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Ellipsis Zine #10

Everything Has a Price

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Mix and Match

by Jude Higgins

I collected cake plates, but she often broke them. She collected pottery rabbits with hollow insides. Stuffed her earnings (dubious) inside, in neat bank rolls. Never looked to see how much was missing. I rummaged in junk shops — bought more plates with some of what I took. 1930s Clarice Cliff, random bone china, hand painted with poppies. We carried on. One breaking, one taking. For a while, it was a good match, But her rabbits took over the shelves in the kitchen, the living room and then the bedroom. And I tired of plates. Smashed up everything and hopped away.

A Grandfather is the Largest Marble

by Abi Hennig

He collected marbles.

We'd nod, swap swirling orbs for round pound coins.

'For the grandson.'

But then he came on Tuesday instead of Friday, slip-staggered at the doorway, face puce, collar twisted, jacket slumped sideways.

He was a stickler for presentation, usually.

'Dead smart,' the boss used to say.

I watched glass spheres pop out of his hand one by one, miniscule-worlds rolling across the floor; gathered them up; kept them safe.

Now they're burning a hole in my pocket as I watch men in tailcoats carry him high: pallbearer, brother, son.

He'd have liked that, I think. Dead smart.

A Portrait of War and Love

by Rosaleen Lynch

Though half my dead lover's face stares at me from a glass cabinet of memorabilia, if I tilt my head an optical illusion shows it all, and though the moustache is his real hair, the glue has cracked and his face rests on broken spectacle arms, against a display of medals, light catching copper where the mask's enamel is worn off, reflecting like a halo, and though the portrait-prosthetic looks like him, it's not, not even when I ask my husband to wear it to make love to me and I tell him nothing of the faceless dead I see.

Like Clockwork

by Tamara Rogers

Like clockwork, we visit.

Regular as the cuckoo clock counting hours in the window.

Mom browses, I entertain myself with everything not valuable enough to be behind glass. Mom says to not be a nuisance, but it's half-hearted, the manner of someone who hasn't really seen you but feels like they should. Today, she collects a tin, a vulture painted inside. She pays, wraps it in paper. I stow it reverently in her shopper.

Like clockwork, we visited.

I place the tin on the counter, along with other trinkets, returned.

The cuckoo, quiet in its hollow clock.

Like clockwork, stopped.

Afterlife

by Fiona McKay

At night the photographs come alive. It's harder for the paintings; the paint cracks slightly with the movement, but the resulting ghosts are more deeply vivid and in technicolour.

Eleanor doesn't tell her family that she sees them, instinctively anticipating their disbelief, but makes excuses to slip down from the flat above the shop – away from all the anger of the living, to spend time with the dead.

She loves their stories, and when the opportunity arises to pass through to their world, she jumps.

Eleanor smiles so much more now. And doesn't care how much it cracks the paint.

I Hope This Finds You Well

by June Drake

His phone flashed in the dark. (1) new message.

Hi! You don't know me. I rescue old photos from antique shops, and I think these might belong to you...

The attachment was blurry and underexposed. His grandparents looked out from old cabinet cards and monochrome Kodak prints, insensible to the soot streaking the deckled edges.

He'd confused everyone after the fire: the agent when he declined to rebuild, family friends when he refused a memorial, the poor woman from the estate auction. "Just take it all," he'd said, granite settling in his stomach.

He swiped the message to the trash.

Relic

by Katy Naylor

The hardback is faded by years of sunlight. I can only just make out the title: *The Boys' Wonder Book*.

Between the musty pages are tales of Empire. Colour plates show battles and monuments. Leftovers from history that make me faintly queasy.

Inside the front cover, a certificate. A school crest and handwriting: *To Albert, aged 7, For Effort and Improvement, June 1935.*

Some of my grandad's books carry similar dedications, tiny testaments to his own Effort and Improvement. I'm the only one who remembers.

I sigh, and take the book to the counter. I can't leave little Albert behind.

The Erroneous Pantaloons

by Paul Ruta

The thief balled up his old dungarees, kicked them into a corner and exited the changeroom, wearing colourful and arguably more stylish trousers.

Without paying, he strode from the vintage shop, past the window washer and alarm clock store, whereupon he was overcome by an urge to cross against the lights, then was struck and killed instantly by the bus he hoped to catch.

No identifying papers were on his person, only a name stitched into the waistband.

Wait, said the ambulance driver – isn't Wensleydale the name of the guy who died here last week? There's no mistaking those trousers.

Restoring the Ship's Wheel

by Rae Cowie

The ships' wheel lay faded and cracked. The brass cap in the centre needed a polish, and the wood (teak, so it said on the label) would shine with some buffing and a lick of varnish. He cradled the handles that fit snug between his palms.

When he retired, Freda gifted him a garden shed, but the air in it was too thick.

He would mount the wheel on the wall and throw the windows wide, allowing cold rain to lash his face. Then pretend he was back on the bridge, steering forward, with life's adventures still ahead of him.

Antique Love

by Brecht De Poortere

Treasure hunter, take a look at this body of antiques. A second-hand pair of hands—callused, but still soft to touch (note: the wedding ring's been lost). A delightful set of matching ears—like shells they echo broken vows—and some vintage eyes (seen better days—but a little love should make them shine). How about these stunning lips? They've lost some gloss—but quiver still with longing for a lover's kiss. And then there is this porcelain heart—very fragile, please don't break... With a little tender care, it should be easy to repair.

Distraction

by Amy Bohlman

She wore her best duster, the one the cats usually left alone, and put her eyebrows on before going down to Half to Have It on Second Avenue across from where they used to make her go to Group.

In the far aisle, she pretended to drink from a tiny teacup, throwing her head back and cackling at her own silliness, before returning it to the dusty shelf. The shopkeeper glanced over too late.

Back home, she wrote again to Mother using the fine-looking fountain pen that fell into her pocket, to tell her about the walk and the cats.

At The Recycle Shop, I Harbor My Dwindling Hopes

by Mandira Pattnaik

I know what he hounds, what he finds.

His arthritic hand pulls out a cardigan, a muffler; feels the touch; returns them to the heap. I look over him; he's forgotten he requested this visit. Forgotten me. He's unremembered why he excavates these piles of dirty used women's clothing.

Do you want it?

He turns at my voice; drops a scarf he'd been holding, with motifs like the one Mum used to wear.

The recycle shop is back to front, like turning out a worn sock.

At the far end counter, some women gossip; their whispers, floating antiquities.

Holiday Visits to My Dad

by Kristina Thornton

I hated coming here.

‘While we’re passing!’

Now, the door ding-a-lings and the dread returns.
Dust and must hitting my nostrils, stepping into
history where time takes forever.

He would stroke the Victorian Mahogany,
admiring its beauty and strength, from a time where
he belonged.

Now, I try to imagine a what-not stand’s contents,
if he had bartered for it. It remains empty. No insight,
from three stays a year, while I grew. No insight, from
the sombre readings today, when I’m grown.

Function not fulfilled, treasure not cradled.

I buy it to fill with family.

Cutting Season

by Jessica Andrews

I find the perfect shears at the back of Village Antiques, gathering dust. Despite this, they're more than I can afford.

"Cute," yawns Marjorie when I present the now polished and sharpened silver, "... for a newbie like yourself." I mumble they're for her, complain I'm just as experienced, but she's already feigning sleep on her lounge.

I glare beyond my veg patch to what Marjorie calls our "real garden". Rose heads from blush to bubblegum to blood red quiver in the afternoon breeze. I force my fingers into the ornate handles and decide to be a newbie after all.

Intimate Strangers

by Janis Lane

Emily holds the book and savours the connection to a person she'll never know. She ponders that reading is as multi-layered and multi-temporal an experience as she'll ever know. She seeks further comfort in the imagined touch of a book's previous reader: the hint of a story of his or her own. Perhaps it's a pencil note scribbled in the margin – *'Help me, please'* – or a forgotten postcard found within – *'Dear Edward, Forgive me. You were right. Please come. Yours, Ursula'* – all leaving unanswered questions on and between the pages, and Emily always wondering which might be the better story.

Lost at Sea

by James Montgomery

'We'll see it all,' his boyfriend promised, so Robert splashed out on an antique globe bar to map out their future.

Setting it spinning, he sees them in Ireland, savouring tall pints. In France, toasting Champagne. Or Italy, indulging in carafes of red. But the farthest they got was that final night in Blackpool, Robert drowning in drink.

Stopping the globe still, Robert's finger lands in the middle of a washed out blue. Alone. In deep.

He opens the world and, in pouring his favourite tippie, pours himself out.

'Cheers,' he says, raising the glass but feeling himself sink. 'Cheers.'

A Rainbow Ribbon

by Christine Collinson

Weighing the medal in her palm, she only sees its shine. A rainbow ribbon, an unknown name, years long past.

It doesn't tell of buoyant, fat rats stealing bully-beef from floating mess tins. Of falling asleep on the fire-step. Of letters written at dusk by stiff fingers. Of comforts missed: velvet-seated theatres; smoky dance halls; empty-sky parks; home.

It doesn't tell of latrine filth, trench foot, blackened trunks, death-trap craters, sucking mud, fire-blast skies.

Weighing the medal in her palm, she only sees its shine. A rainbow ribbon, an unknown name, years long past; 1914-1919.

Once Upon a Time

by Denny Jace

I'm the youngest thing in this house.

Ceilings bow their broken backs; swollen walls, bloated with memories, crumble under the weight of spider webs.

You are the oldest thing in this house, yet just a child.

You giggle when you steal my things, pull open kitchen drawers, and in the dead of night, throw my slippers down the stairs.

Last night you disturbed my books; antiquarian Fairy Story's with fragile spines, dusted with your tiny fingerprints. You'd dog-eared the pages of your favourite tales.

Tonight, when you come, I'll read to you; bring fairies and elves to hold your hands.

Treasured

by John Holmes

It only took them thirty minutes to clear Vera's home of 70 years. The man from Treasured Past was both professional and ruthless. He quickly decided whether it was skip or shop. Vera's full life, rapidly emptied after death. Faded labels, hanging on some of the items, were ignored as the van was loaded. Names of intended recipients no longer relevant. A consequence of living long and dying lonely.

The neighbour stepped back from watching the man through her window and looked around at her cluttered room.

Just like Vera, everything she owned was important and valued.

Her treasured present.

My sister Morgana and I invent a board-game in People's Antiques

by Valerie Fox

Each round begins with *Woman in Flowered Bonnet* (1870's). Score-keeping is Christmas-themed. The time is ticked by a radioactive clock radio and the player who moves first is the youngest present. Bonus points are given for scarlet carnival glassware. Our whirring spinner is a leg-broke, porcelain monkey. The overall middle phase has sleepy writing and mailing scenic postcards and pretense. The magic radio laughs itself off and on. Between recent opera and early jazz, he says, *call me Kevin* and picks the best story (player). He grants one wish. Ours is a cruel art.

Now We Wait

by Gemma Al-Khayat

I wince as he spreads open the unblemished pages, his rough fingers exposing the stitching.

'Christmas present?' I ask, wrapping it in tissue paper.

'Investment. It'll fetch £1,000 on eBay!'

The injustice floors me. It wasn't meant for someone like him.

When he leaves, I tread over creaky floorboards and trace embossed spines with my fingertip, stopping at the empty space, the book's whispers now extinguished.

He's back the following day.

'Faulty page numbering? You're sure? You know what this book is...?' but he insists on a refund.

I slot the book back into place.

Now we wait.

Frosted Thimble

by Alisdair Hodgson

Midday, and the usual suspects are here: pillowed woollen trench coats, noseless china doll, five chewed Shakespeares, and a single, permed thrifter. Thimbles of every creed fill an army-issue mess tin, nesting low enough on the shelf to be hand-level for even the most crooked elder. Our thrifter, a fixture amongst the antiques, finds all her attention here, thumbing a thimble of frosted crystal, smoothing its edge, feeling for faults. It's misty as a core of ice, all charm and glamour. While never a crystal thimble herself, she's no longer made of rubber or brass.

Cracks in the Glazing

by D.B. Miller

The day before his wife chained the cabinets shut to speed up his job search, he arrived home with the vintage dinnerware. The same pattern of bald eagles and stars and stripes had once lured him to these shores, lodged inside his heart. He did not notice the cracks in the glazing, but she did, deeming them unsafe for the roast they could no longer afford. Only on that first night years later, when the world came off its hinges, did he serve himself room-temperature hot dogs on a single unwashed plate and taste what almost passed for freedom.

The Locket

by Gillian O'Shaughnessy

It's an heirloom piece you grip so tightly, aged silver
and hollow for keepsakes and secrets. Cool as ocean
spray on skin.

Your mother bought it second-hand to cure her
melancholy, a talisman for all her swallowed rage.
When the time came to gift it, she told you it'd keep
you safe, bind you to the pain of women born before
you, the black salt of their tears and sweat.

The current is insistent and the foam bone-white
as you step into the shallows with the locket in your
hand. How it glitters when you throw it to the sea.

Euphemia Brown's Book of Recipes for Melancholic Ladies

by Donna L Greenwood

"So, you're finally buying it?" the shopkeeper said as he lowered the dusty tome into a paper bag as though it were a fanged snake. Maria had stolen £5 from George's pocket whilst he was sleeping. She wasn't allowed her own money, but she had to have the book.

She'd been coming to the little antique shop every day, sneaking a peak at the pages. She discovered the recipes weren't recipes and they certainly weren't for women. It would take a few more weeks to get the money for the Belladonna but George was going nowhere, and she could wait.

How to Store a Pickled Kitten

by Nicola Ashbrook

1. Wander aimlessly round an antique's emporium
2. Allow your eyes to be drawn to an unusual jar
3. Allow yourself to register that it contains, inconceivably, a pickled kitten
4. Consider the circumstances by which a tiny, fluffy vessel of life came to be strangely contorted and suspended upside down in formaldehyde
5. Buy the kitten. You don't approve of the pickling but what sort of place is this to rest a troubled soul?
6. Take it home, away from the perversion of curious eyes
7. Stand it on the mantelpiece. Make yourself answerable to its pleading glare, always.

Real Human Skull, Medical Specimen, \$450

by Sarah Jackson

It was the blood running down the walls that did it. And yes, I checked, it's really blood. Thick as syrup, the flavour of money. Seeping down from the dado rail.

All the other strange happenings I could dismiss, but this... This one sank right into my slippers.

So today I took my new paperweight to be examined. They found something I'd missed. Something I can't make sense of. Tiny letters just inside the occipital: "Made in Taiwan".

What now? I'm just standing out here on the sidewalk, and I swear I can hear the damn thing laughing at me.

Outside Collectables 18, Hong Kong, Tung St

by Tom O'Brien

Your palm leaves a mark on the window. White whisky
from the meeting burns in your stomach.

You stare at yellow chipped paint and that wonky
back wheel you slalomed around kitchen table legs,
nine thousand miles and fifty years away.

Impossible, surely? But you're here; sweating in
your 24hr suit, so...

Back then you left a smaller handprint on toyshop
cabinet glass. Dinky, the box said. The price tag higher
now than when it was new.

You'll have another baijiu. Call them back before
six. No, just after.

Dinky, your father called you, on phonelines that
crossed the world.

Happy Families

by Sally Doherty

It stands in a forgotten corner, between a tasseled lampshade and wrought iron birdcage. Four wooden dolls, faces cracked, lie abandoned in miniature rooms. A lump catches in my throat.

Back home, I scrub the dust and grime. Repair the crooked chimney. Repaint the faded tulip wallpaper. A perfect home. Ten pounds and some love and care.

Lily stalks downstairs. 'What's that?'

'I had one when I was a kid.'

She rolls her eyes. 'I'm going out.'

'Be home for dinner.'

The door slams.

I draw a smile on the daughter doll and place her in the living room.

Number 63 Herbert Marshall

by Victoria Stewart

Born to a coal mining family in Wakefield, first man to represent England in both Association Football and cricket, Captain Scott's doomed expedition, presumed killed Ypres.

The card must have been pasted there at some point. The empty rectangle above the words is crusted with grainy yellow glue.

We leaf through the rest of 'Sporting Heroes', an array of striped jerseys, slicked hair, moustaches, in case Herbert's ended up in the gutter of one of the other pages, but no.

It's not the same if there's one missing. We close the album, move on.

Mourning at the Berlin Deluxe Shop

by Eleonora Balsano

The owner ushers me to the back, where he keeps *the best piece, from Checkpoint Charlie*.

You can touch, he says.

I lay my hands on the concrete, cold and brittle like old bones.

My father was forty-eight when he jumped.

White dust falls to the floor, plasters my shoes.

So? the owner glances at his watch.

I wonder if the guard that pulled the trigger was as impatient.

I crouch, soak my hand in the dust, dry and light as ashes.

We never saw the body.

Thank you for your trouble, I say, slipping a fragment in my pocket.

To Die, Then Live Again

by Kate Armitage

She was found dismembered beside some A-road; obscured by creeping Cotoneaster. No one claimed her and she was buried under meaningless platitudes by a vicar who never knew her. No flowers. She would have preferred poetry by Christina Rossetti. *Remember me when I am gone away, gone far away into the silent land.* She always did like irony. Her worldly possessions were donated to a charity shop and so once again she lay scattered and discarded. Until one day a young woman came and with glee grasped at the ruby necklace and floral A-line dress and put her together again.

Davy

by Mark Stewart

Where have you been these many years, Davy? Is it true you'll soon be back? Looking for you in the discs I bought back then, the LP covers, verses fashioned in purple vinyl, hieroglyphics written in stardust, in grains of cosmic ash. Haunting the record shops and the music arcades, as if I might find you there. Never the same, from song to song, from film to film, from year to year. The chameleon who lived amongst us. The changeling who changed our lives. Always a different face behind the mask. The Pied Piper who fell to Earth.

In memory of David Bowie: 1947–2016

Everything Has a Price

by Laura Besley

Madeline pushes open the door, hears the bell's dull thud. Inside everything is shrouded in dark and dust.

'Can I help you?' A short, stout woman stands up from behind a sideboard.

'My grandmother had a mirror,' Madeline says. 'Full-length, gilded edges. She said when she looked in it, she could see... this might sound strange...' Madeline glances down at loose-fitting clothes hiding stretched flesh. 'She said she could see herself, as she was, before she'd had children.'

'We do have one,' the woman says, 'but I'm afraid it's very expensive.'

'I'll pay anything. I just want to see again.'



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