



BRAY ARTS JOURNAL

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Weighing In by Layla Moroney

Breakfast was an apple at ten to feckin' seven
I ate a spoon of Muller Light for my tea break at eleven
So now my tummy's rumbling, but no morsel shall I eat
Until after the dreaded weigh-in, as then I'll have my treat

I take the woollen jumper off, the trainers come off too,
I might take off the earrings because I didn't have a poo,
The watch is rather heavy, sure my phone can tell the time
I wonder if I lose the bra, would it be a crime?

Gemma's feeling anxious as she's waiting in the line
She ate a wheel of cheese, drank a barrel full of wine
Trisha's waiting patiently with a smiling happy head
Hasn't touched a carb all week, not even 'Be Good' bread
'My week was great', I tell them with a grin
Forgetting about Friday when I knocked back Gordon's Gin

My card goes in the laptop, up on the scales I go
I hold my ass and tummy in, why I'll never know
'Down 2 pounds' says Linda, as she hands me back my card
'Well done' says Gemma behind me, 'now picture that as lard!'

Gemma hops up next, praying for a miracle
Remembering the wine and how she was so comical
'Down a half' says Linda, as she writes it in her book,
'That must have been the quark' she says, as Linda gives a look

Trisha's turn comes around, as she steps up on the scales
'Been good all week' she says but Trisha's telling tales
She is up 2lb, and needs some intervention
Milk and cheese not measured, poor Trish forgot to mention

Group talk begins, awards, claps and cheers
Stories of food and recipes, and some involving beers
Highs and lows, ups and downs, tips and tricks galore
Until next week my dears, when we shall weigh once more!



Let us Think that we Build Forever by Ellen Britton

'If you borrow something, always give it back in better nick'. She could hear his voice. It was his mantra and it was embedded in her psyche. She was afraid to look behind her, knowing he would not be there.

Holding back the tears that threatened to spill over, she ran the rag up and down the spokes one final time and then spun the wheel. She shouldn't really be doing this the day before the funeral. She should be inside talking to the friends and relatives who had come to convey their condolences. What the hell! She had talked enough. She needed time to grieve and to think.

It was only a few days ago that together they had removed all the grime and rust from the old bicycle. The sprockets were well oiled so that the wheel spun smoothly reflecting the sunshine into her eyes, making them water – at least that's what she'd say if anyone came out. Emma had wanted the bike for her eight year old daughter. She had felt privileged and honoured to be the one to get this bike. It was the bike on which she had learned to cycle. The dents in the frame and the scrapes on the orange paintwork recalled for her the first nervous efforts to balance on a machine that had no right to stay upright. It brought memories of exciting family expeditions to the country and to the seaside as well as the not so exciting trips to school.

The bike looked better than new, at least in Emma's eyes. The dark bits where the chrome had worn off were black and glistening, but the flaws on the frame added character to the old machine and told a story of trial and error, courage and perseverance, just as the furrowed forehead and lined face of Emma's father told its own story.

Although he was in his eightieth year he had been in good health; he needn't have died. Emma shuddered involuntarily. How could the bus driver not have seen him? It was broad daylight! All they would ever know was that having been hit by the bus, he had died instantly. Did he walk out in front of it, unheeding? What had him so distracted? Did the bus driver suffer a lapse of concentration and not see him? They'd never know. It was enough that he was dead. He had lived a good if simple life. He was much loved and would be badly missed.

Kate interrupted her reverie.
'Do you remember these?'

The carpentry books! How could anyone forget them! How could any of his four daughters forget those interminable evenings trying to understand the carpentry drawings their father used to explain algebra and geometry? Emma cringed when her father took one or other volume of his *Audels Carpenters and Builders Guide* down from the bookshelf. He would metaphorically nail his daughters to the kitchen table, explaining to his dull-witted children the principles of angles, triangles, the use of compasses and how to draw arcs and circles. Failing miserably to understand, Emma would pretend understanding, just to get away, while Kate struggled with the problems and ended up in tears of frustration, no wiser for the time she spent wrestling with the concepts that her father tried patiently to explain.

'There are four books. We should each have one,' Kate said. Emma got volume 2 since she was the second eldest. She still didn't understand the technical drawings, the geometry and the algebra used in building and carpentry but she loved the books, the yellowed pages rimmed with gold, the black leather covers, the smell of old books. Emma opened her volume, just to look, just to feel the pages. The name, J. Finn was scripted in faded grey ink on the flyleaf with the date Oct. 1925. That was her grandfather, whom she had never known. He had died before his grandchildren were born. He had passed these books to his only son and now his four granddaughters were to have them.

Thinking of the irony that there were no grandsons to whom to pass on these male oriented books, Emma opened the next page and read the quotation from John Ruskin, 19th century art critic: "When we build, let us think that we build forever. Let it not be for present delight nor for present use alone. Let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for; and let us think, as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come when those stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say, as they look upon the labor and wrought substance of them, "See! This our father did for us."

For the umpteenth time that day Emma held back tears. She smiled, glad that she had worked on the old bike. The bike in itself didn't matter. It was the principle involved in working on it. The bike

wouldn't last forever, but the lessons, the value of honest work and integrity that she had absorbed

from her father would. She would see to it that those principles would imbue the lives of her children too.

"This is what we should read at Dad's funeral mass tomorrow. It says everything," Emma said. She handed the book, page opened to Mary, the eldest daughter. She read it aloud. "Yes, that about sums up the philosophy of father," she said.

It was the perfect quotation.

'Mermaid' by Patricia Aherne O'Farrell

To call it a lobster boat would be too grand by far.
A squat little thing scraped bare
in Spring, right back to wood; primed,
painted, rigged out with care.
Off out and away again, come Summer days
by harbour's mouth.

On this particular one
the woman sits astern not breathing in
the stink of bait. At prow the artist fisherman,
legs well spread, pulls in
the speckled sparkling creel;
engrossed - while she so quietly slips
her clothes - and overboard she goes.

Suppressing gasps as naked skin
meets icy sting; cold cold the shock to body
and the heart - she swims without a splash
lest she be spied upon, adrift.
When plank of boat at last she meets
no purchase can she make at all
so wet and slippery are her feet.

Meanwhile the man aloft quite shocked
to find a mermaid lady in the act of breach,
leans out and down to reach this 'catch of day',
and haul and haul and haul within.
No shame or shyness did the hussy show
exposing parts a tingling and aglow
to heaven's laugh.

A-ha! But here's the lark! When Summer's gone
and hobs and nobs collect indoors for Winter
warmth,
what does she spy but her own self on show
among seaweed fronds, there cast in bronze.
Entitled 'Mermaid' with below, a price of
monumental
height. She turns about, she flips her tail,
befitting one day's merry saucy tale.

The Wexford Train by Richard Webb

Clutching our coffees and our
free passes from a grateful nation,
We board the sleek, neat train
settling ourselves on the seaward side,
for the views, herself against the glare.

A quartet of gentlemen of a certain age
enjoying their regular jaunt,
Joke about the stations murals, the limping
Black and Tan and his bandaged bulldog.

Stark sea cliffs streaked by cormorants and
kittiwakes.
The low shingle stretch of the Murrough
and shining levels of the wildfowl
sentineled wetlands.

Plunging deep into the wooded wonderland
of Avondale while bridging rushing waters.
Stopping at quiet stations in the Early Corrugated
style.
Past Woodenbridge and its ghost train to
Shillelagh.

Edging the reed-fringed Slaney,
Broad salmon road to Vexfjordur.
The loveliest line delivers us to the timbered quay
And leaves us on the lookout for lunch.



Tommy Mason (1928-2015)-now it can be
'toll'd' by Michael Doorley

**And thought of how, as day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
'Peace on earth, good will to men'.**

(Henry Longfellow)

The sound of church bells summoning the faithful to prayer (traditionally thrice daily) has been an integral part of the Christian tradition since the fourth century. Neither encouraged nor discouraged in Scripture, the art of bell-ringing had evolved to its present stage by the mid nineteenth century. Here in Bray, the bells of Christ Church have been pealing since 1881 and the remarkable aspect is that for half of that time since, one man Tommy Mason- campanologist extraordinaire- has been a central figure. Tommy was born (or cast- in bell terms) at Windgates, where he lived for all of his life. The only child to loving parents, he grew up living and working the healthy outdoor life. He intimately identified with his scenic locale and though always attuned to the times he lived through, he was very much part of the fabric of old Bray. He was quick witted, fit and active and never lost the common touch in his dealings with people of every age, status and all walks of life. Although an innate countryman, he also evolved into a streetwise 'Townie' through his years at Arthur Guinness & Co. in Dublin, where he spent most of his formal working life. When he retired from the brewery in the mid eighties, he bought a little Hiace pick-up van (known locally as the 'Wanderly Wagon') to continue his busy endeavours. If something needed doing then who better to complete the task than the self-styled 'Sheriff of Windgates'. But nothing exemplified him nor indeed cemented his iconic profile right across Bray more than his position as Ringing Master at Christ Church, a role he carried out with gusto for over seventy years.

The history of the church and the bell tower (1881) has been well documented over the years. There are eight individual bells with an average minimum of four being struck in unison as they reach their crescendo at 12 midnight on New Year's Eve. The bells are hung for traditional "full circle" ringing. Sometimes, for solemn occasions such as funerals, leather pads are attached to one side of the clappers, so as to effect a quieter tone. Thus, one strike will produce a loud sharp 'open' tone, whilst the counter strike renders a subdued 'muffled' tone. There is no guide or instruction manual to refer to, hence the complex skills are handed down through the ages. The art of bell-ringing requires a basic level of fitness (with stamina being

more important than strength) patience, commitment and above all teamwork. After about six months training, the novice ringer will have developed a sense of rhythm and timing. He or she must take cognizance of the bell striking immediately before and the bell striking after, oftentimes in changing numerical sequences. Hence while being musical is helpful it is not as important as numeracy for accurate timing. Because Tommy had mastered the full range of skills, under his stewardship, a whole generation of bell ringers were trained to the task. "Go handy, grip like this" he would urge "and don't pull harder on the sally than needs be". His personalised version of health and safety and checking the tone of the bells was achieved by clambering up the narrow winding steps to the top of of the bell tower and giving each bell in turn a good kick. "Sound out".

Traditionally, there was a social aspect in that after practice, the thirsty bell ringers would retire to a local hostelry. It was here that the full range of Tommy's sharp humour and repartee came to the fore. For about thirty years, the favoured venue was the Vevay Inn, then run by the Kennedy family. Over time, these post-practice social encounters became 'full circle', as the regulars in the pub would 'chime' in. Tommy was uninhibited, gloriously self assured in his natural habitat and taking impish delight in being centre stage. He could literally hold his audience in the palm of his hand, poking fun with his colourful animated dialogue. When men gather socially, many will try to weave a positive self-image through role-play in order to impress others or to forge acceptance. Tommy never had to feign a role- as he had no time for pretence or to use his own words 'playing to the gallery' to court popularity. He didn't need to. He was authentically himself, wherever he turned up and his consistent stance was that he 'couldn't give a s***te' what others thought of him. Irish pub parlance used to thrive on light hearted teasing or 'slagging', so as to elicit and gauge a response. Tommy was adept at this code and would dismiss naive or mischievous banter with a strident, colourful (but never offensive) 'one liner'. He was thus holding court one evening when some of the locals (ever keen to join in the 'craic') began to extol the prowess of a local

teenager who had aspirations as a bell ringer. This was deliberately planted within Tommy's earshot, just to gauge his reaction and he duly rose to the bait, asking for the name of this young fella. Apparently, it was a young 'Murphy'. Tommy's face clouded with incredulity.

"Young Murphy!.....You're joking me now" (taking a swig from his pint- all the better to gather his thoughts before declaiming) "He wouldn't pull----- **Rhubarb!**"

The general conversation would float along from bell ringing to the quality of the pint and then on to football or horse racing. As with bell-ringing, timing was everything and so by the time the general chat had drifted to more mundane topics, Tommy would have quietly departed uphill, home to Windgates and his beloved Mai. A few weeks after his passing in December 2015, Mai was bemused when David Sammon asked her for a few pairs of his shoes. In an appropriately honourable and practical gesture, the leather soles of Tommy's shoes are now held at the belfry to be used as muffles attaching to the clappers when needs be. He was always keen on sport. A self proclaimed expert on horse racing, a wizard at table-tennis and an acknowledged ace at billiards. He never had to purchase a Christmas turkey, as he usually won the one which was the annual prize at the BMI Snooker and Billiards club. He was also hugely involved in football as a mentor/ coach with Bray Wanderers, especially after he retired from Guinness in the mid 1980's. He was part of a coterie of 'old geezers' who conferred on the sideline, spurring on their team and enjoying the football banter, especially on 'away' trips. Acting as a selector/ scout for Bray Wanderers, he would check out the small clubs around the county for new talent. Word had filtered in about a young athlete in a nearby club but nobody could remember his name-----except Tommy. He and his good friend Liam Richardson were then dispatched to a club up in the hills and a trial was arranged. The young star duly appeared with Wanderers at the Carlsisle Ground and to say he was disappointing was an understatement. He was useless. Unfortunately, they had selected the wrong player (albeit one with a similar name) so he was taken off at half time. Their

embarrassment was compounded when at the end of the game, many of the players discovered that their pockets had been emptied in the dressing room at half time. The 'star' had been the only one with access. Naturally, Tommy took his fair share of 'slagging' in the pub over this but it didn't dent his confidence as somehow he always managed to have the last laugh.

Like most Guinness folk, he had appreciated the traditional brewery custom of giving each employee a bottle of stout at the end of the working day. On retirement many years later, he graduated from being a connoisseur to a virtual ambassador for the product. When holding court at the Vevay Inn, the only time the conversation threatened to take a serious turn was if somebody were critical of the quality of draft or bottled Guinness. As the man who had been responsible for quality control at the brewery, he took it personally and left no one in doubt of where he stood on the issue, as he declaimed the merits of the humble pint. Stephen Collier recalls meeting Tommy at the Vevay Inn during a busy Christmas week in the 1980s. He was sitting on his bar stool surrounded by Christmas decorations and reams of holly, well endowed with red berries which he had been selling earlier. "A great winter for holly" says Tommy, "loads of berries..... a sure sign of s***te weather". His holly was retailing at two pounds, thirty seven pence for a large bunch and when asked how he had calculated his margins to pitch it at such a specific figure? "The price of a pint of Guinness", he retorted. "Stick on another pint there Timmy and a lager or whatever muck young Collier here is drinking".

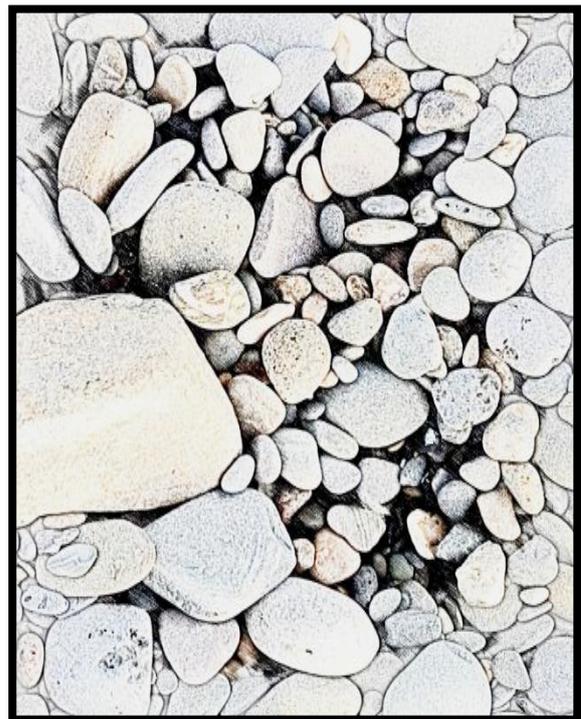
To capture the essence of Tommy Mason in mere print is well nigh impossible and he would have bristled at any ode or eulogy during his lifetime. What is certain is that we shall not see his likes again, for any number of reasons. The concept of such independent 'characters' moulded by their environment and individually hewn as though by the mason's chisel, is now sadly a thing of the past. The likelihood of such an original cast-iron character emerging from this contemporary automated digitalized age (characterised by too much information and too little communication) is zero. Even the pubs have ceded the art of

conversation over to screens of all shapes and sizes. Tommy was wryly amused at young people walking around talking into earphones or taking 'selfies' to store away in cyberspace for the future, instead of truly living the moment. Thus local volunteerism declines and church attendances continue to wane as the very concept of community is fragmented with more people than ever confined to their screens and homes.

In any event, they simply don't cast them like Tommy anymore. The photograph (above) was taken in 1992, during his seemingly 'timeless' period between the ages of 40 and 80. In it he looks just the same as we remember him down through all those years. Here was a direct communicator, a man who lived every day with gusto- as if it was either going to be his first or his last.

The bells of

Christchurch rang out over Bray on a chilly Sunday in December 2015 and for the first time in 70 odd years; the Maestro at the other end of the rope was not Tommy. He was destined to depart this life peacefully on the following day, in his 87th year and the bells were silent. A memorial plaque has been erected at the church entrance but his sonic memory will forever dwell in the 'Joy Bells'- the soundtrack to a life truly lived to the full.



Three Poems by Anthony Huelemann

A Hawk to the North 2009

For Matthew Brady

Scale rendering it almost ordinary,
this moving dot. It is not speed your eyes latch
onto-
speed simply separates it from other dots.
Menace, hereditary and hurtling, not hovering or
roaming,
draws you like a magnet. Even in that
vast almost empty amphitheatre alarms radiate
out and about. Fear is not within you but as it
touches everything out there wave after wave
runs back to you as instinct innate.
Blackbirds, ducks and thrushes dive
to hide in the protectorate of bushes, rushes
and ditch. Getting closer you can give it a name-
Peregrine Falcon. Mature. Male.
Other birds are tied to the earth whether
in flight or perched upon it. This article
is tied to the sky. Bird of prey is far too easy
to say. Pure flight astride deadly insight.
Death on the wing. A terrifying thing.
Its line of flight you can consider pagan
and ancient too its drive and dive. Older
than ogham script and yet all things
modern seek perfections from it. If it holds rage
then it is trimmed and ordered to sleek
and fastidious purpose. Involved with death
from the outset, grief, sorrow and the dark
are not constituents of its constitution.
Only height and distance dictate. East,
South and West anticipate.

Snowed 2010

Its 2am in the morning
of the second day of the year.
I hear, outside, the
loneliest sound ;
a solitary shoveller
clearing snow
from a snow packed freezing driveway.
In the dark and all alone
he works away at it;
scraping down to black tarmac. A line
of dirty snow
piles either side.
It's all very black and white.
On and on he goes. Rhythmically and slow.

The forecast
is for another fall, heavier too,
tonight and again tomorrow.
Then, what's the point? There is none.
Why must there always be one?
Leave the man alone; he isn't the lonely one.

What was it Picasso said?
*It's not the painting. It's
the creating.*

Sorrow 2009

Some sorrows are like old slippers
some sorrows are like memento mori some
sorrows are for the daylight but the majority
suffer the dead of night.

Some sorrows drift in shifts about your
body while skirting your mind as other sorrows
cry for closure. Most just settle around and about
your head
like dreadlocks.

Some sorrows come packaged and complete,
keep to their *sell by* date, deftly doing what *it says
on the tin*
while dispassionate sorrows morose themselves
into the hem of your very being.

And then there is sorrow.

Sorrow singular, irascible, grim.
Sorrow rabid and white. Sorrow
cutthroating your heart without question
and beyond any concession.
Sorrow. Direct and beyond adornment.
Like a mummer on Grafton Street
caught between pretence and disclosure
with sorrow as sole interlocutor.

Sorrow that rends genitals, guts and entrails
into messy little pieces of mimed impossibilities.
Sorrow. Saying *no*, saying *yes*, has no effect.
World and words separate.

NOTE: The editorial team on the Bray Arts Journal
is Julie Rose McCormack (Chairperson). Carmen
Cullen (Treasurer), Michael O'Reilly (Editor), Paul
Fitzgerald and Brigid O'Brien.

Vico Road is my Today by Ann Kennedy

I stop and catch my breath a while.
I lean against the low stone wall and press my knees into the harsh surface.
I secure my position by clamping those same knees together to hold me upright.
Meticulously set aside, neatly, my two walking sticks. They balance there with symmetry and I rest my hands on top of the knee-clenched wall.
Rocking gently towards the wild vast vista I drown the senses in salty moist air, damp with the ever increasing misty rain.
Birds.
White rock fulmars, gulls and kittiwakes float by in the toss of the up-draughts
The sea now finally heard, with the invention of modern technology, crashes against rocks of my once, much travelled Beach.
I am in a good place, indeed. I comfort myself warmly. The Irish East side jewel, my hometown, my psychic mother, my place. A much needed sense of belonging.
Looking downwards at the tarmacadam pathway twisting tangled ferns and vegetation, I glint metal and only slightly see the railway bridge.
“Can I get that far now?” These set of barely usable pins are in question and doubt prevails.
“Would I? Could I?” “How could I?” I dance mad ideas of ways to transport me on a virtual vertical by many means.
I do not stretch it as far as zip wiring down – it doesn’t exist yet, but it’s a very nice thought indeed.
I look to the right. I spy my old school. Memories flood back.
They were not my dizzy heady finer days of childhood. I hated that place with a vengeance and for far too many reasons. I am stilled in the memories flooding back. My legs give a little, and I have to admit that peg leg dependency is futile. I twist to half-sit on a craggy surface once leaned heavily on by old hands. I twist again and adjust.
A view of such magnitude will never allow you face away from its magnetic forces, which call you to open your eyes and pay homage to its beauty.
I dutifully comply, but though my eyes are feasting, my thoughts are dancing.
“I wasn’t bullied.” I muse.
I remember back the fully blacked robed nuns with wimples. They were kind and nice.
“I didn’t have my left hand tied behind me and forced to write with the chosen hand of Gods own right. Instead I continue scribbling with the fiendishly devils scrawl of the left.

Many catholic children were beaten for such a crime as this but I was not, thankfully.
“The girls never singled me out to tease or hurt me but they didn’t either, seek me out for friendships.”
I am pensive now.
I won’t forget the one who did. Though and though brief a companionship forming, it was precious and it unfurled to see me pass on by or more so I was passed by, alas.
I look over in the school’s direction. I am now in a state of overwhelm.
I begin to flag into the deep place inside, all too familiar – I am lost as once I was.
I mutter in low tones aware that with the whistle of a blustery wind, the words will drift and struggle equally for equilibrium now reflected by that of seabirds defending their stance, my home town. Killiney.
I turn upward to watch their feathery outstretched unbalanced wingspans and whisper – slightly out loud, wholly unheard.
“God Ann! You really were very lost in that place.”
Drawn back to crashing waves below I am further reminded now that I did not have technology’s greatest gift on my side, hearing-aids.
I could neither hear speech like the other kids nor could I hear what I do now as I sit looking out to sea.
I never heard the sounds of waves on the shore before my adult days.
I smile awhile as I remember standing alone on the metal railway bridge, many decades ago.
“What IS that sound?” I trembled there. I had hearing aids for the very first time and it was all a foreign language.
A man with his dog passes onto the bridge. Sounds rebound and echo, clanging metal rebounding with his heavy boots.
“Excuse me, can you tell me what that sound is?” I am nervous. It did actually scare me so. “What sound?” he asked bewildered.
I point a finger upwards as if testing wind direction and wait for the rumble tumble.
“That!” I cry out.
“That is the waves crashing onto the rocks below.” He remarks mystified and incredulous.
“Never.” I expel a breathy note of wonder.
“I am sorry I have hearing aids for the first time and I have never heard that sound before.”
He looked still and kindly and stood a while alongside me.
We waited for similar waves. I was like a reborn child and comforted by his presence, comforted I was not in the midst of an impending earthquake as only a few minutes before I was convinced I

would be consumed on the rocking metal bridge to my eternity.

I had felt it an unnatural sound and it brought deep disturbance.

I announce with a shrill voice. "It's terrific!"

"Isn't it?" I ask for confirmation.

He laughed.

"It is indeed."

"It is SO terrific!" I double back once more louder and in jubilation.

He walks on by with a simple word –"enjoy." And he was gone, his mutt jauntily tagging beside.

He fades through the mist and I am back above these memories tossing my mind this way and that.

A tremble begins again inside.

"They didn't treat me badly there." I repeat inwardly.

"I was SO lost, so lost. That's All."

These are MY attempts to justify these feelings of how hopeless I felt for far too long and at far too young an age.

Despite the chilly wind beginning to bite. I remain rooted to my perch on attempting to make some sense of this, this alienation of a schoolgirl, so present still as an adult.

"They considered me dim and slow," I screwed up my face in childlike fashion.

"They wrote in the reports, "Do not expect much from Ann," they said to my parents in these pages, referring to my lack of academic prowess.

"Ann would do well to concentrate more on her studies and not day dream." The wimple traps the scrunched up firm lips of an aged nun.

"The misguided!" I giggle at such a comment now remembering.

Never having a chance to stand up for myself, I do so now with glee.

"Ah!" I rebuke my wimpled nun all in black, and I demand her to understand.

"Sister!" I was DEAF! I barely knew I heard at all, I barely heard a word and by the way Day Dreaming is a beautiful creative mind altering drug. It is a FANTASTIC defense against my personal dread and isolation."

I feel like Shirley Temple aged six standing up to giants!

I was swallowed whole there, as easily as the herring shoals off shore could be by a wandering alien white shark to Irish waters.

That easily consumed facing my unnatural deafness in a sea of noisy children.

I pronounce my explanation fully valid and true.

I remember my suffering there, trapped in a prison of extreme pain and no one knew or thought to

inquire what may have been wrong and difference in this little girl.

So too much was going on for me, the silent child at school and the wild child at home.

A harsh cry rings out and I jolt in the present. Screeching gulls appear overhead in a flurry of urgency.

I am back on solid rock. I feel it pressing into my flesh.

I feel cold and shivery inside.

I rebuke myself slightly for overstaying a visit on this patch of homeland. I shiver as the birds cry out and exclaim "oh dear God I better get home and warm up this body of mine!"

My solid walking sticks like sentinel soldiers are waiting. I move to take firm hold, to rise now painfully, I find I am stiff.

I shake out the muscles and reactivate the blood system and I flex to get all in collective cohesion to step on my shaky path back to my parked adapted van nearby.

I open the driver's door and crank my body inwards and like a rusty tankard I move rusty joints into a driving position.

I wind down the windows for one final view.

I announce with exceptional determination, "I am going down onto my beloved strand, White Rock Beach again, any which way I will get back down there and feel back the times I ran with Timothy a much loved loyal tricolor collie. Far more memories to recall and touch again with mixtures of salty air, dewy tears and wonderous delights.

Memory can be as lively as the presence of a living reality and solid and rock hard for all and for me.

Turning the key in the ignition I find I have been kicked into life with renewed vigor.

I face towards Monte Alverno, my mother's home.

I am more alive and together now.

I have spent a lifetime of learning at 'the academy of hard knocks, I sense and feel not half bad about my own self and personal achievements met.

Amidst the howling chaos of uncertain storms and waves and unstable wings I am fully alive and sure.

I drive on into an uncertain future.

But I drive on sure that I am ok with who I am. I mark my exercise with 100 out of 100.

My efforts paid off –the nuns would be pleased.

I drive with a final giggle.

Hot chocolate next

CARE FULL by Frances Browner

A tower of burnt toast on the table
Melted butter dribbling our chins
Porridge glued to the saucepot jellied
Tea to trot a mouse upon . . . image in

Clothes drying on the radiator
Whiff of Sunlight, Ariel, Surf
Ma making lunches, two cuts of bread
And a banana mashed black, strawberry
Jam for buzzing bees in the schoolyard

Baby shuffles the floor on his bum
Da snaps his newspaper shut and we
File out one by one . . . in different
Eight of us into the Volks-wa-gen

Into marriages; immigration
Care full families of our own.

The Rhythm of Wood by Helen Harrison

'Hazel burns well; made for fire.
Ash splits and cuts easily. The thorn
is the best. Elders are useless', he gestures
through gaps. His hands are veined
like leaves; he touches his cap in thought.

A character from this town land,
born of the substance of soil;
his pride in wood-piles.

A shy bachelor smile, and dragging a branch,
comments on the cold season. His furrowed brow
like his fields are full with life, but worn
with the tread of time. Fertilized with the rapture
of repetition,
feeding his ragged trouser philanthropy?

Forty acres with a rose-scented doorway to the
past,
at last reconciled to being a bachelor and a good
neighbour.
I smile gratitude for his earthy routine –
the rhythm of wood freely given.

GREATER LOVE by Jack Plunkett

*A song about dementia, but also about the
endurance of love and the mysterious power of
song.*

It's alright if you can't recall my name
Why don't we just sing an old song?
The Twelfth of Never, Love Me Tender
And I'll try to sing along
Through these tears, I'll sing along

You once knew me better than I knew
myself
Now you're not sure who I am
Let me sit by your side, let me hold your
hand
And perhaps you'll remember my name

And you'll pretend you know our children
And you'll pretend you know me
And maybe you do, in your own secret
way
Who can say, love, who can say?

So go to sleep, my tired girl
I'll be waiting for you in your dream
And we'll laugh and we'll talk about
everything
And you'll call me by my name

It's alright if you can't recall my name
Why don't we just sing an old song?
The Twelfth of Never, Love Me Tender
And I'll try to sing along
Through these tears, I'll sing along

"You ask how long I'll love you, I'll tell you
true
Until the twelfth of never, I'll still be loving
you"

To hear the song, go to
<https://soundcloud.com/jack-and-angela-plunkett/greater-love-d> ©2017

Five More Musings by Brian Quigley

Catafalque [for Giuseppe (ipriani)]

**Giuseppe the time has come
To take you from Harry's Bar
To Venice's finest cemetery.**

**We have the flower-covered gondola
That you wanted for this journey.
All of your friends will be there –
Hemingway, Hitchcock and Truman Capote,
Clementine, Orson and Charlie Chaplin.**

Across The Universe [for Oisín O'Driscoll]

Once wings were granted
I flew across the universe,
Further than any astronaut
Or cosmonaut has ever been.
I spiraled in and out of orbits,
Dovetailing and daisy-chaining
My way to making new ones.
Now I'm swimming with the stars,
Watching their golden collisions.
Through it all I've not forgotten
That I am not forgotten.

Crocodile

**Leaves collected where wet remained,
Stuck to it like feathers glued to paper;
Now even the wind can't shift them.
At first I thought it would be Chile
But it bellied out in the middle,
Sprouted stubby feet.
So here it comes,
Gold and yellow and brown,
Creeping across the concrete ground.
It's a crocodile a whole terrace long,
It looks hungry and it looks strong.**

Marsupials

In a pouch
At the back of my Moleskine
I keep Post-its
With early drafts of poems,
Poems about
Kangaroos and wallabies,
Koalas and possums,
Wombats and quokkas
And other marsupials,
Animals who give birth
To underdeveloped young
That need nurturing
In a pouch.

Max [for Colin Dexter]

**Max took the lungs out first,
Tut-tutted at their barbecued state.
Next came the heart,
Arteries blocked like a traffic jam,
And the liver, pickled like a gherkin.
Then the pancreas, with insulin sapped out,
And the kidneys, totally clapped out.
Finally the brain, battered and bruised,
And the guts, fattened and abused.
"Sir, you didn't need to be murdered!"**

Birth by Leonard Fitzgerald

Emerge as if from a dream. Dragged into the world as naked and outraged as a newborn, witless save for the terrible cognisance that you will not be returning from whence you came. Eyes held shut against the oncoming saga of futility and the gnawing onset of madness as enshadowed apparitions careen wildly in arrival like a makeshift horde assembled from hell to stand in judgement at your disorientation. You are helpless, beaten, weary even from the stubborn labouring of your lungs, those brown bags filling quivering in exhaustion and then shuddering forth it's relinquished alimentary sustenance converted to a miasma of wretchedness via your foray into the time of no time, the futile barricade against reality, and there is no use in even feeling one way or the other.

This owns you now, the boundless relentless rapaciousness of time. The room spinning in a nautical loneliness, with limbs heavy as concrete, the confines of your skull pounding in the same agonising indeterminacy as the multitude of voices that clamour abound as the fatigue of centuries bears down with crushing oppressiveness and darkness upon your feeble attempts to fend off what cannot be fended, the naivety of a man who cannot see that his undoing and doing are one. You marshal every last ounce and reserve and assert your will to order your respiratory system to cease but it does not. You are aware only of foulness and languor.

The sounds of morning form a bizarre reference for your ill-timed return and the distance between okay and now is an eternity, an expanse vast and inhospitable, and the tearing scrape of bedlinen and unnatural echoes of articulation boom off every surface external and within and you envision with eyes closed the delicate miscellany comprising the fabric of your inner ear rustling in torturous gusts like winds of space roaring in immensity and you dare not leave this bed, this bastardised uterus, this twisted mass of entrapment, this stinking abomination that shits forth it's vile progeny with all the disdain of a discarded prophylactic gelatinous and vile, but you

cannot stay here, cannot weather this awful culmination of ruin.

You turn your head, rub your eyes, look back forward. Nothing has changed. You are still here. You comfort yourself with the knowledge that you are infinitesimally closer to cessation than you were before; before you turned your head. Legs banging together in a spastic autonomy, the most powerful desire to stop them effecting a few seconds of stillness before they resume their clattering bone shaking concussions.

The enormity of it all. What is left but to keep some halfhearted vigil against it. You look around your room hoping to find something that might take this away but you will not. You wonder how you ever thought otherwise, how you ever attached such a childish hope to your crudely forged itinerary that some other with vacuum equal could somehow fill that roaring void when they too are just as enshrouded in hopeless and dismal despair as you.



Poems by Rosy Wilson

Water-borne

sea water on skin
seaweed strokes limbs
I breathe in sea-mist

waves take over
bear the weight of me
drop me in deeper

memory of origins
formed in the oceans
changing evolving

spray in my hair
salt in my eyes
taste on my tongue

sea-minerals
course in my blood
strengthen my bones

Colours of the Wind – Ariadne's Thread

Light and the Dark
painted on linen
the height of a woman
a spear of white light
pierces layers of colour
cream orange silver

reaches the dark where
the Minotaur waits
Lord of the Underworld
horns at the ready
always in charge

Ariadne
bands of yellow orange red
backcloth of her golden thread
spinning and weaving
a trellis of webs

lover's gift to Theseus
so he can find his way
out of the Cretan maze
into her waiting arms

*from Anne Madden's exhibition
Hugh Lane Gallery 2017*

Star-Struck

They cluster in constellations or
shine apart some twinkling winkinga morse code
for star gazers others
are still lights on a dark backcloth

early riser Venus, Orion's Belt
the Milky Way streams pearls
the Great Bear holds the Plough
stars light the navigator's way.

Cavemen painted rainy Hyades and
Pleiades named for sailors or Seven
Sisters on cave walls in Lasceaux
dated twenty thousand years ago.

One night we all lay on pre-dew grass
watching comets streak across the sky
not knowing where they were landing
we took turns telling names of stars

the moon comes up, the fox barks
a badger rootles in bedded plants.

Haiku

after snow days
sea dip stony walk
recovery

breakers white horses
gallop onto shorelines throw
boulders flotsam and jetsam

breaking bread onto
the bird table I shoo away
marmalade cat-in-waiting

tiny blue beads tip stems
hide among green leaves grape
hyacinths welcome spring

a gathering of poems
you bring me wild daffodils
illumination

field of bright yellow sunflowers
faces upturned to the setting sun
side by side with all the scars of war

Serenity in Limerick by Jamie McDonagh

Come to this place of peace.
My wild spirit, you'll never tame this beast.
A declaration I once withdrew.

Come to this place of peace.
Where wise men humbly welcome with glee.
And a scent of silent aroma fills the air.

Come to this place of peace.
Where broken souls often become repaired.
A feast of love you'll find here.

Come to this place of peace.
God will pave the way.
For I seen those footsteps in the sand.

Come, I received a gift.
The chant of hymn, sweet music to my ear.
Floods of emotion, I confess I almost cried.

Come and see this gift.
The one I got.
Tell your story you used to dread.
For me too I never thought you'd see here.



Dirty Hedges and Roast Potatoes by Ellen Britton

When the Papal Legate came to Dublin in 1961 it was an occasion of great celebration. Everyone decorated their houses with white and yellow bunting. On our road, we topped that by tidying up our gardens and trimming our hedges, all except Mrs. Devlin our next door neighbour. The excitement of the Papal Legate driving by waving at us only lasted a moment. We wondered about all the tidying and decorating. It seemed hardly worth the effort.

Since then, Mam simmered about Mrs. Devlin's hedging, not the eyesore at the front of the house, but the nuisance at the back. She tried bending my ear about it before dinner, but I was uninterested and inattentive and so engrossed in the latest Swallows and Amazons book that Mam had to let it rest. Now we were finishing dinner and Mam was still going on about Mrs. Devlin's hedge. Dad was trying to read his paper, but he couldn't ignore her. No one could.

'We'll do it this evening,' she said.

'Did you ask her?'

Dad looked at her quizzically over the top of his newspaper, his shirt sleeves rolled up, bare elbows planted firmly on the table.

'Of course, I did. What do you take me for!?' Mam replied, slightly irritated.

'I suppose we'd better, then!'

Dad folded his paper with a resigned sigh and slurped the last of his tea. He got up, slapped the newspaper down on the table and headed toward the back door.

'Kathleen and Ann, clear the table and then come out to help,' Mam said, going out the back door after Dad.

'Help with what? What are they talking about?' I asked 'Were you not listening? It's all Mam talked about over dinner,' Ann said

'I wasn't paying attention, I was thinking about Swallows and Amazons.'

'Ugh! I don't want to spend all evening dragging dirty hedge cuttings down the garden.'

From what Ann told me, it appeared that Mam had virtually coerced Mrs. Devlin to allow her to cut down the dusty overgrown hedge between their back gardens. Without that filthy hedging, Mam said, her sheets would come in from the line as clean as when they were pegged out. They were doing the deed tonight, whether Dad wanted to or not.

I started to clear the table and then thought better of it.

'If you clear the table and do the dishes, I'll go out now if you want?' I said.

'OK, I'll come out when I'm finished,' Ann said.

We both knew she wouldn't hurry. Washing dishes was the better option. I, however, couldn't wait to join in the demolition work.

Dad hacked away with the bow saw and Mam held the branches taut to make it easier to cut. Already, her hands were black with dirt.

'Kathleen, start a pile there,' Dad said, pointing to a patch of ground cleared for planting. 'We'll burn the lot.'

'Not, there' Mam said. 'We will burn it in her garden. It's her hedge, not ours.'

I climbed over the railings into Mrs. Devlin's garden and began raking up the cuttings. I piled them in the middle of the garden as far from the hedges surrounding the garden as possible. To be honest it wasn't far from any hedge since the garden was small.

I went into the house then to get some newspapers. 'Come on out, Ann, we are going to light a fire. It'll be fun. Let's pretend we are Swallows and Amazons. Mrs. Devlin's garden can be the island and we'll have a camp fire and roast potatoes in it.' I said.

The prospect of a camp fire, even an imaginary one, encouraged my reluctant sister to join us. It was better than the earlier prospect of unremitting hard work, so Ann came out and got involved. The newspapers were aflame in seconds and the satisfying crackle of burning wood confirmed that the fire had taken hold. Piling the dry hedging on to the fire, the flames leapt high and Ann and I jumped away from the flames when the wind gusted in different directions. It was exciting and fun, like running from waves barefoot on the seashore. Nevertheless it was dirty work and our eyes smarted and streamed from the smoke.

I took a turn holding branches taut for the bow saw while Mam went back to the kitchen to return with four big potatoes which she threw into the middle of the fire. Mrs. Devlin came out and said how bare and exposed the garden looked and Mam said cryptically that she'd get used to it. It did look a bit bald with only stumps of hedge left. Mrs. Devlin was under the mistaken impression that Mam and Dad would 'trim' her hedge, but they had other ideas, and now the hedge was virtually gone and no matter how much Mrs. Devlin moaned about it, it couldn't be put back. She took the hump and stomped back up the garden into her house.

'Perhaps we should have clarified this with her before we started,' Dad said.

'Ah! Just ignore her. She'll get over it.' Mam said.

The job was bigger than it had originally seemed and it was dusk before the last of the cuttings were thrown on the fire.

'Anyone hungry?' Dad asked.

Without waiting for an answer he fashioned a makeshift table using a plank and two milk crates. Mam went to put on the kettle, and Ann brought out a tray with mugs and milk and butter and salt for the potatoes. In the meantime, I used the garden rake to root out the roasted potatoes which were black and looked like lumps of coal.

'Eh . . . can we eat them?' Ann asked, doubtful.

'Course you can. It will melt in your mouth,' Dad said. Holding one like a boiled egg wrapped in newspaper, he cut off the top. Inside the blackened shell was white fluffy potato. A dab of butter on top and a sprinkling of salt and it tasted delicious. The crumbling blackened edges that fell into the soft meat of the potato only added to the flavour.

'Hunger is good sauce,' Mam said digging into the steaming soft potato with a teaspoon.

There they were, a grubby smoke grimed family sitting on a plank, supremely content to eat roasted salted potatoes after a job well done.

I was thinking of Swallows and Amazons again and how when the children were camped on the island they had kept their camp fire alive overnight by placing sods all around and over it until no wisp of smoke came out. Would that really work?

Careful not to rouse Mam and Dad's suspicions, I returned to the fire, ostensibly to rake it out. I raked stray twigs and debris together into the glowing embers. On the periphery of the fire, in the gathering dusk where I could hardly be seen, I dug up sods of grass and placed them round the fire, grassy side in as they did in the book. Within minutes I had built a satisfactory pyramid around the fire, enclosing it so that it appeared that the fire had been put out. Only small wisps of smoke escaped through the gaps between the sods. I filled them with smaller sods of grass.

'Are we all sorted?' Dad asked standing, pouring out the dregs of tea and stretching his aching back.

'Yes. Everything is finished now.' I said.

I climbed over the railing bringing the rake and the spade with me. There was nothing left in Mrs. Devlin's garden. Dad glanced into the garden noting that everything was ship shape. Time to go in; it was getting a bit chilly sitting in the garden. He took up the plank and leaned it against the shed and moved the crates out of the way.

When morning dawned damp and dull I slipped out the back door and down the garden. There was no fire, just damp black burnt out branches. Huh! It hadn't worked. And, it had seemed so feasible when reading about it. Disappointed I returned to the kitchen where Mam and Dad and Ann sat eating breakfast. I poured some cornflakes into a bowl and sat down.

'Did you hear anything during the night?' Mam asked.

'No, why?' Ann and I chorused.

'In the middle of the night, your Dad was snoring like a pig. I turned round to thump him and opened my eyes. There was this weird orange light and shadows jumping around the walls.

'Jim, Jim!' I shouted. I couldn't wake him up, so I left him there.

'What did you think it was?' Ann asked.

'I didn't know. I thought it was the end of the world! I got out of bed and looked out the window,' she said, pausing for dramatic effect.

'What do you think I saw!?'

'A devil with a three pronged fork?' Dad asked facetiously.

'No, you eejit! I saw Mrs. Devlin and Pat down the garden in their dressing gowns beating out a fire. The flames were almost at the hedge on the far side of the garden. Now, how do you think the fire could have flared up again during the night? It was out when we came in, wasn't it girls?'

'Yes. There wasn't even a spark when we left the garden. I looked back and you couldn't even see where the fire had been,' Ann said.

Despite Ann's reassuring statement, I had a sudden vision of me being dragged in shame before Mrs. Devlin to apologise.

'What did you do!? 'Ann asked, all agog.

'What do you think? I got back into bed.' Mam said.

'What if they had been hurt!?' Ann asked, horrified.

'What if !? . . . It would serve them right. If they hadn't let their hedge grow that big in the first place, there wouldn't have been a fire at all.'

'Are you going to say anything to them about it?' I said, shaking in my shoes.

'Least said, soonest mended,' Dad said and cast a sly glance in my direction. He didn't refer to it again. Neither did I.

The Incendiary by Tanya Farrelly

Alice was applying her make-up, as she did every morning on the train, when she learned of her husband's dilemma. Holding her mascara wand to her fluttering lashes, she stared at her reflection in the mirror, as the boys, clad in grey uniforms, descended on the carriage disturbing the reticent commuters.

'What d'ya think will happen with Mr Carty?' said a boy who had thrown himself into the seat next to her. Alice's lashes fluttered before her compact.

Another boy who'd been studying a textbook looked up. Alice could see him in the edge of the glass. 'I don't know. They're talking about Dunner getting back into school because of his background and all - but that would be weird, wouldn't it? I mean, you can't just loaf a teacher.'

Alice dipped her forefinger in a pot of rouge, smeared it on her cheeks and pretended not to listen. A swift glance at the crest on the school jumper removed any doubt that it was Aiden they were talking about. She snapped her compact shut and stared out the window. 'He didn't loaf him but, did he? I heard it was a punch.' 'No, some of the fifth years were there and they said he loafed him. Anyway, Dunner's off his head. He shouldn't be let anywhere near the school.'

'I'd leave,' another boy said, 'if I were Mr Carty. The school board would be giving a license to lunatics like Pat Dunne if they let him back in after that.'

'Dunner used to be alright, but then his Da died and he lost it.'

A tall boy standing in the aisle spoke up. 'Pat Dunne was never alright. It's just now he can use his father's dying as an excuse. He was always a bully.'

'Well, I wish Carty'd come back. The sub's a disaster, hasn't a clue,' the boy with the textbook said.

'What have you got him for?'

'Maths. As if it wasn't difficult enough.'

Alice watched the coast flash past the train window. She thought of Aiden leaving the house that morning, bag in hand - lips grazing her cheek as he told her he'd see her later. When did this incident happen? And why wasn't Aiden at work if the student had been suspended? Alice took out her phone and dialled her husband's number. But then she changed her mind and hung up before it had a chance to ring.

Dunne. Had he mentioned the name before? She thought he had. Wasn't he the kid whose father had died in that horrible accident? It must have been almost a year ago. The train chugged along, jogging Alice's hazy memory. Dunne. She was sure that was the name. She took out her phone again and typed 'Patrick Dunne' into Google. If the kid's name was Pat, chances were the father's was too. She paused and then added two more words: death and fire. She scrolled down the sites as the boys bundled out of the train at Aiden's station.

Aiden drove out to Killiney. He sat in the car, looked out to sea and waited for the train to pass carrying his wife and some of his students. Then he got out, threw his briefcase in the boot and walked down to the beach. It was after nine on a Thursday, he should have been teaching his first session of double maths, not here watching strangers and their dogs gambolling on the strand.

He'd told Mr Lavelle he needed time off after the incident. The principle understood, told him to take as much time as he needed. He still wasn't sure if that had been a good idea, if his absence wouldn't look like an admission of guilt. Maybe he'd have been better to brave it out, to drag himself into the school and ignore the students' whispers. Maybe he should've stood before them and told them he knew they'd heard what had happened, that it was being dealt with and they should all put it behind them. But was it being dealt with - and how? He had Sarah Dunne on the phone three times a day pleading with him, asking him to take responsibility. He wished she'd never talked him into trying to help the kid.

Patrick Dunne had pretty much flown below Aiden's radar until the accident. A quiet, moody teenager, he wasn't exactly unique at the school. He should've scraped by in the third year exams, but instead he got six honours - the second highest result in the school. He could hold his own in any argument, but refused to join the debating society that Aiden chaired. As far as he could see the boy had only one friend, and that was an enigma. He feared it was more a master-slave situation than a friendship.

The first time he met Sarah Dunne was at the parent-teacher meeting in February. Dressed in a white suit, make-up only on her clear green eyes, she'd worried her short blonde hair and told Aiden she was concerned about her son. Aiden looked at his notes. 'Well his grades are good,' he said. 'Second in the junior cert exams last year.'

Sarah nodded and bit one of her pale pink nails. 'It's not that,' she said. 'It's just he doesn't...communicate.'

'With you?' Aiden asked.

'With anyone. You must've noticed it at school. I mean, who does he spend his breaks with? Does he talk to the other kids?'

Aiden considered. He'd never really seen Patrick Dunne talking to anyone except Danny Byrne. 'There's one kid, it's an unlikely friendship I'd have thought.'

Sarah Dunne's face had brightened at the mention of a friendship. Aiden wondered just how unsociable Patrick was at home. 'How was Patrick before the accident?'

Sarah straightened and looked away. 'His father's death, you mean? That wasn't an accident. My husband was high, Mr Carty. He locked himself in his car, covered himself in petrol and set himself alight.'

Aiden leaned forward, he had to stop himself from touching her arm. 'I'm sorry. Does Patrick know it wasn't an accident?'

Sarah turned her spectacular green eyes to him. She blinked and swiped a hand under her eye, somehow managing not to disturb the perfect black line around them. She shrugged. 'Patrick was difficult before his father died. Not difficult, maybe that's the wrong word. He's not outwardly uncooperative, it's what he doesn't say that bothers me.' 'Has he seen a counsellor?'

She shook her head. 'No. I mentioned it after his father died, but he said he was fine.'

'I think it'd be a good idea. There's a school counsellor if you don't want to make it too official. Patrick might feel more comfortable.'

Sarah nodded. 'I think he is missing a male influence, was missing it before his father died. He doesn't speak to me, that's for sure. The thing is if it comes from me, this suggestion, he probably won't want to. Do you think maybe you could mention it?'

'Me? Well, I don't really know your son. I've only been teaching him for one semester...'

'But you could try? I like your attitude. I think maybe he'll listen to you.'

She smiled then and Aiden could not refuse her.

When Alice got home, Aiden's car was already in the drive. He usually got home before her unless

he'd something extra-curricular on. Now when she thought about it, he'd been home a lot more in the past few weeks. He must have been helping that boy a lot before whatever had happened happened. She hadn't noticed his absences too much, she was too busy with the musical society. Two weeks before opening night and the actress playing Eva Peron still didn't know her lines, or her lyrics to be more precise. Alice wondered what time Aiden had turned round and come home that morning. Had he been there all day - doing what? She'd have to tell him she knew. Poor Aiden. Had it been so difficult to tell her?

He was in the shower when she entered the house. His briefcase was in the hall. She listened and then opened the case, it was full of his usual texts and papers. What had she expected? It wasn't like he was masquerading as a teacher. She sighed and eased the clasp closed. A smell of cooking wafted from the kitchen. He'd started dinner. Alice opened the oven to see what it was. A chicken was browning in its dish, skin wrinkling under the heat.

'Hey, I didn't hear you come in.' Aiden entered the living room wearing a t-shirt and jogging bottoms. His hair was wet. He didn't ask how her day was, but kissed her lightly on the lips. 'Rehearsal tonight?' he asked.

'Yeah, I swear if Amy Watson isn't off book this evening, I'll be tempted to play the part myself.'

Aiden grinned. 'You'd love to, wouldn't you? You're probably hoping she doesn't get it right.'

Alice shook her head. Aiden brushed past her to look into the oven.

'Aiden, I heard some boys talking on the train this morning.'

'Yeah?' He shut the oven, walked past her without making eye contact.

'Why didn't you tell me?'

'What?' He was hedging, wondering what it was she'd heard.

'About what happened with that Dunne boy. Did he actually hit you?'

'No.' Aiden sat down. 'He headbutted me. Can you imagine? Didn't know what had happened till I was counting stars.'

'Jesus. Why?'

'Why? The kid's not right, Alice. Who knows his reason for anything?'

'But when did this happen? Why did you not say?' Aiden put his hands together, elbows on his knees and exhaled. 'Because I was too ashamed. A fifteen year old kid laid me flat in the school corridor, and I had to just take it.'

'But he's been expelled, surely?'

He spread his hands. 'Suspended for the moment. There are some who think he should be given

another chance, given what happened. They're putting it down to delayed trauma, grief.'

'But why you? You were trying to help him.'

'Again, I don't have an answer. The kid needs proper psychiatric help.'

'What will you do if they take him back?'

'Put in for a transfer maybe. I couldn't stay there, not if they undermine me like that.'

Alice crossed the room and put her arms around her husband. 'And that's the thanks you get,' she said. 'For trying to be a good person.'

He wasn't expecting the note. A page torn from a maths copybook lying on the mat inside the front door. It wasn't even in an envelope. Aiden stooped to pick it up, thinking it was something Alice had dropped on her rush out to rehearsal. 'Come to the house tomorrow at ten. If you don't, Lavelle will be told everything.' Aiden pocketed the note, thankful that Alice hadn't seen it. Had it simply been luck or had the kid been watching the house and seen her leave. The idea of Patrick Dunne knowing where they lived made Aiden nervous. He had visions of the kid following him home, of him lurking across the street watching the windows, of his eyes following Alice down the street. There was nothing to stop him telling her everything, or worse - using her as a way of getting at Aiden.

The note instructing him to go to the house. What was that about? And was it coming from the boy or his mother? He cursed himself for his stupidity in getting involved with Sarah Dunne. If he hadn't, none of this would have happened. The lad hadn't cared when he'd caught them together. He'd grinned and said he figured there was a reason Aiden was helping him. It was the closest thing to happy Aiden had ever seen him, but now he understood why - the kid could hold it over him - his affair with his mother. There was no way of ending that without some kind of fallout. He'd figured on it being verbal though, something he could deny. Denial was the only tool he could use - that and the kid's mental state. He relied on Sarah having more tact than having her private business broadcast around her son's school.

A week passed after he'd ended the affair. The kid didn't show any signs of knowing. Sarah Dunne had tried calling him. He'd taken the first call but when she suggested meeting to talk about it, he declined. 'Look Sarah,' he'd said. 'You're lovely, but I should never have let things go as far as they did.' 'And what about Patrick?' she'd said. 'He's so much better with you around.'

This angered him. He wasn't about to let her use the kid to make him feel guilty. 'There's not a lot I can do about that. Maybe he'd agree to see the school counsellor. I should've insisted on it in the

first place. I'm sorry, Sarah, but you know my situation. I like you, but the longer we let it continue, the worse for everyone. You must see that.'

And he thought she had seen it. Apart from that one phone call and then a text to say she was sorry it had ended, he hadn't heard from her. It was only after the incident, after she was called up to the school and told what her son had done that she pleaded with Aiden to take responsibility. 'I'm not expecting you to tell them the truth,' she'd said. 'If you could accept responsibility, say you'd said something to provoke him, that it's your fault. I can't have him kicked out of school, Aiden. What will happen to him?'

Aiden hadn't taken responsibility. Instead, he'd said the kid had huge psychological issues - that he'd attacked him with no good reason, that he was a danger to those around him. He wasn't lying. He believed every word he said. Every conversation he'd had with the boy, he gleaned something disturbing in his manner. When he tried to talk to him about the father's death, he'd shrugged and said it was better with him not around. It was when he'd asked what his mother was like in bed that Aiden started to feel really uncomfortable. The boy wasn't close to his mother, he barely communicated with her, but sometimes Aiden saw him looking at her in a way that wasn't right for a son. He hadn't said it to Sarah. He didn't want to anger - or worse - frighten her. She was convinced that his talks with Aiden were helping, that his behaviour had improved, but Aiden had serious doubts. And now the note, he couldn't ignore it. Who knew what the kid might do? He was only amazed that the truth hadn't yet come out. It made Aiden anxious that he was saving it up for some grand finale that would result in him losing his job.

'Jesus, Amy. We're less than two weeks from opening night. Can you not get it right?'

Alice stood, her chair clattered to the floor, the sound echoing round the near-empty hall. She didn't care if she sounded dramatic, she was right. At this rate every person in the theatre would know the lyrics except the actress.

Amy mumbled she was sorry. That she'd get it. During casting, she'd told Alice that she'd played the part two years before, all she had to do was revise the lines. And she did look the part. Alice took a deep breath. 'Okay,' she said. 'Let's try that again. From the top.'

Alice sat back, eyes on the stage. She hadn't meant to lose it with Amy, even if she did deserve it. She wasn't that kind of director. She believed in getting the best from the actors through

encouragement, not balling them out in front of the rest of the cast. It was the note that was bothering her. She'd found it on the mat inside the front door just as she was leaving. She picked it up thinking it was a flyer, ready to crumple it up for the bin, and then she'd read it. She was about to take it into the living room to give it to Aiden, but then she stopped. What did the kid mean, Lavelle would be told everything? What was it that Aiden hadn't told her? Alice had folded the note, put it back where she'd found it and hurried out the door.

Amy stayed back when the others had left. 'Listen Alice, I'm really sorry. I know I've been messing up at rehearsals. I've a lot going on at the moment. Jimmy's not happy about me taking the part. He thinks I should've waited until Jasmine's a bit older.'

Alice sighed. 'We knew it was a big commitment when you signed up, Amy. I wouldn't have given you the part if I thought you weren't up to it.'

'But I am. I've done it before. I swear Alice....'

Alice nodded. 'Next time just show it to me. I shouldn't have lost it with you in front of the others either, I'm sorry.'

Amy shrugged. 'Yeah, well.'

The note. Alice couldn't concentrate on anything, but that note. Normally, she'd have sat Amy down, talked to her about her problems with Jimmy.

'Listen, you'd better get on, no point in giving him something else to grumble about,' she said. Amy grabbed her coat, said 'thanks Al' and hurried from the hall. When Alice got home the note was gone, but Aiden said nothing about it.

Aiden hadn't been able to sleep. As reviled as he was by whatever awaited him at the Dunne house, he was anxious to get there, to discover at last what the boy wanted.

When Alice left for work, he went upstairs to get ready. He put on smart trousers and a shirt, no harm in reminding the lad he was a teacher, someone in a position of power. Someone who could have him expelled if he wanted to. At least that's what he told himself. Maybe he could convince the boy that the decision lay in his hands, that the suspension was only until he, Aiden, decided the boy's fate.

He stood in front of the mirror, soaped his jaw and shaved. He ran the razor meticulously over his skin, no nicks - no slips, today he was in charge. At 9.30am he got in his car, briefcase in hand and drove to the Dunne house.

Sarah opened the door in a white satin robe. Disconcerted, he wondered for a moment if it was she who'd sent the note, a final attempt to rekindle the relationship, but there was nothing

suggestive about her manner. She stood back and gestured for him to come in.

'Where is he?'

'Upstairs.'

Aiden glanced up the stairs, but there was no sign of the boy.

The woman turned and walked into the living room and he followed. 'Aiden, couldn't you do something about this, if he gets kicked out of school...'

'Doesn't matter.' They both looked up at the sound of the kid's voice. He strolled into the room.

'I mean, what does it matter?'

'Patrick, think about the future, you're clever, you came out almost top of the year...'

'If it doesn't matter, then what's this all about?'

Aiden was no-nonsense. He wasn't about to pander to the boy, whatever he threatened him with.

'It's about doing the right thing.'

'The right thing by who? What do mean?'

Patrick Dunne strolled around the room, he stopped by the fireplace and picked up a lighter, he tossed it in the air and caught it again.

Sarah looked worried. 'Pat, what did you call Aiden round here for? Just get to the point.'

The point is,' the kid said, his eyes not leaving Aiden's face. 'You hurt my mother. Nobody should ever do that.'

Sarah raked a hand through her short blonde hair. She glanced at Aiden. 'Come on Patrick, that was nothing, that doesn't matter.'

The kid looked at her, angry. 'Oh yeah, so what was all the crying about? I can hear you mam, the other side of the wall, crying.'

Sarah looked embarrassed.

'And this moron is going to pay for it.' In a surprisingly swift movement, the kid had locked the door, pocketed the key and taken a can of gasoline from behind the sofa. Aiden attempted to get past him to the door, but the kid sloshed the gasoline at his feet, flicked the lighter and held it aloft. Aiden stepped back, eyeing the gasoline on his shoes.

'No, you have a seat,' the kid said, advancing, the small flame still alight. Aiden retreated towards the sofa. Then the kid stopped him. 'Not yet,' he said. He sluiced the sofa, can swinging, and shoved Aiden into it. The foul-smelling liquid seeped into Aiden's trousers. He made to get up. 'You're crazy,' he said. 'You can't get away with this.'

'Patrick, Jesus, what's got into you.' Sarah moved, attempted to grab the lighter away from her son, but she slipped on the spillage. 'Get back,' he barked.

She began to cry. 'Patrick, please.'

The boy started to laugh. 'What, you think Dad's

death was an accident?' he said. 'That fucker deserved exactly what he got.'

'Stop. You don't what you're saying, Pat. And Aiden, Aiden tried to help you.'

For a moment, the kid took his finger from the lighter and the flame went out. Aiden, waiting for his opportunity, leaped from the sofa and slammed into the kid, knocking him to the floor. The lighter flew from his hand and lay there in the gasoline.

Alice had phoned in sick. She'd told Aiden she was taking the car because she'd to go to her sister's after work. She drove to the end of the road and pulled in at the entrance to the park. There she had a view of the house, but the car couldn't be seen from the road.

When she saw Aiden get into his car, she started the engine and followed, making sure there were at least two cars between them. When Aiden turned into the estate, she slowed. When he pulled up, she stopped at a distance. She didn't see who opened the door, but he disappeared inside the house. 'What now?' she thought. She waited five minutes, but her husband didn't reappear. Anxious, she got out of the car. She walked up the street, not caring now if Aiden suddenly emerged and saw her. She had to know what was going on.

What Alice saw when she looked through the window was Aiden rushing the boy and the two of them crashing to the floor. There was a woman too, who was attempting to rise when Alice started banging on the window and shouting her husband's name. For a moment, the three faces looked towards the glass. Then everything was in motion again. The boy hurled himself across Aiden struggling to reach something. Then the woman threw herself on top of the boy. They continued to tussle as Alice looked round, then grabbed a garden ornament and hurled it against the glass. Aiden, with the distraction of the woman in the white robe, managed to wriggle from beneath the boy just as the ornament crashed through the window. Without stopping, he grabbed the woman's hand, ran to the window and shouted at Alice to run. A crowd had gathered now on the pavement. The woman attempted to stop. She pulled against Aiden's hand and screamed something. He tried to drag her with him, but she broke free and ran back inside the house. She had just vanished through the window when the explosion sounded and the room was swallowed in flames. Aiden, falling from the wreckage, screamed for someone to dial 911, but Alice knew that it was too late for the woman and her son.

Poems in March by Rita Ni Ghailin

ONE

The trees from afar look like sentries
Guarding the road to death;
Sharp rocks point skywards
Denoting the way from Earth;
The seat is dirty and dusty
Showing the grime of the world;
Waves splash unceasingly
In the sea which was ever there.
There is a beach beyond, where people walk,
Hung in the hope between,
Not knowing for what they are waiting,
Not yet starting to seek.

TWO

A tiny white-necked bird, perched on a rusty
rail;
A cormorant, gliding, then diving in the sea;
Swans swimming, peacefully, then ugly
walking on dry sand;
Each with its own special way.

And why do we think we should all be the
same,
And agree and concur and accord?
The success is in reaching out and
determining
To make peace for the good of all,
However different we may be

Editorial Comment

Welcome, reader, to the latest volume of the Bray Arts Journal. Since the publication of our last journal, to coincide with the Bray Literature Festival last November, Bray Arts has moved our monthly gathering from the first Monday each month to the first Tuesday, and from The Martello to Jim Doyles, two doors down. We hope to see you there regularly. We are featuring the work of a number of new writers in this volume but also welcome the contributions from many of our regular contributors. Laugh at the dilemma of a weight watcher, take a train journey to Wexford, read poetry collections from Rosy, Brian and Anthony, thrill to another short story by Tanya and hear how love conquers all, even dementia. Please enjoy and consider submitting some of your own work for future publication to editor@brayarts.net