

AN ÁITIÚIL

volume ii

OCTOBER 2023

AN ANTHOLOGY

featuring work from

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AN AITIUIL

an anthology | volume two

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dearest friends,

Áitiúil, meaning local, is our Gaeilgish sentiment of the feeling of home. Of safety, of comfort, of the familiar. It evokes the image of more than just your own commute, your own street, your own pub. The intimacy of the known, in a country like ours, stands as so much more than the recognisable. When folks flee further afield, as they are oft forced to do, they still find love, comfort, and home in any corner. But there is that barely conceivable, just about palpable knowledge we all have: that the local never moves. In its second year of publication, this phrase has taken on more meaning than we could ever have expected. To us, this edition echoes how these feelings of home can change as we grow, and, more resonantly than ever, how it can grow with us. In the process of our selection, we wanted to fill volume two with work that was contemporary and yet familiar, flavours that are both fresh yet unmistakably Irish that *teacht go maith le chéile*.

The Madrigal and The Martello have continued to intertwine as publications, and as friends. This anthology is a joinder of two roofs, and we could not be prouder of what now calls it home. It is a true honour to work alongside one another, and share in the creation of something that has come to mean so much to each of us as writers, editors, individuals, and dear, dear friends. Reading and reviewing the poetry, prose, and artwork for this edition has been a privilege, and we cannot show enough gratitude to all those who have trusted us with their work. Amid a season of ever-growing change, it is safe to say that the perusal of *Áitiúil* has delighted, devastated, and disburdened us in equal measure, and demonstrated perhaps the most crucial aspect of home: here, in these pages, you are never alone. So go on, read, think, and enjoy it; there'll be a seat saved for you when you're done.

As ever: Be well and Be safe
Helen, Úna, Luke, and Jack
The Editors xxx

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THEY ARE TAKING DOWN THE HALOGENS

ds maolalai

it's not about the line
being beautiful, or true.
sometimes it's just writing down the weather
in cities we only know
from poems and descriptions
by friends. what else is tel aviv
or buenos aires? it's what ray
carver told me. and gui comes from
sao paulo – people there
are good photographers. new york
is a place where the best
weekends happened in my life – bags of trash
on the street bursting open
like fruit in an orchard and two girls
in three nights – I still think of them sometimes.
they are taking down the halogens
in dublin over summer – the lights shine LED-
white suddenly, rather than orange
and salt. rainy pavements, one could say,
have lost a certain style.
what do poets care though – I can write
old light in poetry. as if words
were a refurbished vintage car
being driven down an avenue; a parade
or in a funeral procession. beautifully
buffed and cared for. shining as my corolla
never did on drives to work.

HOLDING OUT FOR A PHALAENOPSIS

chaelio thomas | after bonnie tyler and cesare pavese

I'm writing a poem on the couch
By the window, that despite the clouds,
Is allowing the timid light to pierce through.
The new orchid is blooming, white tigrus petals,
A new bud is forming on the branches
Of the lethargic pink one,
The oldest is just dormant green stumps -
I'm debating whether or not to give
Phototropism and magic another chance.

I'm sipping a smoothie watching the cat
Who is watching the new bird feeder,
Who knows how many birds are eating now?
My parents took away their seeds
Because of rats.

It took the goldfinches two days to stop coming
The collared doves holding out hope for a week.
I stared out the window, eyes brimming,
So they couldn't see that I was mourning something more
Than hungry birds.

GREATER DUBLIN AREA

gráinne condron | or, the foxes and this town used to be in love

The taxi driver remarks at the number of foxes out this way. And I recount again how / from the local to my place, there's always six or seven late at night. What I don't say is that half of these foxes are versions of you and when they stare (hard) through the window - I can't tell which is which. Likewise, foxes never know which parts of this town are secretly me. And we have chosen to lope miserably around what isn't the USA Suburbia that our rich friends saw on Disney channel. Foxes snuffle around a body that mewls for flood relief schemes and unnecessary road straightening techniques. This town is growing into some halfwit halfboy that extracts love from teens holding hands and in wringing out trouser cuffs dripping with polluted Liffey tributaries. She likes to slice the roof clean off your house / pluck out your parents / give them a good lick. This town is thumping metal water bottles against stone walls so no foxes are cornered and is always (always) smoothing out the weeds you tread over (quickly snouting down and reeling from seeing me through the window) She tries to shake off the calling quiet, the backcountry smell, the feeling that this too is withering again but I'm so sorry (baby), the night bus isn't coming for another five years. But then again you know how she laughs at catcalls by stupid fucking teenagers with the imprint of handlebars streaked across their arse and ponders Hallowee'n in 2016 when someone brought cocaine to school by accident and she breathes sweet cologne (hot and dark) as an ode to all those city girls. She still dreams of you (against her will) – trapped in burned out houses, at traffic detours, and buried beneath the halting site. She's absorbed the pieces of my body that have become dead skin cells / glitter excrement and those gone / good parts fill the potholes and make sounds like foxes screaming through the night. But you can't know she loves the red-smudge darkness. Because this midnight was never planned at all.

IVERAGH'S DREAM

declan coles

The teal waves of Glenbeg
Hopping lively to the polka:
 The wind's ditty.
 Through the palette of
 Copper, green, and grey
 Of the serpentine path
 Scars of attempted battery
 A golden ring into submission
 There is nothing left.
The bones of a sheep remain on Gleesk Pier;
 Tufts of wool-sprayed purple
Scattered like ashes in the wind to the western ocean.
 The scatters of their native tongue

 This seems so long ago,
 But it was less than a year.
The homecoming marred by lasting storms.

 The last time I was down was January.
Johnny died, suddenly, and I went down for the mass.
 The hills shivered with me,
As if to accept me as their own.
 I wish I could sing its song.
 In the hopes of a reunion
 Thereafter.

THE CBS BOYS

rianna carroll | p. 14

Visionaries of Irish Catholicism



THE WAKE

olivia carla smith

The last mourner shuffled out of the front door as the hallway clock chimed eleven, tightening both of his small, wrinkled hands around Sean's and muttering for the fourteenth time, "Jesus, such a terrible pity. She was some woman... such a pity." Sean nodded thoughtfully and impatiently closed the door behind the old man.

"Is that the lot of them?" Darren poked his head out of the kitchen doorway, a mouth full of one of the egg and cress sandwiches that Peggy Reilly from down the road had dropped off earlier that morning.

"Yeah, that's the last of them, thanks be to God. Jesus, what a long day," Sean rubbed his face, trying to wipe away the exhaustion of the day, "and we still have the night to contend with yet!" He walked into the bungalow's only bedroom and sat heavily on one of the hard, wooden chairs lining the wall.

"Are you coming or are you just going to sit in there stuffing your face all night, you greedy bastard?"

"I'll have you know, watching the dead is fierce hungry work," Darren retorted from the kitchen.

"Well, you may bring me one of those sandwiches as well, if there's anything left of them! And a can from the fridge on your way in."

Darren came into the room with a beer in each hand and a sandwich clenched between his teeth and threw himself into the armchair beside the bed.

"How many do you reckon came? Hundreds? Thousands?" He handed over a can and the sandwich with a bite taken out of the middle.

"Hard to say," Sean cracked open his beer, "she was a popular woman alright. I'd say half the parish tramped through that door today to get a look at her."

"Ah, good of them to come though, all the same." The two men nodded, sipping at their cans.

“Where’s Uncle John?”

“In the sitting room on the pull-out couch. Don’t know how he can sleep on that thing at his age, but, sure, I suppose he must be done-in after today. I’d say he’s out for the count.”

“Awful pity... But she had a good life, to be fair.” Sean tapped the tin thoughtfully.

“Ay, she did indeed. A good, long life. Sure, what more can you ask for, really?”

The brothers drank in silence.

“She doesn’t look at all like herself, don’t you think?” Darren interjected after a minute, looking at the body in the bed. “I think it’s because she doesn’t have her glasses on, you know?”

Sean looked up at the corpse and nodded. Although, he thought it was more the fact that the blood had been drained from her face and her skin had peeled back and tightened around her nose and gums, creating sharp, hideous features that made their Auntie May unrecognisable.

“Funeral is at eleven tomorrow, right?”

Sean nodded solemnly in response.

“Jesus, only eleven hours to go so,” Darren laughed lightly, taking a swig from his can. “It’s going to be a long night.”

“They made a lovely couple, didn’t they? Even when we were pups, they were always the fun aunt and uncle, bringing us sweets and toys from their travels. They were always happy.” Darren paced the room contemplatively, his arms behind his back, looking at each of the framed photos along the wall.

“They were, ay. That time I tried to run away from home—”

“I remember that! You packed your bags and all! Don’t know where you thought you were going, mind.”

“Ay, I did. I was coming straight to Uncle John and Auntie May’s. They let me stay the night and fed me ‘til it was coming out me ears.”

“I know they did, sure I had to take over the milking with Daddy that night because you were off living the life of Riley,” Darren turned to face his brother now.

“Ay, I got a fierce beating when I came back though.” The two men laughed quietly.

Darren took his seat again and silence fell on the room.

“Do you find it creepy? Like, us having to do this? Stay up with the body the night before the funeral. Are they afraid she’s going somewhere?”

“Ah sure it is a bit odd alright, but it’s just what’s done, you know yourself. And if I’d do it for anyone, I’d do it for Auntie May,” Sean stretched out his legs, leaning against the hard back of the kitchen chair.

They both looked at the body thoughtfully. Her white hair was pulled back neatly into a bun and her gaunt, wrinkled face had layers of yellow makeup and unnaturally red cheeks to give the appearance of life, but instead had the uncanny look of a wax figure. Her hands lay folded across her chest with rosary beads weaved between her spindly fingers.

A creak came from outside the bedroom door and the two brothers shifted their gaze into the dark hallway. They sat in silence, listening. The faint sound of mumbled groaning crept into the room. They looked at one another and then back at the doorway. The clock in the hall ticked rhythmically with the beat of their hearts. Invisible footsteps padded through the shadows, closer to the door.

Tick, tick, tick.

Their breathing quickened and Sean could feel the blood pounding in his ears.

Out of the darkness, a figure walked through the door and turned towards the bed, bending over it. The brothers glanced at each other and laughed lightly at their foolish fear.

“Jesus, Uncle John, ‘tis only yourself. You fairly scared the shite out of us. Didn’t even see you coming,” Sean chuckled, finishing the dregs of his warm beer.

John didn’t turn round. He didn’t seem to hear them, gazing down at his wife lovingly and stroking her cheek softly.

“Oh, my brave girl,” he whispered, cupping her face, “you were never scared of anything. Except me.”

CUISLE AN TSAMHRAIDH

emer nic róibín

i ndromlach coincréite
a ritheann cuisle searbh mo cheannsa,
an cúrán ag siocadh an talamh romham.
boilbeoga goirt ‘gus buataisí gorma
ag damhsa taobh sráide.

ag cogar i measc an tslua;
cuimhmeacháin na ngloinne, 2019,
sean bhéaldath ina dhúch d’àr stair,
sé ag leá anois sa teocht
céad canna an tsamhraidh ag searbhú.

dathú leiceann orainn bheirt,
i mbrothall ár bhfocal ‘gus ga gréinne
ag clingireacht san aer the, faic ráite,
níorbh fhiú ár n-am le chéile a milleadh
leis an sioc a thaghas forann.

ADRIFT

jim xi johnson | p. 20



FEBRUARY IN BALLINA: I'M A CONCRETE BARGE BEACHED ON SAND

christina hennemann

These days my heart is blue. Not light
blue like Uranus, but more opaque
and storm-ridden like Saturn's ring.
Winter lets clouds sink and cool
on all planets dangling in this *universum*.
Belleek woods soar to spring equinox
as a moon-cold platter, elliptic orbit
wobbling and winding but growing wings.
I walk through, keep going to stay warm.
Frost-bitten leaves munch on my feet,
I crunch and march just to feed my fire.
It seems as though everything must move
when it wants to stay alive, even shadows
and woods in hibernation sickly breathe.
But Creteboom stands still, so still,
only a wind-split drop of salt falls
upon the moss-paved concrete
window frame, watching the Moy
splutter by, and quite unimpressed.
I almost would've missed the stir,
if not for my unmoved eye lurking
between the seesawing twigs, ready
to latch on to anything at all, anything
that moves my crumbling cells by osmosis
towards the mellow mind of May.

MULLINGAR WORKHOUSE

s.c. flynn | entered 3-4-1846 aged 13. died 4-9-1849.

Any season would do to tell this story.
In summer these structures would gleam defiance,
their dark brown heaviness standing guard
pitiless and immovable. Even spring
would fail to brighten the picture with its thoughts
of young life blunted, bent and then ended.
Winter makes any scene cruel, but as it happens
I first came here in autumn, so it's still easy:
even these buildings look regretful in the rain
and the abandoned graveyard is draped in leaves,
each a memory and promise of rebirth
that the wind will sweep through the rusted gate.

AMACH

holly jones

It punctuates the unfurling motorways,
that word on dark painted metal

at the mouth of every soft-breathing town
as if to re-name all places after itself.

Sligo — *Amach*

Ballina — *Amach*

Castlebar — *Amach*

It could be that every place
should be called *Amach* — an exit

from the constant shuttling forward
in large vehicles, a putting down of our away-ness.

The house in Castlemartyr — *Amach*.
Escape from the fast uncoiling of a family.

The kitchen table no longer
where it stood in photographs.

The past contested. Siblings buy each other out
after a death, clinging to home. What is a place

if not a thread needled through
the eye of war, separation.

Oh, many things, really. Soda bread
and soapy water, for one. A thorn

in the side of a Dublin man's pride.
A whirlpool in my mother's memory. Carpeted

staircase, tiled bathroom, an ocean,
the whole Atlantic, of time.

A resolute speck passed by as cars — yours
and mine — leave the sound of speed behind them.

YARD OVERGROWN
helen jenks | p. 26

BIRTHDAY

eugene o'hare

last year, before i typed the co-ordinates
of the bomb that would blast our love apart
sending you flying back to Sligo
and me to South London, i put Sailor Rum
in your cake and we ate with mouths already
tired from kissing.

it is your birthday again and you are smiling
in a room where somebody new is touching.

and i am alone in a rented kitchen with a drip-
dripping sound i cannot locate. down here
on the cold tile floor i hold a memory
of your body like five broken shotguns.

outside, the high wires taut between pylons
glisten with resting birds who then move
like sparks in the sun.

it is your birthday
and the whole world is spinning.

MY FIRST DUBLIN HOME

rianna carroll | p. 27

*Not pictured: The fungus growing in the corner, the mouse traps on the floor,
our lease missing pages*





MY SISTER AND I AS BREEDS OF CATTLE

mairéad o'sullivan

My brother-in-law has a herd of Limousin,
a strong-willed French breed, difficult
to work with if you don't know how to handle them,
so he learned how to handle them.

*Yes, my sister says, she's telling me all this,
he does view me in a similar light
except he thinks I'm more of an Aberdeen Angus –
astute and hardy.*

Not that anyone asked, but I think
I would be a Kerry cow, small and unassuming.
Eating gentle grass on the grounds near Muckross House.
Nice to have and not one bit useful.

THE KILLINGS

natalie robinson

On her street, each house was an approximation of its neighbour, a bad copy, a non-identical twin. They were painted in now-fading pastels, the palette of seaside dwellings. Window-sills were dressed, competitively, with tasteful pots and planters. At the bottom of the street and over a deceptive wall: the sea, allegedly. A short step up, the surprising drop to the long stretch of empty beach that waited and waited for a tide that only seemed to come in when she wasn't there. When she was elsewhere altogether; looking the other way.

She first heard about the killings in the café. She was standing, pushing her body against the counter, trying to squeeze herself smaller as she waited, in the way, for her oat flat white. A second one dead, she heard. Two, now. Two women in as many weeks! Did they know each other? Their kids all went to St John's. Matty and Amelia and the other small one... Aoife? Can you imagine? All without their mammys now. Oh, so sad. We're holding a vigil, the committee are. Poor things. A serial killer then? Now don't be dramatic, two surely can't count as that. Probably they all knew the killer. Some scandal! Not that it makes it ok. No, not at all, that's not what I'm saying! But it's certainly scary. Wise to be scared. No more walking alone at night. Especially on that beach.

Two dead in two weeks. She wasn't particularly surprised that she'd missed it. She was a writer and mostly in her head. No colleagues to speak of. Just the Sunday workshop on Zoom that everyone said 'kept them sane,' but she found to be an unpleasant chore. She persisted, because on grant applications it counted as 'community participation.' But she kept her personal life out of it, left before the chat. They didn't know much about her, and definitely nothing about where exactly she lived, the street with the beach at the end of it. Wouldn't the information seem more relevant, more urgent if they knew she was living in the midst of it? A woman, and here, and alone. If they'd known they would have said something, wouldn't they? She shuddered.

They died by strangulation. Purple marks around delicate necks. These were the details she found, when she searched. She imagined large hands, a figure, a man. Watch out behind you, don't wear headphones at night anymore. Don't walk on the beach alone (she had nobody to walk with though?). Don't walk on the beach (but where else?). Don't walk.

A third. A friend of her neighbour opposite who changed out all his flowers for white lilies, leading to strong words from the one with all the cats. They're poisonous, you know! The pollen if it gets on the fur! She watched the confrontation from her window, blinds drawn almost all the way down, peeking out. She wanted to buy more lilies for her grieving neighbour - to keep inside, this time. She wanted to learn the names of other kinds of innocuous poison-plants, to make sure her own sill was safe for other people's pets. She thought about going outside and saying so, but didn't move to. She felt compelled to walk on the beach, to find the sea that shrank away from her.

Four. The dead woman's name felt familiar on her lips and she mouthed it over and over, feeling the shape of it: Amanda. Perhaps a small connection? A friend of an acquaintance, maybe? But no, probably not. Perhaps she was thinking of an Amanda in a novel. She took a taxi to Tesco even though it was close enough and only 8pm and not even raining, because it felt like the correct thing to be seen to do, not to walk. The meter read: €6.43.

When the fifth woman was murdered, she bought a newspaper, her first in years. Devoured the inky sheets of it, searching for something shared. It was hard to think what that could be. Had the dead woman also watched Succession?! She stared for a long time at the picture. Bluest blue eyes that were surely filtered. A smile curving up the corner of a mouth. A drink raised in celebration in a garden somewhere, probably near and not long ago. Looking so directly at the photographer, a friend or parent or partner, or neighbour?

This time someone had seen. The witness described a hooded figure. Exactly what you'd expect, she thought. They only saw from the back, they'd said to the guards, describing the kind of silhouette already imagined by everyone. Hoodie, dark - maybe waterproof - trousers, runners. Probably a man. Can't be sure. She filled in his Ghostface in her mind.

She walked the beach at night.

Six. A stranger to her, again. She felt unnerved. Found herself wondering how she had come to know so few people after nearly a decade in the same house. She started to count those she did know. Realised she only knew her neighbours by number and not by name: number 65, the old one at number 63, the one with all those kids at 60. The one with the cats some way down the street; the lady with the lilac door. She

found herself standing at the back of the funeral. She averted her gaze, muttered her prayers.

She walked at night.

Seven. She wanted to wrap her hands around the neck of someone and push to see how long it takes.

She walked, headphones in.

A man was arrested. The killings stopped. She bought a fern for her window-sill, in a spaceship-silver pot. She looked out at it briefly, and closed the blinds.

SURFACE TENSION
ellen harrold | p.30



PHYESTER

daniel wade

Once you start reading this poem,
I know exactly where I'll be:
loitering on the pier, meditatively

smoking, eyeing up the swell - soon-to-be
one of the forty or fifty or so others
who drove out here just to gawk at it.

On such a day, Leviathan splashed up
from Clare Island, bladderwrack trailing
its fluke like burnished tassels

as if it had submarined labyrinths of dulse,
clamped jaw leaking brine, odorous brow
pecked at by choughs. It arrived out of nowhere,

I expect, gurglings of blood to ripple the sand,
slack as a pulled muscle. It could be
Melville's behemoth tossed up

by oblivions of salt, atrophied to miniature
in oceanic boil and stormwater brew, marrow-
pale blubber basking in the breakers -

its coronach a rising tide's contrabass purr,
and, like the iron scrape of a rusty gate,
its own song submerged by gull hollers.

We definitely won't rest 'til we see its ashen
bulk splayed, waterlogged in alluvial gush
like salvage from some drizzly heaven.

We'll slosh through the silt to reach it,
culmination of breeze gusting at my back

to lurk upwind of the splintered hump,
avoiding death-reek, jangly riptide growl,
bringing neither gloves nor waterproofs.
Lesions like the imprint of net rinsed
clean of blood, salted of reek, orchid-
shaded, greet us as we draft our
observations as amateur eulogies.
It'll always be worth seeing. We'll snap pics
of its closed eye, charnel fins, stand next to it
for scale, follow our own footsteps back
to the car. Three days beached like a razed
cromlech, a slab of bleached gristle
careened against the waves, rotting
tenderly. I keep one weather eye out for them,
worship what I may hunt, revere
what I shall so harpoon, run myself
aground alongside them before a slate horizon,
its eminence in greyscale. This one
is stranded precisely where IWDG
said it would be, all fractured dorsal
and tail buffeted by the incoming tide,
Enough to harpoon the thought
of its penultimate agony, each furrowed groove
under its mouth like the strakes of a boat:
rancid porcelain where the Atlantic ends.

IT'LL BE GRAND, HE SAID

graham ritchie

But whatever you do, do not
look down the side of my bed
and find crumbs from old lunch days,
checkers lost on tedious Sunday afternoons,
and youthful clusters of hair that
gather round: the crown edges -

Now, tell me of this final moult
beyond which wrinkles fail to crease,
aching sinew becomes no matter, and
trembling fingers sit cross fixed.
Not so shabby, eh? -

I have worn out my Gregorian calendar,
welcomed the primrose under our sessile oak,
lacerated hearts for hearts,
howled as loud on Carrauntoohil, and
bitten my fair share of Eliot's ripe peach

But before death brags
before profit, I'll
dance with taut rivals,
weep with former lovers,
preach hearsay, the wisdom I know now
for once sprightly ears and say

What was all the racket?

WE WERE NEVER SUMMER

damien b. donnelly | after Until We Meet Again by Jack B. Yeats, 1949

Come in come out let go. The waves are rough on detail,
on why you stay and I cannot be held. I leave and you
do not ask why. We can't grieve over a question that has no answer.
Carve a boat from wood you've cut in your own field and its destiny
is to make its way to the sea. The waves are rough on rejection.
Come in come out grow old. The journey will not wait
to be captured on a canvas or recalled in detail on a page.
This race is rough on the writer poet painter. Pause & lose
the moment, be unprepared and lose the light. The journey is rough
like the salt in this water that wasn't meant to sustain but to train us
to explore the thirst.
Come in come out come home. The loss is translucent.
The hat is heavier than before and the shadow a slippery beast.

I call & only an echo comes back a myth I made of who we were –
there are many shells on this shore that do not taste of a single sea.
There is light in the shade of this land I never saw before.
I turn but now, it is you who has left. Summers are hard here,
on this island made for winter. But when it rains I see you in its
 fall
and open my mouth having learnt how to taste.

A SUPERMARKET AISLE

beth storey

“Hey, stranger.”

Neither of them says that. They’re too surprised. They look at each other, saying nothing.

“Of all the gin joints –”

They don’t say that either.

She thinks – fuck. I didn’t wash my hair this morning. He thinks – Jesus, she looks good.

“Long time, no see.”

They don’t even say that. That’s the easiest one.

What the fuck are they going to say?

She thinks – I have to tell the girls. He thinks, again – Jesus, she looks good.

She could tell him, “I’ve thought about running into you a million times. I’ve looked for you on busy streets. Only whenever I’ve pictured it – I’ve just washed my hair.”

He could tell her, “They made your favourite book into a movie last year. The ad was on the side of all the buses. I couldn’t get away from you.”

She should say, “Things are good, but I talk about you every time I drink.”

He should say, “I’m happy. But it makes me sad that you don’t know this version of me.”

But neither of them says any of these things. They just stand there, looking.

Elton John is playing in her head – *And I guess that's why they call it the blues/Time on my hands could be time spent with you/Laughin' like children, livin' like lovers/Rolling like thunder under the covers.*

Pearl Jam's Wishlist is playing in his – *I wish I was the souvenir you kept your housekey on/I wish I was the pedal brake that you depended on.*

She thinks, he got rid of the beard. I hated the beard.

He thinks, her hair is longer. It suits her.

She thinks, I should ask after his mother.

He thinks, I'll ask her if she ever got that job.

They'll have to say something. Anything – hello, hiya, look who it is, great to see you.

“I was starting to think I made you up inside my head.”

Still nothing. They're just staring.

She's holding a bottle of shampoo – a new one, she's never tried it before – in one hand, and a box of tampons in the other. She thinks, I may as well just tell him I'm off birth control. I may as well ask the staff to announce on the intercom that I'm not seeing anyone.

He's empty-handed. He's only come in for food for the dog, and that's in the very back aisle. He sees the shampoo bottle and thinks, she's stopped using the apple shampoo. I used to love that smell. He sees the tampons and thinks, I miss bringing her up hot water bottles.

She wants to ask, “Are you seeing anybody?”

He wants to ask, “Will we go for a drink? Let's make the dog wait for his dinner.”

She's thinking, I forgot how gorgeous he is. He's thinking, did looking at her always hurt?

She's hoping her hair doesn't look unwashed. He's hoping the shirt he didn't bother to iron that morning isn't too wrinkled.

She might say, "You look well. I'm glad."

He might say, "It'll make my day if you tell me you're happy."

They'll say something soon. They have to.

His rolled up sleeves remind her of him washing the dishes after dinner. He sees her glasses and remembers how she looked in bed without them.

She wonders if he still stutters when he's nervous. He wonders if her accent is as Dublin as he remembers.

They're dying to speak, suddenly; to hear the cadence of the other's voice. There's so much they want to say.

She says –

"Hiya."

He says,

"Alright?"

PEARSE STATION

jim xi johnson | p. 40



Destination
Bray

THESE ARE ALL THE THINGS I
THOUGHT, SAW AND THOUGHT I SAW
ON THE BUS BACK TO TOWN ON
THURSDAY 9TH FEBRUARY 2023,
LOOKING OUT FROM THE 9.

charlotte moore

A burnt down house, a seed.
A brick is a house seed, a burnt house is a stump.
Cycling in the brick-reflection fading into a house, people
Float-walking through houses out my window.
Fence with gloves on, motorbike's face:
Lobotomies everywhere,
Crane onlooking.
Varsity jacket and a backwards cap. Phonecall that must be loud. Hand gestures
(profuse). Probably profane.
A man who assaulted me crooning to the cats
Walking there later with the new one
Telling the new one part of the story to watch his face
He detects details in people's voicescapes. I wonder how he does that.
Where does a man with his circumstances attain such softness ?

The 'Happy Valentine's Day !' stickers on windows mean 3 days til a year, means 362
days ago, Mean-
Why did the cats lick and nuzzle him ?

"I want to live alone but I can't afford the rent"
I don't want to (live) (alone) at all
I miss you St Patrick and Jonathan Swift
I miss you, the bells
I miss you, the park and the children and dogs
But not the drunken strangers propped up and lonely to wake up and beg
Not their heroin needles pricking my conscience
Not the mould in all my lungs
I miss you, Dublinia, Mario, Little Bridge of Seize,
Ben, Mark, Duncan, all the towering people, the copper domes peeking.
It's only easy on buses when you know where you're going and getting off !
It's hard to feel any ease ever.
I need a roll up backpack.
Do I reward people for just knowing me at all ? I will fall in love with a person for
simply applying to me a pronoun and an adjective I like: Nice one.

Ideas are falling off the earthly string: Jesus fell off years ago but we still advertise mini
eggs
I think I'll get some
for the crunch.

WALKING SEQUENCE

gale aitken

1.

I don't wear a watch on Sundays.
I forgot to put it back on Monday.
The hours bleed, like hours do,

And I trip over a root tooth in the pavement
Cat prints in the concrete, a cold-feet street
I still don't know the name of.

The sky was on fire and
The flowers were in post-bloom and
The pedal bin frightened me.

The sky was on fire and
I closed my eyes and let the sun
Eat away at the eyelids.

The hours bleed, like hours do,
And I'm bending down, try scoop it up,
Hands cupped, dripping minutes.

2.

I can't sleep with this fire
in my hands. She shakes
in a dream. Chased rabbit,
Comb-toothed through
A city awake, but barely.

I get up but her hand
reaches round to grab at
my shoulder. Spider, electric,
enameled in somebody's
lobotomy-pink balcony.

3.

Sidestep the vomit sleeping in stones.
Someone has to clean this up.

Someone has to do the confessing.

4.

I drop dead skin-flakes
Into a
coffee cup.

She is inlayed
In this
humid kind of cold.

The Spar down the road
Closes at ten and
We can't buy our pardons there.

5.

Where did you go, she asks.
Out for a smoke.

6.

I keep having these strange dreams.

7.

I ache.

8.

I wake up
Into panic.

9.

Bring back indulgences.
I'm trying to buy my way
Into heaven.

IN TRANSIT

niamh kelly

Two weeks after the abortion, I am returning to Mayo and the blood is still coming and going. It stains toilets, underwear and jeans at the most inconvenient of moments, a scarlet reminder of my body shedding, shuddering and emptying itself. Now, in the pokey train carriage toilet, I try to balance myself against the gentle rocking as I remove a blood-stained pad from my underwear, wrap it up in toilet paper and carefully place it into a bin. I then pull a fresh one from my bag and place it onto my underwear before straightening myself out.

Stumbling out of the toilet, I feel a tug of dread in the pit of my chest. I love Mayo – how rugged and wild and untouched it is, how football-mad the people are, how it's always the hope that kills them. Yet every return feels like a confrontation with the past and the fear swells in me when the train creaks and groans to a stop in Westport.

*

My mam greets me on the platform. She's always on time and always happy to see me. I give her a quick hug and during the drive home lie about how well I'm feeling, all too aware of the moistness I can feel pooling in my underwear again. I do a purposefully vague run-through of all the latest in my life: work is fine; friends are all good, as far as I know; weather in Dublin has been very icy. I hit all the points.

When I get home, my bedroom is done up cosy, with the radiators on and fresh towels out. My mam's thoughtful work. She potters about, making me tea and chatting about news she's heard about the town. While she isn't looking, I gulp down two painkillers, before following her to the sitting room. I attempt to settle myself in between the cats who are nestled on every surface of the room and eventually one of them curls up on my lap. He kneads my belly gently, his body heat and purring sending a warmth of relaxation through me. In silence, we watch re-runs of gameshows and my mam slices cleanly through a loaf of barmbrack, breaking me off a piece without a word.

*

Later that evening, the fog is on the ground and I decide to visit the Museum of Country Life. I weave my way through the exhibits, stopping now and again to read tiny captions about these objects that have been rendered antiquated and useless by the relentless march of modernity and capitalism. Wicker-baskets, straw draught-excluders, and súgán chairs, all once practical life tools, now exist only behind a pane of glass, as abstract symbols of forgotten worlds.

Eventually, I come to a halt at the tiny exhibit of the tornapa taibhse, my favourite item in the museum, the one that calls out to me every time I come home. I read that it was carved in 1900, making it seventeen years older than my grandmother and fifty-three years older than my mother. Drenched in pervasive superstition and rooted in the earthiness of agriculture, the folk horror artistry makes its American descendent, the carved-out pumpkin, seem glossy and cartoonish in comparison. Obsession isn't quite the word, but I feel connected to this object, and I have an urge to break through the glass and take it.

Driving home, the dull ache of cramps thud in my abdomen and I pull over at shop. Along with a pack of painkillers, I buy their most scarred and jagged tornapa and bring it home with me. That night, I sculpt a ghost of my own. I make the eyes round and hollow, and the mouth an expressionless slit straight across. I methodically carve out its crisp brains, scraping and scooping, shovelling them into a bowl until the chamber is hollow.

When I finish, I place a tiny candle inside the skull and switch off the big light. I place my tornapa on the windowsill and sit at the kitchen table. We regard each other from across the room, and under its glare, I immediately feel sad for having butchered it in this way, for having carved it up, for having cut it open and exposed it. Afterwards I can't bear to throw away the flesh, so I boil it and eat it with potatoes, creamy butter, and salt and pepper.

Carrying that tornapa inside me, I go back into the sitting room and find my mam asleep by the fire, her half-drunk cup of tea beside her. I gently lower myself into the seat across from her, careful not to wake her. I watch as her head tilts backwards against the chair and her mouth hangs agape. I wonder if that is how she'd look if she died in that chair - creased face washed with the glow of fire, incisors bared towards the sky, silently screaming.

THE DESSERT FORK MADE ME CRY, QUICK AND BEWILDERING (after

Aloysius O'Kelly)

megan luddy o'leary | p. 47



THRESHING (LACKAN FOREST)

aoife-marie buckley | for chd and jh

With an incense stick
Lit for our ancestral selves,
And the smoke of our fire billowing
In this dense forest,
I feel a tug -
That the spirit meant for me to be here,
At this threshold,
Now, Speak -
I ask to be shook,
For the tremors of little traumas this while
Be exorcised from this frail frame
By your hands both,
Because I've tried to cough up
The pain and the anguish
Alone
Only I've become gently more solid,
Cast in stone rather than song -
And I don't know exactly what I mean
But you seem to
As you roll out the bamboo mat on this secluded peak.
So
I lie down
And begin to let go and tense up
In perfect response to your shaking of me,
The profligate pummelling of limbs.
It hurts,
God it hurts,
Is every hand on earth holding both?
- You're angry, you say
No, I'm not,
As I quiver with the prowling mother in me
Clawing at our seams,
Should I give birth to this death?
- You're angry, you say
No,

I am anger

And it finally ruptures
So full
It scares me,

I scream into my shut eyes
And all the grief shakes the trees.
- Say it again, you say

And she listens, and rips forth from every wound
Through my throat without resistance.

On my threshing floor
I contract softly
And dehisce entirely.

I pray

For
Seeds

To fall

From
This

.

APPALACHIA

alánagh keane

sink your bare feet into the same soil
let your weight fall atop the bedrock
follow the cliffs as they stretch slumbering limbs
across oceans and centuries
until they remember, and they tell you,
that they were once one
and tall as the skies.

the wind will whip around your face
as you pace the waters' edge, staring ahead
and behind searching for these past traces, wondering
if that familiar smell is from the old world or the new,
if belonging is something grown in the bones.

it has been decades of the coming and the going;
it is the same dirt that greets you, yes,
but does the dirt know this?
that you were borne, and then have grown, on its fabric,
so many miles apart.

but you have returned,
unlike many who have sailed past rocky shores
to arrive at rockier coastline.
would they recognise the texture of the earth—
fostering different crops, sure—
but allowing the same music to take?

would they have known, as you now do?
that they carried their land across the sea
and that new lives grew on the same soil
in which they buried their old;
squint at the distance and bury your toes
in its relics of sand and clay.

GIANT

ryan o'rourke

1

my grandfather told me many stories of his youth -
tales of cowboys & giants
how they were in abundance on this island in the days of forests & dust

grandpa gunslinger;
he'd ride his stud for hours only stopping to drink (whiskey)
shoot down bandits
herd the cattle
Ireland's Last Gunslinger they called him, but that's a story for another time –

2

oh father!

*my father was a giant, he would say, he roamed the land from the burren to
the black water the trees would tremble in his stride
he swam with the whales & wrestled with the great deer*

*giants taught me how to live, live, live
father's footprints turned to lush valleys
father never liked how small i was*

i am smaller now.

3

the footprints my grandfather left were paved over when he died
the trees he loved were chopped down

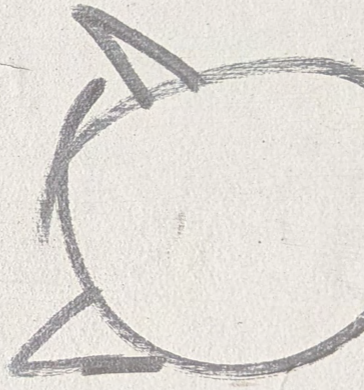
the time of the giant is gone

my grandfather lied to you, he *was* a giant
someday he'll find everything he was looking for, but not
in this life

4

i once watched a pod of whales off the coast of donegal
if i hope hard enough, the time of the giants will return.

OPEN UP
BK UP
BEST
BREAKFAST
IN TOWN



THE ABSENCE OF MARMALADE IN MAGHERAFELT

michael farry

Things fall apart.
The centre's closed.
The car park's full.
We have no sterling.
Whitethorn blessed our early-morning journey
decked out the drumlins all the way, though
on this side the blooms do seem to have a blush
of red or blue. It may just be the way we think.

My stomach's uneasy.
I need plain food.
Here cafes open later.
We scour the streets.
The mix of medicines for sinusitis, headache
phlegm and blood pressure may have caused
my stomach upset which led to that incident
in Emmet Street car park yesterday afternoon.

She chooses lemon drizzle.
He prefers chocolate cake.
I order tea and white toast.
They have no marmalade.
I accept the jam, strawberry it says on the sachet
but I worry about its effect on an empty stomach
in a foreign state. I enjoy it, plan to reconnoitre
the toilet layout once we arrive at the Home Place.

My worries are unfounded.
The workshop's great.
We start with free writing.
The stuff just pours out.
Here at home, I delve and find a poem, two poems,
maybe more. It takes time to let words soak in
recognise in scribbles poetry struggling to emerge,
you know the saying *What goes in*

BEST BREAKFAST IN TOWN

seán carlson | p. 52

IN GLASNEVIN

ds maolalai

the cemetery's overrun
with sprouting wild mint and wild
lavender. the greens and bright blues
all erupting to reach
over pavements like bones
poked from grave-dirt with beautiful
bracelets – a scene from a black
and white 70s movie, taking place on a bright
sunny day. the corners so busy
with insect life now. it feels like a metaphor –
bees, and at night moths
haunt headstones with a ghostish
and dusty-book wingbeat, hunted by bats
flitting down out of birch trees –
ancient, approaching collapse.
such morbid ambience – it's a wonderful,
graveyard – how it goes to horizon –
lets the sky rest a cheek on a bedsheet
of cut and shaped granite as cold
as a fresh hotel mattress. and the air is cold too,
though bright with sharp shadows – august
is ending; winter comes up through my boots.
I wander about, not looking for anyone.
looking at names past the growth.

KING OF THE CLADDAGH

áine rose connell | for uncle leo

Because what's gone is gone, you know what I mean
my reflection afloat on petrol-grease, the end
but then, turned on my heel at the Corrib's edge

with half my life forgotten, given to *poitin*
in bottle clink, I gargled grit to befriend
but what's gone is gone, do you know what I mean

as a boy, I watched a fire warm the mantle, dismantling
some biblical feeling washed over me, Godsped
I remembered as I turn on my heel at the Corrib's edge

back then, seven men to a room, a sight often seen
some tip-tailed together on hardened bed
but what's gone is gone, do you know what I mean?

the wall that saw blood on brick, ripped jeans
I fought battles with fisted grip, knocked heads
do I turn my heel at the Corrib's edge?

I dry out the drink, punch the *divil* to smithereens
not gonna tread this river again, pledged
what's gone is gone, you know what I mean
I turned it all in at the Corrib's edge.

FRESHLY FALLEN SNOW

a. joseph black | Belfast , late 1980s

“Freshly fallen snow keeps the tarmac cold,” Micky mutters as the young couple spill from the back seat of his taxi. It’s the opening line of a song he reckons, or maybe part of a poem or a story he’s read somewhere. Since he drives around listening to the radio fourteen hours a day, and reads no hours a day, he knows which is more likely. He watches them totter up the snow-dusted drive to a ground floor flat as he pulls away.

At the front door she laughs – maybe a little too hard – as he takes her key and pretends to be too drunk to get it into the lock. Micky doesn’t need to be a literature scholar to appreciate a metaphor when he sees one. Three hours ago neither of those two even knew the other existed: now, no one else in the world matters. So it goes.

He’s bone tired but he needs another fare before home. He sighs, swings his head from side to side. He’ll grab a coffee somewhere, have a wee toot of the whizz he got off Stewarty, and do another hour. Linda wasn’t happy about him going out again tonight. Two drivers shot dead by passengers in the last ten days, just because of their presumed religion. Based on the taxi company they worked for. One was right and the other wrong, in a grotesque asymmetry. So there aren’t many drivers working at the minute. Micky’s glad of the extra hours, with twins due in a month, even though he knows Linda worries.

Her brother’s a butcher and he’s given Micky one of his knives, for security.

“Stash it under your seat, just in case you need it,” he said. “And don’t twat about with it. You need a licence for those things. It’ll take your finger clean off and you won’t even fuckin know it.”

Micky kicks his foot back now and feels the handle of the knife against his heel. Another job comes through his radio as he swishes the car round on the thin wet snow. City Hall to Black Mountain. Decent run.

“Driver 302 here Control,” Micky says into the mouthpiece. “I’ll take that.”

“Roger, 302. Cheers Micky.”

He arrives at City Hall after a pit stop and the passenger bundles into the back seat. He’s dressed in an old charity shop greatcoat and black combat trousers. He’s clutching a shapeless dark backpack.

“Black Mountain please mate.”

The accent's off.

He's from here, but it's like he's trying to disguise it or something. Micky watches him in the rear-view mirror as he settles, nursing the backpack carefully on his lap.

"Whereabouts on the Black Mountain, mucker?"

"If you get as far as Hannahstown I'll know it from there."

Micky's jaw tightens. As he drives, he checks his mirror constantly. The passenger's looking all around him, all the time, even sliding across the back seat to peer out of one window and then the other. When Micky asks him for directions, he seems to select them at random – "straight on, mate...uhm...up to the left here".

The streetlights disappear and the houses thin out.

Fucker's up to something.

Micky's certain now, certain this trip will end with his death, or the death of the poor unfortunate in the house at the end of the journey. If it even exists.

He hears a swishing from the back seat. The passenger's opening his backpack, Micky can see him in the mirror, hears it being unzipped. There's a shallow passing bay on the near side of the road so Micky pumps the brakes and swings into it. With an agility that belies his terror he leans forward and pulls the knife from under his seat. Breathless, he swivels and points it straight at his passenger's face.

"You move another fuckin inch and I swear to God I'll slit you right open, right here, right in this fuckin car."

The passenger's frozen. Speechless. Motionless. Micky has no idea what to do next. He reaches up and switches on the little light above them. The passenger gasps when he sees the massive knife in all its glory. Micky sees a piece of paper in the passenger's trembling hand, ripped from a jotter, scrawled on.

"The fuck's that?" he asks.

"A map," the passenger whispers, looking straight ahead, avoiding Micky's eyes.

"Map of where?"

"My Auntie Ann's."

Micky's confused, initially about why the passenger would want to kill their Auntie Ann, then generally.

“I haven’t been home in years,” the passenger explains. “I thought I’d know where it was when I got here but everything’s changed. So I’m checking the map my cousin drew me.”

He offers Micky the piece of paper. Micky looks at it then lowers the knife. All of the tension drains from the car.

“Sorry, mate,” Micky says, although he can’t really explain. “I thought...there’s been...”

“No worries man, no worries, I know where I am now,” the passenger garbles with a slightly hysterical laugh. “My auntie’s is just up there, I’ll walk sure —” and the door’s slamming shut behind him. Leaving Micky in his car, in a lay-by, up a dark mountain, without his fare and holding a massive knife in his hand. He feels ridiculous and predictably cuts his finger as he stuffs it hastily back under his seat, cheeks flushed with embarrassment and shame and adrenaline.

Driving back into the city a call comes through. Pick up at the flat he’d dropped the couple to just an hour before. Last one, definitely. The backs of his hands are sweating.

The young man laughs when he climbs in the back and sees him.

“You didn’t stay long then?” Micky asks, even though he’s not sure he’s interested.

“Ach, you know yourself. No point wasting months coming to a conclusion you can both see right now, is there?”

“No. No, I suppose not.”

“Here, do you know there’s blood all over your gearstick mate?”

GAZING

jacob jago moran

Your gaze is the bumblebee
stumbling over the landscape of my
bare arms, tasting for sweetness
in the pink of my skin

and stinging as you burrow because
we are different animals and
buzzing is not what I do.

Never mind. I let you wander,
and glance off my softer parts.
While you interrogate my flesh
my face is turned towards the dawn.

I will not give you what I can't, and I
am bound for the mountain where
the sun shines and my life is.

The dew evaporates; the clouds clear;
and when the peaks crest the vapour
they tell you where you are
and I know where I am.

HERON

ryan o'rourke

instead of that have this –

the first time i was shot i was a baby in the womb i bled for hours
before the doctor patched me up

exploded from my mother & flung from the rotunda ward to this –

when i came into this life i had scars on my arms
where the bullets had been

hooks leave scars in the fish, even after they're cooked

i sometimes sit by the grand canal and watch the herons bob for fish
i wonder what they do with all the needles they find

when i was nine i saw a heron fish through the weeds,
swallow a needle & die of an overdose three hours later

i still wander up the canal every now and then
wondering what i should do with all the needles i find

i live in this –

someday i'll be like the heron

i'll bob for fish
i'll taste the scars
i'll bite a hook & be pulled back into the womb

CANAL

jim xi johnson | p. 61



Love you Mgan

BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG

bernard pearson

Here, are certain valleys that
For all the world
Look like discarded books
Opened on a different page
Than the one that was being read.

Here the light shines , as if it were
A late comer to a summer party,
Eddying, cinders circling
The stone laced fields
Turn out to be birds,
Flying out across the engorged hills.
Thrown over with bracken,
Bounced by heather,
Grieving for the past,
Solaced by song.

Here lost Shepherds found
Their flocks
In broken little churches
Clinging to the certainty
Of mountains, like barnacles
Would to the hull of wrecks.

Here, history was crowned
And then forgotten
Causes were spoken for and against
Candles were lit for babies.
And the elderly arranged like flowers
Until at last
All that was needed had been
Safely gathered in
So that winter could be waited out
Around the remembering fire.

IN EYRE SQUARE

jack power

Everything here is ever full and free;
She fumbles with a cigarette between her thumbs
In the cold, hard rain on a bench.
Students flock the commons so she turns to let a smile,
I watch.
The air damps the filter as the flame splutters and coughs,
Struggling to lick the fag.
In a bag she carries a comb, a pen,
Loose coins and soft perfumes.

She sleeps in half the day and turns up late to class.
With the trains an hour slow
She waits for the Ennis tour, eyes to the sky, adrift.
'What time did you leave Fibbers?'
She's here to find her feet and lose herself
In the high tides of Salthill.
The sun finds a gap, the dark evening to come, and she touches her lip;
I think she blows a kiss
But I lose it to the smoke, the crowd, the city.

FIVE MORE MINUTES
claire murphy | pg. 64



PATTERNSHIP

hannah mae earner grote

You have become religious of late, though you keep this from your husband. Now you manoeuvre around each other, movements that look more like an ornamental pattern, than any kind of dance. If you were any kind of writer, you'd call this a patternship, rather than a partnership. But you have become religious of late, so you have given up writing much to your husband's frustration.

The plates and bowls in your house have now become open mouths, each frozen in horror. Eternal 'Os' you fill with creamy pasta or oily vegetables, they seemed less shocked when they were bought, but then again, so were you, really.

When you go to bed is the only time you can look at him now, sleep doesn't know change, it seems, he still seems twenty, or five, when he sleeps. There is a look about him that you still can muster love for. Some motherly instinct that makes you want to open *The Secret Garden* and read to him. And sometimes you do, or maybe it is less reading and more the remnants of writing, when you open your mouth and speak to him about the things you think during the day. In this way, you think you might be praying out loud, including your sleeping husband in it. Pulling him unwittingly into the open space that now you see is filled by God. All the gaps of sense that now a willing conscience can slot into. Your God is less a white man with a beard than a reason for funerals and other godless acts. And this is what your husband doesn't understand.

*

When Sammy died you did too. That is that, you don't think you should spend anymore words on that, it is that simple. A whole slice of your 'you' simply fell away. You had to learn what answers to give when people asked about her, or about whether or not you had any children. You had to learn to eat again, how to drink again, how to raise a glass to lips, remind yourself to swallow. You had to learn to read again by tracing your finger along the page, under the sentences. Stopping at the full stops. You had to learn to speak again, inflections and tones.

You have never learnt to sleep again, some things are not like riding a bike.

When you did learn to walk again, you chose the road that is trusted and new in the same way. The stones like bricks a child slotted, the rush of salty water always to your left. You learnt to navigate home by the string of sea that is near where you live. And to stop and stare at the water, and that thinking about simply jumping in is just that, a thought.

And when the trusted day of the month comes, around which all your other days are gathered, for which the whole month seems to hold its breath, the day of the month – the last day, always – when your patternship is at its strongest. When he and you are on the same team, watched by the ‘Os’ in the cupboard as you fill your lunchboxes, leave the house for the place your own body might as well be buried. Where the grass is always angry, deep and green and a little menacing.

The sky here has forgotten the sea, and your baby – your child, your teen, your human – sits alongside the babies of others. Under a tombstone that must dig into her collarbone, must pin her body into the earth that is now closer to her than her own mother can ever be. Here you and he sit and lay out the blanket, joking perhaps about the effort it will take to get back up again once you have lowered yourself to the ground, smiling wryly at Sammy’s frozen face, her frozen name, frozen dates.

This is where, for the next hour or so – however long the rain will let you – you sit and play pretend, act a family again. Speak on little trivial things, as though the stone were a table, the grass were your carpet and the wind simply a breeze. As though Sammy were nodding, chomping with jam filled cheeks on the bread you prepared. This is where your God subsides, leaving you with the first religion you ever believed in; this little space of family.

ERASURE
deirdre maher

I wrote about my mother
Now she has dementia.
She is being erased,
so I have begun
to erase her story.
See how it becomes

A Lament

My mother—my mother—couldn't stand the sight of blood—
—My mother—married a doctor—became an emigrant
—(dark fur coat against Canadian snow)
—sang rebel songs—talked politics at parties—
—wore crimson lipstick and Chanel no. 5—My mother
—cooking bored her—My mother
—pined for Dublin, the clash of the ash—her Mammy's soda bread
My mother—oh the wit of her!
—sure she'd have you in stitches!
—her depression—a shroud wrapped round us all
—my mother
—Salthill, a rented semi—
—my mother—my mother—
—held my hand when I was sick
—blood—blood—
—'Another martyr for old Ireland, from the foe they will not fly'
—snow—cold—red
—bread—bread—'finger lickin' good'
—Mammy—Mammy!
—shroud
—Mammy!
—Mammy!

Once,
back in Dublin
(they got back to Dublin)
I pretended to be sick
so
she
would
hold
my
hand
M
a
m
my
M
y
M
a



THE CONNEMARA PONIES AT KYLEMORE ABBEY

mairéad o'sullivan

A cross-stitched fence between us and a field
stretching back to grey and green mountain peaks.
I seek out the information plaques, a compulsion –

Connemara ponies are hardy from centuries of working
sparse, rocky ground, but also kind and even-tempered.
Another plaque displays headshots of the herd and their

names, each with the prefix 'Peaceful', bestowed
by Benedictine nuns still in-situ. Yet, it is difficult
to identify the exact pony standing in the field. A child's toy

in front of set-piece mountains (perspective, Dougal),
her companion dosing, half hidden by surging grass,
their coats white with grey trimming like the sky

above us, all day threatening to rain.
And here in my notes I had planned to be circumspect
but now realise I cannot speak as to a pony's sense of peace

or place, only that she looks unbothered
as though she cancelled all her diaried plans
and fed the diary to a lake.

MORE DISHES

claire murphy | p. 68

GIVEN ME WEALTH

faith olaosgba

I was asked “why I go by Faith and not Damilola?”.
“It’s a unique and pretty name” she said.

I will not betray the true intentions of my past self,
In an attempt to explain myself, once again,
meaning I didn’t really have an answer to that.
“My memory has gone askew, untrustworthy” I say.
I am reminded of the time when I was going into secondary school,
that was when I decided to go by my middle name,
Maybe it’s because I was tired of people,
including myself,
pronouncing my name wrong.
Or having to repeat that error
every time someone new came across my name.
I can’t pinpoint the reason why I go by Faith now,
I wish I could say it was a way
to assimilate and this poem is now the realisation of that.
An exploration of the mindless code-switching
that is subconsciously imprinted in me
but that would be untrue and misleading,
Like the way my name sounds on your lips
In truth, as a Nigerian I understand my name,
its origins and roots.

Nigeria is similar to Ireland in some ways.
Once upon a time they were colonised by Britain.
The government tried to reduce the hold they had.
They were subdued and lost their language.
And now most people in the country speak English.
Tangent, the need to explain myself,
Born there, raised here, grew up in Kildare.

I’d liken my name to Alex
A common unisex name.
It’s additionally the Josephine of Joseph,
the feminine and masculine version of a name that can be shorten to Joe
Damilola or Damilare can be shortened to Dami,
But none of these names can truly quantify the meaning of my name.
So, I guess it was an act of vindication,
For all the erroneous pronunciation,

Like Ireland losing a part of itself to survive.

A way for “ease” to be found on all tongues and my ears.

Damilola meaning God has given me wealth.

TOWNLAND

michael farry

I emailed him the scan
of the six inch Ordnance Survey map showing
the cottage, no longer there,
the railway, closed,
the level crossing gates, disappeared
and pointed out that the townland boundary,
row of blacker dots,
ran through the little wood behind our house
along the drain which we considered bottomless
proving that for all those happy years in the fifties
we had grown up in Carrowleam,
the quarter of the jump—
probably referring to a great leap by a forgotten hero
or one who never existed—
not as we had thought, in Shancough,
the old hollow—
though which of its many hollows gave its name
nobody knows or cares.

Some believed we lived in Knockadoo
the hill with the burial mound on its summit—
probably Neolithic
and possibly a satellite of Maeve's cairn on Knocknarea—
but I never accepted that
because another of the same name, now dead,
lived there in the big farmhouse,
up the railway line, across two fields
and I was always of the opinion
that one of me per townland was more than enough.

A FAMILY LEGACY

rianna carroll | p. 73

Tony Brogan, The Founding Father of Omagh-Irish



Murder victim's childhood friend writes open letter to killer

By [Name]

... of the ...

... of the ...

... of the ...

WATTERSON'S

DECEMBER 2023						
	1	2	3			
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
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CRANN BETHADH - THE TREE OF LIFE

j.s. bailey

A sky of pink and orange hangs above the treeline of the Wicklow Mountains as a father and son kneel on a small patch of flat land. The man rakes the ground with his suit jacket sleeve, shifting twigs and rotten leaves. The boy tosses any remaining debris aside.

“The Celts used to believe trees were our ancestors,” the man says, plunging a hand-shovel into the crust of the earth. “They believed they were gatekeepers to the Otherworld.”

“What’s the Otherworld?” asks the boy.

“It’s where you go when you die.”

“I thought that was heaven,” the boy says, collecting chunks of soil held together with grass roots.

“It’s like heaven, but a different version of it.”

“So which version did Granda go to then?”

“I don’t know,” says the man, searching the sky for an answer. Crawling to the top of the shovel, his fingers curl around the ashwood handle while the metallic tip holds its balance on the ground. “Here. You have a go.”

The boy takes the tool from his father. The handle feels thick within his palm, he lines it up and pokes it into the surface. “What was he like?”

“You’re Granda?” says the man. “Sure you know what he was like.”

“No. What was he like before I was born? Like before he got old.” The boy is attempting to cut through the earth using the shovel’s edge in a saw-like motion.

The man taps the back of the boy’s hand and takes the shovel. “He was a stern man,” he says, meeting his son’s gaze. “From a different generation, you know.”

He wrenches the shovel into the ground and tugs it toward the centre of the hole. The final piece of crust tears away from the surrounding grass roots like velcro and the boy places it aside with the rest.

“So, if those are the gatekeepers,” the boy says looking around at the grand sky-stretching columns of bark. “Does that mean Granda will be one too?”

“I don’t think your Granda would be all-too-pleased to find out he has a job in the afterlife.”

The man reaches his hands into the hole, where the boy is pulling densely packed earth out as best he can. “Pretty tough isn’t it?” says the man, combing through thick clumps to form a shallow bowl in the ground.

The boy rubs his face along his sleeve while his father reaches to the side and picks up a cylindrical container. Then, gripping it at both ends, he presents the cardboard container to the boy. “Care to do the honours?”

Delicately holding the container, the boy lowers it into the hole. He sits the container into the dirt and twists it side to side. The earth moulds to its shape and rises half an inch around the border of its base. Remnants of smudged tears glimmer at the corner of the boy’s eye as he wipes dirt into the thighs of his loose fitting black slacks.

“How does it work?” asks the boy.

The man stretches his palm around the back of the boy’s neck and gives a gentle squeeze. “Well, your Granda’s ashes are in here,” he says, pointing to the cylinder, tracing a short line from the base to the mid-section. “Then there’s a little soil. And above that there’s a seed.” The man undoes his cuff and sticks his thumb beneath the sleeve of his white shirt, using it to soak up the tear that is streaming down his son’s cheek. “After a while, the box will decompose, and as the tree grows, your Granda’s ashes will form part of the roots.” The man throws his suit jacket onto the sunlit forest floor. “Something like that anyway.”

“How long will he take to grow?”

“Well,” the father starts, allowing a sigh to leak from his breath before he continues. “It takes a long time for a tree to grow.”

The boy slightly nods his head and the man starts brushing the dirt back into the hole. His son disperses the dirt evenly and packs it tight with the press of his hands.

“We can visit every year and see how it’s getting on,” says the man, taking to his feet but the boy stays on all fours, patting the surface as evenly as possible. Then he wipes mucky hands on his baggy white shirt until it resembles used toilet paper.

The pinks of the sky turn to reds and the land becomes encrusted in a golden glow.

The father rests his arm along the boy's upper back. "One day, your Granda will stand *strong* above our heads. He'll have *many* branches reaching off in every direction, *thick* bark skin and roots that anchor him down *deep* into the earth."

The boy nods with an accepting smile.

"...leaves the size of your *head*," the man continues. "And you never know...he might even make a new friend."

"You mean the other trees?"

"Or a squirrel," the man says, which makes the boy laugh, failing to catch a tear rolling down his neck and it dries into his outstretched collar, forming a blotch of grey.

"How will we know how to find him?" the boy asks.

The man searches the forest floor. "See that big stick over there?"

"Yeah."

"Get it for me." The man picks his suit jacket up from the ground and drapes it over his hands, held together at his waist. He gives a nod to the grave.

The boy returns with a thick branch, almost as tall as him.

The man steps to the side of the patch and rotates the pointed end of the stick while driving it into the earth.

The boy stares at his father with a raised brow. The man hangs his jacket on the branch and ties the sleeves together in a tight knot.

The boy smiles and takes his father's hand. "Da," he says, looking up at his father.

"Yes son?"

"What is a Celt?"

TRAVEL

con henry

I make my pilgrimage across
cobblestone paths and tarmacadam,
beaten foot in beaten
boot to the stone.

One by one, follow.
With blessings from the guard, we pass
under the arch, inside
the dragon's mouth.

Communion is average wine
and a deep breath of shoeshine,
we are baptised by sweat
and a chorus of bubbling laughter,
erupting from the parapets
and balconies of the castle.

Here, in this cathedral
with men in lusty bliss against the walls
and fluttering neon feathering the ground,
I am holy.

I mouth the words to another salvation,
out into the rafters,
out into the gazing faces congregated,
out into a sky I can't see - nor wish to.
I piece together a peace in my heels,
I do the movements of my sermon,
I am here as one of the divine -
an angel encrusted in red lipstick
and a blond wig.

I am here.
I am here.
I am *here*, where I am meant to be.

It's hell in sunlight -
crusty foundation and bloodied ground
- and it's worse under the stars.
But a bottle breaks and a fight breaks

out, and the shards sparkle like glitter.
The sacraments are done again,
for another rising sun. We reacquaint
with our hallowed flesh and collect
our belongings near the door.

We, congregation, part
from the mass,
but not long.

One by one, pass inside
the mouth, and mouth
along with the angels
at tonight's rapture -
you win a drink for playing along!
Eucharist comes, communion comes,
we have our share of eulogies,
and we piece together a peace
here.

I am here.
I am here.
I am *here*, where I am meant to be.

LUNCH IN THE DINN RÍ

jacob ray-halliday

She strips me with a wrinkled glance as my mother spills my guts to her. ‘My daughter was the very same’, tells the woman, uprooting an olive with a toothpick, tales of their recent trip to Oslo (‘the air is wonderful’), and how excited her Tilly is to finally be a *Trinner*. Lighting her *Vogue Bleue* cigarette, the woman is joined by her husband & the daughter; ‘she’s gorgeous’, says my mother (I take her word for it).

Along the reclaimed
timber beams
sectioning the sky,
a tangerine cat lies
sunbathing
in pike position.
Beneath me,
its charcoal friend
ambles through
the legs
of a French
bistro chair,
silent upon
the Moroccan tile,
its tail aimed
heavenward.
Behind the husband’s
wispy skull,
ropes of water rise
from the limbs
of the Liberty Tree,
and like dandelion seeds
woven into the wind,
droplets are carried
to the ether, shivering.
‘What is it you said your son is doing?’
the woman asks.
The cats now sleep
entwined,
my coffee is still warm,
and the white sun
anoints my skin;

for a fleeting moment
I belong to you...
'Tell the lady what you're doing so'.

FIRST VIEW OF HOWTH
eleanore jenks



NOTHING WAS MISSED

david o'neill

Steam curls high from the kettle, spreading over the window in waves and blurring the view. All you can make out are the last few blood and yellow leaves, shivering and resilient. The cat is on the windowsill, impatient and pixelated. You open the door. He slides through like smoke. Leave it open, you think. *Let the sounds in, and the music.*

Rain has left the bench looking varnished, long pools collected in the marrow of its ribs. He insisted on buying it, said that he'd sit there all summer, and you notice its corners and how they rise, peeling and stippled like hay. Water spills over the lip of a pot on your stove, hissing accusingly, and the noise of it snaps you from it all; the rain, and his bench, and him. They are probably hard boiled now. You had put on two, muscle memory. Didn't he get a boiled egg on his birthday, and hadn't you carried on this familial tradition just so he could find some part of home there in your bones.

His egg can go in the fridge for lunch.

The kitchen table smells of grease and lops when you lean on it. How have you only just noticed? You always had a good eye, he said; one that darts, or flashes, or zips. You saw his odd socks, and his tired skin, and he'd say that you see too much, and you would blame it on your fast eyes. You haven't been watching things that closely recently, though. Aren't the daffodil bulbs still in the boot of your car? you think. And the first frost has been, pulling the sodden soil together, huddled and conker hard. Surely it tiptoed. It made no sound, there was no notice period.

And has the wallpaper lurched past kitsch, too? Migrated into some uglier, neglected thing? You look around the room, pausing at porcelain bowls and the motley wall tiles cut in rough, irregular shapes that accidentally tessellate. It must have been popular at some stage, at some beautiful precipice when functionality was no more important than those other, looser things. Things that felt exotic, like coming from Latin American, or being left-handed. You run your finger over their glaze and hold it up to the window. An arc of grease rests on your fingertip like a toupee. The tiles are an ice-cream; they are mint, and honeycomb, and vanilla, and you think of him again, curved over a colour fan with a gentle fizz of paint on his face and lacquer-voiced podcasts filling the silence of the room. He chose them, remember? All this, decay, it is his fault, not yours. Timeless, he had said. You start to prepare food, but your hands feel clumsy, —as though they have swollen, and won't fit into your pockets.

Outside, the concrete slabs are slick and rain darkened. Puddles have collected in the crooked ones, reflecting the dull wall of clouds overhead. A strip of tarp you had nailed onto the shed roof has torn and it is waving joyfully, like a flag. With a plate of food in one hand, you run a dish cloth over the bench before sitting down. As you eat,

light peeks through the clouds in thin cables. It is quiet and you suck the air down into your chest in greedy gulps. Those first few months were soundless too, before the other houses were rented to Margaret that works a nightshift and Teddy with the unfortunate back condition. Now it is horrible, and loud, and full as a river, but back then you could bathe in the sunshine of each other and say the small words. Your blood would simmer then with the knowing that this road, and the next one over, and all of the building site gardens and half-finished buildings were yours and his, and that was enough.

Rods of electricity run down your legs at the thought, and you want to run away. Instead, you hold, and sit and slide your fists, clenched and tough like marble, down your thighs to soften the panicking tendons. It hasn't been this bad in ages. Could be hormonal. Or maybe it's that the prayer- silent winter is now sitting squat on your windowsill, draining the colours and heat from your house.

Seasonally affected décor, you think, smirking.

Your blood dilutes at the thought. The vibrato of your chest tapers and runs smooth. And wouldn't those colours bounce and glow if it were July? Things look better in the sunshine, don't they? Cool water pours over you. Your thoughts ease, and shrink, and thaw. It's okay, you think, nothing was missed. Your eyes are still fast.

*

There is a mouse in the porch. The cat has unpixelated and left it as a gift, or a trophy, or a punishment. You ignore the stomach sick sweat of being seen in your dressing gown to crane over it, all goose pimples and pride, on the cold porch tile. It looks beautiful, in a way. Nut brown with a splash of white across its still, dead, belly. It has bubbles for eyes, glassy and berry red. You think about taking a photograph of it but stop yourself. He would have said that was gratuitous. Instead, you sweep it into a plastic bag and thank the cat for being loyal.

You dress quickly. Despite what bus posters and nameless, smiling heads on television are saying, you are sticking to dark colours and winter can go fuck itself. Anyway, there is nothing delicate about seasons, no playfulness, or nuance. They are numbers, battered into rows. Seven, by four, and then by twelve. There is no music.

There is a scarf on the coat hook, some featherweight armour for the wide greyness. Before leaving, you twist it around your body and tie it into a French knot. You notice that the swelling in your hands has subsided. You slide one into a pocket then, making sure you have your key.

28 SEAPOINT

ina nolan

We move the valuables upstairs
Well, valuable
The free TV off Facebook marketplace
None of driving so we dragged it to the DART- awkward, staggering

There's already an itching
Music from three linked speakers goes straight through uninsulated rooms
The whole house feels like a holy chorus, a choir like medley of warm, tipsy song

I blink. The room is overflowing and me with it.
People are load bearing walls.
There is laughing and tender greetings and
I have blood red, wine lips. Seapoint's drunkest vampire.
A friend grabs my arms and I am dancing
Everything is slow and all at once
I can hear time, it is fluttering like a butterfly inbetween my cupped palms.

The floors are sticky and rotten and secretive
They have seen friendships cracking and snapping like a Rice Krispie cereal under the strain of outgrowing each other
Two candles melting side by side, one faster than the other, paralysed in the knowledge that soon it's light will go out

The fireplace is used to crowding and growing warm from the lean of a head on a shoulder
A hand squeezing an arm
I suggest we have a sleepover every night until we die
And then am teased that we live together
Every night is already a sleepover
But you don't understand! I mourn it everytime you leave the room

In April drafts, we etched our names into an upstairs cupboard
Giggling like children playing explorers
This is discovered land, we have claimed it as ours
Bury us in our dressing gowns to rot in the back garden, it is too cold to take them off anyways.

We joke if we were ever to be robbed there is nothing valuable to steal.
Oh but there is, there is, there is.
It just couldn't be stolen if they tried.

TEN THINGS THAT OUGHT TO GO

helen jenks

1

when I think of leaving, or going, or coming and going,
I think first of the bottles piled by the door, empty,
waiting for an end that never comes,
for the five minute walk to tesco is too far to go
when one is laden down with shards of glass

and thinking of other things, an end that never comes
hanging in the mind

2

not unlike the flowers I left for too long
in ill-suited vases, weighed down with pollen,
both of us, sneezing

3

though if i made a list
of all the things alive and living in my head

there would be both too few and too many:
dinner candles, artwork, names of stuffed animals,
all the bike routes into town, mythologies of
my own creation, the photo I took of you
the morning after you told me
which is a myth, a creation,
in and of itself

and something must go
but I live only to remember

4

the things I have collected
haunt and haunt
a tapestry of longing
save for the

5

books
there are too many

6

but what is it to go, really, when there are so many
ways of going, when one could go the way
the rats have gone, paws upturned towards the day-old
sky, tossed in bins or dragged away

or chopped off, like my hair,
aching for change, thrown away
to the mountain

there is never an end, here,
everyone gets a turn
for elegies

7

my CV, I think, should go somewhere
ideally the knitting store
down the road

if there is an end for me
it comes slow, then quick
a skein unwinding into some
quiet, cobwebbed corner
of this homely little house

nestled in
with spiders

8

Hedigan's will go next, when there is
an underground to this city
and all the locals will drink elsewhere
though we stay there through the evening

in case the city takes us with it too
and there is reason enough
to move on

9

the construction on the canal
must be finished soon

I need to sit

and be drowned for love of you

10

me, I should go,
I have lived here too long

for the first time,
I think about what it is
to be left behind