

Underground

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Note from the editors

Here we are again. Issue 2! This was the big test, to see if we could still fill a second issue... and we have! Thank you again to everyone who took the time to submit. We read some great submissions that had us oohing and aahing at the un-recognised talent in our streets. We hope you enjoy reading and feel free to email your feedback and comments to individual writers at: queries@underground-writers.org and let us know what you think. Happy reading.

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PICK OF THE MONTH

Manners maketh man

-By Maureen Hirst

There was the usual Thursday gathering of young women with babies and toddlers outside the post office, waiting to collect their giro's. Most of them were smoking and I couldn't help noticing the long nails painted with glamorous patterns. It cost £25 to get that done. I know, because I'd studied the price list one day, while waiting for my pensioner's haircut. How could they afford it, and smoke, on their welfare money? I must have been in the wrong job!

'Excuse me' I tried to edge my way between the buggies.

The women glared at me and reluctantly moved a fraction of an inch. I squeezed past. Having purchased my stamps and a couple of airmail letters I turned to leave.

A young woman with a pushchair was entering, so I held the door open and smiled. She brushed past me without a glance. I shrugged and again went to open the door. Two elderly ladies pushed past, busy chattering, ignoring me completely. At the third attempt to get out of the door I once again held it for an old gentleman with a walking stick, followed by another young mother.

Now I don't expect people to fawn all over me with gratitude, for what was, after all, just a polite gesture. But not a glance; not a smile; not a word of thanks? By this time my blood had started to boil and steam was coming out of my ears!

I yelled. 'Thank you! I'm not the bloody doorman you know!'

Blank faces stared back at me.

Half way down the street I had cooled down somewhat and felt ashamed of my behaviour. I had really lost my dignity and for what? Those people hadn't even realised what I was annoyed about. No doubt they were already relating to their friends the story of this mad woman who had yelled at them in the post office, while they were going about their business. Feeling pretty disgruntled, I waited for my train

. It was rush hour and the usual crowd lurked – crushing forward as the train arrived. It was packed. There was no way I could compete with the determined commuters, and was about to give up, when a hand grasped my arm and pulled me forward.

'Come on Missus – squeeze in here next to me – you'll be okay, just hang on to this rail.'

I managed to fit into the tiny space beside him. He was a young lad of about 11yrs old with spiky hair and a huge grin. His comments and witticisms kept me amused until the train arrived at my stop.

'So long Missus, see yah.'

'Thank you so much.' I smiled.

By the time I reached my house I was feeling quite happy again, that boy had restored my faith in human nature.

It wasn't until I delved into my handbag for my keys that I noticed my purse was missing!

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"Post-it Notes"

-Rob Butler

Wake up. Where am I? Motel room and post-it notes.

In a café a woman interrupted me,

"we can barely survive with this knife to our throats."

In this moment I am someone without memory.

While in a café a woman interrupted me,

She invades me with her eyes, "Are you even alive?"

In this moment I am someone without memory.

Her hand reaches out and checks my pulse, searching for life

she invades me with her eyes, "are you even alive?"

I reply: "I'm always forgetting and awaking."

Her hand reaches out and checks my pulse, searching for life.

Her eyes leave me, "then what sense do you see in living?"

"constantly forgetting and awaking,

the world does not end when we close our eyes."

Her hands hold mine, "how do you continue living?"

"I leave post-it notes to tell me what is mine,

this way, my world does not end when I close my eyes.

Conditioning and repetition directs me,

post-it notes save my waking life from walking blind.

I believe that instinct can defy memory."

I can't recall this woman who questioned me,

now I'm awake in a motel with a post-it note.

It tells me that instinct defies memory,

but I can barely survive with this knife to my throat.

A Place for Everything (And Everything in Its Place)

-By Rhyannin Brown

I always wondered how the modern world would have looked to my great-grandmother. She was a lady in every sense of the word; a fascinating creature from a time when skirts worn above the ankles were considered tartish and no self-respecting woman left her house without gloves and a hat. She was like one of those women you saw in old movies, who carried a lipstick, a powder compact and a cigarette on a filter wherever she went. I used to look through her photo albums as a little girl, and pore over the images of the glamorous woman of her youth. The beautiful twenty-something who would one day get married, have five children, and end up with a great-granddaughter like me: The complete opposite of everything she was.

I was never glamorous or ladylike. I would have liked to be, but I was always clumsy and I never did grow out of wearing tracksuit pants everywhere. My husband never said anything, so I assumed it never bothered him that I didn't fit into the traditional 'wife' category. My life was a far cry from the lives of my great-grandmother, my grandmother, even my mother. I had a career before I was married and wouldn't give it up after I had children. To my mother's disgust, I made use of the office day-care centre and my house was never kept in perfect order. I just didn't have the time. Needless to say, I never made them particularly proud.

This would undoubtedly explain why they were always trying to give me 'helpful hints' and incredibly unobtrusive nudges in the 'right direction'. Like the time my grandmother bought me a polka-dotted apron and matching baking set, in the hopes that I would start baking for my husband; and our children, when we had them. Never mind that I had only been engaged a month; and we didn't even have a house with a finished kitchen that I could bake in, even if I had wanted to.

So it really should have come as no surprise to me that my 33rd birthday present would be a 1956 book entitled, *The Perfect Woman*.

A how-to manual that spent the next six months at the bottom of a drawer, underneath the polka-dotted apron, the baking set and a pair of thigh-high fishnet stockings that my girlfriends had bought as a joke for my bachelorette party. It was my drawer of unused things.

It would be a long time before I ever opened it. When I finally did, I was looking for a distraction from the work I had brought home with me from the office. The shower was dirty, the floor needed

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sweeping and my bookshelves needed dusting; but I put aside all of those tasks and chose instead to do something much more productive: Clearing out the chest of drawers in the bedroom.

I sorted through socks, nightgowns, underwear and ties. It was only when I opened the bottom drawer that I remembered I even owned *The Perfect Woman*. In an effort to further my procrastination, I decided to sit down and read the words which seemed to hang over my untidy house like a cloud of shame bestowed upon me by the women in my family.

I scanned the contents page. Chapter titles such as, *Good Housekeeping (An Organised House is an Organised Mind)*, *High Society (The Social Ladder, and How to Climb It in Heels)* and Chapter Six in particular-*Modern Family Values* caused me to laugh aloud. But what really caught my attention was Chapter Eleven, simply named, *Women All Men Love*. I turned to page 98 and began to read.

One of the most important things to remember about marriage is that wives are the ones who are responsible for ensuring their husband's needs are met.

I blinked and re-read the sentence, certain I had misread it.

I had not.

The success of any marriage, as you will inevitably discover, rests upon your ability to do the following things:

Ensure your husband is comfortable at all times within the home he has provided for you and your children. This includes, but is not limited to, making sure his meals are ready when he returns from work and keeping the house clean and tidy at all times (refer to Chapter Four).

I thought of the previous Tuesday, when my husband had cooked his own dinner because I was working late at the office and felt guilty.

Keep up appearances. Maintaining your looks and weight will guarantee that your husband will never be ashamed to have married you.

'Is my husband ashamed of me?' I wondered. 'Does it bother him that I'm not as thin as I used to be? I only had his children. How dare I gain weight and wear comfortable clothes.' Slightly irritated, but overcome with a strange desire to read further, I skimmed through to:

Be agreeable at all times. An agreeable wife lays the foundation for a peaceful marriage.

By that point, I was willing to bet my left arm that only a man could have written words like the ones I was reading. While there was no author name visible on the cover, I felt certain that the author would have been male. Surely no woman could have really believed such things?

Then again...

A flashback to a hospital visit to my great-grandmother filled my mind and suddenly I was sixteen again. I remembered sitting at her bedside, the only one in the room because nobody else could stand to see her sick. She had always been so strong, so proud. Even in a hospital gown, her curly hair taken from her by the chemotherapy, she was the regal woman I always knew. I refused to see her as a cancer patient, choosing instead to picture her as the glamorous woman I remembered.

My eyes were puffy from crying and the makeup I had worn on my mother's insistence was smudged. "Dear, please fix yourself up. No man will want to marry you if you walk around looking like you don't take pride in yourself."

I looked down at the ground, disappointed in myself for letting her down by not being like her. She squeezed my hand and smiled at me with a weakened smile that broke my heart because I realised then: The doctors were right. She would not live longer than another week. She would never say it aloud, but in that moment, I felt her acceptance of the woman I was becoming.

Tears filled my eyes and I stashed the book somewhere I would not have to look at it anymore.

Many years later, when my children had grown up and moved away, and my husband had passed on; I rediscovered the book under a pile of old towels in the linen cupboard. I spent the rest of the day in my pyjamas, curled up in bed, reading it. And I realised something: I might not have ever kept the perfect home, or been the perfect wife and mother, but I did the best I could. All I could ever do was be myself. And I can't feel bad about that.

FARTHING

-By Des Burge

"SMITHS" it said, "Made In England".

This compass was a work of art. None better existed. The needle sat on the fluid but the clockworks beneath did the real work. Or tried too, despite the loose farthing which jammed then broke the tooth on the main sprocket, after the bench test.

The needle skipped two degrees. Until detected by a smart navigator it would read incorrectly.

Well that was it for the day. He glued the lid down. On the way out Albert placed the instrument in the crate marked "Titanic", Belfast.

Des Esseintes Contemplates himself in the Mirror

-By Phillip Ellis

You would think that you were a person
attuned to the beautiful aspects
of life, an aesthete that persuasion

would not move, like breath would move
insects

along the branch. For the beautiful
has poured, into yourself, analects

that produce exquisite pleasures, all
minutely tuned to perfection, such
pleasures that most cannot dream. The oil

of such lamps is pure, smokeless, to
touch

the exquisite taste, and, somehow, dream
as well, that could become overmuch

too quickly, over time, over time.

To my Fetch

-By Phillip Ellis

You, my fellow wanderer,
you barely disciplined child,
why look at this world wide-eyed,
when, flesh, you embody all?

The heights, depths of the human
animal, all this is you:
the skull broken by blowtorch,
the orphan comforted, clothed.

Yet you're nothing more than dream,
human-made, mainly water,
arranged for a moment, gone
forever, and nevermore.

And you are not me, who are
a wisp of thought, reverie
that speaks through black marks on white
for want of physical tongue.

Painting a street at night

- By Maureen Hirst

Loitering lampposts
beam brazenly
onto a deep pooled sloe
black slushy street
of dominoed bleak walled buildings.

Blue shadowed snow,
nightcaps glowering
eyebrow roofs
over dark doorways.

Secretly shuttered coaches hurry past
drawn by high stepping plumed and brassed
horses.

Lantern eyes keyhole the sky
jangling with their reflexions in the wet.

Web-footed walkers stick to their shadows,
hands muffed and heads bonneted and top-hatted
against the cold.

Stick insect trees rest
next a velvet onyx-brooch sky.
The moon slinks behind
a dense dark-some cloud.

HAIKU CHALLENGE!

Have you ever written a Haiku?

A haiku is a Japanese poem consisting of three un-
rhyming lines of five, seven, and five syllables.

Haiku's traditionally reflect some aspect of nature
but in recent times have reflected many things.

Here are a few examples:

*The mountain won't bow
No matter how the wind blows
He is much too proud.*

*Don't apologise
Seasons change so why can't I?
Never compromise.*

*I went to K-Mart
I bought a USB stick
Thanks for the mem'ries*

Give it a try and send in your Haikus for our next
issue!

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