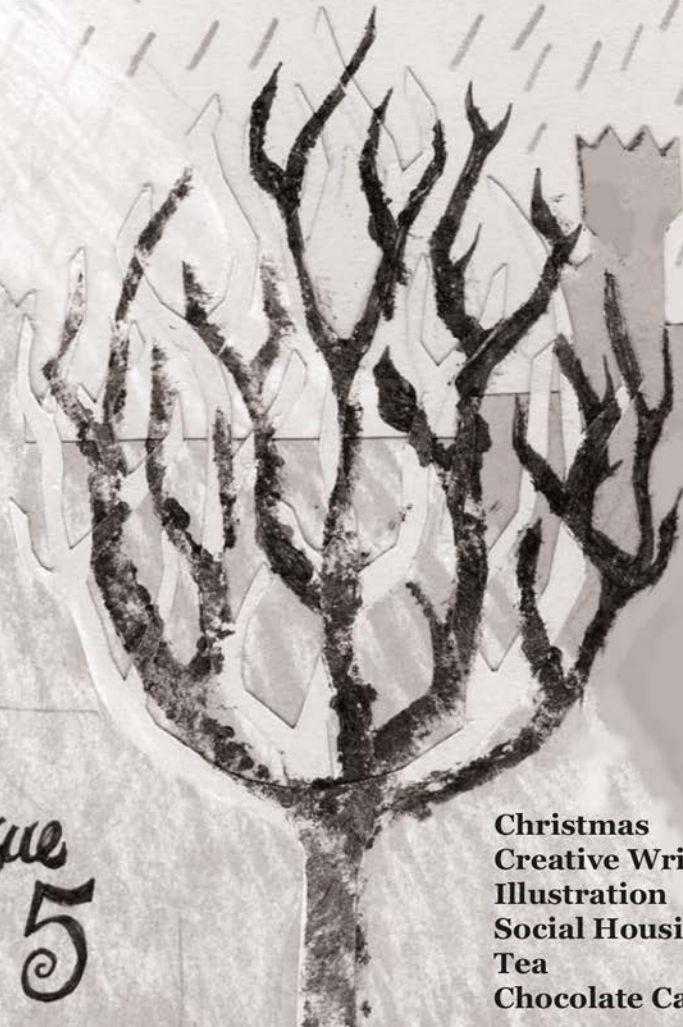


The Strickling Violet



Issue
5



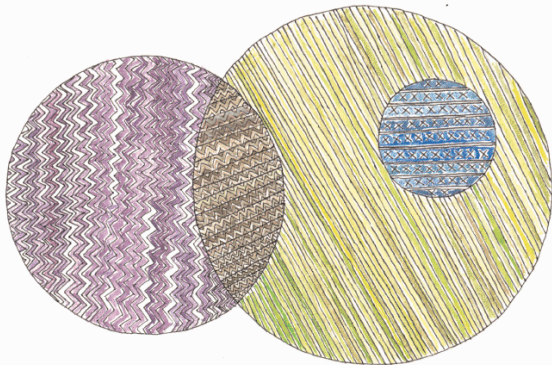
Christmas
Creative Writing
Illustration
Social Housing
Tea
Chocolate Cake



no picture
available of
Snowy, 1992-
2007



Paws,
1997-



"The Cat",
2007-

pets which have co-existed.



**jumpers
growing up.**



1

WELCOME TO issue 5 of **The Shrieking Violet**, which is something of a seasonal Christmas special.

It's hard to believe that since I started writing the fanzine in August the seasons have slowly crept round to winter. The familiar sight of houseboats on Manchester's network of canals has passed. The Canada geese that in August were almost reaching maturity are now fully grown adults that will soon be slipping and sliding around on canals that freeze over with sheets of ice that last for weeks.

It's the time of year for being curled up in the warm inside - though there are still plenty of nice, brisk walks to have on those rare days of crisp sunshine when it finally stops raining.

Alessandra Mostyn celebrates her favourite places to drink tea in this issue, and I'd like to add my recommendations for getting warm; sitting down with a cup of hot apple with cinammon sticks in Earth cafe, drinking some spiced apple at the University of Manchester veggie cafe and eating warm crumble and custard, trying one of the many types of tea in Oklahoma, to accompany their cottage pie, or braving the crowds for a cup of Gluhwein at the Christmas Markets in Albert Square. (If you fancy something stronger, try one of the Britons Protection's 200 odd types of whisky or warm up with a glass of port.) The Britons Protection is a pub that doesn't really work for me in the summer months - to experience its full beauty, you need to go on the coldest day of the year, find a cosy alcove and warm up by one of its roaring fires.

Of course, it shouldn't be forgotten that as winter comes round again there is another side to the city that isn't all nice and cosy or glitzy and glamour. Adam Faulkner considers the crisis of social housing that is affecting Manchester, and is all too pressing at this time of year.

Another purpose of The Shrieking Violet, though, is to publish work that I love and want people to see. One such piece of work is the longest piece I have had in the Shrieking Violet so far, a short story by Sarah Christie. Sarah studied at the University of East Anglia in Norwich and moved to Manchester to complete the Creative Writing MA at the University of Manchester. Her story is so evocative of winter, that wherever you are and whatever you're doing, I hope it sends you into the New Year with a warm glow.

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To tell me what I've got wrong/ contribute/ tell me off for leaving The Shrieking Violet in your cafe/ bar/ shop/ cinema/ gallery without permission/ request back copies, email: Natalie.Rose.Bradbury@googlemail.com



Autumn

by Andrew Beswick

Autumn

With glistening bells

I don't trust you, you're too good to be true

Autumn

In your glass house

Will you be my friend?

Autumn

Your fake frost

Still leaves me with a chill

Autumn

My last ditch attempt

Will never lead to happiness

Autumn

There's only one way

This was ever going to end

Autumn

Please help me keep it together

Until Spring

Autumn

Don't forget that you promised

To keep my favourite leaf safe

Until at least December 1st

Autumn

I can feel my heart giving in

Autumn

Please don't let the Winter win



3

Anyone for a cuppa?

Written and photographed by Alessandra Mostyn

TEA IS Britain's national drink, used as a warm relief from our troublesome weather and a gesture in times of woe. Tea is my addiction; my morning pickup, my treat throughout the day and my after dinner tippie. Living in Manchester, with its daily downpour, provides a great environment for enjoying a good brew. There are many places in this city to get a cuppa, but here I've focused on my favourite haunts...



OKLAHOMA 74 High Street, M4

To certain crowds, OKLAHOMA is a popular destination in the Northern Quarter but I still



meet people who haven't yet discovered this gem. A mix of café and gift shop, OKLAHOMA is vibrant with its eclectic décor of Indian parasols that stand over secondhand furniture proudly, their silver beading gently swaying as coffee steam drifts around the room. Different areas of OKLAHOMA blend into each other well, with orange plastic chairs scattered in between cabinets of Lomography cameras and jewellery made from china tea saucers. There is a large selection of tea on offer here, from your herbal Fair Trade blends to your good quality breakfast bags, but the best part of drinking here is the atmosphere. I have been in Manchester for just over two years, early on discovering the establishment through a friend and since then have felt very attached to it, relaxing in a chair by the window or enjoying a bag of pick n mix or hand made notebook. Walking in to OKLAHOMA from the Northern! rain is a perfect remedy.



TROF 135 Grosvenor Street, M1

This is the 3rd TROF to open in Manchester. The Grosvenor St branch is one of my regular hangouts, residing in a beautiful Victorian building that was once an institute for the deaf, TROF is a welcoming place which feels like a eccentric living room with chesterfield sofas and velvet booths to sprawl on, decorated with wacky clocks, stuffed deer heads and bird houses. Tea here

is served in white builder-style mugs that might seem like an odd contrast to the twee interior but just adds to the eccentric appeal. The best thing about TROF is the staff who are friendliest you're ever meet, always polite and welcoming.

CORNERHOUSE, 70 Oxford Rd, M1

Standing tall on the 'corner' of Oxford Rd train station, CORNERHOUSE is the cultural hub of Manchester providing the city with its art house film fix. CORNERHOUSE offers more than just a cinema though, with a gallery spanning several floors, a design magazine shop and a lively restaurant area. At CORNERHOUSE there is always a beautiful selection of cakes, French tartlets and muffins



to accompany your tea, which in CORNERHOUSE'S case, comes in the form of Tea Pigs. Tea Pigs are not as exciting as they sound, not pig shaped, or coloured like a pig, or indeed make sounds like one, but they are of high quality and thus so produce a very nice brew. I don't often drink out on my own, but when I do it'll be here. It offers a real sense of safety and acceptance; you can come in here and do what you want, read what you want or just sit with your own thoughts and spy down at passers by with a warm cup in hand.



5

Manchester's Mr Blobby and other decorations

YOU KNOW it's that time of year again when (aside from creeping TV commercials spreading thin, enforced jolliness for sale at Tesco and B and Q), the workmen start arriving in Albert Square.

It starts with the legs - four huge blocks big enough to support what comes next, the obese, oversize frame of Manchester's own Mr Blobby. Early in November, Santa's lifted into pride of place on the Town Hall, from where he can survey the town square in all its glory, his twinkling boxes of golden presents scattered across nearby lampposts.

His vantage point is dark until his welcome party, the customary Christmas lights switch on, when Santa reminds the city of his existence in a display of 100,000 glowing lights. This year, he was announced by X Factor winner Alexandra Burke plus, appropriately for such an over-the-top caricature, local pantomime stars.

Sitting atop a 32 foot structure, Santa wishes those below a 'Merry Christmas Manchester'. Subtle it isn't; at ten metres tall, eight metres wide and six metres deep, his scale is huge. Something so cartoonish is an absurd sight on Alfred Waterhouse's stately neo-gothic Town Hall. Santa completely overshadows other seasonal reminders such as the pair of discreet poppies that flank him on the town hall around Remembrance Day. They can't

compete; though they too are oversized, they don't have his sheer bulk. Santa's so fat he doesn't even have legs, just bloated, blobby feet, and seems to prompt mixed reactions from shoppers at the Christmas markets below. A 59 year old from Swinton said: "I would prefer something more traditional. I preferred the old one in the tower, but it kept coming down. Maybe it will look better in the evening when it's lit up." His wife, though, said: "I like it. It's only there for a couple of weeks anyway - it's not like it's permanent!"

A businessman visiting from the US said: "Maybe it's there to draw people here, but I wish it was on a slightly more human scale! The colours are pretty and the lights are nice, but I didn't notice it until you pointed it out!" On the other hand, 21 year old James said: "It's a good piece of culture!" and a woman from Leyland said: "It's lovely. I'm a fan of Christmas and all the things



by Natalie Bradbury





that go with it."

When he was first unveiled (a similarly grotesque inflatable Santa was finally laid to rest in 2006 after succumbing to a growing shabbiness and propensity to puncture), Councillor Pat Karney proudly proclaimed: "'It is very hi-tech and very 21st Century'. It will put Las Vegas in the shade." It's as if the council has done a tour of those notorious houses which compete with rooftop displays every year, and decided to go one better with what they have on their roof.

Of course, it's not just Albert Square that gets the Christmas lights treatment. The pollution of Oxford Road is offset briefly by rows of green firs. Deansgate is a wonderland of simple but wintry scenes. I have to admit, though, that my favourite is the unconventional Christmas tree in Piccadilly Gardens.

Eschewing a traditional tree (that honour is reserved for Albert Square, which hosts the fir tree that's donated by the people of Stavanger, Norway every year), instead the shape of a tree is loosely represented in a 32 foot tower of illuminated silver balls. A real tree could look tawdry and forlorn rattling around in that empty concrete space (a conventional tree would have to be massive to make any impact on the open space of the gardens, and could too easily become tacky if overloaded with too many decorations or shabby if vandalised), but there's something really simple yet effective about the sphere tree that I love. When illuminated at night, its fragile, delicate cages cast a monochrome white glow that offsets the coldness of Tadao Ando's concrete pavilion. The pile of wire baubles somehow makes the sparse space, which is dominated by Ando's minimalist concrete wall, more welcoming. What could be stark and lost amongst the rich architecture of Albert Square somehow fits in Piccadilly Gardens.

Piccadilly Gardens is no stranger to unusual takes on trees. The ball tree has replaced a cone tree that was previously installed at Christmas time, and at the other end of Piccadilly Gardens, there's already another unconventional tree, the 11foot high steel Tree of Remembrance that was erected in 2005 to remember the victims of bombing in Manchester during the second world war. These two opposing visions of trees somehow make you appreciate the few bare trees growing around the area even more.

The ball-tree is a beacon, visible from the northern quarter, guiding you down the narrow streets late at night towards Piccadilly Gardens and the prospect of home. Its only potential downfall is Manchester's unpredictable weather, occasionally falling victim to high winds.

However you feel about Christmas, the Christmas lights add a sheen to the city that could make even the most hardened anti-Christmas cynic believe in magic - or at least spread a little glow for a small period of time. It's nice to see a bit more colour on the city streets (imagine if the fairy lights cheering up Piccadilly Gardens were made permanent, like those in the trees outside Piccadilly Station or around Sackville Street Gardens) even if it's just for a little while.



SOCIAL HOUSING REMAINS EMPTY WHILE WAITING LIST SOARS

Adam Faulkner investigates

MANCHESTER's SOCIAL housing waiting list is mounting as the local council struggles to halt the current increase.

Official statistics display that an estimated 13,000 homes are currently unoccupied in Manchester. Combined with a large waiting list published in June detailing more than 23,000 people waiting to be re-housed the figure shows an increase of 1768 in 12 months.

With Christmas fast approaching it is a difficult time of year for those without a satisfactory fixed abode. Lib Dem Cllr Iain Donaldson has said: "It is a misconception that things are rosy in the garden," and branded Labour's handling of the housing crisis as "totally complacent."

However, Labour's city council supremo on housing, Cllr Paul Andrews has been reported to have denied the crisis and denied the opportunity to comment on the issue. The statistics appear to indicate otherwise after around a seven per cent increase in people waiting to be re-housed in 12 months.

These houses lying empty in the community, considered to be a stain on society could provide much needed accommodation. The Empty Homes Agency, an independent charity, which exists to highlight the waste of empty property in England aims to keep the housing crisis in the public eye to aid the regeneration of communities.

David Ireland, Chief Executive of the group believes that of the areas affected by empty homes Manchester is "well above average" and pointed towards the recession for "regeneration stalls," where social housing has been at a point of transition but a lack of funding has prevented the completion of certain housing projects.

Mr Ireland highlighted that the direction in which the community is going, whether it be improving or declining to be the most important factor in determining the method of regeneration. This suggests that a study of an area's condition is paramount to deciding the best way to make it "economically active" again. He added: "Manchester is a mixed bag. There have been success stories in Manchester and Salford with New Islington and Chimney Pot Park, which have changed the perception of the areas."

These specific so called success stories have come as a result of total regeneration after destroying houses and "flattening the whole lot." Mr Ireland emphasised other northern





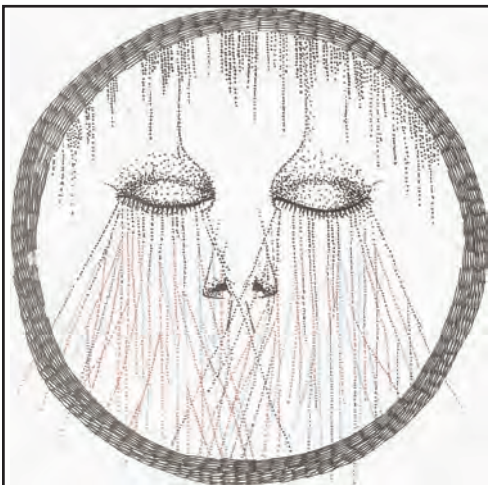
'success stories' where communities have been brought back from nearly complete depletion. In Newcastle the council set up a scheme called home-steading, and sold council houses for £1 under the premise that residents would renovate and commit to a long term interest in the property.

The amount of empty housing in the area can be partly attributed to the private ownership of these properties, with owners waiting for a boom in the housing market. With Manchester's Labour council still suffering from the legacy of the Thatcher years and the Right to Buy scheme, large amounts of council houses have been sold off but not replaced. Many rich landlords snapped up a vast amount of affordable social housing



with the baton of providing new housing stock passed over to the private sector. Unfortunately for those who languish at the bottom of the waiting list, the private sector makes more money out of the richer tenants and buyers than the poorer ones.

In September the council announced in response to the housing crisis that it would build a non inspiring 32 homes in Charlestown and Blackley, which would aid a miniscule number of the waiting list. Simultaneously with the number of empty homes and the waiting list increasing, it may be a productive strategy on the council's part to buy back some of the empty housing stock of property developers.



Projections by

Sarah Christie

I WAS woken by the snow; clumps slithered down the roof and dropped to the pavement, and the sound jerked me from sleep. I lay looking at the ceiling, the cold tasting like aluminium in my mouth. When I closed my eyes again Claire was waiting for me. Pictures played against the backs of my eyelids; I only had the image of her as she was the single time we'd met, sitting on patio steps last summer, twisting a wine glass between her thumb and forefinger.

I don't know when the phone rang; I was in the kitchen and answering it before I was aware I'd left my bed.

'Morning, Michael! Happy New Year.'

It was Dan. He was calling from the other side of town, where he was visiting our parents for a few days but his voice sounded the same as when he rang from London: too energetic.

'You too,' I said.

'Have a good one?'

'The same as always.'

Every December the thirty-first half my old class from secondary school, back home for holidays, descend upon the town. I hardly speak to any of them now, and every December the thirty-first I remember why.

'Claire and I had a surprisingly nice time,' Dan said.

The sound of her name made my stomach jump. He kept talking.

I had such low expectations of spending New Year's with Mum and Dad that there was no anti-climax. And the restaurant was better than I thought it'd be.

'Why're you calling?' I said. 'This early, I mean. I'm back at work today, you know.'

'You're not the only one. You know Claire and I'd planned to go back to London on Sunday?'

'Yes.'

'Well, work phoned last night, and told me that I have to go to Birmingham today. Because of the snow the drive's going to take forever; I'll have to do an overnight, which leaves Claire stuck up here by herself.'

I stared at the notice board above the phone. It was covered in to do lists I'd written on the backs of envelopes. None of the to dos were crossed out.

'So,' Dan said. 'I was wondering if I could ask you a favour: would you mind taking her out tonight? We were going into the city to watch a film, if you fancy that. I wouldn't ask, but I don't see how Claire can spend any more time with Mum and Dad and still stay sane.'

I felt the early morning air on my arms, the chill lino against my bare feet.

'Yes,' I said. 'Of course.'

After our call ended my daily routine fell apart. When I finally managed to leave the flat I drove halfway down the street before realising I didn't have my contacts in. Returning for them added ten minutes to my journey, and I hit the morning rush. In the traffic jam I looked at my knuckles, white on the steering wheel. During work I sat in my cubicle, separate from the rest of the office, and thought about Claire.

I'd met her last summer, on August the twenty-seventh, at a party for my parents' wedding anniversary. She and Dan were almost the last to arrive; they had just come back from a week in Croatia, and the sea-side sunlight had slipped under their skin, separating them from the pale crowds on the lawn.

We had the necessary introductions – I was Dan's brother, she was his then-new girlfriend – but didn't talk properly until the evening, when most of the family had left. Claire and I sat on the patio steps drinking glasses of flat Cava, chatting aimlessly until she mentioned the Madison scene from *Bande à Part*.

'You know that film?'

I spoke too loudly; it must have sounded rude, but she just said, 'Yes. Incredible, isn't it?'

I first saw it when I was thirteen,' I said. 'And, I don't know, something clicked. When I was growing up, while Dan and everyone were going to see *Jurassic Park*, I was watching every New Wave film I could find.'



'I was fourteen,' she said. 'But it was the same for me. It's still my favourite Godard.'

'Yeah, and I don't know whether it's only because it's the first one I saw –'

'But it's got something, hasn't it? It's so...'

She paused, pushing her fingers through her hair. It was cut short, like Jean Seberg's, framing the contours of her face.

'It's so alive,' I said.

'Yes. Yes, exactly.'

'Like the scene in the Louvre. You could never get something like that in Britain – you'd never get a bunch of people racing each other through the Tate.'

'No,' she said, smiling. 'And it wouldn't look as good if it wasn't in black and white.'

I remember the way she held her glass, the way every gesture was right. We discovered that we both saw the world through the filter of those films, and that no one else we knew viewed things this way. Dan certainly didn't.

Eventually the air turned cold. We went inside, where my parents' cleaning operation sent us to opposite ends of the house, and were only reunited for group goodbyes.

But the idea of Claire stayed in the back of my mind. I started visiting my parents more often. It was a coincidence the first time I arrived during Dan's weekly phone call home, and only gradually became a pattern. I'd drive to my parents' house on Sunday afternoons, just in time for my mum to hang up on Dan and relay the substance of their conversation to me. Through that I started putting Claire's history together. While I sat with my parents, trying to think of something to say about work and what my colleagues were doing with their lives, I pictured Claire on a kitchen chair, her hands reaching across the table, the movement of each soft-muscled finger purposeful. In the evenings I re-watched the films we'd talked about, the ones Dan had never bothered to see. Watching them again helped me know her better.

I thought about this as I sat in the office, while the January light thinned outside. On the drive back to my flat I planned what to say to Claire, the words unfolding as I showered and shaved. And then I was in the car again, pulling up beside my parents' house, switching off the engine.

I breathed in the cold, petrol-tasting air. Seven twenty-three blinked on the dashboard clock. I opened the car door and climbed out onto the pavement.

'Michael!'

It was Claire, running towards me from the far end of the street; I'd driven straight past her without noticing. Now she was suddenly there, and I could hear the sound of her breathing.

'Happy New Year,' she said, and leaned towards me for a kiss on the cheek so swift I couldn't register the feel of her mouth. 'I'm sorry, my plan of waiting for you at the end of the road was meant to make life easier.'

I shook my head mutely; I couldn't take her in.

'How are you, Michael? It's been so long. How was your New Year's?'

'The – the same as always.' I focused on the shadowed bridge between her eyes, and added, 'Nothing compared to spending it with Mum and Dad, anyway.'

'Your parents are lovely.'

'Try seeing them every week and say that.'

There was a half minute's silence while we got into the car. I concentrated on fastening my seat belt.

As I backed out of the drive she said, 'Have you seen the film before?'

'I don't know – Dan didn't say what you'd planned to see.'

'Really? God, I'm sorry. Knowing him he probably forgot which film it was.'

'That's Dan for you, isn't it?'

'Please don't feel like you have to go; I don't want you to be sacrificing your evening.'

'No, honestly, it's fine. Which film is it?'

My eyes were fixed on the familiar coils of roads and mini-roundabouts.

'Blow-Up,' she said. 'Do you know it?'



11

The name stirred vague memories; a Sixties film, directed by some Italian.

'Yes,' I said.

'It's beautiful, isn't it? I couldn't believe it was getting screened on a Friday night; I reckon it must be part of an Antonioni retrospective, or something. Do you go out to see films much?'

'Not as often as I'd like.'

I never went to the cinema; the only reason I ever came into the city was for work.

'Blow-Up's one of those films where I can't ever think properly after I've watched it, you know?'

'Yeah, completely. I mean, I haven't actually seen Blow-Up itself, but I know what you mean.'

'Oh,' she said. 'Well, it's really good. I think you'll like it.'

She paused, giving me space to speak, but I couldn't think what to say. I had constructed so many conversations in my head but didn't remember how any of them started. I was only left with the endings: us running across a sunlit bridge, her head tipped back, cigarette hanging from laughing lips, or the starched smell of sheets in a flat above daytime streets. I didn't know the words that got us there.

The silence itched beneath my fingernails. I acted as if navigating the ring road needed all my concentration, and attempted to keep up the pretence as I drove through hushed backstreets. Leaving the car made things harder; even through the sound of her heels on the cobbles I felt the silence scratching at the backs of my eyelids.

It didn't stop until we were safely inside the cinema, with its hum of stifled whispers and people teasing open sweet packets with their fingertips. It was quiet enough for me to hear the soft sounds of Claire's body as she shifted in her seat. I let her have the arm rest, and during the adverts I watched the way her wrist rested on it.

As the film's classification flickered up she leaned towards me, eyes still fixed on the screen, and whispered, 'I really hope that you enjoy this.'

In her hot, damp breath the words became solid; I could have carried them in my palms.

But as the lights fell the film closed around me. I forgot where I was; there wasn't any worn upholstery, or ice cracking the cobbles outside, or distant trains thumping over level crossings. There was just someone else's world, and I was part of it, gazing out from behind a different set of eyes.

We sat through the credits, and when they ended we shuffled into the foyer's sudden, painful brightness and through the cinema's sliding doors. It had rained while we were inside, and the street smelled like copper.

'So,' Claire said. 'What did you think?'

'I thought it was amazing,' I said. 'Absolutely amazing.'

'That's such a relief. Honestly, you have no idea,' she said, and her laughter scattered across the cobbles.

'I haven't seen anything like that in years. I loved how – like, I loved the way the director saw the world. It reminded me of Rivette, a bit, the way it was this fantasy story set in a real-life place.'

'Yes!' Claire said, clapping one half-curved fist into the other. 'Exactly, that's exactly what I think. Because the fantasy isn't detached from real-life, is it? It's there throughout the film; it's this kind of potential inside everything. Do you know what I mean?'

'Yeah, I –' she was waiting for me, her breath caught on the frozen air – 'I do, but I can't, like, I can't put the words together to explain it. Sorry. But, you know, Blow-Up is one of those films where I can't ever think properly after I've watched it.'

She laughed again, and said, 'So true.'

We had walked onto St. Helens Square. Over the Christmas holidays street performers congregated there in the day, and on the paving was a chalk mural one of them must have drawn. I hadn't noticed it on the way into town, and now the rain had melted the colours together. I thought of the artist's fingers, white and numb in cut-off gloves, as I watched two trickles of yellow and pink twist around each other.

'Any kind of drawing like this, that's done on the ground, reminds me of Mary Poppins,' Claire said. 'It was the only video my Grandma owned, and when I was a kid I had to watch it every single time I went to her house. I reckon I can still recite the entire script.'



I'd gathered most of the facts of her childhood from listening to Mum's Sunday phone calls, but the story I'd formed wasn't like the one Claire told me. As we crossed over the river, flowing quiet and swift with the snow melt, she talked about summer afternoons spent in the terraced gloom of her Grandma's house while her parents were away. She asked about when Dan and I were kids, and I was still talking when we reached the car park.

As I unlocked the car doors I looked at her, leaning against a lamp post with her arms folded against the cold. Her tan was completely gone; she didn't look out of place sitting beside me. On the drive home we watched the slow pulse of streetlights over the dashboard.

I parked outside my parents' house. Claire twisted against her seatbelt to look at me

'Well,' she said. 'Thanks for a lovely evening.'

'No, thank you,' I said. 'That was the best film I've seen in years.'

'I'm so glad you liked it. I always worry – you know, whenever you show anyone something you really love, you always worry whether they'll like it or not.'

'Well, there's no need.'

We didn't say anything for a moment.

'You're going back on Sunday, aren't you?' I said.

She shook her head.

'No. That was the plan, but after work called Dan up we figured there wasn't any point in him driving all the way to Birmingham and then all the way back here. So now I'm getting the train to London tomorrow.

'Oh. Okay. Have a safe journey home, then.'

'You too,' she said, as she opened the car door. 'It was really nice to meet you again.'

'Same.'

She half-ran up the drive, fumbled in her coat pocket for keys, and then slipped into the dark house. I started the car and drove back to my flat.

It snowed again in the night, and the morning sunlight that came through the curtains was white and clean. I thought about Claire when I woke up, but it wasn't like before; she wasn't waiting, bold and willing. I thought about what we'd talked about and when I closed my eyes bits of the film and bits of our conversation played one on top of the other.

Dan called later in the day to thank me for taking her out. I told him I'd enjoyed it. Apparently the Birmingham meeting had gone well so he was less annoyed about cutting short his holiday.

Since then Dan and I have called each other more often than usual. When we talk I ask after Claire, but I never ask to speak to her.

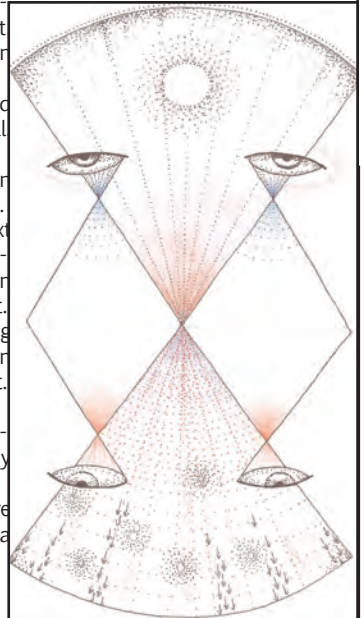
Four weeks after we'd been to the cinema I went back to see the next picture in their Antonioni retrospective. When I left I stood for a moment outside the doors, breathing slowly, the feeling of the film still in me. I looked down the street, and saw a boy cycling up the pavement. Fastened to his bike was a single helium balloon; it bumped gently along the shop signs, moving against the breeze, its red glow shining out in the half-dark of the empty city. I watched until the boy was out of sight.

I tried to tell Dan about it.

'It just keeps coming back to me,' I said, after I'd finished describing it. 'When I'm at work, or in the car, I keep wondering if that boy will find some girl with a blue balloon tied to her handlebars.'

'I doubt it,' Dan said. 'Things like that cost a fortune. I got Claire some balloons for her birthday last year and I nearly had to get out a second mortgage.'

I'd like to be able to tell her about it.





A Christmas Echo

written and sewn by

Rebecca Willmott (a recording of Rebecca reading this poem can also be heard on *A Very Cherry Christmas*, out now on Cherryade Records www.cherryademusic.co.uk)

A Single Candlestick flickering in the shattered light.

I thought I saw a shadowed illustration of you on this cold December night.

Tinsel laced Christmas trees, ribbon wrapped gifts, gingerbread biscuits, a misplaced mistletoe kiss

You couldn't possibly resist.

You worry now your hands become cold. You were bad this year, now coal lines your stocking sole.

You wonder if you will grow tired and alone, no candy striped treats will surround your home.

The sweet sick smell of cloves, suffocate your old dusty lungs, remember the carved wooden hearts together we hung?
The place where the Christmas tree once sat, echoes now the love we once had. I sliced my hands on the Christmas tree ferns, buttons of blood fell to the floor, now when I think of you it makes my heart burn.

As I walk through the cold, I feel strange steps as I saunter through the soft sludgy snow, but no footprints are left as I step through winter's bitter glow

Ribbon red twirls, curls and swirls, tinsel lace wrapped around your wrists, pulled so tight, blood

Drip,

drip

drips...

A Christmas tinsel tangle brushes past my neck. Was that Father Christmas I saw put presents by my bed?

Not for me you fail to let me forget, no presents are left for those who are now dead.



CHOCOLATE HEAVEN CAKE by Morag Rose

FOR ME, the LRM is a political act and part of a revolutionary movement. It may be softer and sillier and more contradictory than some but its still valid and I know we get people thinking about stuff they would not otherwise engage in or feel able to influence. I make the analogy with cake which I feel is a very powerful weapon in the vegan armoury (stealth division). This is one of my favourite recipes and perfect for any situation...

The sponge is based on various people's recipes which I've plagiarised and added more chocolate to, this makes enough for one basement sized baking tray full or 2 large round sandwich layers

470grams self raising flour
75grams cocoa powder
400grams caster sugar
200ml sunflower or vegetable oil
300ml water (you may need more, see how the consistency is)
1 ½ tsp baking powder
2 tsp vanilla essence



Mix all the dry ingredients together – you may need to sieve the cocoa first if it is lumpy. Pour over the oil and stir in then add the water, mixing thoroughly until all the ingredients are amalgamated into a nice smooth batter. Put into your tin and bake at Gas 5 / 375f for about 30 minutes, it works well if it's a wee bit soggy inside, but cook for a bit longer if you prefer a denser cake. When it's cooked let it cool thoroughly. Then you can sandwich with chocolate cream cheese or butter cream frosting and / or jam and top with chocolate cream cheese frosting and / or chocolate fudge icing – those two work really well together. Some grated plain or white chocolate, sliced hazelnut nougat bars or pretty sprinkles adds a really nice finishing touch.

Chocolate Cream Cheese Frosting

Put two or three tubs of toffutti cream cheese in a mixing bowl (amount depends on the size of your cake and how greedy / rich you are, I find 2 is usually enough). Beat it until its really soft then add a tablespoon or so of agave syrup (any other syrup is good too but this is best, sugar would also be OK but may be a bit gritty). Add a tablespoon of sifted cocoa powder and blend in. Add more cocoa or syrup to taste. NOTE: this also makes a delicious cheesecake topping or pudding.

Chocolate Fudge Icing

Melt a large dessertspoon full of soya margarine over a low heat, you could add sugar too if you have a super sweet tooth but I prefer not to. Add 150 grams of plain chocolate broken into pieces. I recommend one with a high cocoa content, flavoured chocolate could also work well. Keep stirring over a low heat until it has melted, then carefully add soya milk, water or chocolate oil and keep stirring until it is smooth and thick and runny, the texture of thick custard is what you want. Let it cool very slightly before using but not so it sets.

Chocolate Unbutter Cream

Soften 75grams soya margarine in a bowl, Sift in 200grams icing sugar and cream well together, add 75grams melted vegan chocolate. If the consistency is too stiff you may need to add a little soya milk. I've also started using soya whipping cream with cocoa sifted in as an alternative – it's very sweet and yummy.



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Good things happening soon

Wednesday December 2, *Josh T Pearson*, Ruby Lounge. Texas cowboy, Bible basher and former Lift to Experience frontman Josh T Pearson's live show is an intense, unmissable experience.

Cass McCombs, Roadhouse. American singer-songwriter.

For Folk's Sake Yuletide Music Special, the Bay Horse.

Thursday December 3, *Six Organs of Admittance*, Islington Mill. American space-noise with support from experimental Manchester bands Gnod and Irma Vep.

Jason Molina, Deaf Institute. Alt county from former Songs: Ohia member.

Ish Marquez, *Jam on Bread*, Art of Tea, Didsbury. Angel-voiced New York anti-folk eccentric and Andre Herman Dune collaborator, with support from Manchester's one man ukulele band. A must see (also, make sure you visit the Art of Tea in the daytime for tea, art, cake and Didsbury Bookshop.)

Friday December 4, *Unresolved*, Castlefield Gallery. New exhibition starts (runs until January 31), complemented by film screening at the Briton's Protection on December 11 (7pm).

Castlefield Contemporaries, easaHQ, Hulme. Castlefield Gallery presents Manchester artists in a vacant commercial space.

Comfortable on a Tightrope present *Box Elders*, Corner, Fallowfield. Nebraskan band plus Beat Unhappening djs.

Pains of Being Pure at Heart, Academy 2. Brooklyn '80s revivalists.

Scrapbook, Kro Bar, Oxford Road. Indie-pop night.

Saturday December 5, *Larkin' Around*, Green Room. Interactive games based around the city, including a giant cake map. Noon-midnight.

Sunday December 6, *A Cheap Affair Christmas*, Islington Mill, 12pm. Arts, crafts and zine fair plus food and drink, with stallholders including past Shrieking Violet contributors such as Lora Avedian and Lora Skilbeck. Perfect for quirky Christmas presents.

Loiterers Resistance Movement walk around Manchester, 1pm (see www.nowhere-fest.blogspot.com). (monthly)

Your Mama's Cookin', Odd-est, Chorlton. Popular '50s themed rock 'n' roll night's spin-off bar sessions. Free Charleston lessons. (monthly)

Tuesday December 8, *Broadcast, Now Wave*, Deaf Institute. Warp Records' experimental/ electro pop band from Birmingham play a long-awaited Manchester show soundtracking a film projection.

Shwervon!, Saki Bar, Rusholme. New York anti-folk with support from Manchester's Amida and Lancaster duo the Lovely Eggs.

Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree, Fuel, Withington. Pull Yourself Together presents Nat Johnson, Allo Darlin' and Jam on Bread.

Wednesday December 9, *Lightning Bolt*, Islington Mill. Noise.

Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti, Deaf Institute. American weird noise/ splodge pop.

Thursday December 10, *Stephen Malkmus & The Jicks*, Deaf Institute. Former Pavement frontman brings his wry indie-pop to Manchester.

Saturday December 12, *A Very Cherry Christmas launch party*, Underachievers Please Try Harder, Saki Bar, Rusholme. Launch of Cherryade Records' annual Christmas compilation, with live music from the 10p Mixes from Leeds, Jimmy of Lancaster band the Bobby McGee's and Manchester's own Shrieking Violets and Doris and the Jumpers followed by classic indie disco.

Sunday December 13, *Jamboree*, Fuel, Withington. Lo-fi night featuring Kriss Foster from Lancaster plus Manchester's Freedom Screech, Monster Island and Maple Tree.

Monday December 14, *Raveonettes*, Ruby Lounge. Glamorous Danish duo play-

ing boy-girl fuzz-pop.

Wednesday December 16, *Victoria Baths swimming club*, Levenshulme Baths 7pm. (monthly)

Your Mama's Cookin', location tbc. Rock 'n' roll night with tea and cake, Charleston and knitting lessons.

Thursday December 17, *Furthur*, Star and Garter. Golden Lab's alternative disco. (monthly)

Saturday December 19, *A Carefully Planned Christmas Party*, Saki Bar, Rusholme. All day gig with free mince pies.

Sunday 20 and Wednesday December 23, *It's a Wonderful Life*, Cornerhouse. There's no better film to get you in the mood for Christmas than Frank Capra's 1946 feelgood classic - a must see. Other December highlights include *Citizen Kane*, French Film Festival on Tour (December 1-6) and the new Richard Linklater and Jim Jarmusch films, *Me and Orson Welles* and *Limits of Control* (see website for details).

Monday December 21, *University Challenge*, BBC2, 8pm. Reigning champions (by default!) the University of Manchester take on King's College, London for a place in the quarter-finals.

Thursday December 31, *New Year's Eve*. Dance into the New Year at *Smile* at the Star and Garter, Manchester's best indie disco or watch some fireworks.

Things that might be in the next issue: Feminism, recipes, photographs, creative writing, illustration, music, things to make and do and more.