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Summer 2003 Issue	<p>Cowboy</p> <p>He swaggers loose-limbed through swing-doors, lightning strike sparks prairie fires. Heads turn in a smoke-wreathed room, barmaids, farmhands, porcine gamblers with gimlet eyes. Sunburnt smile sits down at the counter, scuffed boots, blue jeans, little darlin's wet dream hand rolls sweet cherry tobacco rizla, orders double whisky on the rocks. This time, she pays her bill, reaches for her car keys.</p>
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	<p>Anna is bleeding</p> <p>Anna is ten and she is bleeding. Her mother warned her this would happen to her one day, but she has forgotten. She thinks she is dying, bleeding to death. She sits on the toilet, her favourite pair of panties wrapped around her skinny knees, the ones she got in her Christmas stocking with 'Girl Power' sewn across the front in curly pink letters. She stares in horror at the bright red blotch that has seeped into the thin white cotton fabric, then she opens her mouth and screams.</p>



Anna is thirteen and she is bleeding, she just doesn't know it yet. When the school bell rings, she packs her books and pencil-case away in her canvas bag and joins the throng of children moving in a crush towards the classroom door. When she hears the boys behind her laughing, she turns around and sees them pointing at her skirt. She fiddles nervously with her ponytail and tries to ignore them. She knows the boys in her class are idiots, but they still make her feel clumsy and ugly.

Anna is sixteen and she is bleeding. The sun is shining, the sky is blue, but she is not swimming in the sea or jumping through waves with the rest of her family. She is sitting alone on the sand with the towels and assorted beach paraphernalia they have discarded next to her. She does not know how to use tampons. She has tried, but she can't do it. The instructional diagrams on the leaflet inside the box just confuse her more. She feels like an outsider, a pariah. The sun beats down on the back of her neck making her headache worse. The heat is melting her bones.

Anna is nineteen and she is bleeding. She is also in love for the first time. She is lying with her boyfriend, Peter, on his unmade bed in a varsity digs. He keeps telling her how much he needs her and trying to slip his hand up between her thighs. She is too embarrassed to tell him she has her period. He says menstruation is dirty, makes her feel ashamed of the steady trickle between her legs. Her words stick at the back of her throat and she gets tired of holding her breath, so she stands up and leaves as silently as she came. He ignores her after that.

Anna is twenty-five and she is bleeding. Her latest man, Zane, thinks she is a manifestation of some ancient goddess. He is into earth mothers and crystal healing and loves fucking her when she is on. He says it makes him feel like he is harnessing the power of the natural world. Anna just thinks it is messy. Zane is not the one who has to change the sheets and wash them.

Anna is twenty-eight and she is not bleeding, in fact, she is two weeks late. She sits on the cracked toilet seat in her bachelor flat waiting to see if the strip will turn blue. The drip from the bath tap makes her think of a ticking time bomb. She hasn't prayed to God since before she was ten. She wonders why he should start listening to her now.

The Great Event

a year out of school,
small room, single bed,
motorbike pictures
covered the walls,
he said he felt
he was fucking
a brick wall. I think
he was wearing
his socks. God,
I wondered, wincing
at a brown stain
on the ceiling, is this
as good as it gets?

Michelle McGrane was born in Zimbabwe and spent her childhood in Malawi. She is a freelance writer and reviewer. Her poetry has been published in local journals and internationally in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. Michelle has published two collections of poetry, *Fireflies & Blazing Stars* and *Hybrid* (2003). She was the recipient of the South African Writers' Circle Hilde Slinger Poetry Award in 2003 and the Quill Award in 2004. She is the Executive Poetry Editor of the South African literary website, *Litnet*, (www.litnet.co.za <<http://www.litnet.co.za>>) Michelle lives in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

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