

THE STEEP STREET JOURNAL.

- WINTER 2016 -

CELEBRATIONS ACROSS UK AS
FOLKESTONE IS VOTED CAPITAL OF
THE WORLD

Folkestonians reflect
on the theme of
belonging to mark
this historic event,
submitting short stories,
illustrations of the streets.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Steep Street Coffee House. Hopefully you'll enjoy reading this almanac of the entries to our first Literary Competition.

This year's entrants have responded to our theme of *belonging*. Belongingness is the emotional need to be an accepted member of a group. It is strongly linked with identity. Those who don't belong can feel uprooted, disconnected and insecure. We encouraged writers and artists to consider what it means to belong and how it feels to discover that you don't. Many people experience belonging through shared beliefs and values – but what happens when we question these beliefs and their foundations?

ILLUSTRATION PRIZE - WINNERS NAME - PAGE

ARTISTS WERE INVITED TO SUBMIT A VISUAL RESPONSE TO OUR THEME IN ANY MEDIUM.

FLASH FICTION PRIZE WINNERS NAME - PAGE

WE WERE LOOKING FOR BEAUTIFULLY AND SUCCINCTLY WRITTEN SHORT STORIES OF NO MORE THAN 250 WORDS.

SHORT AND TWEET COMPETITION

TO THE TWITTER GENERATION- COULD YOU WRITE A STORY IN LESS THAN 140 CHARACTERS?

We have been delighted and entertained by the response to our call out. Hopefully you will be too.

The 2016 Folkestone Book Festival is a special moment for us here at Steep Street. Not only do we mark our first year's anniversary on the beautiful Old High Street. We are also launching our very own vegan chocolatiers next door to the café and selling our own range of coffee for you to use at home. For more about this please visit:

WWW.STEEPSTREET.CO.UK/CHOCOLATE

WWW.STEEPSTREET.CO.UK/COFFEE

We also have plenty of upcoming events to keep you entertained. You can find out more about these on our website. Finally, if you would like to keep up to date with our news please do subscribe to our newsletter by visiting:

WWW.STEEPSTREET.CO.UK/SUBSCRIBE

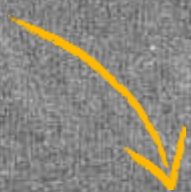
A SHADOW

DAMIAN VALLE

Before you realised it you were already at the airport. That phone call or that email still pounding, burning in your brain. A new job was waiting for you, new people, a new country. Nothing was as you expected, and you were scared and lost, but you carried on. The time passed and miles away the kids were grown, your old people were departing and the dust glided and then piled over your paused life. You became an echo on the phone, and a shadow in the minds of the people you used to know, a name and a couple of anecdotes and then the void. And in here you are just an extra in a busy street, a number in the paper. Some will feel curious others even scared but then you will disappear, you are a mist that crosses other's lives without leaving footprints, a mirage that could perfectly not even exist. And everyday you crawl back home, four walls and a door but not really a home, a place where there is no one waiting for you, no one expecting you. The time came when, whilst you washed your face in front of the mirror, you realised you are but a shadow, a being in the limbus with no anchor on either world.

FLASH STORY

DAVID WILKINS



It is dark in this alley, and damp. A nasty place, a place for mugging and robbery and silent unnoticed bleeding. It is cold and I shiver as I wait. But what if nobody comes?

STEEP STREET SHORT STORY

JASON WILKINS

Following the tumult of the dishwasher, Teacup found himself separated from his long-time partner, Saucer. Now lacking the comfort and support upon which he had always relied, Teacup was filled with grief. Needless to say, he was shocked; having never been filled with anything other than Earl Grey.

Teacup glanced around searching desperately for his friend's unmistakable gold-plated rim to no avail; his efforts thwarted by the gloom inside the cupboard. Not since his mother, Teapot, was knocked off a shelf and left in pieces had Teacup felt such sadness. Though glued back together, she was never the same again.

Before he could find his bearings, Teacup was wrenched from the relative tranquillity of the cupboard and thrust into a bright, bustling environment unfamiliar to him. What was this hell? This place looked nothing like Ms Gaffney's kitchen nor was she anywhere to be seen. Why had he been placed atop a gaudy, mustard yellow saucer?

Teacup was struggling to comprehend the harsh new reality when a glimmer of gold caught his eye from across the room. It was Saucer! Teacup was overjoyed but his relief was fleeting. Looking closer, it was apparent that Saucer was unperturbed by the circumstances. In fact, he was sharing a joke with an olive-coloured mug. Teacup could barely contain his incredulity. Fraternising with a coffee mug? The treachery!

Worse yet, the realisation gradually dawned on Teacup: he had been sold into slavery at the local cafe.

Pru Keen



SLOWLY MOVING.
ALEX BOUGHTON

The conversation on the table next to me is interesting. The two of them are discussing *Game of Thrones*. I want to chip in, but these are not my friends, I don't even know them.

There are times when for a brief moment a connection is made. A shared joke in the queue for coffee; offering an opinion on a video game someone is going to purchase, or perhaps someone has left the tag up on their shirt, and I point it out, gently, and they thank me. But these brief moments pass.

I sit and sip my coffee and I'm ready with a dozen painstakingly prepared sentences to intrude into someone else's life, but the times I feel courageous enough to do so I'm met only with well-mannered responses, with words designed to politely disengage. And I look into their eyes and I see them struggling for an out. Which I give them. I read my book.

I want to tell this couple that the dragon has three heads. They'd know what I mean, we watch the same show, after all. Such an elegant means to drop into their world, they'd smile and he'd turn to her, triumphant and simply say "Precisely", and then ask if I'd like to join them.

So I stand, and I put an arm through the sleeve of my coat, and I look across and my eyes meet his. And in that instant, I am walking down the street, slowly moving.

The light at the end of the tunnel was quickly replaced with warm, wet darkness. For a moment, her 9-month-old brain remembered everything.



SAMSARA
BRAD EWIN

BELONGING OR NOT

KAREN MARWOOD

Sitting watching the world go by nothing in her mind, you could see all the emotions scored in her soul. Even her outer covering looked sad, full of tales, nothing that old would not have stories. Looking like she did not belong in this new world, nothing got old it was replaced with newer models. Maybe she got dropped from the electric dome that took everything to space. They went at full moon then were replaced ready to start again, memoirs kept locked in the hole.

Her eyes looked at mine, searching for a connection. I could hear her breath, raspy and shallow like it was her last one. I am never sad but have heard it thought about, during closed down time. Is she sad? I want to know her thoughts, I try linking but the wall is hard, how does she do that when so old or is she?

I turn away but I want to know, so retracing my steps I say hello in my head and she looks at me with a questioning pose on her face. I know she can see the things I saw and all the questions going round in a loop in my head.

Faintly she speaks, it was my Grandma from long ago, I kept her Soul, please forget you saw, I want her to stay safe in me for protection and history as I am the leading past author.

SISTER

KATE JEFFORD

I was six when my father lifted me up to see his body. A million lights went off inside me, the ones he lit when he let me stay by his side even when his mates said, "Get rid of her. She don't belong."

I slipped from under my mother's mourning eyes and ran to the end of the street I wasn't allowed because of the drowning river and killing cars. At the end of a row of net-curtained neatness, mowed lawns and lush borders, the Johnson house. A filthy-windowed place with a kicked-in door and a yard full of cracked sinks, gashed sofas and Cortina carcasses. "That lot don't belong here," the neighbours said.

"What you doing up here?" The youngest Johnson all of a sudden next to me, a red-haired girl my age but twice my size. Something in her hand scraped on my face. "Let's see if you're white underneath."

Raw pain as if she'd ripped my cheek off. I touched the spot. My fingers bright red and dripping from her half-eaten biscuit-weapon. She dropped it where my brother fell when the Johnson boys stuck a knife in. To see if he bled black. A stain on the concrete. The shape of Africa.

THE SONG BIRD THAT DIDN'T BELONG

CARYS ROGERS

Relieved, the little song bird landed down in his garden after a long and difficult migration. Confused, the feeble bird looked around to find everything had changed. The aged stone bird-bath that he used to bathe in had disappeared and his magnificent oak tree home had been demolished. Everything the frail song bird had ever known had been replaced.

Many birds from far and wide were bathing in a new modern birdbath and sitting in nests in the tender branches of a young apple tree. This garden was no longer just the little bird's home; it was home to many others. All alone, the little bird trudged through the thriving garden he no longer knew, as all the other birds sang happy tunes.

Suddenly the joyless song bird spotted another bird walking toward him looking as unhappy as him. "Hello" the small blue tit whispered "would you be so kind to tell me where I am"? The songbird immediately answered "you mean you don't know anybody either?" The blue tit stared at the little song bird for a few moments his beady eyes like raindrops sliding down the window of a car, "no" he replied. The two birds stared thoughtfully at each other for a moment. "Do you want to be friends?" the blue tit considered it for a second "yes!"

The two birds became best of friends and lived in the new garden happily, they both finally belonged.

Sue Bridge



BOX
KATE JEFFORD

He didn't belong in a box. She knew that, even though he used to go on 'til she wanted to strangle him about how he didn't belong anywhere.

He belonged on a bike pedaling like mad, skinny ankles exposed under too-short trousers on fast-growing legs. Or on a corner bunking off school ogling fit girls. Or smoking spliff in the bedroom of a mate with liberal parents. Or in a club with fake ID, hair spiked with product and neck reeking of cheap cologne. All the places she told him he didn't belong. Before that day when a bike ran a red and tossed him in the air and he landed hard so his head broke and his brain swelled and leaked and his eyes closed forever on the machine that beeped until they switched it off and she signed the papers so they could take his organs to belong to someone else one day.

He didn't belong in a box on the shoulders of his father, grandfather, uncle and brother. He didn't belong under that lid in his favourite t-shirt with his face all wrong. He belonged in her arms pressed to her heart.



LI TTLE DREAMS

NASHI RA HASTON

Sometimes Jeremy wishes
that he could shrink down
and live in his bonsai tree.
Then he remembers he is a
fully grown man who pays
bills.



MONSTERS

MICHELE SHELDON

Today there's a half-arsed monster sticking its tongue out at me daring me to step onto his beach.

And when I look closer he's surrounded by a gang of them; a rabbit-eared ghost, a toothless troll and a what-you-looking-at-teenager and his gormless friend.

This isn't the first time they've tried to intimidate me. Yesterday it was a blue cheese, boss-eyed take-me-to-your-leader pebble. The day before, the smirking, acne-scarred Daesh soldier who shot my father. The day before that, the blank grey face of the Home Office lawyer telling me my country is safe now despite the daily bombings and murders. Then the day before the day before, the shiny white bald man who swears at me when I leave the Mosque, telling me to fuck off home even though I have none. And last week, I even glimpsed a brother pebble. I reached out and grabbed the jagged dagger of flint, turning it this way and that, trying to find his handsome face again; Iron Man, a lady with a cat on her head, a deranged-looking giraffe. But brother had gone. Has gone. Is gone.

Every day I plan to grind my boot into these monster faces. Show them who's boss. Who's King of the Beach. Every day I stand here like an idiot, my foot hovering over the gang. Too afraid to take a step. Too afraid to look up across the water to where real monsters are waiting for my return.

CLARENCE MAT PETTY

"They don't want you out there. You belong here, with us" The voice whispers.

"No!" Clarence wails.

The spider web fractures of the mirror streak haphazardly out from his fist's point of abrupt cessation. The metal of the revolver feels cold against his grip and the sweat from his brow dips into the barrel indent in his temple; crimson seeps from cut fingers.

"Damn" a curse from behind taught lips

Clarence snatches a towel and stems the breach.

"I'm leaving. I won't give you anyone else"

"Stay here. You belong with us, we'll take care of you. Give us what we need" The rasping monotone pleads on.

Clarence pushes his fingers deep into the openings on the side of his head; as if that could keep them out.

"We're all you need"

"There's more. Beyond the door, across the water and..." Clarence sits on his own, whimpering in the darkness.

"Remember what it was like before? Before we came to you? Before you let us in?"

Clarence remembers the hollow emptiness he'd languished in for so long; the cold dark nothing of being all on his own. Then they were there, whispering into his dreams, filling him with warmth; he wasn't alone, but at what cost.

"Put away your toy and bring them to us." disembodied insistence

Clarence sits and turns to his desk, he violently drowns his quill and signs the internment order. Dr Clarence Griffin pauses briefly then hammers down the asylum stamp; then he weeps bitterly.

"Good"



BELONGING

MARTYN WOODWARD

A mislaid belonging, a camera, took us back to Steep Street.

It was a two-hour drive home from Folkestone. We were nearing Halstead when Ella asked my wife if she had her camera. Ella couldn't remember bringing her camera back to the car. At one point, she had asked Kaveri to look after it. Kaveri reasoned that it was probably in the car boot but nurtured a nagging suspicion that she had given Ella her camera back.

We picked our belongings out of the boot. No camera; Ella perturbed.

Steep Street Café had been our last stop. I was pretty sure Ella had had her camera at the café. 'We'll ring tomorrow morning,' I reassured. 'If it's there, I'll go and get it.'

Why do reassurances so seldom reassure?

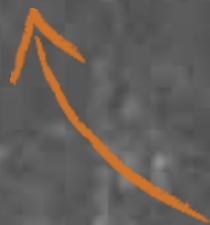
I rang the café before 9am. Alice sounded relieved. 'The camera,' she said, pre-empting my query.

Ella surfaced later, her first words, 'Have you rung up about my camera?'

Kaveri and I set out again for Folkestone. On returning, we noticed the people in the town more than we had the day before. Folkestone felt like a kind of throwback. There seemed to be people who clearly belonged; people who belonged differently; some, maybe not at all. The woman who shook her tambourine and intoned at a shop window — was she protecting or cursing those inside?

Reunited with Ella's camera, we said our thanks and stayed in Steep Street for coffee and cake while the different worlds walked by.

Oi, can I have some of your
falafel wrap? Said the seagull.



BELONGING
HOPE DARE

SPLASH SALLY KINDBERG

Eva was a volunteer. She wore a pale blue top with the zoo's insignia printed across her chest. The permanent staff wore dark blue tops, and sat chatting together in the canteen during tea breaks, ignoring the volunteers. Eva missed her family, felt awkward speaking her new language, but felt at ease with the zoo creatures, especially the birds. She made friends with the vultures, put on goggles and checked the sharp-beaked storks' feathers for mites, made fish and vitamin smoothies for the penguins.

The penguins fascinated her - they were her favourites. She sensed their moods, respected their friendships and dietary preferences. She loved watching them dive into the huge, glass sided pool, would sometimes stay on long after closing time and watch their graceful progress through the dimly lit water.

One especially hot summer night, when visitors had gone home and the security guards were dozing somewhere, Eva slipped off her zoo uniform and slid down into the water with the penguins. At first they stopped swimming, startled, then swam with her, over her back and under her legs, diving playfully again and again with her until she felt she was one of them. Eva wanted to be there for ever. In the morning the penguin pool was closed to the public until the zoo's managers worked out how to deal with the press.



CRI MI NAL

SHANDY REETYN

"Where are you?" "At the Rugby Club." I stared across at the police officer wondering what he thought about my lie... How did I end up here?



Susan McKenna

My red tie's tight on my
neck. I'm smart. Silly. My
peg says my name; Sarah
showed me. I'm stuck. If I
ran I'd be caught. I
want to go home.



SHANE RECORD

NAVIGATION

SUSAN MCKENNA

The coolest kids wear skinny fit trousers and never have a coat, even when it's pouring. They mostly talk about football and get picked first in Games. The nerds wear straight leg trousers, the kind we all wore in primary school. They wear their anoraks in summer and get picked last in Games. The coolest boys are loud and cocky. The nerds are quiet and talk about stuff I don't understand. The stereotype is real.

I am considered one of the cool kids, but not the coolest. I wear skinny fit trousers and a coat in winter. I have friends in both camps yet I belong to neither. I am safe to enter the cool camp without fear of ridicule but I'm not always included in stuff. I'm not afraid to tell them if I disagree with something. This results in exclusion from time to time. It doesn't bother me. The nerd camp is more difficult. Although I have a couple of nerd friends they have made it clear that I can't hang out with them at school and a new found confidence has emerged. Strength in numbers it seems. There are a lot of really brainy boys at my school. Most of them are nerds. "Dan, what are you doing here? You are too cool to be here. You need to go." Seriously, I got kicked out by the nerds at school.

I move between and amongst them all. Friends with everyone and no one.

BELONGING

JESSICA JOY

'We are the champions of the world!' Worked into a frenzy of anticipation by carefully chosen warm-up songs, we all scramble to our feet and shout and cheer and whistle at the tops of our voices, as the sparkling couple cross to centre stage. The roar of the crowd is exhilarating. The smell of aftershave, perfume and warm sandwiches pungent. The beautiful pair on the stage are humble and amusing. They tell us we are all unique for the sacrifices we have made to get here today. The room swells with pride. They remind us that the bigger the sacrifice, the bigger will be our successes. All we have to do is be different. We all agree with sincere nods and glance at our neighbours for affirmation which is willingly exchanged. The man tells jokes and talks modestly of his wealth. We should 'Think Big' and attend all the meetings, read all the books and listen to the tapes every day. He encourages us to shun those who question what we are willing to do to better ourselves and our lives. He suggests that it will probably be our nearest and dearest who doubt our motives. The lady coaches us in how to love and support our menfolk as they take the path least trodden. This is our family now. We drench ourselves in their sermons and soak up their eulogies and tomorrow, when the anticlimactic depression takes hold, we will drown in self-doubt and book another function.



Due to popular demand for our homemade vegan tray bakes we have created a fabulous range of vegan and gluten free chocolates. From hazelnut heaven to devilish dark chocolate, we have spent time crafting deliciously, moreish treats using quality ingredients that contain no animal derived products whatsoever.

To find out more about our artisan chocolates please pop into the shop next door or visit www.steep-street.co.uk/chocolates

ALIEN NATION

DAVE BULL

'You don't look very happy with your genealogy test results Billy.'

'I can't believe it, I expected to be pure English, all my family are and my Nan says all her Grandparents were. I'm in The Defenders Of St George, you have to be pure blooded English to join. Tell me again.'

'52% N European, 24% S E European, 14% The Levant, 10% W Africa.'

'But I don't look South European let alone African and it don't say nothing about English!'

'I'm afraid N European is as close as it gets to English and we're all a mixture going back to the year dot... and your results are "more English" than your Leader's according to the TV documentary last month.'

'I know... he ain't the leader no more! That's why I did this, my workmates were winding me up about it. I'm gutted, I'll get the elbow from The Defenders now, I feel like a fraud, an illegal immigrant!'

'It's quite common to feel alienated at first. You wanted to be as English as all your indigenous countrymen though and you are, indeed more so than most. Besides your hero is St George. As far as we know his Father came from what is now Turkey, his Mother From Palestine ... The Levant. He never even visited England. Your African heritage is probably due to hailing from Portsmouth. Hundreds of Nelson's sailors were black.'

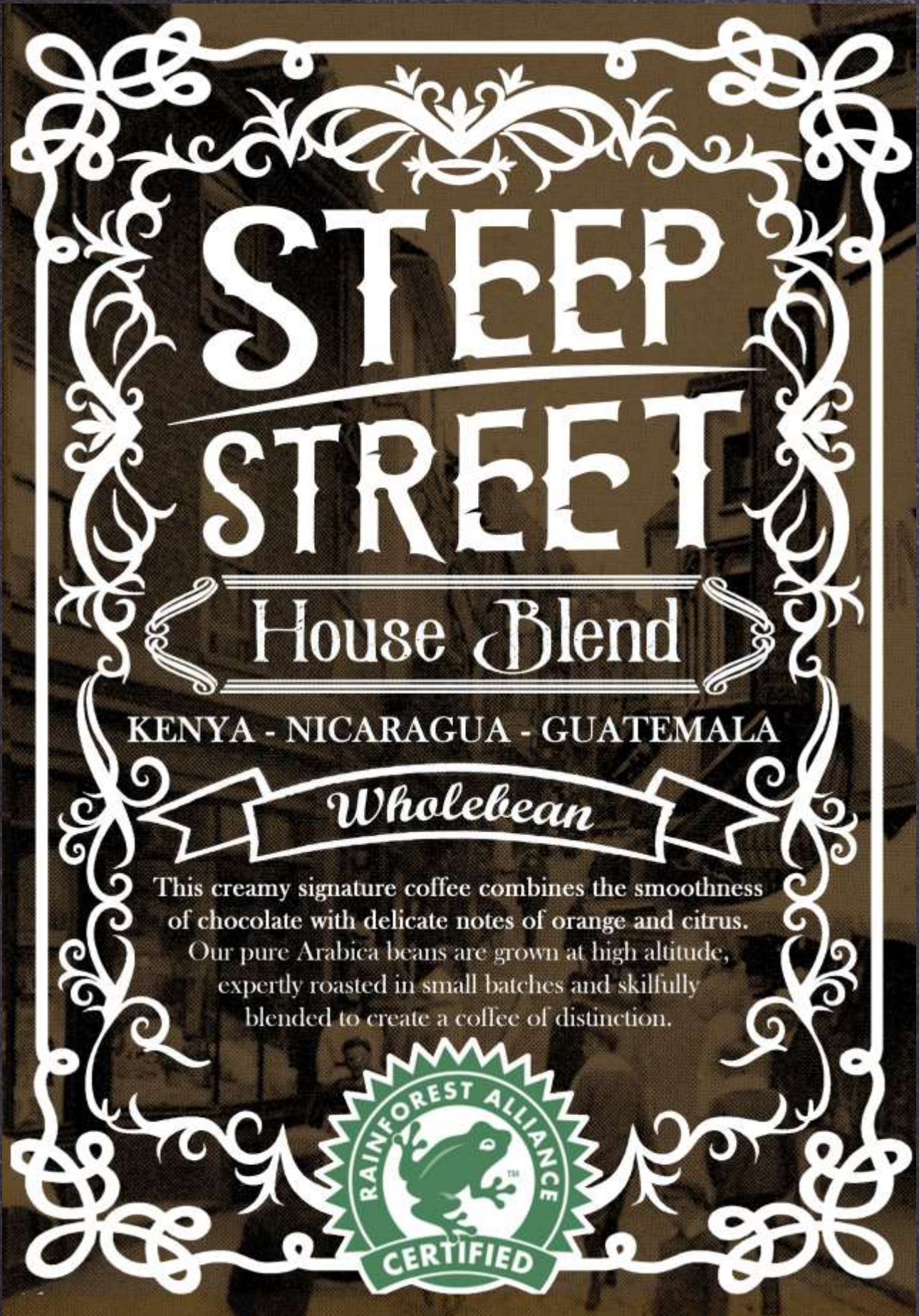
'Yeah... now you put it like that... stuff The Defenders!'

'Welcome home Billy.'

Eva tucked him into the car seat and pulled away, ignoring the noise behind. She felt no sympathy for a mother who had turned her back on a baby; she would keep him safe now.



T W I T T E R S T O R Y
S U S A N H I B B E R D




STEEP STREET

House Blend

KENYA - NICARAGUA - GUATEMALA

Wholebean

This creamy signature coffee combines the smoothness of chocolate with delicate notes of orange and citrus. Our pure Arabica beans are grown at high altitude, expertly roasted in small batches and skilfully blended to create a coffee of distinction.



TAKE OUR COFFEE HOME WITH YOU

Both wholebean and ground coffee now available in retail packs

JIM NEVER FIXED IT

CHRIS MEAKIN

Donald Kiddick always wanted to have an adventurous career. He started out as an amateur gynecologist; unfortunately his girlfriend caught him at it one day, and so decided to go into Public Relations instead.

Don found an agency in Covent Garden in London called JNFI Associates, only to discover it actually stood for "Jim Never Fixed It" and that suited him down to the ground.

JNFI was owned by an enterprising wheeler-dealer called Jurek Assid, part-German, part-Syrian, spoke perfect English. The two soon became Soho celebrities. One early marketing triumph was their promotional campaign for Big Boys Wonderpants. A Chinese underwear manufacturer had taken familiar Wonderbra technology, applied it to men's pants and produced a winner. Don Kiddick proved the perfect male model, so the PR campaign cost them nothing in outside fees. They sold the underpants at a massive profit through eBay, made a small fortune and never looked back.

Jurek's next winner was a solar-powered flashlight, and then a wind-up mobile phone. The partnership became a commercial legend: Jurek Assid's numerous Oriental contacts in the manufacturing presented a succession of brilliant products, while Don Kiddick always knew best how to sell them. JNFI was unbeatable in the marketing and public relations industry; by now Don and Jurek had a Jaguar apiece and extremely nice houses in Cheam.

But even success has its limitations, and they sought new horizons. So one day Don said to his boss "Tell you what, let's open a Language School for all those lovely girls who want to learn to speak English." It looked like a sure-fire winner: London was bursting at the seams with young ladies from exotic countries trying to find a rich husband.

The Assid Multilingual Institute occupied premises in the Balls Pond Road close to Dalston Junction; everyone could find it. The timetable gave its nubile students ample time for recreation and relaxation. Jurek did the languages, while Don did the recreation; unfortunately Jurek caught him at it one day, and Don was right back where he started. Good things never last, do they?

At 10 they came

The hands that burned on my bones

Nothing was left

The sun my father grows dim

This ship of faces

Not belonging

GEOFF KAILE

KITTY HALL



FAIRY STORY? DAVID WILKINS

The mallards of Mallard Lake were not at all impressed by the swan.

"You know what this place is called?" they said to him. "Mallard Lake. Whoever heard of Swan Lake?" The mallards giggled softly. "Plus it isn't just a name. This is our lake; we were born here, like our parents and grandparents before us." The swan looked puzzled.

"I was born here too" he answered proudly. "My parents flew thousands of miles to get here." (The swan was very clever and had learnt to read the notice boards around the water's edge)

"Sorry, didn't quite get that" sniggered the mallards; for the swan only spoke Duck with a thick Swannish accent, and he knew better than to speak to them in his own tongue; no mallard ever learnt another language. He tried again, more slowly. "I — was — born — here — too,"

"Oh yes, we remember that. Feathers all stubby and brown, you looked as stupid as you do now." The mallards paddled nervously; they knew more providers came to the lake, and threw more manna, since the swan had come. Providers seemed to like him.

The swan looked crestfallen, remembering how the ducks had teased him when he was young. He turned with a sweep of one big webbed foot and swam away towards his nest at the muddy end of the lake. "That's it," the mallards yelled, "Get lost. You don't belong here." And they shook their wings and proudly puffed out their brown shirt fronts.

BELONGING

JASMINE DEWEY

Ashley knew what it was like not to belong. He had hoped his parents would come round but in his heart he knew his father was homophobic and his mother weak. "Coming out" was meant to make you feel better but he had lost his home and his family.

Ashley and his partner Drew had read an article in the local paper about a Jack Russell and her puppy needing a home. They had been named Gypsy and Tinker by the staff at the rescue centre. They had been dumped outside in a cardboard box. There was a note attached to Gypsy's collar saying the owner had died and they were an unwanted inheritance.

Drew had encouraged Ashley to contact the centre because Ashley had always wanted a dog as a child but had been refused. So here they were seated in a bright waiting room, waiting anxiously to see if Gypsy and Tinker would accept them as new owners.

Gypsy came through the door jumped up on her hind legs and licked Ashley's nose as he bent over to stroke her. Tinker was a bungle of licks and legs as he excitedly rolled around in Drew's arms. White and brown, one patch over Tinker's left eye.

"They have taken to you both" said the assistant."

"We want them to be part of our family" said Ashley. "They couldn't be wanted more" said Drew as excited as the dogs.

"They belong with us for the rest of their days mother and son."

BELONGING

SOPHIA BLACK

She was alone in the playground: a strange little girl, skinny with mousy straight hair that rested on her shoulders and big, dark moon night eyes.

She was staring at the sky as each cloud became a witch, a giant, chariots and iced cakes. Someone pushed her to the ground. Her knee was bleeding and the shout of 'cry baby, cry baby,' enveloped her as three big girls stood over her laughing.

'Here take dhis,' a boy said. He held out a clean folded handkerchief.

'I'm Ray,' He said smiling broadly, showing off his beautiful teeth, so white against his dark skin and so even.

'Here take it' he said again. 'Take noo notice of dhem gals, dhem witches.'

After this they walked home and if the road was busy Ray would take her hand. Ireni would have walked the world with him. He was gentle and kind and not in her dreams but there with her, holding her hand.

One afternoon Ray's mother came to meet him. She was a large smiling woman and when she spoke it was as if she was singing a song. Her teeth were white and even like Ray's.

'Lost yer tongue chil?'

'Are you the Queen?'

Ray's mother roared and rocked with laughter, not like her mother who never laughed.

She loved this laughing woman who folded her into her fleshy body; who was so soft, so comfortable and warm and who smelt of fragrant roses.

Ireni would have willingly stayed with her forever.

POEM FOR FAVERSHAM
ANONYMOUS

Halfway through April,
The middle of May,
The North East breeze defines the day,
But when the wind doth take its leave,
It can be sweeter than Antilles,
And in these parts it takes the crown,
For we all sense it is our town.

GREEN GREEN GRASS
PATRIC CUNNANE

The plane landed with a slight bump and rolled along the runway to a halt. An old song kept playing in his head, a paean to the 'green green grass of home'. Mick was home now alright, first time in years.

The fields were indeed green, brightened by the red fuchsias that littered the hedgerows. His taxi motored through Ennis then sped up on the stretch running down to Lissycasey. The driver wanted to know everything, "Mick Finucane is it? Oh there'd be no shortage of Finucanes in these parts."

Aunt Mary's wake was held the night before the funeral, she who once dandled the infant Mike on her knee. Guinness flowed in Fanny O'Ded's pub as neighbours made him feel no time had passed since he left for England. "Sure it's grand you're settled over there but there's always a welcome if you're passing," said Meg Clancy. He remembered kissing Meg at a long-ago summer dance.

The mass was packed with relatives and friends. The Irish liked a good funeral. He watched Mary's coffin being lowered into the ground, dropped a single rose after it, glanced into the valley below the church where the silver Shannon meandered into the sea.

He sipped a large whiskey on the return flight, felt his eyes moisten as the song reminded him he wasn't going home, only to the place where he now lived. 'It's good to touch the green green grass of home.'

They liked her. Really liked
her. Still. After all these
months. Maybe it was time
to accept that this was real,
however unfamiliar it felt.



SUSAN MCKENNA

BELONGONG
JAN BARKER

Be(longing) for (Folk)stone solidity of (s)pace quickened to find folk(song) to talk to be with share multiply my desires for (be)longing to burn lonely isolation label above my (fore)head to new folk (stone) as when I do not talk for three days I worry the first words I say will squeak creak peak out of my dry mouth and I'll sound stupid.

Solitary coffee in bubble of buzz at too Steep Street meet no-one but eavesdrop my mind into other conversations of dogs I do not know and human desires I long to experience ... long to belong to have a swan song longer than a stanza of "who why what was I".

Book walls absorb voices with no hard wall dead cat bounce. It would take longer to read each wall book than say "hello hi let's try to fly" to each living person in Folkestone and also read the names of half the gravestones. Yet, time a plenty, voice silent and coffee coldens condenses fear of (be) longing to my townsfolk.

Ice breaker moon shaker coffee stirrer if the fire alarm activated and screamed we would become one unity sharing same experience running out of Steep Street cafe to stand united upon pavement shattering English social conventions of normality to open share belong and gloriously break the ice that stops one being the one one desires to be.

Smile for first time since starting anti-depressants fondling fingering stroking lighter in my pocket before igniting open book pages by table leg.

AS ONE DOOR CLOSSES...

ANGELA CUNNINGHAM

'Oh no!' whispered Sadie to herself as she pushed open the heavy oak door into the church, juggling an overflowing bucket of flowers in one hand and an ornate urn in the other.

'The theme. I'd forgotten the theme was Autumn.' She glanced at her bucket, hoping that the blooms she had chosen reflected autumn in some way – *any* way. Not really. Oh well, she had no time to change her plan now, she'd just have to muddle through.

Sadie was new to the flower group having only moved into Primrose Court during the summer. It was the name that initially attracted her. She had always loved flowers, primroses in particular, so she felt sure it would be perfect, and being so close to Jean and her grandchildren, Josh and Maria, made the move into an exciting adventure. Sadie needed something exciting in her life. The last year had not been easy.

Jean had encouraged her to integrate into the community by bringing along details of several clubs, but nothing had really appealed, until she spotted the poster advertising St Aiden's Flower Group, on the supermarket noticeboard. She scribbled the contact details on the back of her shopping list on the way out, but dithered for almost a week before she made the phone call to Tanya, the club secretary. By which time she could no longer ignore Jim's voice whispering in her head.

'Go on Sadie, give it a go, you know you'll enjoy it and you need to meet new folk.'

At her first meeting she sat at the back, hoping not to be noticed, whilst an elegant lady with a strident voice demonstrated how to make an arrangement with three stems of gladioli and a branch of curled willow. Not exactly Sadie's style, but she'd appreciated the woman's skill.

During the break, Tanya sought her out and introduced her to two other members. They sat round a table together sharing tea and biscuits and Sadie learned a bit about the group. They were all amateurs, keen to learn new skills from the monthly visiting speakers. That made Sadie feel infinitely more comfortable. She had had no floristry training, but had always loved arranging flowers, mostly grown by Jim in their garden. Dear green fingered Jim had kept her well supplied with materials for her hobby. Before the meeting closed Tanya asked for volunteers to add their names to the church flower rota and reminded everybody that the whole group were invited to enter the Flower Festival arranged to coincide with Harvest, so the theme was to be Autumn.

So, Sadie's memory had failed her and left her somewhat downhearted. However, there was no turning back now. She had been allocated a corner of one of the rear pews, so at least her arrangement wouldn't be conspicuous. She collected water from the kitchen and began to create the basic shape. Spiked scarlet balls of monarda and yellow rudbeckia with its startling Maltesa like centres. Contrasting deep purple Michaelmas daisies and mauve verbena softened the effect. She was just getting into her stride when her concentration was interrupted.

The theme's Autumn, where's your berries and seeds?' The thorny voice came from behind her. Sadie turned, red faced. She felt like a child who had misunderstood the homework.

'Err... I f-forgot there was a theme,' she stuttered, 'it won't matter will it?'

'It might not matter to you, but we take these things seriously. The skill is interpreting the topic. Now, I've incorporated rowan berries, ash keys and...'

The tirade was gently interrupted. 'Gwen, I see you've finished your display, perhaps you could go and help setting out the cups for tea please.' Gwen sloped off, shoulders hunched.

PTO

'Don't let Gwen upset you, Sadie,' said Tanya. 'Her brusque manner doesn't mean a thing — we're all used to it, and have learned to take her as we find her. What beautiful montbretias! Have you grown them yourself?'

'No, sadly I have no garden at the flat, they're out of my daughter's shrubbery.'

'They're such a superb shape and add graceful movement against the spikes of red-hot-poker,' said Tanya. 'I might copy that idea myself sometime.'

Satisfied that she had soothed a difficult situation, Tanya excused herself to check the cash float.

Feeling somewhat uplifted, Sadie selected two stems of Japanese anemone to add an ethereal quality to the overall effect and stepped back to admire her handiwork.

'Not bad,' she muttered to herself, but inside she was wishing she'd brought those berries and seeds.

'Granny look what we've found.' The voice was piercing and staccato in the lofty church, echoing around the columns. It was unmistakably Josh and was followed by squeals of delight from Maria, holding his hand and toddling along beside him.

'Close your eyes and open your hands.' Josh presented her with a bag. She peeked inside. It was full of conkers, some in their green spiky shells and some glowing, shiny brown.

'We found them in the churchyard,' said Josh.

'Under a big tree,' said Maria, her eyes wide with wonder. 'A horse tree.'

'A horse chestnut tree,' corrected Josh, then, waving, he shouted 'Mummy, we've found Granny,' as he spied his mother in the doorway, and before Sadie had a chance to give the children a welcoming hug, they were chasing across the church and towing her daughter back.

Jean apologised for disturbing her mother and was about to usher the children away when Josh thrust the bag of conkers at his Granny.

'These are for you Granny. We're off to find some more for Daddy before he comes home for tea.'

Sadie was overjoyed. 'Thank you so much, both of you. I shall treasure them,' she said, giving each child a big hug and waving them off.

A warm glow nestled in Sadie's heart as she put the final touches to her arrangement, then, satisfied she had done her best she gathered up her bucket, handbag and the precious bag of conkers. Then, an idea struck her. Though she would have much preferred to display them at home, perhaps she could incorporate some of the conkers into her arrangement, to better satisfy the original brief. She was pondering the best way to do this when she felt a nudge at her elbow. Turning, she gasped as she realised Gwen had been released from her crockery duties and was back again. 'Oh no, what now?' she thought.

'I wondered whether you might like some of these,' said Gwen, smiling a little hesitantly and offering up some sprigs of rowan and elder berries. 'I brought more than I needed, so they're spare.'

Sadie was quite taken aback, but remembering Tanya's advice she smiled broadly.

'How very kind Gwen,' she said, welcoming that feeling of belonging at last, and accepting the gift gratefully. She paused, then added, 'perhaps you could help me to place them. Two heads are invariably better than one.'