

# Bray Arts Journal

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**Editor's Note** This is the third volume of the Bray Arts Journal that we have launched as part of the annual Bray Literature Festival. The editorial team of Michael O'Reilly, Deirdre Fitzgerald, Carmen Cullen, Paul Fitzgerald and Julie-Rose McCormick would like to thank all who contributed material for consideration. Please submit material or ideas for future issues to

[editor@brayarts.net](mailto:editor@brayarts.net)

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Illustrations by Michael O'Reilly from a series entitled **Lost Bray** – based on historical photos of Bray collected from various sources.

## Tayt-ode by Billy O'hAnluain

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the lady who has sat  
down beside me on the number 9 bus.  
The courage to know that I can only change  
the way I listen to her eating her crisps  
and the wisdom to know that she probably  
won't finish eating them until it is my stop.

I have admitted to God, and with the  
wink of an eye, to another passenger  
that I am powerless over the crinkling  
of her bag and her salted fingers burrowing  
ever deeper there. I acknowledge that the  
journey  
is becoming unmanageable as I watch her  
lick the length of her finger to the tip of her  
Tayto  
dusted wedding ring in search of fleeting  
flavour.

I am turning my will over to the Higher  
Power of  
Bus Eireann, The Driver, as I understand him  
to be.  
He alone can deliver me to Kimmage and  
erode  
my angry scowls to gentle glances.  
As her index finger excavates the dark silver  
corners of the crisp bag, crinkle crescendo,  
raiding them ruthlessly for crumbs. I  
surrender  
my will entirely to Him, the Driver as I  
understand  
Him to be.

As she raises the bag to her mouth, open  
wide,  
dental appointment style, Mr Tayto in his  
pleated  
trousers and smart suit is aimed diagonally  
to  
expel whatever fried fat remains, through  
the enamel  
lip stick stained portals of her teeth.

I make a fearless and searching moral  
inventory of myself. I acknowledge the  
resentments,  
how her shopping bags piled high at my feet  
are unlit fuses to rush hour rage. I pull out  
the cracked mirror I keep for looking at  
myself.  
And see my self eating crisps on the Inter  
City

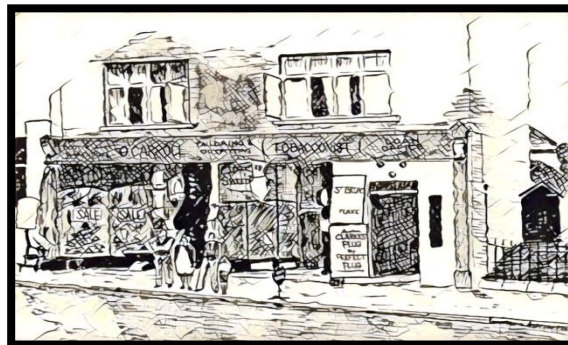
to Galway, oblivious to my own salt and  
vinegar odour,  
deluding myself that I have mastered the  
impossible  
art of eating crisps with a monastic touch of  
silence, that  
somehow when I eat them, it's all Hunky  
Dory.  
I admit that I have crinkled as much as she  
has crinkled.  
I admit that sometimes I despise Mr Tayto's  
gormless smile.

I am entirely ready to have The Driver as I  
understand him to be, remove these defects.  
I endeavour to make direct amends to her  
however possible. Twitching the corners of  
my mouth, exercising,  
building up to the Olympic feat of a smile.  
My mouth stretches  
to a smile as the bus heaves over the arched  
spine of Robert Emmet bridge. I nod in her  
direction, acknowledging the shared  
drudge of the overcrowded commute  
home. She rolls her eyes as  
though to say, "jeez, don't I know...". We  
pass Mount Jerome.

Her tired fingers slither up the bell pole, she  
presses, her stop  
is mine too. Without a word, I gesture to  
carry her bags,  
she gently purses her lips to say thanks.  
Weighed down with her Penny's I weave  
through a forest of damp coats, my eye  
dives down to see a family pack of Tayto  
peeping from the hem line of her shopping  
bag, I breathe deep, thank the driver, alight.

I hand her the bags, ask her if she can  
manage.

"Ah, yes, love, thank you".



## **At The Night Markets by Catherine Brophy.**

The bicycles were long gone from Beijing. Now there were eight-lane highways, crammed with cars. We consulted the map. The Night Markets were only a few blocks away, so we walked. But we hadn't reckoned on the length of each block. An hour later we arrived.

This was beautiful down-town Beijing, where spanking new buildings housed international fashion houses, restaurants and businesses. All around us, the sons and daughters of China's new wealth sat in brand-name cafés, wearing brand-name clothes, where a cappuccino cost more than an entire meal plus a beer in a local Chinese restaurant.

The Night Markets cater for the less affluent. Couples come here on dates. The stalls have been modernised with red and white striped awnings, electric light and cooks in immaculate whites. We walked along, admiring the pyramids of fruit, fritters, shellfish and dim sum as well as kebab-sticks with all kinds of fish and meat ready to cook to order. As we came closer to get a better look, one of the vendors picked up a stick and shook it under my nose.

"Snake," he called, "you like snake lady?"

All I saw was a snake coming at me and, being St. Patrick's spiritual daughter, I jumped away and squealed like an eejit. The Chinese laughed their legs off. The stall was indeed selling snake. You had a choice, crispy snake skin on a stick or peeled snake on a stick. I declined.

A young couple arrived to buy several skewers and fed one another, the way lovers do, with crispy fried crickets. They murmured and giggled and flashed flirtatious eyes and helped one another to get the stray cricket legs in their mouths. Well, protein is protein and anything crispy is good.

We turned back to the stall and our western eyes started popping. Four skewered bats on a stick anybody? Four frogs? Four mice? Four is a lucky number in China. There were larvae, sea slugs, sea cucumbers, and several mysterious things that I preferred not to investigate too closely. The Chinese, I reminded myself, have had five thousand years of civilization, they were the first to invent almost everything, they have an amazing cuisine, so I reckon they know what they're doing. I bought a pineapple fritter.

As we turned back to modern Beijing, we saw a young woman ahead of us. She could have been on a catwalk. Her hair was cut in long spikes and striped blue. Her strappy sandals had six-inch high heels. Her Capri pants were sizzling orange, her handbag designer label, her mobile state of the art. She chattered away on her phone and glanced into the high fashion boutiques she was passing. And, waddling behind her, following her every move, was a duckling, a real, live, still fluffy, still yellow duckling. It quacked as we passed.

## **Sexuality Irish Style by Cathy Bushe**

If you're 50 something, female or other  
With a good Irish Catholic Mother  
There's a real good chance she put the hex  
On your chances of truly enjoying sex.

When I reached the age of menstruation  
Procurement became a covert operation  
Your sanitary protection could only be had  
In the protective guise of a brown paper bag

When your time of the month is due, said mother  
You refer to it not by name, but your 'others'  
Or flowers, friend, Aunty Peggy or worse  
Some of us just called it the curse.

Sex before marriage was a SIN and what's more  
If a woman partook, SHE was a tramp or a whore  
She may have enjoyed it, but God forbid  
The family shame of an illegitimate kid.

With celibacy or withdrawal, us girls had our fill  
Until they invented the contraceptive pill  
If you could convince your Doc in healthy debate  
Your cycle you needed to regulate.

All's changed now and sex is free  
The Irish Mammy's a distant memory  
But to take pleasure when you fornicate  
My advice is learn to communicate



## A Poet, To His Love by Martin

### Swords

You are my comma, my full stop.  
You are my rhythm and my rhyme.  
You are the words I put on paper  
The beginning and the end of every  
line.

## These Things Happen by Kathleen

### Greaney

I needed money fast. I owed Pinkie Foley five hundred euro. "Have it by Friday", he threatened, "or I'll bash your brains in." Ma called after me as I went out the hall door of our third floor flat.

"Get a pint of milk, love, your dinner will be ready soon!" I shouted a reply.

"No problem!" I nearly knocked down my eleven year old brother, Robbie, as I hurried down the stairwell. The lifts were always broken.

"Watch where you're going, you eejit!" he snapped.

A light drizzle had started to fall as I waited at the bus stop. The noise of an aeroplane overhead shattered the stillness. I looked at my watch. 18.00 hours and darkness had begun to fall. The lights shone in the windows of the flat complex. I wished I was home watching the telly but time was running out.

"Where are you off to, Johnny?" It was Sharon Nolan, Pinkie Foley's mot. Blonde hair, big blue eyes, tight jeans and a trendy leather jacket. She blew a plume of cigarette smoke into my face. I was saved by the bus.

"Just going into town to meet a few mates," I called as I made my escape. I had a plan to get the money and with a bit of luck I'd succeed. I got off the bus in Parnell Square and boarded a bus to the Southside. I pulled my hoodie up around my face and switched on my iPod. The bus was packed with a crowd of stuck-up poshers, so up themselves that they would not notice if Jack the Ripper was sitting beside them.

I got off the bus in Stillorgan. I bought a packet of chips as I was starving. I kept walking until I was about a mile from the shopping centre. I turned into a tree-lined cul de sac. There was no one

around. I made my way up the path of the first detached house on the left. I took a deep breath and rang the doorbell. A tall fair-haired man opened it. A dog barked loudly in the background. Before I had time to say my piece he took one look at me and slammed the door in my face. I cursed under my breath and tried the next house. This time a red-haired kid about my sister's age answered.

"Is your Mam in?" I asked.

"Who is it Rebecca?" a male voice called. I mumbled something about being at the wrong house and scarpered.

I tried a few more doors, with no luck. I was about to give up. This one was last chance saloon. There was no car in the driveway. The front garden was a bit of a wilderness. There was no bell. I lifted the heavy knocker and banged loudly. I heard a shuffling sound in the hallway. The door opened. An old lady with a wrinkled face and shaky hand peered at me with bird-like eyes.

"Sorry for disturbing you, Missus," I said. "Would you like to sponsor a walk for the Children's Hospital?" I held up a sponsorship card. I had found it on the bus about a week ago. There were a few names written on it, so it would no look too suspicious.

"Wait a minute," she answered. She limped down the dim-lit hall.

After what seemed like an eternity she returned with five euro on her hand.

"Mrs, would you mind giving me a drink of water? I feel a bit faint," I wheedled.

"Come in then and wait here." Her voice sounded a little nervous as she hobbled down the hall again. I waited until she was out of sight. I tiptoed up the staircase, putting on my black gloves. These auld ones always had money somewhere. There was a light on behind one of the bedroom doors off the landing. I pushed it open. This had to be it! I searched under the bed, and then I tried the wardrobe. There was a brown leather carrier bag hidden under a coat at the back.

I emptied the contents. Yes, there it was! I grabbed a brown envelope stuffed with notes and shoved it into the inside pocket of my jacket. I got to the top of the stairs. Too late, there she was coming toward me, staring at me.

"What are you doing?" she screamed. I raised my hand.

"Stop screaming, you stupid bitch!" I shouted. I put my hand up over her mouth. The envelope fell from under my coat. She struggled to break free. Something inside me snapped. I pushed her hard. She grasped the side of the banister. I pushed her again. She tumbled down the stairs like a rag doll.

I picked up the envelope. She lay there in the hall, her eyes wide open. There was blood pumping from the side of her head. She wasn't breathing. "Oh God she's dead," I realised. I let myself out the hall door. There was no one about. An hour and a half later I was back at the flat. Ma was watching T.V. My younger brother Robbie and sister Ava were doing their homework at the table.

"Did you get the milk?" she asked. "I forgot Ma, I had things to do," I snapped. She put on her red coat.

"I'll get it myself," she said. Before she went out the door she looked at me wearily.

"Isn't it time you got a job for yourself Johnny? There must be something out there. Hanging around here is no good for you"

"There is nothing out there Ma, but I'll try again," I muttered to keep her off my back.

That night I tossed and turned. I could not sleep. I saw the face of the old woman coming towards me, the look of terror in her beady eyes. Pinky Foley's money was under the mattress. I texted him to meet me tomorrow. I won't tell a soul about my journey to the Southside, I thought. I was only in court once for robbing beer from an off-licence. The case was dismissed because I was underage at the time. I didn't mean to kill the auld one. But that's life. These things happen.

### **No Back Door by Anne Elizabeth Bevan**

Saturdays are the noisiest, horse racing  
 Blares from the monochrome set.  
 She glances occasionally at the screen, tutting  
 To herself as she plucks a chicken  
 In the kitchen sink, feathers stuck to her fingers;  
 The boiling water she's poured over the recently  
 Deceased bird steaming into her face; the smell  
 Of its innards making my stomach retch as she  
 Pulls them out onto the draining board.  
 The wireless, on a dusty shelf above dad's chair,  
 Competes with the scene. A food mixer dances  
 On the counter beside her as the home made  
 butter,  
 Straight from the fridge, refuses to blend or soften.  
 The mixer vibrates its way to the edge, sometimes  
 It falls, the waiting dog rushing to claim the spoils.  
 Feathers blow around the kitchen as she turns  
 And curses the dog, whose turn it is to be blamed.

I wish we had a back door to escape  
 The madness unseen. On the far side of my  
 mother

A twin tub lurks. It slops and turns  
 Slops and turns. An extension cable crosses  
 The sink, the dead bird and the vibrating mixer  
 To reach the only socket in the kitchen,  
 Which bulges with adapters. The Rayburn

Is more difficult on Saturdays, refusing  
 To maintain a steady one hundred and eighty  
 Degrees. "The curse of God on it anyway",  
 She screeches as her cakes blacken, still  
 Raw in the centre, then curses the cakes again  
 And the dog for good measure; I hate Saturdays.

### **Under Cover by Ellen Britton**

Tentative moves towards peace in 1996 meant that nationalists no longer fled to Rossnowlagh during July and August to escape violence. They came in fewer numbers to holiday until the schools re-opened. Thus, on a quiet September morning, under a pale rain-washed sky Rossnowlagh lay calm.

Dermot shivered. It was cold on the hill top. It was always one or two degrees colder in Donegal. His muscles cramped. He felt damp. He lowered his binoculars.

'C'mon' he said, rising stiffly from the ferns.

Holly lifted herself from the bracken and followed him across a stretch of common ground. Climbing over a rusted barbed wire fence, stepping through the long wet grass, he approached the back door with innate caution. His movements were a matter of curiosity and perhaps gossip among the local people and so he habitually used the least noticeable entry and exit from the house.

Despite the impression created by its ragged, unkempt garden, and the empty summer houses on either side, the house was comfortable. From the large bay window in the sitting room Dermot could see an expanse of fields and the driveway. There were no trees or shrubs to block the view. Best of all, off the sitting room there was a conservatory, warmed by the sun in winter and in summer. On sunny days, with Holly for company, Dermot often sat reading his newspaper and keeping a watchful eye on the comings and goings on the road outside. Dermot had lived in the house since the beginning of summer, to all intents

and purposes, a higher civil servant on an extended break for health reasons. He spent a great deal of time in and around the Franciscan Friary talking to the monks.

They worked tirelessly on the upkeep of the friary and the extensive grounds, but because of falling vocations and fewer young members in their community, the work on the margins was now beyond them. They spent a lot of time praying and most importantly they provided help to all who sought them out. Among chronic depressives and people suffering from bi-polar disorders, repentant terrorists from divided communities found solace at the friary.

Leaving Holly at home, Dermot went to keep an appointment with the Abbot. Afterwards, he left the friary and wandered around the grounds, stopping from time to time to pray in the various religious gardens, becoming familiar with the layout. It was peaceful and he felt at ease.

Meandering round the back of the friary Dermot discovered a path, little used, shaded under a series of yew trees and overgrown with briars. Curious, he started out. Hidden in the undergrowth he found icons depicting the Stations of the Cross at intervals along the path. The Abbot had talked about the now disused way of the cross. This must be it. Dermot followed the icons up and up until he came into the open beside a huge cross. He was on top of the cliff, looking right out to sea, with a clear view of the whole length of Rossnowlagh beach.

Poking around in the undergrowth behind the cross, Dermot found what looked like a trapdoor. The wood wasn't sodden and half rotted as one might expect. The hinges were well oiled. Quickly, he replaced the bracken and stood up. This wasn't the time to satisfy his curiosity. It was too open.

Back home Dermot swapped his heavy weatherproof anorak for a grey hoody. He called Holly to him and picked up a light raincoat and a ball as he passed through the conservatory.

It took all of five minutes to walk along the Ballyshannon Road to the Franciscan Friary and another five through the grounds, down a shaded walkway to the beach. Powerful waves rushed in from a long way out, white capped, mesmerizing, thunderous. Apart from the few hardy surfers, there was no one around.

Dermot threw the ball towards the cliff that extended from the slipway along the rugged coastline to the horizon. Holly ran to retrieve it with Dermot following. The next time, Dermot threw the ball into a cave where the tide ebbed and flowed. It was one of several caves cut into the cliff by huge Atlantic waves that pounded the coast during winter storms. Unlike most of the caves here, it was accessible by foot at low tide. At its entrance Holly halted, whimpering, backing away from the water.

'Holly, fetch!' Dermot shouted, knowing she wouldn't like the wet and the darkness of the cave. Anxious to please, Holly sidled from the water and took a tentative step towards the black interior. She lost her nerve. Tail between her legs, she ran scared from the encroaching sea and the darkness. 'Ye wuss!' Dermot said, laughing. 'I'll get it myself.'

Leaving her dithering and undecided at the entrance, Dermot went into the cave. He picked up the coloured ball and went further in. At the back he could make out a series of steps cut into the rock, slick with moisture and almost blending into the cliff. He came out and Holly bounded around his legs in joyful expectation. He threw the ball away from the cliff close to the water's edge. Holly sped after it and for a short space she was a silhouette among the surfers against the silver backdrop of the ocean. With Holly in playful mood, he walked the length of the beach as he usually did in the late afternoon.

The sun was low towards the horizon and burnished the sea so that it hurt Dermot's eyes to look at it.

Almost back at the friary slipway, Dermot walked bare-footed on wet glistening sand towards the sinking sun and the receding sea. An occasional maverick wave came up around his ankles making him gasp with the cold. With his feet in the surf and his back to the sea, he could view the cliff from a better angle. While the last daylight rays were deflected by the sea, the land was darkening and the cliff was in shadow. Dermot could barely make out the darker blackness of the cave mouth. The cave was almost directly under the cross standing stark against the sky on top of the cliff.

To the right of the cross, a little further back, on the Ballyshannon Road, crouched the dark bulk of the Smuggler's Rest, a popular pub with a terrific view of Rossnowlagh beach. Its windows shone golden, struck by the last rays of the sinking sun.

Much as Dermot would have relished a pint and the comfort of the pub after his long walk, he resisted the temptation to go there.

‘Come on, Holly! Let’s go home,’ he called.

Dermot entered the house through the front door. A walk on the beach with the dog was an innocent occupation. He hummed “Donegal Danny” a song his father was fond of singing, as he fried rashers, sausages and eggs. He didn’t want to be hungry. He could have a long night ahead of him.

Over the months Dermot had noted from time to time a large holiday yacht idling in Rosstown Bay as it was getting dark, but leaving shortly after high tide. Tonight would be a clear night and full tide would be around midnight. Would it be there? He hoped so.

It was cool with a slight breeze when Dermot left the house again at about 11.30 p.m, this time by the back door. He locked a disconsolate Holly in the kitchen. He couldn’t take the risk of discovery because of the dog.

He made his way to his look-out point. Using night vision glasses he trained his eyes on the sea. The yacht was there. It was almost invisible close to the cliff avoiding the silver path of moonlight on the calm sea. The scene was beautiful, out of this world, but Dermot was unaware of the beauty. He had other things on his mind.

All was quiet except for the rush of waves washing the rocks and the muted splash of water as it fell back into the sea. Dermot kept watch, waiting patiently.

His patience was soon rewarded. He saw two small boats, darker shadows on a dark sea being slowly rowed out to the yacht. As he watched, two people on board the yacht lowered long heavy boxes into the row-boats. In the calm of the night voices drifted to Dermot on the light breeze, but what was being said was indistinguishable. The transfer of boxes completed, the two row-boats started back towards the cave and disappeared from sight under the cliff. The yacht turned in the moonlight and headed for Creevy pier a little further down the coast as it had before.

Dermot watched for a while longer. He trained his glasses on the top of the cliff. It wasn’t long before he could detect movement near the base of the cross. He heard an engine starting up. He watched. A four wheel drive moved slowly along

the cliff road to the Smuggler’s Rest, no lights showing.

Dermot decided to take a walk to the Smuggler’s Rest after all. The pub was closed and in total darkness. He scrambled down the hill and went quickly and quietly to the beach. Keeping close to the dunes to avoid getting wet, he made his way to the friary slipway. Gaining the cliff road he hugged the ditch. Outside the Smuggler’s Rest, he waited. No sounds. No dogs. In the courtyard two men were quietly unloading boxes from the jeep and stacking them in an old stone building to the rear of the yard. They didn’t speak. Dermot remained concealed in the ditch and waited.

Finished their business, still in silence, the men bolted and padlocked the storehouse and set off in the jeep towards Ballyshannon.

The sound of the engine faded in the distance. Dermot waited a while longer. He crossed the courtyard. Carefully, he inspected the door. The padlock was strong. It wouldn’t be easily broken. Walking quietly around the square building, Dermot noticed a small aperture under the eaves at the back. He completed his circuit and returned to the rear of the storehouse. He man-handled an empty crate to the wall and climbed up. By the pale moonlight that filtered through the small gap and the cobwebs, he confirmed his strong suspicion that the long boxes carried rifles. One of the boxes had been broken open and left without its lid on a wooden bench. The glint of gun metal in a shaft of moonlight dispelled any lingering doubts Dermot might have had. What he was looking at was an AK47 high powered sniper rifle. There must be at least 50 rifles in the other boxes. Dermot was jubilant. This was one cache of lethal arms that wouldn’t make it across the border to wreck the budding peace process.

Carefully, he descended from the crate and returned it to where he had found it. Looking around he ensured that nothing had been disturbed. He made his way along the deserted road through the friary grounds and back to the beach. It was pre-dawn cold. The tide had turned, revealing a pristine white beach under a lightening sky. Using his mobile phone Dermot rang Special Branch in Dublin and spoke quietly though there was no one to hear him. He made his report. His work was done. They would take it from here.

**In the dog days of summer by Judy  
Russell**

**grass is baked beyond dry  
a brown lizard with half a tail  
slips from under cracked wood**

**on the step a red damselfly  
rests with outstretched wings**

**a peacock butterfly settles  
on my bare leg, tastes salty skin  
with its uncoiled tongue.**

**Youth's blush by Mitch Staunton  
Moore**

**A slight blush of youth  
Still colours me  
It hangs around the mirrors periphery  
I catch a glimpse of the girl I use to be  
In the woman now looking at me**

**At the age of Christ plus ten and three  
Silvered temples invade me  
Death of a parent  
shows me life's frailty  
A revelation that unsettles me  
My finite existence  
fascinates me**

**Where's youth's invincibility?  
Arrogance  
innocence  
passion  
its intense energy**

**I glimpse again  
I now see  
The woman I've become  
She's the girl I use to be  
A stain of youth still tinges me  
It hangs about the silvered mirrors periphery**



**What by Kate Ennels**

“Wha uuuu hoing hu do wiii vhe?” asked Honor.  
“What are you going to do with me?” Paul  
guessed she was asking. He could tell from the  
rhythm of the words and her circumstance.

Honor was tied to her kitchen chair. Paul had  
bound her hands and feet, gagged her mouth. He  
looked at her with distaste. She was dressed  
inappropriately for her age, but, still, attractive, he  
thought. Being tied up probably excited her. The  
thought of her excitement made him stiff. Maybe  
she was scared. So was he, nervous anyway, but  
he liked the sense of power. He felt taller, bigger.  
Where had he got the idea to tie her up? Or, for  
that matter, the courage? Sometimes, from his  
bedroom window next door, he watched her go to  
work. She worked for some PR company. No doubt  
it was some glamorous world, unknown to him.

“What would you like me to do?” he asked, raising  
his eyebrows.

Was he going to assault her? Let me stay calm, she  
pleaded to a deity somewhere in the attic. The  
room was charged with a strange sexuality.

Honor tried to smile under the gag. Paul noticed.  
She's trying to charm me. He stepped forward and  
slapped her. It felt good at first, but, then he felt  
shocked and stepped away. Honor flinched. Her  
face blanched. Beads of sweat began to appear at  
her receding hairline. He could see fear creeping  
across her face.

It was a good question. What was he going to do  
with her? How had he got into this situation? He  
wasn't a violent man. He had watched Honor  
return home earlier. She had parked her Golf GTi  
in the red paved suburban drive next door, lifted  
out two bags of shopping and let herself in. Honor  
didn't usually get home until after 7pm, two hours  
after Adam. Paul wondered how Adam put up with  
it. He mused often about Adam and Honor. Paul's  
own wife, Sheila, had left him. She hadn't been  
able to deal with his need for perfection. He liked  
tidiness. He liked order. Paul had thought women  
would like a bit of order in their lives.

After watching Honor come home, Paul continued  
with his plans. He wanted to make a string  
hammock to hold Sean's teddies. Sean, his son,  
came for the weekend once a month. Each time he  
brought a bag of toys. Paul needed somewhere to  
keep them. He couldn't bear toys scattered across  
the floor.



Paul went into the garden and down to his garden shed. It was March, a bright and breezy day. The clouds were fluffy orbs bursting with light and bobbing along in a blue sky as if out for a walk themselves. Honor came out of her house at the same time. She was carrying a white plastic basket of washing. Paul crossed his garden and opened his shed door. Everything was neatly hung up and he reached for the drill.

From her side of the wall, Honor greeted Paul.  
"Great drying weather!"

She caught a glimpse of the inside of his shed,  
"Your shed is pristine, Paul. Imagine, having a pristine shed where you can find what you need. Ours is full of Adam's old trainers, his bike, and all the recycling rubbish, well wine bottles mainly. How is Sean?"

"Fine. I'm going to make him a shelf for his toys."  
"That's a brilliant idea, I've been trying to get shelves up for years but Adam is useless at handyman stuff."

"I can make you one if you like," said Paul  
Honor hated to miss out on an opportunity.  
"I'd love that. Thank you, Paul."

Honor's teeth were brilliant white when she smiled. Paul wondered if she brushed them after every meal. They had never been so chatty together before.

"I could start today, if you like, while I'm doing mine. "Okay, let me hang these things out. Come over. I'll make us a coffee."

Paul nodded. She began to hang up her knickers and tights. It wouldn't take a minute for those to dry, he thought. Nothing to them. He couldn't imagine how they covered her bottom.  
"I'll get my roll of tape to measure up," he said.

Paul felt a sliver of excitement. He hadn't talked much to anyone for weeks. Since Sheila had moved out, he hadn't seen many people, aside from the staff on the tills in the small supermarket up the road, and the post office where he collected his weekly dole payment. Sean came once a month for the weekend but he was only five. They watched TV and videos together – although Paul tried to read him too. Paul had joined the library. He knew little about children's stories so he had started at the As, borrowing books for his son.

Paul wasn't sure in which room Honor would want her shelves. Probably the bedroom, he thought.

Presumably their house was the same as his, reverse ways. Carrying a tape measure and pencil, he went out the front door, jumped over the small, red brick wall, and rang Honor's bell.

Honor had wanted the afternoon to herself, to tidy and prepare a dinner for her and Adam. She had decided to leave him and planned to break it gently to him tonight. She wanted to practice a few lines in front of the mirror. Suburban living wasn't for her. Time was ticking. There was more to life than this. But, now Paul was coming for coffee. Never mind, it wouldn't take long, a quick cup of coffee. Honor knew Paul's wife had left him. Gwen from the other side had mentioned it. She said the separation had seemed amicable. Maybe she might get some tips from Paul about 'amicable' separations. Also, with Paul next door, Adam would have someone to talk to about 'it all'. She would feel much better about leaving Adam if he had a 'friend' next door. The doorbell rang. Honor answered.

"Come in. The kettle is on."

Honor walked back through the hall into the kitchen.

"It's strange. Everything is the wrong way around!" said Paul.

"I know. I found that when I popped into Gwen's next door. It's disorientating. Tea or coffee?"

"Whatever you are having."

Honor made a pot of coffee. She made small talk about how great it was to live here.

"I love the sea, and it's so easy to get to town."

She put mugs, milk and sugar on the table, moving the unpacked shopping bags on to the floor.

"Help yourself. I've no biscuits. I forgot to buy any. I'll miss the area."

"Oh, why, are you moving?"

Damn, Honor thought. A slip of the tongue.

"Yes, I may be." She waved her hand airily to disguise her confusion.

"Not much point in making a shelf then," said Paul.

"No, maybe not. I wasn't thinking. Adam will be here though. It's only me leaving. And he isn't good with his hands. I'll tell him you're good with your hands."

Honor ran her hands through her hair.

"I haven't told Adam yet. I'm going to tell him tonight."

"Tell him what?"

"That I'm leaving."

Honor smiled at Paul.

"You're separated, aren't you? Is there a good way to tell someone? Maybe, it would be better if I just left. I don't know...what do you think? Tell him over dinner or leave a letter?"

Paul felt his hackles rise. He didn't want to know about her private life. Sheila had left him one afternoon, without telling him. He had been given no choice, no opportunity to change her mind. He had come home one day and found the house empty. A note to say she had left him was on the kitchen table, on the other side of this very wall. Paul began to feel agitated. Honor chattered on.

"I have fallen out of love. Everything is so routine. Adam's a good man but there must be more to life. I planned dinner tonight. I thought I'd cook and then tell him. But now, I'm not so sure. Maybe it's better to simply go. I could leave a note on the table and then give him time to think. Is that cowardly?"

Sheila's note had said she wanted time to reflect. But they had never talked. It was over. That was that. Paul didn't know why. There was no order to it. And now, here it was happening again. Again, for no reason.

Paul dropped his roll of tape measure on the floor. It sprang under the table.

"Whoops, sorry."

Paul crawled under the table and, without thinking, unravelled the tape. Quickly and efficiently, he began to tie Honor's legs to the chair. She couldn't believe what was happening.

"Paul, hey, stop! Hey! What are you doing?"

Paul re-emerged from under the table. Honor was bent double trying to undo the measuring tape.

"Hey, what are you, mad? Undo this!"

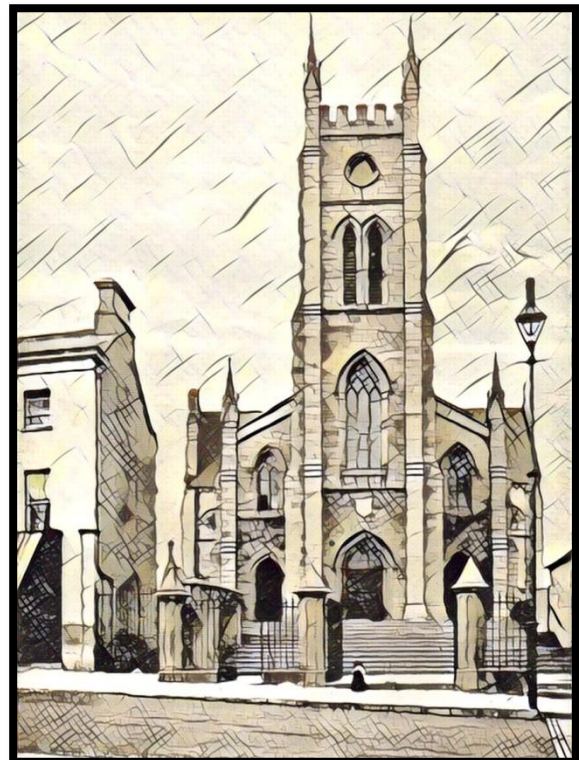
He had started, so he would finish. Paul moved around the table and jerked her up from behind. He continued to wind the measuring tape her and the back of the chair. It was lucky he had bought a 12 metre roll.

"Paul, you're hurting me. Paul, please."

Paul pulled the chair and Honor away from the table. He tied her hands in front of her. Honor started screaming, but she felt stupid. She knew Gwen was at work. Paul grabbed a tea cloth lying by the sink and stuffed it in Honor's mouth. She started to gag. He took it out, straightened it and

rolled it up. He tied it neatly around her mouth and head. He went back across the room and stared at her. She looked odd, marked up with the lines of black inches across her body. He wanted to crack a joke about her measurements. This was absurd, he thought. What am I doing? What am I going to do next? Paul stood still, across the room, staring. He shuddered. He didn't want to touch her again. He decided to do nothing. This was it. Nothing else.

Paul left, shutting the front door behind him. He was shaking. He let himself in to his house and went and sat at his bedroom window upstairs. He wanted to make sure Adam did come home. At 5.30, he saw Adam appear around the corner, coming from the train station. Relieved, Paul got up from the spot at his bedroom window and went down to his kitchen. It was time to eat. He cut two slices of bread and put them in the toaster. He could hear nothing next door. Adam must be untying her now. Paul's tins were ordered by size and alphabetically. He decided on spaghetti hoops. He'd make the shelves tomorrow. Paul cut up his spaghetti hoops on toast into square bite sized pieces, five hoops per square. He began to eat. Adam might call round. He'd like some company. He hoped Honor would leave him. They could share a few beers. He could help him clear his shed out.



**Sea Swimmer after Heart Surgery**  
**by Jessamine O'Connor**

Don't go back into the water  
I tell her, you're not ready.  
It's only been eleven weeks and anyway  
where you go swimming  
is the coldest bit; it's where the river  
empties out its guts after filling up on those  
stony Wicklow mountains, and its colder  
by many degrees than even the rest  
of the Irish sea. You are not able  
for that kind of shock, this is meant to be  
recovery  
and I worry.

I'm telling her off and so I'm glad to be told  
in a stage whisper by her grinning husband  
that the water right there  
has just been found to be poisoned, polluted  
by asbestos leeching from an old dump  
underneath the golf course - I'm actually pleased  
at this news, delighted even,  
which tells you something about my mother:  
how she is more important than the sea.



**Culture Night in Dublin by Phil**  
**Lynch**

The city stretches itself.  
Queues line up to catch an inside glimpse  
of this or that building  
normally closed to the outside,  
heaving crowds surround street activities.

In Temple Bar a poet friend  
hosts an open mic against the odds  
of free advice from randomers  
and city bureaucrats alike,  
all adding to the mix  
of a warm Friday evening rush  
of revelers and homeward-bounders,  
culture on the move.  
Tune in to conversations  
hear of hidden gems discovered  
catch a snatch of office gossip  
watch the dance of furtive lovers  
listen to the bubbling babble  
oozing from the mass of moving mouths.

On Suffolk Street a youthful couple stroll  
They eye up a footpath full of static people  
in softly spoken French  
they urge each other to enquire,  
shyly they hold out their brochure  
and ask a middle-aged woman  
to identify the point of interest.  
After a moment of confusion  
the woman laughs and loudly proclaims,  
*ah no loves, we're waitin' for a bus,*  
the blushing couple giggle and glide away  
in search of other queues.

Culture comes in many ways  
it is often best when left unstaged.

**The Sport of Kings by Michael**  
**Gordon**

I didn't know what a Point to Point meeting was,  
but I had mitched from school that afternoon with  
a few lads to go to one. Now the five of us trudged  
up Brennanstown Road from Cabinteely trying to  
find it.

"How much further is it?" I asked.  
"Come on; we're nearly there."  
But we weren't.  
"Are you sure they said Lehaunstown and not  
Loughlinstown."

"It is Lehaunstown, but hurry it up lads; we'll miss the first race if we don't hurry."

We came to a gap in the fence where someone had propped open a five-barred gate and put up a crude sign saying, 'Point to Point'. We paid over a few pence to a guy sitting at a small table.

"What time is the first race, mister?"

"It's just started; if you run, you'll get the finish."

We ran across the stubbled field. A line of people at the edge of the course blocked our view. All I could see was their backs. A steady rumbling grew louder until it became the thudding of hooves. The shouts of the crowd grew louder. Then, oh, a magnificent sight as a line of horses soared into the air. The colours, the straining of the horses as the jockeys furiously whipped them. They landed and disappeared from view. The thunder of hooves subsided; the crowd kept shouting. The announcer was incoherent but I got the name of the winning jockey, Ned Cash.

Down near the finish line some scaffolding and planks made a temporary grandstand. The place was crowded, mostly with men, pushing and jostling. The music from the carousel created an air of gaiety. It mingled with the smell of diesel oil and the shouts of the hucksters running the hoopla stall, and the shooting range and the skittles. The lads drifted off to try their luck there.

I thought I'd have a bet although I knew nothing about horses or betting. I only had my shilling's pocket money and another shilling I had saved up. But I found my way to the betting ring. Big red-faced men with large leather satchels had set up stalls. They shouted the odds and scribbled them on little blackboards. I looked at the odds and at the horses in the parade ring; I could have been looking into a bush. I found which horse Ned Cash was riding and put a bet on him.

He won, but, sure, I knew he would. I bet on Ned Cash in every race he rode that afternoon and he won, or was placed every time. I couldn't believe it.

By the time the last race was over I was weighted down with money. I sat down at the back of a tent and dragged it out, a mass of half crowns, two shilling pieces, shillings and a couple of ten shilling notes. It came to over nine pounds. It was more than three years pocket money. This was easy. I could do this again. Maybe I could give up school. I met up with the lads and along with hundreds of others we streamed back across the field towards the exit.

A large circle of people had gathered off to one side and I could sense the excitement. I wormed

my way through to the front. A big man in a white shirt, with the sleeves rolled up, stood there behind a small table. He had three cards on the table face down. "Find the Lady," he said.

One card had a slight turn-up on the lower corner. The man beside me put five pounds down on it. The dealer turned it over. The queen of hearts! The dealer paid the man a fiver. Then he shuffled and dealt the three cards again. Again I spotted the card with the slight turn-up. The man beside me put five pounds on it. Again, it was the queen and he won another five pounds. I couldn't believe it. The dealer hadn't copped on.

The next time the cards were dealt my man bet on a different card even though the card with the turn-up was there. Naturally, he lost.

"Did you not see the turn-up?" I asked him, but he just glared at me.

"Would you like to have a go yourself, sir," the dealer said to me, dealing out the cards again. Would I what? I could still see the turn-up on the card. I reached deep into my trouser pocket and pulled out my entire stash of money. I tried to count out five pounds.

"Don't worry, I'll cover whatever you have there," said the dealer.

"Okay," I said and, with two hands, placed my entire stash of coins and notes on the card with the turn-up.

He turned it over. The two of spades! I recoiled. The two of spades! I couldn't believe it.

"Hard luck sonny. Better luck next time," he said. I reeled away and fought my way back out of the throng. I was sick, stunned. Every penny gone!

The walk back down to Cabinteely seemed to take a lot longer than the walk up as the lads gave me a hard time.

And, I had to borrow my bus fare home.



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No longer belonging there  
And I sure am a blow in here  
Wannabe Irish, you ask?  
**Nah,  
only  
want-to-be.**

### An uninvited guest by Jan O'Reilly

Had he heard a knock? He glanced at the clock on the shelf. It was just after 9 O'clock and dark outside. No, who would be knocking at this hour? He settled back, pulling the newspapers over his knees to keep warm.

There it was again, it was soft but insistent.

Dan lived in a shed at the end of a lane.

He stood up, listening, he was frightened now.

"Hello, hello," said a deep, soft voice.

He opened the door a little. He saw a young man, dressed as roughly as himself. A heavy overcoat, much too big for him, tied at the waist with string.

"Yes?" said Dan.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but could you possibly give me a cup of tea. I could sit on the step here. I'm really sorry to bother you."

"Wait a moment."

He closed the door. He made a mug of tea, cut a slice of bread and put a small piece of cheese beside it.

He opened the door again. The man was standing exactly as he had left him. Dan looked hard at him.

"Come in," he said.

"Are you sure?"

"Come in."

He handed him the tea and bread.

"You'll have to sit on the floor, I have only one chair."

"I'm used to floors."

Dan made himself a mug of tea and sat back in his chair and said, "well, is this where we exchange stories?"

"Ah, there is always a story, what's yours?"

"A stupid son who inherited a good business and ran it into the ground. Well, I told him to take off and that I didn't want to see him again, ever.

What's yours?"

"After school, I didn't want an ordinary job. I wanted to just wander, talk to people, see what it was all about. My mother wasn't happy, she was afraid for me. I left her broken hearted. Do you have other family?"

Dan hesitated, "no."

### Wannebe by Marc Gijsemans

'wɒnəbi/ (informal, derogatory)

Noun: a person who tries to be like someone else or to fit in with a particular group of people.

**"How'a ya?"**

A greeting that leaves the door open

To talk the hind legs off a donkey

**"What's the story?"**

Lovely people, good craic and drink,  
flat Seven-Up for dickie tummies.

Laugh at their quirks and oddities

Or they will drive you bonkers!

**Not a bother!**

Politics, religion, football,  
a quagmire best avoided.

You never know what jersey  
the other fella is wearing.

**Ah sure!**

Try and improve your language,  
but it doesn't matter, they'll still ask:

"Where are you from then?"

Just to place your accent

**It'll be grand!**

Then. Your mother-tongue. Slipping.  
Detribalized. Surprised. Loss of identity.

Or embracing another one?

“Me, neither. Did you like having money?”  
 “Loved it, what is better than money?”  
 “Love.”  
 “Love goes out the window, when there is no money.”  
 “What would you do if your son walked in here?”  
 “Tell him to go to hell.”  
 The man said nothing.  
 Dan got irritated.  
 “Come on now, are you going to give me ‘The Prodigal Son’ routine?”  
 “It’s a good story, happy father, happy son.”  
 “Yes, but a furious older brother.”  
 “Jealousy is very uncomfortable, so is anger.”  
 They talked about the freedom of having no possessions and the isolation of having no one close to you.  
 After a while the young man got to his feet.  
 “I must be off, I have taken up too much of your time.”  
 “No, stay a while longer, I have enjoyed your company.”  
 “Are you lonely?”  
 Dan nodded.  
 “I’m sorry, but I must go. Goodbye Dan, you are a good man, time for change maybe.”  
 Dan stood at the door, watching him walk up the lane. He didn’t look back. Dan closed the door, suddenly bereft.  
 He sat back in his chair. Thinking

**Poetry in the Park by Patricia Ahern**  
**O’Farrell**

First Sunday of the month  
 bunched together on the bandstand’s  
 circular rim we oldies  
 cushioning our bums  
 ‘gainst winter chill  
 now and again ambushed  
 by young poets dashing  
 over the grass to centre stage  
 with poems dressed with faces  
 wild with gesture  
 and suddenly gone again  
 on skates on bikes while we  
 their older versions  
 return to sharing verse.

Time around in summer’s sun  
 our footie local team  
 fielding the occasional ball  
 landing at our feet.

Still we sit it out, growing warmer,  
 with the kindness felt by each

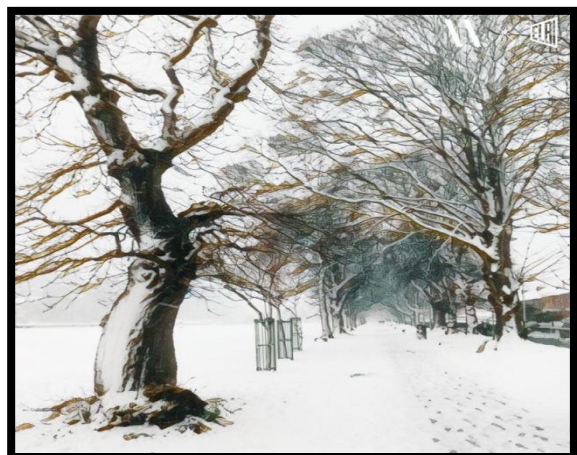
as each we lend our ear  
 to hear another’s view  
 of her of his world  
 to be dropped  
 this hour  
 this moment  
 into the well of listening  
 which is us.

**Happy 50<sup>th</sup>, Woodstock by Brian**  
**Quigley**

Doctor Who is outside  
 And the TARDIS motor is running.  
 I get to pick one journey  
 In space and time.  
 Without hesitation I say  
 ‘Woodstock, please!’ ...

By the time I get to Woodstock  
 I’ll be ready to see the lot.  
 The set-up, the full concert, the aftermath.  
 I want to do yoga with Tom Law  
 While there’s still some clean air left to score.  
 I want to feed the masses  
 With Wavy Gravy and the other Hog Farmers,  
 Breakfast in bed for 400,000,  
 A little bit of paradise in every disaster zone.

I want to see Hendrix  
 Re-invent The Star Spangled Banner.  
 I want to meet The Port-O-San Man.  
 I want to hear Arlo Guthrie say  
 That the New York State freeway is closed,  
 Can you dig that, man?  
 I want to see Joe Cocker  
 Get by with a little help from his friends,  
 I want to slide in the mud,  
 I want to not take the brown acid.



## **Messenger by Jean O'Brien**

*i.m. BF.*

We were young and golden, youth put wings on our heels. A fleet-footed gangly girl I outpaced the lads, they got the message and didn't like it.

After school we would pitch our satchels into someone's garden and race the desk-bound hours off, the enforced stillness, holding ourselves in,

just waiting to escape. I liked a lad called Billy.

At times, teasing, I almost let him gain on me, I heard his ragged breath sing in my ears,

then pulled ahead and breasted the tape. I ran out of road the year I turned fifteen, the boys gained height, their backs broadened, jaws hardened.

I got the message, they could take me, beat me. I withdrew to save face, they never guessed, we all moved on and I kept my victories, my evergreen laurel leaves.

Today my phone barked like a starting pistol, Billy's name lit the screen. R.I.P. The text message said he died from inhaling the gold dust he worked with.

I tried to take it in my stride, and heard again for just a golden moment, his laboured breath behind me still like heavy metal or a valedictorian song.

## **White Mornings by Anthony Uhlemann**

One of those white mornings again in this season called retirement. I know now what to do with them. I'll have a cup of coffee and doodle some thoughts; vaguest of vague thoughts into some words; most ordinary of ordinary words, into sentences; regular plain sentences; making something that is not really anything but, then again, perhaps it could be. That done I'll move on. Stroll from this room to that. Turn on the TV. All channels blurring one into the other

with the same amazing life changing information; how to boil an egg with Phil and Holly; how not to boil an egg with Maura and Daithi. I'll switch it off and look out a window then look out the one beside it; compare norm with norm, whilst playing spot the difference; great for passing a couple of minutes. Perhaps I'll dawdle down to Dubrays. Check out some books. Read the blurbs on the back.

Always good for a laugh; more fiction there than in a thousand libraries How can five new releases all be the No.1 Bestseller?

Or I might go down to the sea again and compare its lively turmoil to the lack in mine; all the while accepting that its weight will always save it whilst mine might kill me.

Maybe I'll purchase another cup of coffee, then stroll up and down a random platform in Bray Daly Station awaiting trains I have no intention of taking; there is immense pleasure in making bold statements

that no one in the whole wide world will ever be aware of.

I might do any of these things with this white morning. Then again I might just slog it out till afternoon, hoping against hope, it will be one of those terrific Blue Afternoons. Now *that* would be really something!!

**Habitats by Rosy Wilson  
for Judy Russell**

**you are not one  
who will look on  
as Amazon forests  
are cut down**

**you are not one  
to close your eyes  
when usurpers, usurers  
destroy lands, tribes**

**ways of life  
the people organise  
in harmony with songs  
of nature's seasons**

**you will not ignore  
orange-clad prisoners  
in Guantanamo Bay,  
on Death Row**

**nor overlook pale faces  
in blue doorways with  
brown sleeping bags  
cardboard bowls.**

**In Glenree Valley  
you share riverain with  
badgers, otters, willows,  
holm oaks, the fairy tree**

**cultivate gardens, beans,  
garlic, potatoes, kale  
for lunch with friends  
supper on your own**

**your growing tribe of  
grandchildren come  
to stay, explore your  
woodlands, river bed.**

**Dawn opens mountains  
lights pine needles, fir cones,  
silver-streaks river, shines  
on your wooden home.**

**Welcome to Dublin by Adam Trodd**

got the ferry over from Holyhead for the weekend disembarked at Dun Laoghaire and there was this tramp woolly haired chinstrap beard sitting by the glass doors said can you gimme nuff fra hostel pal I

don't usually do that kind of thing because it's like you're fuelling whatever addiction they have like giving them a can or a needle a friend of mine said it's like providing the resources to get loaded and beat the shit out of their wife but then maybe if you don't they'll whale on some other poor bastard to get it off them when the sickness is making them feel so desperate they'd kill their granny anyway he was persistent enough and I ignored him at first but when I went to the ATM suddenly he was there again not too close mind but there in my peripherals nuff money fra hostel pal the whisper came over the sea wind faint but audible I paused and put my card back into the machine and took out an extra twenty now I never ever do anything like that but my circumstances made me an easy touch I went over to hand him the score and before I even reached him the head dropped and he started blubbing and wishing all kinds of blessings on me and my family and my dog but the thing is he didn't look up or hold his hand out and I couldn't give him the twenty I couldn't even engage him so I started to feel self-conscious and families who'd just gotten off the ferry like myself were beginning to do that side stare and veer away walk like crabs as they left the terminal as if I was somehow part of the palaver instead of just some punter trying to offer a bit of money to a tramp when next thing his wife or whatever she was came up behind me and I didn't realise she was there at first because there were only light scuffling noises and I heard a zipper and it felt like someone just nudged me I turned around and she was in my face howling what I could only presume was dog's abuse spit flying lips like spent bicycle tubes moving over infrequent teeth her hands stuffed firmly in the pockets of her sodden blanket jacket and just as I turned to face her the tramp behind reared up and he was a lot taller than I thought and there was more scuffling and before I knew it they had me sandwiched and were trying to get at each other through me grimy arms flailing to my left and right and making a weird kind of prison I eventually had to duck to get out from between them and it felt so ridiculous that I shouted at them to stop and they did to my surprise he picked up his bag and patch of cardboard and grabbed her by the wrist and the two of them headed for the west pier quicker than I thought either of them could move Jesus welcome to Dublin I thought as I headed for the nearest bus stop to catch a bus to town and I used the change I had from buying sucky sweets on the ferry to calm my lolling stomach they say it's best to be over the propeller when it's rough because it's the steadiest part of the boat I dunno nothing works for me it's all that upandown and I'm



susceptible because even the bus ride in made me feel a bit blurgh but I was about to feel a hell of a whole lot worse when I discovered the fucking tramp and his missus had taken my wallet and phone and I realised the whole thing was just a professional thieves' pantomime and I could hear Julie in my head telling me how stupid I was and trusting you're the type that feeds the fucking dog when you should really be kicking it she'd say oh yeah all heart is my Julie but what did it matter now that she's with Bluto I call him big bastard with a neck like a Spanish bull and arms as thick as my thighs black beard dense as furze but that would make her Olive Oyl and me Popeye which I'm not believe me I never founds me spinach not unless you finds it at the bottom of a bottle of Teacher's I thought I'd get revenge you see by pumping Bluto's missus in return but it didn't turn out that way no I had to leave the fucking country pack my bag and get out within twenty four hours I didn't realise he's a member of a certain organisation in exile for something he did years ago but still has the clout to tell you to get gone if he wants you to get gone otherwise you're trying to kick the back lights out of a stolen jalopy with a rag in your mouth and splintered ribs after that it's a hiding if you're lucky or if you're not bye bye kneecaps shot from behind to make them blow out or one to the nut though that might be a bit too far for kicking in another mule's stall though his missus made things a lot worse for me by saying she fucking loved me can you believe it anyway I was on Poolbeg Street thinking of Julie and wondering how the hell I was going to get back home and if I did eventually make it how the hell I could evade capture by the pack of small town hoods and teen acolytes that he had eagling the streets around my house twenty four seven if I could've gotten past their trip wire eyes I reckon I could've talked Julie round and we could've both made a fresh start of it over here she could do nails anywhere after all and I'd stack shelves and clean diarrhoea off the UV bog walls of a bus station if it meant keeping my knees I don't think Bluto would've ventured back over this side of the pond for revenge I reckon we'd have been safe there were bigger fish than him over here that would've gotten the scent of his pelt on the wind and come asking answers to the same questions he scarpered from all those years ago and then it hit me and I shivered that maybe the tramp and his missus were moles of his over here and maybe they had a loose description of me to work on but they had my ID and knew I was definitely in Dublin oh shit and there were junkies this time three of them somnambulists of resignation drifting like chunks of iceberg loosely associated through

catches of disjointed banter one rolling papers in grimy fingers neck bent head nodding another with his arm and hand wrapped in a blue plastic carrier bag heeyaw says the girl of them heeyaw boody giz a smowke plastic bag is up next heeyaw would yiz have de boos fayaw weyaw stook in taewon an me geerfrens six moonts pregnant sheeis I kept walking towards the quays with my head down to a chorus of heeyaw mistaw eventually followed by a fook yew I thought that's the end of it but the street was empty and they tracked me from the opposite side until next thing plastic bag is ahead and nobby behind and six-moonts-preggers stays opposite it was a pincer movement they hunted me like lions giviz yaw fookin rooksack or I'll cut ye says plastic bag through tobacco teeth and the moment was so normal yet so unreal I was shown just enough of the rusted box cutter while nobby breathed down my neck and loosened the straps from my shoulders then a swift tracksuited knee to the balls folded me like origami and for some reason I concentrated on an empty crisp bag as they ran six-moonts-preggers shouts something about there being no need fur da and in a fucked up way I felt tenderness towards her for protesting at the needless violence of her compadres and there I was crouched on a wet street somewhere near the Liffey no money no cards no phone no bag wishing I was with Julie she didn't even know I went on the reckie to begin with and I had no way of telling anyone where I was the only thing I could think of doing was finding a map and walking back to the harbour to try to locate forty coats and his missus and get my wallet back but they would've already spent what was in it and fucked the incriminating stuff into the harbour unless of course they'd already rung Bluto with news of my sighting in which case I should've stayed away and re-evaluated couldn't have gone to the cop shop and if I had what could I've said I couldn't risk going home with the glow of blue light around me not with Bluto's history that'd be a cross hairs on my gourd for sure that'd be lights out oh fuck it why did she have to get pregnant and want to keep it I always told Julie I didn't want kids and she still married me even though she wanted to be a mother and next thing Bluto's bird is late and I'm standing in our kitchen while Julie plays the holier than thou card even though she's the one who shopped around first at the same time as telling me he wants me out and the fucked up thing is I really wanted the kid when I knew it was there growing and mine and I didn't love her but the thought of holding a baby my baby swelled something in me augmented something that was shrivelled before and suddenly wanted to live and

maybe if we were parents together the love would've grown between us it happens all the time to teenagers who stay together they learn to love and their kids turn out fine the nausea from the knee to the stones was subsiding and I could stand straight without cramping and the minor elation of having survived a mugging relatively unscathed went through me like a thunderbolt and the odd thing was I felt peculiarly invulnerable now that I had nothing of worth to steal and I briefly considered chasing plastic bag and co fantasised about meting out an unholy beating after all what were they but skinny strung out pricks and there I was nobody a drifter with nothing to lose but they had that edge of desperation that takes years to acquire and judging by the day's events the sign was on that luck wasn't with me with me so I tried to concentrate on how to get back to Julie and maybe work out a way to appease Bluto by taking care of the kid my kid allowing him to get rid of his adulterous missus somehow and letting him stay with Julie all in one go but I heard myself I was in no position to let I held no cards I spied a tourist family coming towards me with a map flapping between four pairs of hands confused poring excuse please Boos Auroos I planned to ask them if I could have the map but then I thought that maybe if I helped them get to where they were going they'd throw a few quid my direction and I could get a bus back to the ferry and work out from there how to get back across the Irish Sea and then stay alive long enough to explain to Julie, Bluto and his missus how I could keep my kneecaps and we could all live in perfect harmony welcome to Dublin I said to the family I still looked respectable enough in my good North Face jacket though the knees of my jeans were wet through but they listened while I explained how my stuff was taken by the tramps and then the junkies and then I told them what I needed in return for helping them and that was back when you could still get the ferry to Dun Laoghaire. *Just for Wayne*

**Send Out The Clowns (Far Out) by Edward Lee**

Isn't it time  
 someone drew the curtains  
 on this farce  
 will call government?

There are too many clown  
 on the stage, their jokes  
 long since over  
 and never that funny

to begin with;  
 surely there are other acts  
 to follow, better skilled professionals  
 and eager-to-learn amateurs,  
 ready to repair the damage  
 our collective I.Q.  
 has relentlessly taken?

And if this is all  
 we can expect  
 for the next thousand years,  
 please then, someone trip  
 the fire alarm  
 and let us out of here,  
 before someone really does  
 burn this place  
 to the ground, and we,  
 lassitude-d by despair,  
 allow ourselves to burn  
 into perfect peaks of ashes  
 too heavy for the even strongest winds.

**Liam and Diane by Steve Denehan**

**We collect our rental car  
 he is a German in Spain  
 here 15 years  
 he tells me to slow down  
 not to speak so quickly  
 that my Irish accent is hard for him  
 I speak again  
 carefully enunciating  
 the words suddenly clunky  
 their corners on my tongue**

**I watch two cats sleep  
 long and luxuriously stretched  
 in the middle of the road below us**

**days pass slowly  
 deliciously  
 drops of the melting sun land on us  
 browning skin  
 with whispered sizzles**

**then today, we hear it, echoed back to us  
 flat and splitting the air  
 as only an Irish accent can  
 they call to us  
 insist we come sit with them  
 at their balcony table  
 we do**

**introductions are made  
 Liam and Diane**

recently retired  
 four children  
 one of them has a self-drive car  
 "we are living in the future", I say  
 Liam laughs  
 too long  
  
 we are warned of pick pockets  
 told of how they caught one in the act  
 I surprise myself by saying  
 "but for every one you see there are a hundred  
 you don't"  
 a perfect small talk response  
 earnestly confirmed by Liam, "never a truer word  
 spoken"  
  
 he had been wearing sunglasses  
 I couldn't see his eyes  
 it was distracting  
 we learned of their family tragedies  
 we discovered personal details about their close  
 friends  
 they gave my daughter an ice cream  
 they never asked us anything  
 but  
 before we left as strangers  
 Liam took off his sunglasses  
  
 having learned of his sister's death at 37  
 "cancer, four children, beautiful singer, terrible  
 thing"  
 and his struggle with retirement  
  
 "it was a shock to the system, make no mistake"  
 and the suicide of his oldest friend  
 "a mechanic, problem with the drink, never had  
 kids, threw himself off Bray head"  
 he took off his sunglasses  
 and for the first time I saw his eyes  
 and they were old and tired  
 old and tired.

### **NOR'EASTER by Frances Browner**

February 16th, President's Day  
 A blizzard hits the US of A  
 Historical, record-breaking sleet  
 Knocks the East Coast to its feet.  
  
 A white mantle covers Riverdale  
 Blocked in, can't see my car  
 Cocooned all day on Broadway  
 It's a boy, I get the call.

In Greystones, a golden child is born  
 Six pounds, 0 ounces, scribbled down  
 Blonde, blue eyes, smiling cherub  
 His name shall be known as Jakob.

"I don't want to be a grandson!"  
 He wails in the family photograph  
 "I don't want to go to Tasmania!"  
 He wobbles the immigrant ship  
 "I can't believe it's in black and white!"  
 He whines at the Wizard of Oz in the Mermaid  
 On 'getting to know our county' trips.

Now sixteen, in Transition Year  
 Scholar, sportsman, Temple Carrig peer  
 Star in his high school musical, Rat Trap  
 Charming, good-looking, it's a wrap.

Still the main man on our excursions  
 Leading lad on cousin expeditions  
 Chatting up a storm on the beach in Brittas  
 Bombarding us with hugs and kisses.

As New York was paralyzed by gales  
 Closed roads, airports shut, train delays  
 Coastal floods, erosion, heavy snow

A whirlwind was gathering force in Wicklow.

### **View by Shelley Tracey**

After you are born, my third, last, long-eyed child,  
 lying calm in a square warm room above the  
 suburbs. Sunlight on every roadswerve, hillcurve,  
 all the way towards the horizon, the power station  
 breathing. The future slides towards us  
 ... *timeblur* ....

The night of the attack. You are three months old,  
 sleepsmiling. I am crouching against the bedroom  
 window, counting every lock and door they forced,  
 afraid to look outside, afraid they will come back,  
 afraid, afraid, afraid ... *fearblur* ...

Three months later. In a pebbledash terrace in  
 another country, in a narrow battered bedroom,  
 you are crammed into a folding cot. Watching you,  
 watching the sullen sky flattening the rooftops.  
 Only one road in, exit route obscured ... *lifeblur* ...

## The Mobile Phone by Joan Valkenburg

I dropped my phone into the loo  
And screamed and screamed  
What can I do?

I fished it out, wiped it dry  
Stood up straight, cried and cried  
What can I do?

My brain was fried  
The phone had died  
I cried and cried  
What can I do?

You-Tube then leapt into my mind  
There's no solution it cannot find

The answer came, it was best  
In a bowl of rice to let it rest  
There to spend the night alone  
That very precious mobile phone

I lifted it out, early morning  
Just as the sun was dawning  
With trembling hands  
I pressed the switch  
And on it came, without a hitch.

## Uninvited Guest by Deirdre McKernan (Crosby)

February '14, a letter through the door.  
Routine. No problem. I put it in a drawer.

Mammogram over. Time well spent.  
Sigh of relief. So glad I went.

What's this now, another envelope?  
A voice whispers "don't despair, have hope".

Waiting room. Anxiety. Unspoken fear.  
A lady calls my name, "Come this way, dear."

Lying in the dark, eyes fixed to a screen.  
Images. Shadows. A silent wish to scream.

Another lady enters, tall, focused, searching.  
She makes a brisk note, my stomach lurching.

Biopsy painful. Excruciating. Distress.  
Mind spins out of control; heart races.

"Sit, please. Take a breath". I try to rest.  
Diagnosis reveals an uninvited guest.

"Where? How? Why?" gently answered.  
I have life changing, early-stage, cancer.

## Betrayed by Maureen Lowndes

Her light illuminated the world  
Large, bright, glowing, a golden halo  
She loved the light  
Trying always to make it brighter  
But moths started to come in  
Fast and furious they came clinging to the light  
Big ugly strange moths with menacing wings  
She never knew such things existed  
Her light was attractive and they came in droves  
They penetrated her light, clinging  
Her light grew fainter and fainter  
Until it became a large black sad cloud  
Why did you let the moths in they all screamed  
No one to blame but yourself they all shouted  
With tears streaming down her face she cried  
I was ignorant, I did not learn to recognise  
Big ugly strange moths with menacing wings  
Now after many clouds I recognise the darkness  
But the harm is done it's too late, too late

## May MeadowMs by Maire Morrissey Cummins

Do you remember the vivid colours  
and textures of grasses  
that we gathered  
as we cut across the meadows  
to the lake,  
that afternoon in May,  
the month full of promise.

With the long Summer stretching out before us,  
there was no yesterday and no tomorrow,  
only bog cotton fields  
and silver Salix  
glittering  
in noonday sun.

