

THE WINE DARK SEA

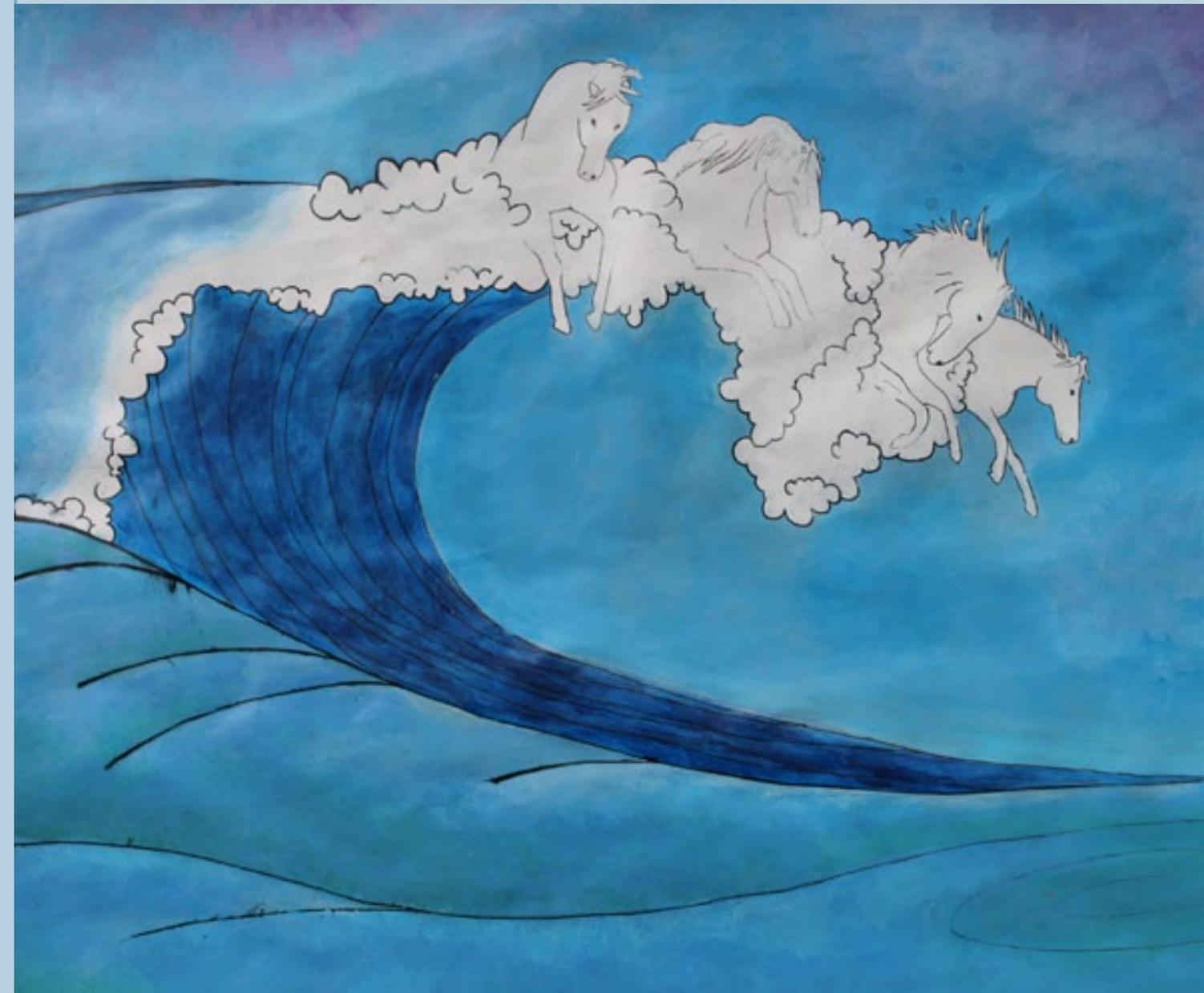


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The Wine Dark Sea

2017

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 eighteenth 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 go to the Irish department for similar dedication.

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

The box, the door, the crumbling bricks

On a day just like today I was riding my shaggy but strong horse, Joe. Out of the corner of my eye I spotted a tree that was different from the rest, and that was where it all started. There in the tree stood the box, the door, the crumbling bricks which begged me to enter. Joe looked hungry anyway, so I jumped down and tied him to an old looking tree close to a clear blue river. I heard the snap of a twig and rushed to the nearest bush. There stood a giant! It was huge, I don't know how I didn't see it before but there it was standing before me, its head hidden by the trees.

He had dirty hands the size of a large pizza box, his ragged clothes torn, greasy and brown and by the smell of things he had really bad breath. It smelled like he had just been eating rats and garlic. He bent down revealing his misshapen head with rotted, black teeth which had gaps in between some.

To my surprise he picked up the dainty little box and took out a rusty key. My heart leapt in delight when he, with some difficulty because of his size, unlocked the heavy wooden door. He stomped through the door and was gone in the blink of an eye. My head was spinning so I opened the box not realizing that the giant had taken the key. Astonishingly there WAS a key there, whether it was the same key or not was another story.

I walked through the door noticing all the crumbling bricks around me and wondering how old this place was. There, on the other side was a torturous sight, something far beyond my imagination. Right in front of my eyes were captured, innocent humans in monstrous cages. They screamed in terror while I gasped in shock. I looked around, the dark room was much bigger than I had expected. I knew I had to act quickly; it may only be a couple of minutes before the giant returned. I looked down; the old key was still in my hand. "Hmmm" I thought to myself. I reached forward and put the key in the lock. I turned it slowly hoping it wouldn't creak. The bolt slipped across and the door of the cell slid open.

"Quickly, follow me!" I whispered. I ran towards the exit as fast as my legs could carry me. Soon we were back in the woods, night had fallen and the moon was out, making the river glisten. I turned around but there was no one in sight except for my faithful horse Joe.

The box, the door, the crumbling bricks, why ever did it beg me to enter?!

Clodagh McKeown

The Stone

I threw the stone into the tumultuous waves, glancing at it while it soared through the sky, sighing profoundly as I did. My hastening heart slackens at the same moment as the ashen rock penetrates the seas surface and sends water swooping beyond the lapping waves. The stone had disappeared into the choppy ocean, but it had left its unsettling ripples behind, to grow extensively. The damage had been done, leaving a mark much greater than itself. The ripples interrupted the consistent routine of swaying waves for just a split second.

I stared down at the pebbled ground and tears trickle down my face. The smooth wet tears feel soothing against my warm skin. I stuffed my hands into my pockets and tried to grin through the tears. I found the glossy shape of a cold metal heart. My grin automatically melts away, and without thinking I whip the charm out and fling it into the deep sea, never to be seen again, and with that I wait for the spine-tingling splash. However, it doesn't come, or at least I didn't hear it, because the only sound filling my head was the voice behind me "Isabel?" the voice echoed. I didn't turn around- because I was too frightened that if I did the owner of the voice won't be there, that I would have just imagined it all. "Isabel, is that you?" the person mumbles sadly, with a depth to their voice that I hadn't heard in years. And so- perhaps because I was intrigued or maybe because I very much wanted to- I turned my back to the wine-dark sea and surprised myself with a genuine smile.

The face I saw filled my heart with hope, and rightly so. From that moment, I knew that everything would be fine, because eventually ripples fade, and once they fade they never return.

Evie Rathbone

The Runaway

My last memories of the orphanage were that it was cold wet and the teachers were mean. "Come down here Luke!!" "Coming." Hi my name is Luke, I came from St. Peters orphanage, I was adopted by a horrible foster family. I don't remember much of St. Peters but the memories I do have are bad. The reason I ended up in that dump was because 5 years ago there was a terrible accident that changed my life forever. Me and my real parents were out fishing and suddenly there was a massive wave that scattered us all in different directions and I've never heard from them since. I've got one younger brother Anthony that is spoilt, that hates me and gets everything he wants.

I think the Grimes family adopted me by accident. I'm pretty sure they were thinking that the form was for a new dog, but anyway they have me now. They haven't told me yet but I figured it out. My mum's name is Mary and my dad's name is John. "LUKE COME DOWN FOR DINNER!!!!" Fine. "Luke who were you talking to up there, was it your imaginary friend?" Mrs. Grimes said in a baby voice. Everyone laughed; they usually make fun of me. "Eat your dinner and go to bed" Mr. Grimes shouted after dinner so I went up brushed my teeth and went into my small dull room. It occurred to me at that moment that I could run away to grandma. So that night I thought should I go now or tomorrow? I decided I was sick of everyone making fun of me and I couldn't wait till tomorrow. So I grabbed my curtain jumped out and used it as a rope. When I was down I ran as fast as I could.

After about 30 minutes I finally reached my grandma's house but something was wrong there were loads of police officer's. I was sure it was this house I had come here all the time before the accident. I asked a police officer what was going on, he ignored me at first but I asked again and he told me that grandma had been robbed. But then with a shock I recognised a face, who could it be? It wasn't a police officer, I was confused but then I knew, it was my mother. I went over to her, she recognised me. She was shocked but thrilled. I asked if she knew where dad was. My mother said she had never seen him since the incident, she explained that she had just come back from an island where she had been swept up on and after 4 years someone rescued her and she had been looking for me everywhere. I was overwhelmed about what had happened through my life. I was happy that I had found one of my parents but sad that I had lost another. It was a miracle and we all lived happily ever after, well sort of.

Nathan Kennedy



A Whisper of Horses

Galloping, gliding through the air
With silky smooth fair hair
His body muscular and strong
He sings out his song as he goes along
Like a flash of light he goes by
Through the evening sky
He's part of the sky
Part of the sounds
Whispers
He's a whisper of horses
Part of the sky
One blink and he's off
Off through the sky.

Rosie Gunn



Joe's War

I sit here on my bed ,
While he's over there fighting instead,
I wonder will he ever come home,
But no he still fights on his own.

Three months later still I sit,
Wondering where he is,
Still all I hear is shells,
And children singing and ringing church bells.

Suddenly I hear the doorbell go,
Hooray! Hooray! It must be Joe,
Oh no, Oh no, Oh no it's not,
I'm very sorry but Joe's been shot.

Brian McCarthy

We should be free

Everybody should be free
Free to do things
Free to say things
Everybody should be free

Boys and girls should be free
Free to wear things
Free to think things
Boys and girls should be free

Families should be free
Free to live in their own house
Free to love people
Families should be free

The whole world should be free
Free to have food
Free to have shelter
The whole world should be free.

Ajay O'Carroll

Missing

"Mum! Dad! I'm home!" there's no reply, Clare can't believe it! She thought she would be forgiven by now. She walked across the living room to find the floorboards creaking and the once polished chairs to be covered heavily in dust. She walked up the staircase, placing one hand on the railing, she finally reached the top to find her hand fully coated in dirt and dust. Clare woke up the next morning and decided that she would ask her neighbours if there was something else she didn't know about.

"Mr. Wesley! Are you home?" Clare shouted,

"Hello Clare, it's been a while since I've seen you! I can't imagine what you're going through" He replied melancholy, Clare being her oblivious self-thought he was talking about the jet lag, "I mean I tend to fall asleep earlier but I'll get used to it in a few days"

"a few days may be an exaggeration! I don't want to sound rude but I went through something similar but you have it much worse!" Clare skipped back home, excited that she would finally see her parents, she decided that they were late back from work and left the house early this morning! Before she would go home she decided that she would take a look at the town notice board. She skimmed through the notices and found tears forming in her eyes, she screamed, shouted and wept till she was too tired.

Clare reached the park and sat down on the nearest bench, she took in every word on the notice board "Mrs. Sarah Ross, MISSING after a tragic car accident for her husband Mr. Ross." "I have no one" Clare said to herself out loud,

"I used to feel like that" whispered a lady who was sitting across the bench

"Does the misery ever end" Clare asked not bothering to look at her,

"Oh it does feel that way doesn't it? Trust me it doesn't ever fully go! You could try moving on but the best thing to do is to associate the person you lost with happiness and everything good. After a while of silence Clare told the lady everything! She didn't know her but sometimes a stranger is the best person to confide in, as you have no history or past and it doesn't matter if they judge you. The stranger said three words which changed everything! "look at me." Clare was shocked, surprised and new tears spilled her cheeks but this time they were happy tears.

"So I guess you've forgiven me for getting expelled and making you send me to boarding school?"

"No way young lady! You are not getting a pass on this one, but since your back we must celebrate with a Disney movie marathon!" she replied

"Love you mum" Clare said

"Love you too sweetie!"

Varshika Mercheri



Unique

As I stared down a well-worn track,
Everyone there travelling as a pack,
I stood and wondered where my choices lay,
Should I follow them or go my own way.

I knew where to go so I veered off the road,
Knowing I'd have to carry my own load.
I looked at the bush not believing what I was about to do,
Would it be beneficial for others, as well as me too?

I paved my way into the unknown,
Leaving behind my friends my home.
I pushed through the bush,
And was out of the rush.

I found myself living the dream,
Amazed two worlds were separated by only a small seam.
And if anyone could make this choice,
They should.

Christopher Lane

Winter

Winter is a candle,
waiting to be lit,
It tastes like hot chocolate,
in a warm child's hand,
It smells like smoke,
coming from a bright flickering fire,

Winter looks like a big white blanket,
that tucked the plants to sleep,
And sounds like snow crunching
under happy children's feet,
Winter is a big white wonderland.

Dearbhla Fewer

Scream

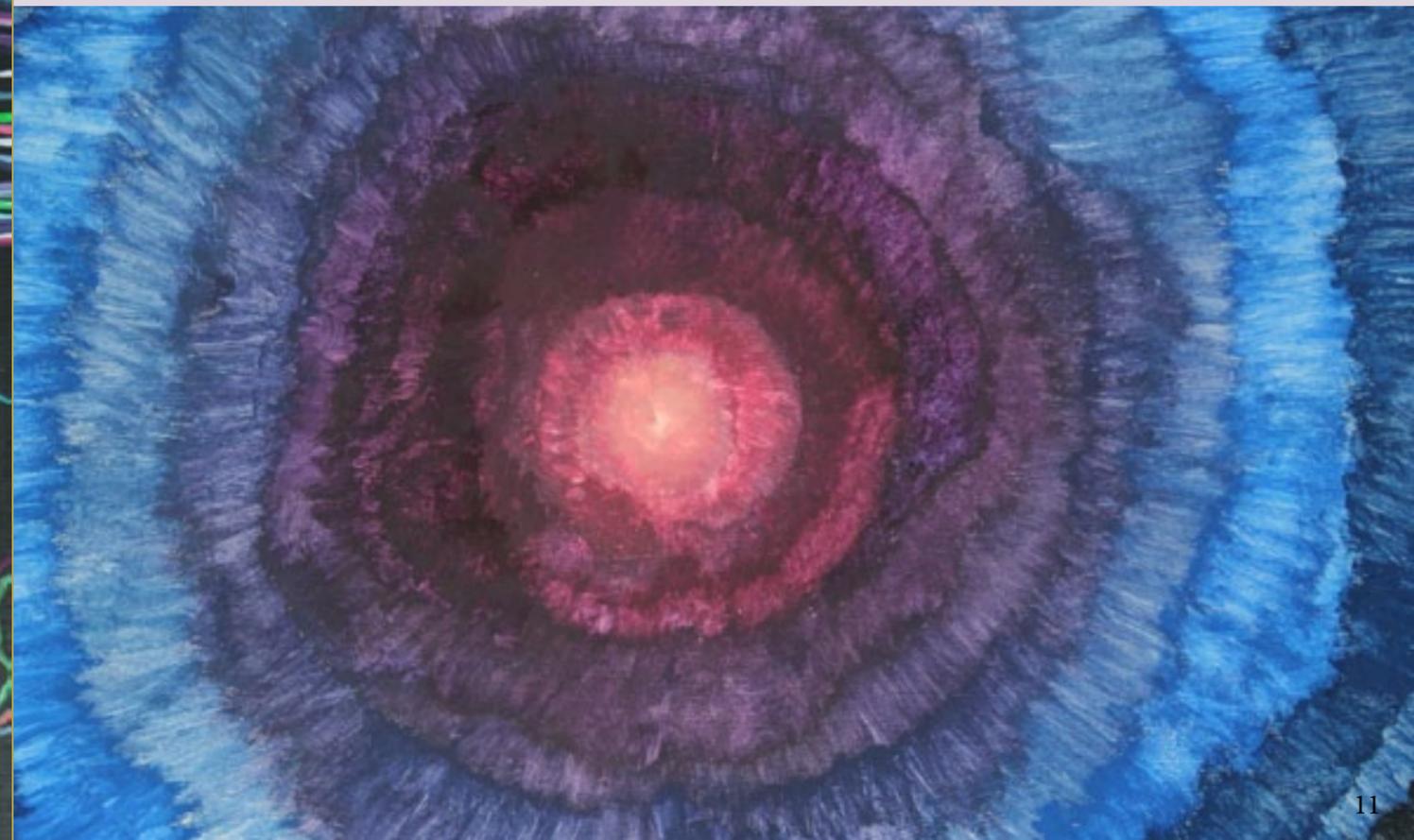
When I came back outside the strong rain had stopped. The street lights were flickering, giving just enough light to see directly in front of you. But no further. Not a single star was in the sky, only a big cold moon. Normally I love Halloween night, but this year it was different. There was a sick feeling in my stomach, like something bad was going to happen...

"CASSIE! Get in here now and help me with the twins!" I jumped with shock. Our street is just beside an estate but nobody comes on it so it was deadly silent before. I turned around. Mum was shouting out the window and I could hear the screams of my two baby sisters from the background. I sighed and trudged back inside.

I imagined what this night should have been like.. Running around the estate with Julia and Annabel, collecting tons of sweets and watching the big firework display that Mr.Conel always sets up.. But none of that was going to happen now because Julia's parents took her and her brother Callum on a surprise ski trip and Annabel is stuck going to a stupid Halloween party with her annoying aunt. Also.. "CASSIE!!" My thoughts were interrupted by mum screaming again. I ran upstairs, not wanting to make her angrier than she already was.

When I burst into the room, mum immediately dumped Sammy into my arms. She started crying even louder as I rocked her back and forth. Mum was doing the same with Jess but the louder one wailed, the other would wail even louder. It was like a screaming match. Mum was beginning to get really stressed. Her face was getting red, like she was about to explode. The whole house seemed to be shaking. The babies screamed and kicked. My head ached and just when we thought it couldn't get any louder "AAHHHHHHH-HHH" a sharp, blood-curdling scream filled the air, it's echo hung faintly and then disappeared. The entire night fell flat in silence. The cheers of children stopped, the bangs of fireworks stopped, Jess and Sammy stopped crying... all you could hear was the gentle hoot of an owl. We both just stood there completely stationery. And then the scream came again. This time closer, like the person was right at our front door. My eardrums popped. I could see the fear in mum's eyes. "wh..what was that?" she whispered clutching Jess. Before I could answer, the lights suddenly snapped off. I flicked the switch – the power was down. It was pitch black everywhere. I couldn't see out the window. My heart was racing. "Mum?", I said. No answer. "MUM?" I screamed. My eyes were adjusting to the dark. Me and Sammy were the only ones in the room. Suddenly the last scream came. It was the loudest, sharpest scream yet, like the person was right behind me.

Zoe O'Meara



Light

You know my kind, but you don't know me in particular. I am a particle of light; I travel with quintillions of others just like me through all of space, at two hundred and ninety-nine million-seven hundred and ninety-two thousand-four hundred and fifty eight miles-per-second. When we fly around the universe we bounce of stars, planets, asteroids, and even the blackness of space itself, when we do, we bounce off again in all directions, showing an imprint of what we bounced off of. Since we move so fast, time goes incredibly slow for us, in fact, it almost stops. I am a quantum mechanical wonder, I introduced myself as a particle, but really I am both a particle, and a wave, even me, one particle (or photon) of light, can exist in two places at once, and I act as if space was a soft, flat, surface, I will roll towards the "dip" made in space by the mass of a planet, and essentially, will be deflected by gravity. Every colour that exists is really just a different shade of light in what is called "the spectrum", certain transparent substances or minerals, such as, water or diamonds defragment the light into all its shades creating a rainbow. Normally this would just show the primary colours, but the edges stack to create more colours, when you see black, there is light, and colour there, but it's just lack of colour visible to us, in fact there are quadrillions of shades and colours, but many of these are more than our eyes can detect.

Different surfaces and textures split the spectrum into different colours, the chameleon can warp its skin to change colour.

Lorenzo Pollastri McLysaght



The Lost Garden

The heavy oak doors swing open slowly with a haunting creak. The old crumbling stones that make up the cobblestone path have fallen out of place over the long, hard years. The high cracked wall is lined with twisting, mangled ivy, forever clambering for the unreachable sky. Once gorgeous now untamed rose bushes and marigolds line the moss-covered pavilion. Wild, rebellious bean plants and weeds have overtaken most of the forgotten garden. A small, sad, decrepit fountain sits in the middle of the garden like a senior citizen; proud, unmoving but unsure of where he is. Depressing, dreary weeping willows sway gently in the faint breeze and not a sound can be heard but the rustling of dry, lonely grass. The air is full of pollen and has a musty, damp smell like a forgotten book. A gnarled, wizened, spiralled tree sits to the side covered in curling creepers like it's waiting, watching, for someone...or something.

Ella Van der Walde



A poem in response to the novel 'I am David'

A young man far away from home,
In a concentration camp, all-alone,
Who can he trust, which way will he go.
A stranger can help, should he say yes or no?

The young man jumped over the wire,
He didn't know the old man wasn't a liar.
It was a great challenge,
Could he manage?

He got on a boat to Italy,
He sailed all over the sea.
He met the old man,
And they made a great plan.

The young man called David,
He took some bread,
And drank some wine that was red,

He was overseeing the children playing,
Too shy to join in.
He goes over to a small girl,
Who was locked in?

Suddenly the shed went on fire,
Everyone was too scared,
But David was too fond of her,
To let her go.

The little girl's family,
Tries to find his home,
And he went on an adventure to find his home,
In the end he succeeds.

Isabella Romoli

Biography poem

Who is creative, sporty and daring
Who enjoys hugs, art and life
Who feels cosy and at home when she's in bed

Who wonders if aliens exist
And why doesn't Snoopy talk

Who fears death and growing up
Who cares about her family and friends

Who is able to cry real tears
Who dreams of being a palaeontologist and an artist
Who loves with all her heart.

Annelise Van der Walde



Garden

It was quiet, the only sound was the soft breeze, swiftly making its way through the cracks in the cobblestone path. The sun was blazing on the scorching summer's day. The lime-green grass was blowing in all directions. The huge golden fountain was streaming with cool, fresh water for the tiny animals to drink. Berries and petals of all different colours were blowing all around the bright garden. The garden smelled of fresh lavender. Apples, plums and nuts were pouring off all of the trees. There were bright, orange carrots scattered everywhere. The silent breeze started blowing dandelion seeds to comfortable new homes.

Aylin Ustuner

A cold night

The sky is dark and
The ground is white.
The world is peaceful on
This cold night.
No one around, not even a bird
For a moment, it's just
The cold and me.
I smile inside.
And I feel so free...

Antoine Van Loij



Consequences of War

(A poem based on orphan refugees during the Second World War)

You seem them walking down the street, Faceless,
nameless.
Each one with a stride so weak,
Heads down with no purpose, feeling useless.

These are the children that haven't eaten in weeks,
Judged upon because they are different, unique.
They don't buy their clothes in fancy boutiques.
They didn't ask for their life to be like this so miser-
able and bleak.

These are the children of ungodly circumstance.
Left alone, orphans of war, without a chance.
Tossed to the side with a label marked fragile,
That nobody seems to understand.

These are the children that light up the world with
their smile.
So why weren't they given the chance?
To run around, play and dance?

Instead their shipped off to big homes,
All alone.
Some are lucky other are not.
Most end up with no bed to sleep in,
Or enough food to go around.
At least they have a roof over their head, right?

These are just children.
Or did you forget?

Sarah Bulger

Cave In

The department of abnormal occurrences in the Pentagon was a large maze of corridors and tiny experi-
mental rooms full of scientific papers and photos of floating chairs and shadows with no people in front of
them that were photo shopped by people who wanted the money for submitting something helpful.
I made my way through the winding corridors searching the walls for a door that could barely be seen
through mounds of papers. As I saw and opened the door I watched a man frantically searching the desks
of research. I stood there watching him search around the room for ten minutes until he spotted me out of
the corner of his eye and twirled around shocked, but calmed down when he saw it was me. The man's
name was Ben Johnson, the head of the department had told me to work with Ben three weeks ago when
we got a strange signal of the coast of Cork. For months we've been looking for answers and now we finally
had some.

'Jack, you're just the person I'm looking for, this morning I got an envelope with the Greypoint Cave on it
and two plane tickets to a private airstrip off the coast of Dublin'.

'Do you think it's real?', I replied.

'You know the only way to find out'.

'You know I hate everything that has to do with a plane'. 'I know.'

As he said that an ear to ear grin spread across his face.

'When are we going?' I sighed.

'Actually I've just finished packing,' he replied.

Some hours late, we entered the cave, it was dark, that just about described it. As we strapped on our har-
nesses, I still felt queasy from the six hour flight to Ireland. As Ben stepped into the cave that would be the
last time I ever saw him.

'Be careful Jack, there's a big gap here'.

'OK' I called back.

One second I was walking along the ledge, the next I was lifted off my feet and the only thing I could hear
was the snap of a rope that made my heart stop.

Billy Williams



The Village

The village was a small one of about 180 people and because of this, word always spread fast, like a wild fire. The latest gossip was about a local family – a family where abuse went hand in hand with daily chores. People in the village tried to ignore it, to keep it forgotten, buried in the depths of their memories, but every now and then, it became almost impossible to turn the other way ...

It happened again one night when the neighbours, Mrs. and Mr. Ellington, a very humble and modest couple, were getting ready for bed. Mrs. Ellington was out putting the clothes on the line when she saw the shadow of two figures in the neighbour's bedroom window. She saw a raised hand and heard a sharp crack, so loud that it felt as if the noise came from someone standing right beside her. A shiver went through her body – she looked like a lost soul when she returned to the living room to be with her husband. He felt that something was wrong but Mrs Ellington remained tight-lipped and worried, as if the weight of the world was on her shoulders.

Later that week, Mr Ellington was in the local bar, having his usual Thursday drink with his friend, Mr Turner. They were close friends, almost joined at the hip, and Mr Turner was the only one Mr Ellington felt that he could trust to talk to about his wife.

"Poor thing, have you asked what was bothering her yet?" Mr Turner asked.

"Not yet, but I will after this drink", replied Mr Ellington. He stood up, his bones creaking, and collected his hat and cane from the corner of the bar.

On his way home, he was startled to see the flashing of blue lights in the distance. As he got closer to his house, he could see that there was a police car parked outside, alongside an ambulance. His stomach dropped as he saw a body being wheeled out of the neighbour's house, into the ambulance. He reached the house and saw Mrs. Ellington standing there, ashen-faced and speechless with shock. The police could get nothing out of her and Mr. Ellington had to do the talking instead, but there was nothing he could tell them. He knew that she was hiding something but it would take some time for her to tell him what it was. Darkness had fallen by the time the police and the ambulance had gone. Mr Ellington was sitting in the living room, still shocked at what had happened that day, but more concerned about what his wife had witnessed. She was sitting blank faced, staring into space.

"Darling, you must tell me what is wrong. I cannot help if you remain silent", he pleaded again and again. Slowly, softly-spoken word by softly-spoken word, Mr Ellington coaxed the true story from his wife. The weight burdening her had been what she had seen and heard in their neighbour's house that night ... and even worse, the knowledge that she could have prevented it. For it was the neighbour's son who had raised his hand to his father, it was the hammer he had brought down on his father's skull which had made the loud crack.

For too long the village had said nothing about the abuse they knew was happening in that house, but now the story had to be told. Mr Ellington picked up the phone and dialled 999 to speak to the police.

Nathan Scarlett

James Healy and the Tragedy of North King Street

On the 24th of April 1916 the Easter Rising began, and while the streets of Dublin were in a state of anarchy and looting my great grandfather James Healy was sitting in his armchair grumbling about the 'The bloody Shinnners trying to kick the owners of the companies out, All this Gaelic revival stuff is hogwash, Wont last a day not a day, His majesties army will crush them.' He then returned to the reading his paper. My great grandfather James was a Catholic, 44 years old and worked in Jameson's distillery. He was passionate about two things his work at the distillery and his family, he insisted on his children receiving every ounce of education possible and he worked nearly every waking hour to ensure that this happened.

He worked as a supervisor in Jameson's Distillery. He had worked in the distillery since 16 years of age. It was his job to supervise the distilling process when the master distillers could not and he took great pride in doing so. He had no strong opinions on the British occupation of Ireland; he did however believe that without the British landowners and business owners the economy and jobs would disappear.

Throughout his adult life he had settled into a daily routine. He would saunter along North King Street to and from his job at the distillery and on each journey he'd stop in O'Rourke's pub and buy a single ball of malt and drink it and then continue on with his day.

This daily routine would ultimately cause his untimely demise. On the fourth day of the fighting James had become sick of not being at work. And so on the 29th of April James Healy left his house, wife and children for the last time.

The fighting around North King Street had been fierce. Commandant Ned Daly's volunteers had been holding off the Staffordshire regiment for many days. When the regiment finally took the street, at the cost of many soldiers they were thirsty for revenge.

James was in O'Rourke's drinking his ball of malt and chatting with the publican Paddy Bealan when the two men heard shouting and shots coming from the street. Paddy feared for his widowed sister's and her children's lives and immediately ran up to the small apartment above the pub to take his family to the cellar below the pub, James quietly finished his malt and moseyed over to the window, drawing back the small curtain he saw men in British uniform taking men into the street and executing them he turned and grunted 'Ahh they're probably just Shinnners'. Paddy emerged from the cellar and began to close the door when a crash was heard behind them, James and paddy turned to see two British soldiers with rifles topped with bayonets. 'It's time for you Fenians to pay the price of your revolution, get up against the wall' one snarled. James and Paddy complied knowing full well their time was short. Two shots rang out and both the two bodies slumped to the floor.

In mid-May a woman sat in the front row of a Dublin courthouse eagerly awaiting the verdict the judge was to hand out, and all the time weeping into her handkerchief, beside her sat her stern faced son he too was awaiting the fateful verdict. Once the coroner ruled that the killings of Paddy Bealan and James Healy were murder it was that son who John vowed he'd make sure the British would leave Ireland or die trying. Two years later he met a man called Big Mick and 101 years later a War of Independence medal hangs proudly on the wall of my Granny's living room.

Oscar Doyle



The Morning Sky and My fallen Angel

Dust swirled around us in an orange fog as we drifted through the Arizona outback. We had a clear stretch ahead and the air around us smelled like petrol. I sat in the passenger seat, my legs swinging out of the rolled down window of the powder blue Cadillac we had stolen a couple of hundred miles back, back where people wore suits and made polite conversation. The sun was setting in the direction we were heading, casting a yellow hue over the love of my life. He slouched with one hand on the wheel, his phone buried between his shoulder and ear. His hair fell black to neck and always looked unwashed. His sallowness only amplified the circles accumulating under his eyes from the week of sleepless nights. His teeth were coffee stained, but his eyes were crystal blue and he spoke swiftly.

"If we came back now we'd be doing hard time not only for breaking and entering but technically for manslaughter, are you crazy? We're not coming back." He flicked his phone off and threw it behind his shoulder into the backseat alongside whatever small possessions we had managed to grab before we left. The goods were in the trunk.

I looked ahead to the horizon and saw the last droplets of sun leave the sky. He hadn't spoken to me directly since the city, no matter how many times I asked timidly where we were going. Despite the lack of attention he ever gave me, he had a way of making you feel like you were in the presence of someone, something special. Every day felt sanctified, beautiful. It was getting cold and my black ripped shorts were retaining any heat. I threw my denim jacket over my legs and crossed my arms, a determined effort to grab his attention. We drove on for a few miles. I counted the stars as they came and the sun disappeared. A cigarette hung loosely from his lips.

"We're almost there," He muttered, not breaking lazy eyes with the road.

"Almost where?" That was me, not breaking eyes with the side of his face.

"Our next adventure, Scout." A devilish smile interrupted his aura of complete disinterest towards me. My ears rang the sound of my name in his mouth. I smiled too, and grabbed the arm of his that was rested passively on the gear stick, holding on like it was our last adventure. For a few moments he was content with my small display of affection, but soon realised his clear headedness and shifted his arm and attention towards the wheel. I kicked my legs up onto the dashboard defiantly and tuned the radio to an aged version of Miss You by the Rolling Stones. The bassline drifted upwards into the night sky.

It was coming up to one in the morning when he spotted our next adventure. We were going 90 down the highway of complete nothingness when he swerved to left and pulled up behind an advert for whiter teeth. The moon was our only light source, and I watched through a clear bottle of vodka as it glistened. We blurred the edges of reality for the next half an hour, 'taking the edge of', he would always say. I watched in awe as he jumped on the bonnet, imitating Elvis and swaying drunkenly. He played with my hair and told me how I was just like the stars. He was beyond intoxicated; I was terrifyingly intoxicated by him. We lay in the car with the music turned louder, drowning out any thoughts left.

"It's time," he said, staring up at the sky, as he erupted with laughter.

"Time for what?" I shifted to face him, but his eyes were fixed on the sky.

"Why do you ask so many god damn questions?" The laughter was gone. He jolted into a cross-legged position on the leather car seat. I promptly did the same. He grabbed the balaclava that hung around my neck and harshly tugged it up to cover my mouth. He did the same with his.

"No, you said-" I muffled frantically through my balaclava. We were done with this. We were going to get away and live together and be fine and be normal. He was going to love me.

His mind was too far gone to entertain me. I saw lightning in his eyes as we faced each other and he outlined what my role was, and what he was going to do. He looked at danger the way I looked at him.

Suddenly he was up and jumping out of the Cadillac like an electric shock. I'd have gone blind rather than let him down. I followed, my suede boots kicking orange dust behind me. He walked a few steps ahead of me, across the highway, without looking, and into the harsh lights that illuminated the gas station.

"We don't have bullets," I skipped a few steps towards him. He batted his hand to my chest and trudged forward, I fell back.

"Don't need 'em".

It didn't take long. The tinkle of a bell as we entered spun my world into darkness and I went into autopilot. I shouted, I demanded, I banged on the counter; I did everything he told me to. The gun burnt a hole in my back pocket but it stayed there. I heard a shot. We don't have bullets. I heard the bell tinkle as I fell back into reality with the colour of red replacing the black. I ran as fast as I could and saw him stumbling towards the darkness of the highway. He was drunk. But he clutched his side, laughing hysterically. I ran but my legs were numb and I grabbed on to him desperately. He pulled his arm away from me and groaned, as we made our way across the empty road as fast as we could.

He tipped himself backwards into the backseat of the Cadillac, I leapt into the driver's seat and we sped away. Tears poured out of my face and blurred my vision as I fumbled with a pack of cigarettes with one hand grasping the wheel. I threw one back to him and he managed to light it. His breaths were heavy as blood stained the white leather seats. He looked like a fallen angel; he had not a single flaw. He looked up at the sky, I looked to him. I only ever saw him.

"Living fast" he smirked; his eyes twinkled like he always wanted to end this way. That wasn't when I realized that I was nothing in his world. It was when he told me.

I found the next exit off the highway and pulled over. My tear turned to hysterics as I leapt into the backseat and propped his head against my thighs. I pressed my balaclava against his wounds, I scrambled at his hand in a effort to hold on, I told him it was going to be perfect, he did nothing but laugh, his eyes fixated on the damn stars.

"Kid, I'll never be perfect, not with you." He coughed, ripping my hand off the balaclava.

"What are you talking about? Stop, let me help you" I clambered to find the balaclava in the darkness.

"Just give up, Scout. I have. It's a done deal, nothing you do will ever help." He drifted away.

I drifted 90 on the highway, swaying side to side, the bassline floating into the morning sky and my fallen angel breathless in the backseat.

Abby O'Sullivan



What is there, in the Dark?

I like to sit in the dark
And gather the thoughts
Among the night sky.

I keep those handful of dust

In the drawers of the universe.

Blankets cover bodies
Without the effort to discard

The intensions of falling, and once more falling
Asleep.

Runaway to the edge of the oceans,
That is all stars ever knew
Of the contrast

Between the soulless and the wonderers.
Not to seek is the preparation for
The forever longing
Ending, as the storms walks in with
The company of thunder.
What is there is in the dark to

Make the distraction

Of the graphite of the moon?

Holly Cronin



Natural Paradise

Cold, cold as the waves comes up to claim me taking me deeper into their frosty clutch. I sink further as the water tugs on my leg, dragging me out. The water seems to numb me, as I struggle to breathe. Flailing about with my arms, unsuccessfully trying to crawl out of the waters' grasp. Waves crash above my head. I look up through the murky wall of waves I see a silver stripe of light. My eyes close. Darkness, this is my natural paradise this is where I belong...

Air, air it rushes into my lungs. I take a breath, the first thing we learn as a baby, the last thing we will ever do before the blackness. The strong warmth of an arm around me, tugs hard at my waist. My mind starts to scream, I wouldn't let it. I focus on that warmth letting it dissolve into me. Soon the soft flow of sand runs along my back. My eyes still closed, I surround myself with it, trying to hide but the arm doesn't let go. They tighten around me, pulling me up into an embrace. I breathe in the soft smell of sea air and something sweet. When I finally will myself to open my eyes, a stranger sits holding me. I pull back. I did not need saving.

Flames, flames they leap and dance in front of me. A show, preformed once for only me. He hadn't said a thing, just started lighting matches then sat down next to me. The heat radiated off the wood but all I can feel is his touch around me. The wind is frozen. It hurts my chest to breathe, but breathe I still do. The crash of the waves seems so distant now, a single bird flying black against the sprinkle of the sky. It's so clear tonight, so many stars, I hadn't paid attention to that before. I catch him staring, the light from the flames casting moving shadows across his face.

Words, words, endless words tumble from my lips. He sits. He listens and doesn't say a word. I don't need him to. He understands. This stranger understands. Water still drips from my hair and clothes. It's cold out but we seem to have made a bubble of warmth in this icy world. How many times have I been here? How many times have I sat alone on the smooth sand in the black of the night hoping for someone to understand?

When nights are long that the days are none, I sat alone. No one was meant to be there, no one was meant to care. But my stranger does. So we sit together, together that's all that counts.

Kate Barrett

What's inside

They have left me with these broken pieces inside. Will they ever fix?
I never knew why it was always me, and I still don't know.
What did I do to deserve this? They started on me young.
The tormenting went on and on, and the memories still float along my mind.
They drained the life out of me, leaving nothing but heartbreak.
I used to think joy was inside, now I don't know? What's inside?

Imani Antoun



Family Ties.

Joel sat behind the counter with his newspaper. Someone entered through the door followed by a heavy smell of tobacco. It was a non-smoking café but Joel gave as much attention to this as he did to the upkeep of his business represented by its grimy windows and overflowed bins.

“Uncle Joel?” a voice said,

In front of him Joel saw a boy of about seventeen with a backpack and water damaged map. It was a member of his family located back down south. But which one was a mystery, it was hard to differentiate one from another.

As Joel rose to his feet and seized the hand of this young man, the following thoughts ran through his head “Should I smile? Don’t smiles show teeth? Did I brush this morning? I better close my mouth”.

The boy started with “it took me a while to find the place, it was almost impossible with the map getting drenched in the rain and my phone dying”.

Joel lowered his brow.

“I would have picked you up had you told me of your visit”.

The boy only smiled and replied “I would have but I got neither a reply to the email I sent you nor an answer from your phone”.

Joel tried his best not to seem like a deadbeat by fixing him a cup of coffee, with confusion as to whether it should be charged or not, and thought “Does he have money? Nah he’s a teenager, he’s a consumer not producer.

“Oh well you must have caught me at a bad time”.

“So I thought, but I rang four times, each of them going straight to voicemail” the boy said not at all sarcastically.

The two sat down with Joel wedging his foot under the leg of the table to prevent it wobbling

“So how long are you staying” inquired Joel. It might have been said in an offensive tone but the reek of cigarettes was only on parallel with that of his father.

“Well, I hope to make some money first but I shouldn’t be working here for more than a month” said the boy.

“A month? Working here?” cried Joel in a muffled scream.

The visitor held up his hands in persuasion.

“Mum said you could do with some help, everyone wants to know how you’re doing since you weren’t at her birthday” said the boy again not sarcastically.

These words only fell on the deaf ears of Joel as he was lost in thought. He did not even know the boy’s name, and possibly had never known him directly and now he was expected to take him in and give him a job. Joel began his usual habit of biting his nails which were now so uneven and worn down that they retreated into his flesh.

“Ok, we open at nine o clock, you’re going to be a waiter and if a woman comes around asking for me and claiming to be my ‘matchmaker’ tell her I’ve gone on a pilgrimage. Do you have somewhere to stay?”

The boy who was listening intently shook his head before Joel led him upstairs to a double bed with a dresser and wardrobe in its corners. The boy realized there were no bedclothes moments before he had a blanket and pillow tossed at him, almost missing them in the process.

“You unpack and get settled” said Joel stepping out of the room and making his way downstairs “and take a shower” he added once he reached the bottom.

The boy stepped across the threshold into the café. The place was deserted with some chairs and tables having a thin layer of dust coating them, an espresso machine stood sadly behind the counter with pieces of tape holding it together. He was drawn to a small door almost concealed by a bookshelf containing classic titles such as “Microwave cooking for one”.

The door led to the basement where Joel was discovered hunched over a workbench, dropping small packets of dark powder into sacks of rice.

“You, smuggle drugs?” said the boy with mild interest in his tone.

Joel spun around with his fists clenched, sighing and releasing his grip before he spoke.

“Yes I do”.

“Just like Grandpa” said the boy.

Joel’s face lit up in a smile.

“Yeah, just like Grandpa”.

Luke Keenan

《忆当年》

房波安

玉盘高挂墨帘悬，

澜光映沙水流连。

我抚琴，子独舞，何其乐？

梦醒，独自忆当年。

朱门炮竹声连天，

巷口行人喜盈面。

金作衣，玉作袄，醺醺醉。

梦醒，独自忆当年。

It was only a dream (English Translation)

It was at midnight,

The moon was hanging on the dark sky.

The moonlight shone on the sea waves and then reflected on the sand.

I was playing my guitar and you were dancing to the music. How enjoyable it was!

Then I woke up and found that was only a dream.

I could hear the sound of fireworks in my manor

And saw people walking by with smile on their faces.

There were jewelleries on my clothes and we were in drink. How happy we were!

Then I woke up and found that was only a dream.

Boan Fang



Apologies

I pace back and forth in the tiny box-like hotel room. I hear my heart racing, beating inside my chest like a manic bird trying to escape its cage. I focus on the floor but occasionally I look up at the musty yellow curtains that are drawn across the window or the door that was locked an hour ago. But not once do I glance in the direction of bedside table. After what seems like hours of this relentless movement, I collapse onto the edge of the dingy single bed whose duvet matches the mustard colour of the curtains. I take two deep breaths and steal a glance at the one thing I have spent the last while trying so hard to avoid- the brown bottle sitting on the bedside locker. I picture its contents in my mind: those white pills that will put you to sleep for a night or forever, depending on your choice.

My heart rate slows and my breathing deepens as I focus on the bottle. My one-way ticket out of this place, out of this world. I can't believe the time has actually come for this, as clichéd as that sounds. After months of debate, consideration and planning, the time for execution has come- and I mean that literally. I feel myself starting to overthink this, which is fitting seeing as I have always overthought my life, so why not for my death too? My mind becomes plagued with doubts. What if it doesn't work? What if I just wake up in a hospital bed in a few hours in an even worse way that I am in now? I mean it would make sense- I have always been a disappointment in everything I do. The chances of me doing anything right, even taking my own life, are slim. And so off my brain goes on another tangent of insecurity and paranoia- a standard occurrence in my life.

No. I steel myself against these doubts. I know this is what I have to do. I reach for the bottle and another thought flickers through my mind. Should I leave a note? I stop still, my outstretched hand hovering inches from the brown glass bottle. How have I not thought about this before? With all of my careful planning how did this not occur to me until now? Do I write one? And if so, for who? Of course I know the answer to that right away- Kim.

Exhaustion hits me, so I lie back on the bed and think about my eight-year-old sister. I would normally be picking her up from school in an hour but I told Dad I was staying in school to study today so our neighbour is going to collect her instead. I picture her holding onto Mrs. O'Connor's wrinkled hands, maybe while chewing on a toffee the old woman brought for her. She may be nine, but the eight years between us make it seem like she is so much younger. Her eyes still hold that stubborn glint of childhood adventure that mine lost so long ago. I remember her always making Mom take us for walks in the forest so we could look for fairies. I sigh at the memory. That was so long ago. Back when things were good and we were happy. Back before I had messed everything up.

Is this how it is going to be now? Will Kim be taken home every day by Mrs. O'Connor because I won't be there to do it? Will she miss me? And what if she blames herself for this? What if she finds herself in my exact mind-set in one year's time? It was Mom's leaving that pushed me over the edge after all. But Mom taking off was entirely my fault and my suicide will have nothing to do with Kim. She has to know that. Mom doted on Kim. She would always do everything she wanted and loved to spoil her. Mom and I, on the other hand, had never got on. Mom was quite temperamental and her mood often changed quite quickly. She was probably bipolar but you couldn't say it to her. I made that mistake once. We would have screaming matches almost every week over nothing. These would always end with her calling me a disappointment and me running off crying. The next day she would buy me chocolate to apologise and take me shopping or something, begging me not to tell Dad. She would be smiling and laughing for a few days until she had another mood swing and then the vicious circle would repeat itself. I came to resent her apologies because they were meaningless- 'I'm sorry' means 'I won't do it again', and Mom would always do it again. This day one year ago it all got too much for Mom. She started screaming at me for leaving a dirty dish in the sink. She called me useless, lazy and stupid. Dad walked into the kitchen and intervened. He tried to calm her down but she just became more frantic. But I let my temper get the better of me. I shouted at her that she was sick and she needed help because she was breaking out family. She stopped screaming and she turned to stare at me with a horrified expression on her face. Then she ran out of the house and never came back. She left because of me. Because I was never good enough and because her mood changes were always my fault.

Kim was heartbroken. She hadn't been there to see the fight, she had been at ballet practice. When she came home she asked where Mom was and we just told her she had popped out for a while. When she didn't come back, Kim asked about her continually. Dad and I had no idea what to tell her. In the beginning we kept saying she would be back soon but that just made it worse. Eventually we said nothing at all and Kim learned not to ask. Every day for the past year I have not been able to stop thinking about how I made Kim's mom leave her. Maybe if I go then she will come back and be with Kim. Even if she doesn't, Kim and my dad will be better off without me- I only ever cause problems.

But Kim cannot blame herself for this. She can't think like I do, I won't let her. Maybe a note is a good idea after all. I take a piece of the hotel stationary and grab a pen. I start writing but pause before a single spot of ink has blackened the page. What do I say? I turn over several possibilities and clichés in my mind before writing down:

Kim,
I'm so sorry I had to leave you. Please understand that I had to but this is not your fault
Look after Dad.
I love you

There. I take a breath and fold the paper over, writing her name on the front in fancy cursive, just how she likes it. I put back the stationary and remake the bed to remove any creases. I set a fifty-euro note on the bedside table beside the bottle of pills and my note for Kim (a tip for the poor cleaner who will have to come find me). I walk over to the door and unlock it, my hands only shaking slightly. I check my watch one last time and take a deep breath. I pick up the brown bottle in one hand and a glass of water in the other. I steel myself and empty the pills into my mouth, followed by a large gulp of stale tap water. I lie back on the perfectly made bed and I picture Kim's face. I close my eyes and let the tears seep out from beneath my lids as I whisper my final apology. "I am so sorry".

Makayla Murphy



Monotone

The Kaleidoscope Dreamer sees all through miniscule subconscious fractals unobservable to any physical eye. With seeing comes understanding so universal that his companions are to him as a dormant virus to a man, aware of their presence he does not bother to acknowledge them. To him they are barely alive until they attach themselves to him and alter his path. Even then their actions are motivated by a force so beyond their understanding even an attempt at comprehension would shatter their reality. So they remain, secure in their ignorance. But he should be so lucky. In a sliver of reflection found within his dreams he observed his observer. In the time since then all his thoughts have been hounding a fearful reality, and lack thereof. But these very thoughts should be proof of their own falsehood, should they not?

He ruminated on a repeating thought: "Knowledge leads to power but not the death of humanity, regardless of the magnitude of the revelation. So regardless of his knowing he must still be what he was prior to his knowing, mustn't he?" Cassandra was worried about her younger brother, he had been.... Off, since his diagnosis. That morning, the morning exactly four weeks after the diagnosis she had gone to check on him only to find a hollow doll sat stiff, kneeling in prayer unanswered and with eyes of a shade paler than she'd known possible for a boy his age. Her touch was not greeted with response but her screams for help were. Her elder brother was the response to her anguish, his firm grip pulled her out of the room and she saw nought but his steely grey eyes as he slammed the door, and not for the last time locked her out.

It wasn't until the white sun rose true to its zenith that, her eyes, were graced with the grey gaze of Daniel's. Grey streaks flecked his black hair now too, where hours before it had been blacker than a moonless night. He was deliberately measured in his interaction with her assuring that the youngest of the three of them had returned to normalcy and informing her nothing of his seizure of the soul other than saying "He sees things differently now." Cassandra was disturbed by this answer but Daniel's aura of clam quelled the tide of her thrashing emotion. She wondered how he could maintain his peace in such tumultuous times.

He could not, but having no other choice he cursed the God he knew and any other he might one day encounter. It all seemed so wrong to him, he shared no bond of blood with little Leo and at sixteen the boy could not hope to come to terms with his diagnosis, much less the kaleidoscope dreams that had for so long plagued Daniel. They still did, but he had long since made his peace with what was and what would be. Daniel knew what was to occur but no less detested it, detested the finite possessions he threw together for his impending departure, detested the infinite memories he could not leave behind. He could not reconcile his inaction with his continued existence in this place but he would bear his guilt wherever it brought him. Cassandra softly trespassed into his room and proposed a walk with him. She sought the answers to the questions her interrogation of the now stable Leo had raised. The questions raised by seeing Daniel with a large backpack slung over his shoulders were lost in the unending hall of queries that made their home in her mind. He agreed to walk with her and answer her questions without a semblance of argument, unusual for him, but a new mark of permanent tiredness made its faint black mark in the impermanent rings below his eyes, which would soon lay eternal. He fiddled with an eternally broken watch as they walked till he was satisfied with its state of disrepair. She spilled forth her questions about Leo. What happened to him last night? How had Daniel fixed it? And just what was this excessive spectrum observance and photosensitivity thing that Leo had been diagnosed with? Daniel bid her sit on the grey sand in front of the sea, so brilliant white in the fading sun.

"I told you he sees things differently," Daniel sighed as he spoke. "He sees the sea and sky in the same shade, but not in just grey, black or white like you and all others." The words Daniel uttered seemed so alien to Cassandra but they were spoken with such clarity that she dared not seek and interlude of questioning. "In other incomparable lands they call it colour, it gives such beauty to our monotone lives but it has its price and I'd childishly hoped he would have all the good of seeing and none of the bad, but once colour bleeds into sight so many things become clear."

The watch rang shrill and clear in the warm seaside air but a frigid chill twined round Cassandra's spine. She leapt to her feet and readied herself to charge back to Leo but Daniel gripped her sleeve "Cassie, I'm going away for a while, and I want you to know I'm sorry, and know that sometimes it's better to be blind to the things that are there than see the nothingness."

He let her go and she ran with a frenetic pace back to the house and through the door and up the stairs and into Leo.

She saw red and the absence of it.

And in the hand of her fallen brother, the adopted third child, was grasped a watch. A watch just like Daniel's. Which counted to the return of the recently departed and eternally guilty prodigal son, the innocent sinner with no hand in his actions.

And while his sister wept for her lost brothers The Kaleidoscope Dreamer the path laid out before him and cursed his maker for dooming him to observe.

Callum Keenan

Tada Gan Iarracht

Thosaigh sé ag bun an ranga,
Ag teip is ag pleidhcíocht.
Sháraigh sé go domhain,
Anois tá sé ar barr.

Thit géarchor ar a ghnólacht,
Ar imeall an fhéimhigh.
D'aimsigh sé slí a shocraigh é,
Anois tá sé rathúil.
Chaill sé a leannán,
As a bheith dúr is gan chroí.
Chruaigh sé é féin di,
Anois mhaith sí é.

D'fhág siad ar an mbinse é,
Agus bhí sé in ísle brí.
Bhuaigh sé an cluiche dá fhoireann,
Anois is laoch é.

Ruaidhrí Simington



Tada Gan Iarracht

Tada gan iarracht. Nuair a chloiseann daoine an frása seo, de ghnáth smaoiníonn siad ar dhaoine cosúil le Bill Gates nó Angelina Jolie; daoine atá saibhir agus cáiliúil tar éis na blianta a chaith siad ag obair go dian. Smaoiníonn daoine orthu féin agus ar na féidearthachtaí a bheadh acu dá n-oibróidís go cruá. Ar feadh nóiméid amháin, ba mhaith liom ár smaointe a dhíriú ar dhaoine eile. Daoine nach bhfuil saibhir, daoine nach bhfuil cáiliúil agus daoine nach bhfuil an t-ádh orthu.

Ar shráideanna na cathrach, faightear daoine gan dídean i ngach áit. Feictear iad ina gcodladh ar an talamh, ag ithe as na boscaí brúscair agus ag braith ar fhlaithiúlacht strainséirí chun fanacht beo. Is iomaí uair nach smaoinimid ar na daoine seo. Rinne siad a ndícheall agus déanann siad a ndícheall chun teach nó áit cónaithe a fháil, ach go minic bíonn gach áit ró-chostasach dóibh. Níl an locht orthu. Sa lá atá inniu ann, bíonn na cíosanna ró-ard agus ní féidir leis an iomarca duine iad a íoc. Ina gcáis, níl an frása “tada gan iarracht” oiriúnach. Ba cheart dúinn an frása tada le hiarracht a rá.

Cad faoi na daoine bochta nach féidir éalú ón tSiria? Níorbh é a rogha é nuair a leag an Rúis buamaí orthu. Chomh maith leis na daoine gan dídean atá luaite san alt thuas rinne muintir na Siria a ndícheall agus déanann muintir na Siria a ndícheall chun maireachtáil ó lá go lá.

Níl mé ag iarraidh drochscéalta amháin a insint. Cinnte, is féidir linn smaoiniamh ar dhaoine mar Bill Gates agus Angelina Jolie agus an rath atá acu. Fuair Bill Gates a thuilleadh airgid tar éis blianta de bheith ag obair go dian. Níor thosódh Microsoft i rith lae amháin, agus níor tháinig an clú atá aige inniu go tapa, gan iarracht.

Feictear an rud céanna i mbeagnach gach réalt is gach duine saibhir – fuair siad a gcuid cáile agus a gcuid airgid nuair a bhí iarracht déanta acu. Faoi mar a deir an seanfhocal, “De réir a chéile a thógtar na caisleáin.”

Anois, tá an t-am thart againn chun smaoiniamh orainn féin. Tá orainn ár smaointe a chur ar dhaoine bochta; daoine atá ag déanamh a ndíchill agus ag déanamh iarrachta chun maireachtáil. Daoine gan an t-ádh céanna atá againnse.

Conas is féidir linn é seo a athrú? Is féidir linn tosú le smaointe mar seo – smaointe nach bhfuil dírithe orainn féin. Is féidir linn teacht i gcabhair ar dhaoine gan dídean trí thacaíocht do charthanais cosúil le “Focus Ireland”. Is féidir linn teacht i gcabhair ar eagraíochta mar na Náisiúin Aontaithe, atá ag obair le muintir na Siria agus ag iarraidh iad a shábháil.

Is féidir linn tosú le grá. Ni athróidh aon rud muna smaoinimid ar dhaoine atá fós bocht agus fós i mbaol tar éis dóibh iarracht a dhéanamh. Ni athróidh aoin rud má smaoinimid orainn féin amháin.

Chun an fhírinn a rá, déarfainn nach duine maith mé ach déanaim mo dhícheall sa saol. Táim leithleasach agus smaoiním orm féin, ach táim ag déanamh iarrachta chun forbairt a dheanamh orm féin. Táim ag déanamh iarrachta chun níos mó cineáltais is níos mó grá a léiriú.

Níl a fhios agam más féidir liom athrú mar seo a dhéanamh.

Ach, tá a fhios agam faoi rud amháin.

Tada gan iarracht, is gach rud le grá.

Lucy Dornan



Tada Gan Iarracht

Ní raibh sé ach 26

Chuir sé isteach ar chómortas rathúil

Bhí sé óg, láidir agus uailmhianach

Tada gan iarracht

D'úsáid sé uirlisí simplí

Níor éirigh sé riamh as an bpíosa

Bhí na sonraí dochreidte

Bhí sé traochta an t-am ar fad

Tada gan iarracht

Beagnach 17 troigh

Thóg sé thar dhá bhliain air é a thógáil

Rinneadh as marmair é

Is laoch Bíoblalta é

David an t-ainm atá air

Tada gan iarracht

Tá sé ag seasamh san Iodáil

An dealbhóireacht is cáiliúla ar domhan

Is sárshaothar é

David- le Michelangelo

Tada gan iarracht.

Adam Mac an Ridire



A Letter for T

A letter for T,

You spend yourself observing. But you passed me by before I could object.
Why my fingers were so hasty to crease is my despair. They fumble desperately to create a single letter, yet I wear them with pride like badges of honour after fighting a lifetime-war.
I know I thought some things I shouldn't have thought. And said things I shouldn't have said, whilst doing things I shouldn't have done. But you've smoothed those potholes over and helped me mend the cracks I created on this scarred road. Now, after your crossing of my path, I tread the gravel gracefully.
They say you will tell. Tell us what? Perhaps tell us tales of never-ending lies - familiar fiction from our pasts. Or maybe if there will truly be consequences to our actions. If the way we treat others actually matters. Or what if you don't, in fact, tell us at all? You show us. You let us learn and realize when our own feelings are involved. To teach us unforgettable, invaluable lessons learnt in no confined classroom.
They say you heal all wounds. I disagree. I don't believe you possess some divine cure. How could anything in this world we live be so easy? You have a way, an art, to making our memories and emotions slip from our thoughts, like water through our fingers – turning our wounds to mere scar tissue. So that we are left with no more than a meagre mark on the surface of our skin, as a gentle reminder now and then. When we almost, almost forget - waking us from our trance.
I know that in you, he may forgive me, or keep me locked out on the doorstep all the same. I am aware that not even you can make up his mind but still I plead now, that you encourage him see through eyes that have seen as mine have.
My time for you to leave me is nearing, I know. But I could not have us parting at this fork in my road, without you aware of all that you've done for me.
So I'm thanking you as a parent, a mentor, a friend and an artist, who sculpted me into who I am today.
For you are Time, the Time that ticks away.

Forever yours,

Past.

Elizabeth Blake

Troubled Times

Seems the world has been in turmoil, with political scandals and reputations soiled,
But what is the point of focusing on the negative, when so many others are already doing so for you,
To try and see positivity seems to be rebellious in this day and age, with so much dark to blight out the light and seal you in a sad cage
Some turn to books and television and numbing the mind with narcotics, while others turn to their gods to heal minds gone necrotic,
Personally I think the Romans and Greeks got it right, gods filled with anger and rage and driven by spite,
Seems to be a fitting image for these troubled times, but again perhaps leave that kind of thinking to other minds,
Those who believed in that pantheon of gods also believed them to be upon a very climbable mountain, but never bothered getting up to check if their faith had true foundations,
So feel free to appreciate the nice things in this time, despite the callings of angered crowds telling you there is only negativity to be found with nothing sublime,
But remember to not let those who seek to spread foul messages to corrupt a populace run freely, keep their talk in check with genuine facts and truths they consider untimely,
For in order to help the world become better, we must make sure the world knows truths and not propaganda from the mouths of the bitter.

Dylan Morris

Perspective/관점/Matariro

Raiva zuva rakanaka, zuva raibginya (It was a nice day, the sun with glistening)

웃는 얼굴로 교실을 드러가(I walked into the class with a smile on my face)

Vane zvakanaka zokufunga muphungwa dzavo (Brimming full of ideas)

처음보는 사람들과 악수하고 (Shaking hands with strangers)

Ndkatarira mukati kuvhanu (I looked across the room)

눈에 보이는 다른 색깔들에 친구 (Friends of different colours I saw)

Tsika, kusiyana, kubatana (Culture, Diversity, Connection)

한자리에 모여 (Coming to one place)

Kufunga kumwechete (With a same thought)

또 다른 모험을 떠나 (Leaving for another adventure)

Kumirara zvakaoma zvichauwya (Awaiting for challenges to come)

헤어에 목소리가 들릴때 (When you hear Mr. Hehir's voice)

시작한다, 우리의 (Will start, our)

하루, zuva, day (day, day, day)

Zororo Chimimba and David Nam



Religion

Let us not only excuse ourselves from segregation
But also the invasion of an entire nation
Let us hurt and abuse as we think so
In the name of a man from 2000 years ago

May we war and fight until we see fit
In order to convert the world bit by bit
May we judge those we do not know
On where they came from or where they will go

Shall we berate our peers on how they look
As we recite an ancient book
Shall we oppress a whole half of the world
While the banner of our faith is dramatically unfurled

We will hurt and terrorise for our cause
Until the world adopts our way of faith and its laws
We will endorse slavery, murder and even torture
But to be promiscuous or gay is most impure

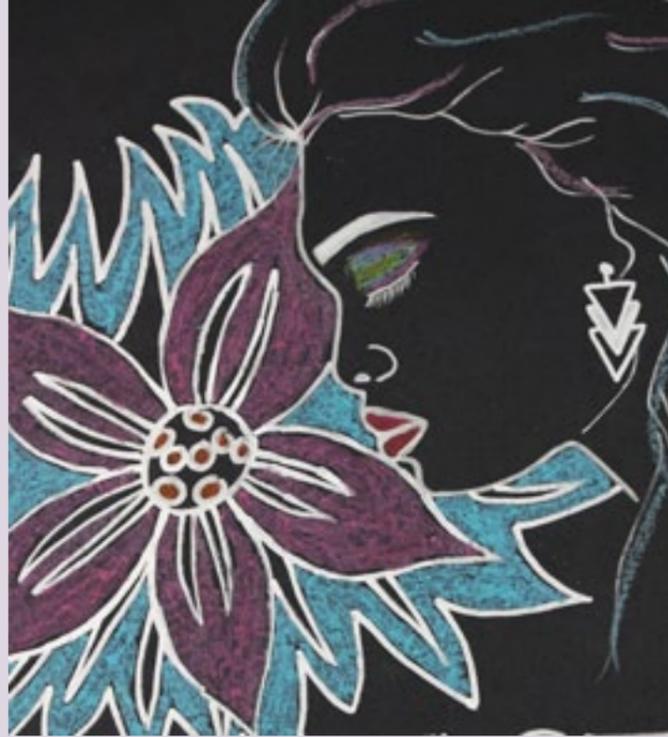
We shall fight against some with whom we disagree
Verbally abuse them until they finally see
We shall punish those who will not comply
Tell everyone they are far more disrespectful than you or I

Allow us to disregard those who do not fit
Say they're insane while on this high horse we sit
Allow us to insult those of another creed
While pretending we're not a stem of the very same weed

Will we let the church have influence over our country
Let them stick their noses where they shouldn't be
Will we force prayer on students at their school
Treat those who refuse as nothing but a fool

Let us try draw in the youth into our cult
Let us lead them straight into our den
"In the name of the father, son and holy spirit"
Amen.

Sean Wade



Little Sister

A child in stature
You stand doubled over
As if there lay two palms pressing downwards
On each of your shoulders

Stepping in each footprint I make
Following each route that I take
Up the hill and through the alley
Before pausing to look each way

Across the booth at a diner
Full of freckled cheek laughter
You blow bubbles through your straw
Until chocolate milk froths over

You were never the winner
Or the top goal-scorer
But you stood and waved, beaming
When each game was over

A child in stature
You stand doubled over
And my hands can do nothing
To rid the weight off your shoulders

Sadhbh O'Mahony

The True meaning of Christmas

When annoyingly familiar Christmas chimes ring out through your local shops and the mutterings of the cynical elderly soon follow suit. "Jaysus, is it that time of year already? Sure that should be a crime." Or when the day after Halloween, without warning, you're bombarded with a series of cringe worthy ads featuring cloyingly sweet families, reminding you that "It's never too early to start your Christmas shopping." YES ASDA.....YES it is. When you begin to notice these tell-tale signs, I think it's fair to say that the Christmas madness is just around the corner.

For some of us Christmas may mean a small family reunion where cordial pleasantries are exchanged and where family members catch up on all the 'important' stuff they missed since their last encounters. For others like myself, this may mean travelling to visit relatives in ,waste I MEAN exotic lands like Clare and Donegal, and for some it's just another day of the year. It's a time when parents (usually mothers) begin to stress about the numerous tasks that the holiday season entails while other family members tread on eggshells trying to avoid the quite frustrated elephant in the room. Things need to be done and let's face it, Christmas would be an unmitigated disaster without the all too often unappreciated things they do. But why do people do it? Put themselves under the same burdens on an annual basis and like goldfish, forget about all the bad stuff. Selective memory, it seems, is a common side effect of the holiday season.

"Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store maybe it means a little bit more" – the Grinch. Even though the season carries its burdens it seems everyone loves a bit of aul' materialism, but have we lost the true meaning of Christmas (whatever that means) in its pursuit of "things"? Some say it's about celebrating Jesus's birthdate even though, most people agree that He wasn't born on the 25th of December, or in the year 1 A.D. or that he was born at all. It might be because it's a tradition that we've adhered to for centuries and in light of this, it would be INSANE to even contemplate doing anything differently. It is a time which you spend with family, explaining to our annoying younger cousins what a board game actually is and amazingly enough that it doesn't have to be connected to the Wi-Fi for it to work. It's about listening to your slightly intoxicated distant relatives reminiscing over past events that neither you nor they have great recollection.

This time of year isn't always jingles and happy-clappy time for everyone. Maybe we should consider that not everyone's reality may coincide with our own. So, in conclusion don't whine, never forget the true meaning of Christmas and Brexit means Brexit.

Ross King



The Resolution

Dark, shades, covered faces, tears and an oversized estate car. There were a lot of tears, but my eyes are dry. Why wouldn't they be? It's been twenty years since I'd seen him. I was the man of the house and Texas is not an easy place to grow up without a father. It doesn't bother me, most people would presumably wonder why they didn't get even a phone call or an occasional visit, but he had his reasons. Everything happens for a reason.

I was glad to leave, I skipped the funeral lunch, hopefully people think it was because I was upset. I'd done that journey a million times. The graveyard wasn't far from work. I approached my door only to see a fancy official looking letter on my door with an eight letter word; these letters were put together by a blacksmith, with the intention of stabbing me right in the heart. "Eviction". I owed the bank two hundred and fifty thousand. On the day of my father's funeral I had cried, but it ended up being nothing to do with grief. His death didn't cause me to lose anyone; I didn't have him in the first place.

Forty eyes stared up at me, waiting for some indication of life. I was deep in thought. I spent hours thinking of anything I could have done besides giving up. I forced myself to remember that once again, 'everything happens for a reason'. Eyes moved towards me, I must've said it out-loud. The day passed. On my way to my six-month-to-be ex home, I remembered something my dad told me before he had left. He told me to 'do what you're good at'. I was good at mathematics, very good. That hadn't gotten me very far. As I drove I noticed the bright lights that I had always had shining in my peripherals, except this time they seemed different, as they mattered now. 'CASINO'. Maybe my love of maths could finally pay off, I thought. What did I have to lose?

Six weeks of intensive brain training, I felt as if I was back in high school. I felt like I was giving myself a real chance. I lived and breathed cards. It's all that was going through my head at any given moment. I remember thinking, 'this is too easy, anyone could do it'. But it took practice, speed and memory. Yes it's about knowing that a picture card has a value of -1, and anything less than a 7 has a value of +1, but that's the easy part. Walking into that casino with the intention of counting cards wasn't without its risks.

After five successful sessions with online casinos, I had netted two thousand. I would be bringing it all to the casino, for the real, face-to-face experience. I told myself I had to focus, I knew I wouldn't have a problem with keeping the count, I had mastered Blackjack. I needed to focus on sustaining a believable face. Counting cards isn't illegal, as casinos can't issue laws but I knew they would take action if they knew I was counting. On my way to the casino, I wasn't as nervous as I expected myself to be. It was now or never, I would be homeless if I didn't succeed. That drove a fire through my body and an urge to win. I saw the bright lights at the other end of the highway.

Walking through it was as I expected. Waitresses offered drinks to increase the chance of alcohol driven bets. I felt I could really take the place by storm. I bought a tonic and water, so that if the casino's loss prevention team were to look over me I would appear to be drinking. 'What are the chances of a drunk being able to card count' I thought as I paid the waitress 2.85, two thousand minus two dollars and eighty five cents. I did the math in my head like I have done my whole life. A sort of, warm up. One thousand nine hundred and ninety seven dollars and fifteen cents left to play with. I looked over at the low betting table, "Here goes nothin", I thought.

At the end of the day there was nothing more important than money for me. One thing is more important than money for most people and that's family. But I had no family left. I was an only child and there were no long lost cousins or anything like that. Heroin destroyed any family that I could've had. It's not like any other drug. Most people become addicted to drugs, but it's the other way around with heroin. It becomes addicted to you. I had a job when I was 12, a paper round. All of my wages went to my parents. Only for them to leave the apartments and come back within the hour. There was very little given to me. Anything I had was due to money I didn't tell my parents about. It only got worse for my dad when my mom died. Her loss triggered a drug fuelled rampage for him, and I was in the crossfire. I never had money, not because of a lack of opportunity but because of heroin. So at the age of 30, sitting in my house staring at stacks of a total of one hundred thousand dollars was staggering. I couldn't take my eyes off it. I'd never seen that much money before. On a good year I make 34 thousand a year before taxes, It was a new me. And I loved it. 4 months had passed in a heartbeat. I went from having nothing to my name; everything I had was in the bank's name now. I had visited the casino 15 times, until I graduated to Las Vegas every weekend. It was around then the casino started becoming suspicious. Basic maths was making me a big profit. It was like a dream. I could walk into any shop and buy something before even checking the price. Having a lot of money has the potential to make a lot of people very stupid. My parents had started out with money, and it was taken away in a heartbeat, right up whatever vein they could find.

I was on the plane on my way to Vegas, my tenth visit. I was using the tray table as a blackjack table,

speed counting. Card after card was drawn and I never lost the count. I felt unstoppable. I looked over the beautiful lights as we came into land.

Everything had seemed normal; I carried out my usual routine. The casino staff knew me by name, and as I was considered a heavy spender. After about three hours had passed it was going well, I started with ten thousand I was up to thirty five. 'Easy money so far', I thought. I noticed movement in the corner of the room near the ceiling; a CCTV camera had repositioned itself towards me. With a thirty thousand dollar profit at the palace I never expected for them to think twice about it. But it was clear to me that they had. I quickly called her up and headed to the exits, planning to cash my chips in the next day, until both my arms were grabbed. I was confused but I knew what was happening. I just didn't know how I had gotten caught. I was led into a small dark interrogation room and made to sit down facing the one-way mirror.

As a kid, I was very quiet. I chose studies over socialising. How I imagine most card counters were like growing up. I never got into fights, maybe a couple verbal ones when I had outsmarted a couple of my teachers but that's about it. I wasn't all too experienced with taking a beating. All I can remember is blacking out, visualising my dad, unfortunately my only experience with violence.

Soon enough, I was home. The loss prevention crew hadn't taken too kindly to me and apparently had been keeping tabs on me. I was down 40 thousand. I needed another fifty to keep my home, and I had two weeks. I'd made a lot of money out of counting cards and looks like I've earned myself a sick week too. It never ended well for me. The world didn't reward me for growing up troubled. But in my opinion it has now, meeting all of you people has opened my eyes that there are good people everywhere. I will miss you all, I'll write to all of you. I'm getting another chance, and I'm going to succeed this time. You'll know that soon enough. I'll make sure every dime I make in the future is taxed, regardless of how much I'd like to see you all again. I'm going, and I can't wait.

"Thank you for sharing inmate Stevenson".

Sean Kelly



Some years later

I will look for you in teacups
And when the water's too hot to sip
I will curl myself underneath
The fortresses we built

I will look for you in street art
The movement of your hands
Along the wall of a side street
As I am walking home

I will look for you in my skylight
The same one you looked through
Watching the weather change
On particular afternoons

I will look for you in shadows
When the lighter's flames go out
Breathing in the smoky night air
And shivering in the shroud

I will look for you in the living
Until my eyes may no longer see
In waking and in dreaming
I will look for you in me

Sadhbh O'Mahony

Cities

A new city every few months
From Paris and Brussels
To Istanbul.

Everyone waiting silently
For the news to accredit
Which city they visit.

Millions affected
Everyone knows their name
Living in the life of fame.

Their name is everywhere
Written in headlines
And also history.

For it takes a special kind of terror
To cause that much misery.

Megan Collins

The First Time I Ever

The first time I ever felt less than others,
The first time I felt I wasn't up to standards,
The first time I ever felt I was a nobody,
The first time I was bullied.

The first time I ever felt I was better than someone,
The first time I felt I had power,
The first time I was in control,
The first time I was given a name,
The first time I became a bully.

The first time wasn't the last,
I ended up in a cast.
I kept quiet all these years,
With bruises, bumps and fears.

The first time wasn't the last,
I put that kid in a cast.
But I didn't feel any better,
It was all because of that letter,
That said I wasn't wanted,
So I took out my anger and daunted.

Although the first became the second,
And the second became third,
I will always remember the first time,
The first time I was bullied.
The first time I became a bully.

Caitlyn Lee

Autumn's Wish

Sunflowers danced in the autumn wind,
Birds flew south to escape the storms,
Leaves turned brown and gathered among the trees-
On the path the sun broke through,
And long shadows cast themselves upon the well-trodden ground.

Soon, winter would come with downy flake,
And woodlands would be bare and cold,
The journey would be hidden for the snow-covered path,
And they would wander not knowing where to go-
The nights would get longer and the days shorter,
And there would be no more longing to make the journey.

Maria Cornella



Murky

The ancient swamp beast moved into the clearing, barely disturbing the dragon flies resting on lily pads. Despite its size it swam through the murky swamp water in serenity and silence. A traveller wrapped in colourful silks lay atop the beast's mossy shell. He gazed at the sky.

The buzz of insects and splashing of the Matashi koi filled the traveller's ears.

Suddenly the beast came to a grumbling halt, extending its long limbs down to the swamp floor. Annoyed by the interruption to its daydreaming the traveller slid down the slick moss on the front of the beast's shell. It landed on the beast's wide flat head, silks fluttering in the air. The traveller trained its six feline eyes on the primordial trees, luminous flowers and mysterious pulsating obelisks around the swamp in search of the source of the commotion. Despite all the strange and new sights nothing in particular caught its eyes. What did in fact draw its attention was a slimy three fingered hand tugging on the flowing, radiant silks coving the traveller's body. The owner of said hand was a squat, bulge-eyed toad who looked rather flushed. It was huffing and puffing after the arduous clamber onto the swamp beast's head. The creature was dressed in coarse fibre with an old floppy hat drooping over its disproportionately large head. It reached about knee height on the traveller.

The toad seemed flustered and was speaking quickly in a gloopy sounding language, beckoning hurriedly for the traveller to follow. It waddled clumsily towards the edge of the beast and plopped off the edge with a splash. The traveller followed as the runes on its flowing robe began to quietly hum and glow while its eyes started pulsating. The traveller gently hovered down towards the water, robes floating and swirling around it. It glided after the toad being just above the surface of the quagmire.

After a short journey the pair arrived at a small hut held a foot off the murky water by stilts. The frog creature clambered up and motioned for the traveller to enter. The traveller landed gently in the doorstep of the tiny cramped hovel and squeezed inside. Many pairs of bulging eyes stared from all around the hut. The one that lead it here was jumping and waving its hat frantically, gesturing wildly at a figure lying on a mat on the dirty floor.

The traveller clambered over frogs and pieces of tiny furniture to take a closer look. Lying on the mat was a pale toad drawing laboured breaths with glazed over eyes. Its midsection was wrapped in bloodstained bandages and a purple substance was beginning to ooze out from under them. The traveller unwrapped the young toad to discover what seemed to be a toothy bite mark, probably from one of the greater Matashi swamp koi. An easy wound to heal but fatal if untreated.

The traveller extended a talon handed arm and placed it on the creature's head, greatly worrying the amassed family. The runes on the traveller's robes hummed loud and glowed brighter than before and its pupils filled each eye. The youngest and bravest frogs clambered onto the traveller's back to get a better view only to be quickly pulled away by an elder. An eerie light enveloped the dark hut, the humming and light increased. The traveller's robes began to float around as if underwater. Then suddenly with a great flash of white light all went quiet and dark.

The entire family, young and old crowded and shoved to see their injured loved one. The wounded frog's colour had returned, the bite healed and its slumber had become peaceful. Dozens of toads jumped around the traveller waving hats and glorpung happily. They shoved gifts and food items into the traveller's hands as it left.

The original toad creature followed it outside and began swimming back to the swamp beast dragging the traveller through the air behind it; glorpung and slorpung in excitement. The duo found the ancient traverser of the swamp snoozing in the mid-day sun on a small patch of marshy land. The traveller rose up and touched down on its usual resting place, a clump of comfy shell moss. Turning to bid farewell to its amphibious acquaintance the traveller was surprised to see the frog creature laying down a mat and other collected oddities from a small pouch on its back. The creature glorped excitedly and plopped itself down on to its new home laid out on the swamp beast's shell. With a shrug the traveller laid back on its usual spot, daydreaming once more at the sky; charmed and amused by its new traveling companion as the great swamp beast lowered itself into the murk to continue its journey.

Pierce Hanley

Saying Farewell to a Relative

We follow you up the gravel path.
Not many people are talking,
Just the odd silent sob or snuffle.
We watch you being lowered down,
Grieving relatives throw flowers down to you
But I suppose you can't see them, can you?
I didn't know you that well,
We met once or twice
But mum says you and she were close.
We leave you,
Underground in your endless slumber.
Did you know we all came to say goodbye?

Lucy Deacon

Debt and cheap crockery

Once, we had struggled to earn a few,
When we did, it was taken away
By necessities and other peoples debt.
We learnt that everything simply passes.

Soon, clouds began to move from the view
Of the sun that would now begin to light the way
Of a new path, in which our footprints would set
And we learnt that everything simply passes.

But, we were wrong. When troubles faded away we knew,
Everything does not simply pass. Feelings wander astray.
But we remember the time we got soaking wet
For things like that don't simply pass.

From the path we have not travelled askew,
If faith will allow us, on that path we will stay,
But no matter how far we come, we won't forget
To drink from those pound shop cups and glasses.

Aleena Manoj



What Windows See

The attic room was small, long yet narrow with a low ceiling and exposed rafters. A thin layer of dust covered every surface. The air smelled old and as she climbed the rickety wooden ladder, Carlotta imagined the first owners of the house venturing up the same rungs for the first time over a hundred years before. The small room was dull, illuminated only by a lonely circular window at the gable end of the house. The single pane of glass was encased by a wooden frame with flaking green paint. Below the window sat a large wooden sea chest also cloaked in dust.

A cool draught ran across the length of the room, catching the dust and sweeping it towards the window. The sudden rush of cold air on her ankles startled Carlotta, who had become transfixed by the seemingly mundane and vapid window. Slowly she began moving away from the small square opening in the floor, through which she had entered the attic, and towards the century-old Edwardian window. There was something about its simplicity that appealed to her. Its appearance was humble and understated. It seemed, to Carlotta at least, to be an ordinary, albeit old, window and that was because that is all it was. It was just a humble window and it was content to remain so without a want or desire to fabricate pretentious chronicles of grandeur.

Carlotta guessed that this was why the simple piece of glass, encompassed by rotting wood, had her undivided attention. In a world where friendships are founded on falsehoods and deception lies around every corner, it was refreshing to know she had met the genuine article, just as it was, even if it was just a window. She continued moving closer towards the end of the room until she stood looking down at the large oak timber sea chest. With the back of her hand she brushed away the many layers of dust to examine the engraving which lay below, yet she was immediately distracted by the sheer beauty of the dust dancing in the light which poured through the window. The individual specks moved from left to right, some even pirouetting around each other, and just as they were about to hit the floor the draught picked them up and again they began their unflinching waltz.

A cloud eclipsed the sun and the mesmeric dust vanished into the shadows. Carlotta drew her attention back to the dust covered chest. She looked where she had cleared some of the dust away and saw the engraving which had been lying below. It had been cut deep and was still clearly legible. The engraving dated the chest back to 1884, pre-dating the house itself by nearly twenty years. The clouds abated and the sunlight flooded through the warped glass of the window, bringing not only light but also much needed warmth. Only now did Carlotta notice the full view from her new found vantage point. Not wanting to dirty her pastel pink shorts, she removed her jumper and used it to clear away the remaining dust before sitting atop the chest and staring out the window. She drew her knees up to her chest and gazed inquisitively into the distance. The room was relatively cool, not helped by the occasional draught, but the sunlight hitting her face did compensate for her lack of jumper.

A large tree stood proudly in the centre of the garden. Its presence dominating every small bird or squirrel that ventured into the confines of its branches. As she watched the animals move in and out of the shadows, which extended forth from the base of the thick trunk, Carlotta was struck by the reflection of the sun in the glassy green leaves of the mighty tree. A breeze gently shook the branches and the sun danced off the moving leaves, giving the illusion of glitter being sprinkled upon the garden by some unseen hand. Carlotta wondered how old the giant tree was. Perhaps it had been here long before the house was even built. She imagined small children climbing its branches over a hundred years prior.

Looking beyond the tree the full landscape was opened up to her. She doubted anyone else had as beautiful and as comprehensive a view of their surroundings as she did. The garden, perfectly square, was enclosed by a low stone wall. The wall, which was hand built, was about waist height. It ran along the perimeter of the garden, stopping only to allow a paved pathway lead from the road, through the garden, to the front of the house. A gate of wrought iron and painted green, original like the window, sat between the two halves of the wall and partitioned the idyll of the house and its garden from the ceaseless, unrelenting world. The road which ran adjacent to the house led down a steep hill and into a small country village.

A tractor drove slowly by the gate of the house and continued down the hill. Its loud engine rupturing the serene ambiance which the garden walls so desperately tried to contain. Carlotta imagined life in the village at the time the house was constructed. She pictured farmers with horse-drawn carts, who did all their work by hand without the help of noisy, disruptive machines. She saw people walking or riding bicycles as their sole means of transportation. Her eyes followed the road down which the tractor had driven, and looking beyond the village, she could make out the small quay. She envisaged the villagers of the halcyon days of old, going every day to get fresh fish from the men on their boats. Now, unfortunately, the quay was home to a plethora of pleasure craft owned by wealthy holiday makers. The days of fishermen selling their catch off their boats were gone and in their place a hectic world of convenience and excess had emerged.

Carlotta thought of the all changes the village had seen in the last hundred years and all throughout that time the small circular window, surrounded by a green wooden frame, in the house at the top of the hill, sat silently, simply observing the ever changing world around it. The window had seen the first motorcar to grace the village streets, the effects of two devastating world wars and the coronation of five British monarchs. Yet not once did it complain. It sat quietly, watching intently as the world around it morphed and changed, moving with the times. Miraculously, and thankfully for Carlotta, the house had resisted change and continued to stand atop the hill in its glorious original and unaltered form.

Suddenly a voice echoed through the house calling her name and Carlotta recognised it as that of her mother. Again the voice called her, this time louder and clearer. Unable to tear herself away she ignored the summons and, still sitting atop the old sea chest, now cross-legged, she stared out passed the village, and the wharf and out to sea. She sat and pondered all the wonderful things windows would tell of, if only they could speak. But in this busy, ever-moving world, who would stop and listen; listen to what they tell of what windows see.

Rupert Zarka



Alone in the Bar

The Bar was almost empty tonight; the sound of heavy raindrops against the windows was all that could be heard. The barman had just served his only remaining customer another drink.

He rubbed the side of his face with his hand while leaning his elbow on the counter. His other hand held his drink, which he gazed upon tiredly. It seemed as if life had already worn him out despite his young age, he can't have been much older than thirty.

The sound of the door opening and another man of around mid-twenties walked in, his face gleamed with excitement. He seemed to have a story to tell and was eager to find someone who he could tell it to. His shoes left behind wet footprints as he strutted over to the bar. He sat quite close to the lonesome looking man, a bit too close as far as he was concerned.

'I'll have a scotch please!' and the bar man served him with curious apprehension.

Everything was silent for a while until the younger looking man broke it in an attempt to engage conversation with his fellow drinker,

"Hey, umm... what's made you come out here all alone?"

He waited an uncomfortable long time before replying

"I came here to get some peace and not to make small talk with the likes of you"

The bar man had heard this, he felt sorry for the pleasant young man but he also captured his interest.

They see sorry looking fellows all the time, coming in here to drink, be alone and forget. This chirpy chap was unique. It seemed as if he'd ordered a drink for cause to celebrate. The barman usually doesn't pry into the business of his customers but his curiosity got the better of him.

"Well I'll ask you the same question, what are you doing here, alone?"

A broad grin spread across his face as he blurted out "I'm free, I escaped I got out!"

Taken aback the barman had half a mind to reach for the phone.

Noticing this he clarified what he meant,

"Ha, nah don't worry that's not what I meant. I'm not an escaped felon. I realize that's probably how it sounded though"

Still looking uncomfortable, the barman spoke,

"Nah go on what have you escaped from then"

"I wrote a book, finally found an excuse to leave. Being stuck in that rural wasteland it was killing me, everyone was just so simple minded I had to get out, and now I finally have a reason. I'm going to go out and get this bad boy published and then proceed to living the sweet life in the city"

The barman looked impressed,

"Well that's ambitious thinking, how are you so sure everything will work out?"

This question was merely to prolong the conversation; this kid hadn't a shade of self-doubt about him. The question failed to wipe his expression of total confidence.

"You haven't read my book. If you had you wouldn't bother asking me that"

The barman laughed at what he presumed was an attempt at humour, although when he glanced back at his customer, he noticed he hadn't laughed along with him.

The barman's interest was now at its peak,

"So, eh what's this book about?"

"My life"

"Really?"

"Well not about my life so far, hell that would be a boring book. I could write it less than a paragraph! No, it's about how my life will be, in the future. This book is my guide so that I know where I'm going"

"Alright then"

The barman turned around, he caught the eye of his only other customer who was hanging on to every word that the younger man had to say. He slyly rolled his eyes and shook his head at the barman who turned around to continue his conversation.

"So where'd you say you were from?"

"A small town, only around 1200 people, quite a long way from here. You probably won't have heard of it" Then the long spell of silence returns throughout the bar.

The two customers slowly sip away at their drink; the older of the two examines his glass, saddened by its diminishing contents.

The younger is drinking his scotch slowly as he stares out to nowhere. His expression suggests he is in deep thought about important and profound matters.

Suddenly he says, "Well, would you look at the time, my bus leaves in five minutes, don't want to miss it, the next one into the city doesn't leave until the morning"

He lay down some change to cover the drink, puts on his ragged trench coat and walks hurriedly out the door.

The barman asks the older man if he'll have one more.

He sighs heavily, and then waits a while before deciding on an answer.

"Best not"

He grunts a thank you to the barmen under his breath before slowly following the younger man out. He walks the opposite direction.

The barman is now alone.

As he finishes cleaning up, several thoughts come in to his head.

Thinking about the two customers he had here tonight, especially the younger one.

He wonders to himself with unusual optimism, "Maybe he'll be different"

Matt McCann



Purgastory

For all the stories I've never finished

His eyes meet mine; the fire in his gaze burning me from the inside out. "I call you" he says, telepathically pushing all his chips into the centre of the table.

So this is it. All those years of Fantasy Poker have been leading up to this one moment. I lay my cards on the table. "Straight Flush!" I announce loud enough for the whole world to hear me. He laughs. "You fool!" He slams his cards on the table.

I wait for another word. More information. How does this story end? "He slams his cards on the table" and then what? Does he win? Is the reader ever going to have a reason to care? Why does this game matter so much to me?

I wait for something. Anything. But no more words come. It begins to dawn on me that they never will. This is an abandoned story. Never to be completed. So rather than basking in the glory of a satisfying ending, I just have to stay here in Limbo. Forever.

So I stand up. It was a basic assumption that I had been sitting down for the duration of the story. I walk around the aforementioned table to my opponent. He sits there motionless midway through his laugh. The poor guy. He doesn't seem to possess the self-awareness to realise that our story has been abandoned. However he was given a gender, unlike me. Stupid first person narrative. Now I know nothing about myself except that I'm good at Fantasy Poker. I look towards the door that I just kind of presumed would be there. I know that there is nothing left for me in this poorly described place. The words will never come back. So I take my only real option. I head towards the door and I open it.

Outside the door there is nothing more of the Fantasy Poker world. In front of me lies an endless expanse of imagination. Little worlds dotted around the place; each one with its own story. I wonder how many of them were left to rot like mine. I look back at my tiny world; lacking in detail. All that is there are the necessities for a Poker game. I look back out into the expanse. With nothing to leave behind I take a step out the door. My feet sink into an unfamiliar ground. It feels like nothing I could have ever felt before. It seems to move under my feet, constantly changing, and as I look down it forms a stone path beneath me like pencil strokes merging into art. Given a backstory I'm sure I would have seen paths like this on a daily basis, but with the extreme lack of description I had been given thus far, I have never seen anything so detailed and beautiful in my life. The path is made up of flat slabs of sandstone each one unique. Some as large as dinner trays, some as small as poker chips. Each stone has its own individual rainbow of colour laying anywhere between a white beach and a red brick. The path is wide enough for a single person to walk on and its glory spans for all of five metres before fading into the ground.

"Never have I ever seen anyone so fascinated by a path before".

I look up from the path and turn my head towards the source of the sound. There stands a teenage girl. She looks at me with an almost childish curiosity but she stands with the posture of a well refined adult. The most fitting thing about her for her apparent age is her facial expression which reads "snarky comment coming right up".

"You're new here right?" she asks me

"That's right" I reply.

"And your story's already been abandoned?"

"Yes" I reply reluctantly

"Damn! That was quick! I mean I'm not surprised. You were in a story about Fantasy Poker that never once explained what Fantasy Poker was. I mean, It's not exactly Wine-Dark Sea material."

"I'll have you know I make great Wine Dark Sea material!" I say, despite knowing that I'm convincing no-one.

"Sure you do" she laughs at some joke which I clearly am not getting. I sigh and begin walking down the path. The girl walks beside me her feet blending into the ground beneath her wherever she steps like trees planting their roots.

"So what exactly is this place?" I ask her.

"Well, it's the area responsible for building stories and the worlds where they take place"

I nod in understanding.

"Take that place for example" she says pointing to what looks like an auditorium. "That's the place where the plot of the Junior Cert essay takes place"

"Was that story...?"

"Finished? Yep."

"Lucky!"

"Yeah. They get to stay in their own complete satisfying world. Not everyone gets to be like that. Our stories

were never finished so we just chill around here instead"

I look at the area surrounding me. So many different worlds, different characters. Some probably still left with the hope of being revived. I wonder if that hope is the one thing they cling on to. That they haven't been forgotten and some day they will be given their ending. This place is what they're left with. A place of endless possibilities leaving the small chance that one of them could involve you. It's simultaneously beautiful and terrifying.

The path I walk on continues to extend as I move along it. I can't tell if I'm following it or it's following me.

I notice an expansive green field off to my right

"What's that place?" I ask the girl

"That's the fanfiction area. You don't want to go near there"

"But it looks so pretty"

"Yeah. I used to think the same about the Zelda universe". She shudders and I decide not to question her any further on the topic.

We walk for a bit more until we reach an apartment block with rainbows shooting out of the windows. The girl stops abruptly in front of it. I stops too considering she's currently the only person I sort of know.

"Here we are" She says.

"We were going somewhere?"

"Well no path leads nowhere"

"My story lead nowhere"

The girl chuckles to herself and then knocks on the door.

"I'm curious to know the story of the rainbow apartment" I comment

"The apartment was a pretty typical place originally. A bunch of characters just kind of came to live here and added some rainbows for decoration"

The door swings open to reveal a man in a red uniform with a cool moustache.

"Is Sally here?" the girl asks

"Right upstairs" The doorman replied. "You know the room"

The girl enters the door and I follow her into the building.

"Who's Sally?" I ask as we head towards the stairs.

"An old friend. She's been around longer than anyone else I know"

After several flights of stairs we walk down a hallway and stop in front of a door. The girl knocks on the door. There's no response.

"Sally?" she calls and knocks on the door again; harder this time. "There's someone I want you to meet". Still no response. The girl curses under her breath. She takes a step away from the door and then slams her shoulder into it.

"Are you going to help me?" She asks me

"What's going on?"

"It doesn't matter, just help me!"

So we stand in front of the door shoulder to shoulder.

I remember how my poker opponent had telekinesis. I wonder if I was supposed to have any powers. Especially something that would be useful right now, like super strength.

We crash into the door together, the force knocking the door open. I stumble into the apartment and fall flat on my face. I guess grace isn't necessary for being good at poker.

"Yes! Nice job!" The girl chimes at me. "Now you're getting it!"

I push myself back onto my feet. I scan the room I'm standing in. It looks like a pretty decent apartment.

There's a couch, a TV

"Oh my god, a poker table" I say noticing the only thing truly familiar to me.

"Come on!" says the girl, taking my arm and leading me towards a door.

"But I'm so good at poker!" I say. "I was totally going to win that game, back in my story"

"No you weren't"

"You don't know that!"

We head through the door into a bedroom with a large open window. Standing on the windowsill is a creature that could have only come from a child's imagination. It's mostly a cat but its fur is purple and it has two wings protruding from its back.

"Sally!" The girl calls at the cat creature. Sally turns her head to look at us.

"What are you doing here?" Sally asks.

"I'm here to help you" the girl responds

"How could you possibly help me? My story hasn't been touched in over ten years! I can't live like this! I need an ending. So I'm creating one myself!" Sally turns her head back towards the window, edges towards

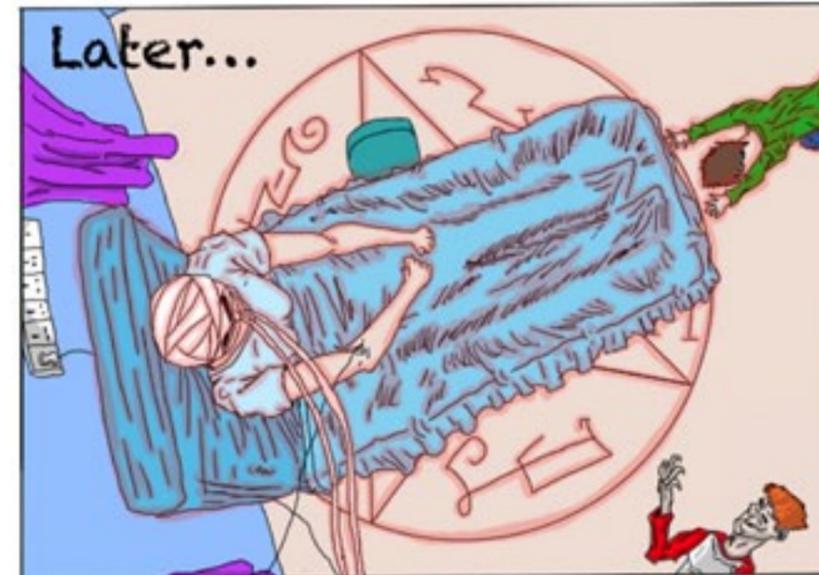
the ledge ad takes a deep breath
 "Sally you can't!" The girl yells. But Sally had already made up her mind.
 "Yes I can!" Sally yells. "This world had no closure for me."
 And with that final statement Sally releases herself from the window allowing herself to fall. All I can do is watch without words as the girl runs to the windowsill.
 "No Sally!" she calls. "I meant you can't die from jumping out a window. You have wings."
 I walk over to the window, my heart pounding, which is a relief because I thought it had stopped for a moment. There floats Sally, her wings allowing natural self-preservation instincts to take over and saving her life. She sighs and flies back into the window, landing on her bed.
 "What's the point?" she asks "I'm never going to be part of a finished story!"
 "Well, funny you should say that..." says the girl.
 I look at Sally. She could almost be me in the future.
 "If it's any consolation you're not the only one who's been abandoned" I say. "There are a lot of characters here who's stories were never finished. You're not alone here."
 "I know" Sally sighs. "But most of them might be recycled into something new. Look at me. I have no hope. What kind of seventeen-year old would ever put something like in their story?"
 "You would be surprised" the girl pipes up.
 "Yeah right" Sally mutters "My story was in a world about evil rainbows. As if I would ever fit into something more mature"
 The girl chuckles to herself a little. I wonder why. There's something about the way she speaks. As though she knows something we don't.
 "What story were you written for?" I ask her.
 "This one" She responds casually.
 "I'm sorry, what?" I ask
 "I was written specifically for this story."
 "What story?" Sally asks. "What are you talking about?"
 "I'm talking about the story we're in right now. The one about abandoned stories. The one that's so meta that one of the characters is literally saying how meta it is."
 "What?" I say
 "Your story was never abandoned" she says. "It was always meant to go like this."
 "So the poker game?"
 "Doesn't matter but let's be real here. You lost"
 "Damn it!" I say although I knew it was doomed from the start. "You know what? I think I like this story better".
 "What about me?" Sally asks
 "You were recycled from all those kiddy stories. You made it back. You get to be in a story with an ending. The best part is that I honestly can't tell if this is a twist or not".
 "After all this time..." Sally whispered "I've been brought back"
 "That's right" says the girl "How could anyone forget you?"
 "I can't believe it! I'm finally in a story with an
 (I'm kidding!)
 ending".

Emma Torreggiani





THE NEXT DAY...



Guardian

It was the year 2016 when they first descended from what they called “the afterlife”. They were similar to us, human that is, except on their back they bore magnificent wings. It took a while for the public to calm down, at first there was uproar. People going on about the end of the world. Aliens. God’s natural selection. Trump’s master plan. The fantastic creatures were in fact, nothing of the sort. They told us, through trial and error, that they had been sent down to protect us. Apparently, the “Man upstairs” thought we were dying off too quick, so he sent his little helpers. One assigned to each person, essentially guardian angels. I thought at first this was the answer to all my prayers, I was a social outcast, keeping maybe one or two friends on my journey through third level education, but maybe this was my chance. My salvation. We grew fond of them quickly. Or most of us did. Everyone had these fantastic stories about their angel.

“My angel saved my children during our house fire.”

“My angel helped me pick winning lotto numbers.”

“My angel helped my son come out of the closet.”

That last story came from my very camp uncle, who told us this during our Christmas dinner, after drinking a very un-Christian amount of wine. Everyone had a fabulous story to share. Except me. See, my guardian angel was a bit of an idiot.

The rain splattered against the glass of “Rob’s”, the small indie café I had found a few months back and had since gone to religiously to read and have a cup of coffee at least three times a week. I scanned the marvellous works of de Shelby, a fantastic writer, whose work a friend had sent to me for my birthday. But I was interrupted.

“Hey.”

I kept reading.

“Hey!”

I glanced up briefly, looking to a figure in the room only visible to me. His tall lean figure had assumed a sitting position in a chair across from me. He wore white ripped skinny jeans, and a Led Zeppelin band t-shirt. It draped across his physique, catch on two lumps protruding from under his t-shirt at his back.

“Come to compliment my hair cut again Clarence?” I asked, my eyes darting back to my book. I hated giving him attention.

“Funny, no I’m not actually, and as we’ve been through this before, I think the blade 3 on the side makes you look like a ponce. In other news, the real reason you come here three times a week has just started her shift.” Clarence replied, his smug grin widening across his face. My eyes shifted to the clock-in machine at the back of the café, there she was. Julia Moore, a complete book nerd, like myself. Tall, thin, lovely personality, I heard she was nice to talk to as well. I hated to admit it to myself, but Clarence was right. She is the reason I have come here without question the past few months. I have been carefully studying her book taste, coffee taste and music taste, and have compiled a list of different situations that can play out when I approach her and utter my keyword, as planned, this should induce a hypnotic state on myself, which I have been training into my subconscious the past two weeks. I had studied this methodology through the works of de Shelby, who allegedly used it to get with his wife during his time. Today was my chance to prove these few months of careful planning hadn’t been a waste. I approached the counter with what I like to call manly elegance, and locked eyes with her.

“Hi Dave, what can I get for you today?” she enquired.

It was go time. Phase 1; the keyword.

“Oh, just a café frappe please.” I replied. A feeling of calm washed over me, it was working! I had Julia in my back pocket. I love it when a plan comes together.

“Of course, I’ll get that for you now.” She said, smiling at me. I was confident, I was ready for anything she threw at me. But as quick as it came, the feeling of calm washed away. What had happened!? My stomach was suddenly a nervous wreck, and that’s when I heard a familiar snigger. I glanced to my left. There he was, my guardian angel.

“Oh, come on.” He drawled, “hypnotism? You have got to be kidding me, like you really believed it was gonna play out well?” I stared at him, the nervous panic in my chest slowly building into a burning rage. “I planted that book on you!” he continued, “and you totally fell for it, you don’t have a friend called Derek! Sure, you don’t have many friends at all! What you gonna do now champ? Now that your hypnosis had failed you.” Julia came back to the counter, with a chilled frappe brandished in her hand. I was flustered, confused, essentially caught at gunpoint with ‘my pants down.’ But a man once backed into a corner, had only one option to escape, and that was to fight.

“Thanks Julia!” I said with a smile, “Say how’s that book I recommended to you coming, have you got to the part with the policemen yet?” She smiled back, warming my heart.

“Yeah! I have actually it’s –“Really crap.”

What? Hold up, did Julia actually just say that?

“Sorry Julia, my hearing’s pretty poor lately, could you repeat that?” I mustered.

“I said it’s really crap.” Replied the voice, but not Julia’s voice, but a harsher, more annoying tone. I turned to my left, there he was again.

“Get lost Clarence.” I said.

“Sorry what?” Julia looked at me in a state of confusion.

“Nothing, sorry how was the book, run it by me again.”

“The book was good as I was –“

“You’re an idiot.”

“Clarence, kill yourself.”

“I’m dead already stupid.”

“Sorry what, did you just tell me to kill myself.” said Julia.

“No not you, him.”

“Me.”

“Oh him, as in who exactly?”

“Your fly’s down.”

“Not falling for it.”

“No, I’m serious, quick before Julia sees!” I looked down.

“Gotcha slick!” I heard, followed by a laugh.

“Sorry Dave, I gotta get back to work. Catch you around.” Julia walked off, my shoulder’s slumped.

Later that night, I had assumed what may be known to some as a foetal position on my bed, or as the Spanish call it la posicion de extecencial criso. I hated my life, I was still a social outcast, at the age of 23, and had just blown it with the girl of my dreams. All because of that stupid angel. There must be something I can do. Just then, at that exact moment, as if an answer from God, or I guess some other divine form in this case. An old book on my shelf caught my eye. I picked myself up from off my bed and slouched across the room, picking up the leather-bound book off my shelf blowing the dust off it.

The Satanic Bible – Anton Lavey.

Suddenly, a plan began forming in my brain. Surely if there was such a thing as angels, there must be something similar down below as it were. It was time to get some answers, I was going to need some chalk, a cross and a goat. It was time for some payback.

Max Lynch



Another year, sails have sailed, between the blue and white.
 Another year, takes its place, confident, in their pride
 Most faces stay, others leave, but we're comfortable in the air we breathe
 For this is a sea where people believe, in the white and blue they bleed

Often, times have tested our character
 For years, this crest, we've carried her
 And endured huge changes in character
 Let's remember those changes, as mariners

Let's explore, as we have these corridors
 And jump ship, and grip, these unfamiliar oars
 Let's live and let live until we hit the shores

And when we do, if you want, there will still be more
 There's more places like this, that build person
 Let's remember this place as we close curtains
 And open new doors to new persons
 Let's experience life, in new verses

A new world is so close, let's grab it as it comes
 But let's never forget, the world we came from

Finlay McFayden



The Mystery Man

I woke up on a cold floor. Where was I? Then I remembered. I had died. But that was impossible... Here I was on the floor, aching but still alive. I had a bad headache and a pain in my arm, but nonetheless, here I was. I looked around at the room I was in and then realized everything was all sideways. What? Then I realized I was still lying down. Right. What had happened to me? I thought hard as I eased myself off the floor into a sitting position. My arm was really sore now. I rubbed it gingerly, trying to remember all I could about what had happened:

I had decided to go for a walk along the pier to try and clear my head after my ex-best friend's body had been discovered in a street in town. Then, a car had pulled up alongside of me, and a man had leaned out. 'Get in', he had said. 'I'll take you home. Look, you're getting all wet.'

It was true. The rain was lashing down, and I had forgotten to bring a jacket. But I wasn't going to get in a car with this rough-looking stranger. He was wearing an expensive suit and aftershave, but he had an unshaven face, with eyes sunk deep into his head, which were also too far apart, giving him a sly look. There was a waxy quality to his skin, as if he rarely saw daylight.

I had politely declined the man's offer, saying I was very close to home. I could tell he didn't believe me. Hell, I didn't even believe me. I had always been a terrible liar. He got out of the car, and insisted I let him bring me home. Again, I refused. He paused. Then there was a curt command from inside the car. I hadn't noticed another person, but then I saw the tinted glass on the windows. The first man smiled, no, leered at me: a terrible grin, full of teeth. Again came a curt command from the second man. I couldn't make out what it was saying, but I knew it couldn't be good. I turned and tried to run, but the man was too fast for me. He caught me easily, and put his hand over my mouth. I struggled, but it was no use. The man might have had arms of steel, for the use of all my struggling and biting. I was thrown roughly into the back of the car, and a blindfold was pulled over my eyes. The first man got into the drivers' seat again, and started the car. I screamed. My companion in the back, the Mystery Man, covered my mouth with his hand.

'Hey!' he exclaimed. 'None of that. You could wake the dead with a scream like that.'

'Get off me!' I tried to yell, but all that came out was a muffled 'Mmmm mm mmmm!'

'Looks like we caught a wildcat, Raf! Did you ever here the likes of that scream?' the first man chuckled. Then, I saw the knife. I saw it glinting in the shadow of the Mystery Man's other hand. He slowly raised it to my arm, and suddenly plunged it in. I screamed again, and this time no one stopped me. The knife was pulled out, only to be thrust back in again. I screamed, and screamed again. Still no one stopped me. It was like red hot rods being pressed into my arm. I felt the warm blood seep through my clothes. Suddenly the car stopped. The Mystery Man yanked me roughly out, causing a fresh wave of shrieks to rise out of me. I was blinded by pain, so I could only feel myself being lifted, and then falling, falling, falling. I knew it couldn't end well. My last thoughts were on the Mystery Man... Or so I thought...

I sat up on the floor, holding my arm. I remembered what had happened now, with the unshaven stranger, and the man with the voice like ice. I remembered that I had died. So was this death? A cold floor, an empty room and bloodstains on my clothes. I hoped it wasn't... I hoped there was more.

Alicia McGrath

Chicken

The butcher had stabbed her in the back. Warm tears welled in her eyes and dribbled down her make-up caked face as the horror of the situation hit home. Her anguished cry lost itself in the din of Foyle & Sons' Craft Butchers as the impatient clientele began baying for blood. Mrs Carson's heart, once filled with tender intentions and rose-tinted optimism, had been slashed cruelly as despair ravaged her very soul. It was a chicken. No more, no less.

When the newly wed Mrs Carson had been tasked with hosting her inaugural Christmas dinner, it was fair to say that her new husband's family greeted this appointment with a great deal of scepticism. Though she was a woman of remarkable beauty she had a distinctly nervous disposition and was yet to be accepted by the more conservative cynics of the Carson clan. With this doubt in mind, and as an icy darkness invaded the December evenings, Mrs Carson began shaping her triumphant yuletide banquet. Central to its near certain success was a 7kg Termonfeckin-bred free range bronze miracle turkey, ordered months in advance from the award-winning Foyle & Sons' Craft Butchers and costing a rather steep €99.99 plus VAT for which Mrs Carson was almost expecting the turkey to predict lotto numbers and cook the rest of the dinner for her. One could therefore understand her hysteria when craft butcher first class Tim Foyle presented her with a feather strewn carcass no bigger than her Michael Korrs purse. This embarrassing mess of contorted bones and sparse flesh, optimistically billed as a pedigree 16 lb premium turkey, was in fact no more than a glorified KFC reject. It was a chicken.

Mrs Carson fled through the hordes that stuffed the butchers and snaked a slithering line of stressed-out shoppers down Stretson High Street. The cold, unforgiving Christmas air slammed ferociously into her petite figure as she stumbled out onto the footpath. Snowflakes fluttered onto her cheeks, melting softly before mixing with crystal tears and cascading rivers of sorrow down her face. She spied the gleaming comfort of her husband John's slate-grey BMW X5 which had just pulled up and she crunched through the snow towards it. The second he rolled down the window and greeted her with his warm smile, admiration and eternal reassurance, Mrs Carson's ability to breathe naturally returned and she knew she had nothing to fear. "Oh John it was absolutely terrible!" she cried, plunging towards the car.

"The turkey was nothing more than a pathetic chicken, that pig of a butcher tried to rip me off! What on earth are we going to do?" Her voice was thick with panic.

"That's awful!" exclaimed Mr Carson sympathetically before flashing a glance at his watch.

"Lidl is still open for another ten minutes. There's still time."

"Oh good thinking!" cried Mrs Carson excitedly. "Drive around the block and I'll be out in five minutes."

With that, Mr Carson coaxed his four-wheel drive to life and skidded off while his wife hurried down the street. She reached the wondrous colossus of Lidl in no time, only a slight shiver detectable as she strode across the threshold. As she weaved her way through aisles of gaudy Christmas crackers and six-piece garden furniture sets boasting easy self-assembly, a myriad of musings filled her aching head. Why did the tins of Roses seem to get ever so slightly smaller every year? Why did the present wish lists of children seem to get ever so slightly bigger every year? And who decided that brussels sprouts would hold an eternal and unquestioned presence at the Christmas dinner table when their texture and flavour triggered more gag reflexes than the X Factor winner's Christmas No.1? Eventually, she seized an 8kg not-quite-so-free-range vacuum packed turkey-shaped thing and, with superhuman strength for a woman of her stature, dragged it along grimy floors to the self-service checkout. Pausing to rest for just a second, Mrs Carson was abruptly informed that she was an "unexpected item in the bagging area" and after fending off the machine's advances to offer her a club card, a receipt, a reusable shopping bag and (she was fairly certain) a date, the frazzled woman eventually emerged from the carnivorous jungle of German supermarket experience, unscathed. Well, relatively.

Darkness had fallen. Tolling church bells in the distance reminded her that travel-weary, judgemental guests would be arriving at home any second. An icy breeze and panicked dread crept down her spine as she pulled her scarf up over stinging cheeks. Flustered, she hurriedly hauled the reluctant turkey into her husband's waiting BMW and, clambering onto the backseat next to it, shouted "DRIVE! DRIVE! We're late!" at the top of a croaking voice. As she sank back into the plush leather interiors and cosied up next to her frozen companion, Mrs Carson let out a sigh of frustrated relief. Crisis averted. She could breathe once more. But suddenly, like a cold shadow creeps over you on a summer's day, tendrils of horror enveloped Mrs Carson as she was hit with the realisation that her towering husband John was not in the driver's seat! In his place, sat a cowering elderly lady wracked with terror and wondering what on earth the crazed lunatic with the 8kg turkey on the backseat was going to do to her. Mrs Carson screamed in ear-splitting unison with the petrified old woman as it dawned on her that she had got into the wrong car.

Mr Carson had surveyed this unfortunate incident with confounded disbelief and perplexity. As he had

turned his BMW onto the high-street seconds earlier the thoughts of the crackling fire and the sheepskin slippers that awaited him at home had been rudely interrupted. He watched from a distance, completely befuddled, as his wife hastily dragged a monstrous turkey through the sludge and disappeared into the back of a slate-grey BMW X5 that was most certainly not his. Motionless, Mr Carson's face was awash with confusion for some minutes. Then he smiled, a broad grin taking hold. He adjusted the rear-view mirror. He turned the car around. He drove away.

Harry Deacon

Unrequited

Ten close tongues, ten months-still you say
No. Many men to whom you desire,
Unholy tricks of lust, day by day,
Your beauty in which men aspire,

Spare me one night, I mean day, please, life,
If not. Choose to leave me in dismay,
You do not know me now my dear wife,
I trust in your longer light's delay

From your unrequited prince D.A.

Demi Awosika



Chicken

As the days grew greener and the light shone warmer under spring's ardent fruition, a strange ritual occurred. A cherry blossom tree, shaking off the drowsiness of winter slumber, underwent a fantastical transformation. Its tawny brown bough stretched and swaggered under the newfound light. Its roots twisted and wove through humus and warrens, much to the annoyance of still sleeping rabbits. The crisp coat of frost on its leaves melted and cleared and disappeared until the wispy white world was all but forgotten. But the most spectacular change was still to come. For in the tiny buds adorning the ends of tiny twigs, a strange chemical reaction was occurring. A process which caused the buds to burst open overnight in a dazzling array of colour. Fresh pink leaves, ripe and hearty, flushed down the tree and announced to the world – spring is here.

And this did not go unnoticed. Oh no, it did not go unnoticed. For then a busy little bee saw the tree. And it was captivated by colour. So it beat its wings and landed on a plump pink petal. Inside was sweet nectar. The bee visited flower by flower, hour by hour until it couldn't drink anymore. Then it flew off, back to its hexagonal home. The bee did not know why it cared so much about colour. It simply did. And what's more, the tree had no knowledge of the complexity of its composition. To it, colour has no meaning. Yet it spent all winter carefully crafting flowers. Beautiful flowers. For this moment. For the impossible possibility that the Earth will once again spin closer to the raging inferno of the sun, and in this temporal pocket of harmony the bees will once again find their way to the tree. The tree swayed carelessly in a gentle wind.

Suddenly, there was a crunch. Footsteps were near. Four boys appeared.

"He won't do it," spat Fat Billy Joad. "Look at him. He won't do it." Billy stood a head taller than the rest. He had the look of a farm boy; heavy set, sartorially unassuming, callused hands and a shock of freckles littering a wide face. He brushed back his thin straw yellow hair and continued up the path past the cherry tree, leading the way beyond the valley farms until the wheat turned to wild grass and the wild grass turned to moss. The boys went over one last ridge onto the top of the cliff. A cool breeze smarted their skin. Beyond the precipice roared a waterfall.

Behind the boys was a posse of more children, the entire Fourth Grade. There were murmurs of excitement. They made their way one by one then huddled, legs fixed to the ground and looked, wide-eyed over the cliff. For many of them this was the first time they'd disobeyed their parents, and the tingling sensation of independence filled them with excitement. Every family in the valley had the same set of rules: Do Your Homework, Respect Your Elders, and Stay Away From The Waterfall.

Far below them white water rushed down the river and plummeted over the edge, torrentially chopping and churning as it crashed into the pool. Flecks of misty water brushed against their faces. They were hushed now. The river rumbled on.

"Huh!" Billy snorted, "Just like I remember." He walked closer to the edge and kicked some dirt into the rushing current. "Water's fine. Last summer it was like this and my brother and his friends jumped 'cross it a hundred times. So did I. Loads of times. It's easy!" He sneered back at one of the boys "Course, this one won't do it. He's too chicken."

Another boy sniggered and echoed "Yeah, too chicken!"

The boy in question said nothing. He was short, even for his age. Pale and skinny with a bowl of hair on his head.

"C'mon don't just stand there," shouted Billy over the roaring waterfall. "Get over here!" The boy walked awkwardly towards him. "Look at him! Look at how chicken he is! He's practically peeing his pants!" Billy laughed. "I jumped it hundreds of times. Course, I'm not a runt like you." Billy looked down at him. "You want to know what happens to runts like you when they try to cross the river? Same thing that happened to Johnson's oldest boy." The boy didn't meet Billy's gaze. He looked down at his feet, arms at his side.

Billy walked back towards the crowd and started talking to no one in particular. "Johnson's oldest tried it ten summers back," he jeered, "slipped on the ridge and fell in the river. Current carried him right over the edge. Went splat when he hit the bottom. Water ripped him all up. That's why none of the grownups ever talk about him. Couldn't find the body. Fed the fishes, he did."

The children muttered amongst themselves. They had never heard of a third Johnson boy.

He was right on the edge now. In front of him was rushing white water; to his left was a drop that meant certain death. He took a step back. Then another.

"See!" said Billy, "He's too chicken. I told you!" The boy was walking backwards now. But his eyes, stayed fixed ahead. He stopped. Billy turned to him. "You're just a –"

The boy ran straight ahead. He jumped off the cliff.

Some said he jumped that way on purpose. Some said he missed. Some of the kids swore blindly that he

flew like a bird a whole ten feet before plummeting downwards. But despite this everyone agreed that he seemed to float for an eternal second, his figure partially eclipsing the setting sun, as they watched in helpless awe. In that moment he wasn't just the quiet kid, the scrawny kid, the kid who always missed school. He represented something else, something the kids couldn't understand, maybe something they'd never understand, but something they could feel was bigger than themselves, bigger than anything they'd ever known. Then he was out of sight and the children snapped out of their daze. They all rushed over to the cliff's edge. All of them except Billy. He stood where he was, mouth half open.

None of the children could see the boy. Seconds passed. Nobody dared move for fear that they would miss what happened next. Then, out of the pool of water far below, a head popped up. The boy swam to the edge of the pool and pulled himself out, shaking himself dry. He walked off through the meadow in the direction of the town without looking back.

"Aw no!" said one of the kids "I really wanted to see him jump 'cross the river! I didn't even see him fall, he fell too quick." Other children groaned too.

"Hey Billy," said one of the girls, "You said you could jump it. Said you did it loads of times. Won't you show us? Go on, won't you show us?"

All eyes turned to Billy. He was quiet for a long time. He scratched his head. "I would. Yeah, I would. I got to beat it though, dinner's ready back home." He quickly turned away.

The children looked at each other. 'He's chicken,' one said. Another took up the refrain. Billy walked then began to run back down the trail, 'Chicken,' 'Chicken', 'Chicken' ringing in his ears.

Gavin McDaid



The Telescope

Growing up I didn't have a Dad. He wasn't absent from my life or anything. We lived in the same house, ate dinner together but he was never present. He would always rush off to go places or said he had to do this or had to do something important. Instead of his child being the most prized accomplishment, or beloved thing in his life, it was a telescope. It was the ugliest specimen I had ever seen. He said his dad had given it to him, his father's father had given it to him and so on it went till it became the decrepit, off brown telescope that my dad spent all of his free time with.

The thing he loved most was his greatest downfall, literally. He fell off the roof while looking through his telescope and died. My entire world had changed in an instant because of that telescope. Yet it was the only thing I had left. In his will he left me his house, the little money he had but above all his telescope. I came home after the funeral to an empty house and I knew the telescope was still up there untouched. After he had fallen I had an onslaught of doctors, undertakers, caterers and family from all over. This was the first moment I had to myself and I was filled with anger. I marched all the way to the attic filled with animosity determined that destroying the telescope would solve everything. I lugged it out from the roof and proceeded to throw it down three flights of stairs. Much to my dismay and irritation it didn't break. There was not even a crack in sight. I lugged it back up to the attic, this time taking a rolling pin. With all my measly might and arm strength I managed to pull a muscle whilst attempting to destroy it. I lay there in the attic with a pulled muscle, my heart pounding and an indestructible telescope, my only companion. After a while I felt the enmity drain out of me. I took the telescope and pointed it towards the skylight in the attic. My eyes focused.

"You have lost your marbles" the boy screamed.

I took my eyes away from the telescope and slammed it against the wall. I was hallucinating. I had not just seen a boy screaming in a telescope. It was tiredness, grief, alcohol anything else. I lifted it to my eye again.

"I had the same reaction" when I was your age the man said.

"Firstly, you were never my age, secondly I know Mum always said you were crazy Dad but this is beyond crazy Aunt Rita with twelve cats that dresses them in tea cosies kind of crazy". The boy spat at the old man. The boy was tall maybe about twenty and there was something oddly familiar about him.

"Eamon you're in denial" the man said in a soft tone to the boy. I suddenly realised how I knew the boy. It was my dad. Granted twenty-five years younger, without mad scientist hair and glasses that were covered in Sellotape, but it was him.

"Drunk people are in denial. I am not in denial." my Dad shouted.

"You will soon realise that this telescope will be your greatest gift in life," the old man who I presume was my Grandfather said while sipping his tea.

"You're telling me that there is a 'magic' in our family that allows us to look into this old telescope and see our and the people we love lives? What and every time the toaster pops a ghost is saying hello? What next you're going to tell me that vampires exist and they live in the TV and they come out at night?" he said in a mocking tone with a smirk to my grandfather

"Without all of the rest of the palaver, basically yes." My granddad answered.

"Ok old man that is definitely not tea in that cup." he said whilst walking away.

I put the telescope down. I had been awake for far too long. This had to be the start of my descent into a mental breakdown. I went to bed. Despite my best efforts to stay away the next day I was back up there. I willed myself not to pick up the crooked telescope but after a measly thirty seconds my will power had evaporated.

"I swear Eamon if you walk out that door I'm gone." she screamed. With a jolt I realised it was my mother.

"I have to go I saw his death Sarah and if I don't stop it who will?" my dad shouted.

"I don't care Eamon, I don't know how many nights I've waited for you to come back from these ridiculous vigilante wannabe Batman escapades. These escapades you go on because of this 'supernatural' telescope. You left our wedding to go to the postman's house 'to save him from going to the shop' because you thought he would get into an accident. You left me in the hospital with our daughter because you thought your crazy uncle Tony was going to 'drive his golf buggy into a lake and drown'. I used to find your imagination endearing; now it's just pathetic. There is nothing in that telescope Eamon." She said to him with a solemn look.

"You're not going to leave. You're going to go up to Laura check on her have a glass of wine and forgive me tomorrow morning I've seen it." he said with a smirk, he winked and walked out.

I put the telescope down. My Mum left when I was one. She never came back. My Dad told me it was be-

cause she got a new job and he didn't want to hold her back. I looked back into the telescope in search of another glimpse of my mother.

"I'm worried about her Dad" my dad said to my granddad.

"You've managed to stop her every time." my granddad said sipping at his tea.

"I know and it was ok because when I saw her dying I could tell what age she was and I knew what she was wearing and on those days. When I saw the signs I just stopped her from going out or distracted her. But now I see them every day. I don't care though if it's what it takes to save her. I need to know what's going to happen and as long as I have the telescope I can keep her safe." He said to my granddad.

I put the telescope down. My Dad didn't love the telescope more than me. He used the telescope because he loved me. I needed to see more.

"I hate you." I screamed. I put the telescope down.

I knew exactly what this memory was. I was supposed to go to a party and my dad had said I couldn't that it was too dangerous. I didn't know if I wanted to relive this or not.

"This is ridiculous. You are actually paranoid lunatic you know that. Nothing is going to go wrong." I screamed at him.

"Laura please I wouldn't say it if I didn't believe it wasn't for the best. Just don't go tonight please." He pleaded with me.

"You know what Dad I used to wonder why Mum left you. Now I know she was just running away from an overbearing man who was disillusioned with the world and obsessed with his pathetic telescope". I said and walked out slamming the door.

I wanted so badly to stop watching but I couldn't.

My dad sat down for a minute at the table and took a deep breath. He got up and went into the attic. He opened the window and climbed out onto the roof where he had the telescope. He looked into it.

He lost his footing and he slipped. He fell from the roof down onto the patio. I lowered the telescope. My Dad had gone up to the roof to see what was going to happen to me.

Claire Mooney



Too Early or Too Late

Walking into that little diner on 48th street, was like stepping into the 1960's all over again. Elvis started to play as soon as you entered the door, while you're greeted by the smell of burgers frying on the grill. I sat down in my usual red booth, facing once again nobody and ordered a black coffee. Staring at the clock's pointer as it's about to point to 2 am, I don't usually leave the house after nine, but home didn't feel like home anymore and this was the closest thing to going back in time. I start to gaze around the room, looking at the other unfortunates that are all sitting alone at a booth meant for a group.

My mom always told me I had a keen eye for detail, she said that with one glimpse onto someone, I could tell personal details about them, that nobody else would know. Some think it's me trying to be creative, but I just think I have an inquisitive mind. You see, people are so much easier to read when you don't speak to them, because they can't lie or hide emotions. That's why I always preferred to just look at people, but never speak to them. Even in high school, I'd sit in the bleachers and watch the different crowds, figuring out everyone's true personality, it's like solving a puzzle or cracking a code.

The first piece to solving the puzzle is appearance. For example, the man sitting at the second last booth, on the far right, let's call him "Red" for the arguments sake. See most people would look at him and describe a male, 6ft 3, brown hair, blue eyes and glasses. But that's not Red, see from his burnt fingertips we know he's a smoker. He's recently divorced, a tan line of a ring on his finger, I'm guessing honeymoon gone wrong as the rings in his left pocket. Poor Red, still isn't over the girl he thought was the woman of his dreams, what he doesn't know yet is that he has unknowingly been flirting with the waitress the entire time. So well in fact, that as we speak she is writing her phone number on his check.

Now turn your attention to the centre of the diner, twelfth chair, a girl that looks like a "Chloe". Some would say, blonde, green eyes, teenager and pretty. Once again, our own eyes deceive us and uncover the truth that even though we seek, we prefer to see the lies. From true appearance and body language we can uncover what she truly is, solving the puzzle. Chloe's hair is tied with a single red and purple ribbon, these colours are only seen in "Avonmoore High". The prestigious academy for the children of the rich and wealthy. Chloe's scared, her mascaras washed away with the crowd of tears and she's hunching in such a way she hides herself from anyone around her. The bag she's carrying is too full to be for a sleepover or trip, Chloe's running away from home. She doesn't know what to do, so she asked a friend to help. She's waiting to meet up with them, who we know won't come, but Chloe still stairs at the clock. Hoping, one minute someone will walk through the red double diner doors.

Unknowingly, from across the room, a man is hopelessly staring at her, let's call him "Jake". He is 5 ft. 7, brown hair, brown eyes and piercing in his right ear. Jake intrigues me, as he doesn't hide anything, like most of us do, or he is just very good at it. He is an open book, covered in tattoos to show his ideas and thoughts, with no remorse on what people will think of them. Jake, shamelessly, stares at a woman across the room. As if he was daring her to look back. The way he hunches over the table, forming almost a U shape, shows us he spends long hours on the computer. To such a point that he constantly looks back at his phone, checking for messages and notifications.

See, even though I have a gift that seems almost out of a Sherlock Holmes story, I still can't seem to figure myself out. My names Eric, 6 ft. 3, ginger hair, porcelain skin and a birth mark on my left cheek. My clothes are worn out to a point it looks as if they were bought a size too big. There is a hole in the sole of my left shoe and a rip in the back of my collar. Why am I sitting in this diner at almost 3 o'clock in the morning? I don't know, maybe I'm hopeless, lost, confused or just sleep deprived. However, I prefer to not self-reflect, I'm not sure if it's too early or late to do so. All that I can do now is stare at the clock, while I sip my bitter coffee, waiting for the sweet ting of the door's bells as someone new walks in. I grasp desperately to figure out these people like puzzles, but I know one day I'll have to piece together my own.

Yasmin Ryan



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