

*The Bodhran: Michael O'Reilly*

# BRAY ARTS JOURNAL

Issue 1 Volume 23 September 2017

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Last year Bray Arts was delighted to publish the third volume of our newly re-vamped journal as part of the annual Yarn Festival, in collaboration with the Mermaid Arts Centre. This year we are equally delighted to present our next volume as part of the new Bray Literature Festival.

Our journal strives to present the work of beginning, emerging or even established local authors, poets and visual artists. We like to strive for balance in the journal and aim to publish work that is serious or amusing, thought-provoking or light-hearted, challenging or easily-read.

With that in mind we invite you, in this volume to savour some poetry by our local shed poets, experience learning how to play the Bodhran, take a boat trip, contemplate the problems of both domestic abuse and drug abuse and laugh at some comical verses.

We hope that you will enjoy our selection and encourage all of you to submit material for future publications to [editor@brayarts.net](mailto:editor@brayarts.net)

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## BITE by Helen Harrison

Glad I can't mould sea, like land,  
It just seeps into my soul, through  
My fingers -

Out of my hands. Poems like  
Broken shells; fragments of  
A person's life;  
All weakness, and strengths -  
Exposed to the bite....

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## Selection Of Poetry by Phil Lynch.

### Footprints

My thoughts are chirping birds  
but all the wings are broken.  
The will cannot find the way  
the child is now a man  
and all the glory fades.

All I ask  
is for the storm long since started  
to be ended  
for this restless soul  
to strike a steady beat.

I want to skim across calm waters  
to reach the safer shore  
from where I can look back  
in impish celebration  
like the child  
who jumped across the stream  
and looked behind  
at the footprints  
he had left.

### Obscuring the Dark

The sun makes light  
of the sea  
then sets to the west  
with a fiery breath  
taking one more  
day's light from me.

My heart holds its beat  
in the sleep of the night  
bringing comfort and calm  
to my mind  
until dawn sends the moon  
off to rest for the day  
and I wake to the tune  
of your lips on my face.

The spark from each kiss  
keeps the embers aglow  
as the sun starts to dance  
on the sea  
each touch and embrace  
fan the flames as we go  
headlong deep  
down into the spray.

The waves wash away  
our tracks in the sand  
but we make a new path  
on a different shore  
though we bathe in the tide  
of a day that will pass  
our love is the light  
that obscures the dark.

### Aftermath

Gentle river of clear water sweet  
singing songs as it runs to meet  
the sea  
torrent of death flowing over the banks  
as nature retreats commanding her ranks  
to flee.

River of blood flooding the streets where we walk  
leaving a trail of distress while our leaders talk  
of peace  
the old and the young in the shade of a cloud lie  
praying  
when the able slaughter each other, the slaying  
may cease.

You sat in a park, a bird came flying by,  
when it saw you, in horror, it soared into the sky  
and hid  
we drink fresh air from a bottle marked *new*  
you didn't believe what they said would come true,  
It did.



*Oriental Chrome Claw: James Devlin*

## A Winter Flood by Nom de Plume

Again I went out to the garden shed;  
At times like this, it is a clear head

I need to find the stopcock key;  
to cut off the water from the street.

Among trusted tools I did believe,  
the key would emerge behind garden sieve.

Or spades and forks or that old bike;  
sweet memory, our child's first trike.

Too much insulation of attic and heart  
would not let warmth play its part.

Then vague disquiet, in the house, a drip  
of water, a gush, let rip.

The sudden thaw let the water flow;  
flood down the stairs to the floors below.

Where is that tool I start to pray;  
part of my life is being swept away.

Edges fraying, gurgling, swirling;  
down the drain our dreams are hurtling.

Small things floating in the hall,  
our relationship is in freefall.

En route to stinking mud,  
devastated by a winter flood.

A marriage under water, rising in the night;  
a need to pack cases, ready for flight.

Could this tragedy break the wintry chill?  
Bring back closeness and goodwill?

Our lives have suffered wear and tear.  
Like those garden tools, we need repair.



Bray Harbour: Michael O'Reilly

## Bodhran by An Aspiring Musician

I had always wanted a Bodhran. So, having bought one on impulse during a lovely boating holiday in Leitrim, I looked for lessons.

A small ad in the newsagents led me to a very small council house where a lovely young girl from Galway welcomed me into her tiny kitchen.

Good God! Eighteen people of various nationalities had answered the ad and were now in that small room, sitting or standing jammed up against each other. Each one clutching a Bodhran and a small stick. It was chaotic. But we started.

The Galway girl showed us the basics and encouraged us to play along to an Irish reel. The result was deafening. It was like one giant homogenous ear piercing machine. She went on her knees in front of each player to see who was in time with the music. She soon found out. Almost no one. The Scandinavians were the worst. The rhythm was totally alien to them. The Americans were very earnest, but they were hopeless.

Anyway, after five classes the number was down to thirteen and slight progress was being made. Then I missed a class and that turned out to be a mistake.

The following week I found a notice on the teacher's front door, "Class transferred to the local School". That was strange. I was now late, but I drove to the School and eventually tracked down the group in one of the football changing rooms. Drab, bare block walls. A lingering smell of wintergreen. The other twelve were seated around the perimeter of the room on the changing benches. I sat down. A new, male, teacher stood there. "OK", he said, "We'll do three of these, four of those and three of these" demonstrating the rhythms he wanted. It wasn't too hard. We practiced a few times. It sounded all right. Particularly if we all started at the same time. With that, a woman threw open the door. "You're on" she said. What?

Everyone got up and trooped out. I followed them, still blind to what was happening. Up some stairs, through the wings and we stood in a semi circle on the school stage behind the closed curtains. I cringed with embarrassment. The curtain rose, and

on the nod we started into three of these, four of those and three of these. Then we did it again. We really had a very limited repertoire but no one seemed to mind. All the time I held the Bodhran in front of my face, concealing my identity from anyone who might know me. We finished. The curtain came down and we retired to the dressing room. I got my coat. "Thank God that's over", I said. "I'm out of here." The lady beside me stopped me. "You can't go now" she said, "It's for charity". I hesitated. I am not an uncharitable person. The hesitation was fatal. A lady threw open the door once more and threw in a bundle. "Your uniforms" she said. What? The bundle turned out to be twelve black plastic bin liners. What the hell is all this. It turned out we were to be the bad soldiers in a play. "Make a hole in the top for your head and two holes in the sides for your arms" said our new teacher. The other 12 proceeded to do just that.

I proceeded to leave, as I had no uniform. "No", said the teacher. "You're fine; your clothes are dark enough". Apparently we were to enter the hall from the rear, march up the centre aisle in single file, playing three of these, four of those and three of these as we marched. When we reached the stage we would split right and left, mount the stairs on either side and regroup in one large semi circle behinds the king's coffin. It all seemed straightforward.

He led us out of the changing room, out of the building, through the freezing darkness to the entrance lobby of the Hall. There we formed a single file, where I was the last man. He shushed us before cautiously opening the swing doors the merest crack and peering into the darkened auditorium. "Ok", he said, we'll be on shortly. "They're just on the king's speech". We remained silent and cold, and looking, and feeling, somewhat stupid. "Shsssh", he said and peered into the hall again, seeking his cue. "Oh, I forgot," he said. They have to do the queen's speech first". Silence again. The tension mounting. What in God's name am I doing here? I don't even know what the charity is. I asked the woman in front of me. "Shsssh" hissed our leader. "What part of 'Shsssh' do you not understand?

He peered through the doors again. "Oh, I forgot, the wicked witch is on trial now. We're on after this" More delays. Then he peered again. "Right!" he said. "We're on. Remember! Three of these, four of those and three of these. He flung the doors open, the hall lights came on, and we

marched in giving it loads. As we marched, the audience clapped, but not in time with our drums. By the time I entered the hall at the rear I could not hear the Bodhrans in front; only the clapping of the crowd. My rhythm disintegrated until it matched their clapping. Mortification.

But when we reached the stage and split right and left there was consternation. There were no stairs. We milled around until eventually we formed a line with our backs to the stage, facing the audience. Most of them were laughing. Sweat poured out of me. Embarrassment at this level could be fatal. I lifted my Bodhran to hide my face, but it was too late. Three of my work colleagues were in the second row. They were in hysterics. They were doubled up in paroxysms of laughter. They were crying from laughing.

Out of there I thought I would never get. I thought that play would never end. Even when the curtain came down, it wasn't over. I was still exposed. Eventually, I managed to limp out of there, a beaten man.

Shortly after, I gave the bodhran away to a charity auction. I wasn't surprised when it failed to sell.



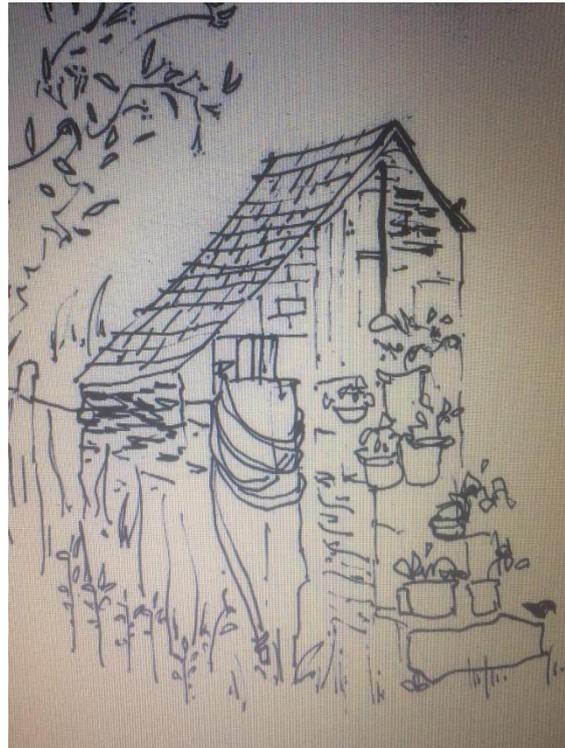
Triple Combination: James Devlin

Lights and Tunnels

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes,  
I felt a freedom I had never felt  
before.  
My shoulders physically loosened.  
My mind was at ease.  
Love really could be beautiful,  
Someone might actually love me  
For me.  
Life seemed to start a new chapter.  
Oh I had being in darkness  
But now all was bright.  
Less closed off,  
More open to a beauty of life.  
That beauty was feeling whole.

Love Isn't A Game

Love is love,  
Love is beautiful.  
The one is the one.  
You just know.  
Whatever happened to the world  
That it got to this stage?  
Opposing sides,  
"Pick a team",  
  
Sorry mate,  
I didn't realise I was playing football.  
  
It can be difficult at times.  
Knowing you are so normal  
And being attacked for such a small thing.  
It's only sexuality.  
I want to be friends,  
I feel no hate.  
But you get at me,  
I have to get at you.  
I'm not classy enough to be the bigger  
person.  
And why should I be?  
We may seem like an easy target  
For many other sexualities.  
But we're tough.  
We have to be.  
We're "the new kids on the block",  
As you say.  
Go on with your power play  
Because no one puts Baby in the corner.



*Outhouse: Brigid O'Brien*

Same Old, Same Old

Why would I be different?  
It's a sexuality,  
Not a cult.  
Why would I act differently?  
Sorry to disappoint,  
I don't live an "exotic life",  
Same old Lisa trying to:  
Finish an Agatha Christie story,  
Headbanging to Kasabian,  
Same old, same old.  
"What is it like to be pansexual?"  
It's like to be human.

### **Dreaming Blue by Rosy Wilson**

We sail in cerulean sky  
over sea-green waves  
blue eyes catching glimpses  
of blue whales

A daughter is riding her cobalt bike  
on tenuous cloud-lanes  
bordered with bluebells , irises  
in flurries of misty rain

A son dives under sapphire

among turtles , coral reefs  
wallows in ultramarine , etches  
mineral , seaweeds  
I swallow a river  
out of my depths  
singing the blues

### **Gunner Grey by Maureen Perkins**

Farm labourer at two shilling a week  
A few drinks and a fight,  
Wish me luck as you wave me  
goodbye.

No more grueling chores  
In hard field and yard,  
\Here I go, cheerio, on my way.

Stewing in stagnant Singapore  
The ship the wrong way round,  
Bring your own ammunition and  
your gun .

The gunner without a gun limps on .

### **The Boat Trip by Verrell Booth**

**M**y mind keeps straying to that day. I know it's foolish to be dwelling on it, but there are so many unanswered questions in my mind—I sometimes wonder if I am afraid of an answer. I don't know.

I remember it very clearly. There were four of us—three boys and one girl--Tim and his sister Sylvia, Johnny and me, Mick, all about sixteen or seventeen years old. Sylvia was a lovely looking girl, tall and graceful with thick wavy fair hair and dark brown eyes. We had all known one another for years, but only lately had I realised that Sylvia meant more to me than just a childhood friend—in fact I fancied her madly. Unfortunately, so did Johnny.

We vied with each other to attract her favour. She accepted our attentions coolly, frequently playing one of us against the other, causing blazing jealousy between us.

It was a day in summer when the sea, like glass, reflected the cloudless blue sky, the air was warm without a breath of wind. We had gone out in a small boat , a twelve foot rowing boat with an outboard engine, belonging to Tim and Sylvia, for a trip around Bray Head. Tim operated the engine in the stern while Sylvia sat in the bow. Johnny managed to seat himself next to her, which left me sitting in front of Tim.

This was obviously one of Sylvia's days for favouring Johnny. She turned herself round on the seat, with her back to the bow, facing him, and started a flirtatious conversation with him. That was what I assumed, although with the sound of the engine it was difficult to catch what she was saying.

I was seething with jealous rage.

To take my mind off what was going on I turned round and said to Tim, "Let's try a bit of mackerel fishing.

"I think it's too sunny, but try if you like," he said. He reached under the seat and took out the fishing gear—not much really, just a wooden frame, with the line wound round it. Tim had found that a heavy weight was needed for mackerel fishing, so Johnny and he melted several small lead weights together, made a cone shaped indentation in a small bucket of sand, put a little loop of wire into

pointed end of the cone, and poured the molten lead over it. When it cooled, a bell-shaped weight was produced. The result was amazing, the catches went up by seventy five percent, Tim said.

I thought I might be able to impress Sylvia if I showed that I was able to manage the line, not that it took a lot of skill, but I wanted to take her attention away from Johnny. Even from behind he was looking triumphant, occasionally turning his head and smirking at me. I felt like hitting him over the head with one of the oars which lay on the bottom of the boat. Instead I unwound the line until the weight hit the water, letting it trail away then into its full length. For about twenty minutes nothing happened, and I was about to give up when I felt a tug on the line. "Got one!" I shouted.

I began to reel in the line but when the end of it surfaced I saw that what I had caught was a tangle of seaweed. Frustrated I jerked it up out of the water with such force that it slapped into Johnny's face. "You did that on purpose!" he yelled. He jumped up from his seat, just at the moment that Tim's attention wavered from steering, and the boat swerved widely. Caught off balance, Johnny stumbled, righted himself, caught his foot in an oar and went flying over the side into the sea.

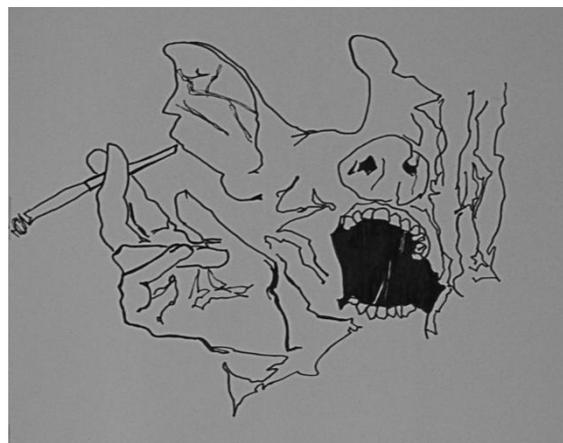
At first we were so shocked we were helpless, in fact, we actually *laughed*.

Then the horror set in. Sylvia screamed "He can't swim!" Life jackets weren't thought of in those days so he was in dire trouble. I kicked off my shoes and dived in, I swam towards Johnny who was floundering and splashing in the water. "It's O.K.," I shouted as I reached him, "I've got you." He caught hold of me, panicking, pulling me down with him, and when I tried to release myself so that I could turn him round into the rescue position he started to struggle violently, pushing and hitting at me, terror in his eyes. Tim in the meantime had brought the boat alongside us, and was holding out an oar for me to catch hold of, I managed to grab it with one hand while grasping Johnny's arm with the other. By this time I was beginning to tire from trying to control Johnny's desperate movements, and despite my efforts my hold

on him weakened and he slipped away, down under the surface of the water. Frantically I submerged again and again, searching for him, until I succeeded in locating him. I pulled him to the boat, and Tim and Sylvia hauled him aboard. I dragged myself up with difficulty, took one look at Johnny, lying on the bottom board and yelled to Tim "Start up and get to shore...*now!*"

Tim opened up full throttle, and with the boat bouncing across the water at full speed it was a nightmare run as Sylvia and I did what we could to revive Johnny, while bobbing around like corks in water, hampered by our lack of expertise, and our fear.

At last we rounded Bray Head and into Bray. Tim drove the boat straight on to the shingle of the foreshore instead of making for the harbour. He jumped out and ran up the beach shouting for help. It's all a jumble in my memory, but eventually an ambulance arrived, and Johnny was taken away on a stretcher—his face was covered by a blanket. The days following passed by in a daze. I couldn't speak to anyone, I was numb. I answered questions when I was asked, but my guilt and self torment overwhelmed me. Ever since, and it's many, many years ago now-- I have asked myself if I could have done more, did I subconsciously hold back because Johnny was winning with Sylvia? Did I let my grip on his arms weaken deliberately? I am afraid to answer those questions, because I don't know. All I know is that a sense of guilt has never left me.



Streaky Bacon: James Devlin

### The Cliff by Michael Gordon

My father stood at the cliff edge  
Seeking peace.  
Brain clouded,  
Vague terrors overwhelmed,  
Pulled him to the rocks.  
Standing on my own cliff  
I hear my mother's voice,  
"It's not off the stones you licked it."  
I am terrified;  
The sea looks so serene.

### Are you hiding something? By Michael Gordon

**A**re you hiding something?"

Jackie turned from the sink, drying her hands. "No, Tom. I'm not hiding anything."

"Well, I think you are. I'm going to ask you again, politely. Are you hiding something from me?"

"No, Tom. I'm not hiding anything. Please don't get started. I'll make dinner and we can have a nice bottle of wine."

"No. You little bitch. You are hiding something. Why do you do it? Do you think I'm stupid? You haven't the brains to hide something. You're a useless cow. Do you know that? A useless cow." "Tom, I..."

"Stop," he said, "I can see you got your hair done. Where did that money come from I wonder. Why do you think anyone would want to look at you or your hair?"

"Tom, Please!"

"Shut up," he roared, and he smashed his fist on the kitchen table. "Shut up, I tell you. Why do you lie to me? Why do you provoke me?"

"Tom, let me check the children..."

"Sit down. You're going nowhere. I'll tell you when you can go."

Jackie made a dart for the door. Tom lunged at her and pinned her against the wall.

"I told you to stay there."

Jackie struggled to break free. He caught her a vicious back handed blow on the side of her head. She reeled away and stumbled over a kitchen chair, banging her head on the leg of the table.

"Get up, you bitch," he roared. "Get up." He

towered over her as she cowered on the tiled floor. She knew what was coming and curled herself into a ball, trying to use the table leg as protection.

"Get out," he roared, as he lashed out with his foot, catching her painfully on her thigh. "You shouldn't lie to me. You know you have to pay, you stupid cow. You deserve what's coming to you."

He caught her a glancing kick in the ribs and yelled in frustration. "Come out. Come out," he screamed.

He caught her by the hair and dragged her out. He pulled her upright and smashed her back against the wall, winding her badly.

She felt his hands go around her throat as he continued yelling. She could no longer make out what he said. She panicked as she fought desperately for air. The blood pounded in her head and things began to go black. She felt herself go limp. Please let him stop.

He released one hand. She gasped for air before he punched her hard in the stomach. She collapsed into a sobbing, heaving ball on the floor.

He aimed a few kicks at her but his fury was subsiding. He kept shouting, though a bit quieter. "You stupid cow. Why do you do it? Why do you lie to me? Why do you make me hit you every time?"

He stopped and sat down at the kitchen table holding his head in his hands, watching her on the floor. The only sound was Jackie sobbing and his heavy breathing. They stayed like that for what seemed an age. Both quietened down. He went over to the sink and brought back a wet paper towel.

"Here," he said, "wipe yourself up. You look awful." Jackie started to wipe her face, looking pleadingly up at him.

He sat down on the floor beside her and put his arm tenderly around her shoulder.

"Jackie, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, really I am. I don't know what got into me. It's just that I love you and I can't stand it if I think you're lying. Please don't tell anyone what happened. I promise it won't happen again. You clean yourself up and I'll make you a nice cup of tea. Would you like that?" He began to cry.

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy. Don't you start crying." She hugged him. "I'm sorry for what happened," she said. "I shouldn't have provoked you. You go and sit down and read the paper. I'll make the tea."

Tom strolled into the sitting room.

## The Banshee by Josephine Leahy

“Do you believe in ghosts, Daddy?” piped Kitty, her blue eyes reaching up to him, her little hands clutching his blue pyjamas lightly.

As the cocks crew in the farmyard below, the two children had ensconced themselves snugly, one on either side of Mr. Jameson in the double bed, his arms protectively around them both.

Gravely he said, “Yes, pet, I do.”

And they were silent for a while. Then he continued matter of factly, in earnest explanation, “I saw a banshee once, you know. Sitting in a tractor one morning early, fiddling with her black long hair.”

Kitty rose on her elbow, looking at him, a giddy smile on her lips.

“They don’t usually sit in tractors.”

“Well, it’s like this, pet” and he put his big hand on her head gently and stroked her blonde crown.

“Couldn’t a banshee use the bit between her ears to make herself grand and comfortable there in Sean Ramsbottom’s tractor cabin, and she on the job, of a cold, drizzly January morning?” he asked mildly, leaning his head to one side at Kitty rhetorically.

“She let out a roar that left the hair standing on my head.”

He nodded that same good head seriously. And by way of conclusion, he added ruminatively,

“She was the banshee all right. Sean Ramsbottom died in his sleep

the following night. His sister Baby found him the next morning, his lampside light still burning.”

So, the next morning, Kitty, on waking early, and finding everybody asleep, padded in her bare feet down past the barn where a ladder

was left reaching up towards the last star, past the small, red, abandoned tractor and through the overgrown orchard where the crab apples lay in the long grass.

She came upon one bright, red apple, like the shining apple the witch gave to Snow white in the fairy tale, and she meandered through a Garden of Eden dawn on her father’s small farm, munching away, lost to the world. The silky black cows in the field lay in a giant circle, as if they were playing “I put a letter in my sack, and on the way I lost it.”

Slowly, timelessly, she wandered back to the first field where the hedges frothed milkily with hawthorn, like galloping sea horses. She passed the little red Massey Ferguson again, and

looked back towards the treasure of hay in stooks, like ancient, golden stone crosses

It was then she saw her, a little old woman in long black clothes, lying against a stook. She was the oldest woman Kitty had ever seen.

Her hair was as white as the hawthorn, and fell in a long mantle down the sides of her fairy like, pinched face. But what really caught Kitty’s attention was the sparkling comb set in her hair. It shone like rubies, and gleamed like sapphires.

It was a jewel like no other Kitty had ever seen. Beside her was a large crimson bag that sparkled with sequins.

She was keening quietly to herself, and rocking to and fro like a red Indian.

She could be none other than the banshee, Kitty thought in horror.

But her next thought struck devastating fear through her. Who was going to die? Was this the warning? Kitty thought in a panic of the father and mother and her sister, and

Grandma and Grandad Jameson. Like lightning it came to her. She

must get to Father Stephen in his favourite place in the church, and pray with him that none of her family would be taken.

Heart thumping she turned and crossed the field, climbing onto the boirin that led away from the house. She ran as fast as she could

until she turned the last winding piece of lane, and gasped in relief as she saw the church rising before her like an ark, like a silver ship, its spire a furled sail reaching into the sky. Hanging on the silver railings there was a crooked row of paintings like a colourful weeks washing hung out on a windy day. Passing frenziedly through the gates she passed yew trees and lichen covered gravestones that were like the backs of priests celebrating Mass in golden vestments.

At last she was in the cool porch, where she blessed herself from the font and continued into the body of the church.

Rows of lit chandeliers hung from the ceiling like a school of beautiful floating jellyfish, and a magnificent, crimson carpet nursed the rows of polished pews and the stone altar.

And there he was, Father Stephen sitting in his black cassock where he always said was the safest place to be in the world, by the golden tabernacle.

He heard the wooden door creak open, and lifted his head to see the child running down the crimson aisle towards him.

“What is it? Whats the matter, Kitty?”

He intoned into the echoing silence, and took her

clammy, small hand in his. Big Buddha like tears fell down little cheeks that were like crimson stars.

"It's the banshee. Someone is going to die. She is warning us. I'm afraid. I came to you so we could pray its not Mammy or Daddy or Rosemary, or Grandma and granddad Jameson" she explained between great heaving sobs.

"Calm down, my dear" and he drew her into his arms. "Nobody's going to die."

"But the banshee. She is out there by the tractor, sitting in our hay field. She even has the comb in her hair."

And Father Stephen twiggled. He had old Mary in the parish house yesterday, dropping in from her travels around the world.

"That's not the banshee, my dear. That's Mary, an old woman of the roads. She's no banshee" he said firmly again.

"She had a comb in her hair and everything, and she was sitting beside the tractor" she repeated, but the sobs were subsiding.

"Sit here with me and God for a bit. Nobody is going to die"

They were sitting there in the golden silence when a bird flew around the box of the tabernacle, like some excited, bewitched adventurer at last finding the treasure chest at the end of his odysseys.

There, together, on Father Stephen's lap, with his silver hair like a halo, it was as peaceful as a Mass. There was a dreamy, golden light which emanated from the tall, stained glass windows.

Bringing home the cows from the pasture that night with her father, she told him about Mary of the roads who had been in their hay field that morning.

"Is Mary back again, the poor auld creature. You should have made a sup of tea for the old woman, or asked her in to the kitchen for a bit of breakfast. Mary is harmless. She came from good stock."

Dusk was falling like a moth. The stars were twinkling in the clouds.

A sudden gust of wind startled the trees, and beyond in the village lights came on like curious U.F.O.s

Then a shooting star dropped through the heavens.

"Some soul has been gathered to God" Mr. Jameson murmured softly, and the tails of the cows flicked around in great, lazy flourishes, and a flock of birds flew up from the hedge, and Rosemary found Mr. Jameson's big, safe hand in the darkness.

## Rain by Leonard Fitzgerald

**G**hostly tendrils of grey smoke coiled from the cracked and blackened wineglass that lay slantwise on the passengers seat beside him. The rain fell as it must have always done, with the impartial indifference to the cyclicity of its fate to one more time leave heaven uncoupled in obscurity to descend down towards earth to join those wretched unmerciful denizens of the surface whom would not delay for even a second the chance to enslave and render void it's eternal impermanence should someday they somehow learn how.

The rain was as dependable as much as anything else in the world was. Whenever he needed it most it would be there, tirelessly bringing solace to the weary ghosts as if it were a role assigned it and as if our configurations in their drafting made mention of this caveat to persuade the dubious attendance of its otherwise questionable viability.

Maybe I would have already gone mad without the rain, he thinks. Maybe rain is like an orgasm; masquerading as divinity but only to distract you from its secret genetic motives... Like fireflies in the dark to reveal for us our way lest we wander so far off course we never get back.

He sat like this for a long time, chipping away at the crystal rock with his knife and transferring the shards to the blackened glass where the flame he held just beneath them would cause them to liquify and their spirits be released and subsequently ensnared in a vacuum sucked through a glass straw to be taken down into the depths of his being to discover what alterations this sinister agent of reconstruction could make to the unsuspecting pathways of neurological intricacies it was born to tweak.

It has just gone dark and the night saw him shift endlessly as his body mimicked his mind in frenetic intermittency and restlessness and alternating constantly between various states and ideas, actions, perpetual motion to stir the moorings of his intellect and send him adrift through horrors long having lost their

element of surprise. He recognises them now and watches for what hitherto loose puzzle pieces might suddenly fit with another, and the giant master puzzle gains some minor form in one of its corner before being pulled further out from view and revealing previously unseen dimensions of the puzzle board only made visible by the observers vantage point being farther out than was previously possible. He remembered this sequence as a child and allowed it to mystify him, no discernible meaning having ever as yet materialised.

Lost in thought, time unraveled before him, grinding away the inhibitors and sealing his fate. He had long since learned that it was futile to try and alter a course assigned as imperative by the forces within. He might as well try and will his respiratory system to cease their operational functions immediately. It's a queer thing to pay mind to; the sole reason and purpose of their existence is working for him; to keep him alive, yet they are inalienably bound to their autonomy, completely oblivious to arbitrary managerial interference. The psychological systems that independently determine his course of action were no more up for question than the other multitude of systems that laboured tirelessly at their respective functions, and so, he wonders, if the illusion of possessing free will and having control over ones life has been disproven by the countless vain attempts to exert control, then who's to say that the voices in my head shouting orders and the invisible hand tending the autonomy aren't all parts of the same keeper that watches over while we sleep? For he has chosen that I should live against my better judgment, too then is my duty to realise it's divine mark in the physical world.

He sat back in his seat, awed at these rare insights into the strange truth of his inner workings, afforded only when circumstances transpire; namely, the interment of those ghostly spirits evoked to awaken and run wild in his being, seeking out trace of other entities, apparitions, tracking the scent of the alpha entity like moth to flame as entire sections of neuropathways are found defaced and vandalised, it's trail pulsing with ever growing mystery and effigies and portraits of omertà executions, the eyes aghast as if

seeing too much, as if seeing themselves... Seeing these grim portents the spirits shudder and disperse into the electric sky and something moving up ahead far in the distance suddenly stops and turns around.

### Down and Out by Eoin Britton

**O**il and water leaches into a scummy puddle near the entrance, a dirty yellow and purple bruise, reflecting Maeve's bruised ego. Being allocated a space in this dark warren of tiny spaces is another demotion. Driving here is to enter a recurring nightmare.

Turning off the windscreen wipers, leaning forward, in a futile effort to see around corners Maeve drives with caution. She eases past fat concrete pillars supporting the huge edifice above. Ancient cobwebs, matted solid, creeping ever lower in the darkened recesses between the pillars and the reinforced ceiling are something Maeve prefers not to think about. Nonetheless, she worries about what might run out of them. She tears her attention from the corners and keeps her eyes firmly fixed on the narrow, oil slick passageway.

The air being sucked into the car is poisonous with petrol and diesel fumes, but if she turns it off, the windscreen will steam up and her view will be restricted. Maeve is nervously aware of the cars parked along the passage blocking the legally parked cars and making the passage even narrower. Arms rigid, she toils to keep her car on the straight and narrow. She hears rather than feels a thump. She brakes automatically. Nothing serious! Her wing mirror had been slammed in, that is all.

Cautiously, she moves forward and hears a resounding metallic crash. Oh, for God's sake! Why doesn't someone do something about that bloody shore lid? Nerves jangling, she negotiates the car round the last corner. Her allotted space beckons, but her angle is all wrong. She is painfully aware of the blue paint marks from the pillar along the side door of her black car, and the shrill shriek of metal against concrete. She can't do that again. Reversing cautiously, she tries to correct the angle. The acrid smell of burning rubber irritates her nose and the car refuses to budge. Annoyed now, yanking the handbrake almost out of its socket, Maeve inches forward. The car parked alongside her space is taking up too much room. If she's not careful, she will have another colour on the other side of the car. Sweating, she reverses again and

thumps the steering wheel in frustration. Now what?!

In the rear view mirror she spots a saviour. Jumping into the aisle, leaving the door swinging and the engine running, she runs after him.

'Excuse me! Excuse me!

Yes?' He turns, clearly wondering at the urgency.

'Could you do me a great favour and park the car?'

He grins and looks over her shoulder to where she has left the car at an awkward angle. Maeve chooses to ignore the grin. She needs him, or more correctly, she needs his skill.

'Yes. OK. No problem,' he says.

He walks toward the abandoned car, a swagger in his walk. Although, embarrassed and resentful at the position in which she finds herself, Maeve is grateful to him. He sits confidently into the front seat and readjusts it so that his knees are not up around the steering wheel.

'It is a bit tight. Don't worry, though, I'll get it in.'

Putting the car into reverse, he shoots back. He jams it into first, and, gears grinding, goes in fast. Securing the handbrake he hops out and hands Maeve the keys with a flourish. Why do men always have to show off?

Thanking him, barely looking at him, Maeve locks the car and rights the wing mirror. The car park will be empty by the time she finishes work. She can take as much time as she needs inching forward and backward until she can get past the pillars.

Not wanting to walk ahead, or walk with him, Maeve fiddles with her bag, making a play of putting her keys into an inside pocket. He hesitates, watching her, then, with a slight shrug, he turns and strolls off.

In the lane, flanked by tall brooding buildings, Maeve wrestles to get her bright red umbrella open. One of its spokes is broken, but it does the job. Maeve feels much the same; broken, but still doing the job. There is no joy in it any more. The new parking arrangements are not the biggest problem. They only added to her problems.

Strain is etched on her white face. There are puffy purple bags under her eyes. She looks a mess. She checks her watch from habit. She is never late. She has to be there in time to avoid the possibility of confrontation and criticism. In the doorway, she struggles to get the ungainly umbrella and her emotions under control.

Face neutral; eyes hard; she walks through the corridors, acknowledging acquaintances here and there. Just get through one day at a time, she tells herself.

There is no large brown envelope marked 'private and confidential' on her desk today. For Maeve, the brown envelope is a poignant reminder of the

corruption for which it has become a by-word in local government circles. She constantly gets brown envelopes marked, 'private and confidential', their contents denying her distress and any culpability for it.

Five years ago, Maeve's colleagues were astounded that quiet, efficient, good-natured Maeve would initiate a bullying case against anyone, let alone the whole establishment.

'Maeve?' they said. 'She wouldn't say 'boo' to a goose.'

Although quiet-spoken and deferential in manner, Maeve had always taken pride in her work. She had earned and was proud of her reputation. When Maeve took a stand against corruption and cronyism, she assumed the establishment would back her. She had assumed wrongly. They tried to bury her.

Within weeks of challenging the status quo her senior management started bullying in earnest. Then the constant drip of poison – a word dropped here and a comment made there - undermined her authority and confidence, so that Maeve began to doubt herself. Maeve was quietly side-lined and her reputation was destroyed.

Initially colleagues were outraged that a colleague could be sidelined and bullied for asking questions. They encouraged her to stand her ground. Her male colleagues especially exuded bravado. Of course they would take on the establishment in the same circumstances. They would support her. But when push came to shove they were too afraid. They didn't fight bullying and cronyism, they embraced it. One even admitted that if he supported Maeve it might affect his chances of promotion. He was not prepared to take that chance. Neither was anyone else. As the years rolled on Maeve's colleagues conveniently forgot what her case was all about.

When Maeve lost what she considered her cast iron case she was gutted. Her social isolation by then was such that no one even noticed. The system had won. The organisation pretended to believe Maeve had pursued a personal gripe, except for one or two senior executives who encouraged her to "stay resilient". That was all. Bullying didn't raise its ugly head in this organisation, the bosses said so. To hell with the evidence!

When Maeve, in desperation, hired a barrister to pursue her case, she was shocked to be told that bullying is not illegal.

'The code of practice on bullying behaviour in the workplace is just a guideline. It is not worth the paper on which it is written without a law to underpin it,' he said. 'There is no law under which you can take a case and win it.'

That was the end of the line. The Department would not even accept that there might or could be a bullying culture within its ranks. It is all too easy for a monolith like the civil service to dismiss people like Maeve. Would society dismiss them too? Probably. There is no law against it, after all! That knowledge made life harder than ever. Maeve couldn't bring herself to chat to her colleagues about every day things. They had abandoned her when she needed them. For five years she had been traumatised by constant vindictive bullying. Not one colleague had displayed the courage of the convictions they expressed when they talked privately among themselves. They knew on which side their bread was buttered.

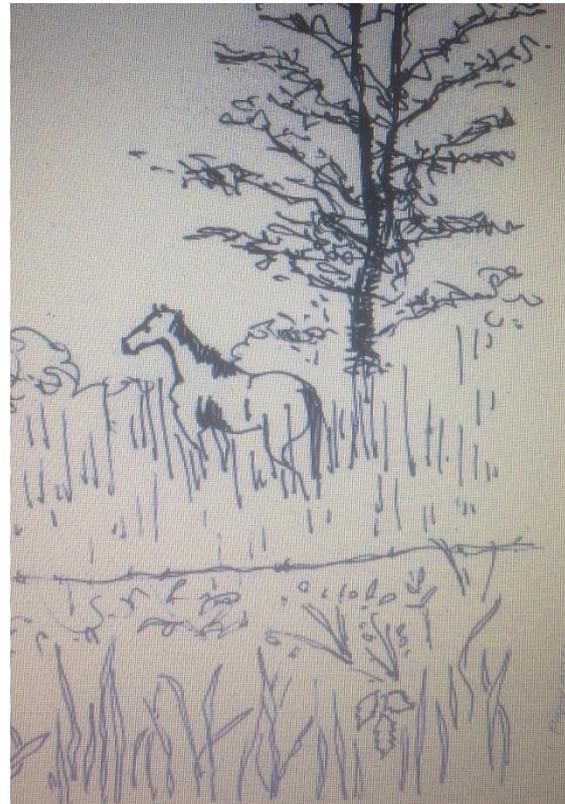
This murky morning, the office felt more depressing than usual. Maeve sat at her desk, oddly grateful that she did not need to consult colleagues about her work. It was all laid out for her and no deviation or distraction from the computer was open to her. By mid-afternoon she would be so tired and bored that she would be afraid of making a mistake. That was the usual pattern. Unlike her colleagues, Maeve could not afford to make a mistake for fear of disproportionate repercussions.

Opening her computer, feeling apprehensive, Maeve is relieved to find only a couple of administrative circulars. She will read them at break time. At 11 o'clock, Maeve can hear voices in the corridor. Her colleagues make their way to the canteen. They don't ask her to accompany them. She doesn't care. At least, that's what she tells herself. She feels awkward and constrained in their company, unable to think of anything to say; sometimes afraid her corroding anger will find voice, a voice that might embarrass them and her.

In the early days when her anger was white hot, she excused herself from going with them, citing pressure of work. They were relieved; her presence was a reproach. Gradually they stopped asking. To them she no longer existed. On the whole she was glad they didn't ask her to accompany them. Yet, peculiarly it hurt that they didn't care.

As the sound of footsteps and voices in the corridor recede Maeve begins to read an administrative circular. Her heart quickens. Could this be a solution or would she be running away? No, she has tried everything. The system is too big a fight. The job is a dead end; no future prospects; all heartache. No reason to stick with it. There might be financial and psychological pitfalls. It is a risk, no doubt about that, but one worth taking. Maeve will take early retirement. There is a light at the end of a very dark tunnel, after all. She can

bear to look beyond the winter and what she sees is a brighter future with endless possibilities. At last - no longer down but definitely out.



*Country Scene: Brigid O'Brien*

### **Hug the Hoodie by Nuala O'Connell**

**B**ridie Duffy fidgeted with the key of her front door. She couldn't see that well in the dark evenings, even with her glasses. She ignored the overflowing post box with Christmas cards of all shapes and sizes sticking out of it. She would attend to that later. Inside, she switched on the hall light and carefully sorted through her shopping bag of Christmas gifts. There were a couple of scented candles for Mary and Trish but it was mainly toys for her grandchildren. They were the most important. She carefully placed the sherriffs' sets for the twins and the doll and carry cot for Imelda, her youngest grandchild, in the box under the stairs. "Much better than those bloody computer games," she said to herself, "now for a nice cup of tea and Fair City!"

Suddenly there was a series of rapid knocks on the front door. "Who on earth could it be at this hour?" she said out loud.

"Help! Mrs. Duffy let me in...please, please let me in!" a desperate voice outside pleaded.

Mrs. Duffy opened the door slightly with the

chainlock on and saw the pale, wide eyed face of a teenage boy; blonde curls framed by a light grey hoodie.

"Good heavens, what's the matter dear?"

"Please Mrs. Duffy, I'm being chased...they're going to beat me up!" he panted.

"Who?" Mrs. Duffy couldn't see anyone. "There's nobody in the garden."

"Please, I'm begging you, they're waiting round the corner Mrs. Duffy."

"How do you know my name? I don't recognise you."

"Mom told me. We've just moved in to the Avenue."

"Oh...oh have you?...oh well alright young man. Come in then. You seem very scared."

"Oh, thank you," he said as she closed and locked the front door behind him. He stretched out a long fingered hand. "Adrian is my name."

"And I'm Bridie. Now my dear, sit down on the couch and you can tell me all about it. I have a nice quiche for tea would you like some of it?"

"Thanks, I'm starving. I've had nothing since breckfast."

"Shall we call your parents then?" Bridie asked as he tore through the quiche at an alarming rate, "Your dinner may be ready."

"Naw. Mum's not at home. She's a single Mum. She does shift work. By the way, this is the best quiche I've ever eaten."

"Thank you, Adrian, I enjoy cooking."

He seemed such a pleasant, well mannered young man. How did he get to be like that with only one parent and the amount of teenagers who had everything? Everything that is except manners. He looked well settled on her couch as if he didn't intend to go anywhere for a while.

"Would you like to use the bathroom to freshen up a little, Adrian? Its just on the right there as you go down the hall."

Bridie flicked through the stations when he left the room.

The News was on. Who's going on strike now? She thought.

*...escaped from prison officers en route to hospital this morning...known as Arioach...blonde hair; baby face...conman...armed - dangerous...last seen wearing grey hoodie, blue jeans and trainers...*

Bridie froze in her seat. Her heart thumped wildly. Her brain took flight.

Stay calm Bridie, stay calm. She immediately switched stations. But how did he know my name? Then she remembered the letters sticking out of the post box. All addressed to her. He knows that I live on my own. What does he want? I stopped at the bank just before it closed...took out a lot of money for Christmas..so he followed me! Well he's

not getting *my* money!

She picked up his duffle bag on the floor. As she rummaged in the pockets, she found a couple of Stanley knives and a screwdriver carefully concealed in a small zipped bag.

She quickly shoved them under the sofa. She would have to find a way to contact the police immediately.

"Oh there you are Ar...Adrian, I was just going to make myself a nice, hot chocolate...would you like a cup?"

Bridie hoped he wouldn't notice that her voice was raised several octaves.

He stood tall and gangly blocking her sitting room doorway. He stared at her for what seemed a long time before he slowly took his place back on the sofa.

"That would be very nice," he said at last.

Relieved, Bridie got up and made her way into the kitchen. She had a plan. She added hot milk to the drinking chocolate and with the mortar and pestle crushed up several sleeping tablets. She whisked them all together and added a dash of cream and mallows.

"My grandchildren tell me that I make fantastic drinking chocolate," Bridie said, anxiously watching him sip her concoction.

"It's good," he said.

"Keep stirring, otherwise the chocolate sinks to the bottom," she said.

Twenty minutes later he was snoring loudly.

Now was her chance to ring the police; she might even get the handcuffs from the sheriff's set...but then again if he woke up... no... just let the police know he's here. She would probably have the press calling. Then a headline in the Bray Gazette; *Mrs. Bridie Duffy, 68, widow, captures dangerous convict.* She looked in the mirror and with her fingers plumped up her silvery hair. She would put on her rose coloured lipstick.

Just as she put her hand on the receiver to call the police, the phone rang.

Perhaps someone had seen him going towards her house.

"Hello," a ladies voice.

"Hello," she whispered back.

"Is that Mrs.Duffy?"

"Speaking."

She was about to tell the caller to call back later - she was in the middle of a crisis - but the voice on the line became quite frantic.

"Mrs. Duffy, I'm Anna Flynn. I've just moved in to number 18. It's my son Adrian...he was chased by some bullies...a boy in his woodwork class said he saw him running towards your house...did he knock on your door Mrs. Duffy? Have you seen him at all?"

Bridie Duffy paled. She didn't know what to say. How could she tell this lady that she thought her son was an escaped convict? That she had drugged him? The realisation of what she had done hit her. However, she had no intention of admitting her mistake. She took a very deep breath.

"Hello Anna, it's so nice to speak to you. And yes, Adrian is here with me. Your poor little boy was exhausted after his ordeal. They chased him round the block – you know he was in fear of his life! He was shaking like a leaf. I gave him a natural herbal remedy in his chocolate and put him to sleep on the sofa. I hope you don't mind. Do come round and see him. But if I were you Anna, I wouldn't disturb him. He's had a huge shock...leave him here for tonight and off school tomorrow. And I would find out who those thugs are and go straight to their parents if I were you!

### Seasons by Pat Woods

I arrived in April, not much sign of Spring. Trees still bare of growth, it was sad to see, even the captivating Silver Birch was lifeless, or so it seemed.

Then quite suddenly, Spring broke through, oh what a change.

And Summer followed close behind with blossoms and flowers in abundance. A bright and beautiful Summer ensued with colourful beauty all around.

Autumn duly took its place in the Calendar but without its well heralded chill. Forsook the anticipated rain and gave us warmth that brought plants to life which were out of season.

Not unlike the Daffodils so often fooled by a deceptively mild Mid Winter. But Autumn brought out a galaxy of colour Which will decorate roadside and hillside alike, Unfortunately the wind and rain will soon take their toll and destroy what is currently A beautiful cacophony of multi-coloured Autumnal colour.

### For Primo Levi by Eddie Tynam

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1945 the Russians liberated the death camp at Auschwitz; among the survivors was an Italian chemist, Primo Levi, who spent the rest of his life bearing witness to the crimes of the Third Reich. His book, *The Drowned and the Saved* is his darkest work.

### *The Drowned and the Saved*

We have peered with your eyes  
Through a crack in time  
We have glimpsed the Gorgon's head.  
Through you we bear witness.  
The wise ruminant in a void,  
Spout drolleries in temples of air,  
As the lords of death  
Hover in the wings,  
Waiting??



Mythological Figure: Giselbertus

## Selection of Poetry by Brian Quigley

### Ostler

The Bray Wheelers cycle club  
stopped at my humble abode  
for tea and scones.

I wheeled their bikes around the back  
and stabled them in one of my free sheds.

I wiped mud off metalwork,  
dried seats and handlebars,  
saw to the airing of the tyres  
and the oiling of the chains.

I hovered in position near the back door  
until requests for their mounts  
started coming to the ostler,  
then I jostled their bikes back around.

### Shunt

You see the shunt  
before you become a part of it,  
like the Mexican Wave  
or lightning before thunder.  
The lights go green then red,  
some traffic gets through  
then the shunt body-pops its way  
down the line to you.

### Guardian

We take The Guardian on a Saturday.  
Not steal it without paying,  
we buy it.

We fish through the pile of supplements  
for our favourites,  
like picking the best fruit.

Guardian,  
protect us from Saturday boredom.

### The Landing Light

At night the landing light came on  
and the doors cracked themselves open, just a  
bit,

enough to let bright in and fright out,  
enough to allow sleep come to tired eyes  
that closed while looking at the stars  
so that stars were what they dreamt of.

Does it still come on now, when it has no need  
to?

Do the doors still crack open, just a bit,  
enough to let memories circulate?  
And the tired eyes,  
the stars they dream under  
shine brighter now they've got them in their  
spotlight.

### Jump Start

Bonnet to bonnet,  
two cars kissing  
on a cold and frosty morning.  
Battery to battery,  
beating heart to beating heart,  
jump leads for a jump start.

### Excalibur

The lighthouse  
at Bray's harbour  
fell into sea,  
stone into water.  
Then got pulled out again,  
Excalibur-like,  
not as a sword  
but as a stone cross  
on Bray Head.  
Years later  
Boorman brought  
Excalibur itself  
to Bray.

### Ozymandius At Bray Head

There was one ruined foot at the base of  
Bray Head,  
concrete and metal and rusty cable.  
Another stood half-way up the mountain  
at the Eagle's Nest.  
The power you had,  
when you were a Colossus,  
ferrying people to and fro and fro and to  
in cable cars threaded through your strong  
steel fingers  
to view your mighty realm.  
Now around the decay of your colossal  
wreck,  
the Irish sea stretches far away.

## Snow is white by Kenneth Bailey

That first deep inhale of the cigarette. The ember red as blood, the nicotine burns black as tar, the white papered skin oozes smoke out each end. I sit at my windowsill gazing out the open window. My apartment lies on the third floor of a dilapidated ruin on the bad side of town. I wonder if the fall would kill me as I watch the people below coming and going. Little worker ants marching to songs of Saturday past. A 'boom-boom-boom' on my door and I'm back in the room again. The dirty striped wall paper and tartan covered furniture are an insult to the eyes. The wood imitation flooring all scratches and stains. 'Boom-boom-boom-boom' again on the door, this time more frantic. I press the cigarette against my lipstick lips one last time before butting it out in the ashtray with my chipped, polished nails.

'Boom-boom-boom-boom'

"Yeah, yeah. Keep your wig on! I'm coming."

I stroll causally toward the door, stopping at the mirror along the way. My painted, pierced face. My tattooed neck and arms. My dyed dreadlocked hair. All for a distinct first impression. Do not fuck with me.

"Yo mirror, who's the most pretty in this here city?"

"Well, you are baby!" replies the mirror.

"Damn straight."

'Boom-boom-boom-boom-boom.'

I've let them itch for long enough. I unchain the lock and open the door where two malnourished, bug-eyed figures in scraggy un-ironed clothes stand. I never know the names of my customers, so I give them fun nicknames for my own amusement. These two I call 'Wheezy' and 'Rattles'.

"Morning gentlemen, what can I do for you?"

"Any sugar?" says 'Wheezy' in his parched dry tones.

"Sure, how much are you cats looking for?"

"Tw-tw-twenties worth" says 'Rattles', his hand shaking as he hands me the money.

"Groovy." I stuff the twenty into my skinny jeans then reach to my shirt pocket. A sleeveless t-shirt with my favourite band's logo printed on it, you know the one with the winged skull.

Anyway, I pull a baggy of white powder out and their eyes glisten like two frogs at an all you can eat fly buffet.

"It's 18 karat stuff. Don't blow your tops all at once, ya dig?"

"Yeah, yeah. Gimme", says 'Wheezy' coughing and wheezing as he snatches the baggy from my hand.

They ogle the bag with wide open-mouth grins. I

close the door knowing I'd see them again, minus the smiles.

My phone rings on the kitchen counter. I rush to answer it. When I see my step mother's name flash across the screen I think twice about it. The usual conversation. Where's the money? Have you got the money? When will you have the money? This went on.

One thing that surprises me is when she says that she will be coming over later. She never comes over. And never during the week. I put the phone down and go to the fridge, cracking open an ice cold brewski and sparking up another ciggy, before flopping on the couch and turning on the TV to catch some rays.

Buy this, want that, fear this, hate that. Real people's problems made into entertainment shows and terror alerts on every channel. All this before you've finished your morning coffee. But, man is it fun to watch.

Alright, enough of that. Time to go now. I slip my blue All Star sneakers on and open the drawer next to the couch. I take out a white baggy of my own along with a small mirror.

"Yo mirror, who is the most sweet in this street?"

"Well you are baby!" says the mirror.

"Damn straight."

The door knob always sticks whenever you lock it. As I wrestle with it, square shouldered men walk up the stairs. In matching overalls and funny matching hats they carry boxes to the apartment down the hall, whistling while they work.

On my front steps some of the neighbourhood crumbs are already out enjoying the morning. Some of them I recognize. I see 'Jitters' and 'Gummy', 'Skull Man', 'Giggles' and 'Snoozy' too.

'Snoozy' is a nickname I can't take credit for. Everyone round here calls her 'Snoozy Suzie'. The only woman you'll ever meet that can sleep upright at a 45degree angle.

They are beat-boxing and free styling and I know they'll let me pass quicker if I give them a verse. So I do.

"A-yo, a-yo.

It's off to hustle I go.

Make paper, make dough.

A-yo, a-yo.

It's a struggle every day.

No pittances, no pay.

So let's fly away.

On a chemical holiday.

A-yo, a-yo, a-yo."

The Saint Maximilian community centre isn't far from my apartment. Maximilian is the patron Saint of addicts and drug addiction. So it is only fitting that his centre be filled with them. From all

backgrounds and all walks of life now all under one label. Addicts!

Before we go any further I want to tell you about St. Max for a moment. Maximilian Kolbe became a priest at 24. He adopted the name Mary because of his devotion to her. He had doctorates in philosophy and theology with a deep interest in science. He spent many a year dedicated to the bettering of humanity. Then, in 1941 he was arrested by the Nazi's. In Auschwitz three months later, after many beatings and humiliations, in the "Block of Death" he was ordered to strip naked and his slow starvation began in darkness. He had volunteered to go to the "Block" so that another man with a wife and children would be spared. Much later, when the jailer came to finish Max off, he was sitting in a corner, not screaming but singing. His fleshless arm received the bite of the hypodermic needle. It was filled with carbolic acid. His body was burnt with all the others. No name. No mention. Silence. He was canonized as a Saint in 1982.

The words "Courage, my Sons" are written above the entrance. The lady behind the reception desk barely acknowledges me as I write my name on the sign-in sheet. I teach a music class Tuesday's and Thursday's to anyone that's interested. Most folks who come are more interested in drugs than music but that's ok 'cause I got them covered too. Needless to say, my class is one of the most popular. For the ones who do play, some are quite talented. We've compiled a barn burning rock/rap sound that has to be heard to be believed.

It seems like only a blink and I'm back in my crib. You forget the class. You forget the walk home. The cigarette in your hand. You don't remember any of it.

There's a knock on the door and I already have a bag ready. Some bearded dude with a flannel shirt like he's some kind of clichéd outdoorsman stands there glaring. When he reveals the axe I am a bit more convinced. He grabs me by the throat and slams me to the ground. He digs his knee in my belly and puts the axe to my face.

"Where are they?" he says.

I take a drag of my cigarette to calm my fear. It's hard to inhale with a hand around your neck.

"The drugs and the money, I won't ask again." He says, digging his knee in harder.

"See that fruit bowl over there, the pineapple's fake, it's in there."

He lets go of my neck and runs to the kitchen. I crawl to the wall and sit against it.

"Ok, now the drugs", he shouts from the kitchen.

"In the sugar jar of course."

I stand up to meet him as he emerges.

"I really should kill you now." He says.

I go to take another drag and he slaps me hard across the face and pins me against the wall. He breathes heavily and his hand is shaking. I look into his eyes, and I know it is over. He loosens his hand and runs it down my neck grabbing the heart shaped pendent my step mother had given me. He yanks it hard and it snaps.

He whispers something in my ear and then knees me hard in the stomach. I fall to the floor. By the time I can gather myself he's already long gone. My money and drugs are long gone with him.

When my step mother arrives she is less than impressed. Ever the pessimist, her fading looks aren't helped by the scowl she always wears. The layers of makeup help little either. Her questions are brief and fleeting. I don't tell her about the necklace but I feel she knows somehow. Her smile practically cracks her face when she says she can fix the problem.

She pulls a hefty white bag from her purse and tosses it my way.

"But wait, there's more" she says, pulling out another bag, tossing it at me.

"It's red" I exclaim. Redder than anything I had ever seen.

"What is it?" I ask.

"This is that atom bomb baby. That rocket 69. My boogie men and women say it's out of sight. This is how you're going to make your money back."

"Wow" is all I can muster. I can't take my eyes off it. "I will give you till next week to fit the bill."

She stops at the mirror near the door. I see her lips move but can't make out what she mutters. Nor do I care. I hadn't listened to a word she said after she had given me the bag. She was right in one thing, though. My problems had been fixed. I hurry to the bedroom and dish out the fattest, reddest line you can imagine.

My bedroom is small, but floor to ceiling mirrors on the wardrobes give an illusion of size. I dive bomb my nose right in. I have now entered the 'Hyper Funk' zone. My head rockets and my neck becomes elastic, stretching all the way to the moon and beyond. Every part of me becomes one big orgasm. I can feel every drop of blood coursing through me, can feel every organ expand and contract. My whole body vibrates and I know what it is to be the universe. But then everything changes.

The lid has been flipped. The line has been cut. The world is fire. My body convulses, oxygen turns to foam in my mouth. Before the curtain can call I catch a sorry sight of myself in the mirror.

"Yo, mirror. Don't lie, am I about to die?"

"Baby. You're fucked."

Game over.

As I lie on the bed, all I can think is damn it takes a

long time to die. No light. No angels. Only lonely.  
Then it happens.

Music. Low at first, hauntingly it sounds. I lie rigid  
but I know it is moving me somewhere. Louder it  
penetrates, and higher I can feel myself soar. Or  
am I sinking.

My eyes open. I see no heaven, no hell. Only my  
same stinking apartment. Am I dead. I ask the  
mirror but get no reply. I still hear the music. The  
ode to me. My front door is open. It's calling to  
me. I follow it hazily down the hallway until I reach  
the apartment at the end. I push the door open  
and become the music. Surrounded by boxes and  
sitting at a piano is a bald man in a Hawaiian shirt.  
He doesn't seem to notice me as he caresses the  
keys, caresses my soul. I watch him silently. The  
song ends and he looks up at me.

"Hey there, chick", he says.

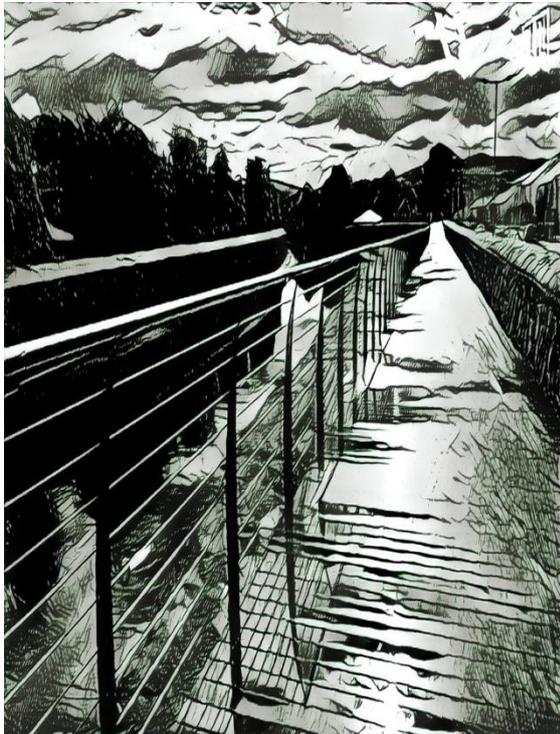
"What is that song?" I ask.

"It's called the kiss."

I say nothing but know that I have felt this kiss in  
all its true beauty.

"Would you like me to play another?" he says. I say  
"Yes."

I sit down beside him and rest my blurry head on  
his shoulder. "Ok. This one is called the end."



*Bray Boardwalk: Michael O'Reilly*

**Ten Years On by Patricia Aherne O'Farrell**

Black and yellow swirls in  
the water  
mesmerising a dreamer in a  
small boat

stalled in the bay of Bray  
while lobsters come afloat

the sky's bright light  
edged with red and smoky  
blue

lifting up the mountains  
completing the circle that is  
Bray

seemingly quiet but giddy  
with minutiae  
and etched deep in the  
memory for to-day.



*Liberty's Bust : James Devlin*

