email for her contact details. (queries@underground-writers.org)

We'd also like to thank the Katherine Susannah Prichard Writers Centre and Perth Poetry Club for their support in helping us gather writers for our first issue.

Visit us online at
<http://underground-writers.org>
for submission guidelines, information and contact details.

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