

THE EDGE



Northumbria University's
Creative Writing Magazine

Index

Phil Wall - Canvas

Jenny Hunter - Champagne

Rebecca Kime - Embers

Rebecca Kime - Summertime Sadness

Jane Burn - Old Lady Jumpers

Nathan Hope - Nightmares

Nathan Hope - Conversation

M. B Johnson - The First Thing You Remember

M. B Johnson - Ode to America

Emma Hill - Human Race

Emma Hill - King Admir's Quest

Daniel Bowman - Believe in Better

Canvas

Phill Wall

Give me the hands of fading clock faces
As I take my time in changing places
Let me go back to the landscape I was born within
Where acrylics and oils are spread across thin
As I stare deeper into memory I notice the shapes
Crude outlines of fields, stiles and gates
Obscured reflections in murky puddle water
Dark images on the horizon being placed into order
These people are not shadows, they are silhouettes
Consisting of vacant black forms, I was attempting to forget
Boulders of beige and marks of moss
Litter the acres of land across
A steel red giant devouring the land
Regurgitating it back into whatever was planned
The lakes I once rowed across I traverse by foot
A tree felled in the centre, the roots pierced and cut
These thoughts and feelings once destined to expand
Are now so small I cradle them in hand
I step back into the present, although I wish I could not
Extending my fingers to the branches, deep into rot
A texture so real it comes off with my nail
Those images of the country, so faded and frail.

Champagne

Jenny Hunter

I

Yellow champagne
In shallow glasses, sparkling.
The smell of fresh rain on warm stone,
yellow champagne.
The feel of pages long since turned brown
light in my hand.
Yellow champagne,
In shallow glasses, sparkling.

All the great minds
have existed here, breathing.
Saxophones swinging on street corners,
all the great minds.
Nudes, Gods and monsters of old
stare at me from their frames.
All the great minds
have existed here, breathing.

Cafes and bars,
liquorice cigarettes, holding.
A worn record player wheezes out its song,
cafes and bars.
Talking, musing, agreeing,
Tete-a-tete about everything and nothing.
Cafes and bars,
liquorice cigarettes, holding.

II

The white wash ruins spread about
interspersed with reaching peaks
bronze and marble stand throughout

Of ancient days they all do speak
of ageless love and olden time,
people long since made antique

As dusk descends the church bells chime
a gentle glow lies all around
and fountains shimmer, each sublime

It tells a story so profound
That empires crumble every day
Deities are all earthbound

III

The blazing leaves glide
nestle on the gnarled stone steps
stretch towards the sun

Shocks of violet lean
lazily near the green and
blue crisp water

Sharp and soft, flowing
yet constant against the
purity of white

Beige and bare in its
beauty, hard as lightening,
soft as candlelight

Copper and frost blend
together as lovers do
in perfect silence

Powder pink hanging
from the bridge, curious to
see its own self there

Embers

Rebecca Kime

Safely cloaked in haze and warmth, a bright orange spark
Its heart blazing through coal-black ribs; illuminating the dark.

Despite its dusty encasing you can see the heart for miles.
Miles is the distance I watch the abandoned flickering smiles.

Once you towered over me, but now you lie encrusted in dust,
Collapsed into large, industrial, rubbly chunks smelling of rust.

But in your sorry state of disrepair your little heart shines on
And despite you are fallen; in a glorious glow you have shone.

Your blazing beauty poignantly permeates your smoky surface;
You are burning in a bright orange aura; fulfilling your purpose.

Resting by the hearth, your crackling once again sends me into a lull
Slow soothing serendipity discovered within the coal-black dull.

Summertime Sadness

Rebecca Kime

When Lana sang summertime sadness;
I finally knew what she meant.
I sang the words in a muffled whisper
With the tears in my eyes and
Artificial smells clinging to my nostrils.
Thinking on a patch of dead grass
Sat in a Le Penseur pose, the dry wind
Breezes softly through my hair
And its sensuous calling reminds me of
You. That bronze key indents
Upon my face- not that I feel it anymore
You kissed me harder before
You left- I wonder if you realised I was
Numb; unable to feel locked lips.
I am sat here encapsulated in this haze,
Ever haunted by your presence;
Wishing it was like when we first met.
Before things got so damn hard
Before the running away, booze, pills;
Before those daily breakdowns.
You were never my distraction. Just you.
Others soothed me through pain
But you, you ignored me and you left me
Longing. Longing, wishing, waiting.
Waiting. And to this very day I am alone
I am posed upon a bronze pedestal
The tears now making their tracks upon
My pale silent face. Softly singing
Her haunted melody to the wistless wind.

Old Lady Jumpers

Jane Burn

Elderly neighbour
Shuffles by, on the arm of her daughter.
Lovely day, she says.
Can't complain, I reply – I could of course,
But I don't because
This simple platitude crinkles up her
Beatific smile.
Husband died last year; nice man –thick glasses.
Always said hello,
Arms folded on garden gate, tea in hand.
She goes on. Despite
Severed branch, her desiccated leaves still
Photosynthesise.
She squints at trace of blue still visible
Beneath the layered,
Slow moving, dirty grey dish-water clouds.
It's just cold enough
For her fluffy mohair lilac jumper.
Drawers and bags filled with
Endless pastel hand-knits – knit one, purl one;
Contented clicking
In front of Countryfile, drop scones in oven.
No-one will want one -
Too old fashioned to be retro, or ironic.

Nightmares

Nathan Hope

I am speechless
that strange something
at night time
is here again.
I'm a child

not born right
so
I run and
(with knees missing)
fall and yell

and curl up
groaning all night
like I always
end up doing.
That strange something
is here again
all snide and
snarling at me
smacking my mind
on the arse.

Conversation

Nathan Hope

And I feel like I have some obligation, a human obligation to say something as simple as "no, I disagree with you completely", or simpler: "come on mate, that's out of order". I could tell him it makes me think less of him, but that won't matter, because I don't say anything anyway. I start to worry that by doing nothing, the real problem is me.

"I'm not racist but...this county has gone to the dogs because..." I watch myself float out of the window as I say nothing or pretend to agree, smile with just my mouth & laugh awkwardly. Look at the floor, then at my feet. I feel a prod at my temple that pulsates because I've lost.

If anyone wins then it must be him, but not me, because I've just shrunk.

The First Thing You Remember

M. B Johnson

It's funny how the first thing you remember stays in your head for years afterwards. America is a big country, so big that if you traveled from Eureka, CA to Boston on the I-80 East it would take you forty-nine hours and fifty minutes of straight driving, without stopping for sleep or food. You would travel through twelve states and meet a lot of people. That's only if you stopped for food and gas and sleep though. And people. You would start in California and then pass Nevada, then Utah, then Wyoming, then Nebraska, then Iowa, then Illinois, then Indiana, then Ohio, then Pennsylvania, then New York and then you would finally be in Massachusetts and I imagine you would be so glad to not be driving anymore. I've been to two of those states and I liked one and the other one was only alright, I think it was because of the big hurricane that came through. Apparently my Dad drove so fast he outran the hurricane and I always thought that seemed silly but also like something he could do because if you've never seen my father behind the wheel of a truck you would think it was impossible. But it's not, at least that's what he says.

I ask Dad if he's ever been to Eureka, Ca and he says he hasn't. Dad has been everywhere.

"Been to Los Angeles though bud, plenty of times. Don't you remember when I took to that big famous diner out there, the one with the motorcycles on the wall and the burgers?"

"In LA?" I asked.

"No, in California numbnuts."

I did remember the diner, but I didn't remember the motorcycles or the hamburgers. I remembered the time I went with him and his friend's from the garage to a Hooter's, and the waitress who was beautiful but who I didn't understand because I was nine. She kissed my cheek and my face got really hot and I got embarrassed and my cheeks scrunched up so tight I thought they were going to explode and it felt like I had blown up a balloon in my mouth which was silly because you blow up balloons with your mouth. When I was a kid I had fat cheeks and they did that, they don't really anymore except when I'm happy. My father and his friends all laughed, easily though, so I knew I that they were happy and having a good time. I prized the times when my father and his friends would speak together and I would sit under the counter or in the chair at the garage and listen to them. I'm not sure if they knew I was listening or cared really, but I got to hear them speak which was enough for me because Dad was always on the road so I didn't get to hear him that much. My mom and sister's voices were so high pitched and I lacked the deep rumble of a man's voice. They would talk about their business and the races and I would understand only half of what was said. When the waitress kissed me I can't remember if I was embarrassed or not but I do remember touching my fingers to where the lipstick had been and hoping it would rub off before Mom saw it.

My dad sits in the cab of his truck and I'm sitting there as well. He sits in the driver's seat and I see him shifting gears with the gearshift. It rises from the floor of the cab and rises to meet his hand and looks a little like a scepter. He could be a king on a throne with a scepter. He is wearing jeans and a tee-shirt and a flannel shirt, which he wears over the tee-shirt because it's morning and the dew is still on the grass and the fog is still on the windows. He hasn't shaved since the last truck stop we were at which, has been so far back I can't remember.

"Hey Dad?"

"Yeah bud?"

"When are we going to be in Mississippi?"

"Got about another 50 miles or so, got to cross over the bridge and then we'll be there."

"Okay." I said.

We were coming from Texas which seemed to be where we were always coming from when we went there from home. We had been to Los Angeles but not for so many years I couldn't remember if there had been a diner with motorcycles on the wall and good hamburgers but Dad said there had been. If Dad said it, it didn't mean it was necessarily was true or that it was what me and my sister needed to hear, it was just what he was telling us. I haven't been to a Hooter's since he and his friends took me and I wonder if they would still kiss me on the cheek even though I was nine and now I am twenty. We were coming from Houston which was much more fun than Dallas because in Houston we went to watch the movies and Dad didn't even watch it because he went to sleep halfway through. We got pizza but no ice cream afterwards and I was okay with

that because I had gotten pizza and a movie in the same day. That means if I had been in school still, I would have to have won something or done well in a fundraiser but I hadn't, not ever. I did sell Coca-Cola products once and I made 300 dollars but I didn't see any of that money except when I went on a field trip and it was overnight and we took a big coach bus.

I have so many memories of the road with Dad and so many not with Dad, I can never keep them straight in my head. I say,

“Hey Dad, remember when we went to the Grand Canyon?”

“What are you talking about, we've never been to the Grand Canyon. Go get a beer from the fridge.”

He's right, we've never been to the Grand Canyon, It's in Nevada or Utah, I can't remember, but if you wanted to go from Eureka, CA to Boston you would travel through both those states, and I know it would mean taking a detour which is even worse than stopping, but you could go see it if you wanted to. I like to think the first thing I remember happened in Eureka, even though I've never been. I also like to think we outran that hurricane when we were in Boston but I asked Dad and he says we were coming down from Pittsburgh which means we didn't.

“Hey Dad, did you have a good trip?”

“Of course I did bud.”

Ode to America

M. B Johnson

“Ode to America, or How I'll Be HOME For Christmas Ma, Please Stop Crying, Yes I Love You Too and Tell Susie I'll Miss Her”

H is for two lovers hugging over a big damn ocean, and missing each other even though John's been seeing Susie behind Laura's back for going on two years now Christ haven't you heard?

O is for a big damn world

M is for those two big damn golden arches Christ can't I get a break, I'll have two quarter pounders and a side of fries and a shake WHADD'YA mean you don't know what that is Jesus Travolta lied because I don't see royale with cheese anywhere on the menu

E is mc^2 and I don't think Father John would want me to know that but hey it's a free country even though I'm still looking for the street signs

Human Race

Emma Hill

Grey smoke Burns orange
sneezing rubble along an avenue, or two.
Shop windows spray shrapnel
over bits of blown bodies-
broken ragdolls suspended in choking air.
And there is laughter. Someplace. Somewhere.

King Admir's Quest

Emma Hill

Arman had no idea where they were heading. One minute he and his brothers were relieved from combat training, the next they were being dashed down spiralling staircases and into an unfamiliar, moss-lined corridor which closed around them on all sides. Before he had time to stop for breath two platinum doors sprung open.

'My sons,' King Admir flooded towards the Princes, squeezing their shoulders before they edged into the large, elliptical hall. A sea of Lords and Knights blinked back at them. The platinum doors clunked shut. 'Please, sit,' he commanded and, with the flourish of an arm, indicated three oak thrones. They obeyed, though Arman shuffled against the uneven wood which was engraved with slithering serpents, majestic, jet-black alpanthers, gangly alacas, jewelled wobo beetles and reptilian snafflordials. A blood-red cloak chased Admir's heels over black marble. 'Many thanks for assembling in such neat, neat time.'

'T-that's all v-very well,' interrupted Lord Calabarata, his droopy, spectacled eyes blinking at the king, 'b-but what is the cause?'

Admir's black, blazing eyes bored into him. 'Well, as is custom before any half-century birthday, I, King Admir,' he took a deep breath, 'announce Yemstice.' The monarch looked on, anticipating the flurry of gasps. Arman glanced at his brothers. Were they were as baffled as him? Dumbstruck, more like. Eaman's pallid face glowed in the dim light whilst Oman's glare stalked his father. Arman's eyes shot back to Admir whose hands conducted silence. 'Indeed,' he continued. 'Three days from now, I shall be fifty and, as is Yem's tradition, the King must give up his throne to the next in line.'

'E-ever so s-sorry, Sire,' stuttered Calabarata, 'B-but your sons are triplets.' Admir rolled his eyes.

'The first to return with a nugget of popolo from Bolechia shall be crowned king.'

Calabarata frowned. 'B-but ,Sire men go-'

'Tsk, tsk, tsk,' Admir unfolded his arms, slipped a sword from his belt and lunged forward. The blade slit the air and snarled its way into Calabarata's heart. The Lord fell to his knees, eyes wide, and, exhaling one sharp breath, he splatted face down onto the polished floor. Arman had felt the intake of breath and seemed unable to exhale. He rose from his chair. The word 'stop!' was still tingling on the tip of his tongue. His father roared with laughter and kicked the newly manufactured corpse. The young Prince shook his head bitterly, his eyes welling with disgust and disappointment.

'Princes, if you do not accept the quest, speak now.'

There was a rumbling beyond the platinum doors. They flew open and a guard stomped forward. He grabbed Calabarata's feet and dragged him out of the room like a sack of potatoes, snaking blood over the gleaming floor. Nerves, anger and hatred writhed in the pit of Arman's stomach. What choice did he have? Stay to be executed or accept the perilous quest and end up dead anyway. He dared not look at his brothers.

'Excellent,' Admir cried after a lengthy silence. 'You shall leave promptly tomorrow.' He raised a palm, signalling for the doors to be opened. Servants surged into the room, carrying vast tables already set with slabs of Tripper Granite Pudding, Quotta Quocha pie and Raspoo and Blatterberry Crunch. His insides knotting, Arman retracted his gaze from the food and found himself staring at his father. How could he? he seethed.

And Calabarata, his lifelong friend.

'Whisperings ballooned around the room after the Yemstice Feast was announced. Yodipaga?' A servant nudged Arman. He refused politely, trying not to grimace at the yellow jelly. The room spun circles of lords; some sharing jokes at Calabarata's expense, others grumbling amongst themselves.

Oman bustled past them. 'Out of the way,' he mumbled, running his green eyes over a litter of solid gold goblets. From the moment he was born, the midwife had insisted he had a black heart. 'He hasn't cried once yet for his mother, yer majesty. Not once. Bad 'un there, yer majesty. Bad 'un to the core,' she'd said. But deaf ears had warded off the words.

'Those, the silver candlesticks, and the crystal chandeliers, they could all be mine,' he wittered, rubbing his hands together. He turned away from a bronze Neptune to peer at his brothers; Arman moping over an empty plate and Eaman piling slices of apple corn in neat, little towers. 'Fools,' he mumbled, 'they'd make better jesters than Princes.'

'Have you seen our neighbours recently?' Eaman nudged Arman. 'I could snatch all their kingdoms and still make it home for supper,' he chortled, struggling to tear an alaca leg from its body. Arman raised his eyebrows. He surveyed his snivelling-ghost-of-a-brother. There was no doubt Eaman had a good heart. When they were younger, it was he who smuggled bars of Hollogroggle from the kitchen to share with his brothers. But it was also he who shot at rabbits and deer and birds to prove his worth to his father. Nine times out of ten the creatures outsmarted him but that wasn't important. 'I wanted to be brave and bold and courageous like father,' he had said to Arman. 'Not a weakling like you.'

Arman smirked at his brother as the alaca leg finally broke away from the carcass. How on earth will he cut down the enemy if he can't even cut his own food? 'Of course,' he mocked. 'Home for supper.'

Over the far side of the room, a bottle bled its last drops of Kea into the king's goblet. 'The Parlettas were right,' Admir droned to himself, scrutinizing the scene.

'Sire?'

King Admir started fiercely and whirled around, swiping a silver tray from his servant's arms; Blatterbombs, large, sapphire berries, and Raspoos, a cubed, bloodshot fruit, lashed against the walls and shivered down a tapestry, before tumbling at their feet.

'Murl!' Admir boomed. The King's hand shot through the air and crashed into Murl's face, cracking the arête of his nose. Tears clustered in the seams of his eyes as blood trickled onto his top lip. Silence ploughed through the room. Wooden legs ground along marble and Arman found a hand clasped on his sleeve. He glanced up and Eaman pointed. A scruffy, grey creature lolloped about the table legs, snatching up spilled treats.

'Eavesdrop again,' sneered Admir, 'and you'll be for the gallows.' Murl bowed his head, dabbing his nose with the hem of his tattered, blackened sleeve. Arman gazed over his shoulder at the scene then crept forth to save his hapless hound from certain death.

'Jan,' Arman whispered, enticing him over with a warm slice of apple corn from Eaman's plate. The wolf-hound bounded towards him and snuffled the goods from his hand. Hearing the King's yells echo around the room, Arman knew he would be too distracted to notice and, rising gently, he beckoned his companion out of harm's way.

*

'Arman, it's time,' croaked Murl. Brilliant light burst over the sleeping Prince. He rolled onto his side. Through the slits of his eyelids, Arman watched Jan scratch at a draught creeping under the door. 'Arman?'

'My boots,' he mumbled, shielding his face. Murl dashed to the wardrobe. Shaking his head at the mud encrusted soles, he let them clunk against the floor boards. There was no time to polish them now but if only he had known sooner, the prince would have been able to see his face in that leather. Arman sat up and started. A bell boomed through the stone walls.

'What's that?'

'Fifteen minutes left,' Murl reported. Shuffling his feet against sheepskin inners, Arman hurriedly plaited one lace over the other. Jan blundered forwards.

'Not now, boy,' Arman patted his head. 'Murl'll look after you until I get back.' Murl's eyes flitted from the door to the window. The floorboards creaked under his step. 'I've got to be King,' Arman declared to Murl's bruised eyes. 'Or die trying.'

'That's what I fear,' Murl sighed. 'I shall be just as happy if you make the journey, let alone-'

'If?' Arman got to his feet and clattered around the room, throwing a change of clothes into a leather slouch. Murl pressed his lips together. A quiver of crimson alaca feathers rattled onto the bed. Arman's eyes fixed on him. 'There is word, that is all,' smiled the servant, 'about a clause.' Arman lingered beyond the translucent net over his window. He stared out into the courtyard. Villagers swamped the grounds to bask in the rising heat haze, their children running through seas of dresses and tree-trunk legs. 'Go on,' Arman urged.

'If the king has no children, and therefore no heirs-' The door burst open. Admir spied Murl. 'It's time.' 'But there's still fift-'

'We're delaying for you,' cried the King. 'Now hurry up. Murl?' Arman's heart plunged, throwing blood into his ear drums. Jan's tail swished around the door after his servant. He squinted through the net. Follo, Admir's sprightly jester, pulled a cord and the bell sounded for a second time. 'He wants to kill me?' Arman whispered, throwing the leather slouch over his head.

Follo's muffled voice called ten minutes in the cobbled courtyard and rays swam over the cheering crowd as Admir, emblazoned in purple, took to the castle steps. 'On the third toll,' he announced, 'the princes' quest to Bolechia begins.' He opened his arms, beckoning Oman and Eaman, both adorned in black and silver, to clamber onto their horses. Murl's eyes wandered to the Prince's window as he clutched Snora's reins.

Arman threw the quiver over his free shoulder and ran out of his chamber, bow in hand. He stamped down one spiral staircase after the other, skidded into the hallway and clattered down the grey, castle steps.

'I'm here,' he breathed, throwing his feet into the stirrups. He patted Snora's maroon nose. Admir's boots crunched to his side. He saluted his jester. The bell beamed in the sunshine, swinging left and right. Gong! Gong! Gong! 'Farewell,' cried the King, his voice lowering to meet Arman's ear. 'Just not too well, ay?'

Arman peered at his father. Hooves rattled through pockets of rising dust. As the whistling crowd closed around them, Snora reared and jerked. The prince twisted the leather reins in his hand and kicked the horse's side. The creature brayed and galloped forward, chasing the fading brothers who pounded on, their horses' tails lashing to and fro. 'Go! Go!' an old man shrieked. 'I bet my house on you!'

As the castle's red flag waved them away, a smile edged onto Arman's face. Happy that Oman and Eaman were racing ahead, he wound Snora round to a halt. 'This way,' he muttered, ushering the horse down a sandy path. They crept along the trail, past a quiet, thatched hut with sloping sides. Sealing the print of his boot in a patch of sludgy mud, Arman permitted a wave to lap against his feet.

'Aha!' A caw shot through the air. Arman snapped his attention on a thickly wrinkled face. The fellow removed his flat cap, smirking toothlessly. 'Gotcha,' he laughed, taking Snora's reins. 'How do I look?' He twirled in black and silver.

'Hud, I-'

'Don't have time. I know. There's yer boat. I'll ride Snora out to the woods as planned.' He tapped the side of his nose. 'If on'y yer brothers were as clever, ay?' Arman sank down into the rickety structure and adjusted the slouch so he could take up the oars with ease. Thick blades shoed waves either side. He looked up. 'Thanks,' he replied, but only the hut heard him.

By the time he had reached the centre of Lake Trillotan, the sunken sky was shrouded in orange mist and Millgonia's trees were strands of liquorice on the horizon. Submerged in shadow, Arman scanned Boulder Bridge. The water rolled against the boat, swaying this way and that as his aching arms turned the oars lethargically. He gazed back at his reflection.

The water was rosy pink but instantly began to swell. The black clouds threw hail at the little vessel and a flash of yellow ballooned above the prince. Still, the water seemed to have a tinge of rose and, as he lowered his head to look more closely, iridescent scales punctured the lake and thrashed Arman's head. The Prince sank back and the world slipped into darkness.

*

The sun, a white disc, peeped over the lake's edge and impelled Arman's eyelids open. Neigh. The Prince glanced about him. A stretch of grey shingle lay beneath him and the boat was a bull tethered to the nearest tree. Neigh. Br. Br.

'Snora,' he whined, shielding his face. 'Snora?' He squinted at the black horse and sat up. His eyes blurring the sky and the woods, he stumbled to his feet. Blue smoke coiled from the scorched twigs and the horse stamped the dried embankment. Throwing his head back, Arman gazed at Bolechia.

'Oman.'

*

Crashing through stark Jaundice-barks, Arman's feet stamped powdery silt until the ground became rock-strewn and uneven. He leapt and stumbled his way over the mountain's trail, a pebbled path trickling under his feet. He sprinted onwards and made the first spiral around the monstrous, jutting peak. Gravel crunched under his boots and his lungs tore air.

'Load one carted to go,' bellowed a crisp, papery voice.

'What was that?' He paused to listen, throwing his eyes about him. Nothing. Nothing, except his drumming chest and occasional birdsong. Suddenly, the sound rang out louder and the floor fell away.

A din of voices hummed as daylight's splayed fingers ran over his cheeks. 'Who's there?' croaked a voice. It yelled for the door to be closed. Darkness enveloped them and flames shot onto the walls. 'Well, we are blessed,' jeered a wrinkled, grimy face. 'Two royal visits in one day.'

'Hud?' Arman whispered, rubbing his forehead.

'Zilo. Hud's brother.' The miner held out a hand, the nails lined with earth. With that toothless, sunken face and poor hygiene all topped off neatly with a flat cap, he was exactly like Hud. Perhaps just a year or two younger. Arman sat up and peered at the cave's roof, adjusting the quiver of arrows on his back.

'And mine? My brother?' Arman asked. A lantern swung light over the far wall, revealing a small, darkly-clothed figure hunched in the corner. Mumbblings fell from its lips. Long fingers clawed and raked through nuggets of popolo. Its eyes flashed emerald. 'Oman?'

The shadowy figure snarled and Arman dashed forward only to find himself being swung around unexpectedly. 'Stop struggling,' cried Zilo, setting him down. 'He's not himself. Not anymore. You must've heard about these places?' Arman shook his head, hands clutching the bow.

'Bolechia,' Zilo began, casting his eyes around the cavity, 'delves into your soul and brings out your strongest quality. Stay long enough and you descend into madness.' He grinned. Arman frowned and stood with his mouth agape. 'His is greed,' Zilo explained, reading the prince's confusion.

'B-but you-' Arman stuttered.

'Are wise. The very reason your father made me head miner.' He paced the floor with his head held high. 'And, as for everyone else, he makes sure they are...suitable, shall we say.' Arman stared wistfully at his brother.

'I tried telling 'im alright,' he assured, 'but he's just one in a long line. Popolo. He's gone mad for the stuff.' At that, Zilo's face brightened and he rummaged in his pockets. 'As requested,' he grinned, holding a pearl bead speckled with sapphire between his finger and thumb. He puffed out his chest. 'Hud said yer'd be needin' it.'

As his palm enclosed around the nugget, Arman was thrown from his feet. He cried out as the quiver dug into his back and a sharp pain shot into his hand. He grappled for his fist back but Oman wouldn't let go. The crazed Prince howled, stabbing his fingernails and teeth into Arman's flesh, anything to prise the treasure from its chest. In one swift move, the brute was torn away. 'Go,' Zilo cried. 'Now! Take the tunnel.'

Arman's eyes welled but he couldn't look back. Not now. His heavy boots trundled into the tunnel and, no sooner had the pitch black consumed him when he trod on something soft and squidgy. A rat squeaked along the wall.

'Arman,' Zilo's voice rang out and he cast a quick glance back. His heart reverberated as Oman's serpent eyes chased after him. He ran for what seemed like an age over the jagged path. It sent him this way and that, forking like lightning at the last instance. Finally, his eyes fell upon a strip of light up ahead. This must be it. Oman's feet echoed over his shoulder. Arman shot to the cave's intestinal wall and his brother, oblivious of all else but Popolo, crashed head first into a dead end.

Oman's skull crunched open.

Light burst over Arman and Hud dragged him upwards into the boathouse, his other hand clutching a floorboard. 'Oman!' Hud set the Prince of his feet. 'I'm Sorry. There's nothin' to be done about him now. You need to get back. You have to win.' Arman's numb face nodded and he set off running from the hut. His feet splashed sand and slammed onto cobbles. Children screeched after him, under the grey archway, swirling bunting as they went. Arman located the snoozing jester and shook him awake. 'Follo?'

'Huh? What? Oh, it's you. It's you!' He leapt up. An almighty chime bled out across the courtyard. The Prince stepped back.

'Where's Follo?' he quizzed.

'Sssh,' the jester hushed him and pranced around. 'We have a winner!'

Behind a stained glass window, the King's fingers curled into a tight fist. He pushed the windowsill away and stamped to the top of the steps.

ren't you going to take your throne?' he boomed. The villagers began swamping him, some throwing their children around with glee, others rattling betting slips and indulging in delightful jigs. A band played; flutes and drums gushed into the courtyard.

'Of course,' Arman sneered at his father. He strolled up the stone steps and Murl stepped forth, clutching a glass case. 'Eaman?' Arman whispered to Murl. The servant shook his head and bitter disappointment dried his throat. Admir snatched the jewelled crown.

'Sit,' he growled. Arman obeyed and his father set the jewelled silver on his head. 'Drink,' Admir offered him the King's Cup.

'Jan,' Arman called out. The wolfhound zipped towards him, his matted fur shaking as he clattered into the goblet. He lapped up the spilt Kea, its sweet scent rising in the heat. The band's melody soured as Jan slumped dead.

Arman rushed forwards, his hands searching for warmth in Jan's fur. There was none. Murl prodded around the spilt liquid, his fingers examining a disintegrating, turquoise leaf. 'Tarlock?' he muttered, 'but this was banned years ago.' Shock flushed over Arman's face as he peered over his shoulder.

'I've seen that before,' he whispered.

Murl frowned at him. 'I doubt-'

'In T.O.P chamber,' Arman blurted out. 'I saw it. I'm sure, on that little table.' He flew around furiously and, still gripping his bow, he reached over his shoulder. With one rapid movement Admir crumpled to his knees and tumbled down the steps. A red alaca feather sat over his heart.

The crowd gasped and the auburn sun glared down at the courtyard. 'Traitor,' Arman yelled. Murl glanced up from Jan and slowly got to his feet. He peered past the newly enthroned King. 'What is it?' Arman asked. He stared into the parting crowd. A pair of black boots slapped the cobblestones and nudged Admir's lifeless body. The shadow stooped at the foot of the steps, turned and raised a hand.

'Your arrow, King Arman?' the voice exclaimed, stroking the crimson alaca feather.

Murl smiled from the king to the crowd.

'Eaman?' Arman breathed, flying down the castle steps to greet his mutilated brother.

Believe in Better Daniel Bowman

INT. COFFEEBUCKS – DAY

CLOSE UP of a metal jug, which proceeds to froth and steam with hot milk.

It is part of a large coffee machine in chain coffee shop 'Coffeebucks', full off beaming staff in identical uniforms and groups of predominantly young customers laughing loudly across tables.

The Coffeebucks slogan is displayed prominently above the counter and on the walls:

'A good coffee is like a good relationship: Rich, warm and strong!'

ANNETTE (30) and GEOFF (30) sit opposite each other at a small table by the wall. GEOFF is on his smartphone. They are the oldest customers in the store.

OLI, a promo guy (early twenties), wearing a hoodie with the logo of a mobile phone company on and carrying an iPad, can be seen moving from table to table, chatting to customers and dispensing flyers.

ANNETTE

Unbelievable.

GEOFF does not look up from his phone.

GEOFF

Huh?

ANNETTE

I said it's unbelievable
that they can do that in
here.

OLI has a group transfixed by something on his iPad.

ANNETTE (CON'T)

It's bad enough that they
can hassle you in the street,
never mind while you're
trying to have a conversation.

GEOFF returns to his phone and ANNETTE continues to stare at OLI, who can be seen progressing round towards their table.

ANNETTE

I honestly have no time
for these people. You
wouldn't believe what one
of them said to me on my
way over here.

OLI is now talking to two STUDENTS on the table next to ANNETTE and GEOFF.

OLI

Alright guys! Hanging out
our arses are we?

STUDENT 1

Mate you don't even know.

OLI

I've been there, believe me.

The group erupt in laughter behind ANNETTE's head.

OLI

I'll introduce myself guys,
my name's Oli and if your
visions still too blurred to
see this logo I work for
Infinity Mobile.

More laughter, as the students wave hands in front of each other's eyes.

OLI (CON'T)

I'm just here to show you
some of the epic features of
the new Supernova S2-60.

STUDENT 1

What you mean these features?

Both STUDENTS produce identical models of the phone from their pockets.

OLI

I see I'm preaching to the
choir. I'll let you guys
get back to your drinks.

STUDENT 2

No worries mate!

ANNETTE

(to GEOFF)

I swear to God if he comes
over to us I'll tell him
where to stick his –

OLI

Excuse me there, I'm sorry
to bother you.

ANNETTE

Hello, no problem.

OLI

I'll introduce myself guys,
my name's Oli and I'm here
representing Infinity Mobile.
Might you be interested in
upgrading your mobile phone
today?

ANNETTE

No, thank you.

OLI

You'd be amazed at the
features on the new
Supernova S2-60.

GEOFF

You mean like this?

GEOFF's phone is an identical model to those of the STUDENTS.

OLI
I see I'm preaching to
the choir here!

GEOFF laughs.

OLI (CON'T)
(to ANNETTE)
Can't you be persuaded to
join the rest of the world?

ANNETTE
No I'm not interested.

OLI
Why should you settle for
less than everyone else?

ANNETTE looks around the room. People are gathered round smartphones wherever she looks. We see the Coffeebucks slogan on the walls behind.

ANNETTE
I'm really not interested.

OLI
I think you're tempted.

ANNETTE
No I'm really not at all.

OLI
OK, well thanks for your
time. I'll just leave you
one of these leaflets.

ANNETTE
That's really not –

OLI has already moved on to the next table.

OLI (O.S.)
Hello there my lovelies!

ANNETTE looks at the leaflet. There is a photograph of a woman in a bikini using the phone. The slogan reads:

'Believe in Better'

ANNETTE
Unbelievable.

GEOFF
(without looking up)
Just doing his job.

ANNETTE
It's that faux-friendly
attitude I really can't stand.
They're only here to make
us buy things and yet people
seem to want to be friends
with them. On my way over
here a woman with a clipboard
stopped me to ask where I
got my coat from. She nodded
along as if she was interested
then out of nowhere just
started asking me where I
usually went to work out.

GEOFF's full attention is on his phone's screen.

ANNETTE (CON'T)
I tried to just walk off
but she followed me down
the road, just walking along
next to me as if I knew her
at all. Then she had the
damn cheek to tell me if I
joined her gym I could lose
the coat and show off my hips!
Get the body I deserved!

GEOFF does not appear to be listening.

ANNETTE (CON'T)
Can you believe that?

GEOFF
I want a divorce.

ANNETTE looks around at the Coffeebucks staff, all grinning like maniacs.

ANNETTE
Why?

GEOFF
I'm not completely satisfied
with my life.

ANNETTE watches one of the Coffeebucks staff writing a customer's name on their drink.

GEOFF (O.S.)
I just feel like I'm settling for what I have –

The customer proceeds to take a photo of their coffee, and then show it to their friends.

GEOFF (O.S.)

- when I should be demanding
more from my life. I won't
be young forever and I think
I should strive for something -

GEOFF is not looking ANNETTE, but at his phone and the woman on the leaflet.

GEOFF (O.S.)

-something richer, and stronger.
Something better.

GEOFF stands up and EXITS the coffee shop, taking the leaflet with him.

ANNETTE sits opposite an empty chair. She slams her coffee down on the table and looks ready to cry with anger.

A COFFEEBUCKS WORKER is instantly at her table.

COFFEEBUCKS WORKER

Is there anything the matter
with your coffee-drinking
experience today?

ANNETTE

I don't want my relationships
to be like coffee.

CUT to black.

COFFEEBUCKS WORKER (O.S.)

You can register your complaint
on our website for your chance
to win a free biscotti with
your next purchase.

CREDITS.

Northumbria University's
Creative Writing Magazine



THE EDGE

Submit your prose, poetry, scripts and reviews online at
theedgemagazinenorthumbria@gmail.com