



Faery Ink Press Presents

# SPLAT! FICTION EZINE

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## NEW IN THIS ISSUE:

**TWO-SPIRITS: CHAPTER ONE. A PREVIEW OF CLARE'S NEW PROJECT.**

**GHOST! A SHORT STORY BY LIZZY EWERT.**

**OUR NEW LOGO! CHECK IT OUT!**

# SPLAT! FICTION EZINE



## From the Editors



Hello Readers of Splat. This page has been hijacked by a budding art student, and she's going to paint words allll over it. Maybe nab a faery or two to rub against the paper so it gets all sparkly.

So be dazzled!

She's not the editor, but she's going

to introduce the coming awesomeness anyway. This month we have two lovely works of fiction by Clare and Lizzy.

Without their endless infatuation with the written word, faeries of the world would be safe. The logo has also been completed by Ben the Benefactor of Logos, (who would prefer to remain unnamed, but as he's a fellow artist, I feel his work should be credited), so you may now hear the satisfying squish of faery wings when you think SPLAT.



It's time for me to run, the faeries are ganging up on me. Something about sacred dust and harming their friends... ahhh! Enjoy this edition of SPLAT, faeries were sacrificed in its name.

*Real Editor's Note:  
No faeries were harmed in the writing of this letter to the readers.*



# Two-Spirit: Chapter 1

By Clare Marshall

Today, she was a woman.

Xya's heart thumped as she rummaged through her brother's chest of drawers. She grabbed a white tunic and a leather vest and put them on. The shirt was too big; she pulled it firmly against her body, cursing her thin form. If she could only add the extra material to the pants, which fell a few inches above her heels, the disguise would be more convincing. But time was of the essence. Xya jumped into the pair of black boots beside her brother's bed. She did up the laces with quick fingers and then bounded out of the room and down the stairs.

Creek. Her oversized boots hit a squeaky floorboard. Xya peeked into the kitchen and held her breath. Had she heard? Her mother was at the back of the longhouse, preparing dinner for Xya's brothers. Xya was supposed to be helping her. Instead, she tiptoed towards the door in her brother's boots and sneaked out the front door.

The morning air nipped at her ears and chin. It was the perfect opportunity to ensure that she wouldn't get caught this time. She pulled a wool cap over her short red hair, tucking in the stray ends, and then hurried down the road.

She walked between the longhouses that speckled the village of Mytovya. Women stood outside with their daughters and worked to prepare the meat that the fathers and sons hunted. The daughters watched intently as the mothers lifted the knife above the dead animals' flesh, and then brought it down again with a dull thump. The boards that served as their tables rocked gently upon impact. It was the only weapon they would ever use, and it was to chop up something that was already dead.

Now to test her disguise. Xya marched past the women. Her brother's boots thumped upon the ground in time with the knives hitting the boards. Some of the daughters looked up at her. They blushed as their eyes followed Xya down the lane. A

smug smile slid across Xya's face. The mothers glanced at the daughters and pulled their attention back to the task.

Her destination lay on the other side of the village. The field stretched for less than half a league, and then met the forest. The short grass was covered in blooming wildflowers that reached for the sun. They were trampled by about twenty young men doing laps around the field. An older man stood in the middle, yelling at the men to run faster. The wolf fur donning his back marked him as the general of the Regiment, the military order that protected Mytovya.

Xya's steps slowed as she approached him. She wondered whether she would be recognized. He'd caught her before. She pulled down on the cap and kept moving.

The other men running around the field swooped towards her, and the general turned with them. They rushed by her at the speed of a thousand deer. She held onto her hat in fear of the breeze stealing it away. She watched as they slowed, some of them panting, some of them going for an extra lap, but all of them showing off their physical prowess by merely being on the field.

The general stared at her, appraising her frail form. Xya straightened her posture, stretching her height to six feet, and waited to be sent home.

"You're late," General Munsterberg grunted. "Grab a bow and some arrows over there."

He pointed to a disorganized pile of weaponry. Xya sauntered towards it.

"Quickly, now!" the general barked.

She picked up a bow and some arrows, hiding behind the fletching. He turned toward the other men on the field. The men finished off their warm up and hurried towards the general. Among them she spotted her brother, Elijah. He spoke the language required of the Regiment soldier in training, play-hitting his peers, bragging about the women and complaining about the weather. The

men tousled his hair and called him a girl, and abandoned him to watch two other men wrestle. His head hung low as he shuffled away from them. Xya hoped she could do better.

Before she could try to interact with the men, Elijah spotted her. His eyes widened in recognition of his clothing, and he hastily pulled her aside.

"Xya!" Elijah hissed. "What are you doing here? You're not supposed--!"

"Alright, listen up," General Munsterberg shouted. "In formation!"

The men stopped their roughhousing and lined up side by side in front of the captain. Elijah took her by the arm and threw her into the line next to him. She retracted him his grip and rubbed her arm gingerly, hoping it wouldn't bruise. Glancing around quickly, she copied the other men's straight posture and lifted chin.

"Nothin' like a good warm up to get the blood running!" Munsterberg said, clapping and rubbing his hands together. "Got to keep strong. Never know when the invaders will come."

The men grunted in agreement.

"Our numbers are small, but I've spoken with some of the cooperative neighbouring villages. They have able men eager to enlist in the Regiment, to prevent the"—he lowered his voice—"prophecy by the Wise Woman." Munsterberg surveyed his recruits. "But if the prophecy of the invasion comes true, we will be prepared."

Xya clenched her fists. If she and the other women of Mytovya were allowed to join, there wouldn't be a need to ask other villages for help. She wondered if the general was inviting the wolf into their midst.

"Bows and arrows are over there," Munsterberg instructed. "Your targets are set up a hundred footsteps away from you. On my mark, you'll nock your arrows in formation and shoot. Am I clear?"

There was a chorus of "Yes sir, clear!" from the men. Xya shouted with them. Elijah kept his mouth in a thin, disapproving line.

Munsterberg paused, scanning the recruits. His eyes stopped on Xya. She felt Elijah inhale sharply beside her.

"Step forward, sapling!" he shouted.

Xya struggled to keep her face steady as she moved the heavy boots forward. She focused her eyes on the red targets a hundred paces in front away. Munsterberg paced in front of her.

"This one missed the warm up. He must think he has the best shot in all of Agaia!" the general jeered.

The other recruits stifled a laugh. Xya gripped the bow tightly.

"Why don't you demonstrate a bull's-eye for us?" the general said, gesturing to the red targets.

Blood rushed to her face. She drew an arrow from the quiver and nocked it. Her eyebrows knitted as she focused on the painted bundle of hay. She slowly pulled the bow string back, adding tension to the string.

Twang! The arrow whipped through the air. Xya's heart leapt as the tip shot into the hay.

"An almost perfect bulls-eye," Munsterberg mused. "When's the last time any one of you boys hit the red?"

The men grumbled. Elijah's eyes said everything: Get out of here now.

"Why don't you show us that again, sapling," Munsterberg said. "Prove that it wasn't just beginner's luck."

A confident smile slid across Xya's face. She nocked another arrow and aimed it at the center of the target.

"Hold!" Munsterberg barked.

Startled, her fingers slipped. The arrow flew several feet before skidding onto the dewy grass. Xya felt as skittish as the arrow, and wished that she too could hide in the thick, green blades. The men struggled to hold their laughter. Her blush deepened.

Munsterberg silenced the men with a glare and approached her. He smelt like freshly cut grass, and rotten meat. His lip curled as he stared up at her; his stubble was the colour of the wolf fur on his back. She drew back instinctively....(cont...)



# Ghost!

By Lizzy Ewert

When Jess left her old store, she swore that she would never work backshift again. The social isolation wreaked havoc on her mind, and the resulting fatigue wreaked havoc on her body. When her boss offered her a promotion to management, her singular goal for several months, she accepted. She far preferred the idea of manager than low-level worker, even if it meant that she had to endure working all-nighters once more.

Jess opened the front door at ten-thirty on her first shift as a manager, her heart racing with anticipation. The other person working with her that night, Darren, was already in his solid royal-blue uniform, chatting with some other workers. She gave an energetic wave in greeting as she bounded behind the counter.

Jess entered the closet in the office, holding up the reason that she wanted management in the first place. It was not because she wanted to learn something new, or that she was tired of knowing the right response and not having the power to carry it through, it was all about the shirt. The other reasons had come later with experience, but her first reason was vanity.

When she first looked at the shirt, well before she had been promoted, she had thought that the shirt had grey vertical stripes on a navy blue field, but she was pleasantly surprised to find out that the shirt was mainly black with royal-blue and grey stripes mixed in. When she put it on, her face glowed. She basked in satisfaction at achieving the one goal she had held for the better part of a year. In addition, the colours in the shirt complemented her skin far better than the royal-blue plaid she had worn the previous month.

Jess opened the washroom door to be immediately greeted by Darren. She yelped, then started to laugh at herself for being surprised.

"Lookin' good, Jess!" Darren said, smiling and giving her the gun pointers.

"Thanks, Darren."

She moved toward the front of the store, gradually taking control from the other manager.

Everyone else left, and Jess was able to lock the store doors behind them. She draped the drive-thru headset around her neck, leaving the

volume loud enough that she would be able to hear the beep that signaled she had a customer.

"So, it's your first night shift here." Darren leaned over the metal encasing the heater that marked the boundary between the kitchen and the counter.

Jess looked wistful for a moment, remembering how busy it got at her old store. "Yeah, it is. I don't think it will be that bad. I've seen the sales numbers, I would have killed for that kind of volume at Jubilee."

"No one's told you this store is haunted?" Darren made a ridiculous face as he silently made the clichéd ghost sound, wiggling his fingers for effect.

Jess let out a short laugh. "Uh huh. Sure it is. Do I look gullible to you?"

"It's true I tell you!" Darren began earnestly. "There was one time that Suze and I were so freaked out by the ghost that we hid in the fridge!"

"It may have been you and Suze as a killer backshift team for a while, but now you have me." Jess sighed and shook her head as she walked away.

Darren needed minimal prodding to get his share of the work done. They continued light-hearted banter, usually the customer's expense. She started on her own cleaning tasks, taking apart the fry dispenser when she heard a voice coming from the back sink.

She walked to the sink, seeing Darren spraying off meat trays to be put in the dishwasher. "Did you try to say something to me just now? I'm half deaf because of the headsets."

Darren's face darkened with confusion. "No, I didn't say a thing. I've just been here doing my parts." He turned back to the full sinks.

Jess frowned. "I could have sworn I heard a male voice calling for something. It came from back here."

Darren's face lit up. "Well, Suze and I heard a group of children running through back here, and we got so freaked out we ended up in the fridge for half an hour!"

"Right, Darren, right," Jess rolled her eyes. "Anyway, I'm bringing Archie back here to get him clean, so clear out one of the sinks so I can get that

done.”

Darren huffed. “If only people would drain the baskets a little longer before putting them back on the fry hopper, then it wouldn’t be so hard to clean.”

“They’re just lucky I can’t really if my hands are greasy anymore, thanks to cleaning all the greasy crap here.” Jess left to retrieve the appliance.

The night continued quietly with few customers arriving and lots of cleaning and preparation completed. Jess started making the first pots of coffee for the morning, cleaning the pots as she brewed the first one. With her attention elsewhere, she did not notice the stream of brown liquid streaming down the side of the pot, making a trail onto the counter and the floor. Turning around at the beeping at the end of the brewing cycle, she was greeted with a large, brown puddle on the floor.

Jess swore loudly at the sight. Darren rushed to the counter area to see what had happened, and began to laugh when he saw the brown puddle that nearly bridged the gap between the two counters, guessing correctly at what happened.

“I’m gonna guess that you’ll be more careful with the pot placement,” Darren did not even try to stop the smug tone of voice that seeped through every word or to smother the tiny giggles escaping him.

“Shuddup,” Jess growled. She retrieved the mops, clearing away the puddle like it had never been there. She prepared a new filter, being absolutely precise in every step. She pressed the button that started the brewing cycle, lining up the pot to the brown stream that started a few moments later. Satisfied, she took the broom and headed to the lobby.

She turned the corner so that she was out of sight of the counter and began sweeping. She listened to the sound of rapid sizzling, and smiled. Good, Darren is cleaning the grill. The sizzling sound came again and again in rapid succession, and Jess could visualize the grill’s surface turning from a gross, brown colour to a clean surface that seemed to appear like magic when water touched both the hot surface and the cleaner.

Jess rounded the corner to find the coffee pot moved just enough to allow the fresh-brewed coffee take the place of the coffee she had mopped

not five minutes before. Before her flash of anger could settle in to become a full rage, she heard the foyer door open. She turned and looked at the open door, which then closed quickly. The door had just settled into the doorframe, when it opened again. Though this door was equipped with an accessibility button, Jess immediately knew this was no mechanical matter. The doors were closing too quickly to allow anything slower than an Olympic sprinter through.

“Darren!” Jess yelled.

Darren came to the counter, and watched the door open and close by itself. Jess ran behind the counter to Darren, and they both retreated to the office. They huddled together in the back corner of the tiny room. The camera monitor flashed, and one by one the camera panels turned red and registered movement. Jess stared with wide eyes as a figure appeared in the lobby from behind a pillar on the monitor, moving toward the counter. The figure stared into the camera as if it knew that Jess and Darren were watching that particular panel. The figure was a woman: her russet skin and long black hair accentuated her delicate features. Her eyes were sunken, and her short, black dress was in tatters.

Darren gasped. “I know her.”

Jess opened the office door, and looked to the place where the mystery woman should have stood. Instead of seeing a person there, as she had half-expected, she saw an empty lobby.

She closed the door and looked at the camera. The woman had not moved, except to smile. Jess spun around to Darren. “How in the hell do you know her?”

Darren took a deep breath. “One thing that Suze told me is that this store was actually built on a native reserve. You know that bad things happened to them back in the day, and there’s no way to know where all the bodies are. Apparently this spot”—he gestured to the store around him—“was the place of the worst atrocities the settlers did to them. I’ve seen her before. She normally just sits at that table like she’s waiting for something.” He turned to look at the woman on the camera.

Where the woman appeared to have stood stock still for the past five minutes, she began to move towards the counter and the kitchen.

*Continued on page 8*



*Continued from page 4*

"You're not allowed to wear hats on the field," he told her, stroking his stubble. "And we all know there's only one person that consistently breaks that rule, and others."

She bit down on her tongue until she tasted blood. The iron in her mouth was better than tasting the iron in Munsterberg's sword. She lifted her chin and held her ground as he grabbed the toque and yanked it off. It tumbled to the ground, forgotten.

Xya's hair was blood red. It curled around her ears, and stopped abruptly at her cheekbones. Her hands flew to cover it, but the damage had been done. The field was no place for woman who bled, and her hair had set off an explosion in the general's eyes.

"You...woman!" he growled.

She turned to escape, but the other men surrounded her. Elijah watched, bending his arrow until it snapped in two. Xya struggled in their grasp as they picked her up.

"Let go of me!" she cried.

Their hands dug into her bony skin. She kicked at them, but more grabbed her feet. Her eyes burned as she glared at the general. "Let me stay! You'll let me stay!"

"Oh, you want to stay, do you?" Munsterberg exchanged winks and nudges with the other recruits. "It's not often a woman offers herself to the entire Regiment. What do you think of that, Elijah?"

Elijah's colour matched Xya's flaming hair. Curious hands reached for the buttons on her pants.

"Help me!" she cried to him.

The men laughed. Her long legs kicked one of them in the face, but another took his place greedily. Her brother's clothing fell onto the grass. Only undergarments stood between them and the secret she fought to hide from her village. Xya ripped her hands from their grip and held them in front of her crotch.

"The Wise Woman will know about this," Xya threatened.

Hurried interest turned to cautious pause as Xya invoked the Wise Woman. Looking to the general, the men obeyed as he signaled to let her

free. He inhaled deeply, gazing over her shoulder to the longhouses in the distance.

"She would know, wouldn't she," Munsterberg mused. "But she'll also know you broke the law. And she'll punish you."

The men of the Regiment smirked. Xya snatched her brother's clothing and shoved her legs into the pants. "I'd rather her punishment than your filthy hands all over me!"

"You make it too easy, coming here as often as you do," Munsterberg replied. "We'll take you home to your mother, Xya. Maybe Elijah will have a proper meal for once, put some meat on his bones. Eh?" He nudged Elijah and chuckled at his own joke.

Elijah swallowed, threw the pieces of the arrows on the ground, and averted his eyes. The boots she had stolen from his bedroom abandoned her as well, forgotten on the grass. As the men jeered and threatened to place their hands in places the sun would never see, she kept her gaze steady on her brother.

Sometimes she was a woman. Other times, she was a man. Xya would have given anything to break the barrier that kept her from being both.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Clare Marshall is a journalist who loves creative writing; Faery Ink Press is her website.*



Jess peered through the office window into the kitchen. She did not see anyone coming towards her, except for a russet coloured shape in the brushed metal surface of the kitchen's counters. Jess backpedaled away from the door, knocking Darren to the ground in her haste.

The woman's face appeared as a reflection in the blackened computer monitor. It flashed to life, with binary code filling the screen, creating crazy patterns until a text-to-speech program appeared.

"You are the leader." A female monotone voice that did not quite pitch the words correctly came through the speakers.

"Y-y-yes," Jess stammered.

"You will give back the sacred land," the

mechanical voice delivered with finality.

"I don't know what you mean!" Jess cried.

"I am not stupid. I am the chief's daughter, and I make the decisions for the tribe now that he is dead. Dead because of you, Jaak Evert."

Jess shook with fear. "I'm not Jaak. I'm not even a guy!"

"You lie, Jaak. And now your servant will die. Maybe then you will talk." The binary code returned to the screen, and darkened to show a knife glinting in the reflection.

Darren let out a bloodcurdling scream as a red flower blossomed through his shirt along his torso. Blood dribbled through Darren's lips as his limbs shook sporadically. The shaking slowed, then finally stopped, and Darren let out his last breath.

Jess could only sit back and stare blankly at her coworker. It was a miracle she caught the reflected glint of the knife through the corner of her eye. She rolled out of the way, and rushed out of the office, not even taking the effort to stand up.

She rounded the corner, her knees striking the hard tile and her palms making a slapping sound. She did not make it far before she felt a hot pain of phantom metal enter her calf. She spun around to catch the woman's reflection in the full-length mirror on the wall. She held the knife, poised to strike. The knife came down, and Jess felt an explosion of pain in her chest, rising with the force of a mushroom cloud.

The pain of the stab wound left quickly, and Jess could only marvel at the blue and red mingling, but never mixing. Such a shame, it was a really pretty shirt, she thought as the pool of blood beneath her grew large enough that she could not be saved. Her eyes grew increasingly heavy, watching the woman in the mirror, until she could no longer keep them open.

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As the coroner carted the bodies out of the small store, the breakfast manager stared at the sticky, black mess by the office door. She could not help but wonder at how such a tragedy could occur. She patted down her own striped shirt as

her nervousness rose: she did not notice Jess calling for help through the mirror.

## SUBMISSIONS

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*Thanks for reading!*

*Clare and Lizzy*

*Splat! Fiction Editors*

