

23

Small

Good

Things

# Preface

*23 Small Good Things* is a collection of flash fiction pieces by students from the 2013 classes of the University of East Anglia's MA in Creative Writing: Prose Fiction and Creative Writing: Poetry courses. The authors were asked to write 300 words or less on the theme 'A Small, Good Thing,' inspired by the Raymond Carver story of the same name. The pieces range wildly in subject matter, from the excavation of a human mouth to an uncomfortable encounter on an early-morning train to a woman whose husband leaves her for a snake-like man.

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I hope you enjoy these stories as much as I have!

- Lauren Rose, MA Prose Fiction student  
Editor and Designer



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# The Story of My Chippy

Kiare Ladner

I like mini dogs specially if they the sausage kind. I had one once. I *did!* My father got it, an it was so cute, it was the cutest little dog in the whole world. It was so small he called it Chipolata. I didn eat no chipolatas after that even if I liked them best before.

One day my father took Chipolata to the vet an she went, 'Your dog got a personality problem.'

She tol him, like it was breaking news, what we'd forever known, i.e., 'Your dog don like other dogs.'

Our dog liked people, yeah, an chasing cats an squirrels an stuff, but when other dogs came near she went stiff as a dead thing. It's cos where we live most people got Staffordshire Terrifiers an they MEAN. But this vet, she jus said, 'Personality problem, end of.'

After that I loved Chipolata all the more cos I understood her a hundred per cent. An that was even before I saw with my own eyes what I had supposed in my own head.

What happened was: we were in the park an this mongrel dog came out from the bushes an Chippy, she went stiff at first but then she didn bark an they sniffed each other, sniff-sniff, sniff-sniff

– I swear they were checkin each other out! –

an each liked what each smelt an I was real sorry to take Chippy home that day cos she was happy as happy can be with no personality problem at all.

I went to the park with Chippy lots more times but me an Chippy never saw the mongrel dog again.

I don know what became of him. What became of Chipolata? Sadly death. Squash – under a dustbin truck.

# School Trip

Matt Zandstra

Henry clutched a precipitation diagram. Cloud, snow, river, sea. Cloud again. His mother hugged him extra tight. She said, 'be good. I love you.'

'Today is special,' said Ms. Gaslick in class. 'When I call your name, come up for your ticket.'

Henry smudged the river mauve. It fed a lake at the foot of a mountain. Somewhere in the city, a thudding began. Like books falling off a shelf. Thump thump thump thump.

'What's that noise, Ms. Gaslick?' asked Micky, who held a blue ticket.

'It's fireworks. The grownups are celebrating too.' The teacher examined her register. 'Henry?'

She handed him a pink ticket. Three other children had pink tickets. Henry knew them from the free lunch line. It couldn't be fireworks. Fireworks don't show up in the daytime. Thump thump thump.

Before school, on the radio, a man said, 'parasites consumed every empire in history.'

In the break queue Micky called Henry a leech. Henry called Micky a dickbrain. Micky tripped Henry so he dropped his workbook and his ticket and his diagram.

Ms. Gaslick retrieved them. 'You kept between the lines,' she said, 'very pretty.'

'I like the way water goes round and round forever,' Henry said.

She smiled oddly. Then she returned his little bundle.

In the playground, most children waved blue tickets. The pink ticket kids were anoraked and mismatched and pasty and overweight. A bus pulled into the yard beyond the chain link fence. It braked with a hissing squeak.

'Pink tickets this way,' called a man at the gate. The engine turned behind him.

'Blue tickets, come to me,' called Ms. Gaslick. 'Henry, where do you think you're going?'

When he looked down, Henry saw his ticket was blue after all.

That afternoon he coloured in the sea and the sun.

# The Eyes Of Her Present

Suzanne Ushie

She is waiting for the simpleton's wife on the runway. So are the two men by her right who no longer bemoan the fierce sun. The women behind her wait too, dressed in matching ankara wrappers, singing one praise song after the other. Her calves burn and tremble, as though she has run a long distance race, dashed far ahead to see her future through the eyes of her present.

When the plane glides up, she doesn't join in the murmur that rises to a glorious cheer. Instead she admires the sleek slant of the wings. One day she will ride in this plane with Senator Obi. She thinks of his overt ideologies, his smoky voice that commands people to listen, and a soothing warmth settles in her lower belly. He *will* be president in 2015.

The simpleton's wife steps out of the plane, beaming. The crowd lurches forward.

She stares at the coral blush on the simpleton's wife's cheeks, at the pristine sheen so expertly applied. There is something depressingly ordinary about the small-boned woman waving messiah-like on the grey steps, embroidered boubou billowing in the humid Abuja wind.

The simpleton's wife voice is shrill. God has given me a second chance to live. I'm happy to be home.

A stylish journalist pouts. Your Excellency, we heard your condition was very serious. Can you tell us –

Enough! a sunglassesed aide cuts in, leading the simpleton's wife to an SUV with tinted windows.

Later in the penthouse suite, she and Senator Obi read the NTA news strap:

**POMP AND PAGEANTRY AS FIRST LADY RETURNS.**

# Real Is What Is

Jo Surzyn

The day had a colour palette reminiscent of a film you said was the most beautiful film ever shot. The sky was over-blown, the clouds aureate, the landscape rolling past like a flick book of cross-processed photographs. We sucked gumballs without checking to see what colours they'd become.

You likened motorways to mass migrations; everybody driving in the same direction, for the time being, the same destination. The northbound carriageway felt further removed than the steel crash barrier of the central reservation.

We created stories for the passengers of the cars around us. They were artists, thieves, lovers driving to the sea, a lorry with a human cargo. We were overtaken by a door-to-door salesman with a boot full of stationary. The car in front of us was a scientist in possession of a discovery that would change the course of history.

We pulled out to overtake him moments before his tyre blew. The car fishtailed, wheels separated from road as sure as oil will separate from water. Time became as confused as it becomes in moving pictures.

The day was overrun with shades of yellow; the car, the flames, the dead summer grass, the ambulance, the light, two gum-balls abandoned on the hard shoulder.

# The Attention Span Detectives

Julianne Pachico

YOU SEEK—WE FIND. That's what it says on the faded yellow flyer, pinned to the bulletin board in the feminist coffee shop.

I meet them in their office downtown. They both wear grey suit jackets with blue jeans and speak accented English. Arturo is the one with black-framed glasses, while Roberto spends the whole meeting with an Etch a Sketch in his lap, shaking and re-shaking it but never turning the little knobs.

'We can help you,' Arturo says, when I finally stop talking and take a deep shaky breath. 'But you're going to have to do exactly what we say.'

'Mind you,' Roberto says, giving the Etch a Sketch another shake, 'some people don't always like what we find.'

I give them my passport to photocopy and they hand me the rest of the paperwork.

I follow their instructions for weeks. I do the breathing exercises and hand-sweeping motions above my head to cleanse what their paperwork calls my Universal Energy Connection. I add kale to my smoothies. I pack up the rest of his stuff, even the snowboarding gear in the garage, and drive it in boxes to Goodwill.

Every Friday their packages arrive for me like clockwork. I find myself nodding along as I read their field reports, flip through their photographs.

And then one afternoon instead of an envelope, they send me a box. I leave my computer humming on the couch besides me as I tear it open. The air fills with the smell of formaldehyde. There it is, floating in the jar, smooth and almond-shaped. It's not at all what I expected based on their descriptions but I'm not upset: it's small, but perfect. It's like I can already feel it on the tip of my tongue, lolling around in my mouth behind my teeth, when I start to unscrew the lid.

# Cars and Children

Krishan Coupland

There are cars and there  
are children.

They play together in  
the road.

The children climb on  
the shiny bodies of the  
cars, leap from roof to  
roof, tap at windows  
with the backs of their  
heads, nuzzle bumpers,  
crawl beneath wheels  
to hide.

The children are filthy,  
streaked with oil.

The children are soft,  
warm, breathing crea-  
tures in school uni-  
forms and tiny parkas.

The cars are red metal,  
exhaling smog, glass  
speckled cold with  
condense.

# The Fifth Day

Jennifer Grey

The first day we woke to the fishman ringing on his bell, playing mourning songs for the landlocked. He stood on the swell nearest his fishboat. *There'll be no catch today*, he said.

Behind him, a curl of spray had caught a seagull by the leg. It croaked and crawked until the youngest of us stepped toward it: walked on water just to crack its neck between his palms. He couldn't chip it free although he tried, the rosy slush scattering as it tried to break free. Before long we all joined him, pacing in and out from shore as though trying to improvise a tide. *It won't come in no more*, the fishman said.

He cried when he thought we couldn't see him, stooping to inspect the fish lodged in the salty ground, frozen plunging for the sky. *We are cut off*, he told them.

We didn't think to shudder til the next night, then the next, waiting for the thaw that never came. The newsman counted thousand boats or more marooned, the same as ours, on all the coasts.

The fishman hanged himself the fourth day. We placed him in his boat beneath the netting, holding the last catch he brought home. Then we turned for harbour, our backs facing the sea.

# Tilly

Elizabeth Briggs

I took Tilly to the museum coffee shop, and we waited in the queue while I ordered her a glass of lemonade and a cup of chips. Ahead of us a baby strapped into a carrier stared past its father's shoulder at me. It stared at my eyes, down at my torso, sideways at Tilly in the buggy, then back up at my eyes. Then it looked away distressed, its fingers pressing at its father's sweater like a pawing cat as he patted it reassuringly. After I had paid for the food I sat Tilly down at the nearest table, and she knelt up on the chair in her dirty shoes like I always told her not to, while the room murmured around us.

She sucked away at her drink, and I tried to offer her the chips as well, but she shooed me away sulkily with her hands, preoccupied. I slouched back in my chair and put the chips down sadly on the table, wanting Tilly's approval. I could smell her lemonade, and wished I could have some of it as well. Later I took her to the sculpture garden, holding a hand out to her in the cold as she turned away from me.

And I was sad, because the wheels on the empty buggy were all scraped, and Tilly thought I was boring, and none of the sculptures were in straight lines anyway. In the end I dropped my museum guide on the grass and the father with the baby in the carrier picked it up and tried to give it back to me, smiling.

# Dentistry

Paul Cooper

'But why on the back molar?' I asked him, and shone my torch out into the chasm. 'Why couldn't we arrive closer? The canine – even the premolars –'

He cut me off – he was always doing that. The professor is a complicated man.

'I told you to listen,' he said. 'When I explained up above?'

He put his hand on his head. You know when some older guys lose half their hair, it all turns white, but their eyebrows are still jet black? The professor had that real bad. He looked sad for a moment, straightened his mask.

'I'm sorry. It still takes me time to recover. It seems younger cells suffer the vibrations more smoothly. You don't feel nauseous?'

I let my torchlight wander up the walls, casting a pattern like the cross section of a tree, all shades of pink so you could imagine the whole thing was carved from rose quartz or something. A great cavernous palace.

'I feel a bit nauseous,' I said. My lips were dry at least. The professor turned his back to me and looked out over the teeth.

'Like a mountain range,' he said. 'Ever thought you'd see that?'

'Not once.'

We made to set camp, on one of the molar's five pinnacles.

'The moisture will pool in the middle,' the professor said, and hammered in the first peg with deft movements. The enamel cracking was somewhere between marzipan and glass – little spider webs of cracks around each one. Large patches behind us were yellow like the veins in marble, some crevices the same colour and consistency as brown sugar. We made quick work on the easy terrain, and zipped up the tent before six o' clock that evening. He scolded me later, when we were wiping the condensation from our suits.

'You know our clocks don't work here,' he said, with that voice he gets. 'They don't make sense.'

But I never liked to think about those things when I was down there. People who've never been don't understand.

# Seeding

Sean Colletti

I begin by looking up television shows online. There are thousands, which I can organize both by year and popularity amongst viewers. For starters, I download the ten most popular shows from the last three years. Every episode. They show up in the queue, the first five listed as 'Downloading,' the others greyed out in waiting. I can alter my preferences to allow for more simultaneous downloads at a slower rate. I have all day.

While the percentages rise, I research instances of litigation carried out against illegal downloading. There are several articles about cases in the United States in which defendants have been charged with hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines. I try to calculate the episode to dollar ratio to see at what point it would be 'worth it.' Most defendants are uploaders. I am a downloader, which makes me safe.

More searching shows that uploading occurs simultaneous to downloading, and I begin to fidget. I check the queue, where the first three episodes are 'Seeding,' which means not only have they been uploading this whole time, but they've finished their downloading. They've become counter-productive. Enemies.

I remove them from the list. But episodes begin seeding a dozen per second. I try to shut down, but the program overrides the request. I throw the computer out the window into the snow. The front door breaks open. Three officers from the TV Police rush in and pin me to the floor. They set up a chair in front of the living room television, which hasn't been turned on in years. They strap me in, superglue my eyelids open and put in a DVD with the worst episode of TV ever made. The DVD is on repeat. The DVD is on repeat. The DVD is on repeat.

# Games

Lauren Rose

As children we would play games, board games, video games, make-believe games. You almost always beat me, except at the card games. I was better at those.

You were the oldest on the block, and we all loved you, but you loved me the most.

Here was a game we only played a few times, your invention. Bored, lounge-lazy summer afternoons. I would lie flat in the middle of the street, on the raised yellow rectangles, at the top of the hill where the road bends and drivers go so fast, they fly. Bits of gravel digging into my back, the smell of dog shit, of tar and tires. You would sit on the curb, watching me, sucking on a fruit lollipop that turned your mouth into a purple bruise.

If I heard a car I would leap laughing to the sidewalk, collapse on the curb, roll into the bushes. I was a sprightly girl of six. You were conniving and nine. You said you just wanted to test how brave I was.

One time the nosy neighbour who lived in the house between our houses saw us there, and pulled me back by the neck of my lime Jump Rope for Heart t-shirt. She called your parents, and my parents, and we had a little street conference right there on the sidewalk that ended in tears and a smack from your dad. We didn't play the game after that.

When we got older we played different games, like Truth or Dare and Nervous, in your parents' garage. You touched under my shirt and said again you wanted to see how brave I was.

Later, I beat you at hearts every day for a summer and won all your allowance, but there were no neighbour interventions, no smacks. I spent all the money on a PlayStation, but I never let you play.

# Life as a Bag of Plink Popcorn

Alita Balbi

The more I think about it, the more I believe in the wisdom of what my brother once told me.

It was Sunday, and we were in the car, coming back from my grandmother's house, as we did every week, and he offered me some popcorn.

I took some, even though I didn't like it that much. I just couldn't refuse. I put them in my mouth and felt their bitter taste take over my mouth.

My face was contorting in disgust when my brother turned to me and said he had realized something potentially meaningful.

According to him, he had a brief moment of clarity, in which life appeared to him as a bag of Plink popcorn.

'Isn't it true that you eat all the rubbery and tasteless crap because you know in the middle you'll eventually get some really sugary ones?'

I remained silent, and when he offered me more popcorn, I gently refused it.

# Forgive Me Father, For I Have Sinned

Dave Whelan

Father Muldoon was so dead proud of being Irish that one day he actually dropped down dead.

Allow me to explain.

By fifteen, all the girls were stroking his long raven hair and calling him lover. More interested in Markus and Ralph than Susie and Sinead, he decided to shave his head.

By the time he was thirty, he'd domed out like the Sahara and lost a fair bit on the stock market too – a fight with an English rugby player on St. Patrick's Day down Temple Bar left him unable to shit without squatting on the lid.

This led to a series of unfortunate meetings with cleaners in various bathrooms across Ireland. He briefly considered moving to India.

On his thirty-third birthday he joined the Church and was promptly sent to preside over a boarding school south of Cork.

He rose swiftly to Choral Master and became famous for his devotion and evening promenades with students.

It was around this time that he began trying to commit suicide.

He made a list of all his failed attempts, a selection of which I make available to you now (forgive my reading voice, I strained it over an aria in *L'Orfeo*):

1. 1998. Hanging. Rope snapped. Eat less Mars Bars.
2. 1999. Drowning. Saved by fleet of porpoise. Momentarily uplifted by the generosity of nature.
3. 2002. Head in microwave. Developed headache, took aspirin and went to bed. (How does Father Murphy crop his beard with such precision? Well, Father?)
4. 2005. Poison. Carted to A&E. Told to drink less whiskey.
5. 2005. Whiskey. See above.

Eventually, I shot him in the head because he touched me when I was a kid. The way I see it, Father, I was doing him a favour. But what does Holy Jesus think?

# Bye Bye Baby

Colette Sensier

My baby's left me. I was winning and loving it: I'd backed him into a corner between Park Lane and Mayfair, my pink-note pile bulging. He tucked three hotels into his blanky, pulled up his Pull-Ups and wobbled away. My baby can't stand losing.

My baby's left me. We were watching Star Wars, scrunched up together in her cot, when I looked down at a trail of jelly worms leading over to the window. My baby doesn't like being woken up too early.

My baby's left me. I turned to ask what she wanted from the bar and she was gone. I couldn't find her under the strobe lights; I moonwalked around the room but no-one had seen her. My baby hates it when I sing along.

My baby's left me. It takes two to tango as they say, and two to start a fight. It started when I took my eye off the clock and burnt the formula, and ended with him belting a rusk at my head on his way out. My baby needs to learn to control his temper.

My baby's left me - which was quite a shock as she was driving. We were roaring along with the top down, and then, suddenly, in mid-air. The car ignited at the bottom of the cliff. Pieces of shiny red metal and petrol fumes floated over the dunes.

Luckily I hadn't bothered to fasten my seat-belt, so I could claw my way out, sucking my thumb, and call the emergency services. But they couldn't find any trace of my baby, dead or alive.

My baby's left me, but I haven't given up. I stand over the stove stirring his dinner, purée carrots and pears, stroking my belly. I arrange roses beside the playpen, waiting for him to come back.

# Let Down

Lisa Owens

Karen applied for a job at Hogan's, hoping to find love in the ashes of grief.

At the interview she handed over her clean licence, keeping quiet about the fact she hadn't been behind the wheel since she passed her test in 1994, and had only ever driven a lime green Nissan Micra.

The driving wasn't a problem. In the beginning, other cars gave the hearse a wide berth and in the end, six months later, Karen was made redundant. More and more people were opting for cremations, unable to pay for a plot of land, a fancy coffin, and a tombstone engraved with tributes for their loved ones (Darling Wife, Loving Mother, Cherished Grandma).

Karen didn't mind too much, and took a job at the bookies soon after. She had imagined working at Hogan's would be blackly comic, but found it to be sad and often boring. She remained alone, taking comfort in the knowledge that she would never need to settle for scattering dust, instead of building her love the magnificent, everlasting monument she knew it would have deserved, but which she could not afford.

# Mister White Snake

Sharlene Teo

My husband left me for a man who looked like a snake.

Instead of calling my mother, I dialled The New Paper and pressed 7 for the Acquisitions department. A girl picked up. She seemed unhappy to listen. The way her voice curled told me she had a sour soul and a forehead full of pimples.

‘What’s your story?’ she asked.

I told her.

‘Your husband left you for a snake?’

‘No, a man who looks like a snake.’

‘We can’t buy that,’ she said. ‘Sorry.’

The line went dead.

I held the phone until it started beeping at me.

I switched it off and thought of the mister. Tall figure diminishing down the street, one hand hurrying the back of my husband beside him. He had joined my husband's insurance company at the beginning of the year, shadowed him during induction period. Karl was twelve years younger and ten degrees better looking than me, if one need even quantify it, if one could mark such things on a page.

He had two tiny eyes, a negligible nose, jaw-wide mouth. All of that embedded in an oval skull slicked back with hair gel. I told you, he looked like a snake. I had no further evidence to extend my suspicions, and even so, I was already forgetting his face.

Don't you remember?

I asked my husband in my head.

That afternoon when it was raining, and you were making your way home, and you found a small, brown turtle in a puddle. How you cupped her in your hands and studied her shy flat face.

I was so sleepy and confused. Don't worry, you had said. We'll figure it out together; we have years and years.

# Somewhere Deep in the Hippocampus...

Neil Gregory

A man in a pith helmet stops and wipes his forehead. He reaches into his pocket for his compass, but instead he pulls out a coin. The coin is embossed on one side with a shiny red tricycle and smells like candyfloss. The man frowns, but doesn't look at the back of the coin; he just shifts the disc over to his other hand and reaches into his pocket again. Again he draws a coin. This one is inscribed with fine curving ridges like silvery fingerprints. They seem to clench as the man squeezes the coin into his other hand beside the one with the tricycle on it. He reaches into his pocket again. Yet again, when he opens his hand, he finds a coin, velvet-textured, with stripes of black and yellow. It stings the man's thumb as he drops it next to the other the coins. He reaches for his pocket again. Again a coin; again, no compass.

The man goes on like this for some time, pulling coins from his pocket like a magician pulling handkerchiefs from his sleeve. Faster and faster he draws them, one hand becoming a blur of speed, the other a blur of coins. Each coin is different: some are etched with places, some ring like voices of friends. He doesn't look at the backs, just keeps flipping them into his other hand before delving for the compass again. The mass of chinking metals grows and grows in his palm until at last he can't keep hold of it. First one-by-one, then cascading, the coins slip from his hand and land face down to form a mosaic at his feet. The man shakes his head. Of course, the mosaic depicts a compass; of course, there are two Norths.

# Home

Michelle Tan

When Lea thinks about home, she remembers *pan de sal*—soft, warm bread, the salt melting on her tongue. Every morning her brother would go to the *panadero* on the corner and come back with a paper bag full of them. Her mother would be in the kitchen, fixing coffee and two warm glasses of milk. Lea would descend the stairs, rubbing dreams from her eyelids, and the first thing she would smell would be the *pan de sal*—her brother depositing the bag on the table and brushing past her to get a few more minutes of sleep.

He would bump her shoulder, and she would inhale the fresh, inviting smell of bread clinging to his *sando*. In the years to come, she will remember this as the scent of mornings, of childhood, of innocence. These days she does not bother with dreams in the mornings. She hears the alarm and jumps out of bed, her feet already guiding her towards the bathroom. She brushes her teeth in quick, practiced strokes. By the time she comes downstairs for breakfast she will have already showered and dressed, her hair blow-dried and tied back in a tight ponytail. The table is set for one.

# Down the Line

Rachel Mendel

I was on the 7.04 from Ely to Peterborough, staring into my faint reflection from the comfy window seat, trying to ignore the self-important busyness of the few suited passengers scattered around me. You got on at Cambridge and sat down hard opposite-right of me, a coffee-breathed wisp of pinstriped cuffs and polished accessories: aisle seat. You committed the cardinal morning sin of looking at my face – it felt as offensive on my skin as the cold shower I’d had earlier.

Worse, you wanted me to notice you. A leather Filofax was pulled from your breast pocket, the clip-on steel pen detached with a flourish, the lined pages noisily leafed through. I tracked your movements through the window. A shiny iPhone emerged from under the table and was unlocked and coughed and sighed over. Your clutter blossomed over the table towards me, and you came with it, until our right wrists were almost touching across the table-top.

Every micro-flex of every individual muscle of your body seemed to be imploring me to look at you.

The snoring businessman opposite me tucked his chin in under his scarf and resettled without opening his eyes. I directed my head at the six inches of neutral territory available, and let my peripheral vision loose on your face. I gathered your features – munge-blonde, worn, restless. Three words dawdled across your neck, just where your collar met the skin, clean, black, and incongruous. I couldn't stop myself from trying to decipher the curlicues – but the stark ink edges were still rimmed with fresh red. I could almost feel the hot jitter of the tattooist's gun tainting the soft cells, compressing emotion into flesh into memory. You leaned towards me, your morning breath sour-smelly on my cheek. Can I take a photograph? You said. You look like someone I once loved who died.

# Teresa

Matthew McGuinness

Most of the Edwardian mansions on Shirley Road had been split into bedsits long ago, but Teresa's place was still one big house. The high-ceilinged room where we sat was hot—stuffed with pot plants and photos.

We prayed the usual words together and then I placed the white circular wafer on her tongue. Tongues don't age. In spite of her ninety-seven years Teresa's tongue was as pink and healthy as a teenage girl's. After a decent silence she opened her eyes and smiled.

Did she remember much about the Budapest of her youth? I asked. She smiled vaguely.

She was worried about her television. A council leaflet had arrived and it said she needed a new thing. I promised to find her a digital box and she seemed content. The conversation rolled on.

Then suddenly she was back in Hungary. She told the story of a male relative who, at eighteen, had been sent on a trip to Italy as a reward for good exam results. He was taken sick though, and strangers removed him from the train, delirious. The young man was able to phone his father and mother from the hospital, but couldn't say where he was.

Eventually his location was tracked down by the telephone operator. An uncle got to him. He was alive but fading. When his father arrived the young man was dead.

That's very sad, I said. Would she be eating dinner later? Yes. Her young cousin would be coming at eleven as per normal. He cooked dinner for her every night after work. Of course she would have preferred to be in bed by that time, but she had to stay up for his sake. After all he was a bachelor. He'd have nobody when she finally went.

# Stones

Sara Taylor

You used to stand at the edge of the graveyard with the rust of the gate crusting your palms, staring at the sunken places in the shaded moss, the listing headstones and cracked marble foot markers. Your first babysitter, not the first one you had but the first one you were old enough to remember, took you there to play leapfrog after school, would challenge you to find someone that lived to be one hundred, or had the strangest name. When you were old enough to go alone you were in a gothic phase, or a tragic phase, wore your grandmother's heavy black skirts and read poetry while sitting graveside with your feet tucked neatly beneath you, conscious of the picture that you made.

When you were older still you briefly considered coming in the night with a shovel or a pickaxe, because dead people are buried with rings and necklaces and they don't need them when they're nothing but bones that no one remembers and you needed the money. You took crayon rubbings instead, kept a book of them, found other ways to pay for beer and school. Now when you come back you lay out duckling-covered quilts and let your daughter pull herself up with her fingers digging into some unknown's stone epitaph.

# Flight

Nic Bouskill

We got back from Greece, raised the blinds and the lawn erupted with mole hills. Under the red sunset it was dwarfishly primeval and I wanted to laugh but you muttered, 'He's going to be sorry.' I did the unpacking, loaded the machine, while you cradled the laptop, elgooG in your glasses.

Monday evening you came home with Moletox and latex gloves. I poached eggs while you seeded the earth with anti-life; but at midnight while you snored, I crept into the garden with a torch, collecting with tweezers the poison you'd scattered.

Tuesday morning revealed a new hill. You called a man before you left who came and gave a Norfolk chuckle and set his traps. You approved when you got home: 'That'll do the trick.' But I sprang them with a stick in the small hours, the full moon witnessing my treachery.

Wednesday morning, a fresh mound. I smiled a yawn over decaf, watching you scratch your head. While you were at work I wandered through the volcanic landscape like Gulliver in Lilliput, holding my back, rubbing my fecund belly, searching for signs of life.

'Petrol,' you said that evening. I wept in the kitchen. Grinning, you described gouts of flame dotting the lawn like camp fires on the prairie.

Thursday morning. A new hill.

'For fuck's sake,' you said, slamming the back door. You dragged the gas canister from the barbecue, taped the garden hose to it, thrust it down a tunnel, turned the valve. 'Two minutes should do it,' you yelled. The garden smelt like sperm. You were late for work.

Friday morning, I repacked my bag. You were naked, shaving. I met your eyes in the mirror.

'She's not yours,' I said, then flew downstairs, out to the taxi and away.

# My Brother's Story

Thomas Morris

Along time ago there was a girl calld Susan. She lived in Bornmouth. Susan liked sihenc One day her brother got in the army layter he died. Susan had to carry on with life nomal. Two years later her mum had a baby called Andrew. They moved to Plymouth then the mum whos name is Angela and is a nurse and her dad was a bank maneger. After a while Mike whos the dad had a hart atak. Angela did her stuf and he was ok. After that he had a nuth one. This time he died.

Two years later Angela met a nuther man called Jack. Jack was thirty five. Susan didn't like Jack but after a while she likd him. After seven months Angela got married to Jack but they didn't have much money. Jack robbed a train and twenty three million pound he got from the train. When Susan had a sihence lessen Susan blew up the school and she have to pay ~~thirty~~ twenty three million pound then Jack got a buzucka two hundrud and shot the headmaster. When he went home he stabbed Andrew the baby. After Jack went to prisene for life after the train got they money back. Then Angela met a man calld Jhon. Jhon was nice. When Susan was thirty seven she new never two get married. She was a aunt and she was very happy.

I have typed this up for a reason. It's a story my little brother wrote a few weeks back. He's seven. He didn't write it in school, it wasn't for homework; he just wrote it one evening, with a pencil. He came into the living room and handed it to me.

'Read this,' he said. 'It's called *Susan Goes Through Hell*.'