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# TAW U3A CREATIVE WRITING GROUP

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CHRISTMAS 2023



### **A WORD OR TWO FROM THE EDITOR**

Here we are again, folks. The intrepid wordsmiths at Taw have laboured over the past few months to produce yet another bunch of literary marvels, this time often dealing with the supernatural. Please don't read these pieces late at night if you wish to sleep; they are not designed to comfort or console but to bring a little frisson of terror (not too much, just enough to keep you awake) into your lives for a flickering moment.

Enjoy!!!

The Editor (that's not an instruction)

## **TRAUMA WITH TWO ENDINGS**

**BY**

**SUE BOYD**

“Bloody hell” said my brother Harry as he downed his sixth pint, halfway through his usual intake for our boy’s night out. “I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes when you tell Trisha.”

“Well, I’m not exactly looking forward to it. She has a bit of a temper when things don’t go her way.”

“Tell me about it. I can still see that look in her eyes when she emptied her pint of cider over your head, simply for chatting up that cute little bridesmaid at our cousin’s wedding. Mind you, your arm was around her waist and goodness knows what you were whispering in her ear to make her laugh so much.”

“I suppose I deserved that as I’d tucked quite a few whiskies under my belt that night, but this is a completely different kettle of fish. Come on Bro give some advice.”

“Oh no. I’m not putting my neck into that noose. I get myself in enough trouble at home without getting involved in your domestic issues. Whatever I tell you to do is bound to be wrong and then we’ll fall out as well and you’ll have no couch to sleep on when neither of them wants you.”

“I suppose I could just tell Trisha that it’s not working out with us. After all we did have that tremendous row last weekend when I got back late from taking Jamie and Theo surfing in Cornwall. She’d been sitting there for two hours in her sexy little black dress, stockings and my favourite meal in the bin when I eventually got home.

“It didn’t help that Jamie let slip that Sam was there as well. I’d warned them not to say anything, but he was so excited about having stood up on his surfboard for the first time he just couldn’t resist telling Trisha about Mummy filming the whole thing and ‘you can watch it with Daddy’.”

“You can’t blame the kids after all they would obviously like nothing better than for you and Sam to get back together, despite the fact that Trisha is very good with them, but she’s still not their mother.”

“I know I have to tell her soon and explain about Sam’s post-natal depression being the cause of us splitting up and how great our marriage had been up until the birth of Theo.”

“I wish you the best of luck. I am going back on the oil rigs and won’t be home for three months, so we’ll meet up then and see how you got on.”

### **Three months later**

(1) “You look terrible Bro. Whatever happened?”

“Well in the end, I realised how much I loved Trisha, how happy the boys were and after all Sam had been the one to walk away and say she wanted her own space. How did I know that she wouldn’t do it again. So I told Sam I was staying with Trisha and she seemed to take it really well. Then a week later I came home from playing squash and found Trisha had been battered to d-d-death.”

“Come on Bro. I’ll get you another drink.” Five minutes later, “What a terrible thing to happen. Was there any sign of forced entry?”

“No, Sam walked into the police station, covered in blood and admitted killing Trisha. So now I’ve lost them both”.

(2) “You look terrible Bro. Whatever happened.?”

“Well, the three of us met up to try and decide how to sort out this muddle because I realised that I loved them both. We made the decision to all move in together and see how it turned out. The boys were happy with the situation and the women were getting on well.

Then a month later I came home from playing squash and found Trisha and Sam in bed together. So now I’ve lost both of them.

**MIRRORS**  
**BY**  
**ROBERT BEATTIE**

Jane Doe had wanted a cheval mirror for as long as she could remember. And then one had come up in a local auction and she was able to snap it up cheaply. In fact, only she had bid for it. The auctioneer said he'd had it for sale for ages but, despite its attractive design, no one had seemed to want it until she bid for it. It now stood behind her as she looked at herself in the wardrobe mirror. With the cheval behind her she could see herself from all angles; she liked to do that before she went out as she always wanted to be smart.

The two mirrors reflected each other endlessly; there seemed to be a hundred mirrors and not just one. A movement in one of the distant reflections in the cheval caught her eye.

"What's that?" she asked herself. "There's something there". But there couldn't be. She looked again There was nothing to see.

She went out for the evening and got back late. She went to her bedroom to change and admired herself in the mirror, with the cheval behind her. A movement caught her eye; the movement was in a reflection in the cheval but closer this time. It seemed to be some sort of figure. She turned around but it had gone.

"I must be imagining things", she said.

Next morning, she was up early, dressed and left the house. She got back in the early evening and went to dress before her date that evening. She stood in front of the mirror and adjusted the length of her dress behind her. A movement in the cheval caught her eye again. The figure seemed to be closer but was gone again when she turned. "I think I'll ask John to have a look at the cheval when he brings me home tonight," she thought.

They got back at midnight. She'd told John of what she seemed to be seeing in the mirror and he came into the house with her to have a look. He stood in front of her wardrobe mirror and peered into it.

"I can't see anything in the cheval; come and have a look yourself. It's just a series of reflections," he said.

She came to his side. There was no figure in the cheval. They stood there for a while, but nothing appeared. At length, John kissed her goodbye and left.

She went upstairs to change. She stood in front of the mirror with the cheval behind her; nothing. She brushed her hair and then, over her shoulder she saw a movement in the cheval. There was a figure there; the figure was almost in the room. The figure had no face. It stepped into the room.

A couple of months later the auctioneer had a cheval for sale.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he declared. “I am instructed in the sale of the personal effects of Jane Doe following her untimely death. What am I bid for this lovely 19<sup>th</sup> century cheval? Start me at £300.” But there were no bidders.

Later the auctioneer commented to his assistant, “I think we’ve sold this damn cheval half a dozen times over the past 10 years, all after a death and all to young women. Makes you wonder a bit, doesn’t it?”

**FIRE**  
**(No Historical Value whatsoever)**  
**BY**  
**SYLVIA WISEMAN**

The thunder echoed around ONGA as he sat in his cave with his arms wrapped around his body. What was happening outside? The Gods must be very angry. He dared not venture from the dark cavern.

Lightening lit up the interior and he shrank back further into the darkness and covered his ears. As he trembled in the corner, he became accustomed to a strange noise outside, something he had not witnessed before. Warily he ventured to the mouth of his hideaway.

A heat that did not come from the sun engulfed him and warmed his chilled bones. The ground outside was crackling and glowing and he noticed a small creature within the embers, its charred body blackened and emitting a strange smell which touched his nostrils. He was hungry, the berries he picked each day did not sustain him for long. He ventured to the innate body and carefully picked it up, burning his fingers and causing him to send out a loud cry so that he dropped it on the ground again. But the smell became so tantalizing he picked it up again and put it to his mouth. It had a curious taste, unlike anything he had put in his mouth before, it was good, and he hungrily ate his way through the

little body. He began to wonder; might this be a better idea for food? If he could capture this strange heat, he could find another creature to roast.

He noticed there were still some sparks around his cave home, and he decided to try to feed them with pieces of undergrowth and after several attempts he had flames which frightened him, and he withdrew until they died down.

He decided he would not let the fire go out, it was comforting, giving warmth and light in his dark home and now it was providing nourishment he had not come across before. The scorched remnants of other rodents lay in the ashes, and he greedily collected them to be enjoyed later.

But as he sat around the yellow flames he began to wonder if larger creatures had perished. If so, he might be able to use the skins to cover himself and enjoy the flesh. He returned to the cave warmed, with his stomach full and lay down to sleep. A feeling of pleasure came over him, his life would be a lot more comfortable with this newly found gift from the Gods and so he decided, when the sun shone its rays, he would go and explore the burnt terrain.

## **FLYPAST**

**BY**

**JONATHAN COX**

The door of the office burst open and Lionel, the Editor of the Porchester Herald, made a beeline for Percy's desk.

"You got anything on this afternoon Crumpton?" enquired Lionel.

"Porchester Rovers are showing off their new signing at their ground at four, I was going to take Spike and get a few snaps and then write a short column for Friday's back page" replied Percy.

"Oh, that's right – look there's a burial at St Martha's at One Thirty, I wouldn't ask you to attend normally, but it's the funeral for Group Captain Finlay 'Mac' MacArthur. He was the last surviving member of the aircrew that flew the Dambusters raid with 617 Squadron. Bit embarrassing really, hardly anybody knew he even lived in Porchester – me included. He had not enjoyed good health for the last ten years but still made it to the ripe old age of 102. I've

spoken to the mayor, and he has arranged for a piper to play at the graveside, and I've left a message with the local RAF base to see if they can send down a small contingent but haven't heard back."

Later that day, Percy stood with a pitifully small crowd around the open grave. Spike, his photographer, sat with his film camera on the slope overlooking the graveyard as it was not felt appropriate to take photos. The piper had just squeezed his bagpipes into life, the infernal drone of the 'Last Lament' echoing across the valley, when it was suddenly drowned out by a much louder noise, enough to cause the piper to stop. Percy looked around to see a Lancaster bomber barely clearing the distant treetops and headed straight for them. The assembled crowd covered their ears as the WW II bomber skimmed over their heads. They then watched the aircraft make a steep turn at the far end of the valley and make another pass over the grave, this time the pilot dipped his starboard wing before heading back across the tree line and disappearing.

The following morning – Percy was in the editor's office and had been relating in detail what had happened the previous afternoon, Lionel had called the Base Commander at RAF Scampton to thank them for the fly-past. He frowned, put his hand over the receiver and asked Percy again what the identification code on the aircraft was.

"It was Alpha Juliet – Tango. I wrote it down on my pad – Spikes photos will confirm it, though".

"This is very strange, Scampton confirms that was the unique code of the aircraft that 'Mac' MacArthur piloted during the war, but she was completely cannibalized for spare parts in 1953. They also say that they know nothing about a fly-past."

Just then Spike burst into the office with a handful of newly developed prints. His face was ashen grey. He threw the prints down on the Editors desk and turned to Percy.

"Tell me I'm not going mad," he implored of the reporter " Did we all see an Avro Lancaster fly over the graveyard yesterday afternoon – I took fifteen shots of her during the two passes the plane made over the graveyard. I had my 200mm lens on so managed to get some really close-up shots and I swear I saw an airman sitting in the forward turret salute as they passed over the grave. But I've got fifteen prints that say I imagined the whole thing."



## **GHOST STORY**

**BY**

**JUNE LIDDY**

Knowing what I know now I may have taken it more seriously then. I was about 6 years old, and my parents had moved me into their bedroom so they could keep an eye on me during the night. During the day and evening my Mum frequently popped her head around the door to check if I was still alive! I had been suffering from whooping cough for several weeks - long enough for me to enquire of my Mum - 'Am I ever going to get better?'.

This particular evening it was dark in the bedroom, but I couldn't sleep. Something made me look into the black. What I saw I can only describe as like watching an enormous TV screen. Over the other side of the bedroom manifest a large kitchen. There were four or five men dressed completely in white and wearing tall white hats. Some of the men were rushing to and fro across the room looking extremely busy carrying enormous shining silver pans, hugging them to their chests. Others were carrying pans at their arm's length and tipping the contents into a huge sink creating a plume of steam. I wondered what they were cooking. I didn't understand at that time that chefs wore tall white hats, and I was fascinated. There was a lot of noise - shouting, banging, clanging, and cooking noises - chopping, bubbling, boiling. I remember blinking not believing my eyes. But when I opened them again the scene was still there. No-one took the slightest bit of notice of me. At first, I was intrigued and entertained but I then began to feel a little uneasy. I was just plucking up enough courage to shout 'Mummy' when the whole vision disappeared as quickly as it had materialised. It was like looking through a fine net curtain and the curtain had dropped along with the scene.

I never told my mother about my apparition - I was too scared. However, some considerable time later - probably thirty years - I recounted the story to my mum commenting that my whooping cough probably affected my mind! She went a deathly white and a concerned expression crossed her face. She then told me that during the war the Army Catering Corps were billeted in our house!

## **CHEVAL**

**BY**

**ROBERT BEATTIE**

“Hey, Mike,” Sue cried. “Come and have a look at this. It’s just what I’ve always wanted.”

Mike went over to her. They were in an auction room. She was standing beside a cheval mirror and peering into it.

“It’ll go nicely in my bedroom; I’ve always wanted something like this to put behind me so I can check everything’s OK from the rear when I’m dressing. I think I’ll bid for it.” She said.

“There’s a nice, winged chair there, too,” Mike said. “That would go nicely in your study at uni when you go up!”

So, she bought both at a good price.

They took the mirror and the chair back to her place and Mike helped her take them into her bedroom. She stood before the mirror and twirled a couple of times.

“It’s great,” she said. She turned to look into her wardrobe mirror. “And the two mirrors reflect each other so I can see loads of them. And the chair looks good where it is; I don’t know that I’ll take it into uni after all.” Mike came around the mirrors and looked at what she was seeing.

“Fascinating, isn’t it?” he said. “All those mirrors. You’d think they could tell a story, there’s so much there to see. Oh well, I must be off. I’ll see you later.” He left.

Later, she changed and, before leaving for her evening out, she checked her look in the mirrors. As she did so, she thought she saw a movement in the cheval in one of the distant reflections. She looked harder but it had gone. She thought she must have been mistaken and went out for her evening.

When she got back, she changed into her nightclothes and checked her look again. Again, she thought she saw the movement of a small figure in one of the reflections in the cheval only this time the reflection was closer. She stared at the mirror, but the figure had gone. Then she noticed that the seat of the chair

showed an indentation in the seat as if someone had sat there. But no-one had sat there. She went to the chair and plumped up the seat.

The next day, she met Mike for lunch and told him what she thought she had seen in the mirror. His comment was that it wasn't unusual to mistake reflections which were, generally, a trick of the light; she shouldn't worry. She agreed and thought no more of it. When she got home that night, as usual, she changed into her nightclothes and checked herself in the mirrors. Suddenly, she saw the figure in the cheval only this time it was right at the front; it had no face; out of the corner of her eye she saw the figure of a woman sitting in the chair; her hair seemed to move.

The figure in the mirror stepped into the room; the woman's hair seemed to writhe.

A face appeared on the figure, first a mouth, then a nose then a chin, eyebrows and, last of all, eyes. The eyes held her gaze; "I think it's time, don't you?" asked the figure as it held out its hand towards her. "Just step into the mirror and we'll be off." The woman in the chair smiled at her; the snakes on her head glared at Sue and twisted in unison.

"No, I don't think so," said a voice behind Sue.

Oh! No," said the creature. "Why are you here Michael, spoiling my fun."

Mike stood there, but this was a different Mike. A light seemed to shine from him, and a feeling of power and peace filled the room.

"More to the point, Bee, what do you think you're doing here? I was amazed when the Boss said you were out and about; and why bring Meddie? You know she has this ridiculous habit of turning people into stone and the Boss won't have it. So, I'm here to send you back to Hades but only after you've released all the other girls. Do that now."

And Michael extended his arm towards Bee; it held a flaming, golden sword.

"All right, all right, Michael," cried Bee. "I didn't mean anything; I just wanted a bit of fun," and he and Meddie disappeared.

Michael turned to Sue who had stood, transfixed by all that had gone on. The sword had vanished, and the old Mike was back.

"What happened? Sue asked. "What's that about other girls and where are they coming back from? Where do we go from here? I.....

“Don’t worry,” Mike said. “I’ll sort it and you won’t remember a thing”, and he bent his head and kissed her on the lips. A feeling of peace enveloped her. She felt safe.

Sue stretched languorously. She had slept very well and she felt comfy. Then she remembered; today was results day. She leapt out of bed and turned on her laptop. “Mum!” Sue shouted down the stairs. “I’ve got my “A” level results and they’re even better than I’d hoped. So, I’m off to Uni with Bee and Maddie.”

“Excellent!” called her mother. “Pity about Bee and Maddie, in a way, though. Somehow, I don’t trust them. Still, you’ll be joining Mike at Uni and he’ll look after you.”

## **WHY ME?**

**BY**

**SUE BOYD**

There I was a very ordinary 20 something out for the evening with a group of my friends to celebrate my birthday. Not that I thought there was much cause for celebration as I was fast approaching the dreaded 30’s, was still a spinster of this parish and had been press-ganged in to this evening.

Every one of my friends were either married (I’d been a bridesmaid three times) engaged or simply living together and although they never said anything about my single status to my face, I’m sure they discussed it among themselves. And as for my Mother I tried to avoid going to see her as I could see the question hovering on her lips as soon as I entered the door. I’d had a few boyfriends at Uni but none of them seemed to last and they always dumped me, not the other way round, so to avoid getting hurt, I stopped accepting offers of dates and eventually nobody asked me.

Usually, I dressed in very inconspicuous clothes so as not to draw attention to myself, but for some unfathomable reason, I’d been shopping and fallen in love with this wisp of a dress in midnight blue. I kept picking it up, putting it back on the rail, nearly fainting when I saw the price tag, walking off and looking through other less expensive brands, but after this happened three times, I picked it up, went in the changing room hugging it to my chest as if

someone might grab it off me. So here I was my bank account teetering on the edge of an overdraft, feeling like a million dollars but bored out of my mind with talk of weddings, house buying and babies.

At the next table was an extremely loud group of 20 something young men obviously out on a stag night. They were all getting louder and louder as the drinks flowed freely, there was much raucous laughter, flirtatious glances at our table, but no actual action.

Suddenly the one sitting next to the 'soon to-be bridegroom' got up, walked across to our table, tapped me on the shoulder and said,

'Would you like to join us?'

The whole room went quiet, you could have heard a feather drop to the floor, but my heart was nearly jumping out of my ribcage. All my friends sat there with their eyes nearly popping out of their sockets, waiting for me to refuse, but I stood up with my legs shaking, took his outstretched hand and together we joined the rest of his friends. Soon I was laughing my head off, tipping back the prosecco and having the time of my life.

After the best evening ever, as Julian took me home in a taxi (he has a Porsche in his garage), I asked him.

'Why me?'

'Because you looked so beautiful in that gorgeous dress, but you were obviously not enjoying yourself, especially on your birthday.'

It's six months later and Julian hasn't dumped me yet. I'm keeping my fingers and toes crossed, but I'll uncross them soon because we going to buy an engagement ring tomorrow. That'll make my Mother happy.

**FIRE**

**BY**

**JUNE LIDDY**

The idea was to capture the enemy camp by creeping through the jungle of

plants and trees. A two-man crew raiding what was probably a more fortified camp was daunting, but they needed to eliminate it.

With their faces smeared with camouflage they belly-walked slowly on the ground towards the enemy. There was a bit of a breeze which helped to disguise any noise they may have made. It was slow going but exhilarating the further they travelled. They did not speak but gave hand signals to pause or continue.

The pistols, always at the ready, were quite cumbersome and had to be struck out in front for safety, so their arms became quite sore, along with their knees which propelled their bodies forward.

Suddenly, the Sergeant held up his hand, palm facing his mate, denoting to stop, which his mate had already done as he heard the sound of snapping twigs close by. They both froze as a rustling noise passed in front of them and a Roe deer strolled through the undergrowth unaware of the danger.

They heard distant laughter and someone shouting, 'it is only a deer'. Luckily the enemy had seen it and so didn't feel the need to investigate if anyone was approaching. The sergeant beckoned to move forward, and they both rose and hid behind two large oak trees, side by side. The trees were thick and numerous now and the boys darted diagonally forward from tree to tree gaining much ground.

Voices ahead denoted the enemy camp hidden behind a thick screen of birch saplings. The Sergeant bent down and picked up a large rock, gesticulated to his mate and held up five fingers. Translated that would mean he was to throw the rock to the side of the camp and after five seconds of the enemy investigating, they would fire their pistols.

The air was tense, the soldiers took a deep breath, and the rock was lobbed. The enemy ran out with their pistols primed and looked around. Five, four, three, two, one - 'fire' shouted the Sergeant. A great stream of water flew out of the pistols and hit the enemy on the back of their heads and then fully in the face as they turned around. Momentarily they were blinded but then realised they were beaten and began to complain. 'OK, you win, now stop firing please. My Mum is going to be cross you have ruined my new hoody' someone shouted. Shouts of jubilation were heard from the Sergeant and his mate and more complaints and groans from the enemy. 'We will get you next time!' '

Another game next Sunday?', asked one of the enemies.

## **HUSBAND'S PASSING**

**BY**

**WENDY PENTLING**

MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY HAVE GONE HOME.  
THE WAKE IS OVER I'M ALL ALONE.

FEELING SO EXHAUSTED,  
I FINALLY WENT TO BED.  
WOKEN IN THE EARLY HOURS.  
WEIRD NOISES IN MY HEAD.

I SAW AN APPARITION  
GO FLOATING DOWN THE HALL.  
I KNEW I WASN'T DREAMING:  
WORE A CLOAK, WAS VERY TALL

SUDDENLY A WHIRRING NOISE.  
CREPT OUT OF BED TO FIND  
THIS GHOSTLY FIGURE HOOVERING.  
THOUGHT I'D LOST MY MIND

SAID HE'D RETURN AND HAUNT ME  
AND PUT THINGS IN THEIR PLACE.  
HE MOANED I WASN'T TIDY.  
FLEW TO MY MATES IN HASTE.

NOW I'M OFF TO BONNY SCOTLAND,  
HOME OF HAGGIS AND HOGMANAY.  
AFTER MY MATE'S PASSING  
MY FRIEND'S TAKING ME AWAY.

SHE SAID WE'D FIND OUR MR RIGHT.  
SHE CAN.... IT'S NOT FOR ME.  
FIRST NIGHT WAS SCOTTISH DANCING,  
AN IMPRESSIVE SIGHT TO SEE

NEXT EVENING AFTER DINNER  
CHAP INVITED ME TO DANCE.  
STOOD ON HIS TOES, BUMPED HIS NOSE,  
NO CHANCE THERE OF ROMANCE

CAN'T CONTROL MY ACTIONS  
NOT SURE WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE.  
FEEL SURE HUBBY'S BEHIND IT.  
IT'S A SPOOKY ATMOSPHERE.  
SAW A FIGURE ON THE LANDING.  
SAID, 'I'M THE GHOST OF JOCK McFEE'  
THEN FLICKED UP HIS KILT AND SPORRAN.  
REVEALED ALL HIS GOODS TO ME.

DID I OVER DO THE DRINKING  
OR HAS THIS ALL BEEN REAL?  
HAVE I JUST BEEN DREAMING?  
ALL SEEMS SO SURREAL.

#### FOOTNOTE from the Editor

So, what do you think? Did you enjoy a frisson or was it all old hat? Please send all letters of congratulation to the Editor at Taw U3A

We shall, in any event, resume our publications in time for Lady Day 2024.