

# MARTIRICOS

MÁLAGA'S E.O.I. SHORT STORY JOURNAL  
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**MARTIRICOS** is a publication of Málaga's E.O.I. English Department. Its sole purpose is to make public the finalist short stories in the III Concurso de Narrativa E.O.I. de Málaga, which this year has been extended to all the Escuelas de Idiomas in Andalucía. In this edition, 2004, the first prize has been awarded to Francisco Javier Gutiérrez González for the story "1,000 pounds", the the finalists being Rocío Báez de Aguilar Barcala and Manuela Pérez Romero.

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### MARTIRICOS

Panel of judges of the III Concurso de Narrativa en Inglés E.O.I. de Málaga

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Cover

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**1000 pounds**  
**Francisco Javier Gutiérrez González**  
**Winner of the III Concurso de Narrativa E.O.I.**

*Born in Málaga in 1980, Francisco Javier Gutiérrez González is on the last course of Mathematics. Sports in general and particularly football, together with reading and music, are his hobbies. He studies English (4<sup>th</sup> course) at Málaga's E.O.I.*

James Louis was a humble shopkeeper who lived in a small village located in the south of England. He was strong but not very tall. He had dark hair and dark eyes and was married with Laura Campbell. His wife was a bit older than him but she was still pretty. They were the kind of people that you yourself would like to be in life. They always had a smile in their faces and nobody had never heard them quarrelling.

James had always been a quite person but lately he had felt a bit nervous because sales weren't enough to make ends meet.

One afternoon, while he was sitting in his sofa reading the mail, he found an odd letter. On the envelope, there was only his name, but no address and no sender. When he opened the letter he found a note in which you could read:

*'If Dick McClark dies, you will receive 1,000 pounds'.*

The note blocked him. He didn't even know that guy. Next morning, when he switched on the TV, something hit him inside because the news was the following: Dick McClark, the famous lawyer, had been found dead in his flat. The surprise came a few hours later, when he received a letter with one thousand pounds. There was no note inside this time.

James didn't give importance to this and thought that it was only a joke of bad taste. In fact, days went by and nothing else happened, so he forgot about it. But peace doesn't last forever and he soon received another letter with the same characteristics as the first one. When he opened it, the note read:

*'If Mathew Stamp dies, you'll receive 10,000 pounds'.*

James threw the letter into the rubbish bin. Two days later an envelope with ten thousand pounds was waiting in his letter box. He ran to his house and switched on the TV. The journalist was saying that the day before there had been an air accident. Unfortunately the UK Ambassador in Russia, Mathew Stamp, was in the plane. James felt sick and took a sit; he couldn't believe what was happening to him.

The next week another letter with only his name on was delivered to him. In the note inside he could read:

*'If Jack Steward dies, you will receive 100,000 pounds'.*

But now it was different because this time he knew Jack Steward. He was the Mayor of his town. When he was going to throw the note away, he thought about what would happen if the Mayor died (or if he killed him): he would receive one hundred thousand pounds and that money would be perfect to change his mediocre life. He was ready to do it but, in a moment of clear-thinking, he tapped his head with his hand and he put aside the idea although he couldn't take it out of his mind during the whole night and the following day. And what is more, he went to the train station when he knew that the Mayor was going to take the express to the capital, but he wasn't able to do anything. He returned home and switched on the radio to relax himself listening to music when, suddenly, the music was interrupted to introduce the latest news: the train the Mayor was travelling on had crashed just a few minutes after departure. There were no survivors. James was still assimilating it when he noticed that an envelope had been slipped under his front door. He picked it up and it contained the promised one hundred thousand pounds. He didn't want to even think about it because, although he wasn't glad about the past events, now he had money to do everything he had always wished to do.

But, a few days later, a new letter arrived and this time what was written on it was:

*'If your wife dies, you will receive one million pounds.'*

He was reluctant to go so far. She was his wife. But that night he woke up startled and saw his wife sleeping peacefully beside him. Without thinking about it, he went down the stairs to the kitchen, he wetted a rag with ammonia and went back to his bedroom. He was so afraid of what he was going to do that his legs started to tremble and he had to sit on a step. And when he doubted more about all of this, he stood up quickly and went into his bedroom. He put the rag on his wife's mouth until she stopped moving and breathing. Then, very confused because of everything he had done, he felt sick and he fell down on the floor, unconscious.

When he woke up and saw his wife, he went downstairs again. He didn't know what to do. He felt like something was burning inside him. Suddenly, he saw an envelope lying on the floor by the front door. He opened it and inside there was one million pounds, but this time there was also a note:

*'Do you like your new job.....?'*

\* \* \*

## BECAUSE OF YOU

Rocío Báez de Aguilar Barcala

Finalist of the III Concurso de Narrativa E.O.I.

*Rocío Báez de Aguilar Barcala is on the 3<sup>rd</sup> course of English at Malaga's E.O.I. Literature being among her hobbies, she not only reads but also writes both poetry and short stories. Born in 1977 in Málaga, has graduated in Computing Engineering.*

It was midnight. Above, I could see the eternal dome full of twinkling stars... but it didn't comfort me as it used to. I could feel my bare feet in the cold sand of my beloved beach, where I always ended up in the hot summer nights. A wry smile showed up in my face, and I began to walk toward the far rocks that delimited the lonely beach near my summer house. The waves broke on the shore with a gentle rumour as if trying to make me feel a little less upset, but at that very moment nothing could alter the hell burning in my soul. I reached the rocks and sat on one of them while I put my plimsolls on. Finally, I let escape a little sigh that shouted to the darkness that there was no other chance: I had to do it. I began to jump from one rock to another, slowly at first, but more and more quickly while a heavy uneasiness pressed my heart. Some minutes later, I saw the cave I was heading for. And there he was. I could see a slim silhouette waiting for me with a calm that mocked my nerves. I tried to become a little more self-confident, but I think that in those moments nobody in his senses could have felt confident. A thin thread of smoke waved into the dark cave, over the light of the cigarette. I knitted and walked slowly toward him, until I arrived at the cave.

- It's ironic to find you smoking –I said.

He gave a deep puff and began breathing out the smoke very slowly, as if he were delighted with it.

- So you've finally come. –he said with a deep and disagreeable voice.

- I told you I'd be here –I answered firmly.

He looked at me as if he was considering something, and I kept his look firmly.

- You are really pretty and young, are you really sure that you want to do this?.

I laughed sadly. Would it have mattered if I had been as ugly as sin?

- Have you brought the papers? –I said instead.

He took a brown leather briefcase that was on the floor, and took out a bundle. He gave it to me with a cold smile and I began to read it slowly, in the pale torchlight that he had with him.

Some minutes later, he offered me a pen. I took it trembling and tried to sign the papers, but it seemed as if I had lost control of my hand. *Come on* –I urged myself- *it's all for him,*

*you only have to sign this and he'll be safe, nothing else matters.* While I did it, a deep shiver shook my body, and I had to blink quickly to stop the tears that threatened my eyes.

-How much time do I have? –I asked him while I returned him the bundle and the pen.

-About an hour –said after looking over the bundle-. I have to put this in the card index and modify the files. We don't want people to think that you have signed this *tonight*, do we?– he finished with a cruel smile.

-I suppose so, but that won't be my problem in a while –I answered trying to look indifferent.

-Really?. You're an interesting girl, I would've liked to know you in other circumstances, but as you have said, this won't matter in a while –said he in a sardonic tone-. You have to wait for him at the beginning of the rocks; I expect you'll be there.

He turned round without saying another word and left. I stood there some minutes, almost without knowing where I was and what I had done. Tears tried to flow in my eyes, but with a firm shake I threw them out. I began to jump from one rock to another, without thinking about the decision I had made, humming a childish song, until I arrived at the beginning of the rocks. There, I sat on one, and looked at the moon rising from the sea. I smiled sadly. That night, there was full moon, like the night I met him. I began to think of all the years that we had spent together, of all the sweet moments we had shared. They had been plenty. Then, I remembered one month ago. We were walking on the street, talking happily, with our hands interlaced. Suddenly, his face turned white, he stopped abruptly and took his hand to his heart. He fell down unconscious. The sirens sounded over and over, and I couldn't keep that terrible noise out of my head even when I was in the lonely and silent waiting room. My mind went blank. I couldn't understand what had happened. I think that at that moment his family arrived, but I can only remember shadows and disconnected words. Finally, the doctor came into the room, with the most awful news I could have ever heard: he had suffered a heart attack, and he was not going to live more than a month if they couldn't find a new one. The days slid from our lives while he was in hospital. Each day, he became weaker and weaker. His breath went slow, and his face paled. His strength seemed to leave his body in every breath, and his eyes looked at me with a pain and a love that tore my heart.

I can't remember how it happened, but one of those days I met the man I met in the cave. He was the director of the hospital. From the moment I saw him, I disliked him, but he did for meeting me at all times. One day, a week before, he told me about his problems: he had a son, and was really ill, he needed two lungs or he'd die. Now, thinking of the past, I can't even guess how he expounded to me the situation: he could save my boyfriend if he took my heart, and the only thing I had to do for him was to give him my lungs... and die, of course.

I gave a deep breath while I hugged my legs. The night was getting colder, or maybe it was that the cold of my heart trapped my body. I looked at the red moon, rising from the sea, and the clear sky, with my beloved stars. I didn't want to die, I didn't want to die... but I know I couldn't live if he left my life.

I closed my eyes. The papers that made me an organ donor were signed now. The order had been given. In a few moments, the man that had to finish with my life pretending I had had an accident, and keep my organs undamaged, would come.

Perhaps –I thought-, he'll hate me for leaving him. Perhaps I tear his heart when he knows that he isn't going to see me again. But the heart I was going to tear was mine, and it was prepared to bear the pain.

I heard steps behind me, but I didn't turn round. I breathed in deeply and kept on looking at my last moon. I thought about my lover, and kept the feeling that he always made me feel, deeply, deeply, in my heart, wrapping it in a protected charm. I smiled. Soon, he'd be safe. I felt a strong blow in my head, and all began to get dark. As I fell down, I saw his beloved face watching me. I didn't want to die, but in those moments, as I was looking in his eyes, I knew that I wouldn't die: I'd always live in his heart.

\* \* \*

## **JAMES GOODMOOD**

**Manuela Pérez Romero**

**Finalist of the III Concurso de Narrativa E.O.I.**

*Born in Palos de la Frontera, Huelva in 1955, Manuela Pérez Romero graduated in Romance philology and Works as a high-school teacher. Enjoys reading, music, films and cooking. This is her first story to come to print. She is on the 5<sup>th</sup> course of English at Malaga's E.O.I.*

James Goodmood was born thirty years ago on a stormy November evening in rural Arizona. His mother saw an omen of his character in the sky but later she could glimpse a little smile on his lips that calmed her. As she longed for him to be a very happy person, she decided to call him James after his grandfather, tradition ordered it, but she added Goodmood. She thought that in that way a good star would always accompany him. Unfortunately she made a mistake. James Goodmood became a very helpful, friendly, cheerful, gentle, nice man. However, his smile and laughter always caused him many troubles. Many times he felt miserable and unhappy. Since he was a child teachers and classmates couldn't understand why he laughed so often. Sometimes teachers sent him out of the classroom because of his fits of laughter. He couldn't help it. The fact of being a good student prevented him from being expelled from the boarding school. At that time he couldn't understand why people didn't like him but as he grew up he came to the conclusion that people can't put up with people who are happy. So empty and sad are their lives.

When he became an adult his mother died and not having other relatives in the world he moved to New York, the city of his dreams, to work in a office as a counter. There, going to the post was considered humiliating by employees so nobody offered themselves to do this task. On the contrary James thought that posting the office letters gave him the chance of escaping from the office atmosphere that had already begun to stifle him, and although he was very well regarded, he didn't mind doing this sort of work. However, sometimes the human being can't understand that there is no interest in doing things like this one and they started to think that James tried to be promoted. Natural happiness and promotion were unbearable for them. James was aware of his workmates' feelings but didn't know exactly why. So every day he used to go to the Post Office. He considered going to the Post Office very relaxing, and even exciting, though he had to cross the crowded and noisy city from one end to the other. In this way he could escape from his sad-bitter-faced workmates for some hours and he imagined himself going for a long walk in a foreign city. Every day he changed his route and tried to enjoy himself. The worst was when it rained, he had to catch a taxi and nobody paid him for it. As he worked in a rainy city, it happened too frequently and he couldn't afford to spend so much. Moreover, when he took a taxi he finished his walk very

soon but, deep down, he didn't mind because in those cases he could spend half an hour in a cafeteria having a coffee or get into a museum to see the latest exhibition. He managed to get to his office on time.

When he got to the office, he couldn't help smiling at them and nobody could avoid looking at him in a jealous way, as if they guessed that going to the Post Office had been a pleasure for him. But as he was a good actor and very good at complaining, he pretended to have suffered a lot because of the heavy traffic, the rain ... Their faces looked surprised at hearing him. Watching such faces, he felt like going out again and again.

I said that nobody in the office wanted this kind of job, and it was the worst considered. Time went by and things didn't seem to come to a good end. Day by day the distance between James and his workmates became an abyss. He had tried once and again to be close to them, in a word: to be accepted by them. But all was useless. For many months, he had been seeking for another job, but he had no special abilities and he was refused in many places. James Goodmood felt himself condemned to be at that office for life. He couldn't put up with that idea. His good mood was changing in an ironic, bitter way. Then he decided to give a chance to his character. He thought that being a bad person he could be better appreciated. He knew how to play the role. He was a very good actor but he risked a lot : his life.

One morning, at midday, he entered the restroom. Everybody saw him. Thirty minutes later James was still inside the bathroom. The workmates began to ask each other what could have happened to him. In the end one of them knocked on the door several times. Finally he pushed the door open. James Goodmood was lying on the floor bleeding from his wrists. He had attempted to commit suicide. He was transferred to the intensive care unit of the nearest hospital. He stayed there for two weeks. His workmates realized that James was neither so self-confident nor so happy as they had thought but very fragile. He needed them at that moment and in turns they accompanied him everyday at every hour. On the seventh day James began to smile again. Once again he was himself. James Goodmood had won his battle. He had changed their moods, all their moods.

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## **POET HEART**

**Juan Antonio Galán Romero**

*Juan Antonio Galán Romero is a student of English at Jaen's E.O.I.*

Here was Norman, soaked to the marrow, like a street dog. This Monday had been another chapter in his way to suicide. The far lights of the bus which went away along the avenue were the portrait of his own happiness, lost in the darkness a long time ago.

Norman was a middle-aged man, tallish, plumper each second and bespectacled with old fashioned metal frames. As far back as he could remember, he had been overpowered by the first person he argued with. Nevertheless, if he were asked he would affirm he had enjoyed some remarkable moments. Now all those memories were under the dust.

Norman worked as an architect in a company headed by his daft father-in-law: Rudolph (what a name!). Rudolph still blamed him for the death of Alice, Norman's wife and Rudolph's daughter.

Time was an unbearable weight, a rope around the neck with which Norman could hardly breathe. Fortunately, there was a lifeboat for stormy days: poetry. Whenever Norman had time in his hands he wandered around the city and he finally entered a warm café, full of excitement, and wrote his verses on napkins. He didn't like incomprehensible post-modern poems; he loved classic authors and traditional verses with the beauty of the world printed on the pages. He even reached talented pieces; romantic enough to conquer a nice amount of innocent girls, captured by exotic gardens and beautiful birds which sang to love. This charm had gone too. He hadn't finished anything which could be shown for ages. Smoking joints didn't solve his creative problems, instead, he simply became a drug-addict in the shadow.

Another morning has begun. Norman has spent two hours lying on his lonely bed, unable to get up and face his fears. The telephone was ringing, he didn't care because his ears were deaf due to the sound of the tears wept on the previous night. Eventually, having taken some pills which gave him the courage he needed, he went to work. He felt like an unshaved slave.

Once Rudolph came down on Norman like a ton of bricks, the architect of abandoned air had to concentrate on his job. He was really grateful for it. The task he was ordered to do was moving to the suburbs of the city and preparing a report about a building which was said to be a complete ruin. He would be helped by two colleagues, who had worked with him almost a century but whose names Norman had forgotten. A few minutes later, while they crossed the grey traffic and the thick fog, Norman remembered their names and how stupid they were.

When they got out of the car, Norman touched the wallet living near his defeated heart and he scratched his itchy beard.

Norman was accustomed to visit this kind of unlucky neighbourhoods, he perfectly knew the hidden dramas of those people and how much sadness he would see near him, too near... He didn't want more miserable stories, at least for that day.

The smell inside the building would make an elephant faint immediately. It was a lethal mixture of rancidness and urine. There was no lift, so Norman and his "two" lovely colleagues climbed the stairs rapidly. They visited more than twenty flats. They had only seen desperate people, children who survived without care and walls that could be demolished by a weak breeze. However, there was a flat left, the penthouse. They had to wait for three long minutes before the door opened. The first thing they noticed was the awful, apocalyptic place they were in. Loads of rubbish bags were strewn around the house, Norman found several rats looking for food in them. The owner of the penthouse was an elderly man with a flat nose, naked except for a pair of worn out trousers. He held a paintbrush and he didn't stop smiling. In that certain moment Norman realized that the music coming from the living room was Bach's (Bach was Norman's favourite composer) and he couldn't avoid bursting into tears. "I know this is a sad piece, but it is marvellous, isn't it?", muttered the old painter.

The extravagant man looked at Norman's affectionate face with complicity, took one picture which was covered with some dirty clothes and gave it to Norman. There was no reaction to the gift. Norman put the picture between his arm and his ribs and he headed for the exit parsimoniously. The two other architects glared at him and followed the same direction.

As soon as Norman was received by the abrupt shine of the sun (the fog was now a loser), he threw away the papers of the report he had to fill in (they seemed to him the doves of freedom) and he promised himself not to go back to the office anymore.

By the time his partners broke their silence, Norman was far enough and he didn't bother to answer. He was recovering the wish to live; millions of butterflies in his stomach made the decisions in those moments. The weird painter had made Norman open his eyes, he had seen a poor man living among garbage, under an extremely weak roof...and he was happy! How could he be upset with such a beautiful world?

"The concert of Brandenburg" and its wonderful harmony were reverberating in his mind, and they evoked Norman's better moments with Alice (she had played Bach's music millions of times on her violin). Norman was discovering what happiness was.

Two years after that fateful Tuesday, Norman was the man he had always wanted to be. He had devoted his soul to literature, with a more than acceptable success as a result. He felt

like a straggly teenager, living alone (he didn't intend to find a woman either) and doing what he felt like doing at each certain instant.

In relation to the picture, Norman hung it just above his desk and he often saw it and thought about it. The picture was of a white house in whose surroundings a pretty girl picked up flowers. Norman decided, the idea sprang up, to write about his favourite possession: the picture. He had never paid attention to the bottom of the right hand side corner and he found out something. The signature of the painter was "Peter Brooker. To my grand-daughter Alice". He was Alice's grandfather! Everything made sense now. Norman sat down in front of the chimney and he listened to Bach willing to dream of Alice for the last time.

\* \* \*

## THE FISHER OF MEN

### María Dolores Egea Valera

*María Dolores Egea Valera is a student of English (4<sup>th</sup> course) at Córdoba's E.O.I. Works as a teacher giving English and German classes. In her spare time reading, swimming, and travelling are the activities she enjoys the most.*

*"Peter, come with me and you'll be a fisher of men"*  
St. Luke

The introduction party of my latest novel has been very successful and as far I was concerned I was very happy with the critics that had said my novel was "precisely plotted, remarkable and visually magnificent". I was very stressed writing in the city so I rented a little cottage in a charming village called Brownhill, very close to Hastings.

When I was a child, I had spent one summer with my family in this place and when I close my eyes, I still remember the smell of the honeysuckles that my sister cut in the garden and put in a porcelain vase. The soft and mild light of the sea piercing the curtains of my room, the murmur of the ocean nearby whispering untranslatable words soothed my soul. It was the right climate to be inspired by the muses and I had plenty of time to write.

In the evenings I used to frequent the local pub, the only place where you could have a chat and drink something. It was a little place stuffed with rotting wooden beams, perhaps remains of a shipwreck

The men in the pub were excited talking about the loss of three fishermen. The little boat had been found but the men had disappeared without leaving any traces.

Everyday I did the same and everyday I was with the same men in the pub talking and murmuring in a thick muggy atmosphere.

One day, I became aware of an old man sitting in a corner of the pub. He had a smart appearance and he was hefty with a healthy look. The owner of the pub told me that he was Mr. Sullivan, the owner of Dawton Place, an old decadent house not very far from the pub, where he lived alone.

From the first moment I was attracted by his figure. I made an attempt to speak to him but suddenly he left closing the door firmly and noisily. The next day, I went up to him. I introduced myself and we began to talk about literature. He told me that in Dawton Place he had a library of 10.000 volumes and that he would be very pleased if I visited him one evening. We could have dinner together and talk about my work and the pleasures of writing a novel.

The idea of breaking the daily grind, the possibility of chatting with an extraordinary cultivated man made me very excited and I was looking forward to seeing him again.

The day arrived and I drove to the edge of Dawton Place where I left the car. I walked up a wide way that led to the house, a magnificent old Victorian building with the gloomy and sullen look of a house thrashed by the rushing winds of the close sea. I knocked at the door and Mr. Sullivan opened it, smiling at me, astonished.

"I thought you were coming at eight", he said.

"you're right sir but I couldn't wait any longer and I decided to come a little sooner", I said.

"Don't worry Doc", said Mr. Sullivan politely." You're welcome, there are plenty of interesting things to see and it pays off to arrive early".

The house, furnished in the old Victorian style, was full of superb antiques. It seemed that everything had held a post for a long time and Mr. Sullivan showed he was a lover of the reminiscences of his ancestors.

We went to the dining room, an over ornate and baroque room. The table and the chairs were made of ebony. The lamp was hanging with crystal petals that moved tinkling and projecting a beam of rays to all the corners of the room.

After eating a tasty turbot delicately cooked by Mrs Willis, the maid, he introduced her to me. Mrs. Willis, the cook and maid, had been working for his family for forty years and was "as old as most of the furniture in the house", Mr. Sullivan remarked jokingly. When we finished with the dessert we went to the library, a large and dark room without rhyme or reason, full of fish skeletons and decorated with all sort of fishing tackle.

I sat in a cosy old wing chair close to the fire and he sat in front of me. We talked about literature for hours. Mr. Sullivan was a well read person with an extraordinary capacity to pay homage to all that was related to fishing. I was amazed at his easiness to narrate, his fluency in speech. He had a natural gift for telling stories and that, for a writer, was very exciting.

Suddenly in the middle of our conversation I was attracted by an object that was hanging on the wall, opposite to where I was sitting. It was an old harpoon. "That is my old iron gaff", he said with a melancholic voice. "You won't believe it but I worked as a harpooner when I was young", said Mr. Sullivan.

We changed the conversation and he suddenly stood up looking at me straight in the eyes. "Oh my dear, I'm so sorry", he said ."I've forgotten I have an extraordinary bottle of French brandy waiting for us in the kitchen. I'm so absent minded". He went to the kitchen a little upset.

I stood up and went to the library. It was really a gorgeous collection. Thousands of books, many of them eaten by moths, covered with dust filled the grimy bookcases. An old leather book attracted my attention. I took it from the shelf, put it on a little table and

switched on a lamp. It was a book of engravings of the eighteenth century. It was printed in Florence. It showed different pictures and illustrations of fishermen whaling in the high seas. One of the pictures was horrible; a fisherman running through the body of two men with a harpoon.

There was a scrap of the local paper enclosed with the engraving. It said;  
"Three fishermen missing in the high seas. Bodies not found".

\* \* \*

# THE FALL

**Rafael Ruiz Palacios**

*Born in Málaga in 1986, Rafael Ruiz Palacios is at the moment in 2<sup>nd</sup> of "Bachillerato", and did his ESO 4<sup>th</sup> course in the United States. He is planning to study Computing. This is his first story to be published. He is a student of Malaga's E.O.I.*

A sliver of light shines through from a door left open. Inside the room, the faint smell of blood hangs in the air. Water drops fall into the bathtub and break the silence. A moth flies in through an open window, and flutters madly towards the light. Spinning in circles, colliding with the ceiling, the moth is unrelenting. A drop of blood falls to the floor and lands on the shiny floor tile. John lies in the tub, eyes closed and face expressionless. His heart does not beat in his chest; his lungs do not breathe. The moth continues its journey towards the light, and small pieces of its wings fall to the ground. Finally, the moth falls, gliding to the floor, bits of wing fall down beside it. Even still, it beats its wings, trying to get back to the light, and it lands in the open palm of John's dead hand.

A few days before, John sat in his room. Hateful and bitter, he was angry at the world and everything in it. It had been 10 years since his father had died from cancer. He thought back to when his father was lying in his deathbed. John had prayed every night to *God* that his father's life should be spared, prayed that the next day he'd wake up and find his father still alive and still breathing. But 10 years ago today, his prayers were not heard, not answered, and his father never woke up the next morning.

The next few nights, did not improve John's mood. Not only was he brooding over the anniversary of his father's death, but he had lost his job, his girlfriend left him, he fought constantly with his mother, and the bond that he so cherished between he and his sister was fading away. Things just seemed to fall apart more and more. But little did he know that, although he felt so lonely, so hated, and so ignored, he was being watched carefully, watched and wanted very much.

Screams and swears were heard from a downstairs room, and then about 20 minutes later, John came stomping up the stairs. He walked into his room and turned on his computer. It seemed the only thing to numb his mind, and numb his conscience from the torment of the world. Staring blankly at a loading screen, he reached for a soda can on his desk. A sharp pain ran through his hand and he gave a jump. "What the...?" he mumbled to himself angrily. John always had a folding knife lying around, and he had forgotten to close it. Instead of grabbing the can of soda, he had grabbed the point of the knife blade. Blood trickled out of the wound and ran down his wrist, and for a split second, John saw a startling

image of a body in a bathtub, with its wrists cut. He shook the image out of his mind and typed in his password.

Two chat rooms signed him in instantly, but he closed them both before they were finished. He didn't feel like talking to anyone. He didn't feel like hearing the ramblings of the trivial arguments his friends were having, or who had had sex with who over the weekend, who drank at a party, who smoked some marijuana or how good it was. He clicked on Kazaa and started to search for music. He typed in "Tool" and began the search. He saw a few new songs to add to his large library of music and began to download. Leaning back in his chair, he took note of his web cam and decided to sign onto MSN messenger. Maybe his friend from Korea was online.

She was online and he let loose a small grin. They talked for a few minutes and it seemed that his spirits were improving. She told him to come back for a visit to Korea, and he wished it more than anything in the world. He had nothing to look forward to in his hometown, and he would have given anything to leave, even if it cost him his soul. After a couple hours of chatting, they said their goodbyes and John checked his downloads. They were both complete. He clicked on one and turned up the speakers. The song drowned out everything he was thinking about. He totally immersed himself in his music. That was the one thing he could totally get lost in. Time seemed to fly by, and he realized it was now very late at night. His stomach growled and he let out a yawn. He got up and headed downstairs to make himself some food. And as he stood up, a small noise was heard outside his window. "Stupid moths," he said to himself as he went down the stairs.

The lights were off all over the house, and it was completely quiet. His mother had left for work that night and wouldn't be back until the following morning. John opened the refrigerator and looked inside. His stomach growled again and he rubbed it slowly. After standing there with the door open for 10 minutes, he grabbed a couple bottles of beer and a frozen pizza. He put the pizza in the oven and headed back upstairs.

A bottle cap dropped to the floor and landed with a small "click." John swallowed down half of the first beer and put it down on the desk. He turned the music up again, and slumped back down into his chair. Something was wrong, and he could feel it. As hard as he tried, he couldn't focus on his music. His mind kept lingering to the image that was put into his head earlier. The body in the bathtub, and then he realized it was his bathroom. He recognized the designer shower curtains and the towel rack to the right of the mirror. It was almost as if he was in a dream. He looked over at the body lying in the tub, and he reeled in horror. It was himself who laid in the tub, with his wrists cut, blood dripping on the floor. He couldn't take his eyes off of the image, he was completely amazed. Whether from fear or

from awe, he just floated there, staring at his dead body. Then a voice called out from nowhere. It seemed distant, yet crystal clear. It called his name, and he wanted to answer but couldn't. The strange thing about it was the voice didn't seem to belong to a man or a woman, it was just a voice. Pure and true, it had no tone of aggression or contempt, happiness or satisfaction. Yet even as clear as this voice was, he could not comprehend the words. It seemed strange and alien to him, but at the same time, natural and instinctual. The voice went silent, and after what seemed an eternity, it called out again, but this time in a man's voice and perceptible.

"John, I apologize for that last bit there, I failed to realize that you are indeed human, and cannot understand my natural tongue, well, *were* human." John replied "Who are you, and where am I?" The voice let out a laugh, and the hairs on John's neck stood on end. "I am Mephistopheles, a Fallen Angel out of God's Heaven, and where you are comes even a mystery to myself."

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## SEEKING THE HORIZON...

**María Belén Díez Bedmar**

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She was sitting down in an aseptic underway train. Never would she have imagined that she would buy that yellow ticket so soon. The intrinsic necessity to go there and fetch what was hers moved that twenty-two year old girl to do that trip.

More people were in that train, but she felt so different from them that she avoided looking at them. However, something caught her attention. It wasn't the boring ads with help lines on them or the opera program for that season, it was a woman and her daughter rushing to enter the train before the doors slid closed. From the way they behaved, you could say that she had always been a loving mother but, from the opaque shine in her eyes, it was clear that there was a need for love in her life.

The train began to move smoothly and, in a few seconds, drops of water were making lineal paths on the external side of the windows. She loved that sound, above all in that beautiful country where the water highlighted the different nuances of green: the green from the bushes, the trees, the grass, even from the moving clothes that were getting damp outside...

As the underground moved on, her excitement grew. Her treasure had been hidden for more than one year and her life had suffered from it. A vague kind of happiness had accompanied her many times, but she needed to recover what somebody had pulled down to the depths of the North Sea.

She had mixed feelings about that Sea and, even though she tried to put her ideas in order, she couldn't decide whether she had been happy or sad on most of the occasions she had been there. No matter how hard she tried, she always reached the same conclusion: that was the place where she would always find her refuge, the place where she had become a grown-up, a place where she had loved and where she had shed tears of impotence.

Not long ago, she had spent magic moments there with the person to whom she had devoted her affection, her passion and her own being. So pure had been her love to him that she still remembered him with a kind smile on her face. But, suddenly, the other side of the coin became uppermost in her mind. He had left her. Thinking that she would accept his selfish proposals, he had threatened her. It had been hard... after so much love and shared experiences. She had made a greater effort to avoid that outcome... She wasn't responsible

for it... But everybody had turned their back on her. She began feeling the inner cold that made her body shiver each time she remembered that horrible month when the impending break was to take place.

The drops on the window grew closer together, and there was a gentle patter on the roof. She would love to escape from her body and leave all her feelings behind, but there wasn't yet anything waiting for her outside. Just water, the Heaven crying for everything that had happened.

Suddenly, a gust of wind entered the train while the mother and the daughter left the comfortable seats to head for their lives. Despite the cold outside, they went out to seek their daily routine and fight for their desired dreams. Out they went.

Were she able to find that strength, she would also face the challenges that life had prepared for her. She had needed that strength on a lot of occasions and the time had come for her to grasp it, to take it in her fists and prevent any foe from stealing it from her again.

She looked at her clenched fist and opened it, little by little. It was there, the yellow underground ticket, the key to get to that secret place, the key to regain her soul, her own self: her life.

With a renewed shine in her eyes, she looked through the window and she saw the drops glistening in the grass. That place rang a bell to her, although some things had changed a little. The layout of the underground station was the same, the crowded Sunday market was full of bright colours, music of all types and lovely old women raising funds.

She jumped out of the train and, jostling the curious people browsing among the things on display, she reached the door. Her objective was near, only some metres away from her. Neither the old church nor the fish and chips shop where she had been so many times were important for her now. She had her watery eyes fixed on the grey monument to the unforgotten local captain who had died in a fierce battle. Just behind laid the Sea that she was craving for. She knew it was there... She could smell it, she could listen to it and her feelings seemed to begin floating on the salt air.

She raised her eyes and there it was. Nothing could disturb her mind then. She breathed deeply. The burden she had had on her shoulders melted away. The rain had ceased to let her have a clear picture of that place she had always had in her memory. In the first place, the stairs leading her down to the welcoming sand. Then, the abbey on the cliff. A bit farther, the waves crashing onto the beach, and there, extending as far as she could see, the North Sea.

Down went the girl, minding the wet steps. It was a dream come true. She was there. She existed there, again. Removing her boots and her socks, she enjoyed the softness of the

sand. Surrounded by the cliffs and the imposing abbey, she didn't feel alone anymore. Touched by the majestic sight, she stopped and sat down on the sand.

Her hidden treasure was there, she was sure about that. Nevertheless, she didn't know how she was going to recover it from that gelid mass of water. Whether she should become one with the Sea until she find her stolen self or not, was the only doubt she had in her mind at that moment. In fact, she had never thought about what she would do once she where there. She just closed her eyes and desired, once again, to recover what she had come to find.

The wind brought her reminiscences of the Vikings who had been on that same sand long time ago and it struck her as impossible that a warrior's tender hand was raining her chin. Opening her eyes, she saw the gift that Life and Nature had been keeping for her. On the horizon, she could see her heart, a big beating heart that had been healed under such magic timeless water. Certainly, it was her treasure, her stolen heart, the strength of her movements, the energy that she had missed for some time. Despite the scar it had on its left side, she wanted it, she needed it. She approached it, embraced it and became one with her heart.

The Mighty Warrior was disappearing in the mist when the girl grasped his arm and kissed his hand. He had preserved her treasure, he had saved her heart.

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## **THE PHOTOGRAPH**

**Concepción Blanco Jiménez**

*Concepción Blanco Jiménez is on the 4<sup>th</sup> course of English at Málaga's E.O.I.*

When Monica saw the letter she knew immediately what was in it. It was a photo, a photo that she had been waiting for for a long time. She opened the envelope and found a piece of paper and the old photograph. She smiled and sighed.

In the picture you could see a happy family: the father, the mother, two sons, a daughter and a pretty dog. Behind them there was a large house in the middle of a beautiful field. It was the place where Monica had been brought up. That photo brought her a large list of memories. But now her life had changed. Now everything was different, she was alone and she felt very unlucky.

Monica was born in 1957 in Canterbury. She was a lovely baby. Her hair was blond and her eyes had a special shine that made you smile. She grew up in a big house in the country with her parents and her older brothers, Mike and Bob.

When she was eighteen she decided to go to London to study. The next three years were the best for her life. Monica learnt a lot of things about the city but the best that ever happened to her was Paul Smith. She met him in the University when he was in the café. In a few days they were friends and in a month they were inseparable. Paul wanted to be a very important judge, so he spent a lot of hours studying very hard.

Time passed by very quickly and the years at University came to an end. Monica asked Paul if he wanted to live with her in Canterbury and he accepted without thinking.

Monica's brothers had got married some years before so she lived with her parents and Paul. In three years her parents had changed. Her mother used to be a talkative woman but now she was very cold. And her father had turned into a nervous man but Monica supposed that it was only the age.

In the country there was time to do all they wanted to do. Monica and Paul used to go for a walk everyday and look at the stars at night. Paul was a lovely man but sometimes he felt very sad and cried. He couldn't forget his young sister. Fourteen years ago Paul's sister had been raped and killed in the countryside near Canterbury. The police hadn't found the guilty yet and Paul's family didn't have any hope. If some day the police found the murderer, Paul would condemn him.

Paul and Monica were a happy couple and they were thinking about getting married. But Monica's parents were the opposite of them. They were arguing all day and night and never slept in the same bed. Monica started to worry but she didn't say anything about it.

One day Monica's parents went out for a walk very early. Paul had an important meeting in the city so he asked Monica if he could take a shirt of her father's. Paul went to Monica's parents bedroom. He had never been there. He opened the wardrobe and looked for a shirt. Suddenly he was paralysed. He couldn't believe what he saw. Among the clothes he found a necklace, his sister's necklace. Paul trembled. He didn't know what to do. He took the necklace and went out of the bedroom. The rest of the day Paul kept very quiet but Monica preferred to say nothing to him.

Weeks went by quickly. Everything kept on the same way: Monica's parents argued all the time, Paul was always thinking about him and Monica worked very hard at home.

One night, when all the family was watching television, someone knocked on the door. It was the police. They were there to arrest Monica's father. Everybody was annoyed but Paul. The police didn't give any explanation and, without saying a single word, they handcuffed him and took him to the police station.

The next day Monica and her mother went to the police station very early. The officer explained that Monica's father was accused of murder: "Your husband raped and killed Samantha Smith fourteen years ago. We had the murderer's blood and his DNA but we hadn't caught him yet. A young man, Samantha's brother, gave us a cigarette of her husband because the boy assured us that he was Samantha's murderer. When we analysed the cigarette we found out that the DNA was the same".

Monica was shocked. His dad was Paul's sister's murderer. It was not possible. It was a mistake. It couldn't be true. His father wasn't a murderer.

Monica went to her home and looked for Paul.

"Why do you think my dad is a murderer?, she asked. "Tell me, I need an explanation".

"I found my sister's necklace among your father's clothes and I decided to take a cigarette of his ashtray to check if he was guilty".

"What? You're crazy. There are a lot of necklaces in the world. Why do you think it is hers?".

"It is hers, I know that".

Paul and Monica argued and he went away. He didn't want to know anything about Monica or her family. Now he wanted to live alone.

Monica went to the police station again, where her father was. There she could speak with him and she promised him that he would go back home soon. But her father moved his head: "No Monica. I am guilty. I killed her. I deserve a punishment".

Monica started to cry. It was true. He was a murderer. What would happen now?

Monica tried to call Paul but he never answered the telephone. He didn't forgive her that she had no faith in him. Monica's father was in prison and would never out because nobody wanted to help him. Monica's mother couldn't bear her pain and she died two later.

Now Monica lives alone and the only memory she has of her family is that photograph.

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