



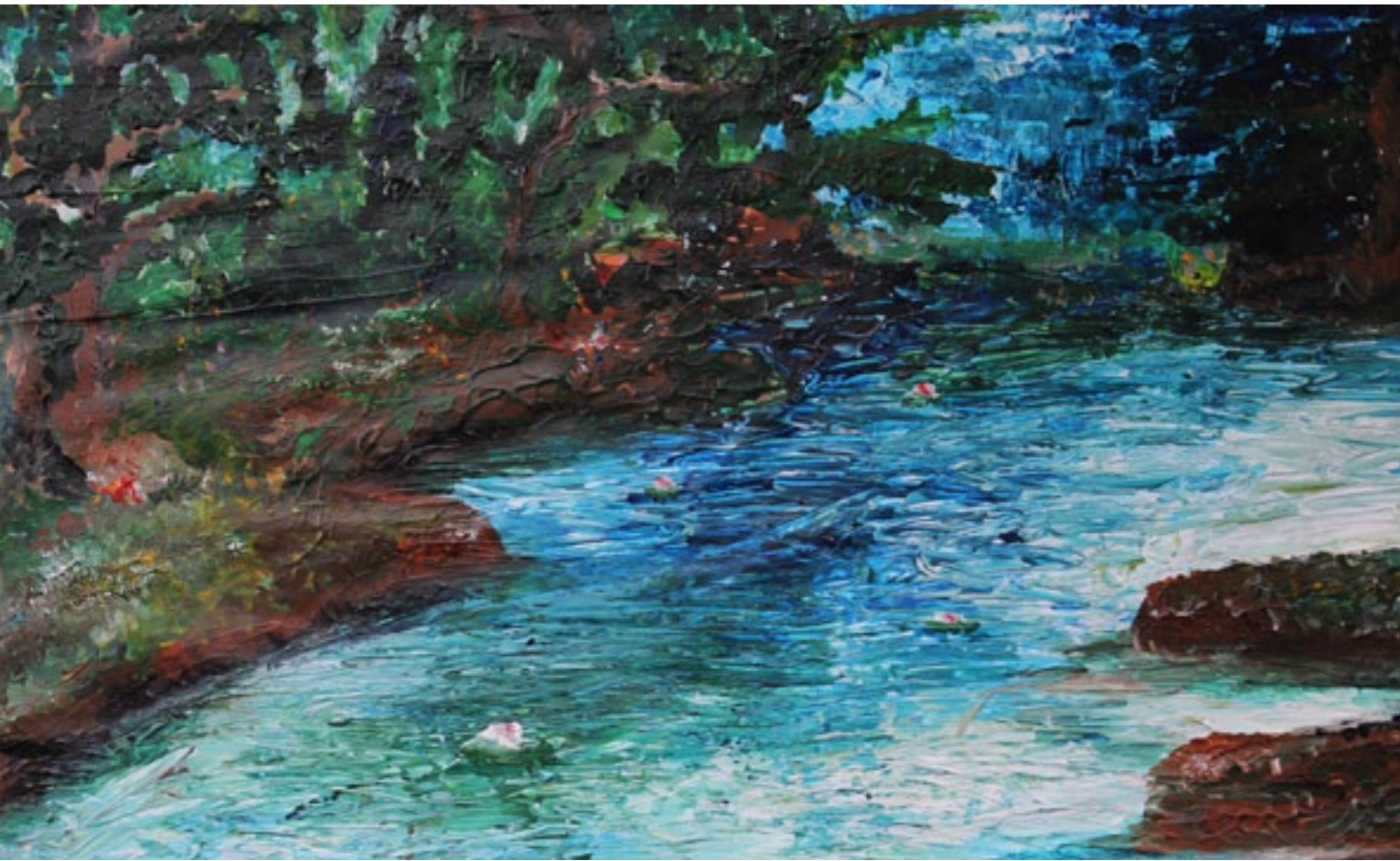
The Wine Dark Sea

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2016

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





It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the seventeenth edition of The Wine-Dark Sea. This year we had another bounty of prose and poetry. There is some wonderful reading in these pages, some deep thinking and some no thinking, something for everyone as it were. The range of subject matter, voice, style and humour is quite something. It has been wholly exasperating, but not without some joy to edit what you find in these pages, I hope your experience of the magazine is more of the latter than the former.

The aim of this magazine has always been to provide a platform for our students to showcase their creative talents. Thus, whether it is through poetry, prose or art, each piece bears witness to the flourishing myriad talent that exists within our school. That the students have this springboard and are encouraged to avail of it, is thanks to the teachers and parents that inspire them to create and have confidence in their creations. What is also unique and wonderful about this magazine is the inclusion of all students and all ages from the Junior to the Senior school. The key to fostering talent is to catch it early.

Therefore, I would like to thank all those who gave generously of their time this year. Thanks to Mrs. Kirby for her continued support of the arts in the college.

Thanks to the English department for supporting their students in their desire (and need) to write.

Thanks also to all the Junior School staff for providing wonderful encouragement to their students and ensuring that the entries from the Junior School are of the high standard we have become accustomed to.

Our thanks go to the Art department for the wonderful images that make up this edition and make this magazine visually exciting.

The Wine-Dark Sea owes its design to the skill of Michelle Owen whose gifted vision and refined sense of style makes this a stunning and professional publication.

Congratulations to all who are printed within these pages. We hope you will continue to express your talents in future editions of this magazine. On a personal note I would like to say farewell to the 6th year contributors (many of whom have given regularly to this magazine), keep writing you are more gifted than you know.

Robert McDermott

Stephan was beginning to have qualms about his adventure for the first time. It had seemed like such a good idea at the time to run away to London, until his mother made that all-important decision. But standing on the platform of the train station, he was beginning to have second thoughts. About six months ago, his mother had triplets, which now required all of her attention. His father was in the marines, and he would be living in Spain for the next year, with no prospect of returning home before that. Now, Pamela, Stephan's mother, was making the all-important decision of whether to send Stephan to live with his grandparents for the next year. Stephan knew his family weren't exactly well off, and couldn't afford to feed four children each day. Stephan didn't mind his grandparents, in fact he loved them very much, but both his parents were at war with his mother's parents, and Stephan knew all too well that if he moved in with his grandparents, he would hardly ever be able to visit his family, and-

His train of thought was suddenly interrupted by the sound of the train pulling up to the station. It was decision time, at last. He took a last, long, undecided look around, and then jumped on to the train. Before he had time to reverse his decision, the guard had blown his whistle, and they were off! There was no going back now... Stephan found a seat in a quiet corner of the carriage and sat down. He was sure he would never, ever be able to get to sleep with all that was going on in his mind. He knew that he was going to be causing his mother a lot of pain, and he didn't want that to influence her decision, but he was absolutely sick and tired of being argued about, as if he wasn't in the room to hear it! It was as if he were a piece of furniture that both his mother wanted for the parlour, and his grandparents wanted for their antique shop.

Stephan awoke with a jump. How on earth could he have fallen asleep at a time like this? What had he been thinking? Just then, the conductor strode confidently down the aisle, announcing the station at London. Stephan felt the train pull up to the station. Here he was! Stephan really felt that his adventure was beginning at last!

Stephan had decided to run away to London when he first saw the triplets in the hospital. He had known there was no way his family would be able to feed them all on his father's meagre income, and he was right. He had carefully planned his adventure over three months, and had every detail perfected. He was going to stay in an abandoned tree house, deep in the midst of a little known park. He had brought a warm sleeping bag, plenty of clothes and food, and as much money as had been in his bank account. He quickly made his way to the tree house. When Stephan reached the tree that the tree house was perched in, he quickly scaled it, and was soon at the top. It was just as Stephan remembered it, and nothing had changed, which was good, and judging by the amount of dust in the place, no one had been near it for the past year! Stephan laid out his bundle of things, and set to work making the tree house fit to live in. Then he made some sandwiches. It seemed a very long time since breakfast.

When Stephan awoke the next morning, he couldn't think where in the world he was. Then he remembered: he had run away to London! He made himself some more sandwiches, and put them in his pocket. Then, he got dressed and quickly shinned down the tree. He walked to the nearby newsagents, and bought a newspaper. He noticed the person who owned the shop giving him a rather odd look, as if he had recognized him, but wasn't sure where he knew him from. When Stephan reached the tree, he thoughtfully propped himself up, and began to flick through the newspaper, until he got to the 'missing persons' section. He scanned it quickly. Nothing there about him, thank goodness! Stephan passed the rest of the day in London's famous art museum, and had a great time. He glanced sharply at the newsagent owner, each time he passed, but the shopkeeper kept his eyes down each time Stephan passed. When he reached his tree, Stephan managed to cook some pasta with an enormous flask, which he had filled with boiling water from the tea and coffee machine at the museum. Then he snuggled down into his sleeping bag, and quickly drifted to sleep...

The next morning, Stephan felt quite sticky, so he decided to take his bathing suit, and go off to the nearby swimming pool for the morning. He brought a bagel with some cream cheese that he munched on the way. He had a lovely time at the pool, swimming underwater the entire length of the pool! Afterwards, when he had gotten out and dried his hair and set off home to his tree house, he remembered the unfriendly behaviour of the shopkeeper. Stephan didn't really want to go back into the shop, but it was the only newsagent within walking distance, and Stephan didn't want to spend any of his money on a bus. When Stephan walked in, the man was standing with his back to the door, fiddling with the radio. He seemed to be trying to turn it off, but couldn't quite manage. When he heard Stephan's footsteps, he wheeled around.

'Hello', he said. Stephan looked on in amazement. The man had glowered at him yesterday, and now he was smiling at him like he was his grandson.

'Hello', Stephan said cautiously.

The man replied with a hearty 'Beautiful day, isn't it? It's a shame I'm cooped up in here all day... Wait a minute, you were in here yesterday, weren't you?'

'Err... yes', Stephan ventured. He didn't want to remind the man of his foul mood yesterday, lest it should come back.

'Mmm', the man replied. 'Listen, son, I was in a rotten mood yesterday, and I'm sorry if I offended you by it. What's your name, by the way?'

'Oh, that's quite all right, sir. My name is Stephan.' He was feeling warm toward the man. It was amazing the difference a smile could make!

'Stephan, you said your name was..?' the shopkeeper said slowly, as if deep in thought.

Stephan began to feel alarmed. Could this great big, meaty man know him? That would ruin his plans completely... And what on earth was the man doing now? He appeared to be scrutinizing him: his hair, his clothes, his face. Then, quite suddenly, he raised his right hand up in the air, and whistled. It must have been some sort of signal, because a woman appeared in the doorway. His mother. What on earth was she doing here? Just then, the radio, which had been playing some awful pop song, changed to a news bulletin. Stephan listened eagerly, anything to stop him from thinking about this dreadful dilemma he now found himself in...

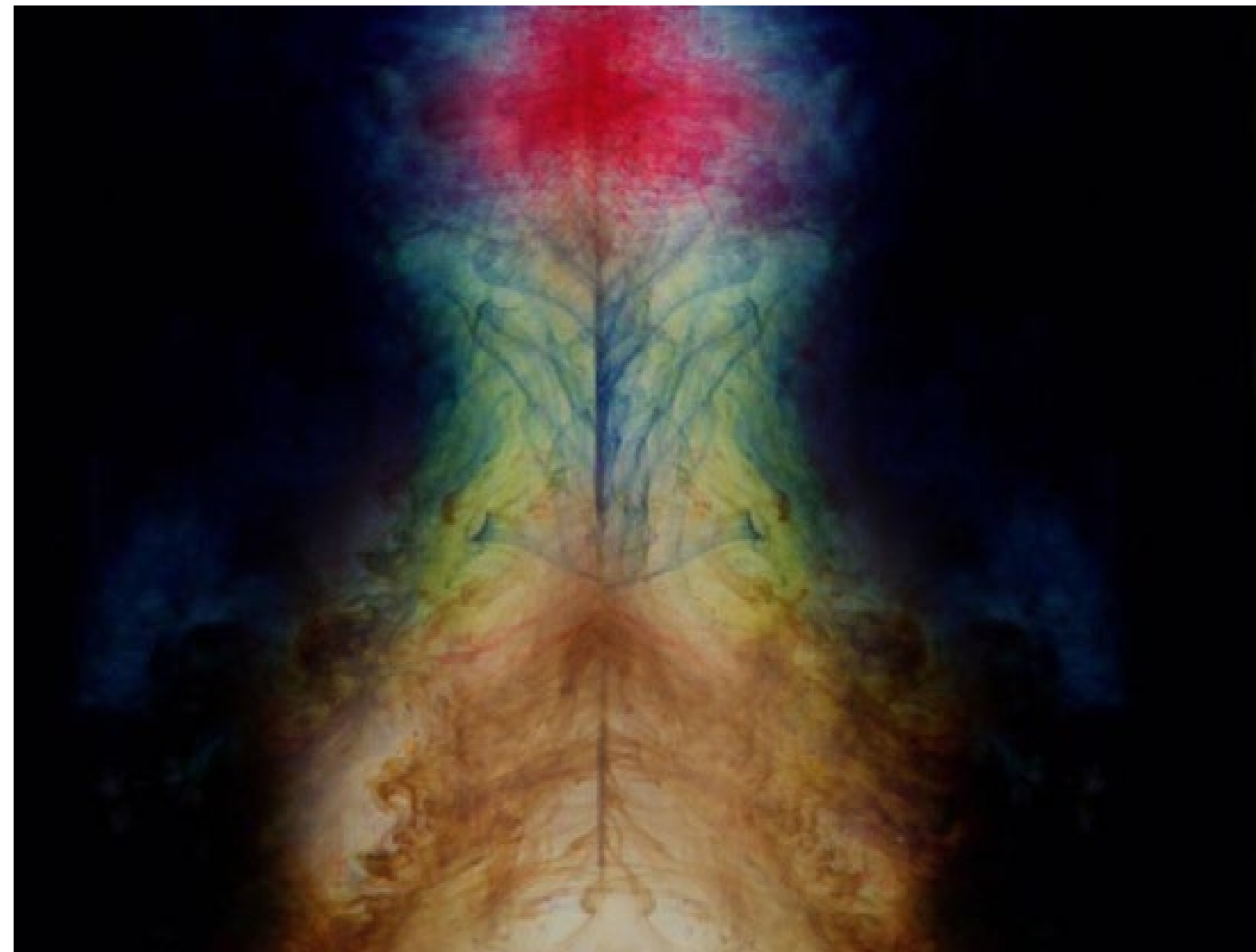
'... and a young boy, Stephan Mullens, appears to have run away from his Sussex home. He is of medium height, with brown hair and blue eyes, last seen wearing jeans and a red hoodie. Contact the following number if you see this boy.'

Stephan listened in horror. He had completely forgotten about news broadcasts. That must have been where the man recognized him from, and why he was glaring at him so yesterday. And-

His mother broke into his train of thought.

'Stephan, I think you need to come with me.'

Alicia McGrath



Autumn

Autumn is like a fox
Howling in the moonlight
Rustling the tumbling leaves
To fly across the field.
Autumn is like a rabbit
Hopping in and out of the trees
Hopping lightly in and out of the trees
Stepping lightly on the leaves
To burrow into its warren.

Tereza Supic

Poem

I sat there, solitary
Only me and my novel
If my eyes just began to venture
I could imagine anything
Different worlds of unthinkable
curiosity
I could see countries
Experience history
Imagine the future
Be a witness to fantastic things
All of this hidden in a book
With pages that uncover stories
And words that mean a lifetime of
adventure

Yasmin Ryan

Grandad - A Poem that Doesn't Rhyme

My Grandad is older than Yoda.
He wears a woolly black hat,
Has fluffy hair, 1970's glasses
That make his eyes look fierce and beady.

In the garden with his hat
He shoots rats with his old shotgun,
Burns pool tables and raspberry canes
And runs into the clothes line on his ancient
motorbike.
In his garage he blows up batteries.

The garden has a golden chicken,
Hedgehogs and million sparrows.
A heron came to visit one time.
Grandad named him Arthur and
He helped Grandma in the kitchen.
He made a trap to catch magpies.

Grandad has loads of crazy stories
About Devils and the Hellfire Club
And him putting rings in bulls' noses
Because his uncle's Cooley bull
Wouldn't recognise the boy from Dublin!

Grandad calls himself Granda.
Nobody else does.
Every time we leave his house
He slips us ice-cream money.

Christian Naughton

Granddad's Forest

In an amazing green forest that's
many years old the trees sway in
the wind. The smell of the beautiful
trees overwhelms your nose.
The feeling of safety and freedom
makes you feel happy. A soft
refreshing breeze sweeps through
the forest. All the grey baby squirrels
fight playfully in the trees. But
one of the most wonderful things
of all are the little happy birds that
chirp tiny songs. The day goes by
and the warm sun peaks through
the leaves of the great swaying
oaks, creating calm and peace.

Sofia Herranz Harmen

Stuck in a Snowglobe

Outside the tiny house beyond the window and
trees was a lovely field full of flowers. I wanted
to go there but then I remembered, the glass,
I could not get past the glass. I was stuck in a
snow globe.

It was a beautiful snow globe. It was full of
shimmering snow. The trees were whipping in
the wind and there was the smell of the lovely
colourful flowers sitting in the meadow and the
pale grass standing in the frozen mud.
But every once in a while an earthquake would
come. The little girl would come and shake it. I
would be thrown side to side, upside down,
crashing around. Snow would swirl everywhere
making me sick and destroying everything in my
house. It was a catastrophe and I hated it.
But how could I get out of here? What could I
do to break the glass? How could I escape? It
was hopeless.

Erin Armah-Kwantreng



The Sun

The sun is a massive star,
A ball of fire from afar.
It's like a golden lion,
Tough, fierce as strong as iron.

Watching the golden fields grow,
And all the white and golden snow.
Hearing the swishing of the trees,
And all the golden buzzing bees.

The blazing heat of the sun,
Makes all the children have some fun.
Relaxing on the beach to tan,
To make a great day as you planned.

As she shines upon the beach,
The sun demands a little speech.
"Goodbye, goodbye I'm going now,
the moon will be your light for now."

Isabella Marmion

The Beach

The Sentosa beach is in sunny Singapore
Where the shoals of colourful fish swim.
The sands are so soft and warm that
It feels like your feet are sinking.
The shady orange and lemon trees sway in the gentle breeze.
The pale turquoise sea only ripples slightly
Even when the dolphins jump out of the water
And it even glistens like a crystal on rainy days.
The bright sun gleams over everything.
It's what makes the sea glimmer,
The sands soft and the orange and lemon trees grow.

Molly Heron

『私・・・』

私は何のためにここにいるのか？
このことを考えて学校へ行ってみた。
私は色々なことを経験し、チャレンジするためにここにいるのだと思う。
何事もチャレンジするって言うのは簡単だ。
でも実際にやるとなったらこれはまた別の話になる。
難しいかもしれない、怖いかもしれない、でも私は勇気を出して一歩前に進む。
その一歩が大事だと思って、勇気を出して私は進む。

今からどこへ行くのか？
このことを考えてみたら答えが全く見えない。
それは当たり前だ。
誰にも未来はわからない。
わからないからこそ人生は楽しいのだと思う。
未来は変えることも、そのまま進み続けることだって可能だ。
でも私は変えるのでも、ただ進むだけではなく自分にあった未来を描くのだ。
そのために私は未来に向かって一歩前に進む。
未来が自分だけのものになるために勇気を出して私は進む。

"I am...."

What is the purpose of me being here?
I went to school with this question in my head.
I think the purpose of me being here is to have as many experiences as I can and challenge myself as much as I can.
I am going to challenge myself, it is very easy to say this.
When it comes to putting it into action it is not as simple as it sounds.
It might be difficult, it might be scary, but I am going to have courage.
I am going to step outside of my comfort zone and move forward one step at a time.
Telling myself that every step I take is the most important thing.
I am going to move forward one step at a time.

Where am I going from here?
When I think about this question it seems like I can't find any answer.
Of course I can't find any answer.
No one knows what is going to happen in the future.
No one knows, that is the beauty of life. It makes life so interesting.
I can change the future or I can let my life go with the flow.
But I am not going to change my future, I am not going to let it flow. I am going to draw the perfect future for me.
In order to do this, I am going to move forward towards my future one step at a time.
To make my future which cannot be copied by anybody else. I am going to have courage and move forward.
I am going to move forward one step at a time.

Akiko Takeda



Factory

Your eyes flicker open to darkness. You are upside down. You are hanging from something. The numbness in your legs tells you that you have been like this for some time. Your head aches. You attempt to call out. You fail. You clear your throat; a feeble sound. You try again.

“H-hello?”

There is no answer. You are alone. You don't know how you came to be here. As your eyes become accustomed to the darkness, you see what seem to be giant machines. If you could believe your eyes, you would say that you are in some kind of factory.

With a superhuman effort, you bring your head up to inspect yourself. Chains bind your legs to a horizontal metal pole. Your arms are bound to your body. You are helpless.

Although the effort of keeping your head up is excruciatingly painful, you stay convulsed for long enough to inspect your body. You do not recognise it. Gasping, your head falls back down, almost striking the grey floor. The only thing keeping you from passing out is the frightful realisation that you have no idea who you are.

You hear my voice from the shadows. I know who you are.

“Who... who am I then?”

I don't want to tell you. I want to play a game. You might not remember who you are, but perhaps you can figure it out from your present situation. Perhaps I'll even let you go free if you figure it out.

You don't believe me. I don't blame you. Nevertheless, you need to know who you are. It's important, but you can't remember why.

“Fine. I'll play your game”

I tell you that that is good. I tell you that it would have been a shame for you to refuse. You expect me to sound cruelly gleeful, but you can't tell anything from my voice.

“Shall we get started then?”

You are growing more confident. I tell you that that is a good thing. You feel that you should feel uneasy, but you do not. I tell you to cast your mind back to everything you have experienced since you opened your eyes. It feels like both a long and a short time ago.

“Why am I chained here?”

I tell you that that is a good question. You must be a very interesting person for me to want to chain you to a pole in what seems to be a factory. I tell you to continue.

“Why a factory?”

I tell you that you are going down the right track. You can't think of many reasons why someone would go to all this trouble in what appears to be a run-down factory. Perhaps I want you to be somewhere private, somewhere where no one will hear you scream.

“Why can't I remember who I am?”

I tell you that if you keep this up, you'll be out of here very soon indeed. You don't know how people usually lose their memories. Perhaps something violent happened. Are you a violent person?

“Who are you?”

I tell you that that is another great question, but that I cannot tell you. You recognise an accent embedded in my voice. You can't place it immediately, but perhaps it's...? Is it...? You don't know, but it does not seem familiar, whatever familiar is.

“Why the game?”

I tell you that I like games. You don't know what else to ask.

You stay quiet for some time. You should ask another question.

“No.”

I commend you for your bravery. Surely not everyone has such bravery. Surely such bravery tells you something about yourself.

You ask more questions. I tell you that they are not good questions. We both know that you are just stalling for time while you work your arms out from under the chains. You stop asking questions completely, and concentrate on dealing with the pain ripping through your arms right now.

One arm comes free. You stop, surprised. You did not think it would be so easy. You thought that I would not allow you to try to free yourself. You wonder if I am even here at all.

“Aren't you going to stop me?”

I tell you that you are right to expect that, but that we will not be alone for much longer. You don't know who must be coming, but by the slight tremor you think you hear in my voice, you think that I must be scared.

Perhaps it is people coming to rescue you. In fact, the more you think of it, the more certain you are that that is the only plausible explanation of what is happening to you. You must be a soldier of some sort. Perhaps a spy. Yes, that's it! A spy, that's what you are. That's the only thing that links everything together: the accent; the factory; the chains; the whole situation in general. Even the ability to make this deduction itself could count as evidence for the conclusion.

With this knowledge, you gain confidence at an impossible rate. The chains feel looser as you rip your other hand out. You begin to work on your legs.

You think you hear footsteps moving away from you, and you realise that that could only be me; leaving; panicking. Your legs come smoothly out of the chains that, until now, were immovable. You fall from your position, but land lithely, as a good spy should do. You reason that I must be long gone, and that your friends will soon be here.

You run straight for what appears to be an exit. You hadn't noticed it until now. You have not only escaped, but you have also won the game. You figured out who you are. You leave the factory, triumphantly, with the expectation that you will meet your would-be rescuers shortly.

Perhaps, if you had stayed just a little longer, you would have seen me emerge from the shadows. Perhaps you would have seen the sliver of a smile on my crooked face.

A spy? Interesting choice. There have been too many billionaires recently.

Perhaps, if you had looked around the factory, you would have stumbled into one of the hundreds of rooms with others almost identical to you, all awaiting their turn to set themselves free.

Steven Diggin



I Last Flight of the Rook

"Tell me again, what do you call it?"

"Waldensamkeit, the feeling of solitude and connectedness to nature one gets when alone in the woods."

"It's nice."

"How would you know, you've never been alone enough to experience it."

I inhaled with every intake of breath I tasted the chill of night and the scent of pine. He wasn't wrong I hadn't ever been alone enough to experience Waldensamkeit.

But I was coming close to the time I would be... And I was afraid.

"Why does that scare you so much?" he asked.

I looked over at him, my friend, my creation, a figment whose end drew near. He seemed so real. Sleek jet black feathers so dark the point at which he ended and the looming shadows of the ancient pines ended.

The eyes, human, white irises ringed in amethyst purple, pupils a deep pit so colourless I was yet forced to turn away. Rook. The alpha and the omega, the first sign of corruption and the last shred of insanity.

"You'll still be you."

But I won't. My thoughts even when corrupted by visions of demonic, malevolent birds bidding do their dark will.

It's always birds.

"Why you?" My voice trails off before I finish never being quite audible. It doesn't need to be heard.

"When I go you heal you return to how you were meant to be."

I don't want to be what I was meant to. Not if what I was meant to be is dependent on chemicals to survive.

Not if what I was meant to be is something that destroys part of himself, the part of himself that provided shelter against all the fractured minds of my madness.

The forest receded, the scent of pine replaced with that of bleach and psyche-shattering sickness, the feel of damp wild grass and thistle on my legs with the stiff sheets of my bed, the pure and fractured light of the moon replaced with the piercing yellow of the sanatorium lamp.

I stared down at the last pill I would have to take before I left this place, the cyanide which would end the bastion in the storm of this in sanity, which would kill my best falsest friend and remove the last of my delusions.

"I'm sorry." I swallowed the tablet.

And watched him fly from the last patch of grass in the room as it melted back to reality. Watched him fly out into the woods I had stared into for so long.

They let me go that day, issued a "clean bill" and released me back to contribute to society. As I walked down the road passed those woods I stopped and looked in.

"Tell me again, what do you call it?"

"Waldensamkeit"

I didn't move.

I didn't reply.

I remembered the words of Robert Frost

The woods are lovely, dark and deep

I looked down at the pill bottle in my left hand and the address book in my right.

But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

With one last intake of breath I left what I was in those woods, and walked off into what I was meant to become.

Callum Keenan



Sunset's sky and shooting stars

Sunset sat on her bench with a sketchbook in her lap. Sitting beside her was a pallet of beautiful paints. There were soft heathery blues and dreamy silk pinks. It was nearing evening in the god and goddesses garden. Sunset looked up at the bland sky - all the other gods and goddesses had made wonderful things. Sunset seemed to be the odd one out. She peered at the sky again.

"Could I stain the sky?" sunset pondered.

"Could I bewitch it somehow?" she said aloud.

She sat down deep in thought and then suddenly she had an epiphany. She snatched up her sketchbook; carefully she took a dSunset's sky and shooting stars

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"Could I bewitch it somehow?" she said aloud.

She sat down deep in thought and then suddenly she had an epiphany. She snatched up her sketchbook; carefully she took a deep mellow gold. She let it glide across the page creating a glimmering dusty effect- then she added a thin streak of peachy pink. She tied in the couloirs with a velvety blue and a creamy orange. The result was breath-taking.

It was so beautiful and memorizing. Sunset couldn't help but stare. She was numb with shock, she slowly enchanted the notebook and then quickly she hurled it at the sky. Bangs crackles and pops engulfed the air as the sky sparkled like fireworks except this was way more peaceful.

Sunset stood back. 2 tears formed in her eyes. They gently melted and oozed into silvery stars that shot across the sunset.

"I wish the goddesses and gods could see this."

As she walked away, the evening sky gently descended with the sun

Amelia Campbell-Foley



"This place really is desolate, not a cottage in sight." said a tall man with jet-black hair. "It gives me the creeps!" whimpered a short, plump man beside him. The expensive Rolls Royce in which they were seated lurched violently from side to side on the marshy, uneven ground. They turned round a sharp corner to the right into an unpaved country road.

Suddenly, the car drove over a soft, sticky patch of mud. The front wheel at the right of the car stuck in this unfavourable terrain. The tall, dark-haired man tried to drive on, to no avail. They were unmistakably stuck. "Blow!" he cried, "Now we're stuck in the middle of nowhere, stranded miles from any form of civilization!". "We're going to die of starvation!" wailed the short man. "Don't be silly!" said the other scornfully.

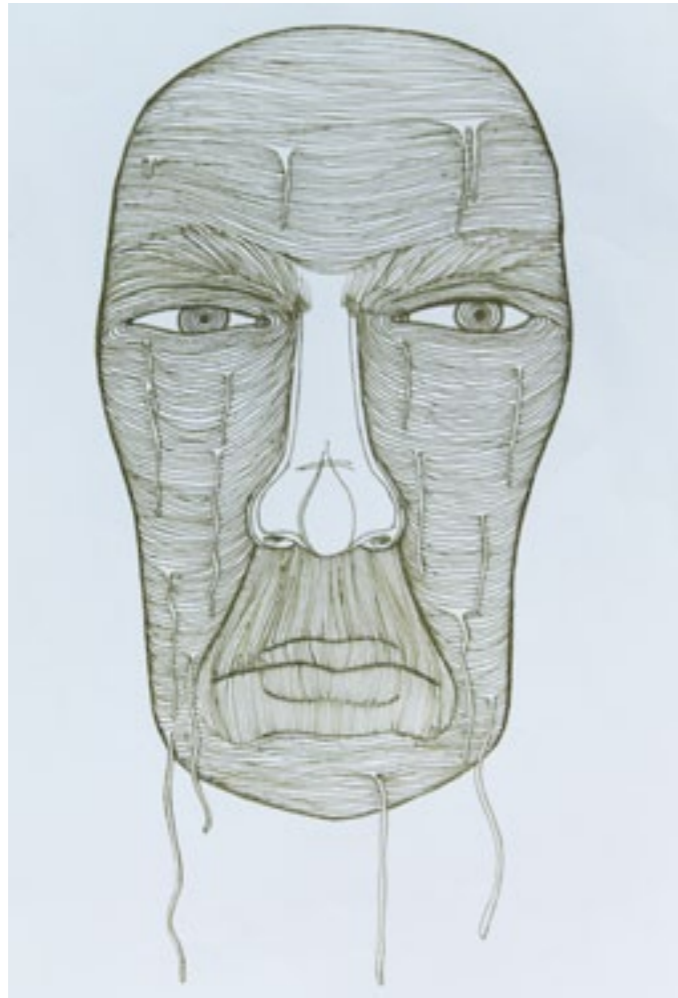
As the pair sat in the car and mourned, a farmer with a grimy face, a straw hat and a pitchfork strode over to the car and rapped on the window. The farmer laughed as the men in the car put on ridiculous, surprised faces. "Ullo in there." he said, "Oim sure yer'll be needin' a bitta 'elp are ye?". "Yes please!" moaned the exasperated man with black hair. "Well then get yer lazy persons out of 'at fancy contraption!" ordered the farmer.

They then heaved with all their might until the car was finally out of the mud. The pair from the Rolls Royce panted and perspired heavily, but the farmer hardly emitted a drop of sweat, nor a single pant. The two men were impressed; he was very fit and strong indeed. "Weak city folk." he said with a superior air. The dark-haired man thought with resentment of his poor physical composure. The short, stout man did not take notice of this comment; he wasn't concerned about his physical state.

As they all sat on a log and to break the ice the farmer asked, "Who might ye be?" "Detective Spooke, John Spooke, private investigator." declared the man with black hair proudly. "I'm his sidekick." muttered the short man. "Do ye not have a noime?" said the farmer. The short man wasn't used to that question; he was only the sidekick and was usually ignored. He stammered for a moment and murmured shyly, "Erm...James Morris, I'm James Morris. The farmer beamed, "It is a pleasure meetin' ye both, it really is. Where might ye be investigatin'?" "Well, we're going to Broadmoor Manor, where a certain rich couple live. The husband is a Russian oil tycoon and the wife was a famous actress." stated Spooke. "Oh oive 'eard of that damned place, now ye watch out, that ploice 'as a bad 'istory."

Mystified, the twosome entered the car, thanked the man and drove away now more carefully and slowly, into the swirling mist of the moor. . .

Ewan O'Mahony



"Don't worry" mum began. You'll have lots of friends in your new school, and you can bring them all over to the new house and you can all play in the forest!" "Yeah I know but I'll miss my old friends. Sapphire stated as she rolled down her window. "Ah now don't do that Saphy, I'm getting cold." Dad said angrily as he turned into the petrol station. He stepped out and filled the car with petrol. Sapphire slouched and groaned. "How long is it till we get there?" "Not too long" mum replied "Okay."

"Saphy, unpack your stuff, it's in the box over there." Dad pointed out. "Yep ok dad." "Uncle Kevin is coming to visit us soon!" "Yep, that's great mum." Sapphire was in a bad mood since they had moved away from her old friends. "Why don't you go check out the forest? I'm sure there is enough room for you and Lilly to play around." "Ok, ok, ok." muttered Sapphire. She hopped over the blankets and boxes scattered all over the floor and out the back door. The landscape around her changed to a leafy dark forest. She wasn't sure if she wanted to go there anymore, but as the curious girl she was, she called her dog Lilly and threw the ball as far as she could.

The trees whispered among themselves in the soft breeze blowing. Sam was just finishing his classwork when a girl approached him. "Hi, my name is Sapphire, what's yours?" "Eh, name is Sam and...." He paused as a boy approached him. "This is my friend Max." "Hey Sam, who's this you're talking to?" asked Max. "Sapphire was it?" questioned Sam as he had forgotten her name. "Yes I just moved house. I'm trying to make some new friends. It isn't really working for me though; I'm not very good at it. She sighed. "Why don't you go talk to them?" Max said pointing out the circle of girls in the corner. "Oh them, I've already tried them, they don't like me." "Ha, I can see why!" Max joked but he could see that neither of them found it amusing. "Do you want to come to my house after school?" Sapphire said looking at Sam. "Yeh sure I'm free. He replied. Max turned on his heel and left them both to walk home.

"There's the big oak tree and there's the forest." Sapphire started. "Cool, can I just go get a drink?" asked Sam. "Yes of course, just go to the kitchen, I'll be waiting at the moss patch.

Sapphire was left alone in the dark forest. She walked towards the moss patch and waited. Suddenly there was a rustle in the bushes and she saw a dark silhouette run from one bush to another. She watched in amazement and didn't move at all. The figure looked like a man and had a black long cloak, then, in the blink of an eye, he disappeared.

Night had fallen on the forest and Sapphire wanted to know more about the man. So she crept down the steps with her flashlight and out the back door. The forest was even darker than before now and all the birds had stopped chirping. The rustle in the bushes was what she was looking for. Then suddenly, she heard it. A few loud rustles then it stopped. Then it began again. Sapphire ran as fast as she could and topped. She was sure this was where he had disappeared. Disappointed, she stood up and took a step back and fell. Sapphire was never seen again.

Amy Lee





Water

I see the water glide down the stream,
It still feels like a dream to me,
I walk slowly in the pond,
Waiting for you to respond,
It's clear and blue your eyes are too,
I see the water glide down the stream,
It still feels like a dream to me.

Imani Antoun

Darkness

As the lights go down
Darkness overwhelms the city.
Crushing shadows
As it journeys through the avenues

Light tries to blossom
But Darkness is too strong.
It destroys light all night long.
Every night is the same.
Darkness cannot be tamed

When it comes silently
It puts shivers down spine.
So stealthy, it does not make a noise.
Darkness destroys all
It does not matter how big or how small.

You cannot stop it.
As it whistles through the air.
Beware of Darkness.
It is what we all fear.

Andrew Maguire

Loosely based on Chris Hadfield's An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth

It was a cloudy but calm day. The truck approached the gigantic rocket and 3 men got out and walked towards the Soyuz Rocket. The enormous crowds cheered on the Irishman, Russian and British man. Cameras flashed and children yelled. The astronauts walked through the safety gate.

The Irishman was commander of the mission. The trainers had been very supportive. He went into the lift and high-fived the Russian man. He hopped into the middle seat and double checked the controls. The system turned on. The engine was screeching and roaring.

"58,57,56...41,40,39,38...10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1,BWARRRRRRRRRRRCCCCCKKKKK!!!! The astronauts were squished back into their chairs with the g-forces.

"Are we ok?" asked the British man. "Everything is nominal," answered mission control. They saw the geography of Ireland. The boosters dropped off and plummeted back towards Earth automatically before they left the atmosphere. The Mission Control doctor apologised that he hadn't checked him before launch. Suddenly the engine cut out. The astronauts floated in their seats. The module turned slowly towards the station and then sped up. It was a surprise they survived.

The module inched towards the space station. They were an inch away. The ship docked into the docking bay. They climbed out of their seats. Each of the astronauts sailed through the hatch. They made the journey successfully! The Irishman flew towards the window inside the space station. The gleaming blue Earth looked back. The continents were about the size of his hands. The cyan oceans were full of white and brown spots. He knows billions of people are looking back at him.

Matthew O'Regan

And still we soar

School bell sounds lunch to an end
As students go where teachers send,
Upon my flight up in the sky
I spot my meal from way up high.

With eyes so good my chances grow
To eat the food that lies there I know,
Day in day out, come rain or sun
There is always food left from the fun.

Boys and girls they aren't aware
They're litter bugs without a care,
But don't you fret and don't you frown
Where we see food we all soar down.

Scraps or scrapes or piles and more
It's always food that we adore,
From children's play, where no rules apply
We all come swarming from the sky.

Without a care, without a doubt
We eat the food and leave none out,
No one cares right where we stand
No one's here to hold our hand.

The food so fresh, the grass so green
Food like this is the best we've seen,
We always want to come back for more
But still we search and still we soar.

Helen Hudson

Fun Pets

Usually pets are
so much fun,
They're always funny
and play with everyone.

Parrots talk
and fly around,
And never really
stay on the ground.

Cats are sleepy
cute and nice,
But here's a warning,
Don't have pet mice!

Hamsters keep going
round and round,
And make a little
funny sound

Now here comes
my favourite of all,
Dogs just come
when you call.

They always sit up
Proud and tall,
Dogs and pets
I love you all!

Dearbhla Fewer

Run

I hurriedly threw everything into
my bag and quickly wrote a
note, a note that explained it all
or at least as much as was safe
to know. I longed to explain
everything to them. I said my
last goodbyes to the room that I
had never left and jumped.

Leah Rossiter



People say our lives make up stories which then turn to histories. They say the exceptional lives and the exceptional stories live on forever and are never forgotten while the other less sensational stories die with the people they belong to. It strikes me as a shame that we don't remember all of the stories that are full of love and contentment. No, most of those are thrown into an abyss of ephemeral mundane memories. Had I the choice, my story would end up in the ephemeral abyss. They would lie with all the other average Joe and Janes who loved and lived in a safe and average world. Had I the choice my memories would only glimmer for me and no-one else would know anything about me. But my story won't end there. I, unfortunately, haven't lived a normal and boring life. I have lived an extraordinary one. My memories will make history and the world will forever know my story. Like most tales in history mine doesn't boast a happy ending.

I had been at the grocery shop helping Mr. Schneider when I got the phone call. It had been a typical Tuesday and so this electronic interruption hadn't been expected. I was glad Mr. Schneider had me answer it as I would've been in deep trouble had he picked it up. The caller had simply said "Margot, ten oranges, forty-two dates and seven apples," and then hung up. The message had been brief yet clear. The pit of my stomach dropped and my hands started to shake so much Mr. Schneider asked me if I was okay to which I replied "never better," and smiled meekly. A woman must always hold her composure they say, even in the most trying of times. Women must never look fretted or tired according to the people of my homeland. They said it wasn't homely or attractive. I had become very good at hiding yet this was one thing that challenged my honed skill of blending in to become nothing more noticeable than an insignificant fly. All of us had mastered that, except for my sister of course. She couldn't blend in if she tried. Mother had always said she was born to be famous. She just had that air about her. I hope she does one day. We could have such wonderful lives if she did. Lives so very different from the tumultuous ones we are living now.

The clock hands seemed to tease me and after staring at it for too long the hands seemed to move backwards. I had to keep forcing my eyes to stay off the clock so Mr. Schneider wouldn't notice but he caught me a couple of times and just laughed.

"You are probably off to some dance hall tonight and you are sick of working," His words meant well but the irony twisted into my stomach like a knife with a vengeance.

After what seemed to be an eternity my shift was done. I said goodbye to the old jolly man who had been so kind to my family since we got here with only the simple "goodbye" word. I couldn't tell him all I had wanted, I couldn't thank him. I just left. I jumped on my bike and cycled as fast as I normally would along the flat canal bank to my house. I tried to act calm as I dismounted and walked up the steps. I didn't need the neighbours to be suspicious. I walked through the door and shut it firmly behind me. My father stood in the middle of the hall. He was a healthy man who had always been of an excited and comedic nature yet he stood in front of me a broken man. My proud father had let them take his joyful demeanour from him. I don't blame him however; they had taken everything else anyway why not his joy as well.

"Margot we must go," his voice was still clear though. I felt like dissolving into tears but his voice kept me strong and steady. This was hard for me but I knew it was harder for him. "Anne and your mother have gone already." I nod and take his arm as we walk back out the door but this time for the last time.

My father acted as if nothing was wrong. He greeted our neighbours as we passed them and asked me about work and school. He acted as if it was any other evening stroll and he was very good at it too. I played my part yet my acting was incomparable to his. I always reckoned Anne got her theatrical streak from him. Father's office was only around the corner and yet we still managed to get stopped by them.

"Heil!"

The boy (and I say boy because he was barely an adult) greeted us. We responded immediately but every bone in my body rejected the action. "Your identification papers, please". Both of us placed our cards into his hand. His face darkened and heard him mutter "Die Jude" and stare at the slightly covered stars around our arms. "Where might you be going Mr. Frank?" He looked down at the card. "Mr. Frank?"

Father responded calmly. "I am just walking with my daughter to get some air." The boy stared at me and softened a little but not significantly.

"Well you better get home soon. There is a curfew for your kind,"

"We understand. We will head home now,"

"Fine but just remember if you are lying we know where you sleep,"

With that he marched away. My spine had frozen and only for my arm on my father's I wouldn't have been able to move.

"Come along, Margot"

My father squeezed my hand. We turned off into a side street and then followed the canal to father's office.

"Take a deep breath, Margot. This is the last moment we will endure of suppression in Amsterdam." He opened the gate and walked to the office. I took a deep breath and prayed that it wouldn't be too long till we got our Amsterdam back.

Amy Fitzsimons



The Last Promise

(An ode to celebration: to the one I love)

When you exhale, I inhale the leftovers
Of your soul,
That leaves the home of your lungs.
As mine found yours, it went
"Oh, there you are."

You are my bones.
Being the inner structure
of my body; motions are controlled.
My body wishes not to be
Broken; if so you will
Feel pain then I will crave
A mixture of morphine and daydreams.

I am a dove,
Devoted to falling;
Knowing that I'm the one you love,
I fly higher.

The truth is
I love you more
Than you could ever love me, because
You gave me a promise worth hoping that it will last
Forever.

Holly Cronin



Reshaping

In the beginning, I was oddly shaped. I was a puzzle piece that didn't belong in the box. I fit nowhere, I was wanted nowhere. I felt as though I didn't belong to myself. Everything I did, I did to fool myself into thinking that I was right; the right size, the right colour, the right shape . . . I was just playing games with myself. I tried to remain strong and sturdy but it's difficult to remember yourself when you don't know who that is. I melted. I turned into dull, squishy, blue play-doh. When they bumped into me, I morphed. I couldn't even recognize myself, let alone be myself. Nobody can know who you are when you don't know. I was dull, blue, neglected play-doh.

Why stop at just play-doh? Why not continue and become cotton candy? I was sweet, sure, but I was empty calories. I was more nothing than something. I wasn't even treasured cotton candy - the type you beg and beg your parents to buy for you at the carnival, the type that's like summer and that is fun and that reminds you of every good moment you've ever lived. No, I was the type of cotton candy that makes you feel sick after the roller coaster, the type you can't finish, the type you leave under storm-laden clouds on top of a trashcan before you get in the car to rush back home. I was cotton candy waiting for the rain so that I could finally just melt away.

When it didn't rain and I was just sitting on top of the trashcan, the most unexpected thing happened. The sun came out. Could anything be so bright? I knew then what had always been wrong with me. I had been a single diamond earring. Without my other half, I had been useless. What good is only one earring? It has no use to anybody. But now, I was finally good for the world. I was part of a set. When I was in a pair, I was invaluable, I was beautiful. I belonged.

It was perfect until my other half got lost. We were together, we were happy, but I made a mistake. The pool was so inviting. I was mindless. I forgot that the water could knock earrings off ears. I didn't care enough. So I paid the price. The my other half came loose and I watched it as it shimmered and floated to the bottom of the pool, out of reach and out of my life. Once again I was nothing. I was a single earring in a jewelry box. I was worthless. I was waste of space.

I was a bottle of dried up, red nail polish. I belonged nowhere. I didn't even belong to myself. What was I doing? How did things get so bad? Why did I have to be loved to be able to love myself? So that's what I decided to do. I knew, I didn't deserve my own love. I was just tired of lying to myself and not knowing myself and not being good enough and being lost in a crowd and being lonely. For once, I just wanted to be someone strong and useful and invincible.

I made myself into a kitchen knife. I was useful and practical and strong and I was not something to mess with. I was never sad nor scared nor weak. How could something so sharp be weak? I was someone who deserved respect. If others respect you then it is impossible not to respect yourself, right?

I was wrong. I became blunt. I was useless. I was breakable. I was again disappointed, yet I learned, somehow, that I loved myself. I was complicated like a puzzle piece, flexible like play-doh, beautiful like a diamond earring, wise like a dried up nail polish and deserving of respect like a kitchen knife.

Finally, I was a woman.

Bikem Pastine



The Time Tree

I could never really understand what the big fuss was about the tree. There were so many tales to be heard; some said it was a myth and others said it was true - that every time a leaf fell from the great oak tree, someone in the village died, and that when a new bud appeared, it was the sign of a new life. It wasn't until I was twelve that I learned that it was no myth, but real ...

It was a bright morning on the road; the dew was fresh on the grass and it had left a moist covering on the windows. The oak in the field across from the house stood proudly as ever, but only a few leaves were still on its branches. Times were hard back then. I had just turned twelve. My father was ill and my mother was worn out taking care of him. I could hear him from my room, coughing and spluttering, the painful sound of his laboured breathing echoing through the house. I tried to drown out the sounds by thinking of something else but it was often too hard. That day I looked at the old oak tree in the field - it seemed as if it was slowly dying as well, shedding its leaves in the autumn light. I thought of it as it had looked during the summer, full of life, with its leaves in many marvellous shades of green. However, my thoughts always returned to the present and to my father, who was slowly dying, withering like the leaves on the tree.

He was coughing again and I turned to look out of the window at the tree. It now only had three leaves left. Suddenly one of those leaves fell, detaching itself from its branch with no effort at all. A sickening silence pervaded the room. I waited for a minute, and then walked out, edging ever so carefully over to the door of my father's room.

I could not take in what I saw. I fell to my knees with a thump and stayed there, staring at my father who had just drawn his last breath. His image was painfully engraved into my mind. My mother tried to push me out of the room, stuttering and crying "I'm sorry" but I knew that saying sorry would not bring him back. I pushed past her with all of my might and fury. I grabbed him and held him so tight, the tears rushing down my face. I did not want to loosen my grip, but my mother gently prised my hands away. Reality hit me then and I realised he was dead forever.

The next week was a silent one - we each stayed in our rooms thinking about the tragic loss of the man who was father to me and husband to my mother. I could not forget the look on his face when I saw him lying there dead in his bed - I tried to forget but I couldn't. I was so angry. Suddenly I was filled with such a rage that I brushed everything off my desk, throwing everything to the floor around me. My mother ran in and held me tighter than ever before saying, "I feel the same, but your father would not want this." I stopped fighting and she let go of me.

The next day we buried him underneath the oak tree. We watched and stared as the people from the villages, both near and far, came to pay their respects, all dressed in black, with sorrow-filled hearts. The funeral was short, yet every second felt like an agonizing pain. My mother was crying - her friends were trying to help her but she just pushed them away and buried her head in her hands, as if she wanted to cry forever. When it was over I went inside and sat in my room, just staring into blank space. There was nothing else on my mind except my father. I could not seem to stop thinking about him. I tried looking out of window again, trying to gain strength from the oak tree but now there were only two leaves left.

My mother and I tried to carry on but it was difficult. Six years had now passed. The oak tree continued to grow in the field across from our house. One day I heard the all too familiar sound of coughing, but it was now coming from my mother. I knocked on her bedroom door and asked her if she was all right. She looked very ill, with the same pale face and sunken eyes that I had seen on my father. The doctor came and broke the news to me that I was going to lose another parent - that she was going to die like father. I went downstairs and sat in the sitting room. I sat with the radio on, trying to drown out my mother's coughing in the background. I heard the faint call of my name and then once again that sickening silence. It was the same silence as when my father had died.

The pain of her death was terrible. The ache in my heart was now twice as bad as now I had lost two of the most loving and caring people in my life. I buried my mother in a simple grave beside that of my father - I knew that was what she would have wanted. They had been so close in life and now they would be together. Setting a bouquet of flowers next to her, I slumped against the oak tree. I sat and stared in despair as I realised that the myth was true, that every time a leaf fell, someone, somewhere died.

In that moment, a ray of sunlight hit my face and I looked up to the top of the tree ... now there were new buds sprouting on the branches, a sign of Spring which was just around the corner. A thought came to me that this oak tree was truly a tree of life, a time tree, giving and taking with each fall of a leaf and each appearance of a new bud. Time was truly precious and I decided that even though one day I too would fall like one of the leaves on the tree, I would use my time wisely until then.

Nathan Scarlett

The Old Man

The paddle hit the turquoise water with a splash. The man who held the paddle though old seemed ageless. His skin was tan to the colour of walnuts and as wrinkled too, his eyes a piercing blue. Eyes which were now gazing dead ahead towards the glassy expanse of water and the green trees with wiry strands of Spanish moss hanging from them.

He saw it after a few moments. The dock which rose from the water of wood grey with age, he had built it years ago so distant a memory. He approached the dock with short deliberate strokes of his paddle. Upon reaching the dock he climbed up in the dock, lifting the canvas rucksack with him. He carried the bag to the small wooden ramp up to the sand path, he then returned to the edge reaching down towards his tarred canoe. Lifting it onto the dock he placed it on the edge turning towards his rucksack he groaned, rubbed his grey stubble then took a few steps picking up the bag as he went.

He stepped on to the sand path which snaked the way up to his shelter and his small encampment. His eyes darted from tree to tree searching for sticks, and when his eyes would land on one he would pick it up. He paused only once to look into the deep green canopy, his eyes then returned to the path and his search for sticks. Once he reached the camp he piled these into a small pit, filled with ashes, he found an old box of matches he struck one. He paused momentarily to hear the fizz of the match; he then flung the match into the pile of sticks. He ran his hand through his unkempt grey hair to reach for the cans of beans he had piled by the hammock he called his bed.

He unsheathed his hunting knife and plunged it into the can. He jerked it from side to side crudely opening the can. He let the fire die while filling an old bean can with a handful of rice and filled it the rest with water. Once the fire had turned to bright red embers he placed his two cans beside the fire. While they cooked he moved for his canvas sack, undoing the buckles he slowly peeled back the cover peering in he saw his supplies for the next weeks 14 cans of beans and 2 bars of chocolate. Behind him as he stacked the beans he heard a hiss, his cue to pick up the dampened cloth and removes his cans. Picking up the dented mess tin he hung it on a nail in one of the wooden supports, tipping the contents in he relaxed.

He lay in the hammock and stared into the flickering embers of the fire. He sighed reflecting on his life, he knew that he was fulfilled. And with this feeling of contentment he closed his eyes. And as the last embers faded to black he breathed his last breath, the smell of a wood fire filled his lungs. It was a month before he was found, one of the wildlife rangers visited the camp to check up on the old man. The ranger saw an immaculate body; it was as if he was dreaming. No decay, no pooling, no rigor mortis just a perfect corpse, as if asleep. He had never damaged the earth only respected it and now in his death earth wasn't damaging him only respecting him, cloaking him in its blanket as it would a new-born.

Oscar Doyle



Mutiny

It seemed to Captain Reynolds that he had two options. Go alone and go faster or go together and run out of food quicker. Young Bradley never did anything wrong. In fact, the only reason why young Bradley was in this situation was because he was the only one to defend Reynolds. A crew of 87 sailors and 4 officers and young Bradley was the only one to stick up for him.

“Just my luck” muttered Reynolds. He had nothing against the boy but he wished it had been somebody else.

“What was that cap’n?”

“Nothing, just stay on course. We’ll be lucky to find any sort of land by nightfall of this rate. A sand bank will do at this point.”

It was Lieutenant Hopper that started the mutiny. He was the one that turned forty members of the crew against Captain Reynolds. Not a single shot was fired but not a single shot was needed. Reynolds was an honourable man and knew that this was one battle that he could not win. He made a deal with Hopper. It is in this way that Captain Reynolds and young Bradley came to be on a two man dingy in the middle of the South Pacific at the start of May. There was probably enough food for three or four days more with both of them on the boat. And that was even after the extreme rationing Reynolds had introduced from the start. The food could be stretched for at least five more days if he got rid of Bradley. It seemed harsh but he didn’t have much of a choice. Starve together or kill Bradley.

The one thing that Bradley had going for him at this point in time was that he was a strong guy. If the wind picked up, Reynolds would struggle to maintain control of the sails on his own. But then again, if the wind picked up then he might not have to throw him overboard. Fiji was two to seven days away depending on the wind. If the wind increased to a nice weak gale, then they would be there with food to spare. One of the biggest problems about sailing is that it nearly impossible to do on an empty stomach. If they ran out of food they were as good as dead.

The Southern Cross was beginning to become visible in the dusk sky. That meant it was time for their evening rations.

“What’s on the menu today great chef?” joked Bradley. Reynolds admired his attitude. How he could still be laughing and joking in this situation was beyond his understanding. He thought about playing along but then thought better of it. He didn’t want to get too friendly with him in case he had to kill poor Young Bradley.

“Just eat your bread. Stop wasting energy.” Reynolds didn’t like being this curt with the boy. He was only sixteen. He might have even become a lieutenant one day if he hadn’t stood up for Reynolds. Captain was probably beyond his reach given his background, but lieutenant, that was something to aspire for. Bradley ate in silence. He was one of the most obedient sea hands Captain Reynolds ever had work for him. Sure, he was a little bit cheeky but he never needed a second warning. The bread was stale when the two got it but now it was going mouldy. The smell was bad but in the middle of the deep ocean, there are worse smells. Scurvy was a problem that sailors battled with all over the world. Compared to the smell of rotting flesh on a live person, mouldy bread was like a breath of fresh air. And Captain Reynolds had witnessed his fair share of scurvy.

There goes another days rations, thought Reynolds as Bradley whipped the saliva away from the corners of his mouth with his tunic. If Reynolds didn’t make his move tomorrow, then his mind would be made up for him. Reynolds knew now that he didn’t want to kill young Bradley. He told himself that if the wind picked up or they made enough progress over night, then he wouldn’t throw poor Bradley over. Whether or not he would follow through or not if the wind did pick up remained to be seen. Reynolds had killed people before but only in the

heat of battle. Killing Bradley would be murder. Reynolds never felt sorry for any of the other people he had killed, so why was he feeling sorry for young Bradley and he hadn’t even killed him yet. Reynolds felt as if he was about to throw up. But vomiting would be a huge waste of nutrition. There he was thinking about killing someone else for food when he was about to surrender some himself. He ordered Bradley to swap places with him. They clumsily moved past each other. Reynolds slumped down at the tiller. He was determined not to lose his rations. He held his breath, counted to ten... and threw up his rations.

How could he let himself do that? Was he not the master of his own body? Maybe he was ill. Bradley began to panic. This was the last thing Reynolds wanted! The smell of mouldy bread was back but it was much stronger than before. Bradley loosened the sail slightly too much. The boat went into a wild tack. The boom swung around. It missed Reynolds by mere centimetres because he was still doubled over trying to recover. Bradley was not so lucky. The word boom does not seem appropriate for the sound it makes. When a boom hits someone on the head, it’s not so much a “boom” as a “clunk”. “Clunk” was exactly the sound the boom made as it hit Bradley clean in the side of his head. And where should he fall to the deck but right on top of the vomit pooled there already. What it sight it would have made if anybody had the time to appreciate it. But there was no time to think. The boat made another wild turn, downwind this time. Reynolds stretched over the mass of flesh and blood and sick underneath him to get to the rope.

It was this precise moment that Reynolds realised that he would not get a better chance to throw Young

Bradley over. He wouldn’t be able resist and would probably sink like a stone. But first thing was first, regain control of the ship. Reynolds tugged the rope and the little dingy flung into a particularly sharp and nasty jibe. The boom swung around again, nearly taking Reynolds head off again. The blood and vomit slushed to the port side of the boat first, followed closely by an unconscious George Bradley. It wasn’t the most graceful piece of sailing Reynolds had ever performed but it got him roughly back on course. Reynolds strained on the rope as he tried to straighten up the tiller. He couldn’t navigate like this. He needed Bradley to wake up and take the rope so he could get them back on perfect course. Fiji is a small island and very easy to miss even if one is just a couple of degrees off course. Reynolds wrapped the rope around his foot twice to keep it steady and gave a quick slap on the cheek before grabbing the rope with his hand again.

“Wake up, I need you” Reynolds ordered. Bradley didn’t respond. Reynolds gave him a kick in the side. But Bradley remained unresponsive. Reynolds rolled Bradley onto his side so that they were facing each other. The severity of Bradley’s injury became clear. A metal loop on the boom caught him in the temple. There was no way of telling how long he would be out for. He might have even been dead for all Reynolds knew.

There was no way that he could get the map out from the bow of the boat in these conditions. He would have to navigate using the stars alone. At least it was night time. Had it been day time, Reynolds might never get back on course. Even for the South Pacific, it was a particularly clear night. The Southern Cross and Sigma Octantis were about where they should be if they were to stay on course. But then, they were probably already off course and would have to compensate for that. Reynolds turned the boat slightly up-wind. He would probably have to tack but he was still recovering from the events of a few minutes before and didn’t have to energy for another turn with Bradley still lying there. Reynolds locked in the tiller, freeing up one hand and shifted his weight a little towards the bow. He still couldn’t reach the bag with the map but he could reach the make-shift bucket they had made on the second day for bailing out water. It was amazing what Bradley was able to do with a plank of wood and a bit of cloth. It didn’t seem like much but it worked and that was all that mattered. Reynolds leaned out of the side of the boat and half-filled it with sea water. He splashed over Young Bradley’s face. There was a splutter but that was it. At least he wasn’t dead.

Through the dark, Reynolds spotted a twinkle under the surface of the water. At first glance Reynolds thought it was just the reflection of the moon on the surface. But then it moved. Then it leapt out of the water in the most spectacular fashion. It was a spinner dolphin. Captain Reynolds could tell it was a female from the size of it. It re-entered the water with grace then swam under the boat and breached the surface again, this time performing a barrel roll. It was mesmerising. In all his years at sea, Captain Reynolds never had quite a spectacular show put on for him. Reynolds snapped out of his trance. He still had a job to complete. A spinner dolphin could only mean one thing. He must have been closer to land than he originally thought he was. Spinner dolphins hunt fish and squid close to the coast at night. This was one of those things that Reynolds had learnt in navigation school that he thought he would never need to know. If he could just follow the dolphin, maybe it would lead him towards land.

There was something else about spinner dolphins that Captain Reynolds knew but he couldn’t quite recall it. The dolphin sprung out of the water again, twisting and turning as it did so. No sooner had it pierced the water than it rose out of the water again. It seemed a bit quick to be possible, even if it was showing off. Reynolds remembered the other thing about spinner dolphins. They travel in large groups. Very large groups. One man Reynolds sailed with back when he was a sea hand claimed he saw a group of 100 at one time, all leaping and jumping all over the place. Reynolds had always assumed he was exaggerating but now he was hoping against hope that it was a gross exaggeration. There was no way Reynolds would be able to keep control of the little boat with a hundred spinner dolphins capering and flipping around it. Reynolds allowed himself a quick look back to where the first two dolphins came from. There were a lot more. At least a dozen and that was just at a glance. He really wished that Bradley was awake. They were so much closer to land than they thought. They couldn’t be more than a day away now. More dolphins were catching up with the boat. Reynolds gave Bradley yet another kick in the side, much harder this time. Bradley opened one eye.

“Have a look at this” said Captain Reynolds. No sooner had he said it than a dolphin vaulted out of the water with a flip and three full flips. Bradley lifted himself onto one hand, still lying on the deck. He was clutching the side of his head, mouth wide open, too dumfounded to say anything. Reynolds smiled. “I thought you were a gonner young lad.” Bradley continued staring at the dolphins. “Oh, and good news.” Bradley looked up at Captain Reynolds. “We’re going to make it.” Bradley’s mouth opened again. “Don’t look so worried, lad, you were only out a few minutes. You’ll be right as rain in a few more.” Bradley took the rope from around Reynold’s leg and looked out front. Was he hallucinating or was he really seeing what he thought he was seeing. He looked back at Captain Reynolds.

“Yes, I see it too” said Captain Reynolds. “That’s Fiji”

It was a beautiful day. The sun was beating down from the blue sky above, with only the faintest of rustles in the leaves of the trees, caused by just the slightest of warm breezes. As I stared out of the living room window, I noticed my friend and neighbour, Sid, out in the park with his Mum. I looked at my Mum, and I didn't need to say anything to tell her what I wanted.

"All right," she said, half sighing, but half smiling too. "But you know the rules."

Now that I was a little bit older, Mum trusted me a bit more. I was allowed out without her, but only in the area of the park just in front of our house, where she could see me. If I went any further, as I'd learned through experience, she wouldn't be at all happy. She opened the door for me – I still wasn't tall enough to reach the door handle, although there were others in the house that I could now reach and open by myself – and I bounded out eagerly to play with Sid.

As soon as he saw me, Sid sprinted across to me enthusiastically, leaving his Mum behind him to join me. We hadn't seen each other in a few days, so he was excited to catch up with me. We messed around for a while, playing our favourite game, chasing. We also chatted about what we'd been up to the last couple of days.

Sid began telling me about this delicious meal he'd found whilst out in town a couple of days ago. Food was a joint love of ours – I loved nothing more than watching Mum as she cooked in the kitchen, fascinated by the smells and by everything going on. Unfortunately for both Sid and I, however, there never seemed to be enough food. We were both always hungry. Every day, my food was strictly rationed, as was Sid's – and for that reason, we were always on the lookout for a chance for an extra meal, and weren't too fussy as to where it came from, as long as it was edible.

"Yeah, Mum and I were walking down the street, and we were passing that new sandwich place that opened up a couple of weeks ago," explained Sid. "I glanced around the back, and I noticed that they were throwing out a load of breads. They were slightly mouldy, so I guess they couldn't serve them anymore – but I wasn't complaining! Unfortunately they came out and saw me before I got to eat that much, though. They started shouting at me and I just legged it. Then Mum started giving out to me as well, saying that that's unacceptable behaviour and all – but even still, it was worth it."

"Sounds pretty good," I replied. "I could sure use some food right now."

"We could go there again!" Sid said excitedly. "We could definitely get more food!"

I considered this for a second. I could hear Mum's warning not to leave the area of the park in front of our house echoing in my mind. But I could also hear the rumbling of my stomach, too. And it was considerably louder.

"Sure," I replied. "Let's do it."

We had to make sure Sid's Mum wasn't watching us before we could sneak off, but luckily it didn't take long before she struck up a conversation with another woman nearby. Her opinion of the weather – "it's just abso-lutely gorr-juss!" – cued our time to leave. We ran out the park gate and headed down the road towards the town.

It didn't take us long to reach the town. Sid was running, which meant I was running too – I didn't often get taken to town, so I was relying on him for directions. We arrived at the street that the new sandwich bar was on and headed towards it. We headed around the back, trying to keep as low a profile as possible, and had a look.

We were in luck. A large packet of bread rolls, not even opened, was sitting right there beside the restaurant's bins, waiting to be dumped. We ran over, tore away the plastic and dived in. Food, glorious food! It may only have been bread, but it didn't matter at all. We were just hungry. We were tucking in, but then all of a sudden there came a loud creaking sound from behind us. The restaurant's back door swung open, and out came an angry looking staff member.

"Hey! Get out of here!" he shouted, running towards us. We didn't need to be told twice, running for our lives. The man chased us as we ran away from the restaurant. We ran and ran, sprinting as fast as we could until I was absolutely exhausted. I was pretty sure that the man had given up some time ago, but Sid kept on running. I simply couldn't run anymore, and shouted at Sid to stop. I looked behind anxiously and was relieved to see that the man was nowhere in sight. Sid stopped, and seeing that the man was gone, came back towards me, grinning.

"That was fun!" he exclaimed.

"Oh yeah. Great fun," I replied sarcastically. "But at least we got some food."

"Where the hell are we?" Sid asked. That instantly sent alarm bells off in my head.

"You mean you don't know where we are? How am I supposed to know? I'm never brought to town!"

"All right, all right. Relax. We'll find our way back home," Sid replied.

We decided to try to go back the way we came, as if we could get back to the street with the restaurant, Sid would know the way from there. But we'd run a long way from the restaurant, and neither of us had been paying attention as to which way we were going, intent only on escaping the angry man. We wandered back slowly, but nothing seemed familiar. Late afternoon stretched into early evening, and as dusk fast approached, we continued to wander the streets in vain.

I began to worry about Mum, Dad and Shauna. I knew they'd be worried sick for me. Sid had become considerably more downtrodden and I could tell he was worried about his family, too. I missed the comfort of the house and of my bed. Darkness began to fall, and we prepared for an evening on the streets.

We found a sheltered area outside the front of some shop, which seemed as good a place as any to sleep for the night. Nobody was around now. I sighed.

"It'll be all right," Sid said comfortingly, but I could tell that he wasn't sure what he was saying was true.

"I hope so," I replied. We lay down to sleep.

I awoke to a flashlight being pointed in my face. It was a Garda night patrol. My initial instinct was fear, but before I could even react, I was in the Garda's arms, and Sid in his compatriot's. Struggling was no good at all. They put us into their car, comforting us, telling us that we were going to be fine. I was scared and confused. They got into the car's front seats and drove off. The one not driving talked on his mobile phone.

"We've got them. Yes, them both. They're fine."

Within just a couple of minutes, we arrived back at our houses. I couldn't believe it! Home at last! Mum, Dad and Shauna were all still wide awake, even though it must have been the middle of the night. I was so happy to see them again. They took turns hugging me tightly, telling me how much they loved me. Shauna brought me inside as Mum and Dad talked to the Gardaí.

It was the middle of the night, so after talking to Mum and Dad, Shauna put me to bed. Sid shouted at me from over the wall. "Is everything okay?!"

"Yes!" I replied. "Thank goodness we're okay!"

"Stop barking now," Shauna whispered to me. She stroked my fur softly, whispered goodnight, and then shut the door to my kennel.

Oscar Maltby





Snow in May

I wake in the morning to a blanket of snow
 Much colder than I can remember,
 Completely fed up, I stomp outside
 Go away! I wanted you last December!
 It does not listen and silently falls
 On the rooftops and alleyways
 Covering each eyelash with a glistening flake
 As if mocking its arrival in May
 Winter is only temporary,
 But the snow doesn't want to move on
 It does not agree with warm summer days,
 And nights that grow increasingly long
 I wish for the blazing medallion in the sky,
 To leave my warm skin glowing
 Instead tiny ice crystals drift peacefully down
 Like powdered sugar, as it keeps on snowing.

Sadhbh O'Mahony

A Sip

She pours it out of
 The olive oil bottle
 Into the little glasses as
 They reach desperately
 Towards her
 To get a taste
 He tips it back
 Down his throat
 So that it doesn't burn
 And he's feels free
 And he falls in love
 And it's all over.
 When he comes back
 Next week and the
 Week after that
 His friends have
 Stayed home and they've
 Gotten jobs and wives
 They've done things
 They're felt things
 But he can't help
 Not feeling anything
 Except absolute
 Bliss.

Richard Neville

Liberty and Éire

Greenland's greener cousin smiles when you walk in the door -
 Darkly framed against the seablue a bearlike grin strikes her face,
 Arced back, inches from the wall behind
 Her, when approached by an older grizzled figure -
 A woman in a white dress framing a redlipped smile on
 Bloodstained, ivory skin -
 Holding the revolution in hand,
 A silky whisper "come with me" she entices, pulling the
 young girl from the seablue wall,
 Carried by an eager hesitance,
 At long last, her last long finger separates,
 And their quiet romance passes,
 Into the annals,
 As men fall at their feet, beautiful in death.

Daniel Cosgrave

Uncertainty

I bent over the paper, my eyes trailing over the same sentence more than three times. My brain was stagnant today. Rubbing my eyes, I read it again, willing my brain to focus. Essay... the word screamed at me, practically jumping out of the page. I clicked my pen again, just as something to do. The clock ticked noisily, reminding me of every second passing that I was wasting. A bead of sweat glided down my forehead. What was I to write? I snuck a glance at my classmates, their heads bent down, faces screwed in concentration, writing a hundred words per second. What brilliance of an idea struck their minds to make them write so fast? I looked back down of my blank sheet of paper. Maybe if I stared at it hard enough words would appear... Uncertain I was of what to write...
 Uncertain... I was always full of uncertainty. Sometimes I want to be omniscient. To be certain about every event, to know whether a decision would be good or bad and if it'd be worth to make a certain choice or not. There would be no mistakes, only good decisions. I would know whether to stay with someone or if they'd just be wasting my time. I would know which career option would be best for me. Will it lead to success or will I end up living on the streets? With this certainty, my life could become perfect. If there was only certainty, everyone's life would surely be perfect.
 But if everyone's life were perfect, would there really be such thing as a perfect life? Would life just become so boring? There would be no element of surprise, no mystery. There would be no need to make a wish when blowing out the candles or gazing avidly at a shooting star. 11:11 would just become a passing number.
 The thing about uncertainty is we live by it. These contingencies give room for hope. They add mystery and excitement, a reason to live. Uncertainty allows us to make plans and dream big; and only those who are brave enough will succeed. Experiencing – both good and bad – leads to learning. Life is like a puzzle and every lesson from experience, is another piece that's added to the puzzle. This uncertainty gives life mystery, a hunger to know more, to live, to experience.
 This is the beauty of uncertainty. The triumph we get from making the right choice, the rush of adrenaline before you're about to ask someone out, uncertain to whether they like you or not, the rush of excitement towards a pleasant surprise. If things were certainly imminent would you bother reading this or make a judgement straight away?
 As my eyes trailed over the same sentence over and over again wondering what to write, hoping for the idea that caused my classmates' hands to write with utter speed, I thought about the notion that in fact our life is one big uncertainty. Will I ever win the lotto, have kids, die old? Will this essay be so brilliant it will move you or cause you to doze off? It is uncertain.

Anna Giatraki

Confluence

One Path
 One Note
 One way
 One hope
 Two hours
 Two days
 Two Years
 Two
 Forever
 On
 One Path
 And Back

Daniel Cosgrave



The Shot

The projectile flew by my head, close enough that I could feel the wind as it skimmed past me. It hurtled into the mesh behind me, and gasping, I looked to the masked man ahead of me. "STRIKE!" was the response, and I swore under my breath. Ready myself once more, I turned to face the opposition. Another ball hurtled towards me, however this time I was prepared. Taking a mighty swing, a sharp crack was heard as the ball made a solid connection with the wooden bat in my hand, and it sailed through the night sky. I watched with bated breath, and after what seemed like an eternity, a rush of noise enveloped me as the crowd leaped to their feet. I could hear my name being chanted above the white noise, and flushed with excitement, I began to run. I ran with all the energy I had left in my adrenaline pumped veins. Less than a minute later, it was over. The seething mass of people surrounded me, lifting me onto their shoulders and carrying me about the area. It was exhilarating; no, it was more than that; it was in my mind most likely the most influential moment in my whole life up till now. Due to my final swing, we had won the league. The night that followed was one for the books. Half of the night I can't even remember. The team threw a party of sorts at our pitcher, Gideon Baal's beach house in Miami. Everyone who was anyone in the college was present at one point or another during the night, and that included the drop-dead gorgeous high-school homecoming queen Deb Bethel. Up until then I would have never considered the possibility of a chance with her, but after my winning hit, it appeared as if anything was possible. A couple hours into the party, after everyone was sufficiently boozed up, and many couples had moved into the various bedrooms to slate their lust, Deb walked over to me; wearing a shimmering red dress with sequins, and a pair of tall, black heels. Taking my hand in hers, she whispered 'that was quite a shot.' Blushing, I thanked her, and she responded again, 'come with me. I'll show you how to hit a home run that is MUCH more satisfying.' She winked, and began to move towards the open door at the front of the house. Practically hypnotized by the movement of her body in that tight red dress, and feeling something else telling me 'yes,' I moved after her into the night; a foolish grin beginning to spread across my face.

Moses Alwood



Anniversary

A hundred years gone by and I'm still by your side.
I'm here and there and everywhere,
Yet nowhere at all.

I'm like a loyal dog, never part from you,
until your day of dying, finally falls due.
And when this day does come, this dog will die too,
For I shall never live apart anyone but you.

That why on this day,
I ask for you to stay and say,
"I love you too".

Sarah Bulger

An Apology

We only saw what we could
That beautiful laugh,
Nose scrunched up as it should.
Never saw the second half.
The part that was in pain.
A place where you were alone.
It was your own domain.
But then I found myself shown
To the part that was yours
And I admit I got scared
I began to close my doors
Behind it all though, I cared
And I guess this is an apology,
Even though I know it won't suffice.
What I'd like to say though is sorry
And I hope at least you're in paradise.

Caroline Doyle

Crushed

Crushed like a snail under a shoe
Like a twig under your feet

That's how I feel all the time
Snapped like a birds wing

Snapped like a bone
That's how they treat me

Crushed like a snail under a shoe
Like a twig under your feet

Why did they pick me?

Clare Holahan



The Fields

It was during the summers of the 1830s, and had been happening long before that when all the crops were harvested and the days were long and sticky. My mother and her mother before that were all slaves. Sold like cattle to work on the cotton fields. No one ever cared about us. No one gave a damn. They didn't see our souls; they looked into our eyes and merely saw only an object at their disposal. They didn't know that we too could look into their eyes and see what humanity had come too, how almost it had been predisposed for man to turn on its own kind.

We would be stuck in our mud huts infested with cockroaches, rats; any type of creature that cared to joins us. While the white folk spent their summer days sipping pink lemonade on their freshly painted porches and going dancing almost every other night.

I never knew my father or siblings. I was sold at the ripe age of five, I don't remember much. Mama came with me though. She's grown old and tiresome. Her skin wrinkled and folded she somewhat resembled a dying flower, her back hunched from spending too many long summers bent over those fields. They still made her work; they showed no mercy, no guilt, no humanity. It was like they had been swallowed up and taken away by thinking of us as the lesser species. I think that was what allowed them to feel no remorse. The master would whip us like horses until even he grew tired of whipping. The torture never stopped on the account of us. Often when I was the only one awake and the only surrounding sound was the dim hum of music and crickets I would fantasise about when I too could sip lemonade on my own freshly painted porch, or go to dances. I was wishing the impossible. I knew that.

My escape was the trips to the circus. Well not trips. You see the circus would come to our town annually to South Carolina. The white folk loved the circus. My master was very rich, so the circus came to them every 4th of July, for as long as I could remember. We of course were forbidden from attending. Although I wasn't particularly rebellious I knew these circus visits were the only things that kept me wishing so I would always watch from the bushes, pressed against the mud and the dirt, watching quietly. I knew if I got caught the punishment would be unforgivable. It was worth the risk. I also liked too dream of becoming a show girl you know those ones with the fancy skirts and lace hats. The ones that came with the circus. I like to imagine that they lived glamorous lives filled with jewels and opportunities.

The white girls used to laugh at me in the cotton fields. What helped me pass the time of those long summers were the songs in my head, the dancers as well. I danced when I worked. I did not care what them white girls thought, it was my only entertainment. My only place of self-expression. I had no emotional output. No one could. It wasn't allowed. But there in those fields I would dance off the feelings of oppression, hatred and sorrow. I think it was the dancing that kept me sane. For without it I might have turned out like Jane. She just like me was a slave from too young a age. In her 47th year of working these fields, something happened. She would sit alone, in the mud houses. Sometimes in complete silence other times her screams and cries would fill the hut. They echoed around. The masters had neither tolerance nor patience for her, so she was shot just like the others. Now at the age of 68 I am. They let me go two years ago. My hard work is what freed me. But it was really those days I spent counting, waiting for the circus to come. And those days spent after dancing and singing my little heart out on those fields. I owe my freedom to those circuses they kept me sane. They gave me a place of tranquillity, a place to forget that my only purpose was to work the fields, ruled by god's toss of a coin.

Robyn Tuohy



One Last Step

When I was a child all I ever wanted to do was fly. To explore towering heights. Soar above oceans. Zoom through open air, like a bird. To be free.

I still want to, but now as I sit working at my desk, taken up only with an old computer and blank papers, I ask myself, why I never did it? Why did I never reach my goals? Why is life such as waste? The dull walls surround me, each cubicle filled with another working person, bent over, typing away, lifeless. We are like machines. We wake up. We go to work. We come home and repeat day after day. We waste our lives away doing this. I hear the gentle tick of my watch, strapped tightly to my wrist. It's 08:30 am on the 9/11/2001. I feel restless, why do I do this, slaving away on nothing that gives me pleasure? I glance to the right, peering out of my window. The view, bustling cars jolting through narrow lanes, people resembling ants from this height, scuttling from one place to another. Flashing traffic lights, blink, changing rapidly. A world of opportunity, yet I don't explore.

"Derrick, you have a meeting now, room 6.16," the annoying twang of my decrepit assistant rings through my ears.

"Thanks, Lindy." I reply, grasping myself back to reality. I slowly trudge off. I twist the door handle and release a sigh as I stomp into the room.

"Ahhhhh!" a piercing scream echoes through the hall. Suddenly I am thrown off my feet, my head bashing vigorously against the polished floor. A sharp pain descends through my body. A deafening crash explodes into the air. Screams filter through the atmosphere. I drag myself up and sprint through the narrow halls, my head bursting with pain. What is happening? Out of the corner of my eye, I make out a green sign, despite my vision slurring. Exit. I thrust out my sweaty palm and grasp for a handle, yanking open the heavy, stone door. As I step out a flow of ash hits me, sending me sprawling down. To my right, I spot a huge plane heading right for this building. WHAT! I hear a crash, bang and boom. The floors seem to wobble. I throw myself to the side of the building and stand looking out over the city. The crisp air has been taken over by ash and cloud. I see cars speeding away. I hear sirens. The building is tilting. If I have always wanted to fly, why not now? I step to the edge of the balcony, heart pounding. I take a breath. I jump, I soar, and I feel the smoky air ripple through my lungs. I'm flying. For the first time in my life I actually feel like I'm living. And then it's gone.

Maya Duncan



Flawless façade

It was a bitter winter day, Jack Frost nipping at the tips of my fingers. A shiver engulfed my entire being. Out of fear or the below freezing temperatures, I couldn't decipher. The dark building before me screamed authority and power, two things I both gravely fear. Although to many this building represented safety, not fear. The place was littered with busy bodies, all occupied with their own problems. No one took the time to bother with mine.

In the modest town of Sandybrook I was known as the town's sweetheart. I was the image of perfection, at least that's what they said. The perfect looks, the perfect grades, the perfect boyfriend. Perfect everything apparently. Little did they know that behind my flawless facade I was holding back my inner demons.

In Sandybrook I was beloved by all, a prominent figure in our small society. However many people didn't love me for who I was, they loved me for who they thought I was. The person I made myself become in order to please them. If these people really knew me or cared for me even the slightest they would know what I had been hiding for the past ten months of my life.

No one questioned as to why I covered myself from top to toe during the sweltering summer season. They overlooked my refusal to swim in the lake nearby. They were all ignorant to my odd behaviour, too absorbed with their lives to intervene in mine. Then again in their minds I had no problems. I was Bella Bensten, the girl with no faults. People didn't want to know about my disfigured life behind closed doors. My personal issues were to be none of their concern. As long as I didn't burden them with my issues and stain my flawless reputation, I don't think they could care less.

The one individual who could see my flaws was my father. He made sure to point them out to me more often than not. He assured to inflict his misery upon me. Once he was a kind, respectable man, who loved me. Although that was before my mother ran off with another man.

His once tidy appearance became rough and rugged. I tried to support him the best I could after the whole ordeal yet he pushed me away on more than one occasion. His words towards me were harsh and bitter. Still I stood by him. I shoved away my feelings of pain and acted as though his actions never bothered me. I cooked for him, I cleaned for him, I did everything for him. All the while he was drinking his life away. Not once did he express his appreciation for all my hard work. In his eyes I was still a worthless, good-for – nothing waste of space.

It hurt to know that he didn't care about my mere existence. When I did receive attention from him it was bitter and resentful. He said I looked just like her, my mother. When he looked in my eyes he saw her and was reminded of all the heartache she caused him all over again. She ruined him and for that I despise every fibre of her being.

Even though it was clear that he hated me I knew that he wouldn't release me from his grasp. He needed me. And I needed him. I was convinced that one day he would come to his senses and rediscover the admirable man I knew long ago. I couldn't have been more naive. For than man ceased to exist. Once you went down the dark path, it forever dominated your destiny and consumed your complete existence.

I was blinded by the love I had for my father. Oblivious to how his hatred towards me grew every time I interacted with him. I assumed that's why I was so shocked when he raised his hand to me. It was such a foreign experience, I could barely comprehend the situation. I knew that he was capable of hurting me emotionally but physical abuse was a total different ball game. The hits then became a frequent occurrence. He said it was my fault, that I needed to be punished for my wrongdoings. Even though I couldn't fathom what my mistakes were.

That was the time where I had felt truly alone. I had no one to turn to for help. I was under his complete control, driven by fear. Each day I wore a mask and concealed everything I so badly desired to let out. My life became a game of charades, it was all fake. It went so far as to be difficult for me to determine reality from imaginary.

I became a victim of pressure. It all became too much. All of these events lead to me to where I was. "Are you alright there Miss? You've been standing out here for quite some time now." Inquired a uniform clad police officer after emerging from the intimidating building.

"I suppose I have." I agreed. It was time. I needed to move on from my torment. "I think I'll go inside now." I confirmed.

I walked alongside the police man as he escorted me inside the establishment. We came to a halt at the front desk and the officer bid me goodbye with a polite nod of his head. I observed that the building was far more peaceful, most likely because the dusk had reached us. The officer at the front desk sent me a warm smile. My fingers nervously fidgeted with the buttons on my coat. "How may I help you today Bella?" Asked the officer. I knew her to be a member of the Jackson family who owned the bakery downtown.

"I'm here to report something." There was no turning back from that point, I knew that much. From that moment on the future for me was unclear. A weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

The claim I had made quickly spread throughout the town. My image had been ruined. And I was relieved. I felt like I could breathe again without having to fear that people would look at me the wrong way. My father had been taken away and I was placed in the custody of my grandparents whom lived halfway across the country. It seemed as though I had lost everything, but it felt as though I didn't really have anything to lose to begin with.

I was given the chance to start over. An opportunity to be free.

Kate Gallagher

The Return

The oak porch creaked slightly underfoot
Looking through the dusty panes of the old sash windows,
The murky frosted glass, barely revealing the room of dust-
Settled on table-tops and leather seats,
Like a shroud, freezing the room in a single moment. And-

The old Grandfather clock in the hallway. Still-
Ticking to the rhythm of a stopped heartbeat,
The picture frames on the mantel,
Intricate spirals of gold, tracing my finger along the frame,
Opening a window into my past.

A pair of empty armchairs facing the fire,
Noticing a bed of twigs, the ruins of a once-
Carefully crafted nest now lay broken in the hearth.
Striking a match I stared into flickering flames,
This house as much a home as those smouldering sticks.
Despite the fire,

The emptiness and coldness matching a hole in my chest.

Thomas Harley



Waiting for my enemy

Graham rocked back and forth, looking out on the family farm, the family of one, now. He remembered back to the day his wife was giving birth to his second child, a daughter this time, but neither made it, he always blamed himself since, only he was there to help so he felt he solely killed them both, not able to keep his family safe.

Drowned in his own depression, Graham never had the strength to leave his bed, he missed the feeling of having his wife next to him, but he could pretend that his beautiful Gredlan was just somewhere else, and that his daughter he never chose a name for was playing outside or sleeping soundly, just that they were both somewhere, alive. His son was forced to grow up quick after that, attending as much of the farm as he could, taking care of his grieving father through bringing in food and water, he gave up long ago of trying to get him out, or even of getting him to talk after a lot of pleading, begging, crying for anything to show his father heard him.

Then Graham noticed that his boy stopped coming in, he remembered that in the last few visits George was always coughing and it only sounded worse each time. He dragged himself out of his cold bed, onto his shaking knees and plumped his feet forward slowly, scared by how he found simply walking difficult now. He walked out, through the porch and out across the farm, it was all dead, not even any birds flew around, the earth could be dead and it wouldn't look any different, he knew that George couldn't tend it on his own, he didn't know a thing about what the farm needed.

Graham was about to head back into the house when he noticed something, a blue dot out among the dead, mud brown crops, for the first time in an awfully long time he chose to accept a truth. He ran out on his fumbling, pain racking legs, threatening to fall out from under him under this new amount of energy demanded. He reached the blue and collapsed just as his old body gave up. Sliding into the mud he fell onto George's body, withered skinny to the bone and stone dead in his over-sized blue overalls, he was reminded of his wife, seeing her face on his son's, noting the resemblance of the family and death. Disease must have gotten him, but the boy had to push himself of course, to keep just enough crop to feed his self-ish father and himself, there was no one else to do anything.

The corpse's father wailed over the body, hugging it close to him, finally accepting that his family was dead, all of them, and even if it wasn't his fault for Gredlan and his daughter, deprived of ever knowing life, he knew he caused his son to die, so early, to never know a life beyond the farm, beyond his youth. His denial to accept death only brought more, his self-centred intentions brought disaster to him and the last person he loved.

Just as this happened, as he was ready to leave the farm owner-less for good, to hopefully join his family at last again, he heard something. The flapping wings of a single black crow snapped him out of his focused crying; he looked up, still clinging tight to the limp remains. The crow landed on the boy's head, craned its neck over and pecked into George's eye. The sheer audacity of the bird shocked Graham that it felt safe to fly down and eat out the child's body in front of the father, not that it could comprehend this but it knew that a person was there, a living person, before all it took was a scarecrow to keep them away. But this crow was starved, dying like everything else on the farm that wasn't dead, it didn't have much choice, its hardship of hunger taught it to have guts.

Graham of course shooed the bird away, wishing to mourn in peace for his last moments, he wouldn't leave the boy, not for anything, he would die here by him, by starving, by freezing as the night came in, whatever it was, he felt compelled to die by his son he failed. The bird flew off, away from the farmer's swinging hand, but merely hovered above them and as Graham's head bent down again onto his son's chest to cry into, the bird landed down and continued on the eye. With the anger of a truly grieved father or a vicious warlord Graham swung at it again, chased it off before it flew way above the land and he started struggling to see it, only for it to come back, determined to find this land bit of food the farm had.

Graham felt defeated, he continued to disappoint his family even after he lost them, he was bested by a crow. He drained his anger, and instead felt something slightly better, not happy, not even anything near content, but something better than he had for the many passed months. Since half the family died, the last child left ignored before also claimed by the reaper, Graham felt he had a connection with the crow, not thinking that they were anything alike, that the crow ever did him any good, but it was the last alive thing here and by God he was tired of handing everything over to the other side.

So now, Graham sat on the wooden porch feeling the end coming and waiting for it, he quietly watched the crow peck into his son, sitting opposite him in the chair he always sat in at meals, it made a big enough hole in his stomach to eat the guts and little amount of flesh in there. Graham felt saddened by the sight, but allowing it did more good than the body being left alone would. Besides, he just wanted some company, something alive, some hope to be there before he surrendered himself to his greatest enemy.

Aaron Kearney-Keaveny

Johanna

His eyes transfixed with river's rhythms,
Solitary in his will to be.
Brown, cold water need not be felt to touch,
But encased by grass banks, travels infinitely
From a source of life, to a place of loss.

Yet he wishes for the same water
Known by two in Summer's suspended dusk.
Waiting for familiar tranquillity, in low light,
Entwined with hanging leaves,
Dancing ripples on the surface.

Now, in Winter's late morn,
He basks in the hostility,
Wistful for something escaped,
He loathes and loves the misery,
Of sitting below the weeping willow.

But pen never reaches paper,
And ink never sprawls.
He watches river's rhythms leave him behind,
While Johanna is carried and reborn.
Once his source of life,
He stays now, only for his loss.

Lili Mae Boorman



NYC

Sagging under weight of jet lags and travel bags,
Hit with smog of SUV exhausts, discarded Marlboro
fags,
An ethnic scene of seedy lights and yellow taxi cabs,
Weary bodies stumble onto pavement.
Well, onto sidewalk.

Cabdriver greets with heartfelt grunt, an apathetic
smile,
Static stream of Chevrolets and horns blare out the
first mile,
Then concrete highways lined with Trump hotels and
eager to beguile,
Past Brooklyn and turn west.
Well, make a left.

Soaring skyline emerges vast and dazes sleep swept
eyes,
Colossal buildings lost in clouds, melt into star strewn
skies,
No street corner without its hot dog cart and standard
Starbucks franchise,
Your typical cinematic cliché in a film.
Well, movie.

Harry Deacon

I am Darkness

I devour the Sun like a ravenous beast,
Your precious day, is my long-awaited feast,

The unmerciful night, with me shall stay,
While the light has taken over the saint-like day,

Together the night and I, awaken your worst fears,
We will taunt you until you break and burst into
tears,

So ignite a candle and its flame you must tend,
Or yesterday's nightmares won't be pretend.

Aleena Elsa Manoj

He

(Warning: this is a tale of love.)

Amongst the bustling stampedes, towering skyscrapers, sickly aromas of fuel that could make an anosmic
gag, impatient honks of horns from impatient distressed drivers, lived a man. Yes, just a man. Like any
other man.

This particular man, like many men, happened to be 31 years old, 5'10 and owned an impressive collection
of Marvel comic books. But what he did have, that he was sure was most unlike many men, was undeni-
ably, painfully certain, true love.

Her name is Iris.

Yes, you could call him clichéd but no, he wouldn't have listened.

To him, he loved the buzzing chatter of people filling the streets, the bravado of some of the tallest buildings
on earth, the subtle scent of coffee and sweet donuts, the lively harmony of people at work, all with unique
lives of their own.

He would smile, more often than not. Usually for no particular reason at all.

Every morning without fail, he would routinely skip down the stairs of his ratty old apartment building to the
café on the corner to get his daily requirement of coffee, but most importantly to see his Iris. Each day, he
had the pleasure of queuing between 6-10 minutes alongside plenty of New York citizens like him. When
he reached the top of the line and saw her, he would be reminded that he would have waited patiently for a
millennium all the same.

He would have given up all of the most valuable currency for her - time.

He would reach that coffee stained, withered, and spent piece of table top that was barely an excuse for
a counter. But beyond it was Iris. That was all that mattered to him. She was an Americano - one cream,
two sugars. But had eyes and hair of the richest espresso. She wore little makeup, if any. But her soft skin,
gentle eyes and button nose were already so beautiful. Like a canvas so finely crafted, an artist would have
no choice but to set down his brush.

Their love was subtle yet so prominent. With each little leaf she drew in his cappuccino, he knew. Each time
she would say have a good day, he knew her silken voice actually said 'I love you too'. She would stamp
his loyalty card every day and when he reached his 'free coffee', it was almost like an expression that they
would always be with each other.

One day, a day like any other, he crossed the same busy street of Manhattan to get to the all familiar café
on the corner. In one moment, he ran out into the traffic and in the next, he heard an urgent honk. His life
ended then. And with it, his love.

An empty smile was left stiff on his face. But maybe you couldn't call it a smile, when there was no life left
behind his eyes.

In a mere twenty minutes, a call had been made, the ambulance had arrived, and his body cursorily exam-
ined and pronounced dead, then quickly swept up into the back. It was very efficient. In fact, only twenty
minutes after the accident, no New Yorker would look twice at the spot where a human being had shortly
before lost his life.

A medic searched his broken body for any mark of his existence, for any sign that he had lived a life. He
was unsuccessful, aside from the well-kept loyalty card to the coffee shop nearby. Nevertheless, follow-
ing protocol, he had to do his best to find a name to match the face, so he made his way into the little café
on the corner and spotted a waitress standing behind a filthy counter top. Her face was simple and plain
- not particularly pretty. He strode to the top of the queue and produced the loyalty card in front of her tired
eyes, interrupting a customer's order. She studied the card before her brow furrowed and she looked at the
medic, puzzled.

"Excuse me, miss. I'm afraid a man was knocked down just now. He had this on him so I guess he comes
here pretty often. If you don't mind coming out to take a look?"

Reluctantly, she agreed.

The medic led her across a street full of people oblivious to what had just happened, and into the back of
the ambulance, where he lay covered by a white sheet. They both stood opposite him in silence, yet the
suspense of discovering who the man was and the fear of the waitress, dreading who he might be, was
deafening. He slowly drew back the white sheet to reveal a young man's dull expression.

She let out a sigh. A sigh of relief.

"Well, do you know him?"

She looked up at the medic. "No." she said, "I don't know who he is. And I don't know his name." With that,
she left him and hurried across the street and went back to drawing another little leaf in another cappuc-
cino. Her normal day resumed.

The loyalty card slipped out of the medic's hand and blew away in the wind.

And so, the death report was filed. "Name: Unknown."



Freedom

The wind rippled through the ripe wheat and I prayed that it wouldn't blow in my direction. Four days had passed since I escaped from my master and I was already being hunted. I lay concealed in the darkness by a juniper tree as the trackers scanned the fields for me. They had pieces of material in their hands which they refreshed the minds of the dogs with every once in a while.

I knew I couldn't stay here, not with my scent in the nostrils of the hounds. Eyes never leaving my pursuers, I sunk into the tall grass, edging towards the forest. Once I was there I could run towards the river. Bit by bit, I glided away. They soon became silhouettes against the burning sky. The pines were almost in throwing distance. I took my eyes off my footing to take on last glance, but I fell down a sharp ledge, breaking twig after twig as I tumbled.

I didn't even hesitate to look behind me. As gruff barks shook the earth, I dashed through the pines towards the crashing of the river. Mist began to envelop my surroundings. Struggling to breathe from lack of water, I paced onwards through the endless woodland. The scraping of claws against the floor edged me onwards. As the panting of the dogs got louder, fear seized me tighter. If I was caught I could end up losing my life, depending on what mood my master was in.

I finally reached the river. Freedom lay on the other side; however, I had never been taught how to swim. I had spent every moment of my life as someone's property, the fresh marks of chains on my wrists to prove it. Why would I know how to swim?

I panicked as the dogs burst from the pine needles and dived straight into the swirling torrents. As my body was pulled back and forth and launched against boulders, I told myself that at least I would be free of my previous life after this. Gagging for air, I pulled my head above the surface. Sure I had travelled far enough down the river to have escaped, I hauled myself to what I assumed was the other side of the river. I was finally free.

As the sun disappeared, a dark shadow fell over me. I looked up and froze. Cuffs in hand, my former master towered over me, and all of a sudden freedom became fiction again.

Elvi Wilson



Suddenly (and gradually)

And they walk. The boy and the girl. Together, mostly. Now anyways. For the girl, it used to be a solitary thing. For the boy, he'd always wanted company, but never really had it. She'd been trying to get away from everything, he'd tried to find a new everything. It first started by accident. They walk, almost side by side, not quite noticing one another, until suddenly and gradually they have fallen into step with each other and they've turned the same corner and all the street is quiet but for a cat knocking over something somewhere nearby. And they both turn, incline their heads in acknowledgement of one another, and continue walking as before. The girl is in her own head, barely having registered the boy. The boy does not yet see this is the company he has been craving. They wander for hours with time, neither one of them really has to spare, not noticing it passing. It's an aimless walking, but the kind that has a point. Then suddenly each is alone again, noticing it suddenly and gradually, stopping and peering round for a glimpse of the other to find that they have long since parted ways.

That was the first time.

The second time isn't for weeks, if not months, but it does happen. The boy has been unknowingly searching for the girl, barely remembering her face, but knowing the rhythm of her walk, while the girl, for the first time, has felt alone as she walks. Despite their willingness to find one another, it once again descends upon them both, and suddenly and gradually they have found one another again. In a different neighbourhood, a different hour, but the same nonetheless. They nod their heads, perhaps not even making eye contact, and continue walking, weaving in then out, closer together, further apart, neither noticing.

Then, suddenly and gradually, it happens more often. Little by little and all at once, they are spending hours a day together, never talking, appreciating one another only with the lost feeling that comes with the lack of the other's presence. Then things develop - if you can call it that. They start to lift their hands in greeting, maybe occasionally chuckling at the author's inability to walk. Little things. They grow comfortable, not just in themselves while with the other, but in their being together.

It's near summer, and the boy is walking, when he hears the girl. He looks up, expecting perhaps a smile, but her head is down, her hands are clenched. He faces back and continues on, not knowing what to do. She snuffles. He is wondering if he should say something, when her footsteps stop. He turns, to find that she herself has also in fact stopped. He moves back, carefully, till he is face to face with her. It strikes him they have never said a word to each other, and he wonders, if this is the time to start. He cautiously places a hand on her shoulder, her head bent, her feet rooted to the ground, almost shaking, quivering. He looks at her, and for a split second thinks it might be ok, before she crumples. He worries that not only will he have to deal with her, but that it might not be adequate. She moves around him and strides on ahead, seemingly fine. His brow furrows in confusion. Should he follow? Up ahead, she spins on her heel and waits. He starts towards her, slowly. When he reaches her, she spins again and things are back to normal.

The leaves are falling on the trees, and she's walking, when she hears him, but he's running, running till he finds her, whereupon he slows to her pace. After a time, they come to the top of a slope. He grins at her before speeding up, sprinting, flying down. She laughs, then follows, attempting to let go, succeeding, for a brief moment.

It's cold, and he's got a new coat today. The two of them are hunched and walking briskly, as if they have somewhere to be. And she does, as it turns out. She breaks off and walks away, leaving him alone, the air somehow less crisp now.

It's not getting warmer yet, but the birds think it is, and she walks down through a mass of trees littered with nests. She walks expectantly, simultaneously moving and waiting. He isn't there.

It's drizzling, yet he saunters, hood up. He's in his own thoughts while on the lookout for her, never looking up, but acutely aware of his surroundings. He can't stay out for long, given the weather.

It's lashing, and she's remained relatively dry under her umbrella. She started out almost in anticipation, but gradually forgets and retreats back into her own mind. She turns a corner as he follows behind, neither aware of the others presence. He turns the other way, nearly no longer craving her company.

He's stopped walking so much, no longer feeling it worth anything. She's stopped walking as often, no longer thinking it helps anything, really. The boy lacks company, something he hasn't really felt the need for recently, but does now. The girl has too much of that, needing time to be more alone, somehow.

And so he walks, and she walks, each with other things on their mind, not quite noticing each other, until suddenly and gradually they've fallen into step with one another and they've looked up to see each other, equally shocked and comforted. And they walk.

Molly Lambton

Petals on a wet, black bough

Miles from the looming skyscrapers of Chicago, where the lights aren't as bright and the night isn't as lively, an empty project street stood quietly beneath the glow of the city. The yellow flicker of the streetlights licked and danced down the long lonely road, pockets of respite from the solemn night. Light trickled out from between curtains, barely noticeable, trying not to stand out in the deep blackness. The broken tarmac on the road was still warm from the scorching heat of the day, and it gave off the strong smell of petrol and rubber. As the moon slowly rose in the sky, the earth began to rapidly lose its heat, and the night became cold. Farther away from the city, a wreck of a car with the windows smashed and tires lone gone sat on the corner under a streetlight. It gained a strange quality under the dim light, glowing with the same radiance as a cloud at sunset giving off its final glorious presence in the world. Occasionally, groups of boys walked down the road in loose formation. They would duck in and out of the alleyways between the project houses, laughing, excited with their newfound freedom. After they passed on through the street, the night went quiet again. Through this silence, groups of men walked straight faced, eyes fixed ahead with purpose, shoulders heavy with burden. A dog barked briefly, piercing through the night, but stopped abruptly. A baby cried softly from a house. A siren sounded faintly far away.

Car horns and mechanical revving could be heard coming from the distant skyscrapers. From here, the city seemed to work as a single organism rather than a group of individuals. The city sounds seemed to come from the skyscrapers themselves, giving context to their looming figures.

A man tripped and fell out of the darkness and landed under the dim yellow of a streetlight, falling with the scraping sound of grit on concrete. He stayed down for several moments, hands and knees on the pavement and head hung low. He slowly began to get up, rigidly, as if it caused him great pain to do so. He stood up fully, head still hung low, and his dim lit figure was contrasted by the dark shadow he cast downwards. As he brought his hands up to rub his face he felt a sting run through his palm. He dropped his arms and noticed that he had cut his left hand on glass. He inspected the cool dark trickle of blood with little interest.

His nose was broken. Bent to one side, it caused him to breathe in a deep raspy rhythm as he walked from light to light with purposeful aimlessness. He stopped between two lights and doubled over in the dark, coughing violently. It was a deep cough, ripping at his throat and causing him to contort his chest painfully. He spat down on his black boots and stayed hunched over once again. The blocks were so indistinguishable that he had no idea how far he had come. Nothing stood out on the street; no parks for children to go to in the summer, no house painted in a bright shade of some colour. Even the graffiti looked the same on all the houses, expressionless in its pattern. The soft sounds were faint and monotonous. He stood listening to himself breathe in the dark for some time.

A sound was rising from the central city. Very faintly, the unmistakable clamour of many voices rose above the crisp air, maybe getting louder or maybe getting closer. It took on the style of a single entity. One deep formless chant made the backbone, following a simple potent rhythm. Soft cries and loud shouts wrapped around this backbone and made the flesh, giving a human quality to an otherwise foreign sound. It resonated in his chest, dancing around his heart. It seemed to have no effect on him. He continued walking away from the city, vaguely considering his surroundings. His neck was sore. He cracked it from side to side and reached up to undo the strap on his helmet. It fell off behind him, landing perfectly in the middle of the circular patch of light from a lamp and stayed there motionless.

He looked up at the sky. The layers of smog and light pollution over the city provided a dim glow, centred on the far off skyscrapers. No stars were visible, only the moon, half full and directly in front of him. He continued to walk towards it, away from the city and away from the shouting. It was not bright, but being the only thing in the sky it took centre stage, soaking in the lime light and drawing the eye towards it. As he watched it, a helicopter flew in front of his view temporarily. It was headed towards the city, searchlight on. It made him feel tired. He loosened the straps on his bulletproof vest and took it off his shoulders. He held it in his hands and inspected the grooves with his fingers while he walked. Printed on the back were the words "Chicago Police Department". He read them softly to himself, hesitated, and then tossed the jacket.

His left hand was cold now. He tried to move the fingers and found that they were stiff and frozen. The sound from the city was growing louder, and he could just about distinguish another separate set of voices. It was led by one man barking orders. It was barely audible underneath the loud chanting sound. The chanting was growing fiercer as it grew louder, its rhythm going faster, its flesh getting thicker. He looked up at the moon and kept walking towards it.

As he walked, a group of men came out of an alleyway about fifty meters ahead of him. Their heads were covered by hoods and they carried bats and knives. They walked down the centre of the street, shouting angrily, trying to join in with the hundreds of people shouting from the centre of the city. They were too

preoccupied with heading towards the city to notice the man walking down the sidewalk. He may have noticed them but did not regard them. He kept his eyes fixed slackly on the moon. The group of men only saw him when he was very close. One of the figures stopped abruptly and shouted at the man, pointing at him with his hand to show the others. The man was sauntering under a streetlight ten meters away, still headed away from the city. They walked towards him, eyeing his CPD uniform and gripping their weapons. One man pulled out a gun, a silver metal .22 with rust in the cracks. They came up on him quickly. The man stopped and his gaze found the group. He was standing under a streetlight. They were very close to him now. They approached slower, weapons braced, spreading out to try and surround him. They stopped very close to him and began to shout with the same intensity as guard dogs pulling at their chains. All of their built up anger came out in a rapid stream of obscenities. They shouted at the uniform and shouted at the man. So much anger came out of their hearts as they shouted from the edge of the light around the lamp. One man broke the line, the man with the gun, and started towards the officer. He went so close to the officer that their faces almost touched and he spat out all of the generic anger that he could possibly come up with. He put his gun to the side of the officer's head and looked at him, pandering to the other men. He examined the officer, and saw for the first time his broken nose and his colourless hand and his tattered uniform. And then he looked down into the empty and cold eyes of the officer.

His demeanour of hate subsided, and he backed away; for he was afraid of what he saw.

The men stood awkwardly, shuffling their feet and loosening their grips on their weapons. The man with the gun took one last look at the officer before darting off in the direction of the riot. The other men soon followed, but they did not shout any more.

The man gazed vacantly at the spot where the group of men had stood a few moments ago. He slowly turned his head on its side and then looked up at the moon again. He undid the badge pinned to his chest and turned it over in his hand. He looked at it, trying to take in all the intricate features and metalwork. But he did not throw it away. He looked at it longer, and a deep fiery rage filled his heart. He clenched it hard in his hand and ground his teeth together

as the anger rushed to his head. He pinned the badge back to his chest. The man turned around and walked back the way he came, disappearing out from the light and into the darkness.

Gavin McDaid



Unexpected Discomfort

This pool contains salt water! I wonder how many people back in Ireland can say that they've swum in a heated outdoor salted pool, with a view of the Alps. Not that many, I'm sure. So yeah my family and I are on a ski holiday. We've taken a day off from skiing to go to the local spa and let me tell you something, I needed this. Skiing is not my forte and after three days of tumbling down steep and icy slopes, this sure comes as a relief for my bruised bones. I gaze out onto the Alps. I can just about make out skiers and snowboarders, speeding down the mountains. I'm much happier where I am now. It's a glorious day, the sun is beating down. It's the middle of March; the ski season is at its end. Already some of the snow is melting away. It's so refreshing being able to breathe in the cool, fresh, Austrian air while also being able to relax in hot water instead of trying to go down a mountain with planks of fibreglass on your feet. I lean on to the side of the pool and focus on the skiers in the distance, zooming down the Alps. I can't help but feel all smug and content that today I'm not one of them. Suddenly, just as I tear my eyes away from the Alps, the most extraordinary sensation rushes through my body. I lose my sense of touch. Everything goes dark. I'm not in the water any more. It's as if I've disintegrated. I can't breathe, my eyeballs are being forced back into my skull, and I seem to be moving fast in all directions. My ear drums begin pounding with pain. Seconds go by until finally it stops. I start shivering, at first I don't know if it's because I'm scared or cold, possibly both. I quickly miss the hot salted water. My fear helps me forget this unimaginable coldness. Why am I so cold?! It's only as I take a moment to notice my surrounding when that question is quickly answered. I'm wearing nothing but my swimming shorts and instead of my view being up at the Alps it's now down at the valley. I don't think I can be too smug any more. The sun is shining and there's not a cloud in the sky. That doesn't really help when you're standing ten thousand feet high on top a snowy mountain. I realise that I'm at the exact point which I was looking at back at the pool. There are people in heavy ski gear all around me and guess what, they're skiing. It doesn't take them long to notice this crazy lunatic. One dude with a British accent stops next to me and says "Ha, um ok I don't think... eh yeah um whatever, ok" I just look back at him, too cold and freaked out to respond. He chuckles and skis away. Other skiers come up to me and say different things. I think it's mostly negative stuff, but I'm too focused on trying not to pass out to register what exactly it is I'm being told. I'm cold. I try focusing my mind on being back in the pool, hoping against hope I'll get that weird sensation again. I give up after trying for about two minutes. It's as if some greater force like God or someone is punishing me for being too comfortable. I use all my strength to muster up the ability to think about how I'm going to resolve this problem. It looks like I'm at the top of a black slope. I never would have tried one of these when I had skis; I don't think going down it without skis would be any easier. I think my best bet of getting out of this miserable situation would be to make my way over to where the chair lift ends. I believe there's usually a guy there who supervises the thing. Moving takes great effort; every time I take a step my feet undergo what could be obscene methods of torture. As I come closer to the chair lift I see a guy there working the lift. I approach him. He looks at me oddly. He then starts blabbering in a foreign language, Austrian I presume. After some moments of listening to the guy I interrupt and ask, in stammering English, if he can help me. After a long pause where his bewildered expression still does not ease, he takes out a phone. Hopefully he's calling for help. After he hangs up he leads me into a prefab cubicle where the controls for the ski lift are. After about five minutes of waiting, in an environment that isn't freezing, to my delight I see one of those ski patrol vehicles coming up the slope. Yes! I'm saved. The rescue man offers me a blanket and I hop onto the back seat. Now that I'm slightly warmer, other emotions other than fear pop up in my head. Embarrassment, yeah this whole phenomenon has been as humiliating as hell. There's no doubt about that. But I'm also full of relief; I could have frozen to death up there. There's still one unanswered question. Why am in the pool one moment and at the top of a ski resort the next? I don't know, but I don't think I'll be rushing back to Austria any time soon.

Matt McCann

The Land of Grass and Dirt

The privilege of responsibility bestowed in my soul.
Strong is the bond that shows me the way.
I am the undead horse.
Guide me.

Odysseus, Aeneas, we venture forth.
My lineage in creation.
Trailing and wandering.
Amidst the land of grass and dirt.

I walk upon the land, burdened by the vessel that bares me.
Trampled and eventually scarred, then replaced.
However duty calls and honour demands.
A slave and a tool for a purpose.

Can I break from the step.
Walk my own walk
Am I food for worms
To be carbon dated in a thousand years.

Ben McConkey

Rejection and Redemption

In that moment, he was rejected. Scorned.
He was marked, branded. His world view changed.
Care for others turned to apathy, then hatred.
His world was razed, turned to ash.
Men tend to want to imprint their world view on others.
He wanted the world in flames.
Every love would be bittersweet.
Every memory tinged with despair.
Every friend would be a threat.
Trust in others turned to paranoia.
Endless cycles of suspicions and accusations.
Hoping to break apart other loves.
He would only find pleasure in other's pain.
Constant self-hatred and loathing.
Wishing to break the patterns.
To rise above such petty nonsense.
It would be aeons before he healed.
Before he realised he caused this.
He triggered his downfall.

Dylan Morris



Langa

Within Cape Town there's a poor community known as Langa, which is located by the main motorway near the Cape Town airport. As you can imagine the township is visible to the public eye because of its location. Some years ago, when I was a teenager, I was lucky enough to tour Langa and have a first-hand experience of the reality of shantytowns. I have to admit that seeing the extreme poverty for myself was surreal. Langa is an area of roughly two square kilometres, where more than 200,000 people are expected to live. Within Langa there are three housing categories: lower, middle and upper class. The lower class build their own homes out of any scraps of wood or metal they can find. I remember vividly the inside of one of the shacks. It had three small rooms including a living room space, a kitchen that also served as a bedroom for the father and a bedroom for the daughter. There were two televisions in this shack, which surprised me. In addition there were no toilets within their homes so they all share small outhouses, which they have to walk to. Their water is collected from a hose in the community and carried by jugs to their shack. They clean themselves by bathing in plastic tubs, which they store in their homes. In a way the lower class, living in shacks, can have a feeling of self-pride in living in a structure that they built themselves.

Once you step out of the shack you find yourself in a dirty, muddy alley with cramped spaces for children to run around, men gathered in groups and women brewing local beer in filthy barrels. The smell is of burning wood was very strong. The overall stench of uncleanness was overwhelming. Seeing a small child drink a bottle of murky water was shocking and sad.

The middle class is accommodated in apartments provided by the government. Although they sound more luxurious, they're not. The apartments are made up of small rooms with one window in each room but three families share one room. Each family has their own single bed and their possessions are all kept on a shelf above their bed. The adults share the bed and if they have children they have to sleep on the dirty floor. There are up to 16 families in each apartment sharing a small cooking area with a couple of pots and no real living room area to sit. I was shocked to think of how these families could endure such desolation. Finally the upper class live on their own property in one-story houses. These are the most fortunate of Langa because they can afford their own living space on private property, although they are very small and still very poor. The wealthiest of the upper class have small grassy areas next to their front driveway. The government provides free schooling to the children of Langa. The schools teach children in junior and senior school, but access to university is not free. This makes it impossible for the poor people of Langa to send their children to university. The schooling provided by the government is very basic, meaning that they're not receiving high standards of education.

On my trip I visited children at a community kitchen and brought them stationary such as colouring books, pens and pencils. The kids all gathered around me and I could feel the excitement and curiosity of the children. They all lined up in an orderly, quiet fashion and they weren't rude or pushy. When I handed each child a colouring book and pen, they thanked me. Their smiles and respect gave me a new feeling of joy I had never experienced before. It was amazing to see their eyes light up at something so simple to us, but it meant the world to them.

Throughout my journey in Langa I realised that the friendliness of the people kept the community together. There were no strangers and people seemed generally content because they didn't know a better life than their own. Families were also interconnected within the different classes and everyone seemed to be so dependent on each other. I saw hope and beauty in a world where most people would just see poverty and sorrow. Within this poor community there is a unique culture, colourful buildings and artwork, and many smiling faces. That to me is something truly special and I am glad to have witnessed the inner parts of Langa.

Thinking about this and how little has changed I realise how fortunate I am to live in a world that has given me so much. However the smiles of the children were universal and remain with me. It gives me hope.

Emma Morin

Night time

The leaves fall from the trees that stand outside
It is dark, with no light known to mankind
Expect from the light from the table beside
You look up and see the sky intertwined
In the place you and i call far far way
The stars look like sequins on a black dress
Which dance while the music is underplay
We should call this the brilliant star express

The owls twit looking for mice which hurry
Unknowing the danger that is coming
The owl lifts his head to see mice scurry
Pounces knowing night time is still running
Soon though the sun will rise and will flourish
The trees blossom and the land will nourish

Katie Kellett



Cat Food

Disclaimer: This fictional story is based off of an elderly Australian couple that were my neighbours and close family friends in Sydney years ago. The following story is my own interpretation of their last years together. It is told in excerpts separated into the three stages of Alzheimer's.

FIRST STAGE:

Heather had always been a forgetful person.

Starting from her twenties, she often forgot what she was going to say and things she planned to buy at the grocery store even after writing them down on a list.

So it came as no surprise when she lost her wedding ring at age eighty-one. After fifty-seven years of marriage, Lindsay had grown used to her forgetful nature. She felt awfully guilty for losing something so valuable, of such significance, but Lindsay reassured her that they would find it. In the meantime, he bought her a rose gold ring as a substitute after she told him her hand felt too light without it on. That, and the fact that the tan line on her ring finger did not look classy.

Heather was, after all, a very classy woman.

Lindsay and Heather loved dinner parties. They loved having people over in the presence of rich wine, rich food, and rich laughter.

They had a system of sorts. Heather was responsible for organizing the event while Lindsay was responsible for the food. On one particular night, Lindsay had made enough to feed four just as dinner time came around.

Their guests never showed. It turned out that Heather never got around to calling them up even though she was almost certain she had. Lindsay and Heather ended up going on an evening picnic with too much food. It was a warm summer evening.

SECOND STAGE:

Their fifty-eighth anniversary was the first one Heather ever forgot.

That morning, Heather woke up incoherent. She had no recollection of what day it was.

Every anniversary, they would go to the same restaurant by the seaside. The restaurant in which they had their first date. Food there was not necessarily the finest, but the memories associated with it were more than enough to make up for the occasional lack of seasoning. Wasn't that what the salt and pepper shakers were there for, anyway?

Their tradition was broken for the first time that afternoon.

Lindsay and Heather spent their fifty-eighth anniversary in the hospital. Heather underwent a complete medical assessment.

At 7:09 pm, she was diagnosed with moderate Alzheimer's.

Lindsay and Heather were a couple that never fought. They disagreed, they debated, they bantered, they teased, but no, they never fought.

Heather took pride in her independent nature. She liked taking care of others, not being taken care of.

With her diagnosis came Lindsay's fretting. He refused to let her lift a finger around the house, not even to feed their beloved (and fat) cat, Shiba.

Shiba was a fat cat for various reasons. Although she was both lazy and spoiled, the most prominent explanation was that she was fed fresh beef on a daily basis. Since Lindsay and Heather were both retired and had no children, they had a lot of time and money to spare.

On the day that they fought, Heather wanted to head over to the luxurious shopping centre where they bought Shiba's food every day, but alone. Lindsay insisted that she let him at least drive her, even though it was well within a walking distance.

Lindsay waited anxiously for her to return home. After half an hour, he went out to search for her. An hour later, he called the police.

She was found in front of a rose garden about 30 kilometres away from the shopping centre with a small bag of beef that had gone bad in the warm weather.

She cried and apologized and told him she couldn't remember where they lived.

Heather decided that she wanted to redecorate their apartment as she really had nothing to do with all her time.

Lindsay was more than supportive of her taking on more hobbies that would hopefully improve her concentration.

He drove her around town to various vintage boutiques where she picked out wooden bedside tables and decor and a dining table with matching chairs. Delivery arrangements were made and they headed off home.

Heather fell asleep on the way. In truth, Lindsay had noticed a change in her sleeping habits but didn't want to bring it up. She often slept well into the day and stayed up during the night.

When they arrived, Lindsay cut off the ignition and reached over to shake Heather awake.

For a moment she said nothing and simply stared. Then— "Lindsay, darling, where are we heading off to?"

THIRD STAGE:

Lindsay made the decision to place Heather in a residential home when he realized he was unable to take care of her. He was eighty-four himself and could not watch over her all day long.

She made plenty of friends at the centre. Heather had always been a friendly and talkative person.

As time went by, Heather's memories of her home, her past, her cat, and even Lindsay began to fade.

Lindsay visited every day, bringing gifts and clothes and kisses, but even those weren't enough to make her remember him.

She would tell her friends at the centre that she didn't understand why that man visited her every day, or why he was so especially kind. Sometimes she would ask him herself, ask him who he was and why he was so generous.

When that happened, and it did often, Lindsay would smile and say, "My name is Lindsay Payne and I am your husband. It's a pleasure to meet you again."

By the next day she would have forgotten their conversation.

On the rare days that she did remember him, she would grab his sleeve and stare into his eyes. Then, almost in disbelief, "Are you Lindsay? Are you my Lin?"

These rare instances were what encouraged Lindsay to bring her home. He thought that if she was home at the apartment, around him and Shiba, maybe, just maybe, she would recover some memories.

She also asked him what their cat's name was, unaware of the fact that she had picked it out.

Within a week's time, she had grown withdrawn and irritable. She asked him to let her go home, saying that the apartment felt foreign and alien to her. Lindsay tried to tell that the apartment was her home. It had been for decades.

On the following Monday, he drove her back to the home.

Heather's condition deteriorated rapidly. She was unable to go to the bathroom by herself. She required assistance with eating and walking and dressing.

During one of his visits, Lindsay sat stroking Heather's hand and watching the bright afternoon sunlight glint off of her rose gold ring. He was still unable to find the original.

"Happy anniversary, Lin."

It wasn't their anniversary but he hadn't the heart to tell her that.

She insisted on going to the restaurant by the seaside.

During dinner, he told her that the food was bland as always with a secretive smile. She laughed that that was what the salt and pepper shakers were there for. Heather proceeded to help him season his food, hands violently shaking, but insisted on it all the same. After she finished, she picked them up again and seasoned his dish some more, having forgotten what she just did. Lindsay said nothing.

After dinner, they went for slow stroll on the broad walk, the sun bright and orange and dying. Lindsay thought to himself how much he missed her. How awfully much he missed his Heather.

When he brought her back to the centre, he held her hands and kissed her forehead and—

"What is your name?"

"My name is Lindsay Payne and I am your husband. It's a pleasure to meet you again."

On a spring morning in October, Lindsay arrived at the centre with flowers and tea cakes, to find that Heather had passed away in her sleep earlier that day.

She was eighty-six.

At home, Shiba lay on Lindsay's bed and patiently awaited his return.

Empire State of Mind

“39th and 3rd please,” my dad said as we hopped into a cab at JFK airport. After what seemed like years, another adventure was finally beginning. I was a nine year old who had no idea what she was about to experience. The only information I had about America came from badly written TV that I had watched way too much of. I remember looking outside my window and watching blur after blur of cars speed past. Suddenly, the Brooklyn Bridge obscured my vision. It stretched across the shimmering East River, enticing people to venture into Manhattan. Its metal support beams weaved across the horizon. And then I saw it. In between those metal beams, I caught glimpses of my new home. Glass Buildings appeared to grow out of the ground- reflecting the sunlight right off them and bouncing it back into my eyes. I know, my description of the city is romanticised. But I was 9, and to me, I had just discovered Atlantis.

Once we'd reached the outskirts of the City, we had to go underground in order to enter Manhattan. The Lincoln Tunnel seemed to devour the road, and we were plunged into momentary darkness as the sky above disappeared. It took a while for my eyesight to adjust but once it had, I saw flickers of orange lights. The cab driver's window was open, and so I was unfortunate enough to be blasted with the lovely scent of rubber, petrol and freedom. It was the land of the free after all...After what seemed like hours, we emerged from below ground. At first, my sight was obscured by smoke that emanated from manholes in the road. All around me were buildings, yellow taxi cabs and people walking their dogs. The sun streamed through the windows and the scent of heat wafted in, filling the car slowly. The noise didn't bother me; gradually I grew used to it. There were nights where the city seemed to be alive and sounds of laughter, traffic and sirens, floated up 52 stories to my bedroom window. Then there were nights where it was silent. A stagnant hum that eerily filled the air. Those nights were rare, and often left me feeling as though the world outside my window and disappeared.

My first day in my new school was memorable to say the least. Imagine being a 9 year old, Irish girl, with NO knowledge of American terminology or mannerisms. I walked into that classroom, and the only person I knew, was my teacher. Mr Kutner. Although he was a lovely person, when the teacher's your only friend, you deserve the nickname “new kid.”

I was made to introduce myself, and upon uttering the words “I'm from Ireland,” an American boy (who would later introduce himself as Jason), blurted out “Where's that?!” I then proceeded to show him on a map that was pinned to the wall behind us, when he gasped, clutched his hand to his clammy forehead and yelled “HOW LONG HAS THAT BEEN THERE?” If only the rest of the day had been normal... I stood out like a sore thumb when I asked to use the bathroom rather than “water closet,” and when I had no idea who Derek Jeter was. The school, although international, was where I would experience softball try-outs, the dreaded rope in P.E, and my favourite: the awkward, sweat-filled, middle school dances. Oh the days! One of my happiest memories from our life in New York took place in January 2009. New York had just been blessed with 10 feet of snow, schools were closed and the skyline was white. I woke up one fine, crisp Monday morning to discover that white enveloped the city. In the distance, buildings only 2 or 3 blocks away were a faint grey outline. I spent all day drinking spicy hot chocolate and playing “Bin Weevils” an on-line computer game. That is until my brother woke up. From then on, both of us were on the balcony. At first it had been difficult to go from a huge garden in suburban Dublin to a wrap-around balcony, but we'd adjusted. We had a huge snowball fight and built our own forts that consisted of flower pots and garden chairs. Our golden retriever Duffy decided to join in on the fun. Or at least, it was fun until he jumped up thinking a snowball was a tennis ball and swallowed it whole. He didn't want to play anymore after that...Ironically one of my best days in such a scenic city was on a day when the view, decided to sleep in.

For me, Manhattan will always be one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Its landscape is one of ever-changing beauty that has greeted thousands of Irish Immigrants over the years, which explains the foundation of “Little Ireland” (hint: that's in the Bronx). Instead of the twin towers, every September 11th, two beams of light shoot out of the ground, stretching up to the heavens. But the most beautiful view in New York for me was the one right outside my window. The Empire state building stood bang smack in the centre of my window-and with its different colours every night, it watched over me while I dreamt of her concrete jungle.



Amy Burgess

I see what you did there

This was the 12th time in one month I had heard my mother say that exact line to a doctor that looked, dressed and talked the same as all the Doctors who had preceded this one. I knew what was next, the speech.

“You would think that being over paid hundreds of thousands of euros and having all this fancy equipment, which by the way comes from my hard earned very large taxes that I pay, that you would have a solution, a notion or even a brain on that extraordinarily long neck of yours”.

Each time there was a new insult thrown on the end to spice up the speech. I must say though in this case this doctor did have an abnormally long neck.

“Sarah get your stuff we are leaving right now!” my mother barked and stormed out slamming the door on the way causing everyone on the ward to turn and look at me.

Now things ended much the same each time. My mother marches out of the hospital and has a cigarette or two. I don't leave because I'm wearing a plastic hospital gown with no back on it. The only exception being the first time in which I actually followed and learnt that hospital gowns do in fact not have a back on them. Then my mother later drives home much too fast and we do it all again the next week to the next poor doctor.

It had been one month since my perfect 20/20 vision overnight become non-existent. My once luminous and high definition world was now dim and distorted. I had a type of eye cancer that was practically unheard of. Unheard of possibly because it's twenty six letters long but also because the chances of getting it is about the same as having anatidaephobia which is the fear of being stalked by a duck.

I used to think that I had bad luck. I would plead to a higher power to let me win the raffle for the terrible prizes of board games and cheap toys or for my name to be picked out but it never was and I never won.

I was the student that teachers always saw when they turned around to see who was talking. I was the person who would walk around all day with toilet paper hanging from their trousers. I thought I was unlucky until now. I was going to go blind and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

When you get a prognosis that isn't good they make you go to a hospital counsellor. This would be fine but it's not just you who has to go it's your family too. Usually when somebody is going blind its all sad and cruel but its ok because when old people go blind they've already seen all the world they're going to see and everyone kind of comes to terms with it. When it's a teenager that's going blind though well then it's a whole different story.

It started with a lot of sobbing. It was my father. As you've already seen my mother isn't really the emotionally soft or fluffy mother you would expect in this scenario. “It's just, it's just.... Not fair” my dad sobbed into his fifth tissue. At that moment I sort of wished it were my hearing and not my sight that was going because no one needs to hear your father's voice go up that many octaves.

“Does that mean you're just going to have like holes in your head?” my sister asked. My sister didn't say this to be mean, she just wasn't the brightest bulb on the Christmas tree.

“She's having the tumours removed behind her eyes removed Laura not her eyes.” my mother said in an irritated tone in between taking puffs on the electronic cigarette that lived in her hands when she was places she couldn't have a cigarette.

“Then why is she going blind? What is she going to see?” my sister asked in the tone that I knew was building up to getting into an argument with my mother.

“Not very much I would think” I interjected with a witty attempt to lighten the mood. Only to hear a brand new wave of sobs coming from my father.

We had to sit through twelve of these sessions. Twelve sessions for my family to deal with the fact that I was going blind.

I wasn't even blind yet and already my world was completely transformed, except just not to me. My friends had various reactions. Horror that I wasn't going to be able to see the faces or bodies of the good looking guys in the movies. There was support telling me not to worry “I'll tell you if you look fat in something”. A lot of crying over the fact that I'd never seen the world or never would, that I'd never get to see them walk down the aisle or drive a car. I assured them I didn't want to see them driving a car.

My eyesight kept deteriorating in the weeks up to my operation in which I would consequently lose my sight. My falls and clumsiness became a regular and normal thing. I became of palette of bruises all different shades and sizes. I thought that I would fall apart but everyone else sort of did that for me. My mother screamed every doctor down not expecting defeat that I would lose my sight. My father might as well have bought a share in Kleenex he never stopped crying and my Sister terribly misinformed every person who asked after how I was what was wrong with me.

On the day of my operation I arrived to a room full of all my friends and family. Friends and family I hadn't seen in years hugged me and told me to just trust my hearing. I got presents so many different coloured and patterned canes it honestly hurt my eyes. My friends showed me outfits and shirtless guys and told me

not to forget. There were so many colours and pictures of sunsets, places and animals making hysterically funny faces.

When it came to goodbye my mother insisted it be casual. Just a see you later after all as she said “It's only your sight sure why do you think they created all the other senses”.

Right before I lost consciousness I tried to take in everything I saw expect all I was the bright light up above me. It struck me that this was morbid. In a way though this was a death. My friends and family had already gone through all the stages of grief and were coming out the other side. To them my sight was already dead. I started to panic. Would it even be anything at all or just oblivion? Would I still find things funny if I couldn't see them? Would people still show me things and ask for advice if I couldn't see them? I would never see the way someone looked at me, the way they laughed. I wouldn't know when someone was crying or frowning or smiling. Suddenly the weight of a thousand bricks dropped on me and I was panicking. I didn't want to never see any of these things again. I'd rather a ridiculous phobia then to never see all the things I'd never appreciated before. I was going blind and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

I awoke to smell of bleach and the faint coppery smell that I later learnt was blood.

“She's awake. Honey can you hear me it's mum?” my mother shrieked. No person on the planet could ever mistake that shriek that I had spent the last few months listening to as much as they might want to.

I tried to sit up only to bang my head on the monitor above my head and lie straight back down.

“Ugh no It's going to bruise so badly.” I whimpered to myself.

“At least you won't have to see it.” my sister remarked.

There was a pause. We all smiled. Or at least I think we did.

Claire Mooney



The Hot Apple

Based on a true story.

I did not dare to look up from the solid ground as over there across the fields, beyond the trees and in the town, bombs were falling, guns were shooting and millions of innocent people were being killed...

"Run! Go fast! The Germans are coming", my grandmother yelled. That day I thought I would die. She grabbed my little hand as fast as she could and we dashed into the forest with our neighbours following. In the dark and gloomy woods we kept hidden from the Germans for days.

Strangely enough my biggest fear was not the Germans but the farmers, Mrs and Mr Legrand...

... Having no good shoes to cover my feet or warm coat to cover my frail body, I sauntered along, the long roads of the countryside to school. If the weather was very bad I used to stop at their house to shelter myself before taking off again. On a particular cold day the LeGrands had made some lovely hot, cooked apples. To my disappointment no one offered me one, as I saw Mrs Legrand exit the room I quickly grabbed a steaming hot apple, ran away and swore to myself that I would never go back.

That night, in the forest I spotted my granny and Mrs LeGrand chatting. My grandmother never told me what it was that they were talking about.

Faraway, the sky lit up in flames reminding me of fireworks. The dreadful sound of bombs exploding especially frightened my grandmother, we were afraid that we would find our house in a million pieces just like I found my shattered porcelain doll...

... It was Christmas during World War II Santa would hopefully bring me an orange and maybe even a piece of chocolate. Through a letter my mother informed my grandmother she would be sending me a beautiful porcelain doll from Paris. Every morning I would run out and greet the postman expecting my package but by Christmas I still had not received my doll. Finally after many weeks my package arrived. With a big smile on my face I opened my present...

I was devastated; a bomb had fallen on my doll.

The following morning, I looked up from the solid ground across the fields, beyond the trees and to our little village. The Bombs had stopped, the guns were silent and we all walked slowly home.

That night at of the corner of my eye I saw my granny wipe her eyes, guessing she thought she would die that day too.

Helen Farrugia



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