

SCRIVENS –

the Occasional Magazine of
Tyne and Esk Writers



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THE DARWIN AWARDS – A GARLAND CINQUAIN

By Martin White

Darwin
Is an award
For folks who lost their minds
Before they lost their lives as well;
Death Wish.

Python
Reminds the world
Snakes can strangle quickly,
Think before you drive with a snake;
Death Wish.

Three big Bull Elephants
Will trample you to death
If others can all outrun you;
Death Wish.

Wrong length
Bungee jumper
Forgot elastics stretch,
Too late, should really think ahead;
Death Wish.

Snapchat
Selfie killer
Jumped over the railing,
Board not solid so fell four floors;
Death Wish.

Darwin
Reminds the world
Will trample you to death,
Too late, should really think ahead;
Death Wish.

A FAIR IN SIGHT

By Robert Blyth

I stood alone, atop a cliff, above a shutdown fair,
Where I spied a carousel, but its stallions were not there!

I supposed they were being painted, or perhaps in winter store:
Yet out at sea, white horses reared, and galloped to the shore.

Then like a pair of curtains parting, letting in a ray,
All I saw, closed, in the fair, seemed open in the bay . . .

A sign read "House of Mirrors" – a padlock on the door:
But I could see reflections, in the rock pools on the shore . . .

A Ferris Wheel stood motionless, its summer work adjourning.
Yet in the bay, perceptible, the tide was slowly turning . . .

Fast food stalls, were boarded up, through stormy winter days,
But on the strandline, on the beach, birds swooped
– for takeaways . . .

Then I saw a roller coaster, nothing rode its wavy line:
Yet out at sea, a speedboat surged, upon the heaving brine . . .

A helter-skelter, stood forlorn, unused, dark and dripping,
But standing proud, just up the coast, a lighthouse shone
for shipping.

But insight does not hang around, nor can it be transposed.
The ray was going, and like the fair, the parted curtains closed.

A HAPPY ENDING

By Isla Aitken

Sarah was a bride-to-be,
Awash with carefree thoughts was she,
Dressed in white,
Prepared for flight,
Into blessed matrimony.

Around her neck her maids strung pearls,
What a giggling group of girls,
Champagne was brought,
Just as it ought,
A veil was laid upon her curls.

Sarah's tender Dad appeared,
Proud of this beauty he had reared,
Into a Bentley,
He pushed her gently,
And off to church the bride's car veered.

But what was this at the church door?
Was something wrong with her amour?
"There is no groom!"
Aunt Mabel boomed
And Sarah sank down to the floor.

Sarah was in disbelief,
Her dad passed her a handkerchief,
Where was her John?
Could he have gone?
Would he cause her so much grief?

Running up, red-faced, was Stan,
John's brother and of course best man,
"John's run away
With Cousin Faye,
You know, the one with the fake tan."

Sarah's eyes were full of tears,
This was the worst of all her fears,
She screamed at Stan,
Sobbed on her Gran,
Who had to wipe snot off her ears.

"You're better off without that chappy,"
Her maids said, "He is worse than crappy,"
Make-up repaired,
Sarah declared,
"Without that cheat I will be happy."

CHESS FOR THE UNENLIGHTENED

By Jeff Kemp

The Queen's freedom
is restricted by my timidity.

She's too precious to risk
adventurous raids.

Opposing pawns precociously
approach her domain
but I shuffle her aside

feebly as a regal wave
against the tsunami of opposing
expertise which rips through

my horse-faced knights
and double-minded clergy.

Long live the impotent king,
God save the powerful Queen.

With wise guidance,
she'd successfully attack

but under my unskilled hand,
she's quickly dispatched.

THE BREXIT DANCE OF MAY

By Kenny Gilchrist

Talks about talks about talks,
Brexit slipping, Brexit going
nowhere fast, deadlines extended,
goodwill extended, back stop
debated, Brexit down a rabbit
hole, Brexit a colonial retreat,
Brexit a vassal state and simpler
times just around the corner.
Brexit a diplomatic dance around
Europe, robotic dancing on to
the stage just makes me rage
with this incompetent regime.
Brexit was "taking back control !"
Brexit's become a global farce !

THE ENCOUNTER

Musselburgh Writers were given the first two paragraphs and, without consulting each other, continued the story. This was the final version.

A face bronzed by weather. Stubble on chin. Matted hair. Battered hands with grime adornment. Sitting in doorway. Large dog sleeps. Cardboard message; 'hungry - please help.'. A tattered hat. A few coins. The air smells of unwashed body. Scuffed shoes. Unkempt clothes. His tomorrow was yesterday. Grim future. I drop in some coins. The face is familiar. Is it me?

How could I get here? Another coin is added. Muttered thanks. A £1 coin. The price of a can of white cider. Life. He has none. Wedded to drink. Any drink.

I am prosperous and successful. My downfall? No. This must be a twin. Yet the likeness... Walk on. Deep in thought. Return tomorrow.

Addiction. Drink not always the answer. Special Forces Adrenaline rush. Can't talk about it. Official Secrets Act. Too long in illegal wars. Buttering-up dictators.

The tale of how he got here. Not pretty. Many people walk past. Judgemental noses in the air. Assume it is his own fault. Self inflicted. Partly true. Nobody forces him to drink. But it mellows him. Numbs the pain. Loved his job. And his colleagues. He had respectability. Dignity. Then it was gone. Redundancy. Smacked us all in the face. No longer in touch.

Too much of a problem. Some tried to help. Put their opinions across. Didn't want to listen. Too far down the road. Start again? Do things differently?

Return a few days later. Same man. Bronzed face. Matted hair. Same doorway. Large dog. NO! Where is the dog? A shared passion. Some other dossier? Tugging at heartstrings? NO! Not the story. Look again, Face streaked with tears. A collar. A lead. No dog. My quizzical eyebrow.

A shake of his head. Tears flow faster. Gloved hand. Snot-smearred face. Broken soul. I drop down. Side-by-side. Unwashed hair on the shoulder of my pristine jacket. Body heaving. Shoulders shaking, Minutes pass. Perhaps an hour. A pat on the back. I take my leave.

PLOT LOST

By Jeff Kemp

Shoot the messenger,
splinter the message,
sitting by a cracked window
noticed while commuting,

glancing out to a
sharply divided world.

What to do with shattering news
but trust in clichés to get you through.

So I read in a book
left by chance on the seat beside me,
the cover invited
a second look then

a perfunctory scan
and that was this

vague narrative wandering
from some semblance
of beginning toward
a finalé I missed.

Left the book where I found it,
title forgotten,

it was a complicated day.
I was rattled as a bus over cobbles.

Can't judge a destination
from the ride is all I say.

HUMAN CONDUCT AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A DOG

By Arthur Greenan

Why do human beings laugh at the feckless photos you have taken of us muddy dogs that won't come when called. You guffaw at us Golden Retrievers completely covered in a black gloom, at haughty hissing cats and at all other quadrupeds who do what you think is the unexpected?

Not one human spotted that I, a dog, grieved for three months when my Labrador mum, Lucy, passed to the *Great Kennel in the Sky*. The humans' relationship with animals is complex. They have found a way into their lover's heads but not ours.

What of the small black and white terrier which lay for three freezing night in a forest, in North Carolina, with a three years old boy, Casey Hathaway. You humans exalted us as protective then as you did with Greyfriar's Bobby and Warhorse. Yet, you giggle at our every misfortune.

Can we animals really be as dopey as the lady in Wales who crashed her car when she spotted a bear lying at the road side? It was a statue, dismantled by the Council, awaiting their uplift van.

You peely-wally yuppies are demanding now mixed-breed pups from 140 different pure-breed quadrupeds. Examples of only these eight crosses are:-

A Pomsky is a Pomeranian X Husky.

A Puggle is a Pug X Beagle.

A Yorianian is a Pomeranian X Yorkie.

A Bullpug is a Pug X English Bulldog.

A Malador is an Alaskan Malamute X Labrador.

A Bullmation is a Bulldog X Dalmatian

A Border Beagle is a Border Collie X Beagle.

A Golden Cocker Retriever is a Golden Retriever X Cocker Spaniel.

Even our Polar and Grizzly bears are moving further north from Alaska and Canada. You humans are causing the climate to overheat and Polar bears need ice. You are cursed at our scratching posts yet again. Worse still, both breeds of bears are now cross breeding. (Soon both breeds will be lost as we saw with the creation of the so called Irish Sports Horse). These bears are now known as Pizzly's.

For us, this is too much to bear!

Why do you adult humans chop-off the tails of Jack Russell and Cocker Spaniel pups? Their tails lend balance. Why remove them. Lurchers keep them! With lambs you constrict their tails and testicles till they rot and drop off.

Why? To make them fat quicker! With young bulls, not wanted for breeding, you disconnect their testicles which are reabsorbed into their body. With farm horses you chop of their dock to give them a nice rounded bum. Their tails cannot swish. They are bitten and blistered by armies of blood-sucking midges. They rub their manes till hair disappears and wounds of torment suppurate. Yet you support egotistical style over logic. That is cruelty without purpose.

Why do you sit back and allow your children to get fat quicker, like lambs? Do you foresee the day that there will be a market for children as there is today for lambs, suckling calves and chickens. Or will you train your youngsters to keep fit as effectively as we dogs do?

It is no comfort to us animals that you rob 2,300 human females, for life, of orgasms through genital mutilation. You also fail to accept that if the 53,000 convicted rapists were castrated, a further 48,000 rapes would not recur. Why did the Roman Catholic Church castrate choir boys till 1903 rather than their clergy?

Similarly, you have interfered with Clydesdale and Shire horse genes. One had dexterity the other had power. Their offspring are now six feet tall (to the withers), weak boned and often visually unattractive. You folk have crossed the Irish Draft horse that with the Irish Sports horse, to meet your yuppie demands. It has lost two pure gene pools to Ireland. The crossing of bears, horses and dogs will continue. The human race will be denied having pure bred specimen animals. With friends like you do we animals really need enemies?

Humans removed cartoons from cereal packets to guarantee that your wee, fat, children will become wee, slim, children. Our plump cubs get thin in the spring. Not so with your children or teenagers. Children are not obese because of cereals. They are fat because of poverty, poor food, overworked parents, unemployed parents, drugs, alcohol and austerity. We dogs do not feed fat to our pups. McDonald's claim that to read literature whilst eating fattening, fast-food is good yet cartoons on sugary breakfast cereals are bad?

Why must you control freaks interfere with cats too. You feed them raw venison. Pedigree cats, badgers foxes and deer are now being infected with Bovine TB by dairy cows. Thanks to humans!

But, what do we animals know? We do not have the same intellectual dexterity as humans. We are just dogs

whose sense of detection is forty times greater than yours and our stallions can detect when a partner is in season within a distance of fifteen miles. Can humans?

Staff at Clark's Shoes now teach children to speak. W H Smith staff now advise parents on how to support their children's language. We animals teach our own siblings!

When told by three years old, Casey, who explained that when he and his little terrier were lost in the forest they encountered a friendly bear.

'Can't be true, bears don't do that' claimed an expert from the University of Montana.

We are grateful to the dynamic humans who redress cruelty to us by passing laws against breeding pit-bull dogs for mortal combat, greyhounds for hare coursing and foxhounds that rip the guts out of a live fox.

We animals will help you. We will civilise you. We will keep your children fit by chasing them around. We will encourage their speech in all countries. We will teach parents and their children foraging skills which will be extremely useful Post-Brexit.

It will be a long time until you Human Brits will be out of the woods.

Just bear that in mind!

Finally, as a dog who has oft heard the recitation, by humans, of Robert Burns' poem 'To a Louse' in 1786 I agree:-

*O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:*

The End

THE THINGS YOU DO FOR LOVE

By Hannah Faoilean

'It will be worth it when you see the view.'

'Hmm' was my mumbled, sceptical reply.

Crampons, I decided, are thus named because they cling to your cramming feet – feet that are screaming at you to give up, but you can't because to give up is to fall or, at least, be left dangling, embarrassed, on the end of your boyfriend's rope.

Up ahead, what looked like steps in the mountainside, comfortable hand-and-footholds, on closer inspection, turned out to be razor-sharp daggers, abrasive to even the lightest touch.

Every nobble of rough, craggy rock dug into my piano-playing fingertips. 'It had better be worth it,' I muttered.

'Aagh!' The solid ridge I'd reached for cracked then crumbled. What had looked like unyielding rock revealed itself to be nothing more than coarse, rusty coloured sand.

Why did I have to pick a mountain-man? I should have chosen Jeremy – a man of grounded wealth and wisdom whose peak of activity involved walking to the concert hall. Not Ray – all flowing hair and confident strides – a man who could scale a mountain like a spider on acid. But as soft and flowing as his hair was his kindness, and that's why I loved him. Enough to hurt my fingers climbing a mountain for him.

A needle-shaped crag punctured my glove. 'This had better be worth it,' I hissed as I fought the reflex to let go. I wasn't going to fall. I could do this. I'd show him I could.

At last, my fingers touched the top. Vertical became horizontal. Ray grabbed the harness around my waist and crotch and pulled me onto grass. GRASS! Soft, luxurious grass. Smooth against my aching fingers. A gentle, sweet-smelling, green ripple blowing towards me as if ready to hug me. And a breeze. Kissing my face. Loosening my hair.

I stayed on my hands and knees and enjoyed my ability to breathe again until Ray touched my elbow and helped me to my feet.

It WAS worth it. On the other side of the cliff, far below us, was a deep-blue lake and, in the middle of the lake, an island and, in the middle of the island, the remains of a castle, its stone walls leaning and curving where the ground had fallen and risen with the passage of time.

Some of the curved wall that remained had been shaped into a question-mark. I wondered what question an old castle might ask. Another set of walls surrounded a now abandoned courtyard – a once cultivated garden released to grow wild. Roses perhaps. Splashes of pinks, creams, yellows and deep-velvet reds: a magnificence of colour against the ark-green, encroaching forest and the dark-blue, surrounding lake that kept the island to itself, far away from the mainland shore, its hidden castle a secret that would only whisper to a mountain-top – the mountain-top where Ray and I now stood side by side, our breaths synchronised in shared wonderment.

Ray's fingers slipped between mine. 'I wanted you to see it,' he said, 'because that's where I want to marry you.'

THE LISTENER

By Lorna Dixon

The girl in the red beret is listening to something buried deep inside. She does not hear the voices swirling around her like leaves in the wind. She sits on the wooden bench and stares at the smooth surface of the lake. She does not see the people passing to and fro on the path between her and the water. The gentle weather has brought people out to walk their dogs, let their children off the leash, enjoy the golden days before winter bleaches sunlight. I am warm in my long coat and the scarf wrapped around my neck and chin is turning damp from my breath. I need not worry that she will recognise me. How could she? In her abstraction she is undisturbed by the two young women who settle themselves on the bench beside her. Their chatter does not reach her and soon they are staring at their phones. They sink back on the bench mimicking her silent vigil.

The watcher is here again. I know it is her, in spite of her attempt to hide in a long coat and scarf. She is standing so still, so purposeful. I wish she would pull out a pair of binoculars and pretend she is watching the coots as they glide across the lake. If she did that I could approach her, ask her why she is watching me. Instead I sit here, waiting for her to make the first move. Why do I continue to come here? I should be afraid, but I am fascinated by this game we are playing. There is something familiar about her, something I should know, but I cannot decide what it is.

Does she know I am watching her? Does she feel the silken thread that binds us together? I am afraid that if she notices me, I will break this fragile link. She does not come every day. I know she has another life away from here, a job, a family, friends, things to do that fill her days, but something must draw her here. Is it a memory, an echo of the way the beech tree rustles above the bench, the way the dappled water ripples, the quacking of the ducks that waddle up the grassy bank asking for crusts? Does she hear a whisper of the past, the past before her consciousness was dimmed by life? I must not break this spell, this magic between us. Each time I come I know there is more danger. I must not do this.

The watcher is not here today. I am disappointed, sad. No, I am angry. Why has she done this now that I have made up my mind to speak to her? I have worked it out, the fascination, the undertow. It is like looking into a line of mirrors each reflecting the other. From across the lake I could not see her face clearly but I know the shape of

her, the way she stands, the way she moves. When she moved I remembered the beech tree creaking above our heads as it swayed in the wind. I heard the harsh voices of water birds rustling and splashing in the water. I heard the chattering of children as they passed the bench. I know that once I was part of her. Now she has gone. I am again bereft.

THE PORTRAIT

By Isla Aitken

Your face.
That tiny smile,
With lips that glisten from
The canvas above the fireplace;
A light.

A light
Which shows the way,
Glowing through the darkness
Of a world without your being.
We see.

We see
What love can mean,
The power that it holds,
The comfort it can bring to all
In death.

In death
You are still here,
A painting on the wall,
A warmth inside our beating hearts;
You live.

You live,
Through memories
And that sketched reminder –
Which is proof that you existed –
Your still.

Your face,
Which shows the way,
The power that it holds,
A warmth inside our beating hearts;
You're still.

THE MILLS DRIVEN BY THE RIVER TYNE

By Arthur Greenan



From the misty Moorfoot mountains,
to the heights of Drylaw hill
the dewdrops slowly gather
into a rolling trill,
with trickling sons and daughters,
from left and right they come,
fluming in together
they head for *Tynningame*.

She flows towards *Pencaitland*,
where *Glen Kinchie* draws its dram,
silent onto *Nisbet*, sair poached by Ted and Tam;
with two mills passed and ten to come,
she gathers strength and run
Preston Mill, East Linton, East Lothian;
in the glade of *Winton castle*,
she hails the *Donort burn*.

She meanders into *Haddington*,
powering *Abbey and Millfield*,
cascades the weir tae *Stevenson*,
tae beild at *Sandy's mill*;
the wintry plains of *Amisfield*
give all to nature's drain;
in the drouthy months o' summer
they suck it back again

At *Hailes*, she saw *Queen Mary*
seduce her lover braw;
she wept for rakish *Darnley*,
sword through him, in the snaw.
She's wrocht nine birlin' water wheels
as she snakes along her bed,
In sight is noo the *Houston mill*
but she is far from dead.

She gurgles ower the shallow stanes
afore auld *Linton brig*,
in deep pool she assembles,
then pours forth a' her micht;
she batters o'er the scarred *Linn rocks*
wi' treachery and sound,
her swirling hidden vortex
where pair *Dagleish wis drowned*.

She roars across the *dookit field*,
where auld *Wull* kept his doos,
gouging at the willows,
where *Myra* grazed her coos.
Ah! *Preston mill*, then yin mair drive,
the burns cling to her breast,
she's *Tynemouth* bound to freedom,
Belhaven is her rest!

(Note:- this River Tyne rises in Peeblesshire, flows through Mid Lothian then East Lothian and into the North Sea)

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

By Jock Stein

If I were a pheasant, I would live in *Fife*,
spend my days in a field of wheat,
never ask the farmer why the cereal
is mixed with beans, or why the *Lomond Hills*
shut off the sight of *Westminster*.

Questioning life's mysteries is not for pheasants,
farmers, or for folk like me on holiday
from such extreme professional indulgence.
It's enough to pop one's head above the crop,
take in the view, leave *Brexit* to the birds.