A painting of a sunset over the sea. The sky is filled with vibrant, textured clouds in shades of orange, red, and yellow, with a bright sun in the center. The sea below is dark blue and black, with a small white boat with a red hull in the bottom right corner. Three birds are flying in the sky above the sun.

# *The Wine Dark Sea*

Edition no.16 Year 2015



## The Wine Dark Sea

A collection of poetry and  
prose by the students of  
St Andrew's College  
Dublin



This began in 1999. The Wine-Dark Sea has spanned three decades, two centuries and a millennium. That's the calibre of achievement you have to bear in mind when you read this magazine.

We have renewed our poetic licence for another year.

I welcome you again to The Wine-Dark Sea which is enjoying its sixteenth edition making it older than most of its contributors. This year we had the largest number of submissions in my time editing the magazine, allaying my annual fear that there will not be enough submissions and that the embers of creativity will go out. To that end there is a great deal of good writing that did not make it into these pages. To those who submitted and were not published I thank you and urge you to keep trying. Also, as we had an unprecedented number of submissions I have decided to dispense with the literary and philosophical quotations that have marked the pages of previous editions. Fret not though; the magazine's designer Michelle Owen has assured me there will be plenty of space in the margins etc. for you to include your own quotations. In fact, I'll start. Here's one that I think is especially apt;

'Find what you love and let it kill you' – Charles Bukowski

Bukowski may have had other things in mind but I think this is good advice for the emerging writer, painter, dancer, and musician. Creativity involves giving one's all, devoting one's soul to its fulfilment and expression and it is exhausting, and it does take a lot and can be a labour more than a love. But the sense of accomplishment is what it's all about. If you love what you do you will endure the suffering, you will let it kill you only to rise again and again. Everyone who strives in this way lives a life that is less ordinary and contributes to a world less ordinary.

A great deal of thanks goes to many people for their help in getting this magazine into the world. The English department: Paul Reidy, Conall Hamill, Pdraig Conaty, Audrey Talbot, Gina Doran, Derek Bohan, Anna McKeown, Stephen McArdle, Monica Lynott, Ruth Devane, Amy Moran and Gary Quinn. Aran MacGiolla Bhríde, Mary Keddy and the Irish Department. Maud Halferty, Estelle Breton and the French Department. I would also like to express a special thanks to our librarian Katherine Ryan whose tireless work in fostering reading and creativity is so greatly appreciated by all of us. She is an invaluable asset to St Andrews. All thanks is equal but the slightly more equal thanks must go firstly to the students whose work you read here and secondly, the most equal of all, to Michelle Owen for the design and presentation of The Wine-Dark Sea. She brings a vision and energy to it that complements and enhances everything about it. I think you'll agree, this is a job well done.

Robert McDermott

## Outside

Author's note: Since I have a problem with coming up with good ideas for stories, the premise for this was taken from a writing prompt from reddit user Dr De, which read as follows: "A young person from the first generation of humans to be born and raised in space (on stations or ships), visits earth, their first time outside of a climate-controlled environment."

This was it. The day they had been waiting for. Robbie Fitzpatrick balled his hands up into fists and closed his eyes tightly. He was tense. They all were; a lot was resting on this moment. Robbie and his fellow Allied Earth University Literature students were the first generation of humans to be born and raised in the climate-controlled environment of the Babel space station, or so they were told time and again. It didn't really mean anything to Robbie. The phrase "climate-controlled" meant so little when they had never known anything else. Even their studies of famous novels and works written by authors long dead who had known the wind and rain and sun of Earth hadn't told them much. It didn't seem that important to Joyce whether the sun shone on Leopold Bloom's journey around Dublin, nor to Shakespeare whether his tales of love and loss and murder took place during a particularly wet summer. To Robbie it seemed an overly politicised event, a manufactured "milestone" in the inexorable progress of humanity. Odysseus returns home. The birds fly back to the nest. The headlines had already been written, the articles long-formed in the minds of sensationalist writers heedless of any factual basis for their stories. Quotes from the students would be carefully handpicked to show their wonder and amazement at the outside world. The confused and the emotional would no doubt delight readers hungry for nostalgia of a world they had taken for granted. There was that word again: outside. To Robbie and his classmates it meant kicking back in the pleasant mild temperature of the parks of the station, or sharing a Coke by one of the huge glass windows, feeling the air-conditioned breeze on your face. They had been warned that Earth would be different. No climate control there, they said, wagging the figurative condescending finger at the students. The older generation's incredulous "what? I thought you kids had never heard of CDs or books or broadband internet" had evolved into "what? I thought you kids had never heard of wind or rain or snow". How could they not have heard of them? As the first generation without those things they were incessantly reminded of this supposed loss by public speakers, parents and teachers alike. It was getting more than a little tiring, to be perfectly honest. But enough of that. The descent was nearly over and the harsh glare of the Sun was trying its hardest to penetrate the tinted windows of the shuttle. They were in the troposphere now and hurtling down through the skies at an impressive pace. All the stops had been pulled out for this, the publicity stunt of the year, by the University and one of the added luxuries was a comfortable and quick flight down to the surface of the planet on a high-end people carrier shuttle.

Suddenly, an eloquent, smooth female voice spoke over the intercom. "Please remain in your seats. We will soon be landing on planet Earth. Please apply some of your regulation solar protection cream as we will be descending into the Arizona desert, where the heat of the Sun is particularly intense. Thank you", it said as all around, nervous and not-so-nervous college students buckled their seatbelts and sat back in their plush blue leather chairs for the last phase of the descent. As the shuttle deployed its landing gear and slowly descended the few final kilometres to the planet below, Robbie tried to wonder for the first time what it'd actually be like, to not have a constantly controlled temperature and weather pattern. But it was too difficult to imagine, even for his creative mind. How often did the weather change, was it at random or every five minutes or just whenever you got bored of it? And what about the Sun? Who decided when it changed temperature? It couldn't be the same all over the globe, the voice had just said that this Arizona place was hotter than at least some other areas of the planet. It was too confusing. As it happened, he didn't have much more time to think about it, as it was at that moment that the seatbelts automatically unbuckled and everyone scrambled hastily to their feet. They had landed.

After a short safety briefing, mainly advising the passengers not to touch or eat anything that wasn't immediately recognisable as safe to touch or eat, it was time. The grey, hangar-style door opened and the intense light of the Sun streamed through, causing the students to wince and

cover their eyes. It was incredibly bright, far brighter than any fluorescent lamp or ambient lighting effects on the Babel. They all hesitantly stepped out into the desert. The red sand shifted slightly beneath their feet as they took their first steps into this alien world. And then it hit them. The heat. The fierce, unbridled heat that they felt even through the layers of sun cream. It was staggering. Robbie thought it almost seemed alive, a pervading, unstoppable living force that incessantly burned their skin. It was incredible. And then the second surprise: the wind. It battered against their faces with an unbelievable ferocity. The pure force of the two combined had to be felt to be believed, the full-scale invasion of the senses that stopped for no

man. It was in that moment that Robbie realised why the atmosphere on the Babel was climate-controlled. The weather made you feel so small and man despised feeling small. Man needed to control everything and the urge was too strong to let something so free-willed and destructive as weather to pass by. The old adage came to mind: Manifest Destiny. An unstoppable conquest that would not take resistance kindly. But it wasn't the time to think of such things now. Now he could merely sit back and experience the weather as it ravaged the red landscape for the umpteenth time since man had left, his desire to control taken to another world, another place.

Jack Heron

## The Old Man

There was an odd old man in the street yesterday.  
He was crossing the road, but when a car stopped to let him cross,  
He simply stood there and didn't move.  
I, who was watching from my balcony,  
Flicked my burning cigar down,  
And the scarecrow went up in flames.

Harry Maltby



21/0

## Running

I had just got home on a Wednesday afternoon the weather was terrible as usual. It had been raining non-stop all day and I was sick of it. All I could hear were the raindrops hitting the roof. I could never go out anywhere. I was stuck indoors all the time. So today I thought to myself I was going to go for a jog no matter what the weather. So I wrapped up about five pairs of shirts and jumpers and went out. I loved running. I could always get my thoughts together and it was the one time in the day where I could just relax and not have the weight of the world bearing down on me. I could just focus on one thing and not have to worry about school, exams or the day I woke to find two policemen at my door. My jog became a sprint. It had been a long time since that day had entered my mind when my parents had gone out and not come back. Maybe it was why I liked to run, it made me feel like I was leaving the memory far behind. When they told me I was too young to go to that concert, when they said I had to look after my sister. Pain filled my head every time my feet hit the concrete floor below. I ran faster trying to get that feeling I usually get the feeling of being free. But I couldn't outrun those memories today they kept running beside me tripping me up slowing me down. I ran faster I ran as hard and as fast as I could. My foot hit a rock and went flying to the ground scraping my hands off the concrete floor but it was nothing compared to the pain I felt when I looked down, yet again seeing my parents lowered into the ground. I sat on the ground and sobbed I wish I could live that day again warn them tell them not to go, tell them not to cross the street in the dark, tell them not to be hurrying home to me, tell them that I love them. I stood up and wiped my hands of my trousers. I was sick of running.

Liam Fitzgerald

## Rainbow

She dressed  
in a unicorn onesie  
wearing a varsity jacket  
in the colours of the universe

Crystal Meier

## A Snowy Scene

The snow acted like a sparkling blanket to the trees,  
The sun shone down on the scene below making it look like there were diamonds everywhere.  
Trees towered above the house as if a fence were protecting it,  
Christmas lights, made from the sun's reflection  
decorated the snow on the trees.  
It rose waking up everything below,  
Ice made everything more bright than it was,  
The cold air was bitter,  
Smaller trees felt buried below the thick heavy snow.

Jordan Tyree

## Under The Rug

Two weeks passed and it happened again. The 'thing' had come back and rampaged through the under-side of the rug, causing books, lamps, cutlery and various other items to fall down and crash into the floor. Neighbours kept coming to his house, asking things such as 'What's the ruckus in here?' or 'Is there something wrong, Dr. James?' They never got to the hospital in time, thanks to that 'thing' under the rug. They came down with strange illnesses, and by the time James realized the 'thing' was doing it, 4 were dead and buried. It happened three times every two weeks, and each time the thing seemed to get... bigger... and it would occasionally 'growl' silently. The first time he thought his neighbour, Ms. Hamah, had let her cat loose and it had somehow gotten through an open window and under the rug to chase mice. She went into a coma the next day and James was confused out of his mind, because she was a fit, healthy vegetarian who kept good hygiene. The second time he whacked it with a chair, but instead of it feeling pain, he felt the chair hit HIS head and he blacked out. This time the thing was MASSIVE, nearly as big as the good Doctor himself. He threw a table at it, but it simply 'reached out' and instantly and cleanly sliced it in half. The 'thing' tried to throw itself at James and it succeeded, throwing him backwards and sliding him into the wall, where it continued to pummel him. James scrambled to his workroom, where he normally looked for new bacteria if he was incredibly lucky, or he built toys for whenever his ex-wife came over with her son. He opened the door to his front yard and ran out, when he looked out as the Demon came out and... dear god. It looked too hideous for me to describe in this retelling, but let's say it was like a rabid dog had a baby with Satan. He got in his car, and, ignoring the speed limit, drove to the Church as fast as he could. He got there, and he shouted for everyone to get out as soon as possible. He ran up to the Priest and begged for him to help him when, knock knock, here comes the Demon! He snatched a bottle of water in a plastic container from the Priest's side pocket, and, praying it was Holy Water, threw it at the Demon. It exploded, and it was no more. Relieved, he stumbled outside, sighed happily, and fell over and died.

Daniel Singhoff



Fall

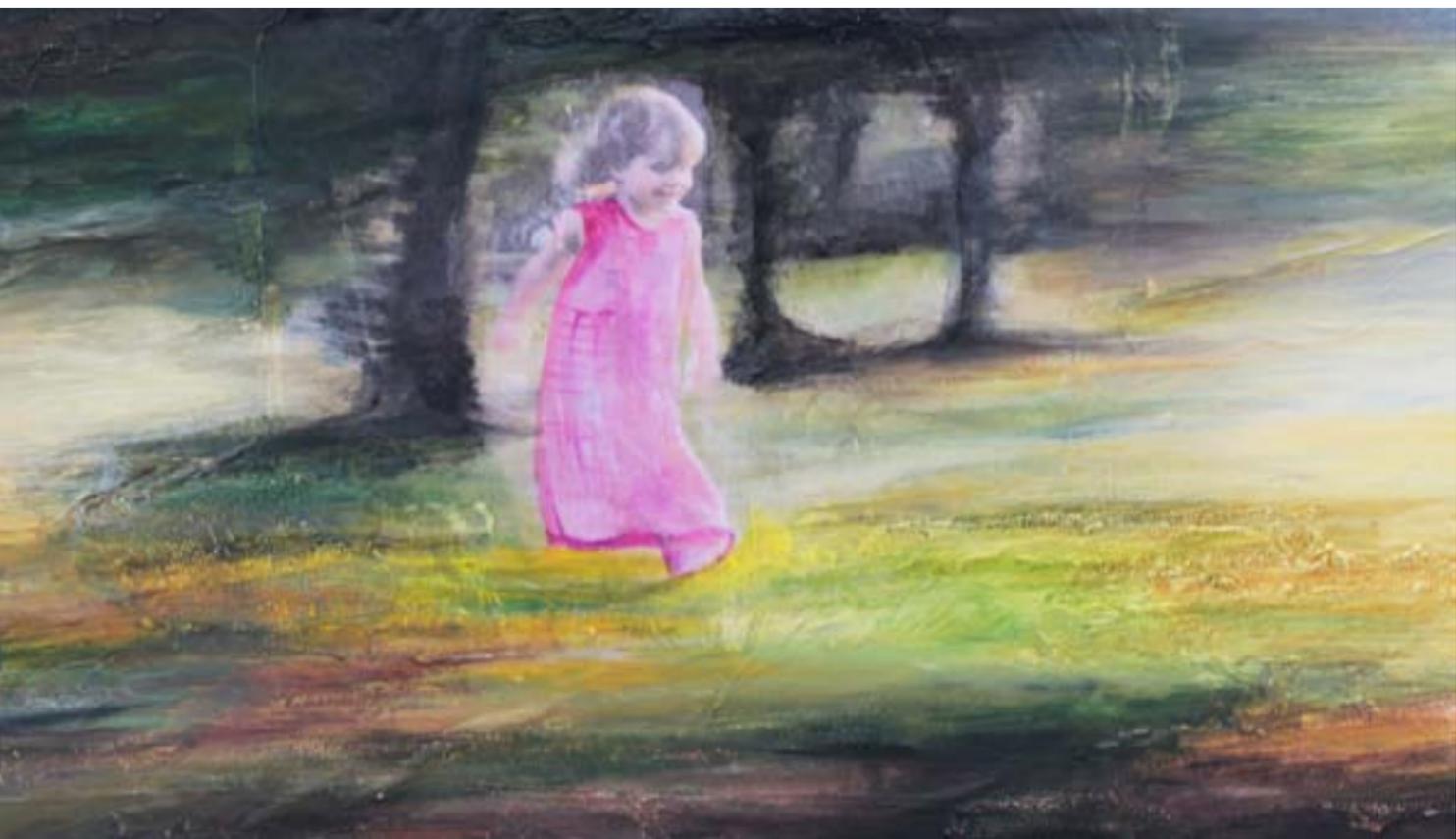
Gravity, it falls like me when I saw you coming  
Forsaken you call to me, when I'm bored and the law is  
Stalling like a Christmas crow's claw cawing at the stars.  
When you came I found fame's lost heaven in myself  
But when you found yourself, I lost my wealth of the universe's whole  
And the one thing that mattered was finding,  
You.

Now you're here and I love it but I'm only fearing  
How you feel about everything,  
Now things are so wrong and my song is like fire like  
How your flames burn higher than my sun's pyre  
And you're warm to the touch but for me you're like ice  
And so concise are your words that the price I pay  
When you roll the dice, with the galaxy of my soul,  
Is loss.

In the far above I watch down on you, as you do to the earth,  
From the stars I pray you raise your gaze to my solemn mirth  
And the haze I create to keep you away is just my hurt craze  
But I shove you away and in the dark I wish that I'd stayed but I couldn't.  
The price is steep like a sheer cliff on the moon, so far from the place of our birth  
And we stir in our sleep searching the sky for a place to rest.  
Homeless, at home.

For now we remain.  
With little to see,  
And less to gain.

Daniel Cosgrave



Butterflies

I once found a most astonishingly alluring tree. He stood wide, tall and strong, this much was evident from his thick, twisting roots that sunk deep and sprung up: often in places that one would least expect to find roots, therefore they would frequently take you by surprise as you approached him. I successfully navigated myself safely to his trunk whereupon I paused. I hung my head back as far as my neck would allow, and I gazed up into the intricate criss-crossing of branches that spun out from his body. Only then did I realise that he was not like any tree I had seen before. Each branch sprouted a unique kind of leaf, no two branches grew the same. Confused, I lowered my gaze and glanced to the right, I stepped forward to a low hanging branch. I studied the leaves and to my joyful surprise I found numerous caterpillars who had found happy residence upon this strange tree.

It was only then that I realised each branch was crawling with caterpillars. At first I was spooked by the immense volume of them and leapt back in horror, but that feeling soon changed to awe. Chrysalises of all different shapes, sizes and colours hung here and there, eager soon-to-be butterflies awaiting their day of completion inside. I explored this tree for hours, committing all his twists, turns and textures to my memory. I observed his caterpillars and learned what made this system they had so special. This tree knew the importance of letting these caterpillars find out who they're supposed to be. He grew these different leaves to encourage them to explore and experiment, and so they did. As they travelled and tasted the different leaves they grew and grew and grew. After all this, each caterpillar finally found the leaf they truly belonged to, and it was here, on this leaf, that they formed their chrysalis.

As the caterpillars developed new parts of their inner and outer being inside their chrysalis, the tree supported and nurtured them. The tree waited in joyful suspense for all of his precious caterpillars to finally see how wonderful they themselves truly were when they had reached their full potential and become who they were made to be. When the newly evolved butterflies emerged from their cocoon of wonder they soared high into the sky. Their wings painted with beautiful strokes that belonged to them and them only. No two butterflies were the same, each colour and pattern varied with each one. Blues, greens, reds, pinks, black and yellows littered the sky in a flurry of colour. How wonderful this sight was. The freshly flown butterflies flitted here and there, looping in and out of his ancient branches. Their joy emanated from their tiny tremendous wings that beat back and forth so furiously.

I could have spent hours under that old tree watching the beauty of this unique system that worked so well, but alas, I retreated from that tree and it escaped my mind for many years until I stumbled upon that same spot once again. I recognised the area leading up to my old friend and excitement built up within me. I clutched my newly purchased camera in my small fist, ready to capture the wonder that had proved indescribable by words alone. I turned the corner but my heart fell as I saw what had become of my special friend. All that remained of him was a wide flat stump, his rings showing how old he truly was. I stopped in my tracks and stared at this atrocity. Who could have cut down such a beautiful system of life? Who could have seen past how wonderfully developed he had made these butterflies? Who could have taken it all away? I shall never know whom but that very same person planted a replacement right next to my old, dead friend.

This new tree stood half the size of my old friend, he was beautiful from afar but close up I saw the cracks and faults, the underlying darkness that lay beneath his smooth pale bark. His leaves all identical and plain. Their waxy coat shining in the morning sun. I ran my finger along one and tested its strength between my index finger and thumb, the perfect looking leaf cracked under the slight pressure, proving to me the weakness of this tree's system. I frantically searched for any caterpillars or butterflies that may be living upon him as they had on my old friend. But alas, my beautiful butterfly friends were unable to survive on the same, bland, shiny leaves that held no real nutrition or substance. This tree only wished for order, perfection and similarity, not for what the caterpillars and butterflies could offer if they were nurtured to their full potential. Why should one butterfly be different to another? Would that not look utterly disordered and distasteful? By no means!

Alas, the tree got what he wished and for all that I found was identical moths that flew blindly towards the light that they were told to. They obeyed the tree automatically and did not question his ways. They flew to the light as they had not been taught any different. I slowly turned from this sad sight. Something once so wonderful and unique had become so dreary and drab, this once spectacular sight now blended into the rest of the world silently.

I slowly trudged back down the path that I came, my once optimistic mind felt squashed like a forgotten grape in a vineyard that had been trodden on. As I turned to take in the last of my lost secret, a light flutter fled past my left ear, I whipped my attention toward it just in time to catch a glimpse of colourful hope.

Ella Wedderburn

## Nothing Had Ever Happened

Have you ever been home alone and felt full of a kind of happiness that no other person but yourself can make you feel? That moment of pure, undiluted euphoria that sends tingles through your fingers and hot-wires your muscles with energy and you just want to move? Have you ever gotten a text that has your feet stomping the floor with excitement and your cheeks to hurt with bittersweet pain from the grin growing on your face? Or have you ever turned on a song and just gotten up and danced, no matter how tired you are? Different people get that feeling in different ways. This feeling isn't quite happiness, it isn't excitement, it isn't quite euphoria, it isn't joy. It's a feeling too complex to define with just one word, but yet the majority of us know what I'm talking about. Sometimes people try and describe it by embellishing the word 'happy' with adjectives like 'so' or 'really', but it isn't quite as simple.

I remember getting this feeling once. I had come home from school after the half-hour walk in the rain, not being able to use my umbrella as the wind was too strong. My hair damply stuck to the side of my face as, no matter how hard I tried, the hood on my coat just refused to stay up. My knees were the colour of a child's cheeks after they have gotten caught doing something they weren't supposed to be doing; a pale, blushing red, contrasting harshly to the dark grey of my rain-soaked socks and skirt.

I unzipped my coat and dropped my heavy bags that landed on the floor with a soft clunk, and slid my shoes off leaving them in the hall to dry. I could smell the spicy tomato pasta sauce that we were having for dinner slowly cooking in the oven, and the warm smell of chocolate brownies that my brother had made the night before clung to the air like chewing gum to a shoe. The house was silent except for the soft drone of the heater buzzing, and the patternless sharp clicks of the oven thermometer adjusting itself every so often. I slowly climbed up the stairs to my small bedroom and opened the door, the cool metal of the handle not feeling overly-dissimilar to my cold hands. I sat on my bed and exhaled, tired after a busy day at school. I pushed my feet off the carpet floor and lay back, staring at the dimpled white ceiling of my room. Then, as I often tended to do, I got bored.

I decided to plug my phone into my speaker, and I pressed shuffle on my favourite playlist. I let the music flow through my ears and take over my senses, feeling the vibrations of my hums on the tip of my lips. The playlist progressed, and suddenly my favourite song at the time came on. It was energetic, lively, fun, loud and powerful and I felt my face spread into a smile. I suffered through a battle with my internal morals as to whether I sacrificed my joy for the peace of my neighbour who I can hear listening to the radio next door, the muffled, flat tones of the afternoon talk show vibrating through the thin walls. As I can feel the guilt threatening to consume me, a voice from the quieter, less-seen part of me speaks up and tells me to turn the music up all the way. As I turn the volume dial upwards and the noise level grows, my grin and joy simultaneously grow and the music fills me with an indescribable amount of energy and emotion, and as the first verse progresses, I stand up and rush out to the hall lit only by the soft grey light of a rainy afternoon flooding through the window beside the staircase; desperate for more space to release the growing energy in my body.

And, at the moment when the chorus started, that is when I felt that indescribable feeling of not-happiness-not-excitement-not-quite-euphoria-and-not-joy that I spoke about at the beginning of this piece. That moment when the instruments got louder and it felt as though I was walking on air, and not an old, slightly roughened beige carpet. I felt as though I might explode, and it wasn't just off-key notes that came out of my mouth or off-time, made-up-on-the-spot dance moves that my body created, it was every single one of the emotions that I had been feeling concentrating themselves and putting all of their combined strength into this one feeling of joy that my brain didn't know how to express, but my body did.

I didn't care that I was in serious danger of falling down the stairs or slipping on the tiled floor of the bathroom beside me. I didn't care that it was unlikely that I was going to get a Christmas present from my neighbour that year. I didn't care that my wet hair whipped itself against my red cheeks every time I swung my head. I didn't care about any of these things, as my brain had switched itself off and let my body do the talking.

And as the song slowly came to a close, my brain slowly came back and I began to laugh. Laugh at myself, laugh at my dancing, laugh at my tuneless singing. And then, I remember feeling almost lonely that that feeling of not-happiness-not-excitement-not-quite-euphoria-and-not-joy had left me.

I sat back down on my bed and exhaled, and when I eventually returned down the stairs with heavy, melancholic steps, it was as though nothing had ever happened.

Lucy Dornan

## Nature

I feel the fresh breeze on my face,  
I see fish fly  
I feel the ocean spray and birds soar high

I see horses galloping in herds  
Playing with each other  
Only the thump of their feet was heard  
Like heaven's thunder

I lie in the long grass  
Nature is everywhere  
This is what it would be like if human kind wasn't here.

Rachel Walshe

I can't

I can't live without your kindness,  
I can't live without your smile,  
I can't live without your eyes shining in the moonlight.

I can't live without your love,  
I can't live without your kiss,  
I can't live without your arms protecting me whenever  
I am scared.

I can't live without you,  
So I can't live at all.

Maya Duncan

## A Week of Winter Weather

Monday's sun was peeping in,  
But rain took over and began to win.

Tuesday's leaves were falling down,  
When all of a sudden they hit the ground.

Wednesday's frost, climbing up the walls,  
Now it's over, no more fall.

Thursday was just as bad,  
But a bit of wind is what we had.

Friday's trees were all blown over,  
Left standing was just one clover.

Saturday's mist was down to our knees,  
With no more flies and no more bees.

And lastly Sunday, Christmas Eve,  
So quiet and calm, how could you leave?

Lauren Dillon



I'll see you next week

I walked in and was hit with the acrid smell of old tobacco and an almost bleach smell that burnt the back of my throat when I took a breath. It was the same every time. I would step past the pile of overdue bills and the piles of empty vodka bottles that filled the bags waiting for us to take out.

When we found her she was usually passed out with the television blaring. She was a small woman who wore only pyjamas and slippers. She had dark brown hair with grey roots. She had few teeth and the ones she did have were a rotten, and yellow and brown in colour.

I always stood awkwardly at the door with her meal whilst my dad went to wake her and tidy up around her. The room was littered with cigarettes smoked right to the butt, empty liquor bottles, old newspapers and rusty needles.

My dad always shook her shoulder lightly and she would wake startled, and then groggily groan.

"Ah Brendan, did you manage to get my..?" She always asked my dad.

"No the off license doesn't open till twelve and its eleven I bought you two packets of cigarettes" my dad answered.

He then went on cleaning and signalled for me to put her food on the table and told me to get a bucket and some water.

I remember being puzzled why a woman who lived in the biggest house I'd ever seen lived alone. There wasn't a picture of a single person. She obviously didn't have any help either because the only time the house got cleaned was when my dad and I cleaned it, which was once a week for a half an hour on a Sunday.

After she ate her dinner I would usually clean up this week's collection of bottles whilst my dad handled the cigarettes and needles. We'd take out the bins and leave soon after.

My dad and I had been doing Meals on Wheels since I was a baby once a week. We went to her every Sunday for two years. In all the time I spent with her I never spoke a word to her. She would grunt a hello in my direction or maybe moved out of the way when she stumbled looking for her cigarettes but other than that nothing.

I walked in that day and knew something was different. The house smelt only faintly less sickly and she had taken out her own bins. When I walked into her living room she was wearing a pair of trousers and shoes with a dressing gown, which was a big improvement and had washed her hair so it didn't look stuck to her head. The curtains were open as well and for the first time in two years, she and her room looked alive.

"Hi guys" she said.

I looked at my dad stunned and he walked over and put down the cigarettes on the table along with her desert.

"Hi you look a lot better" he said with surprise and delight filling his face.

"Ye I am feeling a lot better, decided it's such a lovely day. It was time I actually saw it, not that it's even the nicest view at the moment" she said gazing out at her horrifically overgrown garden.

"I can give it a bit of a tidy up if you would like?" my dad asked.

"Oh would you please thank you so much" she said and smiled her four tooth yellow smile.

He turned and started to talk out and I followed. He swung round and faced me.

"No Claire you stay and do a bit of a clean-up and you girls can have a nice girls chat" he said to me.

I stared at him trying to let him know that if he made me do this I would feel no guilt for being sulky, mean and moody till the end of time. It didn't seem to faze him as he smiled and walked off. I was ready to take off when I heard her say my name.

"It's Claire isn't it?" she asked making an effort to smile without showing her teeth.

I nodded. This was next to my worst nightmare. I hadn't even imagined it because it was too terrifying.

"Yes you've changed a lot you know," she said.

Well I would hope so it's only been two years I said in my head. She continued on.

"You know I haven't always been like this." She said looking around the room.

I shrugged and started picking up the bottles and cigarettes butts and cleaning up the dishes.

"I have a family you know? A daughter and two sons." she told me still looking out the window.

I slowed down the cleaning, suddenly interested.

"This house used to bustling, I had a daughter and three boys including my husband and two dogs and we used to spend all the time in the garden playing. We used to have people over all the time and I was a neat freak." She said.

I looked up shocked by what I was hearing and saw her eyes glazed over.

"Then my son died and a part of me died. My husband couldn't stand me and he left and took all the money. Then my daughters followed him. I found out that I have grandchildren, from the paper. Now I have

nothing left other than a big house I can't afford and empty bottles." She said and looked over at me.

"Don't give up, don't give up on your family like I did." She said and a tear rolled down her face.

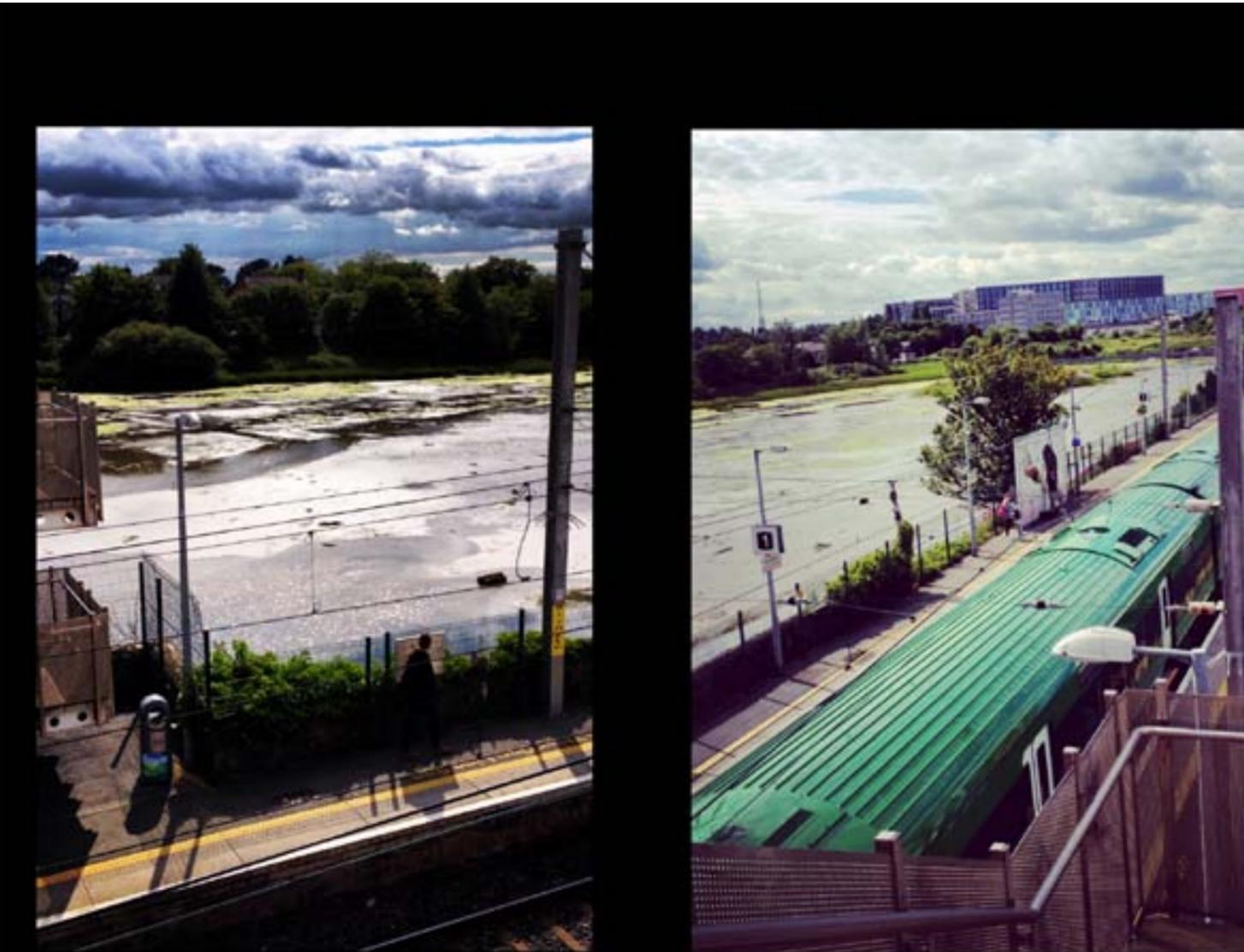
"I'm sorry" I said but was interrupted.

"Come on Claire you have a hockey match in fifteen minutes! I completely forgot" he said walking in out of breath.

"I'll see you next week" he said to her and then dragged me out with him.

When we got our list of people to deliver meals to the next week she wasn't on it. We drove to her house and there were men working in the garden and a 'For Sale' sign on the house. Her house sold and was re-furnished. I heard that someone on that road had killed themselves but I don't know if it was her. To this day I still don't know what happened to her. I drive by her house most days and think of her. I didn't even know her name.

Claire Mooney



Teresa

Sam's. That was the name of the saloon where I first met her. My saloon. I'm probably making no sense so let me just start from the start. My name is Sam Brooks and I'm the proud owner of Sam's, the only saloon in Whitechurch, Texas. But you don't want to know about me, you want to know about September 12th 1942. First you should know that Whitechurch is one of those towns where everyone knows each other and nobody ever leaves or comes. So you can imagine the buzz when someone moved into the Davern's old farmhouse. There was further shock when the town learned that the proud new owners of the derelict property were a young single woman and her elderly, apparently mad, father.

The first time I ever set eyes on this girl, was when she came into the saloon- alone, she stepped inside the swinging door and everything came to a standstill for two reasons, the first being that she had walked in unaccompanied by a man and the second being that she was the most beautiful thing that this town had seen. She had large brown eyes with long eyelashes that batted whenever she needed something from you, chestnut hair that she wore loose and lips painted cherry red. She reminded me of a single rose that stands high above charred ground, fully aware of her beauty and its power. Oh and her name was Teresa.

So anyways Sheriff she walked up to the bar and ordered a cola and when she told me she had left her purse at home and all I could say was

"Well don't you worry about this one Miss. Welcome to Whitechurch."

She flashed me a smile and batted her lashes one last time before sauntering over to the corner table and requesting a song from the piano player.

That was how it became every single night with Teresa, her coming in and me not charging for the cola because I couldn't resist that smile and those eyes. One night, two weeks after her arrival, she stayed until everyone else had left and then she asked me to sit with her oh and while I was at it would I mind terribly getting her a cup of water? She was awful thirsty you see. So we sat at the corner table and talked long into the night, her telling me everything about the world but nothing about herself.

This became the new routine and I used to kick everyone out early just so I could sit and listen to that voice for as long as I could until she'd stand up, thank me and leave.

Then one night, I asked her a question about her crazy old father and why nobody had seen him in town yet. Teresa glanced at the clock and said she had better be off, it was getting late but that she'd see me tomorrow- only the next day she never came.

The night after she didn't come either and so I locked up early and went to the old farmhouse. She opened the door in her nightgown and said she had been ill only she looked perfectly healthy. I then noticed the boxes everywhere. I asked her why she was leaving and she told me she wasn't, she had just never unpacked but she was lying, I know she was. So I asked her why she was lying and she swore she wasn't she just hadn't had time.

Then she started crying and screaming when I grabbed her but Sheriff I was just telling her I loved her and wanted to marry her but she wouldn't stop screaming. I was angry she was leaving me, I mean who wouldn't be I hadn't done anything wrong, and she just wouldn't stop screaming and next thing I know the shotgun was in my hand, there was a loud noise and then silence.

Next thing I see an old man wearing a dress and high heels at the top of stairs and he was waving a shotgun around so there was another loud bang and then silence again.

See Sheriff you say he was holding an umbrella but I could swear to you that it was a shotgun I mean why else would I shoot him? I'm not a cruel person it's just that she was leaving and he was going to shoot me.

No Sheriff, I'm quite sure he was holding a shotgun.

Makayla Murphy

Falling In Love

When you are young no one tells you how much you can love someone. Nobody tells you how you can grow attached to someone and never be able to let go. They never tell you to keep close those that you love, especially when they love you back.

When you're an adolescent no one tells you how much it hurts. It hurts when you learn of the pain and darkness of the world. Through those years you start to realise happiness is a moment stuck in time but it never follows your path. You start enjoying those small moments. But nobody ever tells you to mind your heart, to not give it to just anyone, because it will get broken.

Before you realize it, you're on the verge of your life as an adult, but no one ever warned you what it's like to live with a broken heart. Living and remembering those small moments when it all seemed perfect, and how it was so easy to love so much and so innocently. They never warned you that when you fall in love it just happens and its nothing like the fairy tales. They never tell you to watch your soul as you grow older, so it never grows darker. Never do they tell you to mind yourself and move on from the ache.

I've learnt this on my own, live on and move on from whatever holds you back. But you can never forget what it was like when you first saw them, first knew them, or first thought of them. That person will be forever printed in your heart even if you find someone else to fall for, because you will never feel the same as that time. The time when you loved unconditionally and still thought you weren't enough. The time when you felt invincible but the world was your kryptonite.

It is up to you whether you believe me or not, whether you use this as a guide or as a way to pass time, but one day, you too will know what it is like... Or maybe you already know what it's like.

Delisa Gonzalez Maldonado



## Freddo

(The inspiration for this story came from the range of 'Freddo' Cadbury Chocolates)

There once lived an agitated frog called Freddo, who lived in a swamp in an inhabited part of the Amazonian jungle. Although his world was colourful and noisy, he yearned to see something new.

Now, he was a slightly destructive little frog who had a way of annoying his brothers and sisters. He would jump all over them, leaving muddy triangular-shaped footprints all over them. When they got cross, he laughed, the more they got cross, the more he laughed. So when Freddo announced to his family he was leaving on a great voyage to discover the World, nobody seemed disappointed.

Freddo jumped on a log and floated along happily down the Amazon River until he reached the Atlantic Ocean. At the port here he heard some French people talking. The boat was full of exotic fruit for the Paris market. He heard a bearded man say: "Tous à bord! Le bateau pour Paris part maintenant!"

After Freddo boarded the boat, he befriended the captain, Laurent, who warned him that the French eat frogs. Even though Freddo was horrified, he was a courageous, bold frog who still wanted to go to Paris. So they set sail.

By the time they got to Paris, the crew were fed up of cleaning triangular muddy footprints and were relieved to see the frog go. On his way to the Eiffel Tower, he avoided all the restaurants out of fear of becoming 'Un Plat De Grenouille' or 'Frog Dish'. He was stunned by the view of the broad beautiful boulevards from the Eiffel Tower. There and then he decided he loved tall buildings and was somehow going to see Big Ben and the Empire State Building.

There he was, a month later, after leaving muddy footprints all over London, on top of Big Ben. He enjoyed the rainy puddles, the big red buses and the lit up Ferris wheel.

After sneaking on to a cruise ship, Freddo arrived in New York where he fearlessly climbed The Empire State Building. Here he met a businessman who worked for Cadbury's, Freddo told him his story and it was a big hit with the businessman who decided to make a range of Freddo Chocolates in honour of the brave, adventurous, agitated, destructive little frog.

Freddo left the bright, colourful city for the bright colourful jungle to see no difference between these worlds. Freddo treated his family with a lot more respect because he felt lonely in the world without them.

Ewan O'Mahony

## Les papillons

Ce sont des papillons  
Qui ressemblent à des bonbons  
Ensemble, nous les regardons  
Est-ce que nous les mangeons ?

Non ! Ce sont des papillons  
Leurs ailes colorées avec des crayons  
Oui ! Car nous les colorions  
Avant de sortir en récréation

Sam Martensson

## Words

Verbs are words for something you do,  
Such as run, jump, hop or chew.

A noun is a person, place or thing,  
Like mum, school, chair and ring.

An adjective describes a noun,  
Scary, boring, black or brown.

A pronoun replaces the noun,  
So you can say he sat down.

An adverb tells how something is done,  
Quickly, slowly describe how you run.

Words do things, they get things done,  
Words are useful and usually fun.

Alison Barrett

## Nightmare from a sailor

(1)

Darkness, blackness forever gloom,  
Set across the ocean, to start its bloom  
The wine coloured sea looked like blood splattering across a  
crumpled page  
That was the most horrid thing of the age  
A dancing spear ever so near, coming here  
To kill what we used to call brightness  
Howling, Shouting forever fear  
That's all you'll ever hear,  
Then you wake, it's all dream  
You're so happy, you want to scream  
You want to be blinded by the light, to feel its warmth once  
more  
And then you feel, like that's what you're here for.

Ciara O'Regan

Haiku (Light)

The brightness warms,...  
hearts.  
With the glow of its light  
Making us happy.

(2)

Haiku (Winter)

The winter falls now,  
Bringing people together,  
Love is in the air.

Imani Antoun

## The Little Things

A note on a locker,  
A nod in the corridor,  
Being honest,  
Being true,  
What else could we do?

Yasmin Ryan



## A Fishy Tail

Okay, so get this. I'm on a train heading into the centre of town, and if anyone, or any THING sees me, I'm done for. I want to break in to an aquarium but it is right beside a club full of drunken dogs. Literally. Also, the aquarium has security laser beams, but I'm not worried about those. I need a disguise though. I decided earlier to dress as one of those (literal) dogs. That'll blend in, but where am I going to get a DOG disguise? Oh, wait a minute.... Here's something that might do the trick.....

[Ten minutes later]

Okay, so I'm ready to go. I found a rug on the train floor and I clawed, I mean CUT it to look like dog fur. I'm getting off the train now. Here goes nothing...

[3 blocks and a pint of milk later]

Okay, so here I am, outside the aquarium. The dogs haven't seen me yet, but I suppose there is still time. There's an open window on the second floor, but to an old hand like me, it will be a breeze. There is a tree growing near the wall, so up I go. Now I just need to jump from here to the windowsill. Done! Watch out little fishies.....

[In a nearby nightclub]

Rover: Hey Fido, did you hear that? It sounded like a cat....  
Fido: A CAT!!!!!!!!!! Really!!!!?  
Rover: Yeah, a cat. Do you want to go and investigate?  
Fido: Sure, let's go.

They leave the nightclub and go outside

Okay, so I'm in! The reception is empty, as it should be at 10pm, but there might be a security guard I suppose. I'll just have to be careful. There's a big red door in front of me marked with an arrow and a picture of a fish, so in I go. That was eas-

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Really? A burglar alarm?

Fido: We caught you, ya stupid... Wait a minute, is that what I think it is?  
Rover: It sure is, Fido. Do you have your phone on you? I want to call 999.  
Me: No, don't do that, I can explain...  
Rover: Hello, I'd like to report a break in at the Neptune's Kingdom aquarium...Yes, me and my friend managed to catch the culprit...Certainly, officer. See you then.

[In court, two weeks later]

Judge: Now the defendant shall speak to us. Defendant, please explain why you attempted to break in to Neptune's World?  
Me: Because I'm a cat and a hungry one, you filthy sheepdog!!!!!!  
Judge: Well, really!!!!? I am a Border collie, for your information. And what are you, a tomcat?  
Me: For YOUR information, I am a most finely bred Persian.  
Judge: You could have fooled me.

Alicia McGrath

## Ochre

In fits of intoxicated insanity,  
In outbursts of rage  
He shows that he cares

Through exclamations of profanity  
And tears which do come at some stage  
He shows his despair

He searches in the dark for the bottle  
Its glass as deceiving as the ochre liquid that  
swirls and tips within it

Satisfaction comes from the promising mottle  
He then takes out what is left of his quid  
And finally loses himself with it

No longer in reality  
His relief is evident  
His mind is numbed and released

He takes another swig until it's too late  
He is placed among those who Nearly made it  
The bottle has swallowed him now.

Amy Fitzsimons



## The Magic Rubber

Once upon a time, there was a little girl called Jenny. She was eight years old. After spending the summer holidays in Spain, she was ready to go back to school. She got new supplies like a pencil case, pens, rulers, sharpeners, pencils, crayons and a rubber. This was no ordinary rubber: it was gold and sparkly and believe it or not, it could run, walk, skip, jog, sit, jump and talk. It could also rub out things on its own, and if it rubbed other objects they could talk as well. The fun began on Monday on the ride to school. "I'm bored", I thought. There was nobody to talk to in Jenny's pencil case. Suddenly, the car swerved and I brushed against something. I heard a grumble and turned around. I saw a pencil and then I was being talked to: "Hello, my name is Bob", said the pencil, "Thanks for rubbing me; I couldn't talk before you did. Could you maybe rub everyone else too, and by the way what day is it today?". "It is Tuesday, no wait Monday", I said and I rubbed everyone else. Then we got to a big white building, the car stopped and we got carried into a room. The room looked strange, sort of like the shop I came from. First, a tall person said "Hello class, I am Miss Briggs and today we will be talking about the days of the week. Who can tell me them?". Then someone's hand shot up. "Yes, Alice", said Miss Briggs. "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday" said Alice. Wow, I learnt seven new words already. Before I knew it, I was being packed into Jenny's bag again. When we got home, Jenny did homework then she asked her Mum for a chocolate muffin. Her Mum said no, but for a strange reason Jenny took two muffins when she was upstairs. I thought that was wrong and I decided to teach her a lesson. I hopped over to her geography book and saw four words: Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connaught. I started rubbing out her neatly written homework. The next day, Jenny was scolded badly for not doing her homework. Can you keep my secret?

Molly Heron

## The Box

My pen scrawled noisily across the page of my old notepad, drowned out by the sounds of Cole Porter that played on the gramophone in the corner. I wrote down everything, describing the peculiar apartment I had found myself in, the apartment of Mr Charles Watson, The Great and Wonderful Watson, the mysterious Murder Magician.

I heard him moving around the kitchen in the next room. I sat there, bemused as to where I was. This was a man of legend, a man so many conspiracies had been written about, so many stories, but none as famous as Paris 1972.

Charles Watson came in, a tall lean man with long grey hair tied back tightly, exposing his stern face. He was no longer the great illusionist people went to see; he was a cult icon, locked in his apartment, praised by murder fanatics. He handed me a cup of tea and sat down on the armchair opposite to where I was sitting.

"So, where do we start Mr great reporter?" he asked.

I stared at him, confused.

"You know," he said, "Our professions are quite similar."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"We both know how to bend reality, you know, change perspectives."

He placed his hand on the table between us and in one swift movement took a knife out of his pocket and chopped his fingers straight off. I screamed and jumped back. He laughed, showing me his hand. All his fingers still remained.

"You see? Magic!"

I composed myself, picking my notepad from the floor.

"Mr Watson do you know it's been thirty years to the day since Paris 1972?"

He looked at me, and laughed

"By heavens, doesn't time fly?"

"I think our readers would be interested to hear your side of the story. After all, I think it's time we hear from you rather than those conspiracy theorists."

He stared at me, drinking his tea slowly. He put his cup down, and rested his hands on his knees.

"It was the first time I had ever performed in Paris. The Palais Garnier was sold out, each seat taken up by an excited audience member. Everything was going to plan. I performed all my usually tricks, the disappearing head trick, the mind reading ones, the car tricks; the audience loved me, cheering and applauding. Finally I came to my grand finale. I asked a member of the audience to help assist me with my last trick. This young French girl came on"-

"Amelie Bonnet?" I asked, writing it all down in a note pad.

"Yes, yes."

"Yes, yes."

He stopped for a moment, staring off into space.

"She came on in a beautiful blue dress. She was quite a sight. Wolf whistles came from the men in the audience. I took her by the hand and led her over to the standing box in the middle of the stage. I announced my trick: 'Ladies and gentlemen! Prepare to be amazed! Be warned, this trick is very dangerous. This young woman shall enter this box. The box will be locked from the outside. I will then plunge these samurai swords straight through the box!' Gasps came from the audience. 'Have no fear; she is after all in good hands.' I kissed her by the hand and led her into the box. The box was closed and locked. Each sword went through easily. I remember the drumroll as I opened the door. I also remember the screams as she fell, face first onto the ground in the middle of the spotlight. Every single sword got her. Never in my life had I gotten that trick wrong. After that no one would book me and I became a crack pot conspiracy theory."

We both remained silent for some time. He drank his tea calmly. The question had lingered on my lips.

"You didn't mean to do it, did you?"

A smirk came to his lips.

"Now, Mr great reporter you know a magician never reveals his secrets."

He drank his tea silently, the gramophone playing Anything Goes.

He got up.

"Come, I have something I want to show you"

He left the room. Every nerve in my body told me not to follow, but I had to see what he had in store. I followed to another room. The room was empty except for an object with a sheet draped over it. He uncovered it, a standing box stood in front of me.

"Is that what I think it is?"

"The very one." He said.

He pressed his hand upon it, looking at it as if it was an old friend.

"My murder machine, that's what people call it, right?" I didn't answer, too shocked at what I was looking at. He opened the door. It was quite spacious on the inside. He turned to me.

"Care to enter?" I hesitated, but I couldn't stop myself. All the stories I've heard about this box, and it was right in front of me. I got in it, spacious enough. I took it all in, the murder box. The door closed behind me. I froze, trapped in the dark.

"Let me out." I shouted. I heard the sound of shuffling feet leave the room. I started banging and kicking the door.

"If this is some kind of joke, then it's not funny."

The shuffling feet returned. It was joined with the clinking of swords.

"And for my next trick," he shouted, "I'll make my name go down in history."

From the other room I Get a Kick out of you played loudly. It was disturbed by the sound of a sword tearing through the box.

Robyn Kilroy

Your Table

Your table  
is just - too small.

It won't block anything  
and the wood is too

Weak  
to hold out.

It's just not  
resilient -

no, it really wouldn't be  
of Use.

Keep your table  
your small, weak table

upstairs  
with a small, weak chair.

Even if it can't support a piano  
it can hold your head.

Molly O'Gorman



## The Suppose-to-bes

Today was supposed to be a good day  
But I woke up like a bear with toothache,  
It was supposed to be a lovely day  
Here now I lumber, like my boots are lead.

Joints, tendons, and bones, crack, moan, will I cry  
Like my inner engines died and burnt out,  
Unable to conquer the limitless sky  
No time to expel air from my lungs.

Today did not need to be a good one  
Because on this ladder there is no snake,  
That though life is a game and games can be fun  
That step by step, no matter how slow, nor the ache.

Today I was supposed to have done a lot  
But I'm just happy to have given it a shot.

Jamie Pearson-Evans

## Yet I'm Looking At The Past

Losing in an argument,  
Or fighting back the strands.  
That fall and lie down on your face,  
Like a master plan.

You pulled me in so gently,  
And I fell oh so fast.  
I never knew what love was like,  
Until that first glance.

But you said that love would never last,  
Those moments threw the hazy hourglass,  
And all the things I let slip through my grasp,  
Yet I'm still looking at the past.

Your eyes were like the night sky,  
So deep and dark and blue.  
That shimmered with the hope of light,  
That you only gave to few.

Your love was always pure and true,  
Not false nor wrong or fake.  
My heart was yours and yours was mine,  
Not a single stars mistake.

But you said that love would never last,  
Those moments threw the hazy hourglass,  
And all the things I let slip through my grasp,  
Yet I'm still looking at the past.

Sarah Bulger

## Ezra Compounds: a reinvention of Ezra Pound's The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter by Rihaku

River Kiang splinters just past the fir trees. Of its divergent tributaries, one peters out into dew-soaked highlands while the other is gradually swallowed by the Chokan lake – a still and cobalt body of water in which I've fished since girlhood, when brighter hair was cut straight across my forehead. I was never afraid of this expansive puddle. Its contents are impenetrable to the eye, yet as I dangled a teasing morsel of bait they would rise, rally, and yield food for my small siblings. And in the solitude of its slow ripples I could recline, hemmed in by the juniper-bark boat, unfettered by calls of elders or your preteen pleas for love. It was an escape as well as an oasis; Chokan nourished my growing body and timid mind in equal measure.

But after you followed its meanders in search of business – after its murky depths engulfed you like a fisherman grabs his catch, and you went far into the swirling eddies of Ku-to-yen – I decided to gather berries from the woodland south of here. I am older now, and my height has almost doubled since our first encounter. I have no need to mount those bamboo stilts we used to cherish, for on tiptoes even the loftiest fruit dips gently into my grasp. It then accumulates in the hovel, more spacious since your departure, as I try hard to gain an appetite. Meanwhile the West garden is cluttered with piling moss, made large and immovable by rainfall. I cannot bring myself to counter the season's onslaught; to clear tarnished leaves from the gateway, where you dragged your feet while leaving.

I maintain that our dust should be mingled. At fifteen, your tenderness straightened my scowl, and the resentment I felt at our forced union fell away. And from then on my pubertal grumblings were reserved for more pedantic matters: I brooded over the hamlet's theft-disposed simians or the battered state of my fishing rod, while you annulled the larger worries with your refrain of 'forever'. Forever would we belong to the village of Chokan, float blithely on its lake, eat well throughout its festivals, observe its autumn butterflies, pray and mourn and continue on, without dislike or suspicion.

But the confines of work, the burdens of the temporal world obstructed this ageless pledge, and nowadays I wonder if it was a childish underestimation of eternity. You have been gone five months. My mind whirls with foreign ports, opulent patrons, ominous pilferers. The monkeys call sombrely overhead.

Last week it was decided that my sister's feet should be bound, as this will make her more appealing to wealthy tribesmen on the opposite side of river Kiang, with whom our community hopes to establish ties. I watched as she pulled flowers and strolled absently through the field, relishing her final days of free movement. And in her languid gestures I gauged the same despondence I had suffered at fourteen. Whether this custom will attract a Lord whose devotion and attentiveness redeem her disfigurement is unclear, but I know that conditions can alter drastically, and I know that if you are returning on Kiang's narrows you will write to me beforehand, and I will come out to meet you, as far as Cho-fu-Sa.

Oliver Eagleton



## Other's Expectations.

It was a warm night in Torella, warm enough for the Americans to smoke and drink in the square rather than inside the bar. Our little village in the north of France was never a place of strategic value at the start of the war, but since the landings many of the soldiers from both sides used Torella as a passage to their next destination. The past few days had been an exception with some allies settling there awaiting instructions. My sister and I didn't like these Americans. They didn't distribute any extra supplies to us being two of the oldest women in Torella, most soldiers gave us some priority but not these ones. They were more interested in the bar. The soldiers in the square were a little more drunk than usual. This had been their fourth inactive day so I could understand why. I watched them from the window on my floor that overlooked the square. We lived on the second floor of a house that was originally the Mayor's residence. Every room in the house was connected by the living room which you walked into through the front door. The floor still had the furnishings from the Mayor's time living here but was now more worn and grey. The living room was coated in a layer of thick grey dust. The once bright floral pattern of the rug on the floor was now faded mixed with the gloom of the room. Apart from the big window overlooking the square the only other source of light was from the bulb in the bathroom, the only light that reached us was through its doorway. The bathroom light bulb was the only one in the house that drooped low enough for us to replace without a stepladder.

Florence slept while I continued to look at the Americans. They fascinated me. Their life so far removed from my own. They'd been drinking for hours now, enjoying the new wines the bar had on offer. I didn't speak English but it was clear that they were having a great time. Just when their voices became that bit louder and their laughter more hysterical, a grey military truck drove in on the opposite side of the square. My first thought was how late it was to be driving around in an area they mustn't have known well but this mild confusion quickly changed to terror as the top of the grey van opened to show a man with a large gun. The fight was over quickly most of the Americans were shot on the spot and the rest retreated into the bar. I didn't stay around to watch, while the gunshots continued I went into Florence's room to tell her. She was already awake.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"The Germans are back, in the square" I was already out of breath.

Florence started to get out of bed. "Quickly switch off the light, we don't want them to have a reason to come up here".

She always was the smart one. By now the gunshots had stopped and I could hear loud German voices coming from outside. As I was walking to the bathroom across the living room I heard a light knock on the door. I presumed it was our downstairs neighbour looking for some safety in numbers and that a German would have just barged in. I used the key already in the door to unlock it.

The soldier in the doorway before me was covered in blood. There was a trail behind him leading to my doorway. I froze, shocked. The stories I'd heard of Nazi brutality were on my doorstep. I tried to close the door but he easily pushed his way through. After locking the door behind him, he walked to the centre of the room. He looked at every corner in a dazed way before walking into our bathroom.

Florence and I watched him as he washed his hands and face in the sink of the bathroom. He hadn't said a word since he'd arrived. The longer he stood over the sink the younger I realised he was. He was slight. His uniform draped over him like clothes passed down from a much older brother. I was waiting to see his face properly when Florence started speaking to me. I was standing in the doorway of her bedroom across from the boy still in the bathroom but I hadn't noticed her approach.

"Rachel, Rachel!" she hissed.

"What?"

"What do you mean what, the Nazi?" she whispered. She looked like she might have hit me but then changed her mind.

"Just see what he wants and maybe he'll go away. He could've just wanted some running water." I said.

"Use your brain would you. When do encounters ever go down well with Nazis? Our lives mean nothing to them, he'll rob us or kill us whichever thought comes to mind." I nodded but I doubted how evil the boy was.

"We should kill him first" she continued. She must of seen my hesitance because she started to reason.

"Look at him. He's shell-shocked; I can see him shaking from here. He couldn't stop us."

I did look at him. All I could see was his back. There was blood all around the doorway on the white tiles of the bathroom. I still didn't know whose blood it was. I turned back to Florence and she looked a little more pessimistic about her plan. I heard a scream from across the village.

"What happens when the rest of his unit come looking-?" I was cut short by a loud thud from the other side of the floor. I turned to see the boy; now facing us slumped against the wall beside the sink. His face was

very young, younger than I'd thought. I'd heard that the Germans were desperate for new recruits but this was shocking. Another scream. Maybe we were lucking with what German came to visit us.

Another knock on the door, louder this time. I held my breath. An aggressive shout came from the other side in German. The boy still shaking against the wall replied in a whimper of a voice. A cruel laugh from the other side of the door followed by footsteps that trailed off.

Hours later and dawn was soon approaching. The boy hadn't moved all night, just gently sobbed. Florence had gone back to sleep believing the "Nazi" in the bathroom would kill her soon. But I stayed up. My new-found sympathy kept me awake. The boy has saved us whether it was his intent or not I will never know. He had left us alone and his German friend was sent away thanks to his intervention.

Close to noon the second attack in our village transpired. It started as a series of explosions in the square. As soon as I heard them I ran straight back in to my sisters room forgetting about the boy in the bathroom. After a short round of gunfire the sound of American voices filled the square. From how it sounded the allies were taking no prisoner and acting without mercy. After the screams had stopped Florence began to make for the door.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"To tell the Americans that we've got a Nazi hiding here."

"Does he look like a Nazi?" I shouted. "He's just a boy and he saved us".

"Look at his uniform. He put that on with the intention of killing allies. And you have no idea what he said to the other German. He probably didn't want his friend to see him cry."

I was speechless.

Moments later the allies came and took the boy away. He made no struggle, he didn't even speak, he just let himself get taken along. Looking out my window I saw them shoot that boy in the square.

Daniel Newth-Clark



What we see in today's society

Every gasp for air,  
Every breath you take,  
You're drowning.  
Blinded by the person you want to be  
Not the beauty that is masked that you can't see.

Finding each day unfair  
Things you once loved, you take no care  
In this age all that matters is the perfect face, the perfect hair  
Your face, finally frowning, flooded with hatred of the reflection you see,

Wishing that you could compare to those unrealistic woman photo shopped in the magazines  
When America's greatest dream is to look like a girl on the cover of Seventeen  
Wondering, why can't I look like that?  
Starving yourself in the hopes to be lean,

Suffocating a girl's prospect of beauty when she's only a preteen.  
Seeing yourself as merely stout.

Living through each day with a hidden pout.  
All you want to do is to scream to shout

This isn't who I want to be  
A girl with a figurative dream of what her body should be  
There is so much more in life than our insecurities  
Every day, we see starving children advertised on the TV

While we flush down their hopes, their hunger, their dreams  
Like it doesn't really mean a thing  
We do this to ourselves  
While people involuntarily suffer somewhere else  
That's the problem with this day and age,

We're engulfed in this perspective of what we're told is to be perfection  
It's not our duty to succumb to this modern close-minded concept of beauty  
Next time, when you're looking at your reflection

Stand tall and give your body some proud affection  
For every individual independent women sets the standards for what pretty should be  
Instead of hoping to be on the cover of Glamour, Vogue or Seventeen  
Imagine yourself changing the world on the front of Time magazine  
We all have our insecurities

But confidence in ourselves is what society should truly aspire to achieve.

Erin Woods

To the South

A putrid scent wafted down through the rafters above. Therein an aged resident lay. Over time brambles, vines and trees had enveloped the shack like a padded mossy coat. For long the building had been part of the wood. The tinkle of rusted red metal in the wind just another element of the forest's great orchestra, playing to inhabitants of the dark, green land. The birds, badgers, the hedgehogs and the voles – all of whom resided in the ferny undergrowth or on brittle branches of trees on high – danced in time to the hum of the forest. However, at times a restless sense of unease could be felt hovering in amongst those ancient soldiers. At these times the residents of the usually peaceful place pricked up their ears. Some dived into burrows, some stood stock-still, many ran for their lives and others took to the skies. The beast thought long dead, extinct, from the past – tread now once more on carpeted floor. Its eyes red and burning and foam at its mouth – a terrible fiend had returned to the south.

Long before the birth of that forest, before the first tree sprouted from sand – there lived in the northlands beasts bold and mad. Broad eskers and fogged moors stippled the ground, too poor was the soil to yield good green crop and deep coal black caves exhaled - freezing howls. In treacherous bogs one's life would just vanish, dark winters they carried winds cold and ghoulish. Enough can't be said for the fright of this place as but one crazed, foul thought - sanity - erase.

One ought still recall the life in this land. With spring there to rest – thaw did begin and frozen fall caps slow did fall in. A rush of cold might – pools again filled, and sturdy old bison grazed on verdant hills. At last a huge squall appeared in the sky – the gulls arrived back from months warm and dry. Though crisp, cruel and sodden the northland remained – bustling new life awoke to its embrace.

Dermot Moore



## Mon monde doux fou

Qui n'a jamais passé des vacances ordinaires ? Ou des vacances qui n'étaient pas aussi amusantes que prévues disons... Je sais pas pourquoi, mais dans ma famille, on est bon pour ça. Quand on planifie nos vacances, on commence par décider ensemble où on va aller. C'est quand même compliqué à cause de notre petit pitou adoré. Au Québec, il n'y a pas beaucoup d'endroits qui acceptent les chiens. Un été, mon père voulait absolument qu'on vive l'expérience de la forêt. Vous savez, celle avec un petit chalet de pêche en bois rond rustique sans électricité perdu dans le nord... Donc, c'est comme ça que je me suis retrouvée coincée dans une petite Civic avec un chien asthmatique pendant 7 heures d'affilées. Il faut dire que l'auto était pleine à rebord à cause du fait que ma mère avait préparé tous les repas de la semaine en avance... Bref, le voyage d'aller était vraiment confortable... Arrivé à l'adresse, ce n'était pas du tout comme sur la photo... Malaise. Mes parents vont s'informer, on est bien à la bonne place c'est à dire, la réception de la pourvoirie. C'est alors qu'on apprend que pour se rendre à notre chalet, il faut encore faire 2 heures sur un chemin de terre... Quand il est 5 heures du soir et que tu te fais dire que t'as encore 2 heures de route à faire, ça commence mal les vacances mettons...

Bref, arrivés au fameux chalet, on a tout de suite remarqué qu'il était pas vraiment en bois rond. Ça ressemblait juste à une petite cabane de pêche assez grande pour 4 hommes bien virils. Quand j'ai vu ça, j'ai regardé ma mère et ma sœur. On a toutes roulé les yeux en même temps. Mais mon père lui, disait que l'endroit respirait l'bonheur.

Bref, les jours qui ont suivi ont été plus palpitants que le trajet poussiéreux en Civic à 20 km/h pour se rendre au chalet. Heureusement. Le premier jour qu'on a pêché, le total de prises s'est élevé à un seul bébé poisson. Une chance que ma mère avait prévu d'autres repas. Par la suite, la moyenne familiale était de 4 ou 5 prises, toujours aucune pour moi. Au 4e jour, j'ai décidé d'aller explorer les bois, une folie. Tout d'abord, mon chien m'a suivi et ensuite, je l'ai perdu. Quand elle est revenue, son oeil était enflé et sa paupière était fermée. On a donc essayé de trouver un vétérinaire toute la soirée, en vain. Le soir suivant, j'en avais marre de chasser les moustiques dans mon lit alors j'ai décidé d'aller dormir dans une tente avec ma sœur et nos réserves de chocolat, une autre folie. La forêt, plus du chocolat dans une tente, égale à une visite charmante d'un animal sauvage, l'ours. J'ai donc couru vers le chalet en laissant derrière moi mon précieux chocolat. Le lendemain matin, on a retrouvé la tente intacte, étrange. Il s'est avéré que le bruit qu'avait fait le prétendu ours devait sûrement être celui d'un lièvre inoffensif qui faisait son jogging. Bref, mes parents ont beaucoup ri de nous !!

Nous sommes donc tous allés pêcher en famille pour la dernière journée. Avec le talent et la chance que j'avais, j'ai décidé de pêcher les ménés avec mon filet. Je suis donc restée les deux jambes dans l'eau avec mon chien sur le bord du quai alors que ma sœur pêchait son 10e poisson de la journée. Le pire, c'est que les ménés nagent plutôt vite et que mon filet était complètement inutile... J'ai seulement réussi à attraper une grenouille qui se faisait bronzer. Elle s'est sauvée assez facilement lorsque je suis tombée à l'eau avec ma seule prise de la semaine dans les mains. Le problème dans les lacs artificiels créés pour la pêche, c'est qu'ils ne sont pas aussi propres que les lacs récréatifs... J'ai donc ressenti un profond dégoût quand j'ai touché le fond du lac et que je suis remontée à la surface avec toutes les araignées qui patinaient sur l'eau. J'avais tellement hâte à ma douche froide...

Plus vite que je le pensais, c'était la fin des vacances. Avant de partir, on est allé voir le responsable de la pourvoirie pour lui acheter une vingtaine de poissons, question d'inviter la famille au retour pour déguster nos bons poissons frais. On a évidemment fait un tour chez le vétérinaire pour l'oeil du chien, qui n'était qu'en fait qu'une simple piqûre de moustique. En rétrospective, c'était des belles vacances. On a beaucoup ri de nos mésaventures et des douces folies qui ont rendu notre voyage épique et mémorable.

Marie-Claire Hamel

## What I see when going to school

He never sees me  
But he's always aware  
Like he has radar for a brain.

He runs quickly and climbs skilfully  
Bringing food back to his shelter  
Eyes darting like telescopes.

He's hoarding them all for himself no doubt  
But he's doing it with style  
And a lot of patience.

He does this every day  
It's his job, hobby and pastime  
He never changes anything  
That's why he's so good at it.

He never fails  
This is what he's best at  
His paws work like clockwork  
To get the job done.

These woods are his territory  
Even though he's very small  
As I step slightly nearer he shoots back up  
And into his hole in the tree.

Luke Keenan

## Unspeaking

The voices in the living room,  
Give no mercy,  
No shame,  
In showing you things you'd rather not take.

The voices in the living room,  
Are loud and quiet,  
Obvious and subtle,  
But speak none the less.

The voices in the living room,  
Gnaw at your bones,  
Deafen the silence,  
Wake you asleep,

Unless,

You polish your shoes my dear,  
Straight into the living room,  
And silence their sound.

Ciara Blake



## To Right a Wrong

I lay there on the cold stone floor, my whole body aching from the hours of training. A searing pain spread through my arm. I train longer than everyone else and yet somehow I always end up doing worse. Everyone here has been training for longer than I have, so it's even harder for me to be better. One of my friends, Cole, helped me up and attempted to encourage me to try again, but I just shrugged him off as my face turned red and I hung my head in shame. I muttered congratulations to my opponent and then limped out of the training hall, crestfallen and bitter.

I came here less than five months ago when I was found running away from the police, and Cole saw me and decided to help me out. I used to live on my own in a small wrecked shack, just like everyone else that lived around me. There were no jobs that I could get, due to the fact that I was neither smart nor talented at something useful, so, the only way I could survive was by stealing. I was quick, agile and nimble, which meant I was never caught in the act. Almost every day I would wait patiently in front of one of the more pricey restaurants and as people left, I would take a few coins and maybe a watch or a bracelet, and leave before anyone even knew I was there. It helped that I was extremely small, thin, and that I had long dark black hair, which was especially useful at night-time.

On the morning of the day I was caught for the first time, I was extremely tired and had just caught the flu. I needed some more money than usual to buy medicine that day, so, I decided to go into one of the crowded towns where wealthy people would go shopping. I knew it was a bad idea the second I got there but I didn't have much of a choice because I really needed that medicine. My head was swimming and I couldn't concentrate on anything. There was a throbbing pain in my temple and my movements seemed to be slow and sluggish. I just made a weak attempt at trying to take anything from the people closest to me. Just as I was about to take off one man's watch, a large calloused hand gripped my thin, bony, wrist. I looked up in shock as my brain tried to process what happened, and before I could even understand what was going on, the man began shouting at one of the police officers that were standing at the side of the road and dragging me towards him.

Just as the police officer began making his way towards us, I realised that I had to get away, so I just twisted and turned until the man dropped my arm and then I sprinted away as fast as I could. That's when Cole found me. He saw me running away from the policeman and that the policeman was catching up very quickly, and decided, for some unknown reason, that he wanted to help me. He grabbed my hand as I ran past and dragged me down an alley I had never seen, before I could ask him what was happening. Soon enough, I realised that he was helping me and that the police officer was probably completely lost by now. Finally, he stopped and let me catch my breath. He didn't mention what happened just a moment ago, and he didn't ask any questions. All he said was that he worked for an organisation that fought against a criminal gang that was recruiting thieves like me by force and that his organisation was trying to find a way to stop it and to free the people. He told me that if I wanted to save myself from a life of crime, then I can follow him, if not, then I can leave. After that, my head began throbbing even harder, my vision began to blur and then everything went black.

I woke up in a bright white room, lying in the softest bed I have ever felt, and for a moment I thought I was dead, but then I heard the whirring of a machine beside my bed and muffled voices came from somewhere on my right. A tall man in a clean white shirt and large glasses came in to check on me and I assumed he was a doctor. I vaguely remember him telling me that I just had the flu and was welcome to stay here if I chose to. I don't remember much else that happened on that day. Cole and a few more people showed me around and told me more about the organisation and I ended up joining. I have been here ever since, preparing for the time when I can finally right a wrong.

Tara Rossiter



## Lo que Veo Mientras que Paseo al Cole

Es un día típico. Me levanto, y cuándo veo afuera de la ventana, está lloviendo. ¡Qué pena! Odio la lluvia. Salgo de casa, y empiezo a andar con mi paraguas encima de mi cabeza. Este día no podría ser peor. La lluvia, el cole, sólo quiero irme a casa y dormir hasta mañana.

Al lado del parque, veo un grupo de niños. Se quejan, porque a ellos no les gusta la lluvia, tampoco. Los oigo: '¡Qué frío hace!', '¡No puedo sentir mis dedos!'. Aún así, saltan en los charcos y se ríen cuándo la agua entra en sus zapatos. Su ropa está mojadísima, pero eso no les importa mucho.

Sigo andando por la calle. Delante del estanco, tres o cuatro sin hogares aguantan alrededor de un zafacón. Están llorando y gritando: 'Odio cuándo llueve, tenemos que quedarnos aquí todo el día'. Pero, tienen sonrisas en las caras. Uno dice al otro, mientras que enciende un cigarillo: '¡No te he visto desde la Navidad! Quizás debe llover más, ¿no?' Los hombres se ríen. Hmm, quizás.

Llego al cole. Qué raro, nadie está aquí. Me acerco de la puerta, y bajo el paraguas. Hay una noticia en la pared que dice: 'A cause de una inundación en el comedor, el colegio está cerrado hoy'.

Supongo que con la lluvia vienen las malas cosas, pero, también las buenas cosas. Todos tenemos nuestras propias razones por qué nos gusta la lluvia, y solo tenemos que pasear afuera para encontrarlas.

Emma O'Mahony

## Warehouse Girl

When I get to the warehouse, it's dark out, so much for staying until dark. Someone has been here again, moved some stuff around, and now one of the crates is upside down, the giant letters KENYA stamped across it accordingly. Tea, I think it had once held. Did Kenya even produce tea, who knows? I turn it back around, with difficulty – first onto its side, then the rest of the way around. I stand back and survey it, dusting off my hands. I smile, triumphant. Every time this person comes here, they tip the crate around. I have not yet given up hope that it's some guy I might fall hopelessly in love with, and he with me, but for now I have to dull my hope. It could totally just be creepy Mr. Norton from down the road. I climb up, using the crate and a pile of junk in a skip, to the windowsill – it's deep enough to curl up on, high enough you wouldn't want to fall. Though I guess the junk would help break your fall. I look down. I'd dislodged a bike missing its front wheel on my way up, pushing everything further away from me making the drop bigger. Oh well.

I look out the window, up at the sky. The sky is too light, the streetlamps and city lights taking away from its sea of darkness, broken only by the stars, which I can never determine any pattern from. Maybe it'll look better after the city has gone to sleep.

Everyone I know, more or less, is out there, one of the glittering lights I can see. The warehouse is on a slope, looking out over the city. Kenya crate guy is out there, probably. Sheila is too. I wince, both inwardly and outwardly at the thought.

It started what, four, five months ago now, yet I still get upset at the thought. She left me, but for what, popularity? She's never cared about that. It's not like I'm a loner anyways, at least I wasn't before. How she managed to make people think the worst of me without spreading any actual rumours flummoxes me. Did she leave me because I know about her family? Highly unlikely, I was the only one who knew and cared, and she showed her gratitude for it often. Or she used to, anyway.

Each time I think about it, I go through every possible reason she could have stopped talking to me, and each time I think about it, I come to the conclusion that she'd stopped talking to me purely because I was myself, and she was herself. Because she'd simply felt like it, felt like she could be spending her time elsewhere, with better people, not me, I'm not good enough, am I? I'm not fit for purpose.

It was her who first showed me this warehouse, back when we were little. We would play hide and seek in amongst the boxes, the assorted trash, tossed away toys, broken china sets. This was where she brought all her old stuff when we were thirteen and she decided to throw away all her dolls. She'd grown out of them years before, but suddenly it was like she couldn't even be in the same house as them.

Me, I always kept everything. I still had all my playthings from when I was younger stuffed in a box in the corner of my room.

Anyway, we came here, with all her stuff, and tipped it, I'm pretty sure, right into the skip I'd just climbed over. Then we'd gone back to hers and proceeded to redecorate. We dyed her sheets, painted her walls, stuck up new and shiny posters. But that was then. Years ago. I yearned for it that comfort, that easy, yet lively friendship. I missed it.

She stopped coming here the year after that. She neglected this place, in a way, just like the rest of it. No one comes out here now, as far as I know, except me and Kenya-crate. Nowadays I'm here so often I'm surprised I've not seen them.

I haven't talked to her in so long, and last I did, it was only to ask why. She'd ignored me. I'd given up straight away. I was always the more passive one in our friendship.

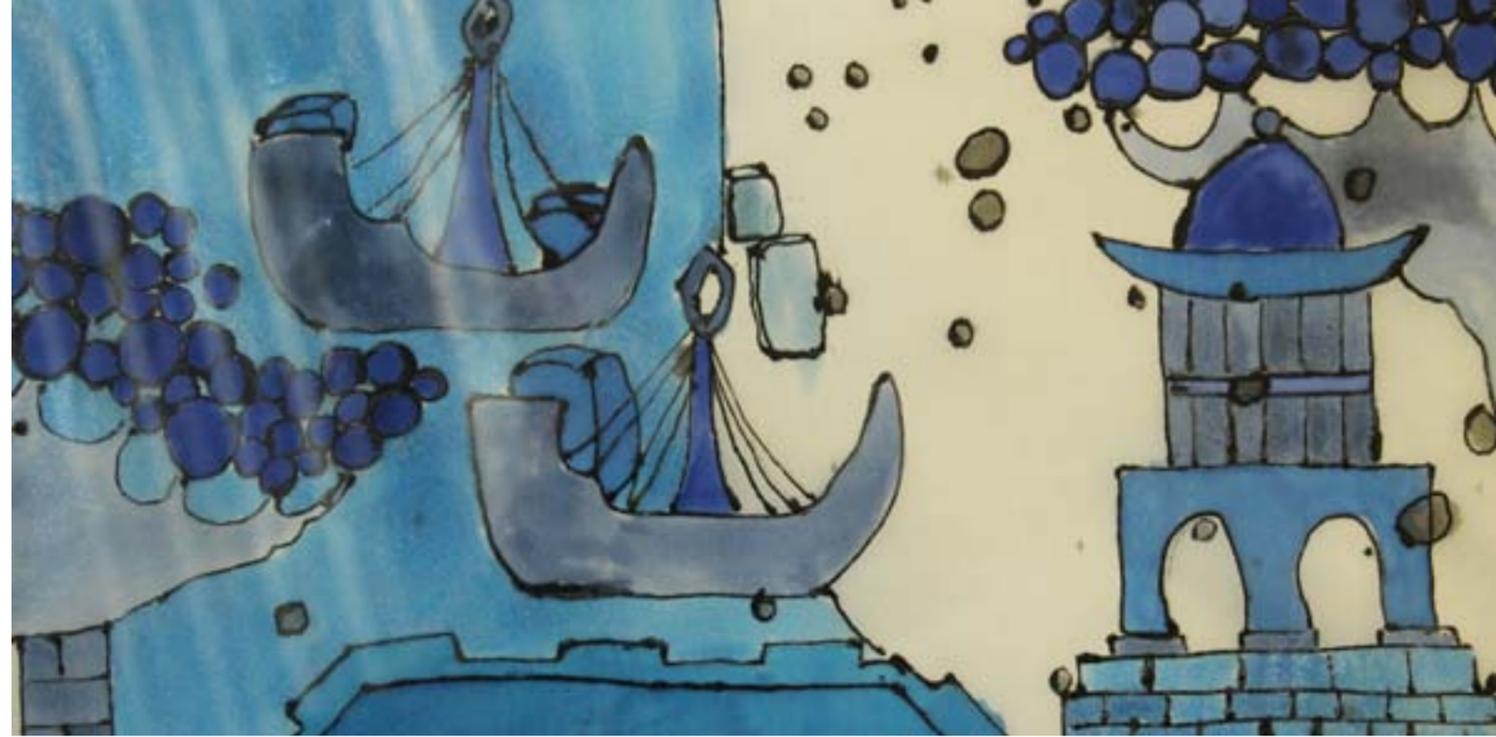
I lean into the window, the ill-insulated cracks letting the cold, gushing air in from outside. I can hear it, the wind. I breathe it in.

At first I don't hear it, maybe because of the wind, but the metal door creaks open. I hear footsteps, then. I hold my breath. Is it Kenya crater? I'm scared to look, lest it's Mr. Norton. The footsteps stop. I turn my head, look down. And she's looking up at me, surprise on her face, before it's replaced with a look of apprehension.

"Hi," she says. She sounds timid, small. I stare at her, hoping my face is giving away nothing. Why now? Did she know I would be here? Is this just temporary, or is she coming back for good? I'm wondering whether I should just ignore her, like she did me. But I know I'm never going to be that person.

"Hi," I say, my face breaking into a smile.

Molly Lambton



## The Seven Chairs – Chapter One

"The fifth one ended up in France"

It was a cold day in France. There was frost and snow everywhere in the little village called Annecy.

"Bonjour" said a small man who was named Père François. He wore a long black coat and on his head was a fur-trimmed hat. It was scruffy and worn, but it did the job and kept him warm. He was well known in the village, as he was vicar to the community.

"Bonjour Monsieur" came the reply.

"Ça va?" Père François asked.

"Ça va très bien", came the answer.

Père François trudged back to his home, fumbling to get his keys out of his pockets, his big, puffy gloves getting in the way. When he opened the door, he felt a warming whoosh of air on his face.

'I'm home', he said.

'Papa!' replied a young voice. The girl in question was only five years old and was the apple of her father's eye, her mother having died when she was just a baby.

'Hello, Angel, are you ready for church?' he asked.

'Oui Papa' she answered.

They struggled to walk through the snow and when they reached the church, they were both freezing with the cold. Père François looked up at the wall, gazing at the one thing that always fascinated him – it was a large picture of a saint who was sitting on a chair and seemed to be floating in the middle of a cathedral. People said that the picture had magical powers. Indeed he always felt comforted when he looked at it. He knew from the history of the town that people had said the picture had protected the church during the war and in other difficult times. The picture had the number five painted in the corner. The old man had heard that there were seven of these paintings scattered around the world. He thought to himself, 'If I could find the other six, imagine how powerful, how strong I would be!'

As soon as he thought it, he felt a powerful pang of guilt – to seek out riches would go against all he had been taught as a trainee priest. 'But surely', he argued with himself, 'I have as much right as any man to wealth and happiness.'

As the first of his flock entered the church, Père François vowed to find the other chairs.

Nathan Scarlett

Waiting for the arrival of the emergency squad and her husband, Mrs. Adams struggled to maintain some sense of sanity. Lying at the bottom of her outdoor pool was a boy of about two years old. Apart from the fact that he was dead, he was rather healthy looking, with curly blonde hair and large blue eyes. It was those eyes that met her when she first saw him. They stared at him, unblinking and as lifeless as the rest of his small corpse.

Mrs. Adams was just about to step into the pool when she saw him. As soon as she did, a horrendously high-pitched scream escaped her mouth, causing her wine glass to vibrate just enough for the housemaid, Paula, to notice. Their neighbours – the Johnsons – did not hear a sound as they were on holidays in Prague. Not that they would have done anything; Mrs. Adams was known around the neighbourhood for being particularly melodramatic.

Finally, the ambulance arrived, shortly followed by Mr. Adams. They reached the child out of the water and prepared to take him to the local morgue.

“How will you ascertain who the child belongs to?” Mrs. Adams asked the ambulance crew as they covered his body with a white sheet.

“A DNA test and blood sample should tell us within a few days.” one of the men replied, and with no more than a “thank you”, they piled into their vehicle.

Now of course, this incident would shake most human beings. But after seeing the dead toddler at the bottom of their swimming pool, the couple were particularly shaken. The reason for this was that that day – May 9th – was the two year anniversary of the death of their stillborn child. This was the fourth time such a tragedy had been bestowed upon the two, who gave up the very idea of having children the moment their 7 pound, 6 ounce boy was born without a heartbeat.

A painful silence hung around the house in the wake of the mysterious incident, filling the gaps in the room and the air in which Mr. and Mrs. Adams breathed. Neither would talk about what had happened, for the memories it brought back were so strong they enabled the pair to remain in their own worlds, reliving the heartache in their minds time and time again, as though it were a song left on repeat.

For several days Mrs. Adams remained in a continuous cycle of not eating or leaving the house. Although pale and clearly undernourished, she refused every solid food in the house, claiming her appetite had disappeared. Mr. Adams tried to coax her out of her shell and back to normality, but his company’s employees had just ended a three month strike, and he was at the head of the negotiating table, meaning he was gone from dawn to dusk.

On the sixth day of this routine, the doorbell rang. Mrs. Adams approached the door at a slow pace; the small round figure behind the faded windows was unfamiliar to her.

“Who is it?” she asked suspiciously. It was eleven o’clock in the morning, a time when most functioning members of society were under the fluorescent lights of their offices.

“Mrs. Adams,” the man replied with a slight sense of urgency in his voice, “my name is Aaron Ward. I’m from the Department of Social Protection. I’m here in regards to the incident that occurred last week. May I come in?”

After some hesitation, Mrs. Adams let the man in and the two sat in the living room after Mr. Ward politely declined the offer of tea.

“I’ll get straight down to business.” Mr. Ward said bluntly. His eyes met hers, and for a moment Mrs. Adams felt like she was being read by the stranger sitting opposite her, even though there was nothing to read.

“I am here because of the boy found in your swimming pool on May 9th of this year. There have been no missing persons reports for a boy similar in age for months, and after finding DNA samples of you and your husband on our files I’d like to inform you with some very interesting news.”

Mrs. Adams’ head turned sideways in a puzzled expression. “What?” she asked.

“Mrs. Adams, the boy we found was yours.”

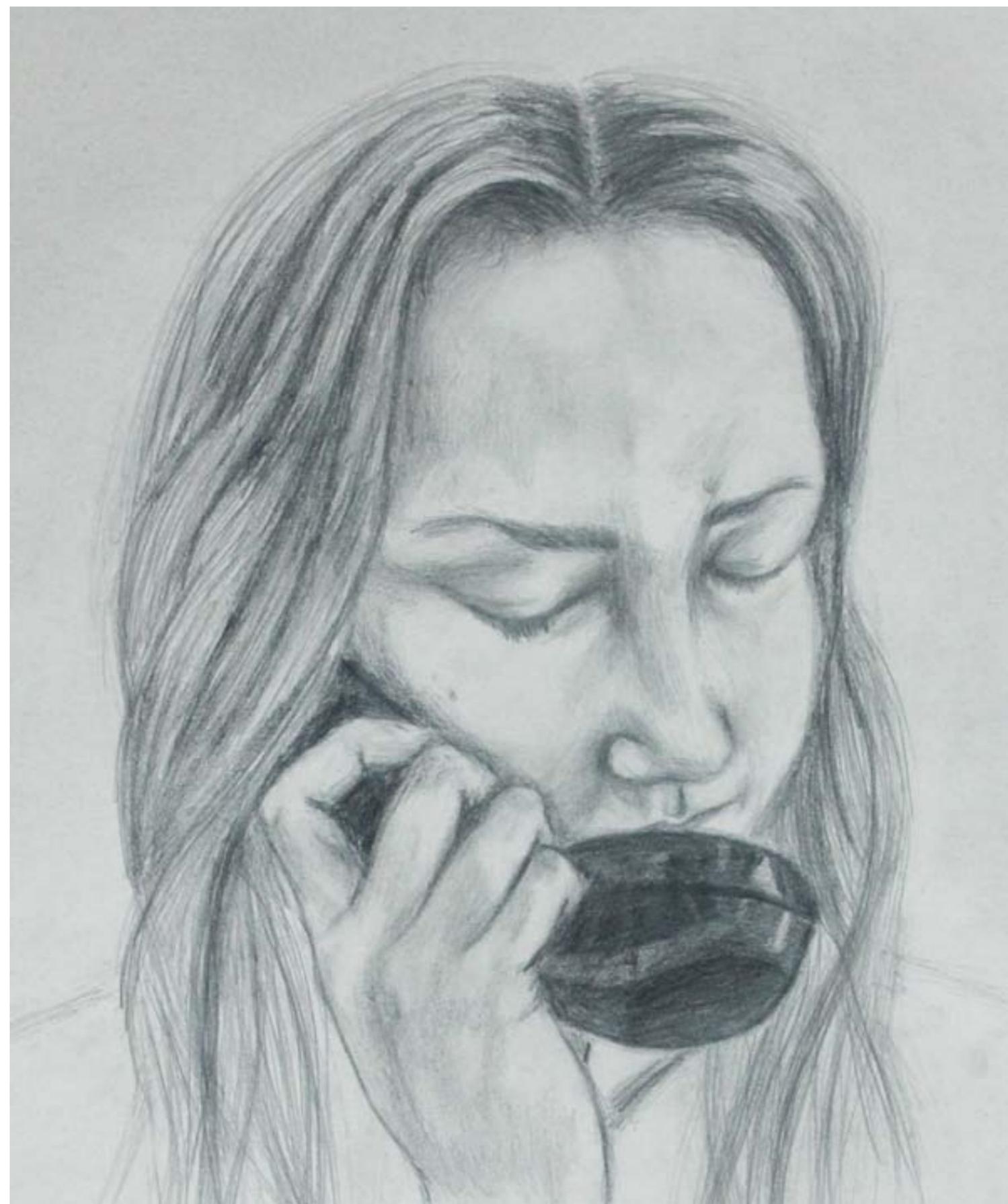
A much shorter silence followed as Mrs. Adams processed this information. Although only a second long, it allowed a feeling of anger to flow through the frail woman’s veins. Who was this fat little man? How dare he say such ridiculous things? He was clearly part of the many branches of government idiots. He - Mrs. Adams stood up. Her voice shook slightly as she spoke. “Mr. Ward, my last child died two years ago before he could take his first breath. I find it extremely rude for you to come into my home and tell me such horrible and ridiculous things. If you have no more to add, I suggest that you leave.”

Mr. Ward insisted that he did indeed have a lot more to add, and before walking to the porch hounded her with many more questions. She ignored all of them, and after telling him that he would need a police order to enter the house again, she slammed the door in his face.

Tears welling in her eyes, Mrs. Adams made her way to the bathroom. She immediately noticed that the

bath was overflowing, and walked over to it to turn the taps off. Unfortunately, she didn’t get the chance, for lying in the tub were two small bodies – the same boy as before, and this time a girl of perhaps a year or two older. Their heads and limbs bobbed with the currents of the water. This time, Mrs. Adams’ screams shattered the windows.

Kate Malone



Three poems in a sequence

(1)

### Underwater Ecosystem

Prowled by predators  
Feeding on passing  
Plankton.

Metal portholes clouded  
With urchins and  
Plastered with corals.

Schools of creatures  
Scuttling through  
The galleys.

Swaying seaweed  
Dancing to the motion  
Of the waves.

Sunken possessions  
Become the houses of  
Colourful critters.

The desired loot  
Lost beneath the  
Decaying wooden floors.

(2)

### Plastic Plants

Caught on the thorn  
Of a live weed  
The artificial plant  
Rustles in the wind

The quick sparkle  
Of the dusty plastic  
From the nourishing sun  
Beaming on the dry soil

The colourful algae  
Of many brands  
On the river's surface  
Bobbing up and down

The strange twigs  
Fallen and burnt  
White and brown  
Clustered in corners.

(3)

### The Tree

For you, the brown bird  
Who awakens me,  
I would turn myself  
Into an old oak tree.

I would give up my  
Movement, my voice  
And limbs, and instead  
Become a wooden statue.

For you, I'd let you nest  
Among my boughs,  
I'd let you rear you're  
Young and watch both  
You and them grow.

I'd let you leave me,  
Saddened, with the high  
Sun, because I'd know  
That you'll return with  
Your sweet chirp and  
Browning feathers and Spring's  
Breeze.

For you, I'd let you sing to  
My growing buds as I  
Rustle with joy.

For you, I'd serve you  
Loyally until you fly  
Away for the last  
Time.

Sarah Clarke

### The Chosen

The sound of pounding hooves and battle cries filled the valley,  
Dust shot into my face and the sound of wind filled my ears.

The castle came into sight as did the chaos around it,  
Fire engulfed homes and people.

Women and children cried and fled in terror,  
Soldiers wallowed in in the blood of others.

Arrows and spears flew through the sky like birds of prey,  
Picking off their chosen targets.

The cavalry and I tore into the enemies lines  
Crushing them under the hooves of our steeds.

The intense carnage lasted until night,  
Crippled siege towers lay in ruins around the base of the stone  
walls.

The corpses of men made a bloody carpet of meat hiding the  
ground underneath,  
It almost felt like death himself was watching

Like a child choosing sweets  
And out of all the sweets death could choose, he chose me.

Karl Viio



## Picture Day

Today is the day I've awaited for weeks  
I jump out of bed and apply blush to my cheeks  
Pictures today but I have to complain  
My hair is close to resembling a mane

Later at breakfast my dad appears for a hug  
Opening his arms and knocking over a jug  
The milk from the jug covers my skirt  
The look that follows filled with anger and hurt

I scrub and scrub trying to wash it away  
Until at last it is time for me to be on my way  
My mom looks at me with my hair like a nest  
She smiles assuringly and says give it your best!

It's time for the pictures and I'm starting to worry  
The girls in my school all gather in flurries  
Their hair is perfect, make-up just right,  
They start running in circles beginning to fight

Over whose hair is the prettiest, who gets to go first,  
Who looks the best, I know I look the worst  
The man calls my name and I begin to stand  
My nails bitten to the bed on my hand

The man goes behind the camera and I take my place  
Quickly brushing away the hair from my face  
Cheese! I say, with an award-winning smile  
But the camera's not flashing, it's taking a while

What's wrong? I ask, with a questioning look  
Then flash goes the camera and the picture is took  
No! I protest, please take it again  
But the next girl in line has already come in

When the pictures arrive I hide my head in shame  
Knowing that these aren't quite fit for the frame  
Although I was excited I now have to say  
That I'll no longer look forward to the next picture day

Sadhbh O'Mahony

## The Walkers

The lonely weather tower watched down  
from the summit  
As the wind spun the vanes and the storm  
cloud marched in.  
The lone group of walkers snaked their  
way down.

Down to the town  
Where there was a shop, a pub and a park  
And where their cars sat  
Ready to carry them home

Home to a stew  
Home to warmth  
Home to rest.

Oscar Doyle

## A Sticky Situation

I stood at the door waiting for a reply  
But then I stopped and asked myself why?  
Why should I apologise for being so blunt, when it is her that should be here out front.  
I made up my mind,  
Ran home within an hour, and the taste in my mouth was o so sour.  
I knocked at the door and she said 'come in'

This is where the story really should begin.

I walked inside with a stomp and fist and I dare to say that it really did exist.  
There she was with a cup in her hand and with a grin on her face as this was all unplanned.  
There I was shouting, pouting and all the stuff in between,  
And to think I was only nineteen.  
She said 'calm down child all is done and everything is as perfect as the midnight sun'  
She patted me on the back and said 'you did well'  
I responded with 'how can you tell?'  
'By the look on your face and the twinkle in your eye'  
'You did the right thing' she said 'and you know why'

Katie Kellett



## The Golden Bars

The bars that surrounded me were delicate and golden. They were crafted by talented hands and they radiated a low pink light, like a lullaby that pushed me softly into sleep. The bars curled and intertwined circuitously, until they joined above my head; and below my feet, they melted into the ground and made their roots. There was no way out of the beautiful cage. And I was not looking for one.

I knew whatever he was made of had been used many times before it formed his brown hair and green eyes. Protected by his hunched shoulders was a wise and wrinkled soul that had seen love, sins, tearful nights and everything in between. Sometimes he would look at me with omniscient eyes and I felt that his pupils were the whole world. I thought I could live and die in the blackness.

He was an extreme being, but that was all right. Some days, I felt as though he had taken the fire from the sun as it rose in the morning, while others were lived in dark corners, but that was all right. Sometimes he felt like overcoming fears, and sometimes he felt like giving up, and that was fine and I was always there. And occasionally, my arms were too tired to lift him out of the black hole, so I stood and I watched from higher ground. And that was that.

He looked at me with no curiosity and I cannot remember if he ever had. My skin was glass to him. So transparent that nothing was a mystery and nothing was interesting after a second look. I used to think that if I was the enigma, then he was the genius that broke me, but I was never made feel that complicated. Instead, I felt stolen from. I wanted all my secrets back, to regain the worth I had given them in my head. But he did not keep them to taunt me; he did not keep them at all. He did not even care, which is, perhaps, why it was so difficult for me to collect them again.

He understood the world enough to live a life in it. He existed on the highest and lowest extremities of the scales and I waited and I gathered up all the pieces when they shattered and I remade him exactly the same. He was wise and omniscient and he spoke with a clarity that I wanted to hear.

And I was alive and I was surrounded by golden bars, which intertwined above my head and melted into the ground below my feet. I lived in the confines of a beautiful cage. There was no way out. And I never looked for one.

Lili Mae Boorman



## Megan

All I wanted was to fit in. I didn't want to be 'four eyes' again, to be the last person picked for basketball. I had a good feeling, but then everything changed.

The day had started off well; I had even made a few friends. I wasn't sitting around at the 'loser table' as I had been in my old school. When we went to the locker room, I was feeling good, but then I saw her. My mouth fell open, I started sweating and my heart began to race.

I made a strange choking-like sound .... She was supposed to have died in a car crash over three years ago and yet here she was laughing away with her friends as if nothing had happened. As soon as she saw me I could see that she was alarmed.

After PE, I confronted her. She tried to run away but I grabbed her arm. As soon as we touched I began to shake, after all she was the one who had made my last six years unbearable. "Megan, what the hell..." I started but she cut in. "I was so unhappy, I couldn't do it anymore." She tried to run away again but I ran after her and said, "I don't understand... the car crash..."

"My friends and I faked it. As soon as I could I ran away. I couldn't live with what I had become. I'm living with really nice foster parents ... Everything's okay." She replied, biting her lip.

"Wait a minute, do your parents know about this?" I asked, suddenly gaining confidence.

"Em ... no" She said. She was fidgeting the whole time. I could tell that she was just as nervous as I was.

"But you'd better not tell them". She ran away again and this time I couldn't catch her.

When the school bell rang, I got my books from my locker and went straight home. "How was your day?" asked my Mum, taking off her apron and turning towards me with a warm smile on her face, but I walked straight past her, up the stairs and into my room.

I turned on the computer and typed in "Parents of Megan Foster". A bunch of newspaper articles about the car crash came up, but nothing about her parents. I decided to leave it for a few days.

After three days of keeping my mouth shut, I gave in and told my parents. My Mum was shocked and contacted Megan's parents.

The next day, there was an announcement over the intercom: "Megan Foster, your parents are here to see you". Megan wasn't in any of her classes that day.

The next day, Megan came up to me and said "What the hell did you do that for?"

"I was just trying to help", I replied.

"Well, you just made everything one hundred times worse!" she said and stormed off.

Later that day, my Mum told me that Megan had run away. I felt terrible. It was all my fault.

That night, I couldn't sleep at all. All I could think about was Megan. It hadn't been her fault ... her Dad in prison, her Mom getting drunk every night. I would have gone just as crazy as she did.

The next morning, instead of taking the bus to school, I got a taxi to the seaside. I understood how Megan had felt; I just wanted to get away.

When I arrived at the beach, I walked for hours. My phone buzzed constantly in my pocket but I just ignored it. At the end of the long sandy beach, I saw a lone figure that resembled Megan. I ran all the way to her.

When I reached her, I saw cuts on her arms and a cold look in her piercing blue eyes. I reached out my hand and said, "It's going to be okay".

Martha Bolger Webb



### An Urge to Fly

I'm lying in a hospital bed. People are staring down at me. They look as if they're staring at a ghost. I think I know why. You see the reason I'm here is because I lost control when I flew and crashed through a window. When the people around realise that I'm awake they begin to ask questions, like how do you feel? And can you remember anything? But I don't pay any attention; I can't help but notice a newspaper under my father's arm. It has my face on it. I ask for it and he hands it to me.

So apparently there was a witness when I jumped off the building. Here's what he said-

So I'm on the roof have a smoke break and just gazing out over the city. This guy comes out; he's skinny and scruffy, looks a bit lost and has a hazy look in his eyes as if he's high or possessed or something. I say a few words to him but he doesn't hear me. He starts walking towards like a freaking zombie and I'm getting a bit scared, I'm like what the hell is this guy doing? I mean he's completely out of it. I get out of his way but that was a mistake because the crazy s.o.b just hops over the wall, no hesitation, just hops over.

I really can't explain what led me to do it. I just had this overwhelming urge to jump off a very high building. Looking back on it I don't think there's anything I could have done to resist it. When I was walking towards the edge of the roof, about to jump, I felt no fear, I just did it. And that's when I started flying.

My invisible wings held me in the air. A flood of new feelings rushed through me. I felt invincible, free from the chains of reality. Not a care in the world.

I didn't have complete control, which is why I'm in a hospital bed. I crashed head first through a window. That's when I blacked out I guess.

The sad thing is that I don't know if I'll be able to fly again. The urge hasn't come back since. I don't really want to try jumping off another high-rise in case it doesn't work, but hey, maybe the urge will come back and if it doesn't, at least I've had the experience.

Matt McCann

### An Áit is Fearr Liom Ar Domhan –

Is í Durban an áit is fearr liom ar domhan. Tá sí suite san Aifric Theas agus is áit álainn te í. Tugaim cuairt ar Durban gach dara bliain agus fanaim le mo sheantuismitheoirí nuair a bhím ann mar tá teach acu inti. Tá na radhairc i nDurban gan sárú. Bhainfidís an anáil díot. Ar an gcéad dul síos is féidir leat an sliabh Table Mountain a fheiceáil ón mbaile. Go baileach is sliabh an-ard é agus tá cuma boird air. Chomh maith leis sin is féidir leat an fharraige ghorm a fheicáil ón mbaile. Go deimhin tá na radhairc i nDurban fíorálainn.

Tá a lán rudaí suimiúla i nDurban. An bhliain seo caite chuaigh mé go dtí an Pháirc Náisiúnta Kruger. Is páirc mhór le haghaidh ainmhithe fiáine í. Creid é no ná creid níl aon chillíní inti, mar sin is féidir leis na hainmhithe siúl aon áit gur mhaith leo. Nuair a bhí mé inti chonaic mé sioraf, eilifint agus a lán ainmhithe eile. Gan bréag a insint ba bheag nár tháinig taom croí orm nuair a léim leon mór ar mo charr.

Tá a lán áiseanna iontacha i nDurban. Mar shampla tá ionad siopadóireachta nua-aimseartha inti darb ainm Gateway. Is foirgneamh ollmhór, gnóthach é agus bíonn sé dubh le daoine. Is dócha go bhfuil níos mó ná ceithre chéad siopa ann. Chomh maith leis sin tá nócha bialann agus páirc a rinne Tony Hawk.

Nuair a thugaim cuairt ar Durban de ghnáth caithim mo chuid ama ag snámh nó ag siopadóireacht i nGateway. In ainneoin é sin go léir níl aon amhras ach an rud is fearr liom le déanamh ná dul chuig an bpáirc uisce áitiúil.

Ar an iomlán is bréa liom Durban. Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil comhlúadar cáirdiúil, difriúil inti agus is bréa liom cuairt a thabhairt ar mo sheantuismitheoirí. Mar fhocal scoir is léir don dall gur áit álainn, suimiúil í Durban agus sin an fáth gurb í an áit is fearr liom ar domhan. Deirtear gur glas iad na cnoic I bhfad uainn agus sa chás airithe seo ceapaim go bhfuil an seanfhocal sin fíor.

Caitlín Colbert

### Cóisir

Is cumhin liom go maith í, an chóisir is measa a d'fhulaing mé ariamh. Oíche dhubh, dhorcha a bhí ann. Bhí gach duine ag teacht go dtí mo theach. Caithfidh mé a rá go raibh mé ar bís ag fanacht leis an gcóisir. Léim mo chroí le gliondar nuair a chuala mé cnag ar an doras.

Tháinig cúpla cara isteach de réir a chéile. Gan bréag a insint fuair mé a lán bronntanas. Bhí gach duine ag damhsa agus bhí a lán craic againn. Bhí atmaisféar leictreach le brath. Bhí mé ar mhuintir na muice.

Tar éis an damhsa bhí gach duine sa seomra suí ag féachaint ar scannán. Bhí meangadh mór gáire ar a n-aghaidheanna agus ba léir go raibh siad ag baint taitnimh as an gcóisir. Ar an drochuair bhí an chóisir beagnach críochnaithe. Bhí brón orm ach ní bhíonn tréan buan.

Ansin, go tobann fuair mé boladh aisteach. Deatach a bhí ann. Rith mé isteach sa chistin agus chonaic mé tine i ngach áit. A Thiarcais, baineadh geit uafásach asam. Bhí an phraiseach ar fud na mias. Ba beag nár thit mé i laige. Scread mé i mbarr mo chinn is mo ghútha agus rith mé amach. Nuair a chuala gach duine cad a tharla, lean siad mé.

Ansin chuir mé fios ar na seirbhísí éigeandála. Nuair a tháinig siad, mhúch siad an tine amach. Ach scriosadh an teach. Pé scéal é, idir an dá linn, tháinig mo thuismitheoirí abhaile. Bhí fearg an domhain orthu. Bhí mé in umar na haimléise.

Ar deireadh thiar, ba thromluí ceart é, ach buíochas le Dia ní raibh aon duine gortaithe. Caithfidh mé a admháil, gan aon agó, nár chodail mé néal an oíche sin.

Emily McCarthy

## Famous Last Words

It was one of those nights, you know, quiet, uneventful. I was sitting on a park bench trying to think about a book that I had recently read to look more intelligent to passers-by but really I was just sitting there staring into the trees. I was just in my own little world, the only place where I could be one hundred percent me. My imaginary world in my head was where I was who I wanted to be and nobody could say anything. It felt very nice to know that nobody could make fun of you while I was daydreaming. When I woke up from my conscious dream, I realised that I should go to school. When my classes were done I went back home to find out that something quite out of the ordinary had happened...

"Annie!" I shouted but there was no reply. When I went into the office, I found a note saying: 'Ritz-Carlton, 8:00pm don't tell ANYBODY. I immediately felt a shiver down my spine as I found out where my mum was. When I arrived at the hotel, I was lead into a room and a guy wearing a fancy suit said: "Give us the money and the unthinkable won't happen to your sister."

I was desperate to get out of the hotel and to find my sister too. I didn't want for me or for her to find out what the 'unthinkable' was. I rushed out of the room, the sweat dripping off of my forehead as I sprinted with all my power to my apartment.

When I reached my apartment, I was full of emotions but mainly anger, not fear. I was full of adrenaline to get my sister's gun which was lying on the floor and I grabbed it just as the guy came in. 'Take the shot. Come on! Take the shot!'

As he fell to the ground, I muttered 'Famous last words.'

Pamela Fitzsimons

## Etymology, My Dear Watson

The dusty clock resting on the mantelpiece chimed with a loud ding. It was midnight and they were gathered in the missing Vicar Timothy's dining room. It was not the ideal location for an investigation but it was the only room in the backwards little community of Egalliv big enough to hold them all and, despite the strangeness of the victim's disappearance, no useful evidence had been found so there was little reason to avoid contaminating the scene.

There were four of them gathered before Detective Anna Lissis, the representative of the Amalgamated Crime Research Organisation for the Northern Yugoslavian Mainland who had arrived earlier that day to investigate the murder of the vicar.

"Mr. Lee, Is this everyone?" An ancient man seated in an even more ancient armchair slowly turned his head. "That's 'Sir Lee' to you." he said with a scowl, "And you would do well to remember it." The detective rolled her eyes. "Sir Lee," she tried with a sigh, "Is every person in this village here?" Sir Lee took his time answering. "I believe Cliff has yet to join us." A few eyes were cast to the clock. "Why don't we just get started and save some time?" suggested someone. There were a few murmurs of agreement. "Well we might as well," snapped James Eckshen, "It's not like we're going to get anywhere with this anyway."

"Very well." responded the detective, decisively ignoring Mr. Eckshen, "Mr. Agana, you were the one who first noted Tim's absence. Why don't you run us through us through the story?" Mr. Agana glanced up with his usual look of surprise plastered across his face. He was a man whose perpetual visage of bewilderment gave the impression that he was constantly rearranging his thoughts.

"Hm, what? Oh, me. Yes, well it happened last Tuesday morning," he began.

"It was Wednesday" someone interjected.

"Was it?" he replied. "Yes actually, I suppose it was."

"And it was late at night," chimed a different voice.

"Was it really? You're probably right."

"Oh, this will get us nowhere, you bumbling oaf," sighed the elderly woman seated to Mr. Agana's left. "We all know your thoughts are as jumbled as a dyslexic's scrabble board."

"Perhaps we'll return to it later, once you've had time to organise your thoughts," said the detective pessimistically, before peering over at the spindly hag to her left. "I don't believe we've been introduced, Mrs...?"

"Andromeda, but you can call me Andry, dearie," she chirped, her scowl disappearing suddenly,

"Though it's Miss, not Mrs. I'd never tie myself down to one of those Neanderthal louts. Us women are better off without them." There were a few exasperated groans around the room, as this viewpoint of hers was evidently well established.

"Why don't we discuss the means and motive?" suggested the detective, desperately trying to stop the discussion from being derailed.

"What motive?" snorted Miss Andry, "It was one of those three, following their baser instincts like typical men."

"Or maybe it was you," sneered Sir Lee, "Or Cliff. He still hasn't arrived."

"Are you seriously implying that a lady as civilised as myself could have committed as heinous an act as this?"

"Well you always hated old the old vic."

"Just as much as she hates the rest of us." countered Mr. Eckshen.

"What about establishing a means instead," proposed the detective desperately, "Considering how out of character this apparently is for the vicar, we can probably assume he has been either abducted or even murdered. If this is the case, the perpetrator has likely armed themselves. This would give us a means to investigate."

The others looked at each other, confused.

"What I'm suggesting," the detective continued, "Is that we try to establish a weapon."

"Well I suppose the revolver that old man Khovech had is the only real weapon within twenty miles of us." offered Mr. Agana.

"His name was Chekhov." groaned Sir Lee.

"And it hasn't been seen since he died." added Mr. Eckshen.

"Well isn't there a chance that one of you still has it?" said the detective doubtfully, "Considering that it's the only viable weapon."

"Now that you mention it, I suppose it has to be Chekhov's gun." conceded Mr. Eckshen.

"First thing tomorrow, we'll look into it," decided the detective, "For the moment, we'll leave it at that, since there's not much we can do without Cliff here as well. I'll be staying here overnight."

The others stood to leave as lightning lit up the room, casting four shadows at the door as a thunderclap sounded.

"Where do you suppose that idiot Cliff is?" Sir Lee was saying to the others as they walked to the door.

"Maybe he's gone missing too." suggested Mr. Eckshen.

"Or maybe he's just realized how awful all you men are." spat Miss Andry.

The doors suddenly crashed open, to reveal a bruised Timothy being held around the neck by another man. The man levelled a revolver at the vicar's head. "Ya'll should probably pay attention, unless you want the old vic Tim's cerebrum rearranged." he droned in a thick southern drawl.

Detective Anna Lissis knew who this was. There was only one person it could be.

It was Cliff Hanger.

Niall Mooney



## Tidal Phases

Even through the tinny speakers of my phone, that voice was my favourite sound. I stood at the edge of the boat, watching the turquoise waves sparkling in the sun as I fought to keep a grin from spreading across my face. I wanted to savour this moment, but more importantly I needed to be serious for a second. His carefree tone betrayed the fact that he had no idea that this would be our last conversation. "Ah but you've always loved that about me," he gently teased. I could practically see that smile of his that I knew so well despite the physical distance between us.

The wind blew my hair into my face, obscuring my view of the ocean, as I formulated my response. "What I love about you probably isn't what you really are," I began, speaking quickly as not to lose my nerve or let him interrupt in confusion, "much the same as you love a person that is not really me in truth. We know what the other presents to the world and further delude ourselves by building up an idea of the person in our heads. If we are what others love about us, and they what we adore, not does not actually matter though; what matters is that we see it in each other."

I heard him take a breath, processing what I'd just said. However, before he could offer his thoughts on my statement I spoke again.

"Remember me as that girl, even if she never existed." I instructed before hanging up without an official goodbye.

I saw the phone disappear beneath the waves along with the girl he thought he loved.

Aleca Roantree

Release

Hand clenched around my heart  
Squeezing, tightening  
Living, love, lust, like  
deafening silence

Hope, having, health, heart  
bound and shackled  
enclosed  
entrapped  
scratching of the pen  
scribbling across the page

Anger, angst, action, awe  
voices strained  
head pounding

Confusion, cowardice, candor  
Poems of living  
Poems of love  
Poems of lust and like and loathing

Music of hope  
Music of having  
Music of health and heart and happiness

Songs of anger  
Songs of angst  
Songs of awe and action and aimlessness

Tales of confusion  
Tales of cowardice  
Tales of charm and candor and camouflage

Deep breath in  
and release.

Saibh McCaffrey

## Parallel Universe

I had one instruction: To not open the box. It was a dusty old thing, hardly appealing. But curiosity bubbled inside of me. I tore my eyes away from it; but they flickered back. Should I open it? I had been trusted to look over it before they found a safer place to hide it. No, stop, I told myself firmly. The hands of the clock ticked noisily, slowly, indicating that I had plenty of time. Just one little peak... I reasoned with myself. My hand reached out and unhooked the latch in one swift motion. Nothing. I edged closer to get a better view. All their seemed to be was white light coming from deep inside the box. What was it? I leaned in trying to get a closer look. The light grew brighter, alluring and I leaned in even more. Immediately I was pulled in. My feet left the ground and I was thrown into infinite brightness. My hands tried to grab something – anything – around me as I fell faster and faster until... wham! I was thrown to the ground. I looked around me, dizzy slightly, trying to contemplate what had just happened. I probably would've panicked if the scene around me wasn't so bizarre. Flowers the size of trees and trees the size of flowers grew around me. Over by the pool a dog was walking a human. And over by the bench, sitting down was a boy wearing shoes on his hands and gloves on his feet. "No vegetables until AFTER dinner I said!" a toddler yelled at its mother. I fought the urge to burst out laughing at this extraordinary sight and decided to explore a little. I stopped outside a health store. 'Double chocolate fudge – €2 only!' was an advertisement outside the window. I smirked and pushed open the door. "That girl just walked through the door. Yes, the door. I'm not kidding," I heard someone whisper just before my entrance. I walked up to the cashier to pay for the chocolate bar. "Goodbye, it's €2 please" she said handing me the money. "Um..." I stared at her. "Here?" I tried giving her money instead. At this she became very annoyed. "Miss, take the money." "But I need to pay," I insisted. "You want to pay?!" she gasped. "SECURITY!" Even in a world like this, I knew that could never be good. Without thinking, I ran. I don't think I ever ran faster in my life. Not when I had been running the 100m meter race, not even when a dog had been chasing me. Behind me, the security guards had jumped out the window and were running after me, they were catching up. But I was almost at the box. I jumped in immediately, feeling the same sensation as before. Within moments, I was back to my own world. I lay panting on the floor, my heart racing, waiting for my heartbeat to slow down. The door opened and my head snapped up. "Goodbye," I said. The manager looked at me in confusion. "Hello!" I quickly corrected myself. "Thank you for looking after the box," he said. "Oh, it was a piece of vegetable... CAKE. Piece of cake." I nervously laughed and left the room, feeling his confused eyes on me as I walked out. What a day!

Anna Giatraki



Nothing

My time had come; I just knew it. The feeling of resignation and relief hit me with the softest of blows. I let out a croaky sigh but it was lost in the vast hospital bed that engulfed me. An intricate jungle of wires spiderwebbed across my vision as I eyed the great mirror on the opposite wall. I could hardly make out my ghostly figure amid the crisp white bed sheets. Brittle bones were clear through skin; a mop of faded grey hair obscured the scars. An army of humming machines laid siege to the bed and was joined at intervals by tearfully optimistic relatives, but they grew ever distant. Suddenly, an ice cold feeling of dread chilled my "heart". What was next? What was to come? Fear, not of death itself, but of what lay beyond consumed me. As a fire of panic began to roar inside me, and images of utopias and dungeons filled my head, I remembered a rainy night almost 50 years before....

Sipping a cup of muddy water, optimistically billed as a "cappuccino", I surveyed my surroundings with a sigh. The dim, grim café with its shabby interior and disinterested staff was a far cry from what I had imagined when entering the exciting world of journalism. In the naïvety of youth, I had envisaged a life of rushing from crime scene to courthouse, writing sensational exposés and hard-hitting reports. But the harsh reality of free-lance journalism had hit me with the hardest of blows. After six months without a publication or even a lead, desperation had driven me to this less than savoury establishment. I glared out the window as the rain continued its relentless assault. Passers-by were scarce, driven indoors by the torrential downpour and the danger of the dark night.

I glanced at the cracked wall clock before hunching over my brew and scowling at the door. Without warning, it swung violently open and a sodden, portly man bumbled inside. Rivers of water dripped from his greasy beard and tattered coat, gathering in a fast expanding lake at his feet. He spent several minutes wheezing, spluttering and shivering with alarming vigour before collapsing into the plastic chair opposite me. The teenage waitress with her large selection of tattoos, black lipstick and bored expression had completely missed this strange episode, her eyes not straying from the latest issue of 'Vogue' for a second. Such was the care and attention of Selma's Café.

By the time my trembling companion had regained the ability to speak, I was poised and ready. Notebook in hand, biro wedged between fingers, I was all set to hear the story that could turn my career around.

"Mr. Smitherson?" I began inquiringly, using the sharp, efficient tone only reserved for interviews.

"Well....um, yes," he replied still spluttering away with frightening gusto.

"You contacted me with a rather sensational and unbelievable story Mr. Smitherson. You claim to have, and I quote, 'died three years ago and returned from the grave to re-join the world of the living'. Is this true?" I was in no mood to beat about the bush.

"Oh yes, of course it's true." His rotund figure shook violently as he nodded his head.

I was already having suspicions about Mr. Smitherson.

"If you really have been 'beyond death', as you put it in your letter, maybe you'd like to describe it to me?" I asked with only a hint of sarcasm detectable.

"Pardon?"

"After death, well, it's just nothing. The world is nothing. Existence is nothing. Everything is nothing. Just nothing." He smiled.

"You mean to tell me that I waited two hours on a Saturday night in this sad excuse of a café for you to come in here and tell me that after death there is nothing." I tried to stay calm but was screaming inside.

"Well....um, yes."

With a volley of curses, a deafening stomp and a slam of the door, I was gone. "There's always trialing new drugs for a living," I muttered ruefully as I began another long trudge home in the rain.

A loud interjection from a beeping machine brought me back. My head ached with a dull, cold pain and the firm, ice block of a pillow was unforgiving. I never realised until then that I remembered that idiot Mr. Smitherson and his tale of what lay 'beyond death'. But it got me wondering. It got me thinking about life after life and the heaven so confidently promised by Reverend Johnson every Sunday. It got me speculating about what was in store for me. One of the machines began to beep, a low staccato melody. Questions, theories and ideas filled my mind but I was tired. The bed that had been my prison for so long now felt soft and warm. Sun streamed in the window, its delicate rays kissing my face and drawing a smile from cracked lips. The beeping was faster now, a presto tempo taking hold. Room 376 was getting smaller, the walls closing in with the darkness. All the pain melted like butter as I closed my eyes for the last time. Nothing.

Harry Deacon



Free

It is quite bright already. I'm trying to be quiet but it's hard when everything in the house creaks. 4:36AM I read on my watch. I get up, I put on layers. Lots of them. 2 vests, 3 T-shirts, a fleece, a hoodie, jeans and woolly socks. I slide down the stairs, making an attempt to spread my weight so not to make any noise on the old stairs. My Timberlands are sitting under the radiator. Above it, lies my backpack, coat, hat, gloves. I instantly get a knot in my stomach. Am I really doing this? This is what I have planned for months on end. I need to see her.

I slip on my outdoor gear before making a quick trip to our small kitchen to get 4 apples, 6 energy bars, an old sports bottle full of water and i grab a €20 note out of the drawer. They won't notice. I quietly step outside the front door and instantly feel the freezing air in my lungs. Inhale. Exhale.

I start my journey by walking to the front of our open patio, walking through the bushes and out onto the empty field. Old snow crunches beneath my feet and I can already feel little bits of snow melting in my loose boots. I start to pace into a jog, it's hard because I sink a little with every step I take.

I walk again. 20 minutes on and I'm at the edge of the forest. It's not really much of a forest, just a bunch of trees at the edge of a river.

It feels good to finally leave. I hear familiar footsteps behind me and I turn around. Luna, my sister. We have a long, warm embrace before we even talk.

"Alex" she whispers, barely audible. "You remembered," I say, a grin forming on my freezing face. She stands there, same Timberlands but smaller, skinny jeans, leg warmers, black coat, fur hood and earmuffs. She puts her hand in her pocket and takes out a wad of cash. "You stole that?!!" I shout whisper, as is there is anyone else in the woods, in December, at 5:10AM. "Yeah, they're fine. They have enough. They'll barely even notice either my or the money's disappearance. We smile at each other. She has always been much more adventurous than me.

We walk towards the river to start our journey. We are finally doing this, we are getting away from this hateful place and we are going to be free.

Rosie McFadyen

Josh pulled the coat tighter around him as the wind whipped his hair into his eyes and made his jeans rustle against his legs. It was a bitter February night and the moon was hidden from view behind a screen of city smog and cloud obscured any stars that may have been twinkling. Josh wasn't looking up, he was focused on the streets that intersected at the corner he was standing on. If anyone had been watching from the other side of the street they would have seen a boy, roughly fifteen or sixteen years of age. Brown hair cut short and lightning blue eyes. He was kicking his feet against the kerb producing a dull thump every few seconds and his fingers couldn't stay still. They twisted and curled betraying his nerves. His eyes rapidly moved in his face as he tried to focus up and down the street and then repeat. He was standing on a corner in the eastern quarter of town. The chill had begun to seep into his bones. He melted backward as a man came past coughing huge lung fills of air. He staggered slightly as he walked showing he was drunk. A group of teens shouting and laughing were coming down the other side of the street steaming hot bags of salty chips. Josh started salivating, imagining that instant salty hit and the roasting hot burn as the fluffy chip broke open in his mouth. If he squinted he could see a kid a few years older than him sitting on a corner two blocks downward. He wondered if he was part of Scott's employees. The hunger and cold were becoming unbearable. Just as Josh began reconsidering his options he spotted Scott strolling down the road. "All right little man" he said as he reached Josh's corner. He spotted the beads of sweat on Josh's face. "Nervous" he said. He rested a comforting hand on Josh's shoulder. The simple touch of a human hand helped to calm Josh. He threw the brown paper bag at Josh. "Always keep the merchandise and money separate" he said smiling, "remember that". Josh just managed to nod. "Look" Scott continued kindly. "Just stuff it deep into your jacket pocket". "Head down to the next block, my men there will have already set up the sale". "Hand them the bag and collect the cash, I'll be around to collect that later". Josh just nodded again and smiled shakily. Feeling slightly calmer. "Good man", Scott shot another smile and stuffed his hands down into his own pockets and turned around continuing down the street but not before Josh saw the reassuring smile turn to one of scorn.

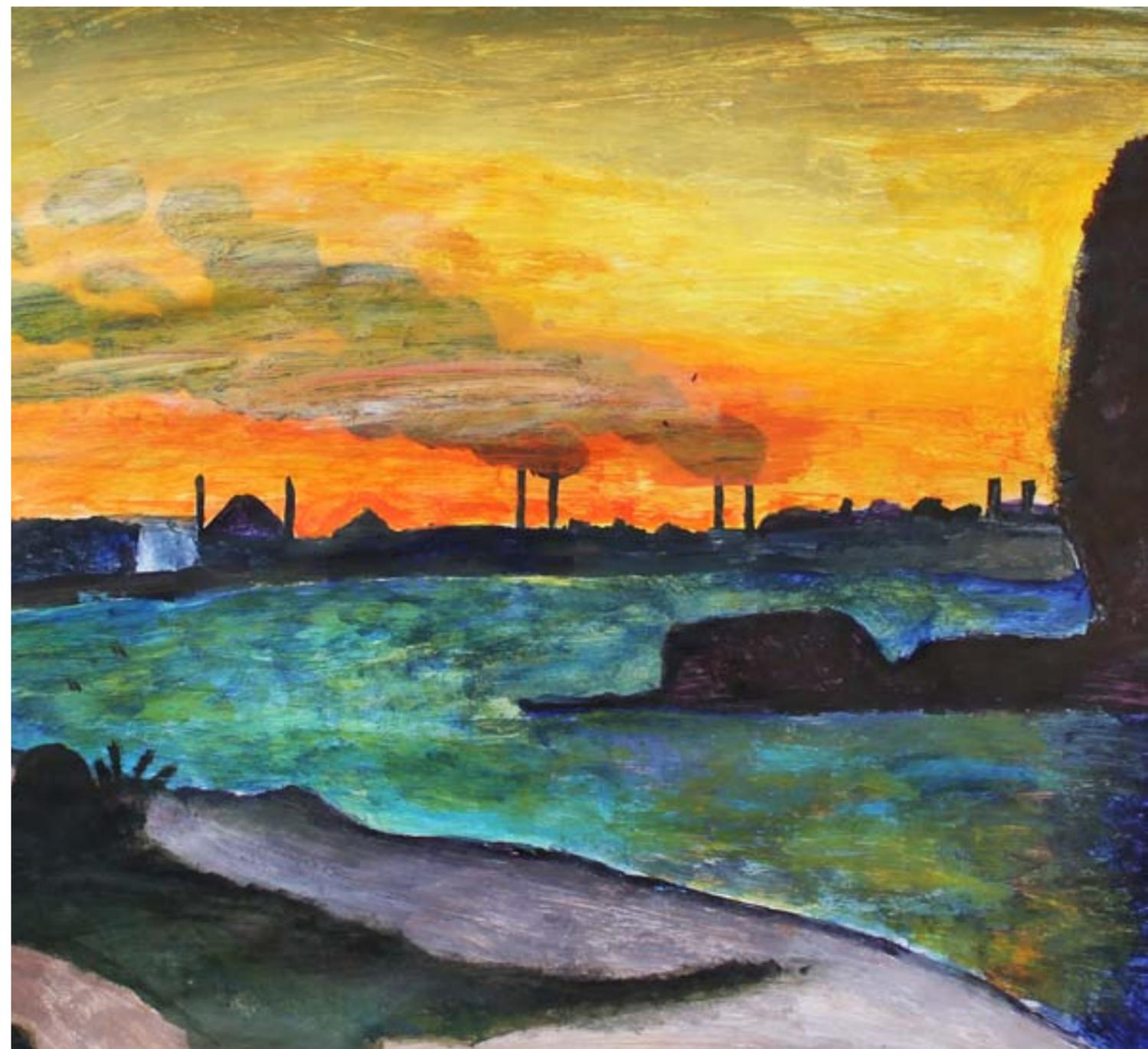
Josh turned on his heel and wiped the smile off his face. He had to remind himself that Scott was manipulating and uncaring. He had hundreds of kids just like Josh working the streets and keeping them on side was the only way to keep bringing the profits in. He didn't give one damn about Josh or any of the other kids holding the corners for him. Though just being in Scott's presence just made Josh instantly feel safe. He felt like Scott knew exactly what was best and found himself looking up to him. He focused on the only reason he was working these streets for a scumbag like Scott. He pulled his hood up and finding the deepest reaches of his pockets with his hands, headed down the street, his head down. He recalled the morning his mother had told him the news, "they found him lying on the side of the street Josh", "he's dead, the police are saying a drug overdose..." He tried to remember the emotions he's felt. He'd never had a close relationship to his father. He wasn't the kind of dad that took you to the football game or picked you up after practice. When he'd lost his job, he lost himself to the bottle and then when that didn't work to drown his sorrows, switched to something stronger. Josh turned the corner of the street just as the rain started. It came down in heavy droplets pattering against his hood, running down his face and dripping off his nose. His converse squelched through the newly formed puddles heading for the block Scott had pointed at. After his father's death. Josh's mother just sunk into a kind of despair. Once she started hitting the bottle, the problems became financial. Now when Josh walked in the door the ground was strewn with unopened bills and emergency mortgage payment letters as well as insurance policy renewals.

Looking through the rain Josh managed to spot a man in a heavy overcoat sitting by some rusted railings outside an old abandoned warehouse. Josh drew up to him seeing his wrinkled, worn face and weathered eyes. Josh swallowed, his heart was beating fast enough that he felt the man must have been able to hear it. It was the slight twitch of the man's eye that told Josh something was wrong. He felt a cool breeze chilling the back of his neck and felt as if someone was watching him. The man sitting at his feet coughed again. He shrugged off his paranoia. The bag crinkled as he pulled it out of his pocket and handed it to the man. The drunk passed him an envelope before springing up with an agility Josh wouldn't expect from a man in his mid-fifties and left Josh standing there alone. Fear crept up the back of Josh's spine as he was left with the rain pattering softly onto his coat and slapped against the pavement around him.

Standing in a hopeless situation Josh felt like screaming in despair. Drunks, drug dealers, this was his life now? He heard a gruff shout in the direction of the man wearing the overcoat. A shape came barreling through the rain. Josh opened his mouth to shout. There was a huge blast and the man in the overcoat was propelled forward past Josh. Wet sticky liquid splashed onto Josh's face. Josh screamed in shock and horror as he stared at the lifeless body of the man on the ground. Josh heard more shouts. The light from a muzzle lit up the dark night, a piece of shrapnel whizzed past Josh's face skimming his cheek. The red hot

pain woke him from his trance and he started running. Stumbling over the man's body and continuing on. Still clutching the envelope he considered dropping it but found the idea of Scott's rage worse than possibly distracting his assailants and his knuckles turned white as he gripped it. He slipped in the puddles as he went around the corner and screamed in pain as white hot agony shot up his right leg. Limping onward he heard the first police sirens. A weird image of his mother came to him when he had been five and accidentally broken the window with his football, she was scolding him. As a police car stopped next to him the last thing he saw before sinking into that comforting blackness was her disapproving face...

Thomas Harley



## The Pilgrim's Progress

I love it when the plane takes off. I love it when it starts accelerating and you're pressed back against your seat as it goes so so fast and suddenly up, up, up. Then the lights from the city below fade and it's all dark. In my family, only my father is religious. He's Buddhist. I'm atheist.

I'm not sure about my brother because of our strained and cold relationship (if there is one, even). I love him anyway, though. My mother is only religious as the plane takes off and lands.

She prays and prays with her hands clapped together, fingers straight and palms pressed. I love take-off because they're exhilarating and a treat every few years. My mom prays for our safety as I enjoy something she feels the need to pray for.

I've travelled to more places than a lot of the world's population can claim to have. On April 1st, 1998, I was born in Sydney, Australia. After just four months, I returned to Taipei. I moved to Los Angeles, California in the United States shortly after my fifth birthday. I started school there and learned my second language.

When I was nine, we moved back to Taiwan to the city of Hsinchu. I entered the fourth grade and left two months after 10th grade (4th year) ended. My dad had told us we'd be heading to Dublin, Ireland back in May. We left my (now) seven year old poodle back at home because it would be too cold here for her to handle. She was my entire world. My best friend had baked me a dozen chocolate muffins after I sobbed to her over video-chat the night before, hours after I left my dog in another city, in another person's arms.

I think the hardest time to leave is in your teens. It's during a time when you've finally made close friends and are starting to learn what independence means. It's ironic because it's also a time when belonging to a group is most important to us. Maybe that's what makes it the hardest; having to start all over from scratch. Strangely, I never felt especially crestfallen until after I got here. It's not to say I didn't have close friends.

I did, I do: close friendships that will likely last for my entire lifetime. The saying is, "You don't realize what you have until it's gone." Something like that. But they weren't gone. With how advanced technology is nowadays, video chatting and social media sites more or less make up for the distance. I missed them the most when I was alone at school, too shy to utter a word to anyone— so unlike my usually almost imposingly rambunctious demeanor. I hated that I couldn't sense any cultural similarities with students here, despite being so westernized.

My mom called me alien a lot. I'm the black sheep of the family. Figuratively and literally (most of my clothes are black). I'm different from them. My Mandarin isn't very good— I can speak and listen well enough, but writing and reading are basically impossible for me. I mean, have you seen what Chinese characters look like?

我是卜奕心，我很愛吃。

"I'm Buu Yi-Shin, I love to eat."

I've always had trouble with identity. I grew up around two very different cultures.

Different beauty standards, foods, languages, people, customs... the list goes on without an end.

My family all chose to remain true to Taiwan (my brother more or less as well). Me? I'm not sure. I like both cultures. I am part of both cultures. I speak a weird mixture of Mandarin and English which is known informally as Chinglish. My fashion tastes stray towards more westernized, though I use Taiwanese clothing to achieve those looks. And yet, even now, I don't know which side I should take. We all want to belong, but can we belong to two groups at once? When they're so different?

I remember when I first got to America, I told my mom one day as we were crossing the street, "Mom, I know this is hard for you, but in a few months, my hair will turn blonde and my eyes blue." I believed wholeheartedly that people all looked like me until they moved to another part of the world (I still suck at biology, just in case you're wondering). I would change and fit in and we'd all be the same once more. Talk about an identity crisis, eh?

You haven't really travelled until you've left a piece of yourself at that place as you leave, taking a piece of it with you in exchange. I lose and gain from every place I've been to. In fifth grade, I visited Moscow, Russia for two months. There, I lost part of my ignorance and gained memories, good and bad, from it. That's travelling. That's learning. That's living. Maybe I love the feeling of take-off because it's a jump start dive into a new experience. The acceleration goes too fast for you to doubt yourself as it launches off. So sit back and enjoy it like I do. It's part of learning. I know I look forward to it next time.

Ivy Buu



## The Train

There I am sitting on the train, the rickety-rockety train. That's the best way I can describe it, because that's what it is. Sitting there I look ahead of me, seeing either side of the train from the corners of my weary eyes. Seeing each side's windows and out them, one side showing the cliffs and the other the wide sea.

All from my weary eyes. The corners of them I should say.

I'm aware of how small the carriage is, this one carriage. Then the entire train, the towering cliffs and the stretch of sea I see from either corner of my eyes, the stretch of sea that seemed so big and now suddenly was so small.

The train swayed my body from side to side along my seat, as I thought about what I just wrote, and as I realised how insignificant I felt and alone I felt. I had this fear, this untitled, unknown fear, as I rode on, on the screeching rails and hearing the almighty howls.

Oh the howls. The sound only gods or ghosts can make. They pierce you. They haunt you.

I look out the window and I swear to God I'm sure that the train is going to fall. I can see it.

I can see it falling swiftly through the air, of the screeching rails, out of the howling. Falling swiftly and slowly, twirling, almost dancing in the air. And then with a plunge, an elegant plunge if there ever was one, the train sinks to the depths of the sea. The sea which seems so small yet so wide.

Ruby Doyle



### Saol Éagothrom

I mo shuí ar thaobh an bhóthair  
'Gus cupán folamh i mo lámh.  
Ag faire ar na daoine ag siúl tharam  
Le hairgead ina bpócaí acu.

Ach mo ghoile ag canránach  
Agus uaigneas an domhain orm.  
Gach uile duine saibhir agus áthasach  
Gan cíos, cás ná cáthú orthu.

Gan chairde, gan chlann, gan  
chomhrá,  
I m'aonar, níl áit ar bith agam.  
Mo chupán agus mo chroí folamh.  
An saol éagothram seo.

Zoë Bermingham McGuire

### Urú na Gréine

Tá sé álainn,  
An spéir le hurú ar siúl  
Tá sé gruama,  
Foirfe chun féachaint ar urú na gréine

Tá sé torannach lasmuigh  
Mar tá a lán daoine ann  
Scréad duine amháin, "tá sé ann!"  
Agus chonaic a lán daoine an áilleacht  
D'urú na gréine

I bpreabadh na súl  
Tá sé dorcha de clapsholas.  
Ní féidir éalú ó áilleacht  
D'urú na gréine.

Ar fiche cúig chun a deich,  
Ar an maidin dochreidte,  
Tháinig deireadh leis  
D'urú na gréine.

Sam Dornan

### An tEarrach

Is é an t-Earrach an t-am sin den bhliain  
nuair a thagann solas agus dóchas  
Fásann na plandaí agus na bláthanna áille  
Fágann an geimhreadh agus fágann an fhuacht  
freisin de réir a chéile.

Beirtear na hainmhithe óga,  
i bpáirceanna glasa, féarmhara.  
Páistí ag dreapadh na gcrann agus  
tús a chur le súgradh lasmuigh.  
An aimsir ag dul i bhfeabhas  
lá i ndiaidh lae.

An ceiliúradh san earrach,  
Lá Fhéile Bríde, Lá Fhéile Pádraig agus an Cháisc.  
Ná déan dearmad ar Lá na nAmadán,  
ag bualadh cleasanna ar a chéile!

Hannah Moran





#### Alfred the Clown

Red Klowns was a theme park in Ohio. It had a main mascot 'Alfred the Clown'. He was a nice guy, but when his house burnt down killing his wife and new-born daughter, he ran in to save them, but he failed, blinding him in his left eye and charred 87% of his body with 2nd, 3rd and 4th degree burns. He was fired and banned from red Klowns because he terrified the kids. He went crazy and died in the back ally of a thrift shop from a heroin overdose, and his ghost now haunts red Klowns. The owner tried to keep the hauntings out of the press, but when the people would go on the rides and the photos would only show Alfred's charred, face. When it came back all that remained was human remains with what looked like bites. Soon nobody ever came back, and the boss became very, very worried. So when he became bankrupted and failed on all accounts and with no money coming in he became depressed and hung himself in his office with his tie. His wife found him dead and was overcome with grief and went crazy and shot her kids and then herself. To this day nobody fully knows what happened. Later it was abandoned. But you can still go here and find Alfred killing people (he prefers to kill kids) and eating their remains, starting fires out of nothing, making rides go even though nobody is there and singing songs. But a man named Toby Allen (creator of 'extreme ghost hunters') said "I will capture him". He had a crew of eight. So first he drove down and got out. They got out and the 'red' was gone and replaced with a board of wood with multiple carcasses of humans and it read 'dead Klowns'. They went into the place and found it set ablaze with most of it covered in rubble. He called for Alfred ... no answer. Out of nowhere the gates closed behind them! They all looked around in horror to see thousands of dead children. He shouted we are here to help. Then they heard a cackle "I don't need help."

But that's just an urban legend. . .

Dominic Grealis

#### Happiness

Once I met him  
Walking down the street  
After a rather pleasant day  
He shook my hand  
And he smiled.

And we chatted  
And we laughed and we  
Smiled -  
Really such a cheerful guy  
His eyes glistened when he spoke

Above the bags  
And crow's feet  
He was handsome  
Fashionably dressed  
In yellow tweed

He told me about his  
Pleasant day  
His pleasant week  
He took out a picture of his  
Beaming wife from his wallet

But soon the sun  
Became too bright  
And he had to get going  
He shook my hand firmly  
And walked away - whistling

Then I turned around  
And I continued into the night  
My face beaming  
So that I could see  
So that others could see me

He greeted liars and cheaters  
Like old friends  
But we never did see each other  
However often I called him  
He always cancelled last minute

I guess our schedules just didn't work.

Richard Neville

#### The Voyage of a Dreamer

As my head sank into the pillow  
I let out a sigh,

No stress or worries in tow  
And with sleep so nigh,

My grip on the awake began to slip  
It was the time to dream I thought-

The perfect time for a trip  
When my sleep brought more time than sought.

So I delved deep into my mind  
To find the perfect voyage to embark upon,

When my thought process was so kind  
It presented the voyage to be done,

I spent the next long while  
In a place built for only me-

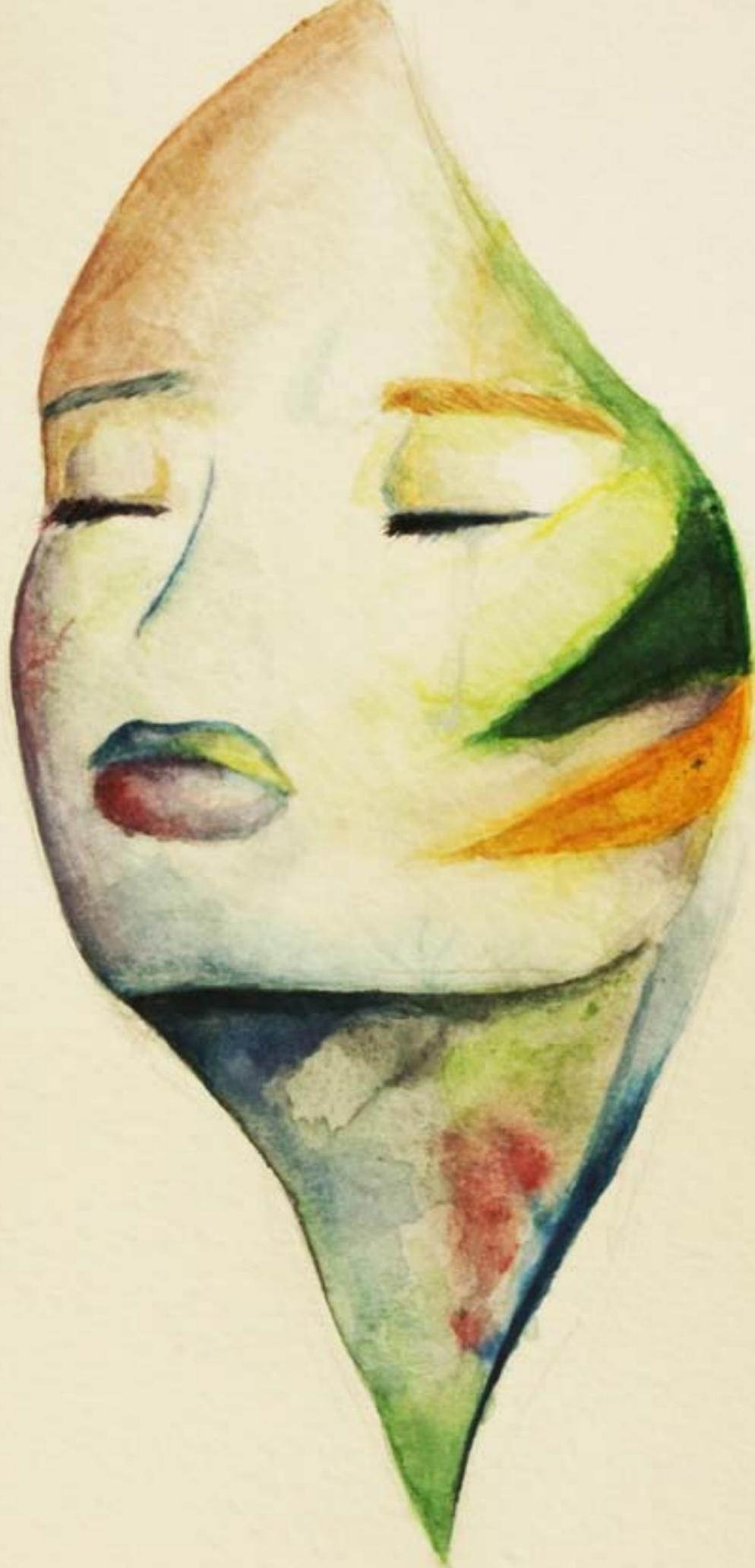
Where one could not help but smile  
At the sight that was there to see,

But alas the sun must rise  
And alas I must awake,

But as I opened my eyes  
I knew that the dream would not break-

For in fact all good things do not come to an end  
But merely lie in wait to be once more with their  
friend.

Megan Collins



## The Risks of Self-Improvement

Tom could have been Tim. Or Jim. Or Joe. Or John. He was nothing special. He was average. Averagely average, at that. But he wasn't a very nice person. He knew this. He didn't like it. In fact, he wanted to change. Tom was unfit, unambitious, uncaring and just generally lazy. If you were to ask anyone that knew Tom, they would describe him as unfit, unambitious, uncaring, and just generally lazy. Tom's properties were what he was, as far as anyone cared. If you took those away, what was left? Nothing, as far as anyone cared. Then again, they didn't really care that much. They didn't like Tom.

Tom neither liked being unfit, nor unambitious, nor uncaring, nor even just generally lazy. He had wanted to stop being who he seemed to be for some time, but he was too just generally lazy to change. The very thing he wanted to change was what prevented himself from changing it. How could he possibly change his nature if his very nature itself was opposed to change?

Tom couldn't start, couldn't begin his metamorphosis internally. He needed something else, someone else, to set the very first gear in motion. It was a girl that did it. It always is. She didn't even know she did it. She was just there. But, just by being there, talking to Tom, just once, she planted the very beginnings to a beginning of a seed, a single seed, of motivation in Tom's mind.

It doesn't matter how what happened, happened. It only matters that it did, in fact, happen.

That tiny bit of motivation caught hold, and motivated Tom to become more motivated. For every little more motivation that was created, the more and more motivated he was to motivate himself more. It grew exponentially. Everything, every last thing, about Tom changed. Tom changed it all himself.

Tom trained. Lost weight. Became fit, even. He set goals. Achieved them. Set more. Ambition grew. When he could do something to help someone, he did. Because why not? He was motivated to do it. The motivation won the battle against the just general laziness. Tom was no longer the same person as before.

Tom would have said that these were all good things, the things he became. The things he had chosen to become. After all, he had changed himself into someone that he had liked. But what he liked could change. Did change. A lot. After all, he must have had originally wanted to be unfit, unambitious, uncaring and just generally lazy. Why else would he have become it, in the first place, if not?

Tom realised that he could become any person he wanted. Anyone could. All he had to do was see something in someone that he liked, and adopt it into his personality. Into his very nature. Why not? Everyone wanted to be better, he was just actually bringing the change upon himself.

There was, of course, one large problem with the path that Tom had chosen to take. All he was doing was improving. He improved into a person that he thought was better. What was the problem with this, you ask? Every time Tom changed his person, he changed his doings, sayings, even thoughts. So he changed what he thought a better person would be like. What their characteristics would be.

What he wanted to become, who he wanted to become, changed every time he became someone else. It was a never-ending cycle. He changed who he was every day, every hour, every minute. And all in an effort to be better. To be the best. Whereas the just general laziness had prevented Tom from changing, the new-found motivation forced him to. The old Tom had been trapped in a person that could be better. The new Tom was trapped in a person that could never be good enough.

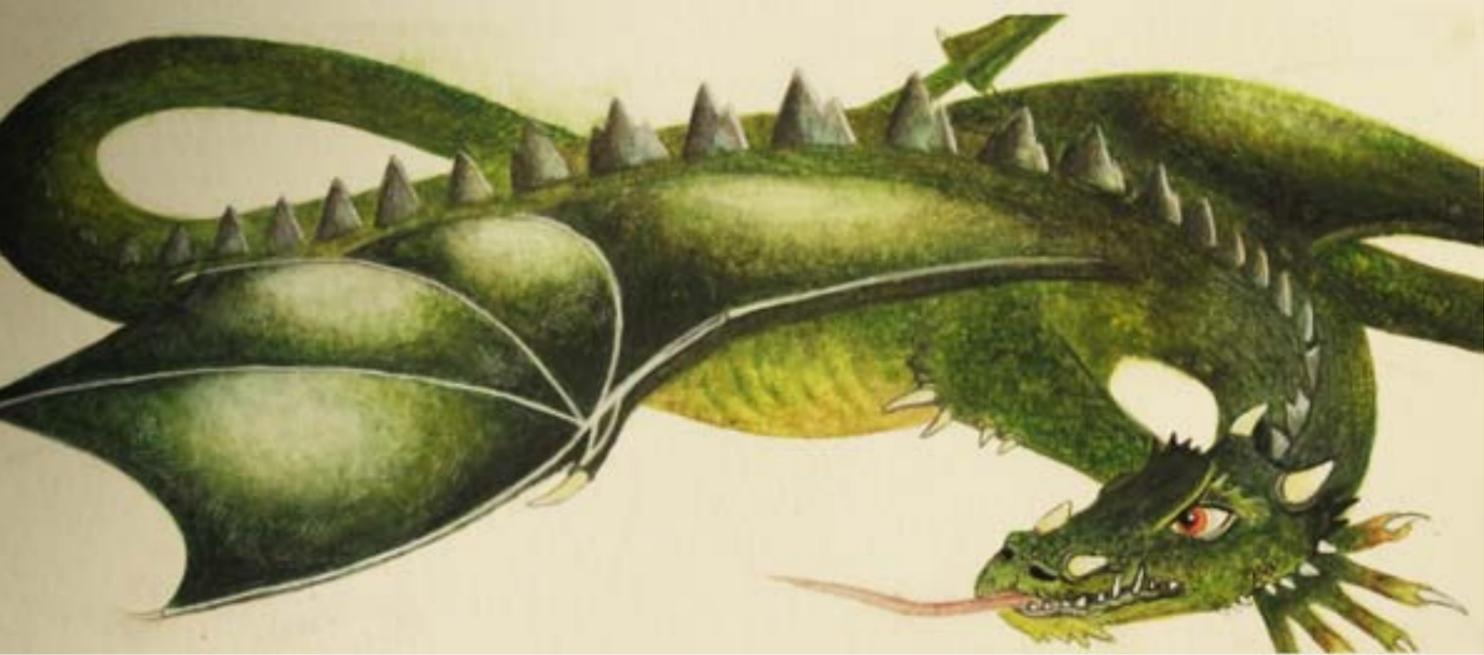
You can no longer describe Tom as unfit, unambitious, uncaring and just generally lazy. But, then again, you can't really describe him as anything, anymore. He is perfect. But, what Tom needs to do, needs to be, to be perfect changes with every situation that he's placed in. All he does, all he can do, is perfectly change himself into the person that is perfect for that moment.

Into the person that will get Tom what he wants.

Only, Tom doesn't really want anything anymore.

There is no Tom left to want it.

Steven Diggin



Being a boy as I am now

I grow and I grow, I just don't understand how?  
 Each day passes like every other, my feet are much bigger, 'how's that?' I wonder.  
 When I do grow, is it at night or by day  
 Maybe it happens when I am at play?

I used to have blue eyes, but now I have green;  
 How can this happen?  
 How can this be?

I look at old photos and see how I've changed,  
 Even Mummy & Daddy, it's really quite strange.  
 I used to look Nicholas right in the eye,  
 We even shared the same height for a time.

When I look in the mirror I only see me, how much will I change when I am thirteen?  
 My eyes will stay green, now this is a fact,  
 An answer I'm sure of, at least I know that!

I'm happy to be this grand age of eight,  
 My reading's improving, and that's pretty great.  
 These questions have answers that I'll have to find,  
 I will get bigger and wiser, it all just takes time.

Rory Vaughan

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