

healthy boy

issue #1

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FRONT COVER ART BY ANGUS BRUCE
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a note from the editor

Welcome to the first issue of HEALTHY BOY!

I wanted to create this zine as a space to celebrate artwork by those of us who work in hospitality, in retail, in supermarkets, and so on. Those who come home after a double shift with aching skeletons and still find time to write poetry and make art.

For this issue, I asked for submissions that capture the essence of working in minimum wage jobs – whatever that might mean to you. And I'm in love with the pieces we received.

There is so much to be found in these works, from organising a revolution in Tesco's frozen aisle to the pleasure of choosing the café's playlist. In these pages, dear reader, you will find unreasonable hostel guests, rooms filled with naked mannequins, and an unforgettable glimpse into the sorting office. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.

A huge thank you to everyone in this first issue for sending in such wonderful work, and for trusting me with your art, and to Angus for letting us use his beautiful linocut as HEALTHY BOY's first cover illustration.

May every boy be healthier than the last!

martha nye

ruthie kennedy

summer shifts

sun comes up
regulars love me
it's just regular love
ten hours fizzing
up milk defoaming
cappuccinos I know
I am indispensable
I know the place
barely breaks even
even when I break
break for twenty minutes then
dive into the lunch rush
it's my cafe so I get to choose
the music so I get to choose
my clothes so I get to
choose my hours
sometimes
once
a quiet evening
mouthing our predictions
through the window
'he's a white americano,
looks hungry so maybe a muffin tonight'
we lie and say no soup left
you just would not believe
the hassle
so we can start closing early
closing early becomes twenty minutes
late every time

I love my job
contrary to the belief
of huffy parents
bringing neat kids
to the uni up the hill
'I studied english too
loved it
loved every second'
the mum and dad
exchange a glance
hmm well
sure I'll be in debt
forever but why not
have fun doing it
once again I must try to explain the peace
of the pink and orange sunrise
it is seven thirty a.m. and I am alone
just waiting to make
your day
it is already getting warm
and I tap my foot to the gentle
hum of the dishwasher
hiss of the coffee machine
tick of the pastry oven
watching students professors working people
float over the river
up the hill
it is already getting warm
and I will miss this day
that repeats and repeats
never enough though already far
too often good morning
and what can I get for you

Ruthie Kennedy is a poet and short fiction writer from Glasgow. Her debut pamphlet, **Room to Swing a Cat**, was published in 2020 by OrangeApple Press. Also in 2020, she released **Sound of two black hoodies swallowing each other in the rain**, a collaborative pamphlet with artist Jessie Whiteley. She is currently co-editing the Glasgow edition of Dostoyevsky Wannabe's **Cities** anthology series with Colin Herd. Previous work can be found in **SPAM Zine**, **From Glasgow to Saturn**, and **-algia**.

martin breul

At the Injection Moulding Machine at 3:30am

i take the piece of plastic and put in the box
i take the piece of plastic and put in the box
i take the piece of plastic and put in the box
i take the piece of plastic and put in the box
i take the piece of plastic and put in the box
i take the piece of plastic and put in the box
i take the piece of plastic and put in the box
i take the piece of plastic and box it in the box
i take the box and box plastic in the box
i box the plastic piece in the plastic piece box
i plastic the box in the plastic box i box
i box the piece in plastic put the box
plastic piece box plastic box piece box
box box box plastic box box plastic box

Martin Breul is a writer, poet, and student of literature from Germany. His poems have appeared in **Wet Grain**, **The Honest Ulsterman**, **The Wild Word**, **The Riverbed Review** and others, while his first short story appeared in **The Speculative Book 2021**. He also contributed reviews and essays to **The Common Breath** and **[X]position**. Follow him on Twitter for updates on his writing and his academic work: @BreulMartin

carolyn hashimoto

1 FULL FRIED
1 FULL SCRAMBLED
(NO HAGGIS, TOMATO
MUSHROOM)
1 GF TOAST

Full Scottish B'fast
~~and~~ a side of
GLUTEN FREE TOAST
Ironie faux pas?

66

Bar's OPEN Masks OFF
Covid Cocktail
Happy Hour
NO music? No Life?

Wld u like ur steak
rare, pandemically
fried / or medium
well done?
(THE CHOICE IS YOURS)

67

hospitality haiku blues

Let's GET TANKA'D
Customers nervous.
for \$8.72 an hour
I'm risking my life
To serve
PORN STAR WHORENIS
Put them at ease. WTF!

88

1 STEAK (M. RARE)
2 ROAST BEEF
2 RED WINE
1 W. RUSSIAN

Steaks are high
When you /
play Russian Roast
Beef Roulette /
Eat out to help who?



hashimoto

Carolyn Hashimoto is an experimental writer, currently studying Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. Born and raised in SW Scotland, she spent twenty years in Tokyo, where she taught English to flight attendants and police officers. On returning to Scotland in 2016, she got her first waitressing gig aged 47. Her pamphlet **The Chips Are Down Here In Lockdown** is published by OrangeApple Press, and other work has appeared in **Gutter**, **3:AM**, **Perverse**, **From Glasgow to Saturn**, **-algia** and **BlueHouse Journal**.

megan rudden

Always Be Nice to the Cleaners

On Monday I am waiting tables for minimum wage and I am tired and worried about the virus. We know that the virus lives on hard surfaces so I rigorously wipe down tables and chairs, seats and legs, thinking about where finger tips might have touched, hoping to protect the next Customer from the one who sat there before. It is possible to have the virus without presenting any symptoms of it, so not everyone is aware they are infected. The virus spreads through droplets in the air so I wear a mask for the entire ten hours of my shift, even though it's given me acne and is rubbing the skin raw behind my ears. I see this as an act of care for The Customer, but The Customer complains that the mask is hiding my smile. I tell him not to worry because I'm not smiling. The virus spreads faster between people in closer proximity to each other so we ask The Customers to stay within their group. I see a drunk man bothering some people he did not arrive with so I ask him to sit down. *'I'm just having a laugh,'* he shouts in my face, now so close to his I can feel the spit spray from his mouth to my cheek. I tell him I'm not laughing. On Monday I am waiting tables for minimum wage and I am thinking about consent and what it means to care for others who don't seem to care for me.

*

On Tuesday morning there is an online call with my class and I realise I have forgotten about the Art School. We are talking about physical and metaphorical barriers to entering university. I think about the thing my dad used to say about always being nice to the cleaners. I think about Davie the Doorman who used to let me into the building even when he wasn't supposed to and it might be a funny story or it might be about how the lo-

rudden

west paid staff within institutions are the ones who hold the actual keys to the building. If you make friends with them it's likely that your movement and access within the university will be much easier and more free. I consider this type of economy and I wonder if it's built on kindness or manipulation. I think it's kind, but then I also wonder who can be excluded from these relations that I have always found so easy to maintain. I don't say any of this out loud because every time I attempt to take my microphone off mute and open my mouth the sound is forced back down by a very dry circular object closing off my throat as my heart rate rises rapidly. So I sit in silence, pulsating. I try to note something down, but I can't remember how to spell that word and my hand doesn't seem to be moving in the shape of letters.

*

On Tuesday afternoon I am waiting tables for minimum wage and I am tired and worried about the virus. We know that the virus can spread through contact with material used by an infected person. A group of customers spend almost £200 on their dinner without leaving a tip. Instead they leave the masks they wore to the bathroom, along with the napkins they used to wipe their mouth, on the table for me to pick up. As I clear away this potentially contagious material they watch me from the side, drunk and cheerful, looking through me rather than at me and I wonder if they understand their violence. If a tip is thanking someone for their service, what would you call this?

*

In my final year of Art School a tutor upset me during a tutorial. I showed him a performance piece that I considered to be about the invisibility of low paid workers within the service industries. In response he told me I was perpetuating negative stereotypes about women and that I should consider making the work from a more positive perspective. Leaving the building in visible distress Davie the Doorman stopped me to ask if I was okay. *'Don't*

listen to anything that guy has to say', Davie said sympathetically, 'he never says hello to me, and he isn't very nice to the cleaners.'

Megan Rudden is an artist and writer currently based in Glasgow working across performance, object making, text based work and drawing. Through this interdisciplinary practice, her work reflects on the intersections which shape contemporary ideas of identity. She has performed and exhibited at various locations across the UK. Megan is currently undertaking postgraduate study in Art Writing at Glasgow School of Art, while working as a waiter and bartender.

toby goodwin

The Angel of Coffee

(A tale from a Glasgow youth hostel.)

Our flat was very close to the hostel, a ten-minute walk along a row of tenements and then a sharp left, followed closely by a sharp right. Soon enough there was a long piece of scrap land that led to the building, past an overgrown green pitch, a dual carriageway, and the odd bit of fly-tip. A few more seconds and I was heaving my shoulder against that weighty front door to unenthusiastically greet whichever poor soul happened to be on the desk.

That day it was one of the night staff, Abdul. A nice guy; in his fifties; who was always sitting quite comfortably in a dark, cotton throwover. He told me the rundown and I took the keys off him, telling him to have a nice day. Abdul always worked 11pm to 7am and then he'd be straight out to take his kids to school. Working nocturnally quite never sat right with me, but Abdul seemed happy with it. He liked having his afternoons to himself. He was always on time. He never left anything for me to do. He was always friendly. One of my favourite people in the hostel really. My other favourites included Drew, this great big New Zealand ex-bouncer who'd been living there for years, and Marco; an Italian who was about ages with me. The three of them, thinking about it, were among the only reasonable people in the building, and as a consequence of this they were often together.

Abdul gave me a hurried, "See you later," as he pelted it for the door, and I got started with the morning tasks: counting the till, checking the bookings, going through the emails, etc. About half an hour later Drew and Marco came past, chit-chatting groggily.

"Wow," Marco said, pausing at the desk, "what happened to the wall, Tam?" He had a strong Italian accent, but he spoke like he'd learned English in Glasgow. It was charming. He had shaved hair, a wee goatee and

wore one of those long black jackets with a fluffy lining in the hood.

“Oh that?” I said, gesturing to the great coffee wings behind me.

“Yeah, what was that?” Italians always miss out the ‘t’s, ever noticed that?

“Oh, that happened yesterday,” Drew said in his soft New Zealand accent.

He towered over Marco and his bushy beard was a little flattened on one side from sleep. His hair was in a messy bun. Drew always knew everything that was happening in the hostel, which made him particularly useful for routing out problem guests.

“Yeah,” I said, “someone threw a coffee at me.”

I’ll explain. So, every day, part of the morning shift involved making a list of all the daily checkouts so I could then go room by room to make sure everyone had cleared out by eleven. Most of the time it was just a case of poking my head through the door, seeing the empty bunk, and marking it down on the sheet. Occasionally someone had slept in and I’d knock on the wood of the bed, saying something like, *‘You staying another night? Checkouts at eleven. I’ll be back in ten minutes.’* Then they’d grumble something and start packing their bags.

What happened yesterday was that I’d poked my head into one of the three-bed shared dorms on the second floor to see it empty, apart from this one redhaired girl lying on a bunk, fully clothed, in a grimy, Lacoste tracksuit. There was also, to my dismay, a large pile of cigarette butts collected next to her on the bedside table. I tried to nicely rouse her, knocking on the wood of the bed as I did with everyone else, but she ignored me. I gave her the ten-minute warning, and said we were going to have to charge her for smoking inside. Something that I didn’t enjoy doing. I went back to the desk, checked the system, and input her card details into the reader. £100 for smoking indoors. Unfortunately, the card was cancelled.

I came back up the stairs, tried the door and found that she’d barricaded it from the inside; probably with a chair. I shoogled it loudly and went, “Look, I can take this door off the hinges if I have to. I’ve got the tools.” This wasn’t true; I didn’t have the tools, or the know-how, or the willpower. I paused, no reply.

So, I just kept banging away, for quite some time. Eventually I heard a

goodwin

loud, “For fuck sakes,” there was a thudding sound and the door swung open. “I’ve no been smoking,” she said in a grumbling weegie accent. She looked at me like she was about to whip out a flick knife, and if the texture of her voice hadn’t told me that she was an avid smoking enthusiast, then the clear pile of ash and cigarettes on the side would have. Not to mention the smell.

“Look,” I said. “Why don’t you just get packed up and we can talk about this at the front desk. Cleaners are needing in.”

She grumbled something else and went over to a dusty looking suitcase in the corner. I propped the door open and rang Kathy, the head cleaner. She was about five foot nothing, but she had one of those loud voices that cut right through you like a high school teacher. Anyways, I told her to get started ASAP. She did, and I went back to the desk.

About half an hour later I was fannying about with some key cards at reception when Kathy appeared at the door, “You clean that room alright?” I said.

“Naw, the stupid girl’s gone and locked herself in the bathroom. I found this though.” She slapped a crumpled pile of twenties on the desk, “That girl left this on the bedside table. Won’t cover the smoking fee, but it’s a start.”

“Right,” I said.

While that girl *did* owe us money, I’m not so sure we should’ve just taken it like that. But, what the hay. I bundled up the notes; it came to eighty quid. I added them to the cash sheet and continued on with the morning tasks. I had other things to do, so I forgot about it.

Well, I forgot about it until about twelve, when our smoker appeared at reception. She must’ve gone for breakfast or something. Anyways, she marched up to the desk and naturally she went, “Where the fuck is ma money?”

“Oh, that eighty pound?” I said, silently cursing Kathy. “The cleaner took it as part of the smoking fee, so you still owe twenty.”

“Whit?”

“Aye it says on the wall,” I said, gesturing to the sign on the wall. “One hundred-pound charge for smoking inside.” In hindsight my pointing at that wall may have proven to give the girl some kind of a psychological cue.

“I never saw that.”

“Well, I’m sorry, but whether you knew them or not, you did agree to the hostel rules when you checked in.”

“Whit?” She was holding a coffee in one of those paper cups from the vending machines. “Can I at least get that other twenty then?”

“Which twenty?”

“You just said there was another twenty for me?”

“No, I said that you *owe* us another twenty for the smoking charge.”

“But you’ve got ma eighty, so you’re giving me back sixty?”

“No. The smoking fee is one hundred pound, we’ve got eighty off you, so now you owe us another twenty.”

She stared daggers into me for a second and then looked down at her cup of coffee, back up at me, back at the cup. ‘Don’t you fuckin dare,’ I said with my eyes.

“Fuck you,” she said with her mouth and she tossed it.

It was cold, milky, sticky. The coffee splattered against my face and up the wall behind me like a pair of brown angel’s wings. Kathy, seeing this from the corridor, ran at the girl; fist raised, but she pegged it for the door before Kathy’s meaty right-hook could connect. I took my glasses off, seeing the brown, sticky liquid dripping off them to the floor. My whole front was soaked.

“Are you okay?” Kathy said.

I paused for a second, processing, and then I just started laughing, deep hearty laughing. “It was fucking cold.”

“We could phone the polis for that, like.”

“Ugh, I cannae be fucked.”

So, I just left it, took a tee-shirt out of lost property, and went back to work. I sent the boss a text and he said he’d have someone in to repaint it later that week. That had been the day before. “Did you not notice it last night?” I said to Marco, still at the front desk.

“No? What?” Marco said. By then the coffee had dried into the wall, crackling and glistening.

“Yeah,” Drew said. “You should’ve seen how mad Kathy was, thought she was about to go at the girl with a circular saw.”

“Was it hot?” Marco said.

goodwin

“Nahh, freezing cold. It was bizarre.”

“As long as you’re alright, mate,” Drew said. “You coming for a smoke?”

We often coordinated smoking breaks. Well, I coordinated my smoking breaks. His whole life was a smoking break.

I poked my head into the office, grabbed my jacket, clipped the phone to my belt and followed the two out the door. Sometimes there were guests smoking on the front porch and I had to shoo them away. The reason for this was that the smell tended to blow in and, if the manager came by to refill the vending machines with those *‘Multipack only, do not sell separately’* crisps (as he did once a week) then he’d tell me off for it. That day there was no one there, so we took a left and went along the side of the building. The smoking area had one of those clear plastic roof coverings like a bus stop.

“You seeing all these things about the virus?” Marco said.

“Oh aye, I heard it’s supposed to get to Europe pretty soon,” I said.

“Nah, I think it’s too cold here for it to survive,” Drew said.

“You think so?” I said.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t worry about it.”

“Well, if the virus is coming, then places like this’ll be the first to get infected.” I gestured up at the building. It was made of this beautiful, smooth red sandstone. Rounded at the front into a slight parapet.

“You’d love that though, wouldn’t you?” Drew said. Smoke curling into the cold air.

“How?” I said.

“Well, it’d get you some time off work, hay?”

There was a beep. The phone on my belt lit up. I held up a finger and answered it. “Hello, Cosy Haggis Youth Hostel, Tam speaking. How can I help?”

“Hi Tam, just me,” it was the manager. “So, Kathy just phoned me there, she’s gonna be down to talk to you about it in a minute, but we’re needing you to remove one of the guests. Apparently, there was an incident with a guy *exposing himself*...”

“Oh dear, really?” I widened my eyes. “Do you have a name, or a room number?”

“Yeah, room twelve. Big bald guy, they said. We’re wanting him out of the building soon as.”

I sighed, “No bother, I’ll take care of it.”

“Thanks Tam, bye now.”

Sake

*

Toby Goodwin is a twenty-five-year-old writer and musician from Dunblane, Scotland. He is currently studying a Master’s in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. He mostly writes contemporary fiction, but he also dabbles in crime, sci-fi, and memoir. He loves dogs, movies, and cheesecake. **The Angel of Coffee** is an extract from his novel, **The Train has Struck a Cow, Ladies and Gentlemen**. A contemporary comedy about Scottish youth hostels and life on the road.

lizzy simonen

Food Stamp Sushi

You cannot buy hot food with food stamps
(EBT, sorry)
Grocery store pizza is not allowed
Ditto the hot dogs that spin all day on rollers
I don't know why this is a rule
Beyond the usual premise of food stamps:
Make it hurt

There are two grocery stores
Seven blocks south and three blocks west
From the house I share with strangers
One store is cheapish
I like their dried tortellini
Even if it never rehydrates

City Market is across the road
It has a bakery when you enter
Where they sell rows of macarons
In City Market you have to announce at the register
"I am using EBT"
(Food stamps)
And everyone watches you swipe the plastic card

I don't belong in City Market
But they sell Ribena
In the international aisle
And sometimes oat cakes
Five times more expensive than Tesco's
I miss Scotland

So I go to City Market

Work is long and I am hungry
No hot food on EBT stamps
Go home and soak your tortellini
City Market sells sushi in plastic boxes
In refrigerated shelves by the macarons
I study the thin strips of Puget Sound salmon
The mounds of rice
That's not hot food

I go to the register and announce
"I am using EBT"
Ribena, beep
Oat cakes, beep
Sushi, pause
The woman at the register looks at me
I focus on the blush of the salmon
Don't look at me

I eat the raw fish and sweet rice in four mouthfuls
As I walk home
With milk and tortellini and Ribena and oat cakes
It's a government gig, my job
Below minimum wage
"Don't tell anyone you're on EBT"
Except at the register at City Market
"Consider this a time to diet"
Though my work is long and labor intensive
"No hot foods, no tampons, no vitamins, no Tylenol"
And I don't know why we have these rules
Beyond the usual premise of food stamps:
Make it hurt

simonen

Please Tip Your Barista

The middle-aged couple from the Midwest
Are counting out coins by the counter by the till
They need 67p more to cover their coffees
And keep mistaking 10p for 25¢
They've done it three times now
I take the coins and count them out
I ask them if they've enjoyed Glasgow
They tell me it's lovely, it's just all these coins
They have to use them up before they go home
I nod and take the correct change
They seem nice in that bland way that people are
Where I come from
I ask, "Where's home?"
Expecting Milwaukee or Menominee
Not so far from Minneapolis
Where I come from
The man smiles wide
"We're from America!"
My Irish co-worker sniggers into steaming milk
Her Glaswegian girlfriend snorts
And I know it's weird maybe
To find a Minnesotan behind a café counter
On Byres Road in August
But that doesn't stop the way we laugh by the milk fridge
When the couple leaves

Lizy Simonen has worked many strange jobs across America but is now happily employed as a librarian in Glasgow. She is about to complete a Creative Writing masters at the University of Glasgow. Her poetry has appeared in **Uncanny Magazine**. Sushi remains her favorite food. Follow her on Twitter @lizysimonen

miriam schlüter

A Night at the Drive Thru

There's a faint honk. It disorients me, disrupts the blurred distraction I have succumbed to yet again. I'm at the window, sliding it open. It makes room for a gust of sharp, cold wind, passing right through me as if determined to get inside. Shivering, I pull my fingers back into the sleeves of my stained fleece jacket. I am a turtle withdrawing into her grey, fluffy shell. "Hiya. That's 3.59, please." I recognize the person that's attached to the hand, warm against my frozen fingers, that presents me with a grubby five pound note. I rummage through my memory, trying to locate her face. Maybe she comes here a lot, maybe I've seen her around campus; who knows, they all look the same to me after a while – *nachts sind alle Katzen grau*. A couple of wet, pathetic snowflakes settle on my skin when I hand her her change. "Enjoy your meal", I try to say. I am tempted to shout: My words trail after her, headlights rushing away whilst I am still withdrawing my hand. She spares me half a glance, at most – the quest she's on, the pursuit of hot, greasy food, dominant in her mind, drawing her from my window to the next, no second to be wasted. Me: hardly registering in her mind, nothing more than a cold palm, spitting out money like a vending machine. I close the window and stand under the small electrical heater for a second. With the wind shut out into the night, it actually does its job, bombarding me with hot, stuffy air that tastes of plastic, melting the snow on my jacket and making it trickle into my sleeves. I roll them up a little bit more. The small room that hosts the first window is like a separate little world within the store. You can be on your own in here for hours, if it's busy, serving one customer after the other and still not speaking to a single soul. The door that leads to the kitchen stays closed most of the time, in winter, to help shut out some of the wind and the noise. I can see right through the little window in it, from where I'm standing. Can watch the guys in the kitchen in their grey t-shirts and long aprons, bent over the

schlüter

metal counters that we call the “line”: sliding paper boxes from one person to the next, adding sauce from big, heavy guns, a pinch of onion, 14 grams of lettuce – but really, it’s just however much their hands can grab. They look cheery, all stood next to each other along that invisible line. They should line them up by size, in my opinion. Just for my very own aesthetic pleasure. If I am ever a manager, I decide, I will place the tallest at the very front and laugh at the triangular shape the rest of them will form. I can’t hear what they’re saying through the door, but I can see the laughter on some of their faces if I watch closely. Most of them are laughing, maybe, apart from one girl who’s standing towards the side on her own, carefully picking up patties from a grill and placing them on a tray. She is slow, because she is trying not to burn herself. She’s barely finished her training shifts, she’s allowed to be slow and she’s allowed to be quiet. I wonder what kind she will turn out to be. The kind who, after an initial period, will warm up to everyone else, losing her shyness and participate in conversation? I’ve only ever spoken to her once, I don’t think her English is too good, maybe that’s why she keeps her head down. Or will she be the kind to focus, almost compulsively, at the job at hand, rejecting any sort of social interaction but getting faster and better at an alarming pace and collecting the burns she was initially so anxious to avoid.

I hear a shrill beep in my left ear and press a button on my headset. The person at the other end knows exactly what they want, it’s a satisfying interaction. I have learnt, in this job, an appreciation for speed that seemed entirely foreign, even repulsive, to me beforehand. I am simply incapable of remaining patient now when a car full of people takes their sweet time to messily communicate what they want with me – but this one is alright. My fingertips move over the till quickly, automatically. I wonder how many times they have completed the journey from the “medium meal” button to the “Big Mac” button to the “Coke” button, always in the same motion, painting a wonky triangle upon the screen. Again, and again, and again, and again. I am so thankful for every new menu item that gets introduced; purely for the satisfaction of my fingers finding new ways on the till, exploring heretofore unknown territory. The window slides shut after the customer has moved on. I remember nothing about them. This is good; it is the unpleasant ones that you do remember. I turn off the heater. I can no

longer stand the hot, stuffy air it puffs out, completely oppressing my ability to breathe. I decide to go to the front for a drink. Sometimes, I like to fake a cough so I can go and have some Fanta in one of the tiny courtesy cups that are reserved for staff, and talk to someone for a little bit while they're trying to do their job. The front counter is busier, filled with a different kind of customer. Kids, less in a rush, less rude, I think, but also louder, more permanent than the ever evolving trains of cars that I encounter at the window. There's a small bundle of people standing next to the fry station, warming their hands in the glaring light that's emanating from it. In the summer, we use Happy Meal boxes as fans. I look forward to that time again. Right now, everyone is shivering – managers more than anyone in their thin, white shirts. They're advantaged, managers. Those shirts, and the black trousers that have actual pockets, and the sweet satisfaction of not having to wear a hat at all times. They look more like people than us, in our grey rags, hat obscuring our hair and some of our face, as anonymous as humanly possible. "There's no 'I' in team!", it says on the website. I have a look around – at those familiar faces around me and the identical grey outfits that frame them – and I wonder what it is, exactly, that makes us so synonymous.

Miriam Schlüter, born in 1996 in a German town that she refuses to return to, moved to Scotland in 2016 to start her MA in English and Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen. Now completing her MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow, she likes to write about rainy mornings spent in Glasgow cafes, boozy Christmases spent in Berlin pubs, and the feelings of being between places.

rebecca kane

A Year in Hospitality – Highs and Lows

friendly

Very pretentious

it's just too much hard work trying to obtain any sort of smile or humanity from the staff:"

very professional
her service was exceptional.

Rarely have I ever seen a staff member smile, why?

she was absolutely brilliant and bursting with energy!

in welcome by inexperienced staff
staff who were so attentive,

very attentive throughout.

The staff although pleasant are

forgetful

red and some weren't happy.
pretty rude and unhelpful.

Well done to all in these difficult times"

Will definitely not return.

MANIFESTO FOR THE TESCO REVOLUTION

FREEDOM!

**GET IT HALF PRICE THIS TWO FOR TUESDAY!
50% OFF!**

JOIN ME COMRADES!

**LET US CONGREGATE IN THE FROZEN SECTION AND DEFROST ICE
CREAM TO USE ITS MILKY SLUDGE AS FACE PAINT FOR OUR BATTLE ON
PRICES!**

**WE WILL SOAR TO THE CANNED GOODS AND PERSIST AS THEY DO!
PERSIST! PERSIST! PERSIST!**

**THIS COUNTRY IS BUILT ON
HEINZ BAKED BEANS**

**WE WILL JOIN OUR B & M BRETHREN AND FINALLY DEFEAT THE
3 FOR 2 EXCESS THAT SUFFOCATES US!**

WORKERS UNITE!

Rebecca Kane is a Scottish poet currently studying English and Art History at the University of Glasgow. She has previously been published in Wild Pressed Books Young Poets' Anthology **Dark Animals**. Her poetry typically discusses ideas related to dissociation, art and the uncanny. Her Instagram is: @r.kpoetry, and her Twitter is: @rkpoetryy.

benoit blanc

Do The Right Thing



‘I had a dog called Bounce,’ Jimmy Stewart says. ‘By God, I loved that dog. Then a neighbour’s dog killed him, and I was so angry that I vowed to kill that dog. I just wanted revenge, and every day I’d tell my father I was going to kill it. I was actually aware that I was screaming for blood... and I used that emotion – that rage – later in the Westerns I made in the fifties. Anyway, Dad said to me, “So you really want to kill that dog?” and I said, “Yes, I sure do.” And he said, “Right, let’s go and do it.”’

‘He took me to the store and we went down the alley by the side of the building, and I discovered he’d already got the dog and had it tied up there. He went into the store and came out with a huge deer rifle, put it in my hands, stepped back and said, “Okay, son, do your bloody work.”’

‘I aimed the rifle at the dog, barely able to hold it... and this dog... he just looked at me through big brown eyes... and his tail started to wag... and I couldn’t squeeze the trigger with him looking at me like that. Finally, the gun was too heavy to hold any longer, and I put it down. Then the dog started licking my hand.

‘Then Dad untied the dog, and the three of us walked home. Dad didn’t say a word to me. He taught me I wasn’t a killer. He also taught me it was all right to say what was on my mind and get it off my chest. It was *okay* to be angry. But what you do about it is another matter.’

Philoxenia is a Greek word everyone should know, I’m told. And it’s virtuous principle – ‘friend to a stranger’. The social norms of the day dictated that a Greek home should always be prepared to take in a guest, no matter how ‘lowly’ this stranger might be, and offer them food, drink, a bath, hospitality, a bed to sleep in. The hosts were not to ask questions of their guest until the visitor had eaten.

In return, the guest was expected to be courteous, polite, and as light a burden as possible. And to offer a gift of thanks to their host, should they have the means to afford it.

‘People think Jim is always this slow and *gentle* man,’ Gloria Stewart says, ‘and mostly he is. But he can get as mad as any man. He has this terrible rage. But he has learned to contain it so it doesn’t show very often. He has a rage that is as frightening as anything I have ever seen. But he controls it better than anyone I have ever known.’

A moral act committed for selfish reasons is *still* a moral act, I’m told. If you help a dinky old lady cross the road in the hope she gives you 20p, or strangers bear witness from their cars, tap a finger on the wheel and think *well gee wizz, what a lovely, selfless, generous guy* or you film it on TikTok and post it to your 375,590 followers with #BeKind #SomethingForNothing flashing in crude neon colours, the dinky old lady has still made it to the other side of the road. Maybe you even rescued her from being struck and mown down by a speeding van. Maybe, however, that in doing so, you are late for work. And now one strike closer to losing your job.

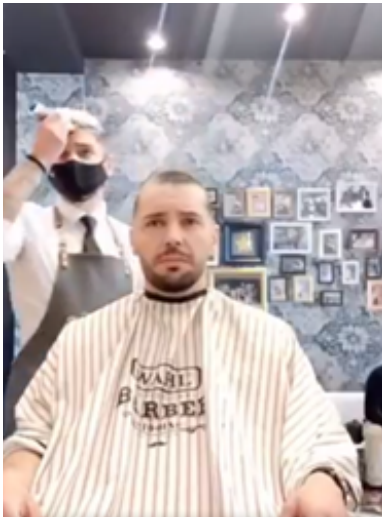
blanc



Rex Chapman  @RexChapman · 16h

...

This barber is cutting his friend's hair who has cancer...



While offering hospitality and nourishment, Greek households did so in the knowledge one of their houseguests might be revealed as a god in disguise, and they would be rewarded handsomely for their charity.

I work at a frozen food supermarket. Every day I play host to hundreds of strangers, and offer them food, drink, hospitality. *Hello! How are you. Are you OK for bags?* Many of these people seem quite sad, and I often have a very hard time restraining my snootier impulses and instincts. Particularly after seven hours of strenuous manual labour, without break, and with RA (Rheumatoid Arthritis). This condition means that I tire often, that I have to start earlier and finish later to complete my duties, that I am often in a lot of pain, that I am often smiling politely and raging quietly each day. I have to remind myself that the reason customers are spending huge sums on huge trolleys of shit bleak frozen food, food that will likely shorten their already shorter-than-expected lifespans, is indebted to their place trapped at the bottom of a grotesquely unfair socio-economic system, one they didn't ask for, and one they have callously little in their power to do anything about. Indeed, one they have always had very little in their power to do anything about.

And *not* because they are basic, or pond life, or idiots, or ignorant, or gammons, or whatever equally grotesque insult flashes crudely in my mind. That they don't deserve the violent loathing I feel when they heave themselves to the till, or grunt in response to my pleasantries. That the very word *basic*, in this sense, is loaded with hideous class snobbery and remains one of the few remaining acceptable bigotries during a moment of social reckoning. Many of these same people – they are people, remember - come in on the same days at the same times and buy the same items and say the exact same things. Sometimes, the same people come in on the same days and say these same things multiple times. Many of these people say

I only came in for one thing!

I only came in for one thing and came out with half the shop!

You only come in for one thing and spend nearly £100!

I only came in for one thing and

blanc

It goes on. *Always the way!*, I reply, always. One particularly sweet man comes in each week, thumps eight frozen Traditional Beef Hot Pots on the till point, rubs his hands together and exclaims *throw em in the microwave and they're ready in eight minutes! Eight minutes, and dinner time!* He makes me smile, and I always say *enjoy the hotpots mate* and I always mean it, despite myself.

I like to think I am generally a friendly, sociable face around the store, and can't help but wonder how many of these faces really only came in for that one thing. Just someone to smile at them, chat to them, pretend to be kind and friendly for a minute or so. Being honest, I also wonder what exactly I think it is I will receive as my unexpected, handsome reward for kindness to people who always make me feel violently angry, or deeply sad.

While offering hospitality and nourishment, we do so in the knowledge one of our customers might be revealed as a mystery shopper in disguise, and we will be disciplined severely for snapping *we are ferociously busy as you can see, and working under extreme pressure in difficult circumstances, so if you want a tip, don't tell granny how to suck eggs* with delicious venom back at customers who look at you behind the till, and see a pinata with a patronising uniform and cute little nametag.

Nearly five years ago, in November 2016, I had just had one of the worst days of my life. I won't go into it, but it's worth mentioning I ran into a previous partner in Sainsburys. They looked at me, at my crutches – because of the RA – and it felt like they enjoyed it. I can't be sure; this may well be my own projection.

Later that day, while hobbling to the train station on crutches I was still getting used to, because of the RA, I dropped £1.20p into the cup of a vacant-looking homeless man sat in a heap beneath a bridge. He was munching on a packet of blue biscuits. I moved on, looked up at the grey, swirling ceiling, which was darkening quickly at 5pm, and couldn't believe that it was real. I was in agonising pain; felt grit and crunching every time I moved my joints, took 15 minutes to manoeuvre myself off the bed just so I could piss into a plastic cup at 4:20am, because of it. It felt too awful to be real life.

Shortly afterwards, I bumped into my tutors, James and Susana. They saw me for the first time following our lengthy discussions regarding my

likely deferral from University, because of the RA. Their faces dropped. They looked shocked and sad to see me so frail. We chatted, said goodbye and I looked back at the bridge. The homeless man was gone.

I'd say I don't want to brag, but that's not true, I kind of do want to brag. I finished that final year with first-class honours at an average of 74%, after a year spent working and researching relentlessly, with a rage, with crutches leaning on the armchair next to me.

My dissertation, an analysis of the power and influence of newspapers in British politics, was marked by James and Susana. It received a mark of 80%, 'exceptional'.

blanc

Supermarché

This joke has been haunting me

Gammon buys duck gammon buys chicken gammon buys
beef gammon buys gammon

And I wonder if gammon eats gammon is it cannibalism

Benoit Blanc presently lives in Scotland. He is a writer and journalist, and formerly a national news reporter. His work has appeared in newspapers including **The Times**, **The Guardian**, **The Telegraph**, **The Independent**, and literary zines including **SPAM** and **GUM**. He has an MLitt in Creative Writing from University of Glasgow. When he is not writing, or working at a local supermarket, he enjoys cooking, films, jogging, and watering his plants.

daniel ridley

replies to all staffers

now our grave is contained on
the burner phone at the bottom of the sea,

repetitions lack means.

so rota fortunate
< no limits to experience >

i'm carrying a head
to a club death

with some words from the lost texts

sagging in realtime analytics,
night long
 in negative rooms.

Daniel Ridley is a poet from
Newcastle upon Tyne. His work has
appeared in **Alliterati**, **Cadaverine**
and **SPAM**.

marina notaraki

Dream Journal

content warning: sexual content/dubious consent

After ten hours of folding and refolding child-sized t-shirts, she heard the last tannoy. Soon Sharon - the manager who, for almost a year, thought that Sophia was Polish - would turn off the floor's white lights; and the unapproachable, quietly scary security guard, whose name nobody knew, would stop the escalators. Only half an hour to go. Out of habit Sophia gently pats her right pocket; the single Xanax she always carries with her is still there. The thought of this small disobedience makes her smile. As long as she has her pill, she'll feel safe.

"Come with me". Sophia follows her line-manager Becca, a much younger redhead obsessed with SWATCH watches, V-necks and Dua Lipa. Without talking, they walk down three long sets of stairs, all the way to the basement. Crowded by naked mannequins and rails of cheaply made clothes, they dig into a mesh trolley full of single shoes; they start dividing them into boxes according to their size, trying to pair them up with the stray shoes that were fished out the day before. Becca tries, unsuccessfully, to start a conversation: "This basement is haunted". Sophia has nothing to add, and Becca feels like she can hear her own heart beating. She sighs. "Megan is leaving. You should apply for her position." Sophia laughs aloud, and Becca can't tell if she's being hysterical or ironic. Sophia finally responds: "Don't wait for me".

Exhausted, Sophia leaves the store with her backpack of emergency items - clean socks, KitKat bars, a bunch of her dentist's promotional pens - and meets Mara in the pub across the street. Mara has already had two G&T's, and since it's a quiet Sunday shift she has time between serving beers to talk to Sophia about how her posh boyfriend has hidden her sex toys in his safe, how committed he is to denying her all pleasure in life, how she'd prefer to move back home to a right-wing Athenian suburb. Sophia half-listens as her thoughts drift to her family; they haven't spoken

in nearly four years, not since Sophia drained their trust fund in order to stay with her ex-girlfriend Flavia in Rome. And how they deserved it! They only knew that Sophia was in Scotland because last Christmas, during a moment of weak, drunken nostalgia, she sent them a Duke of Wellington postcard.

Sophia regrets nothing - how would she become a writer if she had no life experience? Waking up with her lover to the sound of their flatmate listening to Patty Pravo on the radio, making cheap coffee in the biggest Moka pot she's ever owned, chasing African parrots around Villa Borghese, speeding in Flavia's moped around San Lorenzo while drunk on homemade limoncello. How would she become a writer if she had no such memories to balance out being harassed as a child, how would she write about love in this "modern, grey" society if she'd had no ugly and nasty relationships to romanticise?

She'd had to leave Italy after Flavia beat her up in public, during a house party. Flavia was on coke and she thought that Sophia was flirting with Antonis, her only Greek friend in Rome. It was not the first time; once, Flavia hit her in the face before jumping out of their bedroom window. Luckily they lived on the first floor, but the melodramatic gesture was enough to shake Sophia, to make her realize that the right thing was always for Sophia to take care of Flavia, to never ever ever make Flavia feel like she had to escape Sophia's presence in such a monstrous way! But no matter how well Sophia looked after Flavia, she always got it wrong.

Sophia downed her second pint as Mara talked on. A shot of whiskey was offered to her by a middle-aged man with a fat moustache who sat at the other end of the bar. Everything around her was foggy: the first notes of an Abba song, Sophia and Mara singing their hearts out to an unofficial karaoke version of "Lay All Your Love On Me", her lips sore all of a sudden, how long has she been kissing this stranger for? Sophia's out of the bar, the man is looking for a cab, Glasgow's street lights could cause a seizure as the cab drives towards the East, the man's hands inside her pants while the lift goes up and Sophia can feel his hard cock above his trousers, and suddenly

notaraki

Sophia lies naked on her back on a brown patterned sofa, the city lies in front of them, she can see the building tops upside down, the man breathing heavily above her, now in a bathroom with black tiles, and Sophia's on her knees, mouth open, listening to a masculine moan of pleasure.

Sophia is back in the lift, it must be around seven in the morning. She gets out of the building and looks around. Three high-rise flats stand next to each other, offering her shade on this unsurprisingly rainy winter morning. She has no idea which way to go, but she has a feeling that sooner or later she will find a train station. She is right. She locates the main street fifteen minutes away, and a big Scotrail sign can be seen from afar. She stops in a 24-hour shop and gets a cup of lukewarm coffee for a pound. Sophia has never been more obsessed with money. Not because she tries to maintain a savings account, but because she hardly makes enough to even start one. It was much more fun when she took her share of the family savings in order to leave them forever, but now she survives on a part-time wage; just enough to pay her rent, pay her bills, pay her train fares, buy groceries. Sophia lives on reduced and sometimes semi-rotten vegetables from her local fruit shop, Lidl deals, and a reduced Waitrose meal as an occasional treat. It's a relief that Mara works at the pub; at least her much-needed alcohol is always cheap.

Sophia pays close attention to the station's details. Tame graffiti by Council-funded street artists covers the station's walls, yet the tracks are crammed with garbage: cans of energy drinks and beer, condom packets, old Metro pages. If not delayed, the next train will be in seven minutes. Sophia wonders how it feels to look at the rails without having intrusive thoughts about falling into the path of speeding trains.

Sophia has an eight-hour overtime shift, which means that she must take an hour of unpaid break. After three hours spent serving long, unsatisfied queues at the customer service desk, full of people trying to return worn multi-packs of underwear, she sits in the shop's staff canteen all alone with headphones on, listening to loud, aggressive hip-hop for no

reason other than to annoy everyone around her. Another hour of her life wasted, another hour where she is forced to stay in this stupid room, which is decorated with quirky plastic flamingos and unconvincingly friendly staff notices - “REMEMBER TO SMILE!”, “VOLUNTEER IN GAMBIA OR SLOVENIA WITH US”, “LOSE WEIGHT WITH DUTY MANAGER LAUREN” - without gaining anything from it, not even free crisps from the vending machine. Only three and a half hours to go.

Sophia has run out of shampoo. She uses the same bar of soap to clean her body and her hair, it doesn't really matter as long as she washes last night away. She doesn't feel ashamed about sleeping around anymore, and she almost enjoys feeling sorry for herself. Once she's clean and dry, she leaves her flat again. She jumps over the fence to her neighbour's house, reaches the door and rings the bell.

Becca smokes her e-cigarette in front of the kitchen window, still wearing her lanyard, while Sophia helps herself to a bowl of Weetabix. Finally, Sophia breaks the silence: “Why don't you make us some tea?” Becca is boiling the kettle when she feels Sophia's hand around her waist. She turns around, they kiss each other and Sophia kneels in front of Becca with tears welling in her eyes. “I am falling for you, Becca, and I don't know why. We have nothing in common, I despise your taste in everything, I am bored and embarrassed when you talk about becoming a store manager. We will never be able to have an intellectual conversation about art or literature. But, Becca, I can't stop thinking about you, you make me feel calm and happy.” After a few moments of silence, Becca gently holds Sophia's chin up, looks into her wet eyes and spits in her face.

Sophia sits on her bed, it's already past midnight. She drinks from a bottle of cheap wine while Anna Melato cries come distorted through Sophia's phone: “*mare maje, scura maje, tu si mmorte e je che facce*”. She thinks of Becca's suggestion to become a supervisor and laughs loudly. She can't wait to spend more time in that cemetery of the young and the unfulfilled, she can't wait to manage a team of angry, depressed sixteen year olds, she can't wait to sit out another unpaid hour in the shop's break-room with

notaraki

Siobhan looking at her disgustedly every time she eats Mara's mom's food sent express-postage from Greece, while Siobhan's boyfriend Colin eats mozzarella sticks dipped into his McFlurry because "it tastes like a donut", she can't wait to hear new comments about her difficult-to-understand accent, insults that are not even worth reporting to HR because "We're Scottish, we know what xenophobia feels like - no-one understands our accents in England."

Tonight Sophia will again dream of being chased by a rolling ball of "Grandpa Loves Me" babygrows. She will dream of getting locked in the basement with Becca, ghosts dancing around them. She will dream that Flavia kisses her with great intimacy. But whatever happens, she will always touch her pocket and her little pill will be there, giving her strength to wake up from her nightmares. And she will open her notebook, briefly write down last night's dreams, smile with fulfillment at the thought that her writing moves forward, get out of the house, experience life, get drunk, lose touch with reality completely, remember none of those new memories she created, take a pill to sleep, wake up, write down more dreams, feel unexplained grief and pain, get ready for a quick four-hour shift, go round to Mara's pub, miss home, fall asleep in a stranger's flat, dream of aisles filled with clothes, wake up, write down some dreams - those where she still is in a factory, processing the remains of dead fish, or those where she cleans teenagers' vomit from hotel rooms, dressed in an extremely tight and small uniform of flammable golden tinsel.

Born in Greece and now resident in Scotland, **Marina Notaraki** (she/her) is a filmmaker and writer. She has contributed to a diverse range of shoots, workshops and residencies including Bellrock, Talents Sarajevo and Scottish Shorts. Through her stories, she is sharing her experience as a working-class queer immigrant, wishing to be part of the on-going conversation around diversity and the representation of marginalised voices.

morag smith

Five Star

May from Kirkcaldy gathers news of stellar lifestyles, world peace and eco-goop, crushes and throws it in the trash of the John and Yoko suite, bends her sphinx gaze to a brimming gilded porcelain bowl, stained sheets, spilled coffee, a one euro coin and

Thank you

scrawled on hotel stationery. She polishes the television, spits on the water jug, then wipes with yesterday's monogrammed towels, which she's used to wash the floor and the hairy sud-scummed bath. She points out her gold plated Employee of the Month badge, *These fuckers don't know shit, it disnae have tae be clean, jist needs tae look that way*, then, with a latex-fingered snap, becomes a multi-limbed goddess, transmuting faecal matter, vomit, menstrual blood to lustrous splatter, detectable only to crime scene investigators. She's the supernova of the seventh floor, invisible to the shuttered eyes of rock stars, oil sheiks, arms fairs, fashion weeks, millionaires, people who can't flush their own toilets, are cosmically oblivious to women who seize their lot with weaponised Marigolds. If you ever find yourself first class, guilt-edged, Amsterdam Hiltone'd, remember you're never more than one metre away from the blink of a million tiny lights, the bioluminescence of May's monstrous regiment - sleep in your clothes with one eye open and rinse your glass before you drink.

Morag Smith's short fiction and poetry have been published in ezines, magazines and anthologies, including **Ink, Sweat and Tears, Pushing Out the Boat** (Apr 2021), **Poetry Ireland Review, Crannog and Gutter**. She is the winner of the **2021 Paisley Book Festival / Janet Coates memorial poetry prize**. She is currently pulling together her first collection, as well as working on a pamphlet about the ecology, nature and human history of the partly abandoned site of Dykebar Hospital near Paisley.

river ellen macaskill

God is that you

In the sorting office, Ghost looks for God again. So far today, all God's given them is a postcard consultation about rent increases from Inverclyde Council, returned by a tenant with

FUCK YOU GREEDY CUNTS

scrawled across it. Their colleague Barbara asks their opinion on it.

'He said what he said.' Ghost takes the postcard from her and places it in the box for PA16. Barb disappears behind the sheet of cardboard erected to prevent the exchange of viral particles.

Ghost glances around for supervisors and checks their phone. A couple of messages from concerned friends: *heard there's an outbreak in the royal mail is that not your work? hope you're alright!* Ignore, ignore. Don't ask me these kinds of questions. Ghost returns to their podcast about Jungian psychology. Middle-aged American academics discuss a dream where a man breaks a screwdriver in his dad's garage. Ghost is riveted.

When they signed into the endless room at 06:58 this morning, bike helmet bouncing off their leg, a grey-haired man in a tabard walked by on his phone.

'Aye, there's been thirty-six cases confirmed on the night shift and fourteen off still waiting on results.'

Despite their best efforts, Ghost can taste tension in the stagnant air. A supervisor appears behind Ghost, pushing a cage of parcels into a storm of other cages of parcels. She says to another grey-haired, tabarded man,

'This guy went off at me, saying I should have told him because his wife's shielding and he wouldn't have come in!' The man says *aye* under his breath. 'And I'm like, well you can run but you can't hide, know what I mean? Why are you working here?'

Ghost is here for a short time, not a good time. After a series of failed employments, they came across a typo-ed advert online: *Christmas Casuals, Mail Centre, Minimum Wage, Full Time or Party Time*. They got the job in a spiral of online forms, identity checks and no interview. Initially the place excited Ghost, formerly starved of any variety of circumstance: the round-the-clock strip lights and dusty machinery and avalanche of letters tumbling daily from their workstation. Now, low-level dissociation is key to passing the time. The post must get delivered.

A poster near the break room catches Ghost's eye on their hourly trip to the toilet to lay their head between their knees.

WE HAVE A PLAN FOR CHANGE THAT'S GOOD FOR EVERYONE.

THE THREAT OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION ONLY HOLDS US BACK.

They've heard stories that the posties working on delivery are ready to strike at the mention of a staff-management meeting. These guys don't stay here forty years for the banter, and the old timers didn't secure good pay and hours by accident. And still we get sick.

They mill back to their letter hole. A supervisor, whose gait expects Ghost to recognise his authority without introduction, takes them by the arm and tells them to move things around a place called the bullring. This job is all moving stuff from one place to another. He talks in nonsense acronyms, gesturing towards a hundred cages of parcels in formation. Ghost goes by the book, one cage at a time, unlike the show-offs with their big arms. No injury risks and no rush. Slowly, the task could tide them over until break time.

Their path to the bullring takes them past Comrade Jim's machine. He has a new indigo scrape on his cheek that they don't ask after.

'The problem with the Communist party after the sixties was,' he says to Ghost, continuing his lecture as if the last twenty-four hours didn't happen, 'That the macho working class white men felt left behind by identity politics. Guys like me see folk getting rights now and they think, where's my special bathroom? But the thing is, no matter who you are - white, black, a transgender, a gay,' Ghost holds eye contact, 'You all want the same

macaskill

things - a house to come home to, decent pay and access to food, safety, and the same things for your children.'

'I agree with you there, Jim,' ventures Ghost, leaning macho-like on the cage. 'And on the other hand, folk who gained something from identity politics now seem too comfortable to shout about the visibility of gay people on the telly, forgetting all the while about material resources and the people dying on the streets.'

Jim says, 'Look around,' and waves a firm hand at the red posters hanging up by the strip lights. 'Black and Asian faces on all the intra-company literature but what about when someone asks for time off to travel home to nurse their sick mother, or complains about harassment? Will they get paid?'

They stand pensive for a second, two sides of one leftist splinter.

'By the way,' Jim adds, 'Watch out for your bike this week. Steve off the night shift had his whole frame nicked the other day. Two locks is best, I reckon. One for each wheel.'

The monstrous machine behind clunks to a halt and beeps red. Jim hops over to the computer controlling it and Ghost wheels a few kilos of non-essential goods to the dullest bullring ever.

To pass the time, Ghost sings a song to God in the hope she's listening. It's all about the delivery, so they throw themselves into *A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall*, repeating lines and making noises where they don't know the lyrics. Suitably apocalyptic. Not that this God is into judgement day, no. This is not the God they've been lied to about by the Kirk or the far-right or any of those racist families who sent their kids to ambiguous summer camps back home. This God is on their side, in the words of Bob. This God is a worm, a piece of shit on the road, a sunset, the shadow of hair on Ghost's upper lip, and you all at the same time. She is sexy and wants the best for everyone.

Ghost, she whispers at night, when they meditate so hard they become a plant respirating on the carpet. *You are a perfect cog in my huge machine. Keep turning.* And other aphorisms. She keeps them stringing along on the farce of linear time. It helps.

At break time, it is too cold to go outside, maybe even below zero. Barbara calls them over to a table with her and another couple of temps.

Ghost pulls a flask of Ovaltine from their bag. They sip while the women chat. It transpires that all their male partners are useless at both domestic work and meeting their families' emotional needs. Ghost listens as this venting escalates into a competitive form of bonding for the group, on a par with dieting and shit-talking the management. Ghost wishes that heterosexual culture could be something you opted into, but instead they always have to opt out.

'Once, Derek shot the telly with a BB gun after I said we couldn't afford a new one, and it went right through the screen. He acted like it was an accident,' says Donna, an agency worker with an amazing laugh and teeth. 'Then a new one he'd already ordered turned up later the same day.'

This gets a chuckle from the group. In the break room where rules are relaxed, Ghost forgets people can see the twist of their mouth as they react with no mask on.

'That's grim!' they say, breaking their gay silence.

'I wouldn't have him any other way,' sighs Donna, with a real smile on her face.

Ghost leaves the room, fuelled by milky lukewarm calories. They look out the window as they return to the body of the warehouse.

Out by the rack lies their bike, wheelless and incapacitated. Fuck!

Their heart sinks into their slow pedestrian feet. In all their years on two wheels, this was their first loss to petty crime over the value of a fiver. Some chancer with bolt cutters is out to ruin their road-risky lifestyle. Those tyres were ancient, Ghost wants to yell. Why not just take it all if you're going to take anything, if you need it that badly. The wheels would appear at the Barras in a couple of months. Ghost would have to buy them back. They let out a sigh like a horse. Break time is over.

They go to the toilet, innards fizzing, and find a woman stuttering by the sinks at the sight of them.

'Oh! Wrong one!' she says, flicking drips at them with eyebrows high.

'Haha, no,' says Ghost and pushes past her into a cubicle. Nothing like this cliché to make you feel passively unwelcome in public space.

Back at their foamy half-eaten swivel chair, Ghost throws the letters with force into the boxes: G1-84 postcodes, Doubtful, Vague, Other. Barbara asks how they're doing.

macaskill

'I'm angry they've not told us about the outbreak. And my bike wheels are gone,' Ghost says, cheeks pinking and hands little earthquakes. 'And some woman told me I was in the wrong bathroom.'

Barbara's face lit up in confusion. 'Just cos you've got short hair? Show her your tits next time!'

'Haha, no,' says Ghost and remembers why they shouldn't talk to straight people. Or anyone except God. They were trying really hard not to come across as too trans. People might start to think they're trans. What about the closet? The promise of its safety, warm and stultifying. The closet is dead, fuck the closet. 'Do you know the postcode for Yoker?'

Time slows. Barbara gets called away by the supervisor to help consolidate some outward mail for the Edinburgh region. Ghost sits on their stool then stands up again. Gets given box after box of 'return to sender' circular mail to sort. Feels their soul cracking alongside the skin of their fingertips from the constant paper contact. Looks around, sees nothing. Forty-five minutes left. How will they get home? They feel like if they try to walk, they'll never make it. The pavements are black ice. They are ideologically opposed to the privatised buses. Ghost's fingers are prone to Raynaud's-like symptoms--turning yellow then white and useless with chill--and they have recently learned this leads to gangrene in rare cases. They can't take that chance.

Through the doom metal leaking from their headphones, a phrase on the tannoy catches their ear: 'Can Ghost please come to the platform immediately. That's Ghost to the platform immediately. Thank you, stay safe.'

The air plummets five degrees when they step through the plastic flaps out to the platform and into a maze of grey crates. Immediately, cold condensation starts to collect on the inside of their mask. The sky, finally visible to them, is a soft pale grey, stroked by high rises and naked trees. They strut down the concrete runway. Red vans sit like ducks in a row in the sprawling car park.

One has its bum pointed towards them, door open and engine on. The tabards are nowhere to be seen except one guy poking about at the front of this van. Peeking in at the boxes of letters stacked inside, Ghost spies some postcodes close to home. The fire curdling in their gut, slowed by boredom

returns in a jab of conviction.

Ghost, leave with the letters. God says, in one of her voices, exactly like the one off of the tannoy. *They will take you where you need.*

Ghost looks around then crawls into the back of the van between the cages full of dripping crates and waits for departure, a red fleece over their head. A feeling of peace falls over them. Vroom vroom. The post must be delivered.

River Ellen MacAskill (b. 1994) is a writer and massage therapist from the north of Scotland based in Glasgow. They co-founded the Writers 4 Utopia queer sci-fi collective; wrote 'A9', a novella in **Hometown Tales: Highlands & Hebrides** (W&N, 2018); and self-published the **Slow Down** per-zine series and the novel **Coasting**. Their new pamphlet **Virility at Home** is available from Death of Workers While Building Skyscrapers. Follow their work on Instagram, @__leomoon.

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