



# BRAY ARTS JOURNAL

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## Editorial Comment.

This volume of Bray Arts Journal is being published by Bray Arts as part of the Bray Literary Festival 2018. Our aim was to provide local authors, poets and artists with a platform that showcases their work as part of the festival. I was delighted with the huge volume of excellent submissions I received for this particular volume and only regret that space restrictions prevented me from publishing them all. Be assured, that if you did submit, your work is on file for the future. So, what can you look forward to in this volume? We have tried to include a balance between the work of some of our regular contributors and some first time writers, between the light-hearted and thought-provoking and between prose and poetry. We hope that you enjoy this collection of work and will consider submitting work of your own for future publication to [editor@brayarts.net](mailto:editor@brayarts.net)

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## Season of Cold by Mitch Staunton Moore

The biting wind nips  
A tattered plastic bag struggles and flurries,  
held fast by a determined still golden tree.  
The wind tries to free  
its twenty-two cent of government-levied life.  
Not a sinner in sight  
Winter begins to establish her hold.  
Her reign to remain for a season of cold.  
She sprays a frosty scent  
her perfume of glittering fury  
marking her territory.  
She curls her bitter cold pelt  
around a warm chimney  
surveying her realm -this world of men.  
A full moon causes her domain to sparkle cruelly.  
Winter sardonically smiles  
then frostbites in envy.  
She'll not be out outdone  
by the pale moon's glory.  
Remaining leaves fall  
as she tightens her hold.  
Her presence established  
by a biting cold  
her grip to remain  
as her season unfolds.

## When buttercups and Poppies Ruled The Earth, and will again soon by Ann Kennedy

Wild flowers of yellow, red and sunny blues are happily nodding to every passerby.  
A tractor comes along the dirt path. Exhaust plumes splutter with mud entrapped. It stutters along, an ungainly, dangerous machine held together with a whack and a plug. Now and then. "Please don't go there". I cry out.

He grumbles.  
The man slithers down the side and waddles to a rustic gate. It screams reluctantly, scraping against stones.  
This little girl runs to find a spot on the fence. She scratches bare legs and is stung by biting nettles.  
Shoes scuffed badly, she balances over the top ridge.

She watches in disbelief.  
The day she ran amongst the buttercups and poppies were over.  
The curlew cries out one last time. The field is now cut by a crushing insanity.  
Spitting out on either side of the tractor's giant wheels are crushed, broken and torn asunder yellows and blues bleeding in a river of poppy blood.  
The field is barren and broken, masticated and chewed.  
The child has turned her head in horror.

Time moves on.  
The power machine of a giant has cruelly run a ridge through their fragility once so brim full of tenderness and joy. Once smothering deeply on the good earth they feel crushed in a stark living isolation against the crowded places of such abundance.

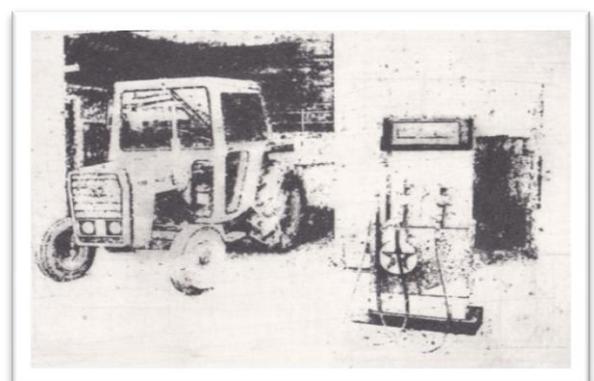
Abandonment is a lonely cave away from beauty in the fields turning to dirt tracks of barrenness.  
The twins are stilled – there is no sound, no cry of the curlew, no buzz of bees.  
All has subsided and been subdued.  
A sister may pick a stem of one such buttercup clinging to a wall beneath a shady tree. Both see it's stamens which once supported life, cupped into a hand.  
Waking each day to see ahead a muddied field, lying idle and forlorn.  
Watching fallow.  
Hearing nothing at all, a gate is half ajar, expectant for change.  
Stones can be kicked aimlessly.

Nothing could stop the machines.  
Nothing could prevent or preserve the reserves.

Nothing could sway callous men eating out on lives of children and vulnerability.  
You can flap but change comes dropping slow.

This country is deep with human rights issues. The gentle touch of diplomacy, intelligence or understanding has escaped by the back door or through Dublin Airport.  
The elite young men brought up in this new age consider only one thing. Money rules 'ok.'

Can we do this?  
Can we travel back to something good?  
Can we run wild again, free of burden and hear and see once more the earth we once loved?  
All human beings should, in their twilight years on this earth.  
Can we cry out for the downtrodden, like curlews protesting the advancing tractors?"  
Can we live again in buttercup fields?  
Can we place the 'do not trespass' notice around our field?  
Can we halt their bulldozing and Blunder, allowing us to create a beautiful picture and story of wonder.  
Can we lie flat and watch clouds and dream as free - for old time's sake - one last time.  
We once kicked off sandals and ran through buttercup and poppy fields.  
Can we ever sit at peace to a simple meal and calmly note a day well spent?  
Can we spew out and trash and sick up the horror and cleanse our road to unlock those gates?  
Can we see rows of tractors gnawing but stilled at our very own gate, heavily chained and impassable?  
You cannot come here! We will cry out.  
You will not come here! We cry out in defiance.  
You will never again come here! Determined.  
You are the broken.  
We are in the last remaining poppy field with buttercups. We are protecting the curlew and the bees.  
We are alive and free.  
We watch the steel and iron and rubber and fatter men stand silent and still, incredulous that such petals have actually outwitted the sledgehammer.  
We will dance now our dream back for one last time - for old time's sake



## Scotswood Road by Brian Quigley

[for Jimmy Forsyth]

Jimmy was old school,  
Didn't mind if his shadow was in shot,  
Sure it proved he took the picture.  
Lost an eye in an industrial accident,  
Thankfully not the one for a photograph.  
Bought a cheap, folding camera in a  
pawnshop  
With his compensation money,  
Did a thousand times more with it  
Than others have done with equipment  
A thousand times more sophisticated.  
Social commentator, documenter of change  
By saying nothing – the pictures did that.

## Steeplejack by Brian Quigley

[for Fred Dibnah]

The world was at Fred's feet  
When he swung in his bosun's chair  
From the top of Bolton's giant chimneys,  
Keeping them in good repair.  
Wind was his only enemy -  
One foot wrong and it was  
"Half a day out with the undertaker!"

Later he took most of them down  
When they were no longer of use.  
"She's going!" he'd cry out  
As the structure began to topple  
Exactly where he had planned it too.  
No dynamite mind you, he was old school,  
Just lit a fire in a cut-out section of the base.

I suppose you couldn't blame him  
For needing a bit of grounding  
In his hard-earned free time.  
He restored steam engines,  
Working with the rusted wrecks  
Until they coughed back to life.

For Fred, I bet heaven is a scrapyard.

## The Burning Bush by Catherine Brophy

There he is, over in the corner. Near the fire. Best seat in the house. Case on the table. Hat off. Overcoat open. Billy the Bar brings him a pint of plain and a ball of malt.

They call him The Burning Bush because Billy saw him one time in Beggar's Bush. As for Burning... well...some people swear that they've seen little fires all over his coat, like flaming polka dots. And rumour has it that, once you see the polka dot flames, you go off and do something surprising.

I suspect he likes being around literary types because this place is heavin' with them. One or two heavy hitters and their wannabee satellites. After work, office workers and a few Civil Servants, like me, come in. I asked him once if he came here for the poets. He just smiled.

I come here because it's handy to work... and o.k., I admit it, writing's a bit of a hobby. I thought that he'd make a great character for a story, that's why, when Billy the Bar is run off his feet, I take The Burning Bush his next drink. It's a chance to get him talking. Not that it's worked. The most I ever got out of him was that his favourite poem is Wandering Aengus. "I went into a hazel wood because a fire was in my head..." You know the one.

"It was me inspired Yeats to write that." Sez he. Yeah right! The Burning Bush is old, but he's not that old.

He seldom opens that case of his but, the occasional time that he does, people say that a silvery light shines out. And that the light is so bright that it's blinding and you can't see him or what he's doing. I had serious doubts about that, till I saw it myself. The case is a battered, old-fashioned thing with clickety clasps and celtic-y stuff painted on the lid. Mostly he leaves it, untouched, on the table. Then one evening, when the place was hoppin', I brought The Burning Bush his drink.

"Put it down out of me way." He said and slid the case in front of him. He rested his hands on the lid and winked at me. He clicked the clasps and opened the lid a crack. Silvery light flooded out and he seemed to melt into something wafty, floating above me, like a sprite... And then it was gone. I blinked and there he was again, hands on the open lid of the case and the silvery light making him look young. I craned my neck to see what was inside the case and I couldn't believe my eyes. It was filled with silvery fish! Alive and swimming in silvery water! I must be seriously scuttered, I thought. Then his coat sprouted polka dot flames! Next thing he plunges his hand into the water, grabs hold of a fish and launches it into the crowd at the bar. The fish flapped about a couple of times but no one at the bar seemed to notice. Suddenly there she was. Maura Connor. I always notice when Maura Connor comes in yet, this time, I'd missed her. A line from Wandering Aengus sounded clear in my head,

"It had become a glimmering girl..."

Mind you, Maura Connor was neither glimmering nor a girl. She was fine figure of a woman with a billowy

bosom that I longed to bury my face in. I've had a bit of a thing for her since the first time we met in Áras Mhic Dhiarmada. I think about asking her out all the time but, so far, I've not had the nerve. I reckon I make up in longing what I lack in courage. But somehow, this time, I found myself going over and tapping her on the shoulder while the old timid me watched in surprise. "Fancy a drink?" Says this new me.

"I thought you'd never ask!" She laughs.

"I'll have a G. and T."

I order the drinks and bring them back.

"So..." She says as we clink glasses.

"When are you going to ask me out?"

"This very minute." I reply.

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

"Well, why don't we finish these drinks and head back to mine."

Morning-afters are normally a fuzzy confusion but, on this morning after, I was bright as a bee. I remembered everything from the previous night, it was as lovely and vivid and clear as the hot, sea-side Sundays I'd spent in Rush as a child.

I didn't see much of The Burning Bush after that. It was all me and Maura. Me and Maura eating together. Me and Maura cuddled up on her sofa. Me and Maura laughing our legs off at some silly joke. Me and Maura dancing till three in the morning. For my birthday she brought me to Prague. Berlin for Christmas. Madrid for Easter. Boys oh boys, this was the life. I moved in.

She had an e-business on the side which was how she could afford the trips. Nothing big but it turned a nice profit, enough for life's little luxuries as she said herself. She sold ladies fashions, discontinued lines, which she bought from several wholesalers. I helped by answering e-mails, taking orders and, packing them for delivery. She had the whole thing streamlined. She and Shauna, her friend since primary school, choose the items. Maura priced and promoted. Shauna collected the goods and delivered. And now, with me helping, we could move more stuff, profits went up and I got my cut.

Me and Maura started talking about settling down and buying a house. I met her family, they loved me. She met mine, they loved her. I brought her to Paris and proposed at the top of the Eifel Tower. How's that for style! We set a date for the wedding. I started taking an interest in fashion - though I wouldn't be caught saying that out loud! But it made sense. I'd browse fashion sites to get my eye in and for the fashion lingo. It came in handy when I had to answer a query. Then, a month before the wedding, Shauna arrived with her breath in her fist and a bundle of stuff she'd collected. He eyes were lit up, her cheeks flushed.

"Jesus Maura," she said. "that was a close call I..."

"With the car?" Maura interrupted.

"The car? Oh yeah, yeah, right, with the car."

It clearly was nothing to do with the car. Later, when I was packing a gold brocade evening suit, Original Price 1,899 Euro, Our Price 750 Euro. It looked vaguely familiar. Then I noticed a tag. Brown Thomas. But we

never bought from Brown Thomas. I checked the label. Versace. I Googled, Versace Prêt-a-Porter and there it was, part of this season's collection. So definitely NOT a discontinued line. "I think Shauna might be shop-lifting." I told Maura after dinner. Maura drained the last of her wine.

"Not shop-lifting, love... liberating."

"What?"

"Have you any idea what kind of outrageous mark-up there is on those outfits?"

"No."

Well... they can afford to reduce them by 50, or even 70, percent in the January sales. They're ripping us off. We're just restoring the equilibrium." "You could end up in prison." "So could you." I didn't know what to think. How could the woman I love be a crook? What should I do? Send an anonymous letter to Brown Thomas? Tip off the Guards? Call off the wedding? I churned it around in my mind for a week and finally decided to have a word with The Burning Bush. He'd got me into this, maybe he'd have an out.

There he was, as usual, near the fire. Case on the table. Hat off. Overcoat open. A pint of plain and a ball of malt in front of him. I sat down and told him my tale. He smiled.

"And pluck," says he, "till time and times are done,

The silver apples of the moon,

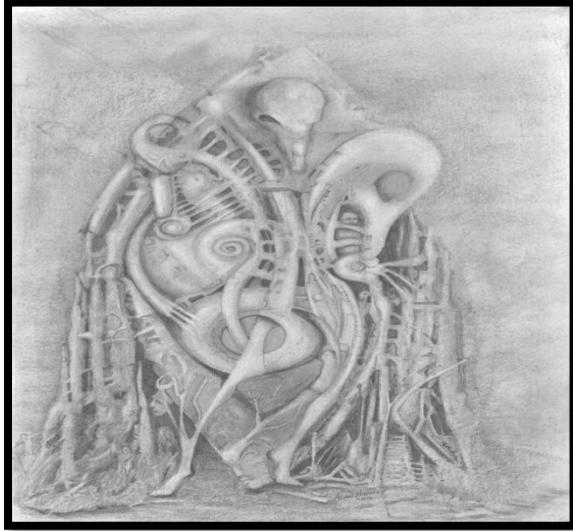
The golden apples of the sun."

"That's no kind of answer." I said.

"Apples," he said with a wink and he took a long pull on his pint. "Silver and gold."

I stayed for another half hour or so but not another word passed his lips. Later that night I woke up with Maura's long hair in my face. She turned towards me. Her eyes opened briefly and she smiled. Then she slept again. The solution seeped gently into my head. I'd marry Maura, I mean, she was the love of my life. I'd pluck the apples and I'd enjoy them. We'd have a child, maybe two, and gradually, gently, over time, I'd wean her off crime. Children would make all the difference. Wouldn't they?





### A Different Light by Phil Lynch

He saw the light in a different way  
and filtered it  
into tales of past and present worlds  
preserved for the illumination  
of future generations.

The everyday bustle shut out  
by windows looking in on other lives  
created from a host of saints and sinners,  
a pastiche of myth and magic  
displayed in deepest hues,

stylish shapes  
superbly crafted  
by a master of his trade.

A uniquely skilled genius,  
stymied and betrayed  
by weak-willed post-revolutionaries  
succumbing to the thumb  
of dominant institutions,  
exiled in search of freedom  
from diseases of the day,  
destined to die  
without the embrace of home.

So much achieved in such short time  
we can only imagine  
all that was left unseen  
and rejoice in what there is,  
a treasured legacy  
that will forever glow  
with richness and grace;  
a different light unfurled  
around a dark and troubled world.

*In Memoriam Harry Clarke.*

### Driftwood by Bernie Walsh

Drenched in saline water the  
driftwood rests in silence on the  
shore, among smooth pebbles and  
rough sand. Surrounded by shiny  
seashells, coloured stones, bits of  
plastic, flotsam and jetsam, that had  
accompanied it through the vastness  
of the north Atlantic sea. Storm  
Ophelia joined it on her nautical  
journey, with her tidal winds causing  
high waves, driving boats into  
harbours, eroding the coastline,  
creating a voyage of destruction and  
despair. Once, this driftwood had  
pride of place, on the side of an  
unsinkable ship which now lies on the  
bottom of the ocean full of treasure,  
and ghosts

### Against The Odds by Jean Roarty

Sonnets from school lay buried in my  
mind  
Re-reading them brought me back to my  
youth  
And wistful, childish, dreams I'd left  
behind.  
Innocent, gullible, searching for truth  
I'd hoped for a life with some gravitas.  
Most of all: do what I was meant to do.  
Revisiting those sonnets now, I ask  
What about my dreams? Did I chase a  
few?  
Does my life have meaning? Yes—it is  
true.  
I am fortunate, most blessed of women  
I am doing what I was meant to do.  
Cynical, older—I hope more to come  
I survived, am loved, life now sheer bliss  
For I am a mother and writing this.

## First Love in Lidl by Kate Ennals

We were discovered '*sunning ourselves on the hill*'  
Said the letter from school  
When we should have been playing hockey  
We were breaking rules

I remember, you stretched out  
Your head lay in my lap  
I stroked your long, dark silken hair  
Fanned across my kilt  
Your straight arrow nose stared at me  
I leant down, you reached up

We kissed

I look about me now. There, I think  
Between the Roma tins of tomatoes  
Olive oil, Amoy coconut milk

And it must be over here, our tryst  
Against the trunk of the sycamore tree  
Hands flecked with blue skies, yellow leaves  
My school shirt unbuttoned, tie dishevelled  
There, by the Spanish Salami and German pastrami

And, it must have been here we were caught  
'*Sunning ourselves*'  
Just here, in the deep freeze

If I slide back the top, I see you staring up at me  
Next to the frozen cauliflower and Birds Eye peas.

## From The Director's Chair by Mari Maxwell

The last time I saw Tilly was at Mother's funeral. Head tilted just so, her black hat perched jauntily at an exact right angle. Showing off her cheekbones, she was. A limo too. The only thing missing was the liveried chauffeur. Billed it all to Mother's estate. Every last penny. Mother wouldn't have cared how we'd shown up. Didn't go in for all that fancy fluff. Comfort was to Mother like ... well, like bacon and cabbage. Staples. Familiar. Like a comfy pair of shoes you refuse to discard even when the toe flaps grin at the ground, slap and soak up the rain.

I suppose Tilly should have been something or someone of note. Flighty she was, our Tilly. One lover after another. And the look she gave, first me, then her current floozie when I stood first in line behind Mother's coffin. Humph. Trying to usurp my place in the family. Mother wouldn't be happy to know we don't keep in touch. I wish I could say I missed her. Truth is, I saw that look she gave. Face made up for optimum centre stage affect. And dead, like Mother. Nothing in her gaze but the focused set of her face, tilt of the head. Chekhov or Stanislavski method acting at its finest. Practised I'm sure to perfection. I knew then it was over.

She led the funeral entrance, down the aisle Mother was married in; had each of us baptised at. I knew then Tilly and I were done. Covering up Mother's murder, denying her justice, was it for me. I suppose I could say it'd been a long time coming. Decades even. See I'd mothered that girl. Took Papa's fist sooner than let her get it. Gave all the love Papa soured in me and Mother froze brittle, to help ease her journey. Gave her a leg up as you do family. I couldn't save her then, nor could I now. Mother would say it came down to choices. Once I'd have understood. Even twice. But there's something about the passage of time, less on the forward side, that makes you realize some things just can't be bartered, or played with. Some things you have to clutch greedily – even not knowing where it'll take you. One day there will only be empty air to clutch. And that's family. Tilly's and mine.

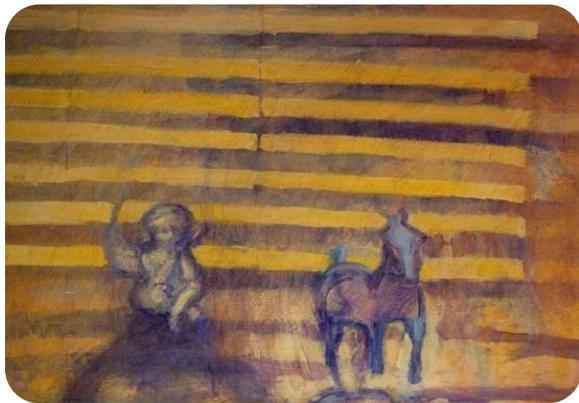


## Dark and Light by Gina Wilkin

FROM SUNBEAM HOUSE

There is dark and light  
I walked into a cave and I saw a dove flying  
all over the cave  
The cave was dark  
There are crystals all around the cave  
There is a bluebird that had flown into the  
cave

I saw a fire in the cave  
The bluebird had a gift for me  
It was a box and I open the box  
I find a crystal rock, a precious rock  
The rock was the beginning of the light  
So when things are in the dark  
If I feel that I am in the dark  
I did shut a door that I thought I would  
never open but it did  
From the dark came a mystery girl  
The mystery girl was me  
The bluebird was minding me  
He had set me free  
I see dark and light  
I stand up and I walk out of history  
I walk free and I am safe.



## Amnye and the Yeti by Síofra O'Donovan

The Yeti came in the moonlight, after the monks had blown their horns for evening prayers and Amnye had taken the Yak to the pastures below the temple. Momo, his wife, gave him his dinner when he came back.

"If the Abbot asks for more tax, I'll throw my dinner at him." she said, as the children slurped soup around the stove. The dogs were silent.

"Don't desecrate the clergy." said Amnye, but inside he agreed with her.

That night, the stars gleamed like the jewels of the Gods but a terrible thing happened. A howling whistle like a ghost's lament came up from the pastures. Amnye sat up with his gun and stood at the door and he saw every yak in the pasture dead. Still, black shadows under the moon.

"The Yeti!" he cried, as Momo came to his side, and the dogs growled like thunder. Amnye saw the black figure facing him, wheeling his arm with a yak pat on his head. Amnye knew who he was, pretending to be a man, calling him into the pasture so he could choke him to death.

"Demon! Murderer!" said Momo, spitting on the ground. The children woke up and huddled around them, staring at the dead yak and at the huge *mi drong* tearing up the hill, his whistles howling in the the wind.

Amnye packed a bag of *tsampa* flour, slung it on his back with his rifle.

"Don't go." begged Momo, "He will take you as well!"

The little ones tugged at their *Pala's* thick chuba coat, but Amnye would stop at nothing, after this third attack the yeti had made on the village. In the morning, the monks prayed for Amnye and the Abbot did not ask for tax. They said they understood if he had to kill. They had seen such things since the Han soldiers had marched into their land.

Amnye's boots crunched over the crumbling rocks on the pass, and the white peak of the Goddess mountain gleamed like a knife under the moon. Amnye knew the crack in the mountain where the yeti lived, and where he had taken his cousin's daughters three years before. Amnye stopped at the creak for his *tsampa*, and lit a small fire in the crevice, A yeti knew fire. He would smell the smoke but Amnye was ready. He clutched his rifle, the one he'd had since the sky fell down and the wolves howled on the Goddess Mountain. Since the Han came. The sky had never risen again, and all Amnye had known was misfortune. Now, twenty yak were dead and his family would starve in the winter. With all his thoughts of war and enemies, a shadow fell over him.

"The *mi-drong* is a sentient being. do not take your gun to the cave. He will lead you to the right path."

Amnye bowed to the lama, who stood before him. But inside, he was angry. The lama had grey hair in a knot and a grey beard draped to his waist and his chest was shiny and strong.

"How am I to avenge the murder of my herd? And the two women robbed?"

"Take your prayer wheel." said the lama, and vanished

into the shadows. Amnye did not have his prayer wheel. He had his rifle. In the morning, he saw the eagle in the sky and it swooped down and scratched his bushy hair. "Ah, ah! Why do you threaten me when I am right!? The Goddess would not afflict me like this!" The eagle turned and stared in to his eyes, hovering right in front of him on the path. "You should listen to the lama! Retreat! Bring only your prayer beads, old man..." he swooped away, high in the sky, and danced around the Goddess's peak.

Amnye reached the peak, and icy winds bit his cheeks, and his *tsampa* was empty. He saw the Yeti, mocking him, with a yak pat on his head, wheeling his arm around and whistling terribly. Amnye pulled his rifle up, and aimed at the heart, as the Yeti thundered towards him, his sharp white teeth gleaming in the sun, his hairy body dull and thick, his shoulders no man had the back to carry. He slung Amnye over the hairy shoulder, like a piece of meat. Like every other victim, he was carried into the cave of the Goddess mountain.

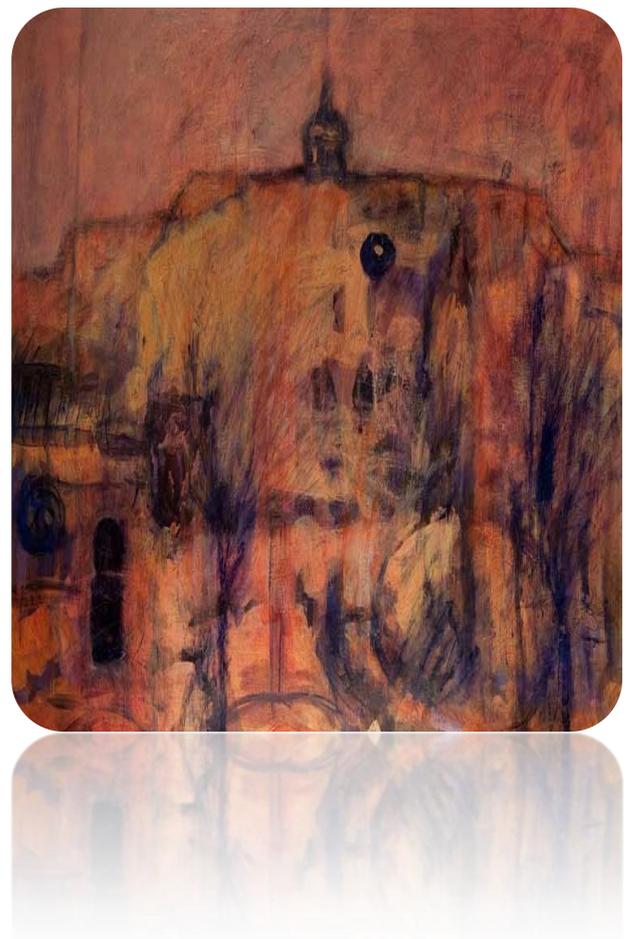
Amnye woke in the dark. His cousin's two sisters were making yak soup on the fire.

"This is where you have been? Why don't you escape?" "Our life is good here, Amnye." *Their minds have been made simple by that monster,* Amnye thought. One of them, the salt trader's girl, was pregnant. It was unimaginable. Amnye searched for his rifle. It was gone. Instead, in his sack, he found his prayer wheel and his prayer beads. He had not packed them, but there they were. He swung his prayer wheel, around and prayed for peace. He prayed for his life, and for the lives of his cousins' sisters, and the lives of the people in his family, and for the people in the village, and the yak to be reborn in De Wa Chen, the Western Paradise. He prayed for the end of the wrath of the Yeti.

But a gleaming white figure sailed in through the crack of the cave, tall and shimmering, with silken black hair and eyes as deep as the Turquoise lakes. Her body was slender and wispy...the Goddess of the Mountain.

"Welcome," she said, "to the mountain. We knew you would come." she swirled around, as the Yeti came in. "Here you will stay with us, and pray with us."

Amnye's mother had always said he should never have been a yak herder. He had the mark of a lama on his ears, long and soft for listening to the sorrows of lost souls. His eyes filled with tears as the Goddess showed him his family climbing up the pathway to give him alms, a year after his capture. Amnye had always known, but he had forgotten. Pilgrims from far, far away came to the Goddess Mountain to seek advice from the wise sage Amnye, whose wisdom was as sharp as an eagle, whose strength was as mighty as the Yeti. His family was blessed with a new herd of yak, and the Abbot suspended taxes. The Yeti served him, cooked for him and cleaned his cave and was even seen sitting with Amnye, spinning his prayer wheel under the snows of the Goddess mountain...



## On Ballinoulart Beach by Judy Russell

Soft sand warms her feet  
as she zig-zags bleached dunes

saving the world one plastic bag  
bottle, burst balloon at a time.

Waves shush reassurance  
we can do this, we can do this

one push forward, one slide back,  
the moon rocks the world's oceans

neap tides in a tea cup  
tsunamis in each watery cell.

## Mark My Words by Frances Browner

"Mark my words," Miss Cotter used to start every lesson, her face scrunched up something furious. "I'll be like a tigress on the warpath otherwise."

Miss Cotter used stories to hammer home a point. Sean and Sheila were the protagonists, starring in various roles. I wondered if she'd picked the names at random, like rosy apples from the orchard behind the convent.

Sean and Sheila are courting. Sean calls at her house to take Sheila out on a date. Sean doesn't sit in the car and beep the horn and expect Sheila to run out. No, he walks up to her door and knocks hard until someone lets him in. Sheila keeps him waiting. Sean shows his respect by being patient.

Sheila watches how he is with her mother. Is he polite, admiring her new hairdo, remarking on the weather? Does he pull out a chair for her? Remain standing until she sits down? Open the door for Sheila when they reach the car.

"Was the handle broken, Miss?" I raised my hand.

"Handle?"

"On Sheila's door. Could she not open it for herself?"

"Sean was a gentleman." Miss Cotter growled at me.

Sheila should mind how Sean treats his own mother. Make sure he doesn't use a harsh word. That he obeys her and helps around the house. Takes her to the shops for the messages. Buys her nice presents on her birthday. Never raises a hand. Because how he treats his mother is how he'll treat her too.

Sean and Sheila are getting married. Sean is Protestant and Sheila a Catholic. The couple can't have Mass, but have to make do with a small ceremony in the sacristy. Only the Priest present. The rings not blessed. No congregation or fancy dresses. Two witnesses, that's all, Miss Cotter tapped out the words with a ruler.

"Can they go on a honeymoon, Miss?" I asked.

"Of course," she hissed.

"And have a wedding cake?"

"Oh, for God's sake!" She spat out the words.

I couldn't wait to grow up and be like Sheila. I imagined myself in all of the scenarios Miss Cotter conjured up for our Third Class. The school was attached to an Orphanage and I loved climbing the silvery stairs to the soot grey building when I wet my knickers or forgot my lunch. Sharing tea and sticky buns with the House Children at a miniature pink table; sliding up and down the shiny linoleum floor in my stocking feet. They weren't real orphans, Miss Cotter explained, but children from broken homes.

"How did their houses break?" I asked her one day, waiting for the bell to ring.

"Mother of God, girl, I'm going to kill you?" She pounced on my desk, her hands raised, fingers curled, as if she was about to maul me.

Miss Cotter had wanted to go out foreign. She'd picked the Daughters of the Heart of Mary because she could keep her name, she said, and wear ordinary clothes. Not like Sister Mary Immaculate who had come to her school recruiting Brides for Christ.

Miss Cotter never got to Africa in the end. Never nursed one of the black babies Sister Mary Immaculate had shown them pictures of. Had never cuddled a child on her knee at all that she could remember. Miss Cotter looked wistfully out the classroom window.

"And was she dressed immaculate?" I wanted to know.

"Who?" Miss Cotter snapped.

"Sister Mary, the immaculate one?"

"Oh girl," she said, "What will I do with you?" Miss Cotter's scowl crumpled into a smile for the first time.

Sheila has a Vocation. God has called her, whispering in through the keyhole at her. Sheila has to answer the call. Give up all her worldly goods. Shear her hair and wear a habit.

"My Mammy thinks that picking your nose is a bad habit," I said.

"Isn't that what you wear when you die?" One of the House Children distracted Miss Cotter. They were always in trouble. Forgetting their homework and losing their schoolbags.

The nun's head swivelled to the back of the room. "When we die?" She snarled at the House Child.

"Yeah," said the girl, nonplussed. "Me Ma wore one in her coffin."

"No." Miss Cotter had been ready to mangle her. "That's a shroud," she whispered.

I was terrified I'd end up a nun. Terrified I'd get one of those Vocations Miss Cotter was always raving about. Terrified I'd have to wear those shoes. Hobnail, brown brogues pinched her ankles, a circle of fat oozing out over the strap. 'Puss 'n boots' the Sixth Class girls christened her.

We never did hear how Sheila fared in the end. And, wasn't she a Protestant, or was it Sean? Miss Cotter's stories could be confusing for me; the rest of the class never paid them any heed.

"You were a great teacher, Miss," I told her. She held the door open, as we filed out of the classroom for the last time and I could have sworn I saw tears trickle from her china blue eyes.

The school is on its last legs now; the Orphanage closed, only two or three nuns left to hold the fort, none of them called Miss Cotter. If it wasn't for these Car Boot sales every Sunday, they couldn't manage at all, a woman selling scones told me. The money to park cars in the schoolyard keeps the House heated for the winter. Afternoon teas pay the rest of the bills. Vegetables from the garden and home-baked bread, scone woman sighed, feed them every day. I paid a visit to the tea tent, where a kind old nun in billowing robes served me.

"Isn't it a lovely day?" I said to her.  
"Oh, it'll rain before evening," her tone was sharp.  
"Mark my words."  
"Miss Cotter?" I searched the wrinkled face.  
"It's Sister Sheila," she said.  
"Sheila?" I opened my eyes as wide as the moon. "Can you tell me one thing?"  
"Yes?" She nursed the teapot with two chubby paws.  
"Whatever happened to Sean?"

She turned on her shabby worn heels and hobbled away, the tears coursing down her jaws.

## At the Junction by David Butler

If you die in a state of grace you go straight to heaven. Lucy Riordan was knocked down on the day of her first communion. She was hit by a 15A bus. Sr Consolata said she'd gone straight to heaven.

Sometimes you see sunlight pouring down through the clouds onto the bay. That's what grace is like.

When you go to confession your soul is washed clean. Maria thinks of her soul as a white handkerchief. When you're disobedient, or when you tell lies, your soul gets smudged with dirt. But if you make a good confession, then it's washed clean. That's what immaculate means.

If she went to confession today she'd say, 'Bless me Father, it's been three days since my last confession.' But she wouldn't say, 'for I have sinned.' Because Maria hasn't sinned. Sometimes she's gone a whole week without committing a sin, even in her thoughts.

If she died now she'd go straight to heaven. But you couldn't kill yourself. To kill yourself was a mortal sin. But if God loved you, like the boy in Conor's class who'd had leukaemia, then He'd take you up to Him.

Maria can see the junction of Foley St in her head, and when she looks hard up ahead, she can actually see it. If she counted her steps and they came out even, she could do it. It was ok because you have a guardian angel who looks after you. Say if God didn't want to take you to Him.

At Lucy Riordan's funeral everyone carried a candle. There were white flowers all through the church. Everyone said it was a beautiful funeral. When Maria reaches the florist's shop she starts to count her steps.

At the junction of Foley St. she feels queer, because the steps came out even. That means she's to do it. She looks up and down the footpaths on either side of the junction. She has to be sure the footpaths are empty. That nobody is there to watch.

Then she closes her eyes. *Oh angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me, here.*

In swimming, when you take a dive, first you're empty, then you're giddy. If you wait too long it gets much harder. Tentative, she takes a step off the pavement. Silence. She takes another. Distant sounds – a bird, a bus. A car? She takes a third step, has to stop her arms from reaching out like in blind man's buff. The next few steps are easier.

Her nerves thrill. There's a squeal. Horrid. Shriek. Tyres shrieking. It's so close her eyes spring open. Everything has stopped. As if the whole world gasped. A car has ground to a halt. Skidded so close she felt the wind. A smell of burn. In the window is a face like a Halloween mask. 'What the hell?' Her heart is thumping. It hurts her throat. She has been caught.

'Just what the hell do you think you're playing at?'  
'I...'. And she frowns.  
The red-faced man is shaking his head hard at her. 'I could've killed you, you know that?'  
He sounds calmer now.  
'Are you ok?'

Her heart is still thumping. It's like a bird trying to escape out her throat.  
The man has leaned across and pushed open the passenger door.  
'Climb in.' Something isn't right. 'I'll run you home.'  
Maria frowns. 'I'm not to get into a car.'  
'Your mammy tell you that?'  
She nods.  
'It was your mammy sent me to get you.'  
She shakes her head. Something isn't right.  
'Where d'you live?'  
She points. She's not supposed to talk with strangers.  
'On the hill?'  
She nods. She looks up and down the street. No-one is watching.  
'Come on!' The man sounds nervous. Why is he nervous? 'Your mammy said I was to pick you up. Run you up home.'  
Maria shakes her head, no.  
'Do you want me tell her you were crossing the road with your eyes closed?'  
No! She doesn't want her mother to know that. Her mother wouldn't understand. She'd get into trouble.  
'Jump in.' The man winks. 'I won't tell her. It'll be our little secret.'

## Bray Promenade by Layla Moroney

The sun was setting low over the rooftops  
Children's face sticky, candyfloss and  
lollipops  
Noisy seagulls, foraging for fallen chips  
Mothers weary, wet toddlers on their hips  
Electronic sounds, bright lights, the fun of the  
fair  
Dad proclaiming 'the sand gets everywhere!'  
Waves crash, children shriek with delight  
Grandma on the deck chair, her family in  
sight  
Ham sambos eaten with a side of sand and  
flies  
Coins ready for sharing, an ice-cream  
surprise  
Towels and picnic baskets, get packed safely  
away  
Bray Head silently observing, the remains of  
the day  
Fond memories take me back, as I walk the  
promenade  
Simple pleasures of a child, the greatest  
summers ever had.

## The Ceremony by Richard Webb

After all the form filling, the photos,  
documents confirming our identity  
and how long we have lived here,  
we are at last standing in an  
expectant line in the biting wind  
beside the Convention Centre.

The doors open and we file into the hall,  
Glad to be out of the winters chill.  
We are so many that the line snakes  
back and forth between the ropes.  
People of all nations and creeds are here  
coming at last to the Promised Land.

There are folk from Eastern Europe.  
Some from the Philippines, from Africa and the  
Americas and Muslims from many countries.

There are those from the Indian sub-continent and  
there a Coptic priest bearded and skull capped,  
as well as a sprinkling of nervous Brits.

The line moves slowly forward  
until we are called to our numbered booth.  
I am granted entry but am I worthy?  
We are handed our pack with the words  
of the national anthem and our certificate  
confirming that now we really are Irish.

We enter the great hall while families  
and friends ascend the stairs to watch.  
We wait quietly for the ceremony to begin,  
when a phone goes off -  
The call to prayer echoes around the hall.  
YES! Eire Nua, Allah be Praised.

The Army band tootles away. Greensleeves?  
Perhaps so the Brexit refugees feel more at ease.  
The Minister welcomes us all and speaks movingly  
of his own family's experience of emigration. One  
that is shared by so many others  
in this country.

The kindly judge who is to guide us through  
our oath of allegiance also greets us.  
He asks that we should not forget our own  
heritage rather to use it to enhance the nation.  
He hopes that those from India and Pakistan  
have brought their cricket bats with them.

The Army colour party stride onto the stage  
and the judge leads us through the oath.  
The band strikes up Amhran na bhFiann.  
We struggle with the words, feeling very Irish.

In the foyer happy family groups share hugs,  
Handshakes, smiles and selfies.  
Wearing our Irish flag lapel pins  
We step out proudly into a brave new world.

## To Have or to Hold by Carmen Cullen

Henry Flannigan hadn't expected to be present at his  
mother Louise's death. It had been like entering a place  
of the unknown. He and Louise were there together,  
sealed off from the world. His mother however had  
slipped beyond his grasp. They could not commune  
together any longer because the tides of death were  
sweeping her away from him.

When the final moment came and the gate between  
their two worlds closed, Henry felt a fleeting lightening  
of a burden, and he knew then a line had been drawn  
between them. He and she had been finally uncoupled  
and like at birth, as if new energy and life had poured  
into him, he could rise fortified and go on his way.

As the weeks dragged on the sensation Henry had of  
having pushed his mother away from him and creating  
more breathing space for himself, seemed out of place.  
He became burdened with a sense of loss. Her absence  
from the world could make him cry. It was why his  
girlfriend Ellen felt him easing away from her, as if his  
mother's ghost had a greater call on his time. Henry had  
devoted himself too much to Louise when he was alive  
and Ellen often complained to him. Now, in after-life,

she was still hanging on. 'Sometimes it feels as if it's her or me,' had been one of Ellen's cries.

The older woman's death had been a shock in the end, but the time had come for her to be ruthless, Ellen decided. Henry had inherited a considerable sum of money after all. Somehow she'd have to nail down her man.

Ellen Hanley was at times called Baby. When she was young she'd worn an air of innocence, and on first making her acquaintance that was still often the case. It was because a glance into her blue eyes induced a momentary feeling of playfulness, as if Ellen was an innocent from the start and should be recognised as such, in the way the blue of the Sistine Chapel ceiling gives the illusion of heaven.

Baby was plain Ellen to Henry. After all she had the steady habits of a woman beyond her twenty five years. Her flat for instance was neat and ordered and she never drank more than one glass of wine with her evening meal. Those heavenly blue of her eyes had a different appeal. They suggested passion. Their look of calm was an illusion, he was convinced, because her true nature needed to be exposed. Perhaps he would bring her on a holiday to the Bahamas, or even Costa Del Sol. Recently she'd been expressing an interest in nudist beaches, as if longing to be freed.

Henry's mother Louise had been a worshiper of the sun. Crete had been her favourite holiday destination and one summer's evening he saw her give him a special look, from her photograph placed beside an urn containing her ashes, on Ellen's mantelpiece. He patted his girlfriend on the sofa beside him as she sipped a cup of tea.

'Maybe we could bring Mammy's ashes to Crete and scatter them. They could go on their own voyage, like Odysseus. Some day some of them might end up on the coast of Ireland,' his eyes brightened. 'If it puts your mind at rest. There could be no better place for your golden girl. It will give us all rest and peace at last,' Ellen sighed.

A tear escaped Henry's eyes. For a moment Louise was back with him. He seemed to see her sitting on one of Ellen's armchairs, opposite. *Don't go out of your way for me dear*, the smile suggested. *After all you have Ellen to think of now*. His girlfriend stood up to tidy the tea-things away.

'Remember you have a meeting with your solicitor at the end of the week. Some matters of the will could be ironed out, if we decide to go away. We can't delaying these things. It can take ages for probate to be processed. There's no point in letting an asset like your mother's house lie idle. A place not lived in deteriorates every day.'

'Perhaps you're right. It would be what Louise would want,' Henry sighed. This time he shivered, as though his mother, on her long journey from him had turned to wave goodbye.

'In the meantime it would be a good idea if we opened a joint bank account together. You know how much better I am at handling money matters,' Ellen said. She was like a Greek goddess herself, Henry marveled, admiring the svelte woman, poised before his mothers' ashes. He imagined a bleached beach and Ellen's naked form beside his. *Bring her to the sun*, Louise was telling him. *Ellen needs to thaw out*. It would be her last wish for him and he nodded in agreement.

On the night before their holiday to Crete, Henry found himself standing in front of the mantelpiece that displayed the photograph of his mother. 'Tomorrow you'll be going on a long journey. Maybe you'll come back as a beautiful Venus rising from the waves, or a pale-skinned Irish temptress bewitching hearts with your fiery ways,' he addressed a steady gaze. He'd sneaked downstairs from Ellen's bed to pack the picture into his suitcase for the trip abroad and as he always did, when he'd first greet his mother, he leaned his face towards hers for a kiss. He was only touching a metal container of ashes, of course, but clear as a bell he heard her voice.

'I know I can trust you. I'm leaving everything in your hands dear,' Louise said.

'It's after twelve o'clock Henry,' Ellen's loud tones reached him from the landing above. 'Come to bed. If we're not careful we'll sleep through the alarm and miss our bus for the airport.'

'Sorry, I'm on my,' Henry said. 'I don't know what I'd do without you Helen,' he added. His use of the mistaken name was a slip of the tongue, because of course their destination tomorrow was a Greek island and because, shouting up to her, he'd experienced a violent urge to make love, as though longing could induce oblivion and help him abandon his past, in his future queen's embrace.

A wind swept past him when Henry opened the front door to check on the weather outside. The cold made his eyes smart and he had a vision of a turquoise sea lapping on a beach. Ellen was lying beside him and he had smothered her with sun-cream, all over. The impulse to make love returned. She wouldn't of course, at such a late hour.

'This holiday means the beginning of a new phase in our life together. There is only one woman for me from now on. Let's seal the past away.' Henry found himself cuddling up to Ellen even so, when he slipped into bed. He slid his hands under a warm nightdress. 'I'm sorry about this. I hope you don't mind, but it will help clear my head for tomorrow. After all we must celebrate the here and now, the reality of being alive,' he said. The passion his caresses kindled in Ellen came as a surprise as their love-making continued, as if she too longed for a kind of release, something daredevil; a flighty woman who on a whim could stand up from the bed that minute and walk away.

Ellen's house was inland and Henry was surprised to note seagulls emitting shrieking calls and crisscrossing one another in flight outside, the following morning. They were a good omen. He was doing the right thing and because there was more than one of the birds it could mean something extra, apart from scattering his mother's ashes on the sea. An unexpected turn in events might give his holiday a different dimension. He gripped his suitcase. 'At least you won't have to worry about flying Mum,' he said and as if in answer one of the seagulls shrieked even more loudly, poised to rise on powerful wings, to glide in the wind like a sleek airplane.

'You were a sly one, making advances when I was taken off my guard last night. Now I can hardly keep my eyes open,' Ellen sulked. Still her eyes shone like that seagull's. She was a force to be reckoned with, they said; mistress of her world, and she pecked Henry on the cheek.

'That's to say thank-you for the holiday. Soon we'll be able to do this all the time, we might even be able to afford a house abroad,' she said.

The holiday apartment was in a plain-looking block of white flats with bougainvillea growing up the front when they arrived. There were souvenir shops across the road. Through a connecting archway a thin line of blue sea appeared, enticing as a desert oasis. It was better to stay indoors during the early afternoon, Ellen advised Henry as they gazed. In their apartment she drew the curtains across, to create a sepia toned light.

Ellen was right, Henry discovered, because as the holiday continued the brown spots started to proliferate. He had Louise's almond shaped eyes and it was these he addressed on the last day of his sunshine holiday-with-a-mission, on the fabled island of Crete. He was alone in the apartment and getting ready to pack, and he blew a kiss at his mother's photograph in its customary place on a shelf beside the urn of ashes. Brightness, struggling to get through heavy drapes accentuated the silence. Ellen would be buying a basket right now to be able to bring the ashes to a seaside promontory near the local beach to throw them.

'I can't do this Mum, we're too far from home,' he murmured. 'You want your apartment cleaned today?' a local woman with tired eyes was standing in the doorway as he spoke.

'No thank you. But I'd appreciate if you mind this for me until tomorrow,' Henry said on impulse. He felt himself blush. He picked up the ashes and took a ten-euro note from his pocket. 'This is for your trouble,' he waved it.

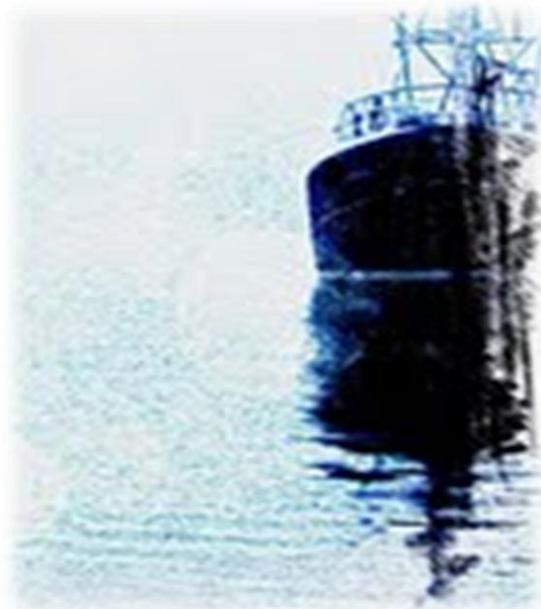
For a second, through a slit between the curtains, He seemed to see a face peer in through the window. It came to his attention for the first time that the apartment had a disheveled appearance, as if a struggle had taken place. His heart began to beat violently, when a note was slipped under his door.

*Hand over the funeral urn or your girlfriend will die. Do not look inside to see what it contains. You have five minutes.*

Somebody had swapped the urn at the airport. Henry forgot about the cleaning lady. He began to pace. His mother's ashes had been flung away. They were probably in a bin, or scattered somewhere like a tramp's, with nobody to care where she lay. He looked at his watch. An hour had passed since Ellen had left. It was too long. He rushed to the door and changed his mind. She had been very quick agreeing to come here. He began to remember all the broad hints about what they would do with the money for Louise's house when it was sold, and how recently Ellen had talked about their getting married and how nice it was going to be to have a nest-egg for a rainy day.

A passing truck caused vibrations in the room and Henry's horrified gaze saw Louise's picture shake and then fall. He stepped back to rescue it and his fingers touched another photograph behind. It was a picture of Ellen and himself, she must have brought on holidays. *Forever in love* Ellen had inscribed on the back, when he turned it over. If his mother's picture had stayed in place those words would have remained unseen. They were insignificant.

'You're too slow Henry. I got away.' He jumped. Ellen had been testing him all this time, because she was standing in the apartment doorway. A gunshot sounded and she stumbled. The tin fell from his hands as he lurched towards her. It opened and a cloud of dust flew out. It was like a magician's trick, Henry's mind reeled, as if all the time his mother had been lying in wait for him, to get him back.



## I Can Taste The Flavour of Ripening by Helen Harrison

Crisp coolness captures  
My senses; touches the tip  
Of my nose

I look to the vegetable plot, it's  
Waiting a whisper of warmth  
A last caress.

Root crops are safe to remain,  
Clay wrapped around their roots  
Underground recipes.

I think of ripening rose-hips  
Early elderberries, tonics  
To be made.

I hear the blackbird among  
The thickening blackberry  
Bulging bushes,

Anticipating ambush; it's  
Still September but I feel the  
Changes coming...

Spirit warmed by promise,  
Colours to charm berries, and  
Apples from trees, before -

Winter's tip pierces like holly  
And the air becomes full of pine  
And peat-smoked scents.

## Longest Summer by Maire Morrissey Cummins.

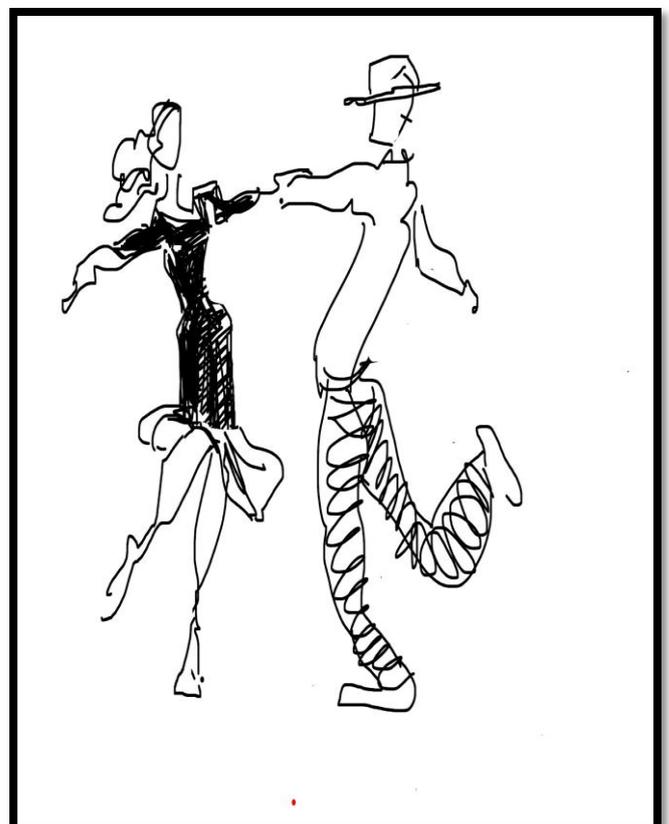
In the shelter of the Sugarloaf, we bask in hot  
sunshine.  
Bray head is scorched brown after the gorse fires  
and our green fields are bleached from months of  
no rain.  
Global warming they say  
but we are not complaining  
as we swim in cool blue seas,  
eat sweet strawberries and new potatoes from  
Wexford  
and fresh salads grown from seed in my  
greenhouse  
during the snow of last April.

In Greystones this June,

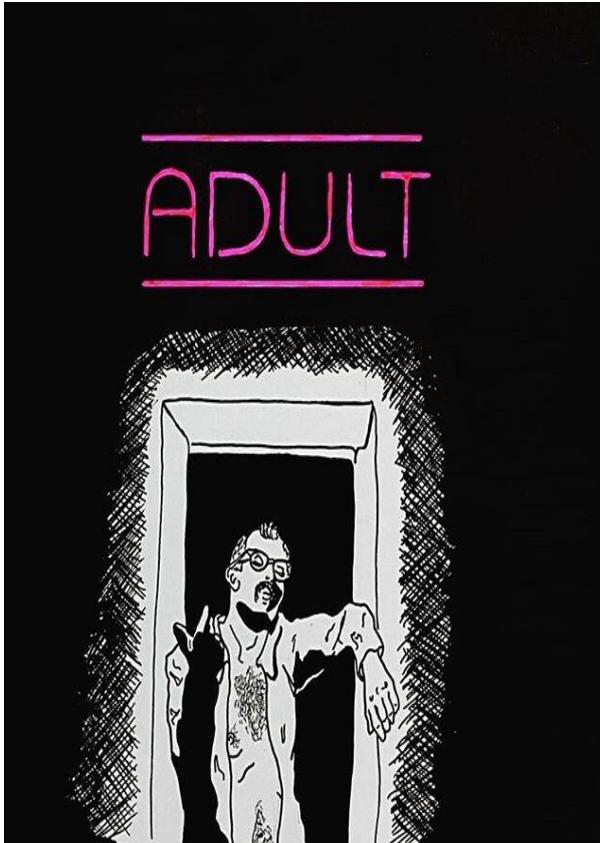
the garden is in full bloom  
with perfumed roses in every corner.  
I cut them to fill jugs and vases, decorate rooms  
and I am filled with an energy,  
powered by the sun.  
I rise with the sunrise  
and sleep at sundown.  
Window boxes bloom pink with geraniums  
and begonias trail from pots on the porch.

I glide through the weeks  
float into each day,  
rooted in moments, in this seaside home.  
I scribble down words,  
try to capture the shape of wavering skies  
and paint wildflowers gathered from daily walks.  
I plant my garden to bloom all year round  
from garden centres of Avoca and Kilquade.  
I adore all seasons in my later years,  
for each day is precious as time flashes by,  
from these blazing days of Summer,  
to the crisp crunch of Autumn,  
to lily white snowfall of Winter  
and the certainty of new blossoms on the cherry  
tree in Spring

I see the exquisite beauty  
every hour of every day  
at every time of year.



## The Guy Who Owns the Adult Store by James Devlin.



## Getting to the Other Side by Michael Gordon

Laura never knew that there were four stages of grief. But she did now. She had passed through Denial, Anger and Loneliness. Finally, she had reached Acceptance.

"You're doing very well," her Counsellor told her, "It's only been four months."

"I know," said Laura, "but they were four tough months. We were soul mates since fourth year. He loved rugby and I loved his dry sense of humour. And he was doing great with Goldman Sachs; they were fast tracking him through the company."

In the beginning Laura found coming to terms with her loss very hard. She went into meltdown and was unable to cope. She had taken time off from work but it didn't help. Now she was glad to be back and busy and to have a structure to her life. But her evenings dragged and her weekends were interminable.

"You have to get your life back on track," her Counsellor told her. "You have thirty six years behind you, but you could have fifty years ahead of you. These can be your best years if you want them to be and if you work at it." "I hear you," Laura said; "I'll try."

She started in their bedroom. She gathered up all his clothes and gave them to her local Vincent de Paul shop. In tears, she cleared out his study. Everything was a reminder of him. She kept just one photograph; the one taken on their wedding day nine years earlier. She discovered who her real friends were. Gradually they helped her pull out of her grief and to look forward.

But as winter arrived, so did the threat of depression. "Take a trip," her counsellor advised; "hot weather and new experiences can work wonders."

Her sister invited her to stay with her in London but that was too mundane. She decided to travel for a month and arranged time off. She could not persuade any of her friends to go with her. She asked her mother.

"Sorry, dear," her mother replied, "but I play Bridge on Wednesdays. Would you go to Tramore for a week? It always did your father and I a load of good."

"I want to go to Australia," Laura told the travel advisor in Trailfinders in Dawson Street, "First class. And I want to stop off in Dubai; maybe three nights."

"Would you stay in the Burj al Arab?" he asked her; "it's a fabulous hotel."

"That sounds great. I'm starting to get excited. Can you get me a really high room?"

"They don't have rooms, I'm afraid; only suites. Is that Okay?"

"Even better; I want to do some serious shopping."

She also booked two nights in Singapore. "It's on my bucket list," she told him, "to stay in Raffles and drink a Singapore Sling in the Long Bar. Do you know Somerset Maugham?"

"I can't say I do, Madam. Is he a friend of yours?"

"No, not at all. Silly question."

She booked the Park Hyatt hotel in Sydney with tours of the city and the Blue Mountains and planned three days at the Great Barrier Reef, with a trip to Ayres Rock.

"Sure, why don't you keep going then and come back via America?" the advisor asked. "You could take in Hawaii, San Francisco, New York. You can break your journey anywhere you like and the cost is the same."

"Now I am excited. It sounds fabulous. Can I pay for it all in advance?"

"You can of course, except for the shopping."

They nailed down her itinerary over the next hour. "Can you email that to me? If it's all okay I'll drop in and pay you tomorrow."

She hardly slept that night. There was so much to do. The email was correct and though it was expensive she was happy to accept it. She called back to Trailfinders and waited for her travel advisor. He handed her the Invoice for €26,000 and got his machine. She handed over a credit card.

"I'll pop this in here now," he said; "you just enter your Pin." An anxious wait followed.

"That's fine," he said; "that's gone through. I'll courier out all your tickets and vouchers to you. Just think, this day week you'll be on your way around the world."

"I know. I can't believe it. I'm waiting for it to sink in"

But a week later she was on her way. It had been hectic; wrapping up work, fixing timers for lights all over the house and packing. It was only when she sank back into the plush leather seats of the limo that she started to relax.

First class on the plane was luxurious. She thought she might meet a man and, if she did, then the type she wanted to meet was going to be at the front of the plane, not down the back. She didn't meet anyone and fell asleep watching a movie.

Dubai was hot, and different. Her suite in the Burj al Arab was so luxurious that she would happily have not left her room at all. After three days of swimming and fine dining, her thoughts of Dublin fell away. And her shopping spree was so successful she had to have most of it shipped back to Dublin.

"The gentleman at the bar would like to buy you a drink," the waiter said as she sat in the hotel bar. She looked up to see a handsome, well dressed man, smiling at her, displaying perfect teeth. From Saudi Arabia, he was intelligent and charming. She enjoyed his company over drinks and over the dinner that followed. He was related to the House of Saud and was wealthy beyond her imagination

"Will you come for a drive with me?" he asked. I would love to show you the desert by night."

"Thank you," she said,"but no. I'd love to, but I'm not ready."

Her mother rang her. "Are you all right, dear?" she asked.

"I'm fine, Mum. I'm fine. I've been propositioned already by a squillionaire. He owns his own oasis, would you believe?"

"I'm worried about you," her mother asked. "Is your hotel in a safe area?"

"Mum, I'm standing on a carpet so thick; I can't even see my feet. My room is so large I need a packed lunch just to get to the bathroom. It's fabulous."

"I'm glad," said her mother; "I was worried."

Singapore was different in a good way, and she was surprised and delighted to find that her travel advisor had booked the Somerset Maugham suite in Raffles for her. She rang her mother.

"I'm having breakfast on my balcony overlooking the Palm Court. The same balcony Somerset Maugham sat in and wrote in every morning."

"That's nice dear. I think your aunt Paula went to Hong Kong once. She didn't like it. Very hot and noisy, she said. She couldn't drink the water. Are you taking your medication?"

"Oh, Mum!"

It took her a while to get over her jet lag in Sydney, but her trip to the Blue Mountains and a swim at Bondi took care of it. On the third day she spent the morning in the hotel spa, had a massage and got her hair done.

"I need a limo to go to Claymore," she said to the concierge.

"Certainly madam. I hope you don't mind me saying, but you look very glamorous this afternoon."

"Oh, thank you. It is pretty, isn't it? I bought it especially in Dubai"

She gave the driver the address from the envelope in her hand and twenty minutes later they pulled up outside a bungalow in the suburb of Claymore.

"Please wait," she said and made her way up the path to the front door. Her knock was answered by tall, slim blonde wearing shorts, sandals and a skimpy halter top.

"Hello, Cindy," she said.

"You? What are you doing here?"

"Sorry, Cindy, I won't talk to you. Is my husband here?"

Cindy turned and rushed down the hallway, "Justin. Justin."

"What is it? What's wrong, Cindy?" Justin approached the front door.

"Yes? Oh, it's you. What the hell are you doing here?"

"I'm doing you a favour if you must know. You left one of your credit cards at home. I thought I'd bring it back in person. I find you can't trust anyone these days."

"Bye".

She sat back into the limo and was driven away



## Windfall by Paul Fitzgerald

Windfall

A beautiful word  
connotes catching  
apples. Sweeter still  
being caught in mid air  
windfalls in an orchard  
of scents , breezes full  
of bees.

Take care there.

For there the youngest hero  
a windfall of speed  
surprise and delight.

Catch him mid air  
and smiling as he lands  
looks up to you.

The heart opens  
love surges  
spins you out of breath  
catch him mid- air.

Windfall  
a windfall.

## On Bray Beach by Eileen Casey

*After Midsummer's Day 2017*

A miracle of weather bakes loaves of stone.  
Trickles ice-cream over fingers and chins.  
Dogs pant under low walls. Bray promenade  
paints its panoramic vista for the weary eye -  
striped awnings, hazy plastic colours.  
Sky-tinged ocean dimples into surface folds.  
A tease of ebb and flow flirts with pilgrims  
crawling towards Bray Head.

Out of the blue, a child goes missing.

Soon, an aftershock distorts the frame.  
Carousels cease, swing boats bob in empty air.  
Sea-breezes cease their playful rhythm,  
leave the whirr of windmills motionless.  
Bare feet scurry over flesh-prickling shale.  
Sentinels string out along the shoreline  
caught up in this sudden drama of hide 'n' seek  
search and prowl between gaps in booths hung  
with useless buckets and spades.

Dressed for winter, a man sits, his back pressed  
against the sea wall, staring out, oblivious to how  
suspicion already winds the black ribbon, worn  
like a mourning band around his Panama hat,

out beyond hotels, seafront houses. Out  
into narrow laneways leading to the town  
where shadows dart like minnows.  
Suspicion spreads its contagion into alleys,  
garden sheds, disused outhouses.

Just as quickly as it begins, the journey  
ends, this time restoring reason's  
syncopated rhyme. A cry goes up,  
the wanderer's found, safe and well.  
Relief swells from the sea.

A fresh white wave rolls in.

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**Christmas List for My Newborn Girl by  
Jessamine O'Connor**

Botox  
Vajazzles  
Spray-tan  
Collagen  
  
Foundation  
Blusher, Shadow  
Liner; Stick-on lashes  
Anti-perspirant; Perfume  
Body spray, Deodorant; Facelift  
Tummy tuck, Magic knickers;  
Padded bra, Corset  
Silicone implants;  
Waxed legs  
Shaved armpits  
Plucked eyebrows  
A Brazilian; Detox, Diet  
Diet, Diet; Teeth whitening  
Anal bleaching, Liposuction;  
Colonic irrigation, Pedicure  
Manicure; Laser hair removal;  
Cosmetic gynaecology  
  
How long should  
We leave it  
Before telling her  
She mustn't  
Be perfect  
After all?

**Wicklow Lighthouse 3am by Martin  
Swords**

***“ A deepening depression  
heavy rain  
poor visibility  
strong southerly winds veering southwest  
building strong gale after midnight ”***

Shine, steady light,  
and bring them home  
to Wicklow

Dear God, look out for Jim  
and all the lads aboard the Sarah Ann,  
struggling home against the wind  
beyond the Arklow Sands

Shine steady, light,  
and bring them home  
to Wicklow

And all for what? Less  
fish than ever, every time,  
a box of crabs, a living? A  
hundred hooks, a life, all on the line.

Shine strong now, light,  
shine strong all night  
and bring them home  
to Wicklow

Your daughter Sarah, soon, I hope  
will have a brother.  
And they will need their Father  
then, to love them, and their Mother.

Shine steady strong and surely  
show their way  
and bring them home  
to Wicklow, safe, today.

***“ reports are coming in  
fishing vessel  
no contact  
sighted  
approaching Wicklow harbour  
just after 3a.m.”***

## A Carol from Albert Avenue by Anthony Uhlemann

No Christmas ghosts, past or present,  
will haunt this tiny thoroughfare,  
though a graffiti Salvador Dali lookalike,  
scrawled on a wall in neon blue, might  
at a pinch, do as a substitute.

Neither will any shepherds watch by night;  
yet the crews in that Bus Depot over,  
like to think they sheppard a different rover,  
of rowdier stock, through these seasonal  
festivities.

Few wise men will grace this place either;  
or if they do it will always be in cognito.  
Some Magi might be out there still; in exile,  
Their *Orient* a mishmash estate of hate filled  
religions  
their saviour now, not deities: The United Nations;  
their gold locked in paper stocks and bonds in  
banks;  
in jars in kitchen presses their myrrh and  
frankincense.

The thunderous rumble of a passing Dart  
and the rattle of a empty shopping cart

do little to create a festive vibe but you  
can blend their harmonies into a *chant de noel*  
if you have a mind. As for manglers there are none.  
(The restaurants, Carpe Diem and Campo de Fiore,  
might fit the bill but only if your French is wrong.)

There are stars, sure enough, but not a one  
will guide you to any place but the heavens;  
stables, inns, donkeys and straw are long gone;  
outlawed by our urban environmental laws.  
And as for *chestnuts roasting on an open fire*;  
forget it; you are sure to be arrested.

So where is this carol you're half expecting,  
to enhance this season, offset the commercialism?  
Like all great notions it's nearer than you think;  
it takes some mental reconstructing though,  
which is easier if you are a believer and  
nowadays even that takes bottle:  
and there's the rub. The Christmas spirit  
is always in the drink, or in the Christmas lights  
or in the company of *loved ones* at the Christmas  
dinner;  
before the Christmas family fights. Carollers  
wassailing you upon the street. Holy salutations

we offer religiously but very seldom keep.

Peace, goodwill to men, beyond our means,  
it seems, the next best thing is make-believe;  
an art at which we, a dreaming species, do excel.

So as you next walk this little alley, pretend.  
Smile, nod and utter seasonal greetings to each  
and everybody. Head home. Take a seat.  
Then pour yourself a festive drink.  
Cocoa, tap water, Grannies' dodgy Christmas  
toddlies  
or the most expensive brandy on the planet.  
Anything will do, for this toast is just to you;  
that the very next step you are about to take,  
be you on the gravy train or on your uppers,  
will be with *hope, for* and not *fear, against*.

