

# The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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## Diary

New Year Party

Civil Service Club

28 January 2012

## DATA PROTECTION ACT

**Members' names and addresses are held on a computer database which is used for mailing copies of the Civil Service Author.**

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# THE SCPSW AUTHOR

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## **Editorial**

Paul Williams

On behalf of the committee, a merry Christmas and a happy, productive New Year to all members, especially to those who remember to renew their annual subscriptions!

This term I have been attending a weekly seminar at the Ipswich Institute (an organisation originally founded in the early nineteenth century to advance the education of poor young apprentices, but has evolved into club mainly for affluent elderly people with time on their hands). The course I enrolled on was about nostalgia in literature, and it came as no surprise that the first half of the term was devoted to *The Great Gatsby*. Whatever the course, be it A-level, Honours degree (forty years ago at university I had to attend seminars devoted to it) or just for fun, *The Great Gatsby* always seems to be there somewhere! I suppose the shortness of the novel helps, but I can't help thinking that once a novel establishes itself as required course work it will stay there for generations, if only out of laziness. There are just too many textbooks written about it to resist, tutors will themselves have been required to study it, and so the Gatsby industry rolls on under its own momentum. I don't blame Scott Fitzgerald for this. He was not to know it would happen and the novel does have its merits, but if ever there was a case of a novelist being in the right place at the right time, this is it. Such are the inequalities in the literary world. Oh well, at least we're half way through the course and no-one has yet used the word 'seminal'!

I have still received no letters or feedback on contributions, a marked contrast to the way things were in days of yore. Are we all really so shy? It's quite unusual for writers not have opinions. Those who have had recent successes, however seemingly modest (from little acorns, and all that) are also welcome to let me know so that I can mention them.

## **Chairman's Chat**

Terry Rickson

A recent edition of *The Independent's* arts and books review featured an informative article about contemporary war poetry. The writer, James Jeffrey, an army captain, is himself a poet who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. This November saw the publication of a collection entitled *Heroes: 100 Poems from the New Generation of War Poets*. Although James Jeffrey has four of his poems included in the work, he expressed dismay at its title especially the use of the word 'heroes'. He wrote that 'heroism' is the last thing motivating the war poet, rather, telling the truth that it is the opposite. This view has been put so clearly and forcibly by the likes of Sassoon, Owen and others. The message of the poets of the First World War may never be bettered, and the writer was of the opinion that there was a need for it to be applied to Iraq and Afghanistan. The collection, which has the support of Carol Ann Duffy, the Poet Laureate, includes poems about conflict, homecoming and remembrance. It is published by Ebury at £10 per copy.

The same review referred to a new edition of *The Collected Ghost Stories* of MR James, the master of the genre. I liked a description used, '...the topography of terror...' Just the thing for a dark, stormy night around Christmas!

Members who attended the Annual Lunch in October were treated to an excellent talk by Dr Paul Doherty, a writer of historical fiction as well as being the Headmaster of a large comprehensive school – a master class, if you will forgive the pun! It should, I hope, have spurred us on in relation to our own efforts!

My best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

## **Subscriptions**

Just a reminder that subscriptions are due at the beginning of January. A renewal form is enclosed with this edition of *The Author* for those who are not paying by standing order. The cost of membership has not increased for at least a decade (not since the last century, in fact!), no mean feat, so members who can afford to do so are welcome to add a little to their subscription.

## **Annual Literary Luncheon, Civil Service Club, 22 October 2011**

Ethel Corduff

This year's Guest Speaker was Dr Paul Doherty, Headmaster of Trinity School, Woodford Green, who somehow finds time to be a prolific historical novelist having published over 80 successful novels. We found him to be an amusing and inspirational speaker and can imagine his lucky pupils are also inspired by him.

John Barker, Chairman of the Civil Service Retirement Fellowship which has 50,000 members, was also a guest. We do hope to tap in to the Fellowship as their Chief Executive Mrs Jean Cooper is keen to meet us.

Joanna Crawford, Writer of the Year 2011 for her splendid memoir 'A Displaced Person', was presented with her award by Chairman Terry Rickson. Her kind reply was much appreciated by the committee.

Thank you to all who came, especially those who travelled long distances.

## **New Year Party, Civil Service Club, 28 January 2012**

The New Year Party will take place at the Civil Service Club, Great Scotland Yard, Whitehall, on Saturday, 28 January 2012. The event kicks off with a buffet at 1pm, after which the first prize winner of the Froud Memorial Children's Story Competition will be asked to read out their story. Those winners in attendance will be presented with their prizes by Roy Froud. All members attending are also invited to bring along a short story or poem to read out on the subject of 'Greece', and there will be prizes for the winners (decided by secret ballot!). Tickets are £16, which includes the buffet and wine. The form, which should be returned to Ethel Corduff, is enclosed.

## **SCPSW Annual Competitions for 2012/13**

### **Closing Date 28.2.2012**

#### **Lewis Wright Short Story Competition**

Maximum length 3,000 words, double spaced on A4 paper. Entries will be returned if accompanied by S.A.E. Entry Fee £4.00 per story. Prizes as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> prize £75, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £25.

#### **Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition**

No restriction on theme or form, but maximum forty lines and one poem per sheet of paper. (Writers of humorous verse should consider the Vee Bradley Prize.) Entries will be returned if accompanied by s.a.e. Entry fee £2 per entry. 1<sup>st</sup> prize £50, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £25.

#### **Vincent Brennan Travel Article**

Maximum length 2,000 words, double spaced on A4 paper. Entries will be returned if accompanied by s.a.e. Entry fee £2.50 per entry. 1<sup>st</sup> prize £30.

#### **Notes for Entrants to All Competitions:**

Unless entrants state on entering competitions that they do not wish their entry to be published, all first prize winners will be published in *The Author*. If space permits some second and third placed entries may also be published in later editions. The entrants' real names will be used when announcing winners, unless they have advised at the time of submission that they would prefer to be known by their pen name. Entries must be the original work of the entrant and must not have been published at the time of the submission. Entries exceeding the specified number of lines or words will be disqualified.

**All entries should bear only a pen name** (which should be varied to avoid recognition) and a separate sheet quoting the pen name used, title of entry, real name and address. All entries should be sent to the Competition Secretary, Nina Mattar, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton, SM2 6RT, not later than 28<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

**Several further competitions** will be held during the course of the year and details will be published in future editions of *The Author*.

## **Gordon Gompers Competition Result 2011**

The winner of the competition (for non-fiction articles) was Una McMorran for 'Fabergé Is Not Just For Easter'.

Ethel Corduff, who judged the competition, writes:

'Though there were only 4 entries for the Gordon Gompers Article Competition, it was very difficult to choose the winner. This was because the topics were varied and fascinating and they were all well written. I enjoyed reading them very much. The titles tell how diverse my task was; 'A Midget Submarine', 'The end of a Victorian Market', 'Walking with Dinosaurs' and 'Fabergé is not just for Easter'. I wish there were more than one prize to give as the entries were of such quality, but after many readings and deliberation I had to choose the winner. I chose 'Fabergé is not just for Easter' by Una McMorran. This had a wonderful title and an intriguing opening, with fascinating stories of the major pieces in the Royal Fabergé Collection that entices one to want to see the collection. The article was very well written and I could not fault the grammar or spelling. My commiserations to the other entrants whose articles are worthy of publication and I wish them success. Thank you all for entering.'

The winning entry can be found in this edition of *The Author*.

## **Vee Bradley Humorous Poetry Competition Results**

The Winner of the competition for 2011 was L Wilkie for 'Piggicide'. The judge wrote: 'I really liked this poem, its rhyming stanza delicate yet humorously arranged. It really fulfils the requirement of funny yet well-balanced poetic lines. It will make you laugh'.

'Deceased Pets (Disposal of)', also by L Wilkie, was recommended. 'Again,' the judge wrote, 'this poem has a similarity to the winner, beautifully rhyming and humorous.'

Also recommended was 'The Python and the Princes' by Jenny Grove. 'Humorous rhymes and has a magic as few lines bring a funny ending.' Below are the winning entries.

## **Piggicide**

L Wilkie

I had a friend who did decide  
To train his pigs in suicide.  
He'd learnt it in the war you see  
The art of Kamikazery.  
They'd line up, hidden in the bush;  
As car approached, out one would rush.  
The owner's aim was compensation –  
The very essence of this nation.  
He'd claim the pigs were pedigree,  
And pushed each claim the full degree.  
Thus motorists who felt the onus,  
(not to mention 'No claims bonus'),  
Paid up quickly – a fat fee.  
My farmer friend had pork for tea.

## **Deceased Pets (Disposal of)**

L Wilkie

When Gerry gerbil curled its toes  
I buried it under that yellow rose.  
The frog that Freddy raised from spawn  
Is that green patch there on the lawn.  
I was building that lawn when the rabbit went  
He's down there covered in fine cement.  
Over the years I've buried a few.  
The goldfish? – they went down the loo.  
But now I must plan on because  
Grandad's bought them both a horse!

## **The Python and the Princes**

Jenny Grove

'Hold this snake,' said the warden, 'Take heed!'  
Princes William and Harry agreed,  
But the sight of a Prince  
Made the poor python wince  
And it tried to look pleasing, but peed.



## **Open Poetry Competition, Kent & Sussex Poetry Society**

Terry James has drawn attention to an open poetry competition by the Kent & Sussex Poetry Society. The entry fee is £5 per person and the closing date is 31 January 2012. Space does not permit reproduction of the competition rules here, but those interested can find the details on [www.kentandsussexpoetrysociety.org](http://www.kentandsussexpoetrysociety.org).

### **Poetry Workshop**

Mike Boland

### **Review of the Year**

The days are shortening, the first frosts are biting and the year is moving to its close. Yes, it's time once again for me to write a short review of the last twelve months in the life of the Poetry Workshop. I'm pleased to be able to report that the Poetry Workshop continues in a healthy and vibrant condition, with membership currently standing at 68, a slight decrease on last year. Once again, all our activities have proved well supported and popular. A report on the PW's main activities follows:

### **PW Weekend**

The 2011 Poetry Workshop Weekend took place in July. The venue was the Hillscourt Conference Centre at Rednal, Birmingham. PW members attending enjoyed a varied programme of poetry-based activities.

The 2012 Weekend will be held at a new location, Launde Abbey, which is in Leicestershire on the border with Rutland. Full details and a Booking Form will be included in the winter issue of **wavelengths**.

### **Bill Barnes Competition 2010**

I'm writing these Poetry Workshop Pages shortly after the closing date of this year's competition, and therefore judging has yet to take place. Hopefully the results will be available in time for inclusion in the winter issue of **wavelengths**. The winning entries and the Judge's Report will be published in the spring issue of **wavelengths**.

## **Waves**

This is the annual showcase anthology of PW members' work. The editor for the 2011 anthology was Angus Livingstone. Running to 30 pages, it contains 46 poems by 24 poets and is, as usual, of a very high standard. Copies of Waves 2011 are available at a price of £2.50 (inc p&p) from Terry Rickson (address above).

The winter issue of **wavelengths** will contain details of how to submit work for consideration for the 2012 anthology, but PW members should note that the closing date for submissions is 31 March 2012.

## **Postal Folio**

There are four circulating postal folios in which participating members can exchange critiques of each other's poetry, encouragement and news. There is room for any member of the Poetry Workshop who would like to take part. If you are interested, contact me, Mike Boland, at the address above or by e-mail to gothic.garden1@btinternet.com

## **e-folio**

The PW also runs an efolio for members who have access to the internet. Anyone interested in joining the e-folio should contact Sylvia Neumann. Her email address is: sylvia.neumann@btinternet.com

## **wavelengths**

This is the Poetry Workshop's quarterly magazine, issued free to all its members and averaging twenty pages in length. The winter issue will contain the text of one of the talks given at Birmingham in the summer, poems by members, plus the regular Newsletter section providing news of the Poetry Workshop's upcoming activities.

\*

## **Subscriptions**

Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop will fall due on 1 January. A renewal form will be enclosed with **wavelengths**. As decided at the AGM, the fee for 2012 remains at £5 for Society members.

\*

## **The Poetry Workshop**

If you are a member of the Society, have an interest in poetry but have not yet joined the Poetry Workshop - what are you waiting for!

The cost of membership is only £5, and for this small sum the Poetry Workshop provides:

- four issues of our magazine **wavelengths** each year - contributions of poems and articles on poetry are welcomed from PW members
- the chance of publication in **Waves**, the PW's annual anthology of members' work
- access to the popular Postal Folio scheme
- Access to the new e-folio scheme
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition ( open exclusively to PW members)
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend.

If you are interested in joining us, contact our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Terry Rickson, at the address above. Cheques should be made out to: SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account.

### **Dates to Remember**

<b>1 January 2012</b>	<b>PW Subscriptions due</b>
<b>1 February 2012</b>	<b>deadline for wavelengths #30</b>
<b>1 March 2012</b>	<b>wavelengths # 30 published</b>
<b>31 March 2012</b>	<b>deadline for Waves 2012</b>

I'd like to wish all members of the Society a very Happy Christmas and a successful New Year.

Best wishes,  
*Mike Boland*

## **Poetry Pages**

Edited by Terry James

### **Brother**

Bill Torrie Douglas

There were pictures on the walls,  
football players, boxers, actors,  
they frightened me when I was small,  
forbidding eyes, glaring down,  
they were his heroes.

I was forbidden from his room,  
but I sneaked in when he wasn't there,  
until he started setting traps,  
hairs on the door frame, talcum on the floor.

Years passed, the pictures changed  
to nymphettes in very few clothes,  
the older he got the less they wore,  
but he never called them heroines.

One time, he hid his girlie mags beneath my mattress,  
mother found them, thought they were mine,  
but I never told on him.  
he gave me the mags when he left home,  
I would rather he had stayed.

My big brother was always my hero.

### **Decay**

A Grant

Lichen coats walls like velour cloak  
then thistles take over,  
blocking door.

Through punctured windows work,  
long lost, leaves its souvenirs  
for peeping Tom.

Rotting floorboards, mildewed stairs,  
wall-tiles going who knows where,  
man's energy long gone.

## **The Ache of Eternity**

Mike Boland

The ache of eternity howls from the void.  
Poets and scientists see, but evade  
the question posed by each constellation  
and the creative fire of imagination.  
Poets now prattle on prosaic things,  
like angels aflutter on pinioned wings;  
while scientists, lost in their cold equations,  
are happy to fret at quantum evasions,  
where beauty and truth are never let in,  
like angels that prance on the point of a pin.  
And we, the technological ape,  
can only look at the stars, and gape  
with narrowing minds and astonished eyes  
at the endless, endless throb of the skies.

**April 29<sup>th</sup> 2011**

A E Hobbs

The grey walls of the Abbey are transformed,  
From cloister to a garden scene.  
Trees line the centre aisle,  
And banks of flowers can be seen.

Trumpet fanfares start to play,  
The organ's music swells.  
This is a Royal Wedding Day,  
Confirmed by wedding bells.

When the service ends,  
And the couple leave, as man and wife.  
The nation sends a fervent wish,  
For happiness and long life.

## **Tea**

AE Hobbs

We have an old friend of the family,  
An acquaintance of many years.  
It's grandma's old brown teapot,  
Still brewing the cup that cheers.

Once, tea clippers raced across the sea  
To be the first in port.  
After the unloading dealers came;  
That's how tea was sold and bought.

Gone are the romantic days,  
Modern methods are now to hand.  
One can just peruse the shelves  
And purchase a favourite brand.

So, on social occasions  
When conversation begins to sag,  
Someone will brew a cup of tea  
But use the ubiquitous tea bag.

## **New Passengers**

Steve Glason

At Edgware Road – at Edgware Road  
Pigeons seen in modern mode  
Preening on the Circle Line  
Fluttering their feathers fine.

Were they tired at Earls Court?  
A junction where trains are sought  
Upminster – Barking – very slow  
They travel via Plaistow/Bow.

To London Squares they go alone  
(Euston – Russell – even Sloane)  
Spending time resting feet  
Eating crumbs – Great Portland Street.

And more sightings yet again  
Manor House and Turnpike Lane  
Cockfosters seems a favoured place  
Their expeditions grow a-pace.

Let's issue them with OysterCard  
Even that they might discard  
Preferring just one station hop  
Hainault – where their journeys stop.

### **Sunday on the Firth**

Bill Torrie Douglas

A grey drizzle under grey sky  
the firth empty of all but grey sea  
islands out of focus and ghostly,  
likeness to a Whistler seascape.  
A shrouded figure pursues a wet dog  
along the prom,  
both hang their heads, and tails  
in the colourless morning

The lifeboat emerges from its den  
like a drowsy fox,  
it eases into the water  
forages into the mist  
onwards to unseen quarry.

Two matrons hide beneath  
yellow brollies,  
stride by unheading.

### **Whithorn**

Norman Bissett

Half a century  
before Columba landed

on Iona's strand,  
Ninian came here,  
scholar of Rome  
and Christian troglodyte

founded a church  
performed his ministry  
preached the Gospel.

Whithorn's reputation grew,  
a holy place  
that attracted pilgrimages.

Bruce, the leper,  
came, a pilgrim,  
to seek forgiveness.

This drowsy backwater  
kindled a flame  
that, flickering, flared.

### **Raptor**

Norman Bissett

Perched on an oak branch,  
a kestrel sits motionless  
with death in its eyes.

### **A Christmas Garland - a cinquain**

Terry Rickson

Now the  
Holly and the  
Mistletoe, with dark veined  
Ivy, bid Christmas welcome in  
Once more.



## Miss Matilda Brown

A E Hobbs

Miss Matilda, or Mattie as she was known by her most intimate friends, was sitting in her kitchen having a break, her elevenses she called it. Today was not the best of days for her, a certain sadness pervaded the cottage and the reason was evident.

In the corner of the kitchen stood a now empty bird cage on its stand, and the absence of Smudge, her bird and companion, told its own sorry tale.

Two days ago, the kitchen was alive to the tweets and chirps, and now an oppressive silence was ever present.

Mattie sipped her coffee and decided that as life goes on, so must she and with a heavy heart she rose and finished the morning chores.

Days passed in this fashion and gradually the sense of loss lessened and Mattie turned her attention more and more to her garden and the welfare of the wild birds, for which she provided a generous bird table.

It was whilst washing up at the kitchen sink, she glanced out of the window and noticed a commotion going on around the base of the bird table. Three magpies, bully boys she called them, were mobbing a small ball of yellow on the lawn. Quick as a flash Mattie was out in the garden flapping her apron and the bully boys departed.

Mattie looked at the abject ball of fluff and thought she detected signs of life. She quickly organised a cardboard box, lined it with an old jumper and laid the canary, as it turned out to be, in the box, took it into the kitchen, placed it on a shelf shaded from the sun and waited for signs of recovery.

The signs did not come quickly. Next morning, although life was in evidence, there was not a lot of movement. Mattie then thought about food, and from somewhere in her memory she recalled that cat food could provide the answer. Cat food was purchased and Mattie then set herself the task of getting the food into the bird's crop.

This she achieved by making a small spatula out of wood, and by tapping on the bird's beak, which opened after a few attempts, she

managed to get a few morsels into the crop. This was repeated about every two hours over the course of the day.

Two days passed, and Smudge Two was much more alert, so she gently placed the bird in the bird cage and waited for a result, if any, to come.

Another day dawned and Mattie was taking her elevenses when she heard, or did she? a very faint "cheep, cheep". No, it was real, and Mattie leaned back in her chair, a smile playing around her lips, for now all was right in the world of Miss Matilda Brown.

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## **Fabergé Is Not Just For Easter**

Una McMorran

(This was the winner of the Gordon Gompers Article Competition 2011)

**T**hey had mice at the palace and rats too, a pink elephant and five hundred and forty-three pieces by the incomparable Fabergé. The mice had diamond-studded tails, rose diamond eyes and were utterly charming.

On a hot summer's day I thankfully entered the cool dimness of the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace Road, to see the Royal Collection of Fabergé. I came prepared to be impressed and I was, not so much by the more spectacular and known pieces but by the wonderful simplicity of the flowers, animals and birds. Each one beautiful, made so by the masterly choice of the right material for the right piece, the shading of the stone exactly where it should be, but we are talking about the work of Carl Fabergé!

The Queen's Gallery was crowded but not uncomfortably so, the showcases pools of light in a darkened area. I had a catalogue giving a number and a short description of each exhibit in the case. Visitors were engrossed – a child with foreknowledge and a high clear voice, wanted to see 'the little pig scratch his ear' – after that, so did we all! Sure enough there he was in pinky-brown agate with rose diamond eyes and a lot of humour. I really loved the litter of four sleeping and utterly believable piglets nearby.

The pink Fabergé pig that he examined on the BBC Antiques Roadshow, also captivated jewellery expert Geoffrey Munn.

'Look at the pink piggy's little round bottom,' he exclaimed delightedly and promptly valued it at £10,000!

Having read about King Edward VII's much loved and pampered terrier, Caesar, I was delighted to come face to face with him and look into his ruby eyes. Sure enough, around his neck was the translucent brown enamelled and gold collar inscribed 'I BELONG TO THE KING'. However, if rumour is to be believed, it was the dog that owned the King! If ever a dog had its day it was Caesar!

In 1907, King Edward decided to have a model of his famous racehorse, Persimmon, made by Fabergé. Mrs George Kepple, a particular friend of the King and a frequent guest of their Majesties, suggested that some favourite animals should be made for the Queen's Collection. Mrs Kepple was the great-grandmother of the Duchess of Cornwall. It was decided that their Majesties' pet dogs and the whole range of Sandringham domestic and farmyard animals should be made. In order to carry out this commission, Fabergé and his workmasters organised the despatch of sculptors from St Petersburg to the Sandringham Estate to model from life, in wax, the Sandringham animals. The models were then to be returned to St Petersburg to be made in the appropriate and carefully chosen materials. The names of the stones were magical – chalcedony, lapis-lazuli, purpurine, aventurine-quartz, rhodonite, bowenite, nephrite, tiger's-eye quartz, bloodstone, rock crystal and jasper.

This was where the Fabergé genius became apparent; the choice of stone and the shading was inspirational. For the animals' eyes, precious stones were used but they were of small size and not of great worth. The cost of each animal, when made, was not of great monetary value but the craftsmanship was of enormous worth. I wonder what those St Petersburg modellers thought when transported to the Sandringham Estate to do work for the King of England?

It is recorded that the King made them very welcome, took them on shooting parties, invited them to luncheons and treated them as guests. When, some months later, the work was completed, their Majesties, accompanied by Caesar, of course and a large number of luncheon party guests, assembled to see the finished wax models of the animals. The King declared himself well satisfied and said, 'I think the work is splendid'.

Fabergé's London branch was established and flourished between 1903 and 1915. The shop sold cigarette cases, animals, birds, flowers, bibelots, clocks, photograph frames etc., all rather modest pieces at modest prices. An oyster guilloche enamelled clock could be bought for £29. In 1966 Christie's sold a Fabergé guilloche enamelled clock for £20,000. Great excitement was caused at a Leominster auction house in 1997 by the sale of

a Fabergé cigar-cutter for £7,200. It had been in the possession of one family but unidentified for many years. Fabergé cigar-cutters are rare.

King Edward VII was given a pocket cigar-cutter by The Grand Duke Michael Michaelovitch. Queen Alexandra generously returned it to him, as a memento, after the King's death.

The cigarette cases, patterned in different shades of gold, in stone and in silver were famous throughout Europe. Gentlemen considered themselves ill-equipped if they did not own at least three. Later, King George VI had a splendid collection. I saw seventeen cigarette cases in the exhibition – what illuminating tales they could tell!

Queen Alexander was an ardent admirer and collector of Fabergé. King Edward and their friends knew how to please her with gifts of Fabergé animals, birds, flowers and boxes. Certainly not jewellery or anything highly priced; there was an unspoken limit in the region of £30. When Queen Alexandra died she left one of the largest collections of Fabergé's work in existence.

I thoroughly enjoyed seeing them as part of the Royal Collection at the Queen's Gallery. The variety of the pieces was astonishing! A fan, a rowan tree, catkins, a Chelsea Pensioner, a chimpanzee, a wold strawberry, owls, a brooch, terrestrial globe and a *walking stick* – however unlikely, it appears to have been made! I doubt if so many Fabergé works have ever been collected together in one place before.

It was probably in 1885 that the first Fabergé Easter Egg with its 'surprise' was given by Tsar Alexander to the Tsarina Marie Feodorovna, sister to our Queen Alexandra. The first egg was of gold, enamelled opaque white, and on being opened revealed a yolk also of gold. The yolk opened and inside was a chicken made of gold of different shades; within the chicken was a model of the Imperial crown and inside hung a tiny ruby egg! (This first Imperial egg was not in the exhibition.)

Number 278 in the exhibition (collection no 9032) was a Surprise Easter Egg of gold, with jewelled enamelling and panels of white and pale pink guilloche enamel. It was dated 1899. The 'surprise' is missing. Somewhere in the world – bearing workmaster Michael Perchin's mark, MII – it is waiting to be found. Perhaps in a child's doll's house in Russia, in a homestead in Australia, or is it a much loved piece in an elegant vitrine in France? We do not even know *what* it is! One day it will be found, that indeed, will be the real 'Surprise'!

## **Lorne House**

Terry Rickson

*(An extract from a novel in progress, with a brief introduction)*

The Story is set in 1917-18 in a military hospital and convalescent home, Lorne House, located on the north Kent coast. The main character is David Petersen, real name Templeton, a young lieutenant invalided home from the Western Front suffering from shell-shock and loss of memory. In common with many in his condition, he endures disturbing flashbacks and night terrors – his ‘demons’.

In this extract a German cruiser has appeared offshore early one morning and bombarded Westhaven-on-Sea, where Lorne House is located.

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**D**avid stood at the window of his bedroom watching the events. He felt no fear or anxiety, just a curious sense of detachment, as though observing the performance of play which bore no relevance to himself or his surroundings. The alarm that ensued minutes after a shell tore into the stable-block roof, left him unmoved. He left his room and went out into the garden, walking slowly until he reached the lily pond and stood for some time staring into the water.

“Davey!”

His head snapped up sharply at the sound. Looking across the pond he saw a laughing figure leaning nonchalantly, arms folded, against a stone urn of the balustrade of the terrace. The shock of recognition made him gasp with disbelief. Then in a blink of an eye there was no one there, the garden as quiet and empty as when he first walked out into it only a short while ago.

Will Lessing was dead, blasted into oblivion in that moment on the road to Arleville.

“The bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling

For you but not for me:

And the little devils how they sing-a-ling-a-ling.....”

The men were singing as they tramped along the road towards Arleville. David smiled to himself as the familiar words ran through his mind. Will was singing along in time with the men. A heavy barrage was building up, shells falling and exploding ever nearer, sending showers of mud splattering down; they were used to it and continued their steady slogging pace. The road was rutted and uneven from earlier battles in the sector, shell-holes, tangled remains of gun-carriages, corpses of both men and horses and the shredded remains of the trees that once lined the road, detritus of war.

A company of Canadian gunners galloped by, harnesses jingling, their limbers bouncing and rattling from the road's uneven surface. They took the first hit. Men and bits of armoury flung in all directions, accompanied by the screams of horses. The barrage of British and German artillery opened with a deafening ferocity.

Davis could barely recall what happened next. An explosion so loud that it seemed to turn everything into a singing black silence. He'd no idea how long he'd lain with his legs in the shell-hole, his body wet and slimy and head in foul mud. He had a vague recollection of heat beating down on him at one point and staring a large malevolent rat in the eye, its nose and whiskers twitching expectantly. Dragging himself out of the shell-hole he stumbled along the road, thirsty and feverish, until pitching forward into oblivion.

By a stroke of good fortune, a passing stretcher-party noticed the slight movement of the body lying by the roadside. They stopped an ambulance that was jolting down the road and managed to heave the mud-caked, torn uniformed body on board. The rest was confusion. A voice saying, "Put out that light, for God's sake, put out that light," unaware that it was himself. He had a vague awareness of someone asking his name, company and regiment, and a voice saying, "You're very lucky to be alive." He didn't remember answering any of the questions put to him.

Later, as he was being placed on a stretcher and into an ambulance before being taken to the hospital train, he said to a medic, "My name is Petersen, Lieutenant Petersen." The man nodded and, lightly lifting the identity disc around David's neck, replied, "Your disc, sir, says 'D Templeton'."

## Silent Night (a story for Christmas)

Ruth Sear

‘I wonder what Christmas presents I’ll get this year?’ said eight-year-old Katy.

‘Presents? Best part of Christmas is the turkey, pudding and booze,’ replied Granddad Bert. His eyes gleamed. ‘Especially the booze!’

It was a cold morning and the pair sat at the kitchen table. The *Daily Express*, dated Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December 1957, was open at the racing section.

‘Are you going to be Father Christmas again?’ Katy asked

‘No.’ Bert’s reply was resolute. ‘Last year were enough for me. I only did it ’cause them firemen promised me a drink if I dressed up as Father Christmas at their youngsters’ Christmas party. ’Orrid little brats kept climbing on me knees, and pulling me beard. But the worst thing of all was them firemen. All they gave me at the end of the evening were lemonade. Lemonade! Some drink that were! They accused me of having a skinfull before I arrived, and said I were too miserable for the kids. But I got me own back, that night.’ His leathery old face creased with glee as he chortled at the memory of a fire engine speeding to answer the false 999 call he’d made on his way home from the kiddies’ party.

He turned his attention to the lists of runners. The newspaper reminded Katy of Christmas last year... wasn’t it exciting! Bert had made his own crackers from the *Express*. Not from instructions in the newspaper, but from the pages. The contents were stuffed with a mystery ingredient.

‘Why pay all that money for crackers, it’s bang, flash, and then it’s all gone in a puff of smoke,’ he’d said. It wasn’t the only thing that went bang, flash, and gone in a puff of smoke. His pullover had caught fire. Katy, who’d pulled the other end of the cracker, fortunately suffered nothing more serious than a blackened face.

That afternoon Katy walked into the town to browse in the crowded shops. There was a cheerful sound of carols as people did their Christmas shopping. Woolworths was full of cards, tinsel, glitter and decorations; a fairyland of delights. Smells of ‘Evening in Paris’ and Yardley’s ‘English Lavender’ assailed her when she went into a chemist’s shop.

Meanwhile, back at home, Katy’s mum and dad were discussing Christmas.

‘What shall we buy for Katy?’ asked Pam.

John's face brightened.

'I thought we could buy her a Meccano set. All those bits and pieces, you can make some very interesting things. I've always wanted one.'

'A Meccano set?' Pam looked horrified. 'They're for boys. You'll be suggesting a chemistry set next! I thought about a post office set but I don't think Katy is very good at maths. No, we'll buy her one of those new toy cookers with its little saucepans and grill. There's an oven door that opens, and shelves inside.' She giggled. 'Perhaps you could play with that, John!'

Granny Daisy was knitting near the fireplace. She had arrived two hours ago declaring she was just paying a fleeting visit. Although she and Bert lived next door, Pam said she'd brought enough wool to last for a year.

Daisy said, 'Christmas is only for children. Oh, and shop owners, judging by the tills ringing. Now, you two, guess what I bought our Katy for Christmas?' before anyone could speak she continued, 'A Mickey Mouse. I saw it in a toy shop when I went to change me library books, at Boots. You wind it up, and it walks.'

'Walks where? To Boots?' John chortled.

'No. It just walks.'

'Hmm. Sounds daft to me. How much did it cost?' But Daisy was concentrating on her knitting.

'Happy Christmas everyone!' Daisy shouted as they entered the door on Christmas morning. Hugs and kisses were exchanged, and John narrowly missed being kissed by Bert.

'Let's open our presents,' was the universal chorus.

'This is for you, love,' said Bert to Katy, feeling like a philanthropist. She eagerly unwrapped the paper, which was a page from an old edition of *Woman*.

'Oh, thank you, Granddad.' It was a skipping rope. As she moved it, a rattling sound came from the handles.

'Why is it rattling?'

John stared at the wooden handles. 'There's little holes all over them.'

'Maybe that's the pattern, Dad.'

'I don't think so, Katy. It looks like woodworm. Put it outside, quick.'



Katy hurriedly threw the skipping rope outside the back door, and later that day John threw it on the fire saying, 'Might as well get some use from it.'

Meanwhile, Bert was prowling around the room. Daisy snapped, 'What's up? Have you lost something? You should've lost that rope. Fancy buying the child such rubbish as that!'

'I'm looking for a drink, I'm starving, when's dinner? Ah, oranges! What a treat! They look fair nice, I'll have one.'

'They're very good for you, they've got vitamin C in them,' said Pam.

'It's amazing what they can put in things nowadays. After all, life is just a bowl of oranges,' philosophised John.

There was a blank silence following his remark. No one knew what he was talking about. Bert ate two oranges while Daisy smoked a cigarette, and orange flavoured smoke gradually permeated the room. Sooty the cat sniffed curiously at his present. What did the tin contain?

'Isn't he sweet?' said Katy. I spent ages wrapping that tin. It's the best cat food I could buy.'

'Probably the same stuff as they put in dog food,' said John. 'The only difference is the labels.'

Meanwhile Daisy was unwrapping her present, a pair of scissors. 'Thank you, Pam.' She unwrapped Katy's present. 'Oh, thank you, Katy. A new kitchen knife!' She waved the scissors and knife in front of Bert's face. 'Ain't I lucky to get these! Don't you come too near me, today,' she added malevolently.

Bert had somehow found a bottle of sherry and poured out a glass. The sherry rapidly went to his head for he hadn't eaten any breakfast in his hurry to get next door. But he remembered to give a present to Pam and John, a hammer with a small area of rust on the head and a few tiny holes in the wooden handle.

The remainder of Christmas Day was passed in the usual fashion for this family. The dinner was a success and they toasted everyone's health. After the washing up, they listened to the Queen's speech, and toasted her health, and then all the adults had a snooze whilst Katy read her new *School Friend* Annual. A choice of ham or cheese sandwiches were provided in the evening, washed down with several glasses of stout. They listened to the festive wireless programmes until about ten o'clock, when the adults had a glass of port, before Daisy and Bert declared it was time for bed.

Pam closed the door with relief, and the last words she heard Daisy say to Bert as they made their way unsteadily next door were, ‘You’re drunk, I bet you snore all night!’

Meanwhile Pam and John were tidying up, discussing the hard work that Christmas entailed, and was it really worth it? Katy went up to her bedroom and looked at the Mickey Mouse toy. She’d turned the key several times during the day, and the mouse hadn’t moved. She tried once more before climbing into bed, but it remained inert. She would ask her dad’s advice tomorrow. But she was pleased with the little toy stove, and Daisy said that if she wished hard enough, then steam would rise from the little saucepans. Soon she fell asleep.

*Whirr, whirr.* She woke with a start and shone her torch on the clock. It was midnight.

*Whirr, whirr.* Something was walking over the bedroom floor, en route to the door. It was Mickey, come to life!

*Whirr, whirr.* She stared in surprise. Mickey stopped in his tracks. Silence. She soon went back to sleep, but was woken again at 2 am.

*Whirr, whirr.* Mickey, unable to exit through the closed door, was off again, on his nocturnal prowling. Just as she was about to leap out of bed and smother him, he stopped. She dozed until 4 am, when Mickey decided to walk a mini marathon around the floor, at top speed.

*Whirr, whirr, whirr, whirr.* He *whirred* until Katy wanted to scream. He wouldn’t stop. She grabbed him, and threw him on her bed. He landed on his head. His little black legs with the big shoes continued to move, waving in the air: right, left, right, left, *whirr, whirr.* Taking her torch, she ran downstairs. She grabbed John’s hammer and returned to the bedroom. Mickey was still whirring, at full speed. Somehow he’d managed to fall on his feet on the floor and was now rushing madly around in a figure of eight.

Down went the hammer, SMASH! Pieces of tin and plastic flew in the air, and the key narrowly missed Katy’s face. Then silence. She pushed the debris into a pile on the floor, and climbed back into bed. As she snuggled down to sleep, she heard the familiar *whirr, whirr.* There was one part of Mickey’s anatomy that she hadn’t destroyed. It was the coiled spring. Katy pulled the bedclothes over her head; she was not getting up again. Finally there was a *ping.* It was Mickey’s last sound, before his final demise. A peaceful silence fell upon the room.

## **In the Beginning**

*Musings from Mellor*

Douglas Fulthorpe

**I**t started, as in an ancient and fabulous story, with fruit. The difference was that the fruit, although tempting, was not forbidden; on the contrary it was abundantly available, not quite a glut.

We were living in Tynemouth, on the Northumberland coast. Our predecessors had planted a Bramley apple tree, which one year, as plants do, opted to procreate prolifically.

“What are we going to do with all the apples?” asked my wife, echoing my own recent thoughts.

I put down my newspaper readily, for to tell the truth I was grateful for any excuse to escape the problems of Newcastle United, however briefly. We had been using apples for every conceivable purpose: tarts by the ovenfull, dumplings, jelly, sauce, and the rumour was that the butcher was planning to buy his wife a fur-coat from his profit on our pork purchases. Friends and neighbours had been showered with Eve’s indulgence. I had even taken some in for working colleagues, reserving the sourest for the boss.

My thoughts turned to drink. Really, the local lads in black and white had that effect.

“Could you make apple beer?” I ventured, naming the only fruit-based drink I could think of.

I still recall fondly the home-brew shop on Bedford Street, in my home town of North Shields, a tiny shop converted from a terrace flat, where my wife, after carefully studying a book on wine-making, went for her ingredients.

The result was, not apple-beer, but a delicious, pale gold elixir, verging on, but, not quite, a dessert wine. Over the years I have suffered some woefully poor concoctions, among them one or two of my own, but this was, from the start, a winner.

Everyone enjoyed it: neighbours, friends, the people at work, who toasted the boss in his absence, since he was suffering an acute stomach disorder.

After exhausting the apple stocks, my wife decided to try her hand at brewing lager. The result, no surprise to me, was a tangy, pleasingly potent, amber ale, its taste resembling that of the Austrian Tyrol's "Bier vom Fass" (beer on draught). My enjoyment of weekend television was enhanced: through a pleasant haze I could view the shuffling mistakes of the round ball players with benevolence, and even Bruce Forsyth looked human after a couple of pints.

In 1971 I was transferred to the Royal Ordnance Factory at Blackburn, where I would work for the next twenty years. We moved into a new house at Mellor Brook, by the beautiful stream of that name. In our first month we took in a stray kitten, a tailless white waif with a pink nose and paws. She would stay for thirteen years.

"She looks like a marshmallow," I commented. That became her name. There the resemblance to the confection ended. Her temperament could be likened to cactus in a drought, with a liberal lacing of sugar. To this day my wife bears scars on her arms. Returning home from work one day, I found she had a deep scratch across her face.

"Marshmallow?"

She nodded.

"What had you done to her?"

"Blew on her tummy."

Marshmallow didn't take that from *anybody*.

Time passed, and I decided to embark on the road of beer and wine-making, not least because, in the early 1970s, home-made wine and beer were far cheaper than the commercial products. The journey was fraught with problems and pleasures, as with faltering, sometimes swaying, steps I stumbled from one heady adventure to another. I found religion, forsaking false gods, and prayed nightly to Bacchus.

One of my early mistakes was bottling my beer before it had completed its fermentation in the bucket, following which half-a-teaspoonful of sugar, no more, is placed in each bottle. I used large, plastic lemonade bottles, and the excess pressure produced by the generated carbon dioxide not only caused the bottles to bulge alarmingly, but made the screw caps extremely tight. One Saturday evening I was sitting on the settee. I had a pair of pliers to loosen the

cap, and a jug to catch my beer, which experience had shown would issue freely.

After a careful couple of turns the rapid surge of foam indicated that I was presented with what is known in the trade--at least in Mellor Brook--as a "gusher." Frantically and ineffectually I attempted to remove the cap so as to pour the beer into the jug. Marshmallow, reclining peacefully at my feet, became suddenly aware of a gushing, white geyser, boiling and jetting with volcanic fury in every direction. I still remember flying foam, a soaked carpet, and a cat streaking for the kitchen. My prize was an inch or so of beer, which I sipped thoughtfully.

Marshmallow's face, when, ten minutes later, she peeped cautiously around the door, was a shade whiter than usual.

Eventually we joined Mellor Wine Circle, but that's another story.

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## **The Cherry Tree Affair**

Angus Livingstone

(This story came second in the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition, 2011)

*Dear Chantelle,*

*I don't imagine you expected to hear from me again after our candlelit dinner on Wednesday evening but I urge you to try and forget about our unfortunate parting. Language is just language and I am sure your choice of Anglo-Saxon to tell me to go away was quite right under the circumstances. I am also convinced the diners had their attention fixed on the excellent cuisine rather than your obscene gestures as you chased me out of the restaurant. My firm hope is that once I have explained the reason for my behaviour to you, we will be able to wipe the slate clean and start again. And don't worry about my foot you jabbed with your stiletto heel. The bruising has already started to reduce and that's after just three days.*

*I know we exchanged e-mail addresses earlier but I am more comfortable with pen and ink. The problem I have in the letter is to explain the situation to you in a believable way, for it comes under the heading of 'Strange but True'. Oh, by the way, soaking with white wine is good for removing red wine stains. It was terribly bad luck for*

*you that the waiter tipped your elbow just as you were about to throw the contents of the glass over me.*

*Anyway, to get back to my story. Do you get the same thrill that I get from working out the driving principle behind a situation? The one behind this story is that it doesn't matter in the slightest what the mission is, but a person with a mission in life is best avoided and if you yourself have a different mission, then the avoidance should be at all cost. I had never thought of my own one as a mission as such, more a strong conviction. It is simply for people to keep their word.*

*Seems at worst harmless and at best laudable, doesn't it? But when I came into contact with one George N. Washington IV, who saved my life and had a mission to get everyone to tell the truth, it changed my path from one going nowhere to one that led to our meeting and also to our separation. So there you have it: tell the truth and keep your word — a disastrous combination.*

*It all started as I walked home along by the river from the speed-dating last week. No interest from the women, as usual. Oh, I know I told you that this week was my first session, but I could hardly say I've been going to it off and on for three years, could I? What kind of sad case would I have looked then? The only other little exaggeration of mine was when I said I was in films. I am in charge of the photographic section of a chemist shop - but it's a large one.*

*To get back to George, he fished me out of the river onto his cruiser, The Cherry Tree, about ten seconds after I had jumped in. By that time I had changed my mind about drowning anyway — the water tasted absolutely foul and it was a lot colder than I anticipated. So, all in all, I was quite pleased. But if I was pleased, George was ecstatic. To have had the opportunity to save a life was a gift from heaven as far as he was concerned. He took me to the nearest hospital to get my stomach pumped by a lovely understanding nurse then back to his riverside condo, as he calls it, in my hospital robe. He ran me a bath. He even found me a full set of clothes - all on the loose side - and finally fed and watered me, all the time fussing about like a mother hen.*

*He's a wealthy American a few years older than I am, doing a leisurely tour of Europe. We had a long chat about things. Some of his advice was quite helpful, actually. Later on, I thought I had better ask*

*if I could repay him in some way, expecting him to say no, naturally. But he immediately said I could repay him by always telling the truth.*

*As you've probably guessed, he's got some family connection to the first president - you know, the one who cut the cherry tree down and confessed because he couldn't tell a lie. Pure folk myth of course but I couldn't say that to him. He takes it all so deadly seriously. His face had the glow of a driven man by this time.*

*I said that I told the truth anyway (ignoring the speed-dating and film industry lapses). But he explained it wasn't just a matter of telling the truth. He had developed it into a code of living where you had to say exactly what you thought with nothing added or taken away. No half-truths, which I have found out we use almost all the time. This was going to cure all the ills of the world as far as he was concerned since it prevented misunderstanding, lying, mistrust and a dozen other problems just stopping short of curing Britain's inclement weather. It also explained the sudden comments he had made about his irritable haemorrhoids while we were eating.*

*Even in the mellow state I was in by that time, I could see that revealing the contents of your mind at all times is dangerous. Anyway, I argued mildly against it before agreeing to try it for one day. That was my first mistake. My second was to choose Wednesday which is normally the quietest day of the week for me, being my day off. But I had given my word and that is sacred in my book.*

*When he heard my tale of woe about my speed-dating disasters, he insisted I try again on Monday and gave me one or two good ideas to make a better impression (which I am not going to reveal). But Sod's law meant that I would finally find someone who would go out on a date but could only manage on Wednesday. You do go out with girlfriends a lot, don't you? Anyway, I was so excited when you agreed to a date with me that for the moment I forgot about my pledge. That was my third mistake. I could mention others, such as choosing a public restaurant to meet in, but they were the three main ones.*

*That's why I often paused before speaking — I was getting in touch with all my thoughts. It's a bit tricky but his booklet gives some advice on technique. Then I had to try and express these thoughts in a way that wouldn't upset you. I know I shocked you with some of the things I said, but remember we almost never say what we think after our*

*childhood is over. I tried to keep sex out of my mind by pretending you looked like Ann Widdicombe. I still get flashes of her when I think of you even though you are much prettier.*

*It was when you asked me what I would really like to do after the meal, the dam burst. In defence I would say that what I said was only what almost all men privately think and at least it showed that I liked you in a physical way as well as an intellectual way. All I can do is ask you to try this truth exercise with a friend to prove to yourself how difficult it is not to make a faux pas and let me know how you get on.*

*My dear Chantelle, I really would like to see you again and later on introduce you to the unforgettable George. He is quite concerned at what transpired with us and has not tried to foist his doctrine onto me since.*

*Yours in hope, Thomas*

The postman thought that Thomas had got himself a lively dog, judging from the sound of what could have been growling, accompanied by running feet, and ending with the snatching of the mail through the letter-box.

Tossing the other mail onto the floor, Thomas tore apart the envelope he had waited for with increasing anxiety over the three days since posting his own. He pretended not to notice the stamp was only second class but knew deep down it hinted at bad news.

*You bastard! First you insult me. I couldn't believe my ears what you said in that restaurant. A sexy tart am I? Well it takes more than a short skirt and a low cut top to make one. Which by the way you had a job taking your eyes off. And the things you would like to do to me, never mind the things you would like me to do to you, it turns my stomach, or my lovely belly with the big love handles as you prefer to call it. Speak the truth is it? That's easy compared to not swearing when you have every right to and want to. And right now I want to swear. I really, really want to. But I am a lady and would not stoop to such a level. You must have misheard me in the restaurant. Twenty-nine years old are you? My arse! You're thirty-six if you're a day, you lying creep.*

*I wanted emotion - remorse, grovelling, pleading for a second chance not a university lecture on missions. As far as you and I are*



*concerned, it's mission impossible. See, I'm not an air-head -that was a pun or a metaphor or something.*

*It might have been a hand-written letter you wrote and not an e-mail but it was still a load of spam.*

*Enjoy the speed-dating.*

*Goodbye.*

*Chantelle*

Not emotional, thought Thomas, I was full of emotion when I wrote it: desire; no, make that aching desire; fear of failure; fear of loneliness; excitement that the future might be worth living after all; the need to love and to be loved; and a few other ones I can't think of at the moment. Chantelle has never learned how to read between the lines. I can't win with her. Good riddance. But why did she agree to go out with me originally? What did I say to persuade her? Think back.. Cats! That's what it was, telling stories about our cats.

Love may be blind but frustrated lust exiles good sense to the cranium's Siberian region. So Thomas focussed on the sentence beginning 'I wanted emotion' in her letter, to convince himself that she really wanted a reconciliation. He bemoaned his inability to pick the right words to use with women and shook his head in frustration. Three years of speed-dating, he thought, and he was still hopeless in their company. The only thing he had learnt in that time was an unerring ability to talk for two and a half minutes about himself without referring to a clock.

What would George advise, he pondered. Take positive, sincere action, probably. So he steeled himself and phoned her, ready with a prepared piece.

As soon as he heard the receiver being picked up, he began. "Miaow Miaow-

Sorry, Miaow, my fault Miaow... "

'Whoever you are, get off the line. I'm going to do a 1471 and if you bother us again I'll report you to the police. Pervert!'

The line went dead and Thomas went limp. He tried to make sense of what he had just heard but it was hard to believe. His feline phone-call had been answered by George N Washington IV. Yes, George, the

phoney. He should have been suspicious when it came out in conversation that his middle initial was in honour of his state's Republican senator elected on the day George's parents got married — a certain Richard Nixon.

A minute later, with a gradually reddening face and adrenalin coursing his veins, he took a kick at his cat who had been watching his unusual behaviour with growing nervousness as it lay on the fireside rug. The cat easily avoided the moccasin-clad foot which continued its course onto the hearth's brass guard rail, breaking a bone. He knew he had broken something. He heard the crack just before he heard his scream of pain.

Once the pain had settled down he found Chantelle's address and wrote a letter addressed to George and Chantelle. It began by stating that this was his last session as student of George's excellent creed and would like to express his true thoughts on both of them. What followed was not for anyone with a weak stomach but it had a cathartic effect on Thomas who posted the letter in good spirits on the way to the hospital.

As luck would have it, Angela was on duty, the same nurse as before. She looked at him and smiled as she shook her head.

'I wondered if I would see you again. What is it this time?'

'Broken toe,' he answered nonchalantly.

'What's the story this time, 007?' She shrieked with laughter.

'Do you like cats?'

'Pardon?'

'I want to know if you like cats.'

'No.'

'Good. I tried to kick a cat and missed.'

'What cat was it?'

'My cat.'

'You tried to kick your own cat?'

'Yes. Look will you stop talking about cats when I have something much more important to say to you. I know you must think I'm an

absolute balloon but I assure you what you see is a reformed character. My life had been going down the tube slowly. Then, on top of that, I was let down badly by two people in my life which speeded things up. But, the thing is, I've consigned all that to the past.

'Which brings me to the present. Ah...well, it's simply this: I can't get you out of my mind. I think you're pretty wonderful, Angela. I know I've got little hope of you

agreeing but I would love to take you out to dinner. And I promise you some fun.'

'Where?'

'Your choice — any restaurant except one that's got unpleasant memories.'

'Mm, I'll think about it.'

Thomas watched her binding his foot for a while.

She looked up at him. 'What do you do, apart from James Bond impersonations?'

'Photographic sales.'

There was another pause.

He smiled. 'Did I tell you I think you're wonderful?'

'Yes. Could you fix my camera?'

'Yes. Well probably.'

'Okay 007, you're on. Where's your big American friend today?'

'He messed with me so I gave him the Bond Girl from hell.'

'So you want me to be a Bond Girl, do you?'

'Yes. Did I give you the rules for the part?'

'No, but it's okay — I'll pick it up as we go along.'

After that, Thomas always told her if it hadn't been for his broken toe he would have danced her round the room and her feet wouldn't have touched the floor.

## **Hoisted by His Own Petard**

Beryl Jones

(Recommended by Judge of Lewis Wright Short Story Competition 2010)

**S**itting high in his cab the driver of the refuse lorry surveyed the road in front of him. Something wasn't quite right. Oh, the bins were all lined up as usual like sentries standing to attention which, being an ex-army man, was how he liked to think of them. But there was definitely something wrong with the line-up this morning, although at the moment he couldn't put his finger on it.

He drove slowly down the road as his two workmates trundled the wheelies round to the back of the lorry for emptying and they were half way down the long street before the driver found the answer to his puzzle.

There was a brand new wheelie bin standing out in stark contrast to all the others, a new recruit in a line-up of battle-hardened veterans. Someone must have moved into number 31 at last, he thought, although judging by the house as he drove past, the bin was the only new thing about it.

His musings were suddenly interrupted by a frantic banging on the cab door. One of his men was gesticulating wildly. Taking one look at his ashen face, the driver turned off both machinery and engine, jumped down and hurried round to the back of the lorry.

Neither of the other men said a word. One mutely pointed to a bin poised at the top of the mechanism. It was the new wheelie, lid open, ready to empty its contents into the mish-mash of refuse. Looking up the driver saw what at first appeared to be an extra thick, unwound coil of Cumberland sausage dangling from the bin. Then he realised with shock that it was a human arm.

However, it was to be three weeks before the 'Body in the- Bin', as dubbed by the media, was identified as being that of a 56 year-old businessman, Kenneth Buttone.

Thus on a cold, blustery November morning two detectives and a W.P.C. waited patiently on the doorstep of the detached house which nestled in a small close on one of the plusher estates that were springing up on the outskirts of the town.

‘Mrs Buttone? I’m Detective Inspector Walters and these are my colleagues Detective Sergeant Mason and W.P.C. Rogers.’ He held up his identity card. ‘May we come in?’

Stepping back to let them in, the impeccably dressed and ultra-groomed petite blonde spoke in a soft husky voice. ‘Have you come about Kenneth? Have you found him? Is he alright?’

Following her into the house D.I. Walters said, ‘I think you should sit down, I’m afraid it’s bad news.’

Barbara Buttone went white and sat down on the nearest chair. ‘What’s happened?’

‘I’m sorry there’s no easy way to say this. A body’s been found and we’ve reason to believe it is that of your missing husband.’

Clutching the arms of the chair she gulped and said, ‘What .....happened?’

Speaking for the first time, Sergeant Mason said bluntly, ‘He was murdered.’

Before he could continue Mrs Buttone jumped up and ran from the room. ‘Excuse me I’m going to be sick.’

‘Go with her Constable,’ said the D.I. ‘The sergeant here will make some tea.’

The following day the two men were once again in the Buttone’s lounge. After the ordeal of identification and finding out how her husband had died (a single blow to the head), Barbara Buttone had quite recovered her equilibrium and it was a much more composed woman who now sat opposite them.

Sergeant Mason flipped open his notebook. ‘Our investigations have so far failed to throw any light on your husband’s death.’ He looked up. ‘We understand he was a Waste Management Consultant?’

If Mrs Buttone saw the irony of the situation she made no comment, merely nodding to the sergeant.

Bluntly as ever he ploughed on. ‘Why did you wait almost three weeks before reporting your husband missing? Were you having marital problems?’

‘No Sergeant,’ she spoke slowly and precisely. ‘We were not, as you put it, having marital problems. Oh, we had the odd argument the same

as every other couple, but never anything serious. We were perfectly happy and absolutely devoted to each other. As to why I didn't report Kenneth missing earlier, it was because he was supposed to be in Brussels on business and wasn't due back until last Monday. Of course, when he hadn't arrived by Wednesday, naturally I became concerned and contacted you.'

'Didn't he telephone when he was away?'

'No, he was always so busy, besides which he said he could never be sure that I'd be in and I often forgot to switch on the answer-phone.'

'Don't you have mobiles?'

'Of course, but like the answer-phone I rarely switch it on. Do you suspect me Sergeant? Do you seriously think I bludgeoned my husband to death, managed to bundle him into a wheelie bin and then trundle said wheelie, because I don't drive, for miles without being noticed? No Sergeant. I loved Kenneth dearly and he loved me. I suggest you look elsewhere for your suspect.'

The D.I. now took over the questioning. 'Can you tell me where you were the night you say your husband left on his business trip?'

Sighing, Barbara Buttone glared at him. 'Kenneth left for the airport about 9 m. I had a hot bath, took two sleeping pills and didn't hear another thing until I awoke as usual at 8.30am.'

Back at the station some time later D. I. Walters was reading the reports on the house to house enquires when Sergeant Mason entered his office, 'This is interesting Sergeant. So much for Mrs Buttone's claim that they only ever had minor arguments. According to the neighbours in the Close they were always at it hammer and tongs, so much so they were known locally as the 'Battling Buttons-.' She apparently was especially vicious. So it isn't surprising he didn't contact her when he went away, he was probably glad of the break.'

'This is also interesting sir' said Mason. 'I put someone on to tracing that wheelie bin and guess what! About six months ago Mrs Buttone ordered a new bin from the council, serial number and date which match our little green number. There's a carbon copy of the receipt with her signature in nice clear writing.' He paused and shuffled some papers. 'It looks bad for her.'

‘It does Sergeant. It certainly does.’ Mrs Buttone is a very cool customer, hard as nails as well. After the initial shock when she was sick, which could have been something she’d eaten, she didn’t come across as the grieving widow to me, her answers were so precise and carefully worded. Almost as if she was reading from a script. Nevertheless, if she did it she must’ve have had help. He wasn’t killed on the premises and we’ve verified that she doesn’t drive. He was dead when he was put into that bin and she hasn’t got the build, height or strength to do that on her own. We need to find her accomplice, plus the dead man’s car, and then no doubt we’ll find the motive.’

‘Bit drastic for an affair don’t you think? Time to bring her in?’

Before Walters could reply there was a knock on the door and one of his fellow C.I.D. officers entered. ‘Traffic brought in a bloke a few hours ago for drink driving but this is the interesting bit. The car is registered to a Kenneth Buttone. This chap also has your victim’s credit cards, watch and wallet.’ He smiled. ‘Thought you’d also be interested in his fingerprints.’

Several minutes later as they looked at the man, the most unprepossessing individual they had set eyes on for a long time, they were both thinking the same thing. If Barbara Buttone was having an affair it certainly wasn’t with this man. This was definitely the hired hand.

After the preliminaries were over and the tape was running Walters placed a plastic bag containing a medallion, known to have been worn by the deceased at the time of his death, on the table and said. ‘Your fingerprints are all over that. Not forgetting the wallet, credit cards, watch and car.’

‘Bound to be aren’t they. I told them other lot they were in the car when I found it abandoned down an empty side street in town.’

‘Keys just happened to be in the ignition did they?’ Mason said.

Walters tapped the medallion. ‘But this wasn’t in the car, it was around Kenneth Buttone’s neck.’

‘Don’t know nothing about that. It was in the car with the other stuff.’ He sat back a confident smirk on his face. ‘Don’t suppose you’ve got anything to drink?’

‘We’ve also got your finger prints all over the wheelie bin,’ said Walters. ‘So that definitely puts you in the frame. And there’s always DNA. Who knows what other crimes will be thrown up that can be laid at your door.’

Mason looked sideways at his boss. They all knew there were so many fingerprints on that wheelie it would take a month of Sundays to isolate or oven track them all, but if they could crack the case without resorting to DNA so much the better.

Walters stood up. ‘Come on Sergeant. We’ll leave the gentleman to think about things for ten minutes. I’ll send in a cup of tea.’

Ten minutes later they hardly had time to switch on their equipment before the man was talking. ‘O.K. you’ve got me with the goods. I might as well get it all off my chest. I walloped old Buttons on the head. Had a hell of a job getting him into that wheelie I can tell you, he was starting to stiffen up. I left him and that bin with a load of others miles away. I thought I’d be long gone\_by now but I went on a bender and you know the rest.’

‘How much were you paid to do the job?’ asked Walters.

‘Nowhere near enough. That’s when I lost my rag.’

‘Just how much did she pay you?’

‘She! What’s with this she?’

‘Mrs Buttone.’

‘Oh.’ The man gave an ironic laugh. ‘I see now. You’ve got it all wrong as usual. Old Buttons was paying me to bump her off, not the other way round. He’d had enough of mighty mouth.’

‘Why didn’t he just divorce her?’

‘He couldn’t. Something to do with her money tied up in the business, and he didn’t have enough to buy her out. Old Buttons had this planned a long time ago. He even got her to buy the spare bin; said it’d be a suitable resting place for her as she always talked a load of garbage anyway. But we had this argument over money. He wanted to pay less than we’d agreed. Mean sod. I’d had a few drinks and I lost it. Clocked him one instead. Did everything else as planned. Only the victim was different. Don’t suppose you’ve got anything stronger than tea, have you?’