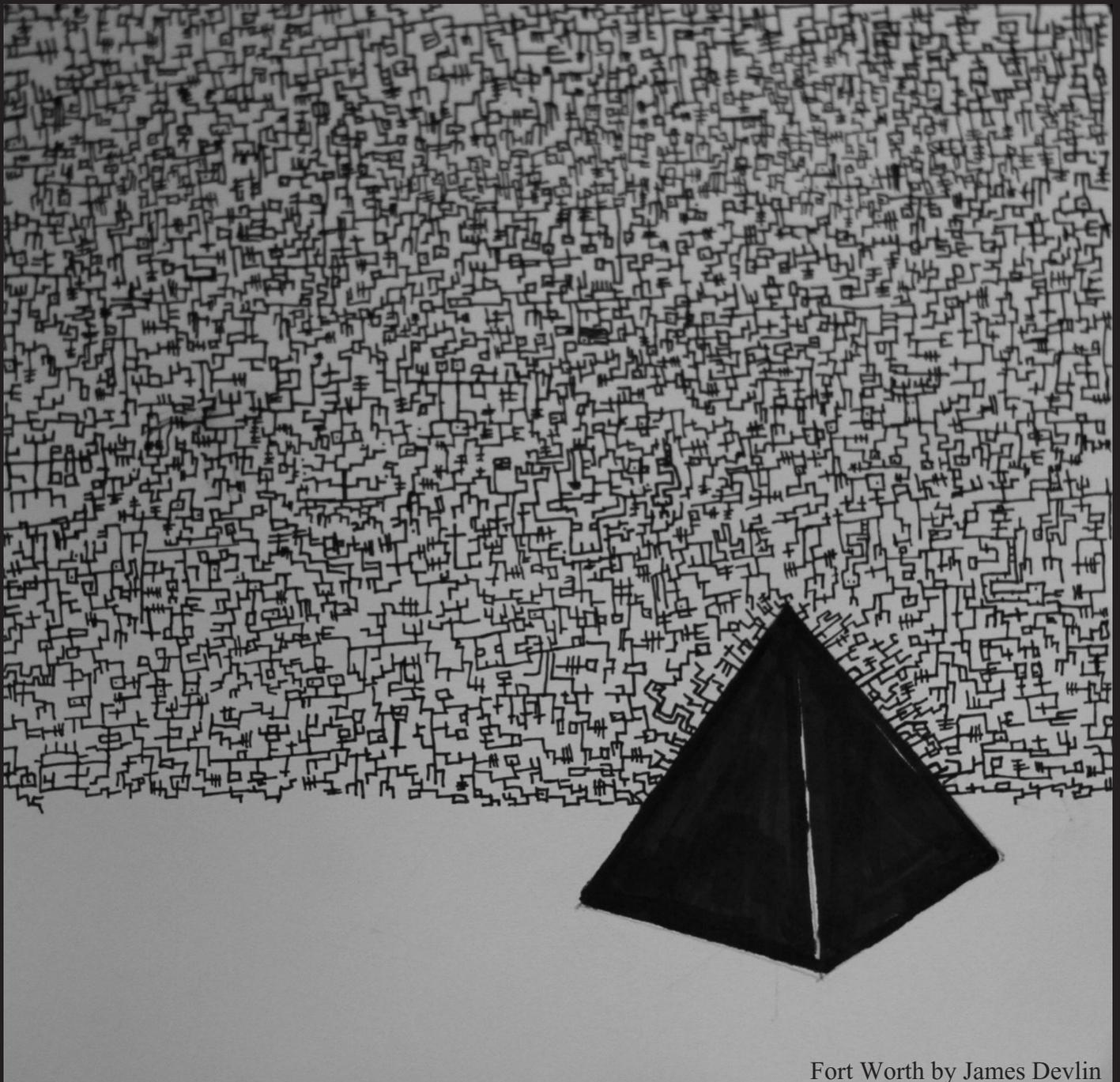


Bray Arts --- Journal

Volume 2 / 2016



Fort Worth by James Devlin

Contents

Fort Worth by James Devlin (Cover Illustration)

In The Beginning by Carmen Cullen

A View from the Cross on Bray Head by Michael Gordon

Five Short Poems by Brian Quigley

Aodhan's Last Breath by Nav Logan

November by Catherine O'Donoghue

Powerscourt Gardens by Lorraine Whelan

Wedding Bells by Lisa Reynolds

Two Swimming Poems by Rita Ni Ghoilin

Goya in Light and Shade by Fionnuala Brennan

Done with Dusting by Breda Wall Ryan

A Map of Getting Lost by Breda Wall Ryan

Two Poems by Josephine Matthews

Life Cycles by David O'Donoghue

Who Says TV Rots Your Brain? by Catherine Brophy

She Burns so Brightly (for Jessica) by Mitch Staunton Moore

Two Sisters by Brian Quigley

Two Poems by Eugene Hearne

Shane by Michael Gordon

When Black Dogs Sing by Tanya Farrelly

Illustrations by Ari Ahmad

James Devlin

Aaron Forde

Brigid O'Brien

Michael O'Reilly

Lorraine Whelan

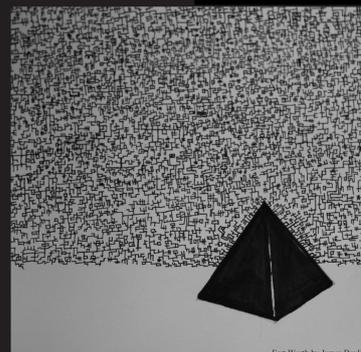
Bray Arts takes great pleasure in presenting the second volume of our new arts journal. We were delighted at how well our first volume, launched at our arts night in December 2015, was received by the contributors, members and the general public and hope that this new volume will be as well received. Many of our contributors attended our launch night and have submitted new material for inclusion in this volume also. Bray Arts was also delighted to welcome many of our contributors, as presenters, to our monthly gatherings and members have enjoyed their stories, poems and shows over the last few months.

In this volume we present stories dealing with birds, ancient celts, new weddings, classic artists, trash TV, mystery and a variety of poetry, comic and sublime, for your enjoyment, illustrated throughout by some of our best local visual artists. We hope that you will enjoy it and that you will consider submitting material yourself for future publications to the editor at editor@brayarts.net

Editorial Team.

Michael G O'Reilly – Editor
Julie Rose McCormick - Chairperson
Carmen Cullen
Cearbhaill O'Meadhra
Brigid O'Brien
Michael Ryan
John Walsh
Layout work courtesy of Ari Ahmad

**Bray
Arts
Journal**
Volume 2 /2016



Fort Worth by James Devlin

Connie was nineteen. She'd made love to Simon. It was daytime but she'd slept briefly, cosily and waking up stretched her hand back awkwardly to the wall behind her and inscribed an invisible heart transfixed by an arrow. This was followed by the etching of the initials C R on one side of the heart and S D on the other. Connie Ryan loves Simon Daly. She told all this to the man in question beside her but he just made an noise as a sort of acknowledgment. He said something about being hungry and that he hadn't expected to fall asleep.

Connie continued to think about the invisible inscription. It might mean I'm in love, she decided. She'd drawn the precise thing so instinctively and with such deft strokes it had to be significant, like the kind of identification mark with blue raddle her father smeared on sheep on the farm to show they were his; a sign that never went away. The drawing meant

that she and Simon had engaged in some sort of tryst, she conjured up in her mind, that would influence her judgment and take over her the seat of her heart.

Simon's bedsitter was perched high up in a dilapidated Dublin Georgian building and when she got up she began to make the place a bit tidy. The bare look of the room; just a table and one chair and a two ringed cooker gave it a temporary feel, as if it had no significance and only their presence was making it real. They talked with ease. It was only the second time they'd made love and Connie noticed a diffidence in Simon about mentioning what had happened. He feels awkward about it and doesn't like to discuss such affairs, she decided and began to hum to provide reassurance. She herself would have preferred affirmation in words that their passion had mattered. At least he hadn't tried to get her to leave shortly afterwards like

boyfriends she'd known, but had snuggled up to her, pleased she'd stayed around. This was how real life is, she decided. They were two people who mattered to one another. In the whirring world of students she was used to; hitching up with an acquaintance for casual love-making and then moving on, this was a pleasant change. She felt solid for the first time in years, attached and belonging.

Simon's room had two windows, the first looking onto a busy street and the other with a wide sill projecting over a deeply set yard. I'll just put them onto a plate on the window-ledge to cool off for a few minutes,' Connie declared when she'd cooked some sausages and she pushed up the bottom half of the back window to stick it out. Straight away a seagull landed and before her finger was pecked off she snatched the plate back in. A cruel beak tapped the window-pane angrily. The bird's eyes had the brute look of a

powerful eagle and that curved beak could tear you apart. Suddenly the room wasn't a cosy place and she wasn't protected from the world. Spitting seas had come in, driven to a frenzy by bitter winds. Connie twisted round. 'What sort of a place is this? That bird nearly took my hand off.' She threw the plate onto the table and glared at Simon accusingly.

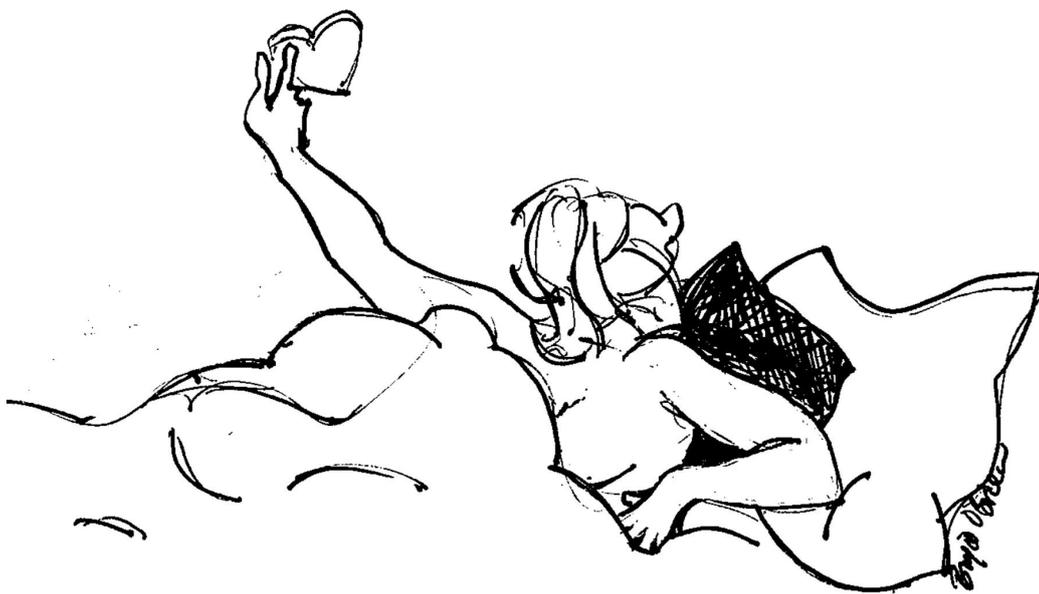
'Seagulls will spot food a mile away. They don't care where it is so long as it can be got to eat,' Simon said. He shrugged as if she should have more sense, as though she should realise the need to survive doesn't allow for niceties or correct behaviour.

'Life isn't as casual and haphazard as all that,' she said. 'A window ledge is not where a bird belongs,' but she knew he was right and despite her earlier sense of being part of a twosome felt placed aside. Maybe she was a just a scrap of adventure for Simon too.

When Connie met Simon the following day, instead of

In the Beginning

by Carmen Cullen



Brigid O'Brien

a person she saw a bird for an instant, staring at her with unblinking eyes. His gaze registered warmth though and she remembered a starling she rescued from the floor of the barn at home that must have misjudged the roof height. 'We could go for dinner after lectures if you like,' Simon said and when she nodded her head he clasped her in his arms in an imprisoning hug. 'I'm glad we've met,' he said, because we're two of a kind.'

Whatever she said now, she was branded forever.

A View from the Cross on Bray Head by Michael Gordon

A symbol of a church triumphal,
Built to commemorate a Holy Year,
I have stood atop this mountain sixty five years.

Pilgrims clambered up, blessed themselves, knelt,
Offered prayers. I could not pass their pleadings upwards,
Nor graces downwards. How could I?

Built from steel rods and mass concrete.
Bearing no figure, no inscription, no date,
I have no artistic merit. Functional.

Once seven churches of differing religions
Jostled for supremacy with grandiose spires.
Obscured by new houses, they are choked by progress

The clearest views now are two tall chimneys,
A television tower and phone masts on Three Rock.
The Angelus bells no more peal up the valley.
But each Good Friday there is a dawn vigil.
A group hauls upwards a large wooden cross, doing the Stations.
What piety drives them now? What fanaticism?

I am neglected, graffiti clad, uncleaned
My worst indignity a basketball hoop fixed to my arms
There should have been outrage, not amusement. Not indifference.

Soon it will not matter. Like the famine walls below me
I will need to be explained by historians. An object on a hill.
As meaningful as that obelisk across the bay.

Garavogue by Ari Ahmad



Five Poems by Brian Quigley

The Bray Regatta

The crowds on the esplanade ate ice creams
as they watched the heave-ho of the four-oar row,
and the angled yachts with sails flapping like towel-flicks
rounding buoys that bobbed above their moorings.
They clapped for the diver who made the least splash,
and Captain Van Dyke plunging into the sea in a blazing sack.

Coins

They danced a pocket jingle
as they trampolined
to the measure of my stride,
the fistful of gold, silver and bronze
related by being change of each other
or minted in the same year.

Bicycle Race

Supple like a snake or a string of pearls
they split around roundabouts
making wristwatch shapes.
Then it's the helix around hairpin bends,
the radial-spoke twinkle and domino shuffle,
the puppet-and-string routine
that reels the leaders in,
jerseys interchanging like a Rubik cube.

Florence Road Barber

Four of us
waiting to be sheared –
a barber-shop quartet –
in the high-chair
wearing the bib
by the electric purr
and swish of deft hands
that tickle nerve pulses
in a cranial massage
as they cleave off
half an inch from the roots.

Seaweed

Rusted clusters of rubber brassica
and sinewy vinyl harvested in salty mounds.
Fluted tubers and octopus whiffing sticks
nestled in spaghettis of knitted pods.
Sugarcanes with husked rootssprouting stipple backs of gnawed
bones and tiger hides.

Aodhan's Last Breath by Nav Logan

Aodhan was the last Irish crannóg dweller. He lived on a manmade island on Lough-Na-Cranagh on the northern coast of Ireland. His family had lived there for countless generations, protected by its stone walls and the waters of the lough. They were all gone now, and his island home was slipping into ruin.

The White Plague had massacred his extended family, taking them one by one. Within a matter of months, he was alone on the island. For some reason, the Old Gods had overlooked him. Aodhan was wise enough not to question the whims of the Old Gods. They had their reasons.

Life was good, however. The lough was rich with fish, and the nearby shores provided Aodhan with everything he could ask for; apart from human companionship.

He had become an outcast from society. It hadn't taken long for the nearby settlements to hear about the death of the Crannóg dwellers, and since then, Aodhan had become shunned. They believed him to be cursed. Some of the local fishermen had even gone as far as to throw stones at him while he was gathering reeds along the shore.

One dawn, while he was fishing in the early morning, Aodhan heard the sound of singing. A female voice slipped through the mist. So sweet was the sound that Aodhan knew that it must be the goddess, Boann, singing to the nearby family of swans. Crouching low in his coracle, he paddled silently closer, hoping to catch a glimpse of the goddess for she was fabled to be beautiful beyond words.

The sound of his paddle in the water sounded loud to his ears in the silence of the morning; even the birds had stopped their morning chorus to listen to the goddess's song.

The goddess was singing in the native tongue of the people of Ireland, but the crannóg dwellers, like most of Ireland's island clans, had never converted to the new tongue of the invaders, and they still spoke fluent Gaelic. The goddess's song, however, was an ancient song. Even Aodhan struggled with some of the words. He understood enough, however, to know that her song was one of love. Between one verse and the next, the song ended. For a moment all was silent on the water, and Aodhan strained to peer through the mist, hoping to still catch a glimpse of the deity.

"Who hides there amongst the reeds?" a female voice demanded. Her voice was as soft as doeskin, and yet it held a hint of anger within it that was not to be ignored.

In a panic, Aodhan crouched even lower in the boat. He knew enough about the fickleness of the Old Gods to know that his life was now in great peril.

"Come out!" she demanded, her tone sharper now. "I can sense your presence!"

"Forgive me, Goddess! I meant no wrong. I was only casting my nets in search of eels ..." he pleaded.

Lifting his paddle, he pushed the coracle forward, keeping his eyes averted. It was said that a man could go blind if he looked directly into the eyes of one of the Old Gods. In moments he could see her naked feet and the hem of her

dress. She was floating on the waters of the lough, perched on nothing more than somewater lilies.

His eyes, with a will of their own, hungered to see more of her. Despite his best efforts, his head tilted and he found himself entranced by her beauty.

"What's your name, mortal?"

"Aodhan Ó Corraidhín,"

Aodhan replied.

"Do you know the penalty for looking upon my visage, mortal?" she demanded.

Aodhan was too enthralled to respond at first, but the flash of anger in her eyes was enough to force the word from his lips, "D-death!"

"Aye, death, and yet you risk it all?"

"I do," he answered, feeling a little bolder. "I have nothing else to lose. My clan have all perished, and I'm the last of the Crannóg dwellers. Sometime soon, the White Plague must surely claim me, too."

Her face softened. "You were not destined for the Otherworld, Aodhan. However, a price must be paid."

Aodhan nodded and rose to his feet. He would go willingly to his death. "So be it, but might I be so bold as to ask for a farewell kiss?"

The goddess raised her eyebrows in surprise. "You're a bold one, indeed!"

Aodhan shrugged. He was a dead man anyway. What did he have to lose?

To his surprise, the goddess broke into a smile and motioned his craft forward. Barely able to breathe, he could only watch as the small boat slid through the lilies and stopped

before the floating goddess.

"Such a waste," she murmured.

Raising her hands to his face, she leaned forward and kissed him. It was not a chaste kiss, like the one Deirdre Ó Daimhín had given him a few years ago. This kiss was hot and filled with passion, a kiss that sent fire into his loins and made his head swoon. Then, the lips vanished, and so did Aodhan's coracle.

He plunged into the bitterly cold water as if his feet were encumbered with a mill stone. The water wasn't deep here, but it was deep enough. Aodhan thrashed about in surprise. His limbs became entangled by water plants, and soon, he was struggling to hold his last breath.

Despite being a good swimmer, Aodhan found himself drowning. When he could hold his breath no longer, he finally accepted his fate and released the air from his lungs.

Lying at the bottom of the lough, he watched the bubbles of his life rising towards the surface, and in those final moments of life, he smiled.

He had kissed a goddess. Not many people could claim that. For a time, maybe seconds, maybe years, his mind drifted, and then, as if in a dream, he felt a hand reached down and drag him to the surface.

"Aye, death,
and yet you risk
it all?"

November **by Catherine o' Donoghue**

Yours is November
This darkening mouth of a month
Seductive, cooling, cold.

Yours is a fire burning
To its very last

Embers hot
As desert stones
In this hopeless freeze

The brutish breath of
A bull
Escapes you
Misting the windows
Like rain

I wonder how heavy
The carrying
Is for you

My heart carries
The image close
Like hope needs to be
On a cold November morning
Such as this.



Brigid O' Brien



Dee Dee by James Devlin

Powerscourt Gardens **by Lorraine Whelan**

For the Absent Man

We speak of rhododendrons and collapsed fountains,
the smouldering fires of that sunny mid-winter
when we walked through lime parkland
full of blossom trees and un-timely flowers.

A garden of paradise.

A child's delight.

We laugh at our memories of the pebbled terrace:
its elaborate decoration in black and white
and the stone spheres poised and ready to bounce
down palatial steps and meet us grandly at the pond
where lily-less pads hover in green silence
over the still water near the grotto.

And more verdure and brilliance
as the stately avenues of silver-barked trees
present us with their royal majesty.

Through the eyes of the setting sun
we see again the patchwork hills
and the dancing birds

as flocks head for their homes,
spiralling in the distance before dark.

Tonight we will believe in pink-tipped daisies
and wish for other days when we were not separated.
When we were still the same.

Wedding Bells by Lisa Reynolds

When I realised that I was a transgender woman I thought that I was destined to be alone. Maybe in a flat alone except for Fluffy the cat living out my existence having watched all my friends fall in love and settle down over the years. I thought no one will ever understand me or see me as the love of their life. I contented myself with the fact that at least I was living my life as me as opposed to living a lie and I accepted that loneliness may be a factor which I must encounter and deal with. What I hadn't anticipated was that the world was changing and when I met her I realised that someone could love me like I loved them. And as I sat alone in my flat I knew this wouldn't be where I would end my days. Staring at the engagement ring on my finger I smiled as I watched it glow under the sunlight coming through the window. The sunshine seemed a metaphor for the happiness which was glowing inside my heart. In two days time I was going to be getting married after she had proposed to me in a Dublin restaurant a few months back. A smile curved the side of my mouth as I remembered the proposal.

The city was awash with people as I made my way down to the restaurant wrapping my fake fur coat around my shoulders while listening to the varied whispers of,
“Is that real fur?”
“Isn't that that supermodel one?”
“She's dating an Irish woman. I guess that makes her one of us now.”

When I reached the restaurant I could see from through the window that Laura was fumbling with a napkin. Nothing unusual I thought. After all she's an awkward, introvert anyway. When I went inside she stood up and gave me a gentle kiss before we sat down.

“We need to talk.”, she said quickly.

And I think in that moment I was hearing alarm bells going off that weren't there. I thought this is the moment when she tells me like a few others had done previously that she can't get over the fact that I'm transgender and that it was over. Tears were already starting to form in my eyes and I couldn't help when one streamed down my face. Unlike the others, I loved her and couldn't imagine my life without her. Although I was honest by nature, suddenly honesty didn't feel like the best policy and I tried to remember my mother's words when I had gender reassignment surgery that if someone couldn't love me for me then they weren't worth my time. But still more tears fell. Laura looked confused and did that very Irish thing of looking around the restaurant to see if anyone was looking.

“Why are you crying you stupid cow? I just said we needed to talk Izara.”

“And I know what about.”

“I hope you don't because this wasn't the reaction I was hoping for.”

I started to wipe my tears in the top of my coat.

“So you aren't going to break up with me?”

Laura looked shocked before she broke into a laugh and took out a

black box opening it to reveal my engagement ring.

“I'm not that crazy. When is a size 14 journalist like me ever going to meet a stunning blonde supermodel again?”

Or more to the point when will I ever meet someone as kind, gentle, interesting and witty as you? Marry me Izara?”

Suddenly the alarm bells in my head became wedding bells and I could hear Tracy Turnblad in Hairspray singing I Can Hear The Bells.

“Yes.”, was all I could manage to utter but that seemed enough for Laura who smiled and put the ring on my finger before cupping the side of my face in her hand and kissing me passionately.

All my family had come over from Croatia for the wedding and all my friends from various places. Standing in my flat as my mother fixed my veil I was a bundle of excitement mixed with nerves.

“Izara, stay still.”, my mum said.

“Sorry mum. Oh god ... oh god ...”

“You alright?”, she smiled.

“I hope I don't fall. This trail is so long.”

“Why did you wear that dress then?”

“My friend Chad would have been unhappy if I didn't wear his design. Laura has a hippie midi type gown. Lucky thing.”

She finished fixing my veil.

“I am so proud of you. You look beautiful. And you and Laura are so perfect together. I couldn't be happier for the both of you. Just treat each other kindly even when the chips are down and everything will be great.”

“Is that the final mother's advice?”

“Final advice before the wedding. Married or not I'll always be on hand with advice.”

We hugged.

Laura and I had walked up the aisle with our mothers. My father wasn't close to me or my sister and had chose not to attend. Laura's father had sadly died a few years ago.

I looked around and seen my sister and Laura's sister and all our friends and relatives in the seats and then I looked back at Laura.

She smiled warmly at me and my nerves steadied somewhat.

It soon came to the vows. Laura took my hand in hers, “Before I met you I was this solitary writer who assumed my only marriage would be to my computer but you came along and ensured spinsterhood had only been a fear and not a reality. You said so what, so am I when I said I was pansexual and you have never been anything other than the most supportive, most beautiful woman inside and out that I have ever met and I love you very much Izara.”

Then it was my turn.

“Laura I remember the day I knew you had my back was when a cisgender woman at a party said that transgender women were men and when you were saying goodbye to her you told her she was one of the loveliest men you ever met. For all of five minutes it showed her what she was putting transgender women through. In that moment every part of who you are shone through: caring, kind, compassionate, gutsy and a little bit mischievous. All the qualities I ever wanted in someone and I've loved you since and I will forever.”

The Registrar smiled and said, “You may now kiss each other.”

We kissed gently as cheers and clapping began to ring out around the room.

“Is that the final
mother's advice?”



Salome by Ari Ahmad



Brigid O' Brien

Two Swimming Poems
by Rita Ni Ghollin

Swimmers and Friends

The brave and brown
 Don't go to town
 They jump into the sea
 They walk back home
 (They don't live far)
 And leave in time for tea.
 They swim all year
 Most of the time
 In spite of wind and weather,
 Then, rather cold
 But fresh and bold,
 They meet at noon together.
 There some play ball
 Or talk of sport,
 Of people and the nation.
 Whate'er it be, these swimmers
 fine
 Enhance Bray's reputation.
 Come sun or rain,
 Come joy or pain.
 Come troubles big or small,
 A friend at hand, a swim in
 the sea
 Will help to soothe it all. III

The Swim

The best thing in the summer
 is the swim
 It changes everything
 It is a focuser of attention
 An antidote to depression
 Every swim session
 Deserves a mention
 Each day the challenge nears
 No avoiding the call
 It's the best thing of all
 To clear the fears
 And then the coffee
 And the chocolate bun
 And a little bit of sun
 If you're lucky, maybe
 So cast off your clothes and
 your worries
 Put on your togs, go in in a
 hurry
 Deep in the water your cares
 flow away
 Out with the tide for another
 day

Goya in Light and Shade by Fionnuala Brennan

I have long been fascinated by the charismatic Spanish artist Francisco de Goya and wanted to have a more intimate look at his life and work. What better perspective to obtain than that of the women who were closest to him in his life? As they lived with Goya at different stages of his long and turbulent career, they have lot to say about the private character of the great artist as well as being able to tell us the background to some of his most famous art works.

To my mind, Goya is one of the most enigmatic and influential painters in the history of art. As Court Painter, he was well-in with the Spanish royal family and the nobility, yet he lambasted what he saw as the cruelty, superstition and hypocrisy in Spanish society, as we can see in his scathingly satirical *Los Caprichos*. He saw nothing glorious either in war and depicted it in all its horror and brutality in a series of etchings *The Disasters of War* and in his large painting *The Third of May, 1814* (which is channelled in one of our own Robert Balagh's best-known works.) Goya painted sunny pastoral scenes, church frescoes and he also covered the walls of his country house at Quinto del Sordo with grotesque images of monsters and devils—the famous *Black Paintings* now in the Prado, Madrid. Goya is also a portrait painter par excellence.

I have just had the pleasure of visiting the major exhibition of Goya's portraits in the National Gallery in London. What a joy to be able to examine the exquisite treatment of fabric in these works and especially to see his psychological insights into the character of his sitters. There is nothing like seeing paintings in

the flesh, as it were. One can see the scale of the works, most of which appear of equal size in reproductions. I know, of course, that the dimensions are given but one concentrates on the paintings. I was surprised to see how small his self-portraits are.

The seeds of my fascination with Goya were sown during my studies in History of Art in Trinity. The firework that sent me into orbit to write the novel,

But Goya is not only to be viewed in such sombre, violent works, in the shade, as it were; his magnificent portraits, especially the later ones of women, are full of colour and light. The exhibition of his portraits I have just visited is testimony to this. Among the women on display there is the luminous portrait of Antonia Zarante, on loan from in our own national gallery, who has been recently described by the art critic



The Painter's Women: Goya in *Light and Shade*, was a visit to an exhibition some years ago of *The Disasters of War*. I was stunned at the depiction, in small intimate etchings, of the savagery of man's inhumanity to man. No glorious victories, no medalled generals, instead bodies hanging from trees, soldiers castrating a helpless man. Later, I went to the British Library in London and handled prints of the *Los Caprichos* and visited the Prado to see the *Black Paintings*.

Alicia Keys by Aaron Forde Waldemar Januszczak as one of the most strikingly beautiful women in art.

To get a closer view at Francisco Goya I chose to create, to listen to, the voices of six women who knew him very well. Four of the six women whose voices we hear in my novel lived in Spain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They are Josefa, Goya's wife of forty years, the mother of his six children, of whom only one son survived infancy; Leocadia, his much

younger mistress who lived with him for the last sixteen years of his life until his death in 1828; Rosario, his unacknowledged young daughter who had ambitions to follow in her father's artistic footsteps, and Gumersinda, his acerbic, grasping daughter-in-law. We know very little beyond their names about these four women. I wanted to give them a voice, to bring them out of the shade into the light.

The fifth voice in *The Painter's Women* is that of the totally fictitious Dolores, a young peasant girl who ends up, in the novel, as one of the most legendary nudes in the history of art. The sixth woman is the famous Duchess of Alba, feisty, flighty and fabulously wealthy. She appears more than any other woman in Goya's art. There was much juicy gossip and speculation as to the nature of their relationship. This gossip finds a possible source in Goya's portraits of the Duchess; especially the portrait of 1797 in which the Duchess is painted in the black costume of a *maja*. She is standing on a sandy shore, her right hand points to an inscription in the sand, Solo Goya. On her fingers are two rings, a diamond ring bearing the name Alba and the other a gold ring inscribed Goya.

I would like to leave the last word to the artist himself, talking to his daughter Rosario. This world is a masquerade: face, clothing, voice — everything is meant to deceive. Everyone wants to appear what he is not, each deluding the other and not even knowing himself.

Read an excerpt from Fionnuala's book at <https://betimesbooksnow.wordpress.com/2015/11/13/excerpt-from-the-painters-women/>

Done with Dusting by Breda Wall Ryan

They watch us from the mantel
as we riddle the grate and carry
ash
through the garden to the com-
post heap.
Their ear-bones do not vibrate
to the noise of our
vacuum-cleaner,

or hear the caged finch
as he flits through his small life
clicking millet seed and trill-
ing.
The song's death bereaves us,
but the dead are deaf to silence.

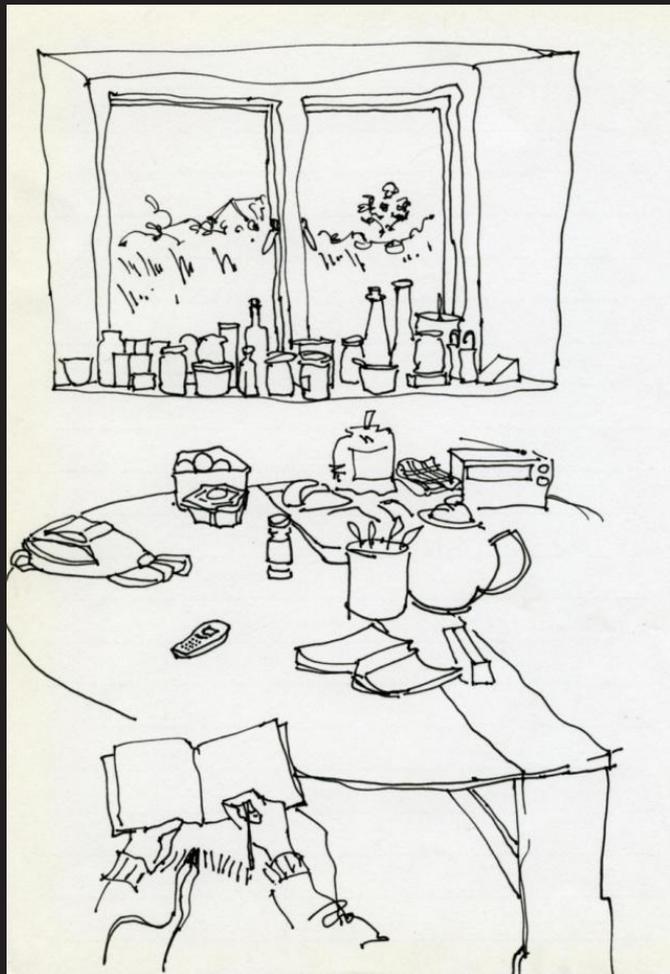
From two dimensions they
examine us
as we sneeze at aerosol sprays
and lavender furniture-wax
that neither trouble nor please
their nasal membranes.

Cake aromas tantalize us
as we unsettle dust from rugs,
brush stairs and chair-rungs.
The dead do not salivate,
they have no memory of ma-
deleines.

The sun creeps across a
wedding tableau
where shadows stay in place
against a studio backcloth.

We buff our finger-whorls
off their faces while they study
us through non-reflective glass,
not flinching at our soap and
vinegar.
All day, we scrub, polish,
degrease
while they fix us in our three
dimensions
with their implacable stares
like camera lenses. Their
darkened eyes
take us in without malice
or benevolence; they form no
opinion.
At last, their house is clean,
our bones and muscles ache,
we displace our bodies'
volume
while they, volumeless, gaze.
Night is here. We haunt their
world,
and the de-boned, unbodied
dead
watch us while we sleep.

Phil Lynott by Aaron Forde



Brigid O'Brien



Circe by Ari Ahmad

A Map of Getting Lost by Breda Wall Ryan

We lean into the wind that won't let us backtrack
past the burnt-out cottage unbuilding
in the elbow of a hairpin,
render stripped back to fieldstone
like a slide of its cell structure

exposed under the sky's lens,
window frames charred and blistered.
Inside, in the stink of elder and damp cinder,
neglected swallow-nests cling to the eaves,
the roof is open to a liquorice-streaked sky.

A mark on a contour shows a headlong ravine
where a torrent, unstoppable
after this last downpour, tumbles downhill,
water quarrelling with stones.
We pretend to listen, as if going back

we might hear the wind driving us,
and not arrive as separate map-pins
pushed into hostile terrain, sharp flags snapping.
Already astray, we missed the signs
for dangerous bends and gale warnings.

Shoko Tendo by Ari Ahmad



Two Poems by Josephine Matthews

The Beggar

People hurry to and fro'
some stopping to drop a few
coins
into the empty cup.
Perhaps it makes them feel
good,
their good deed done for the
day.

The young man shivers
as he pulls the thin blanket
around
his fragile body,
beside him I notice a little dog
shivering,
his sad brown eyes reflect the
desolation he feels.

My heart feels sadness for that
poor dumb animal
used to extract money from
passing strangers.
He has no voice
only his loyalty and love for
his homeless owner.
He would stay shivering beside
him,
hungry and wanting.
I drop a coin into the cup for
the desolate dog,
not the young man

Farewell Shaun

I watched as the pall bearers
strained with grief,
making their bodies weak
as they carried you
to your resting place.
The wailing of those
left behind, echoed
only to be heard
tearing at everybody's
heart strings.
You have left such
a big gap
that never will be filled.
Now there is nothing
but silence,
the sunshine has
gone out,
the rain has stilled
and the silence is deafening.
No more big booming
happy voice,
you lit the world
with your smile,
you spread happiness
everywhere you went.
My big beautiful cousin
I will miss you

Life Cycles by David O' Donoghue

The young think they'll live forever
The middle-aged say they're only half way through
The not-so-young (OK the elderly) say they're young at heart
And on the road to immortality.
Perhaps all three cohorts
Have got it right
(for themselves, at any rate).



Brigid O'Brien

Who says Trash TV rots your brains? by Catherine Brophy

Everyone loves a good sneer. Yes you do. But most of us keep it for home and like-minded friends. T.V. pundits do it in public. And their favourite object of derision is trash T.V. Pap for the masses, they say. Rots your brain. Made for idiots, fools and couch potatoes. What they never admit is...that it's entertaining. Much as I love learning about the Glories of Rome, the lost tribes of the Orinoco, or watching Brian Cox muse philosophically on astrophysics, sometimes, all I want is coloured pictures in front of my eyes and no strain on the brain. I want to sit back and drool. Maybe sip a little wine. Trash television is

perfect for this. And, if you keep your eyes and ears open, you might learn something about the human condition. I like to call it research. Mostly I live the life of a Trappist. I sit at the computer, playing with my imaginary friends – i.e. writing. The only people I meet are family and friends. But a writer needs more than that. Where in my everyday life would I meet mad, young ones aching to make it as Models? On America's Next Top Model of course. Or deluded teens who want to be Pop Stars? X-Factor. Or people being rude about their host's food and taste in décor? Come Dine with Me. Or a T.V. newsreader, spangled in

sequins, failing to learn how to Tango? Strictly Come Dancing. Or spoiled Daddy's girls spending outrageous amounts on a party. My Sweet Sixteen. And as for Big Brother, it's an encyclopaedia of naivety, madness, bitchiness, lechery, cliques, betrayals, crushes, insecurity, over-confidence and backstabbing. There's often a competitive element which affects people in so many different ways. You see how they present themselves. And you watch the mask slip. You see the gap between words and body language. Between what they say and what they actually do. For a writer that's gold. The idea for my novel *Burning Bright* came from reality

T.V. While flicking through channels I caught sight of a white-suited, wedding planner, perma-tanned and medallioned, tossing his luxuriant locks while hiring elephants for a wedding. It was on R.T.E. I sat up smartish. Elephants! For a wedding in Ireland! And with that, spoiled, daddy's girl Kirsty sashayed into my head with her aching desire to be Ireland's answer to Paris Hilton. The rest of the newly rich Kerrigan family followed. They ambushed me. And they kept getting at me till I wrote a novel about them. And they insisted that it had to be funny. So I did. Thank you trash Television.

Two Sisters by Brian Quigley

Priscilla and Sybil had been christened 'Two Sisters' by a lecturer at college. They weren't actually sisters, just classmates in UCD Engineering. They had nothing in common, came from opposite sides of the country [Barna and Bray] and mixed with entirely different cliques in the class, but they happened to be paired for a practical class together early in the first year and the lecturer had asked their names. A fan of The Kinks, it hadn't taken him much of a leap of imagination to get from Priscilla and Sybil to Priscilla and Sybilla, the characters in the song 'Two Sisters' on the band's seminal 1967 LP 'Something Else'. Trouble was, he shared his wisdom with the class and the tag stuck. This caused the girls no end of stress. People loosely connected with them actually thought they were sisters. They looked quite alike and were the same height so this didn't help. They tried to avoid each other as much as possible for the rest of the four years and when graduation came around they assumed they wouldn't have to ever meet again. It came as a bit of a shock then to both when they ended up getting jobs in the same company after college. Plus they'd be working together on shift as Production Supervisors. Even sharing an office. On their first night shift Priscilla went on her turn to do the rounds of the production building and came back to find the office in darkness, some classical symphony or other emanating from the general direction of Sybil's desk. She put the lights back on and

took out her MBA notes [she was ambitious and an MBA would speed up the path to a transfer to the company's US headquarters]. After a few minutes Priscilla realised she couldn't actually work with the racket, so she asked Sybil to turn it down. Sybil went one better and turned it off altogether. The next night Sybil brought in headphones and tied a scarf around her eyes so that Priscilla could study in peace and light, and she herself could continue to enjoy her music in noise and darkness. Priscilla just thought Sybil was being a smart-arse.

Over time they perfected the art of working together without actually speaking or having very much to do with each other. It was a bit like college part two. Their bosses thought them a great pairing because their shift always met its targets and quotas. About a year into the job they were picked to give a presentation to some visiting big shots from the US headquarters. Only one of them was to talk during the presentation though. Priscilla was practicing her public speaking voice one night, assuming Sybil would have little interest in doing the talking. Priscilla thought Sybil didn't have ambition, at least not in the engineering area. All the time listening to classical music and writing away. Her own time was spent on the MBA because she was ambitious. She got a fright then when she became aware that

Sybil was practicing speaking out loud too. "What are you doing? Do you want to give the talk at the presentation? I assumed you wouldn't!" asked a startled Priscilla. "No!" laughed Sybil. "My debut novel is being launched in The Irish Writers Centre tomorrow night. I have to read some extracts." "N-novel?" stammered Priscilla. "You're always writing, I can see that, but I didn't think you were writing an actual novel!" "My ticket out of here hopefully." said Sybil.

Priscilla's presentation went well and she got a transfer to the US shortly afterwards. Her career was on an upward curve. Her going away night was actually Sybil's too, she was leaving electronic engineering behind to become a full-time writer with the success of her first book. Sybil gave Priscilla a copy of the book as a going-away present. Priscilla didn't really ever intend to read it.

A year later Priscilla was in her rented New York apartment trying to relax after a long stressful day. They worked you hard here, she thought. You were shattered each evening, just wanted to curl up with the television. She was flicking through and stopped in shock when she saw Sybil on David Letterman. Talking about the film that was to be made of her debut novel. She'd seen it somewhere in the apartment recently, it had made its way over with her, somehow. She managed to find it and sat down to read. Sybil had written a short inscription and put her mobile phone number and personal e-mail on the inside cover. Priscilla devoured the book over a couple of nights, it was that good. Not what she was expecting at all. A detective story set around Bray and Wicklow, a bit like the Ann Cleeves Shetland books. After reading the book Priscilla got in touch with Sybil. Or back in touch. They became friends and Sybil stayed in Priscilla's apartment's guest room whenever she was in New York. They even hung out together a bit and enjoyed it. Chalk and cheese. Two sisters.

"My ticket out
of here hopefully."

"My debut novel is being launched
in The Irish Writers Centre
tomorrow night. I have to read some
extracts."

Two Poems by Eugene Hearne



War

Syrian War, Korean War, Biafran War,
First World War...

An old man counts the dead on wooden beads
Sitting where children boasted of great deeds
Now deaf to keening women, mullahs' hymns
He's separating toys from human limbs
The black clouds bring a day of heavy rain
They're rolling out the barrel bombs again
How precious now the sound of a known voice
The medic's face contorted with the choice
(The theatre is running out of blood)
To save the one whose life hangs by a thread
Or ease the suffering of the almost dead
Who's that old lady picking through the rubble?
Is that our neighbour looking for her door,
Lying among the ruins of her roof?
The postman calls 'is this for you Old Mother?'—
(One street of rubble looks much like another)
One lucky child gets artificial legs
And now replace my son!' A woman begs
An armless girl sits staring, numb with fright
The house inside her head an empty space
Ghost-pain and after-image haunt her face
Down in some room a thousand miles away
The Drone Control is safely underground
The flickering running figures make no sound

The dust of homes like flour on their faces
Halloween masks for the war-games cast
A phantom soundtrack follows every blast--
His nightingales of death are singing past.

Migrants

The sun sank in a sea of blood
And tiny boats like cradles rocked
The migrants to a restless sleep
Some to break and some to dream
And wonder if they'd ever wake
A seagull landed on a ledge
And stared at this bedraggled race
But tiring of a baby's screams
He cut the sky with blood-red wings
Turning toward a far-off shore
He saw an open wound of war
A stream of sad humanity
Winding toward the restless sea
Where eager boatmen ply their trade
A sort of fishing in reverse
Purple night falls as it will
And tiny man-made islands float
Not cause for major
powers' dispute
Towards a dreamed-of distant shore
Where hope says safety lies in store
The waking seas then overspill
Their flimsy rocking cockleshell
Tipping it sideways, in their sleep
Their struggles break the reflected stars
How sharp and clear the seagull's cry
The panicked screaming children's call
The sea's hard cold relentless grasp
Tears apart two lovers' clasp
The few that clamber back aboard
Sail on still fleeing their dark star
The distant flashes of the war

She burns so brightly (for Jessica)
by Mitch Staunton Moore

She burns so brightly in the light
Shimmers and sparkles unaware of her glory
With the grace and form of an elegant lady
She contains her beauty well
Flick of hair
Face so fair
Subtle tilt of chin
Such youthful gait
Shiny hair peeps over covers
She slumbers
Moonlight filters through curtains,
curious to catch a glimpse of beauty asleep.
She mumbles her dreams into the bedroom air
I catch them and whisper in her ear
“Have a life of adventure and great joy,
my bright one, have not a care.”
I think of her childhood, now girlhood,
soon to be womanhood.
My heart sinks with inevitable loss
She will leave
Go
Destiny awaits her arrival.

Auspice by Lorraine Whelan



Shane by Michael Gordon

I wish my mother had called me Shane. It would not have meant too much to her, but it would have meant a great deal to me. You see, Shane was the title hero of a great Western movie. It was a classic; at least to me and my pals. When Shane rode up to that poor farmhouse looking for work, we knew he was a cut above the usual cowboy. We could sense his inner steel. He was a cool, clean hero before that phrase was ever invented, with clear blue eyes, blonde hair and not a trace of acne. He wore a white cowboy hat and kept a pair of pearl-handled six-guns hidden in his bed roll. He befriended that Walton like family. The husband was toil weary, and his honesty shone through his gnarled features and through his worn, patched jeans and checked shirt. His wife was always wore a long gingham dress, wearily pushing wisps of hair out of her eyes. Shane called her 'Ma'am'. He was always very respectful to women. Our gang was very put out that Shane had to sleep in the barn, but it was right that there should be no hint of impropriety. Those were the days when the hero kissed his horse and

not the girl. We would not have stood for any carrying on. Even after a night in the barn he would awaken clean shaven and in a freshly pressed shirt. We knew he was a true blue when the dog and the gormless child made friends with him. Shane never wore his guns; even when it looked as if every other person in the movie was a member of the National Riflemen's Association. But we sensed, we just knew, that he could handle himself and that, if he did take out his guns, the baddies had better look out. And there were baddies. They ran the town. They were a bunch of no-goods. They spent their days in the saloon, drinking. One man had a turn in his eye and leered at the respectable town ladies in their flowered bonnets. He wore filthy clothes and spat tobacco contemptuously at people's feet. When they brought in a hired killer, we all knew it would lead to a showdown, man to man, mano a mano, and we were glad that it was Alan Ladd, alias Shane, who would be the one to defend these Waltons. And what a killer they brought in. Jack Palance. For fans like us, the name alone spelt terror. Now here

was evil. He was all over black. Black clothes, black horse, black hat, black lantern jaw. We knew his heart was black. He was a worthy opponent. In the early skirmishes we hated him as he casually forced the dirt farmers to walk around him, or as he brutally knocked them into the mud. We yelled abuse as he sadistically shot down a toil worn Walton who was fixing his unpainted toil worn wagon with toil worn tools. And the injustice of it, when Shane was accused of cowardice. Why could the townspeople not see it? We knew he was in control, biding his time. We could see it in his steel-blue eyes. We knew that dogs and children liked him. We knew he had to win. Sure, wasn't the movie called after him? Eventually, he could stand it no more. He rode out of town. The baddies were whooping and hollering. They thought he was running away. Ha. Ha. We started yelling as he reached the barn and dug out his guns. We reached a crescendo as he twirled his pearl handled revolvers expertly in both hands, before grimly tying his holsters tight around his legs to facilitate his lightning draw. We knew he did

not want to fight, but was determined to set things right. The showdown came in the muddy street as people scattered out of the line of fire. The tension became unbearable. We stood or crouched at the edge of our seats; our hands poised over our own imaginary six-guns. We knew Shane would not draw first; but would he be fast enough. We need not have worried.

After much blustering, Black Jack went for his gun. His shot hit Shane in that soft part of his upper forearm, where he could get a lot of sympathy but where it would heal swiftly. Then Shane, ice cold, killed his opponent with one shot. The cinema erupted. Townspeople gathered round. Heroic music played. All the other villains left town, never to be seen again. Good had triumphed over evil. We knew that all was well in the world. The family placed our wounded hero onto the worn out wagon and rode home into the sunset. We knew that they would be all right. But we also knew that we had to do it all again the following Saturday

When Black Dogs Sing

by Tanya Farrelly

Michael G O' Reilly



Carla stands in the back yard and stares up at the sky. Occasionally the clouds part to reveal a sliver of moon. It casts its light on the wooden fence that separates Carla's vegetable patch from the rest of the yard, but mostly the clouds cover the sky and it is impossible to see the surroundings. For Carla, this is not a problem. She knows every inch of this land, the position of every tree and where the earth is uneven. She walks it every night and doesn't need the moonlight to guide her.

As Carla stands there she smokes a cigarette. The smoke spirals upwards, towards the cloudy sky. She puts out a hand and absently strokes the black dog that stands by her side, black

as the night that surrounds them. 'Where is he, Bobby?' she says. 'Where's my boy?'

The dog pushes his face into her hand. She feels the dampness of his nose, his rough tongue as he slides it along her palm. She runs her hand along his back, buries her fingers in his thick fur and feels him pressing against her.

In the shed, Carla turns on the light. Sheila lifts her head off the blanket in her bed and looks at Carla with tired eyes. Six black pups nuzzle her body. Their tiny paws press into her stomach as they squirm and nibble, pawing and clawing at each other in an attempt to get their mother's milk. Every so often, she pushes them

away roughly with her nose.

Carla kneels down and rubs Sheila's ears. She looks at the pups. Some of them are sleeping, the others constantly move depriving the older dog of sleep. 'Don't worry girl, I won't touch them,' she says. She knows the protective instinct of this mother for her young.

Carla turns out the light, steps outside and pushes a brick against the door to keep it ajar. Slowly, she walks back towards the house, the black dog at her side, his paws softly beating a rhythm on the pathway through the grass. A light burns in the kitchen. Carla pictures Ray inside. She hears the tap running and guesses that he's

making a last pot of tea before going to bed. It's strange, him being here. His coat hanging on the end of the banister, his boots beneath the stairs where they used to be. She stops in the hall and looks at them, farmers' boots, mud caked into the soles and sides; tracks on the lino where he came in from the yard.

The kitchen is warm. He stands at the sink scalding the teapot. He turns as he hears her come in. 'Will you have a drop of tea?' he says. 'Sure why not.'

She sits at the kitchen table. The dog lies at her foot. She takes a Digestive biscuit from the packet, breaks it in two and gives him half. He arrived three months ago.

They had been alerted to his presence by his late-night howling on the doorstep. She had put up posters around the neighbourhood, but no one had claimed him and Lucas had begged her to keep him.

The dog developed an allegiance to Carla and had followed her ever since.

She watches as Ray takes two mugs out of the press, his back to her. He knows where everything's kept. Why wouldn't he? It was his home for almost ten years. It feels like a lifetime ago. 'Any news?' Ray asks.

He sits opposite her, pours tea into her mug and then his own. She shakes her head and looks away so that he doesn't see the fear in her eyes. She knows it has been there lately.

She's seen it as she's stood in front of the mirror undressing for bed, trying to block out the voices that tell her that Lucas might never come home.

Ray sighs, lifts the mug to his lips and drinks loudly. For a short time they sit in silence, each one afraid to voice their fears. When he arrived three weeks before,

they had sat at this table and she had told him everything she could about the last time she had seen their son. He'd made suggestions, the two of them carrying out their own investigation that always led to the same place. Nowhere.

'Have you been up at the Reynolds' place?'

Ray puts his mug down and looks straight at her. 'I've been outside checking on the dogs.'

'You know you can't keep doing this, Carla.' 'I'm not doing anything,' she says, but she doesn't look at him when she speaks.

'Tom Reynolds told me

that you've been going up there. That he's seen you standing outside the house at night.'

She says nothing. 'He says it'll have to stop. That he doesn't know anything about Lucas.'

'He didn't just disappear, Ray.' Her voice trembles.

'You can't go accusing innocent people.'

'Why not?' she says.

He sighs, exasperated, and a small, rational part of her knows that there is some truth in what he's saying, that she has no idea what has happened to their son.

'He felt bad telling me. He said he can't imagine

Michael G O' Reilly



what we must be going through, but you can't go prying into other people's lives, Carla.'

She looks at the ground. 'You must think I'm crazy,' she says.

'No.' Ray stands up and rinses his mug at the sink. He pauses as he walks past, squeezes her shoulder and she almost puts a hand up to touch his. She raises it a little and then lets it fall in her lap again.

Upstairs, Carla hears him bumping around in Lucas's room. She imagines him getting undressed, sitting on the edge of the bed, looking around at his son's things and knowing that he doesn't belong there. She pictures him spinning the globe on Lucas's desk, jabbing it with his finger and wondering where on the earth his son could be.

Carla sits there and drains the last of her tea. She glances in the bottom of the cup where the tealeaves are scattered in an uneven pattern. Her grandmother used to read these leaves. She remembers women coming to the house in the hope of uncovering their fortunes. She'd never believed in such things. She still doesn't. She doesn't believe that some gypsy woman can reveal the whereabouts of her son, but she is almost desperate enough to try.

Overhead, the bumping gives way to silence. Ray has gone to bed. She stands up, slowly, rinses the mug

and hangs it on the wooden stand. She takes the black dog's lead from a drawer and he rises knowing that it's time.

The torch bobs as she walks, it's milky beam illuminating the hedges at the sides of the narrow road. The dog pulls ahead, his breathing fast and rasping in the night air. She walks quickly. Her footsteps making no sound in her canvas shoes. She keeps to the middle of the country road. She has no fear of traffic. Few cars pass this way, and she will see their lights as soon as they turn the bend at the top of the hill. The night is thick around them. They push on, the dog leading the woman through the night.

Eventually, he slows down. He stops every now and then to smell at the edge of the ditch, pricks up his ears when he hears a rustling in the hedges. Carla listens too. She knows that it's a creature, maybe a rat scurrying through the muddy waters, but every time the dog stops to sniff the air, her heart quickens and she tries not to picture her son's body, cold and muddied, lying at the bottom of the ditch covered by brambles.

Every night the woman and the dog trace the boy's footsteps. She knows that whatever happened, happened along this stretch of road, the half-mile between their house and the Reyn-

olds'. They have combed the area, search teams with sniffer-dogs, they've spoken to all the residents in a ten-mile radius and they have uncovered nothing.

Not one person saw Lucas walking to the Reynolds' house that evening.

Carla and the dog stop at the end of the laneway that leads onto Tom Reynolds's land. His red jeep is parked outside the garage. She stands there and watches the house in silence, the dog motionless by her side. The curtains are open and she can see into the living room. Reynolds's wife is there sitting in front of the television. She is alone. There is no sign of Reynolds himself or of the boy. Every time she sees him she feels a tightness in her throat that makes it difficult to breathe. If it weren't for the boy, she thinks, Lucas wouldn't have taken that road.

Carla hears a noise. She stands back, crouches down low, her hand steady on the dog's lead. She presses his back gently and he lies down beside her. Tom Reynolds appears from around the side of the house. His son walks behind him. He opens the back door of the jeep and the boy stands there, quietly. Carla strains to see what they're doing. She hears her pulse hammering in her ears. He takes something from the back of the jeep, but she is too far away to see what it is. He slams the door shut,

and leads the boy to the garage. He shifts the door and gestures for him to enter. The boy walks inside, his head down. She hears voices. They have vanished from view now.

She thinks she hears a boy whimpering and she moves forward instinctively, every nerve-end taut.

She keeps to the shadows of the trees, grips the dog's lead tightly. She is afraid of what she might see inside, but she is determined to find out what has happened to her son. It is dark in the garage. Reynolds has left the light off. She creeps nearer. She is within feet of the door now. The whimpering continues, but it is not the voice of her son. In a corner at the back of the garage, she sees Reynolds. He is crouching over something. Someone.

'No, Dad, please!'

Reynolds's son's voice is a whisper.

'I won't say anything, I promise. Dad, please don't.'

He is crying now.

Reynolds doesn't say anything. She hears the clink of his belt buckle as he removes it from his trousers, and she stands there unable to move. As the leather cracks on the boy's back, he yells out in pain. The black dog shifts at her side and a low growl escapes his lips. Carla hushes him, her mouth close to his ear.

She stands up, her legs shaking. She considers rushing into the garage to

stop this hideous beating, but who know what Reynolds might do. The only way she can save the boy is to get away from this place, to tell someone what she has seen.

They will have to believe her now. They will have to help her to find Lucas.

As they walk up the lane approaching her house, Carla sees a figure at the gate. Her heart quickens. For a moment she wonders if Reynolds saw her after all. If he decided to follow her here, took a shortcut through the fields to reach the house before she arrived.

She takes the black dog off the lead, expecting him to

rush forward. Instead he continues to walk at the same pace.

‘Where’ve you been, Carla?’

Ray’s voice rings out clear in the night. He stands at the gate looking out across the land and she almost runs to reach him. She tries to speak, to tell him about Reynolds, but instead the tears come, hot and fast, and she knows, that as sure as the black dog will continue to walk by her side, Lucas will never come home.



Climbing by Lorraine Whelan



The Art Critic by James Devlin