

Edition IV

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The Martello Journal
SANCTUARY

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THE MARTELLO

EDITION IV
SANCTUARY

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Hi Mum!

Dear Friends,

Thanks for picking up this edition of *The Martello*, we could not be more delighted to have you here.

“Sanctuary is a word which here means a small safe place in a troubling world.”

For our fourth edition of the *Journal*, we’ve collected work on the subject of *Sanctuary*; on what brings you safety, comfort, peace.

It is no easy thing, finding a place like that. It is a special occurrence and a rare one. In this Edition you will see how it can be found in the ocean, seafoam on lips. It can be found in your person, the sound of them humming in the kitchen. It can be found in a familiar book, a childhood movie.

Our incredibly talented contributors have shared slices of their lives with us; photos, art, prose, and poetry all approaching the theme in ways as wonderful and unique as they are.

Special thanks is due to a number of people. These include, but of course are not limited to: our parents, friends, significant others, and to each other for tolerating our equal measures of insanity.

We’ve found a sanctuary between these pages - we hope you do too.

Warmly, and as ever - with love,

Úna and Jack

Contents

COVER: *NO.5*, , Jim Xi Johnson

The Blackberries That Stain Our Lips, Conor Henry

nothing's lost until you can't find it again and we just got stuck there for a little while, Heather Slevin

A Mason Dixon Line by Lamplight, Oisín Breen

a conversation that was supposed to happen, but didn't, and the conversation that did, A. Joseph Black

PEACHES AND CREAM, Lee Eustace

How to sit with a tree, Ann Marie Dunne

Lunch, Jay Rafferty

Autumn Afternoons, Nathanael O'Reilly

Autumn still day, Jan Price

Harrison, Marc Isaac Potter

The House of No Children, Gerry Stewart

Livingroom Photo, Ruairi McKeown

everyone survives in the end, Rayn Valteau

WORDS FOR MY DAD, Sol Kim Cowell

picky, Nat Raum

The Handball Alley, Daithí Kearney

Movements, Natalie Winterlich

Fry, Jack McGee

In A 1979 Ford I Heard My First Love Song, Kalie Pead

Church Grim, Annie Cowell

Guardian, Karin Hedetniemi

Siena and the Sea, Maitiú Charleton

Tidekeeping, Alba de Juan y López

The closest I ever came to kissing you, Stephanie Holden

Tenderness, Jan Price

Flat 7/2, Róisín Sheridan-Bryson

September Skies, Jackie Lynam

Greenman's breath in Lismore Castle and Beach Shop, Fenit, Alan Murphy

Tata Winger, Gene Murphy

Sunlight and Clouds, Debbie Robson

Wanted: One Hermit, Jennie Owen

In The Woods Somewhere, Rachel-Marie Cleary

Conversations with Colin, Marc Brightside

Christmas No More But A Garden, Jocelyn Fryer

Love Notes, Jodie Doyle

A sock in the hand is worth two [_____] in the bush, Mike Guerin

Francis Bacon Print, Rory Duffy

Sanctuary, Deirdre Maher

Scottish Rain, Beth Storey

Washing Away Your Past, Bethany Jarmul

Cradle, Isabel Hamilton

Alpine Sunflowers, Amy Barone

THE DEAD, Emma Page

gluttony, Peneople Sanchez

Terrible Lizard, Allan Miller

Home Late, Eoin Hamill

Shrine to Nineteen, Charlotte Fong

Almost like the Sound of Wings, Edward Lee

Crush, Clodagh Healy

Blissful Afternoon, Justine Lepage

Peace You've Given Me, Ellie Cameron

At Night, I make my offerings, Helen Jenks

Low Tide, Meabh McMahon

Love and Accessibility, Mira Cameron

Unexpected Eviction, Kendra Jackson

Clodagh Johnston

stew, Aoifke Madeleine

Cuppa time, Jan Price

Escape, Karin Hedetniemi

Centralia, Pennsylvania; I want to live there, Josh Fortune

Bliss, Sinead Mooney

Christmas in July, Ciaran Parkes

To Be a Chocolatier, Darcey Dugan

Georgian Door, Tommy Rogers

Lullaby, Karen Arnold

Interlude between Cork and Kerry, Sara Buckley

Let Go, Amy Harrison

Indulge Me, Barbara Dunne

Astro-Can, Eri Farrell

Moonrise over Cuween Hill Chambered Cairn in Orkney, Amanda Ball

Photo, Jennifer McKeen-Rodrigues

The Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin, Paul Van Sickle

Egg by Egg, Úna Nolan

I Sleep With A Window Open, Dominic J. Sweeney

Recurring Sanctuary, Lucy Richards-Smyrk

Dartline, Tommy Rogers

Let's Get a Drink on a Saturday Afternoon, Úna Nolan

How to come back from the dead, Ankit Raj Ojha

BACKCOVER NO.4, Jim Xi Johnson

The Blackberries That Stain Our Lips

Conor Henry

Stop.

Wait on the hill for a moment,
just long enough to take in
water's hoarse voice and the wall
of branches woven in Brigid's crosses,
the nettles and the daisies twisted
among the leaves.

Lonely sun sitting in an ocean of sky,
no white or grey at play, just vast
summer blue. In the house
where I grew up, Rapunzel's green locks
wind across the brickwork out front,
thick hair tickling the dirt of car tracks.

And children run for their lives,
for a living, touching down on concrete
and soft earth hardened in the heat.

It's cold some mornings, and we wait
for the sun to peak out, in our coats
and gloves, in the middle of winter.
Amble by the brambles frosted over,
pick berries from where they hide
in the snow.

In the summer,

a friend's dad helps us make jam,
washing all the fruit and leaving
a few handfuls of blackberries for us
to eat. They're bitter and juicy,
wet to the touch and they bleed
between the fingers of our little hands.
Red blood, black blood -
bloodied little mouths feasting.

We tend to green plastic now, no weeds
grow in our garden anymore. Hyacinths
and daffodils still grow, lovely shrubbery
that's easy to keep with dogs in the house
is still tended to by my mother's hands,
and our garden is lovely. White tiles,

Green grass,
Yellow sun.

Sometimes, when out walking,
I stop and take in the crowns of thorns
and flowers, secret passages
for runaway pets, thistles, daisies, nettles,
and blackberries. I touch a finger
to my lips and I say a prayer
for the screams and laughter
and the little faces fruit-stained.
I say a prayer to the blackberries.

Walk on.

nothing's lost until you can't find it again and we just got stuck there for a little while

so let's sleep under the lamplight under the moon on streets unknown let's call each other

girlfriend lover goddess say please like you mean it say i love you like you mean it the windows are further away now the grass is greener out here my love the water isn't as cold summer's coming early this year like it knows how much i miss her let's sleep where the old willow trees reside, have you ever found them, the old willows, they whisper in half-truth, i think i left, footprints there, in the mud,

sleeping restlessly on hot summer evenings

what do you need to rescue your phone from where it's stuck between bed and half-wall? you'll need;

1. two hangers
2. one pocket knife
3. four forks
4. one spatula
5. one metal ruler
6. one German roommate
7. 6 Creative Writing students in the one room

and still you'll feel the panic burning in your chest, the tears burning in your eyes

the willow trees are closer now

i can feel the ecstasy in my legs it builds there first moves up thighs down face your eyes hold whole dreams they hold every stupid thought i've ever had and ignored if i had let myself be a kid for a little longer what fun i'd be having now

and still you will need them, their warmth during the night *screaming through the long night all those days all those long days in the march heat i learned to hate the sunlight on my desk drawer i wished i could trap it away in there forever i wished to hear the shift of the willows*

you will also need;

1. one stress call to maintenance but they tell you they can't do anything they've had this problem before
2. goddamn it my phone is there it's there it's stuck between the wall and the bed frame you are laughing but you don't understand i have
3. no home
4. and no phone
5. I have no mother
6. and nowhere to call my own
7. I cannot sleep without you there
8. and we do not live here we don't live here so we cannot file a request so let's
9. sign away our rights our money years and months fighting for it
10. to live in one bed in one room with one key one lock one name on the lease
11. I can hear the willows god can you hear the willows

i'll be the cure i'll be your cure the cause and the cure i am the goddess in your bed in

our bed it tastes better the second the hundredth time everything in me goes in

between my legs the sun does not rise the day does not shift it is only a thing that

happens to us my phone is stuck down there i can't afford a new one now you have my

entire bank account my entire heart my whole life

mo stór, is liomsa thú

A Mason Dixon Line by Lamplight

Oisín Breen

I chose this seat carefully, when I first arrived,
 For it is better to shun, for me at least, the isolation
 Of Victorian snugs, stretched along the narrow pub
 Corridors, each a Mason Dixon Line by lamplight,
 Leading to the sheltered back, where smokers talk,
 And a corrugated tin roof wards away the rain.

Most nights, too, as time draws on, I lean sideways
 On a stool, and listen carefully –

Mar táim ag éisteacht leis na cailíní
 Óg agus álainn, freisean
 Ag éisteacht leis na buachaillí
 Óg agus dathúil freisean,
 Ag éisteacht leis na buachaillí
 Agus na cailíní
 Ag caint is ag seinm ceoil,
 Agus slap mé mo chosa,
 Mar tá áthas orm.

Because I am listening to the girls,
 Young and pretty, too,
 Listening to the boys
 Young and handsome, too,
 Listening to the boys
 And the girls
 Talking and playing music,
 And I hit my legs,
 Because happiness is upon me.

And this,
 It is the small measure
 Of the old ways,
 I allow myself to keep,
 As I embrace the new:

The birth of abnegation,
 And the hardening
 Of my wanting
 1Into stone.

**a conversation that was supposed to happen, but didn't, and
the conversation that did**

A. Joseph Black

“Hello Mum.”

“Hello,” a tiny voice replies down the line and coughs. She sounds
three hundred years old.

“It’s me, Mum. Sorry, did I wake you?”

“Oh, it’s you. No, you didn’t wake me.” She’d never admit to still
being
asleep at half past nine in the morning. “I was sitting up in bed reading,
I just haven’t got up and dressed yet.”

“Are you okay, Mum? You sound terrible.”

“Ach, I’ve picked up this cold that’s going around, I can’t shake it
off.”

“Mum, I’m phoning to let you know about Daddy’s ring.”

“Oh. What about it?”

“I’ve lost it Mum. I’m sorry, I think it slipped off my finger in this
cold
weather. I can’t find it anywhere.”

Silence.

“I noticed in work at lunchtime yesterday. I searched the office
but I
couldn’t find it, then I thought it must have come off my finger outside,
earlier, on the walk from the bus stop to the office. With it being so cold.
So I retraced my steps from the office to the bus stop, but it had snowed
again by then.”

Silence.

“Then I thought it must be at home. So last night I searched the
flat top
to bottom, honestly Mum, but I can't find it. Then I searched again this
morning when I was walking to work, because the snow had mostly
melted, but I still couldn’t find it.”

Silence.

“I’m so sorry Mum, I don’t think I’m going to find it now. I think it’s gone.”

“I bought that for your Daddy, in Larne. In 1952.”

“I know Mum. I’m so sorry.”

*

“Hello Mum.”

“Hello,” a tiny voice replied down the line and coughed. She sounded three hundred years old.

“It’s me, Mum...I’m just ringing because Kitty said you’d picked up this rotten cold that’s going around?”

PEACHES AND CREAM*Lee Eustace*

He talked about his father's love of family
his love of life
his favourite spot on the couch
his mishaps after having a few Guinness too many
his love of my Nanny.

That's what I remembered most: His description of
Nanny and Grandad going together like
"Peaches and Cream". The words rolling off the tongue.
Effortlessly. And right then,
I decided that's what I wanted from life.

How to Sit With a Tree*Ann Marie Dunne*

Greet the tree.
Sit down with the roots.
Put your back to the bark.
Listen to the soft buds.

Touch the trunk.
Feel the smooth cool rough.
Taste pollen on your tongue.
Listen to the sap rise.

Look up high
Sway with the branches.
Hear their song.
Listen to the leaves.

Sit quiet and still.
Empty your everyday mind.
Feel the green.
Listen to the tree.

Lunch
Jay Rafferty

In the garden I hold court
with the children. We've a
picnic of pale tea and meat-
less stew. One child is in
her nineties, the other in
his noughties. The latter
bade us wear our coats,
for despite the sun there's
a periodic wind whipping the
still chilled daffodil stalks
against each other. Not a
head on them yet, bulbs bulging
out the soil, white as peeled
onions, white as the spuds
in our stew and on our spoons.

Autumn Afternoons*Nathanael O'Reilly*

Drinking beer in autumn afternoon sun
we sip Sunday as amber leaves drift down,
pair naturally with local brews, waltz across

the garden towards the stage where children
play, squeal and spin, bask in t-shirt weather,
parents' buzzed rules. We eat fried potatoes,

lick salt from fingers, sing along to Hozier,
Radiohead and Florence, laugh at tales
we've heard a dozen times, pat shoulders,

lean over to whisper through cupped hands,
transmit secrets, plans and gossip, check phones
for texts from teens riding rollercoasters,

parents and friends in distant time zones,
loved ones connecting across the seas.
We savour autumn afternoons ingested

over the decades in gardens of pubs
in Australia, Ireland and England,
add another to the lengthening tab.



Autumn Still Day
Jan Price

Harrison*Marc Isaac Potter*

... My wife, Harrison, and I were elated that our 5 year old would share what she calls her Disney stories with us. We told her not to call them Disney stories because Disney Corporation would sue us for using their name. So that was forbidden and we started calling it her dream life, which my therapist suggested.

What can I say? The window shades are whispering to me that I need to tell you about my family which I already wanted to do but I don't know whether to tell you about Harrison first or to tell you about our lovely daughter

We cannot decide if we are ...

We cannot decide if we're adopting again or not. Surprisingly Juliana our daughter does not want a little brother or sister which is affecting our decision greatly we think that she will change her mind as she gets older and maybe we can adopt but we don't want to adopt if she doesn't want a little brother and sister which is very strange

She is a very intelligent girl I wouldn't say she is a genius but very intelligent in her class and she is very precocious

I wish I were a writer and if I were a writer I could tell you more about my family that would make sense Harrison and I fell in love as teenagers at a time when being gay or queer or homosexual or whatever word is being used at the time was totally forbidden we both have stories of being beaten by the football team members both together and alone.

I should have said this in the beginning but my name is Garrison. It legally is Garrison. I had it changed. My name was Gary but since Harrison and I have been together well like I say since probably our sophomore year in high school I thought it would be cute for it to be Garrison and Harrison.

I'm not a writer Harrison is the writer but he's asked me to write something about our family like some kind of a memoir which I don't think this is some kind of a memoir I think it's just ... stop

... I don't like writing this and the fact is I'm writing it somewhat against my will but Harrison is my wife and if he wants it then I'll do it and by the way yes is pronouns are he him which I abhor we don't get along about some things but we love each other my pronouns are they them I know it doesn't make any sense it throws itself against the wall like cow s*** I know.

The only way I'm going to get through this is if I can talk about things that I care about - Harrison said was just fine - I just feel like I'm doing this because he wants me to do it well. Hey you know I really am hating it because he wants me to do it.

The House of No Children

Gerry Stewart

There was an outhouse
that I avoided unless necessary.
An old cabinet TV they wouldn't let me turn on
and three types of Jello salad.
There were prayers before meals.

Everyone was old and grew older,
relations I couldn't name
who gave whiskery kisses
and talked and talked
in low murmurs and moans.
And the silence of no cousins.

Fields, but not for roaming,
corn, a sea of it,
surrounding the postage stamp lawn
where the white farmhouse waited.

I crawled in the grass like Christina
unable to navigate this world
into which my father deposited me
while he walked away.

There were sheep who smelled
and screamed when I approached,
bunching up against the furthest fence



everyone survives in the end*Rayn Valleau*

there are dandelions dancing with onion grass,
all growth is good growth, all green is holy,
what is a weed if not resilient, I see smoke
pillar from a burning bush you cannot
beat the poetry out of

I am blessed to be shin-tangled in a
garden that once held more death than dirt-
now there is nothing but; everything;
vines, daddy long legs, fae folk,
magic happens when we make it

fresh frondescence, fertilizer,
banana compost, copsewood kisses,
we cannot hear the whacker here,
no herbicide to choke on,
there is nothing to kill.

Previous: Livingroom Photo*Ruairi McKeown*

WORDS FOR MY DAD*Sol Kim Cowell*

my father's not grey, he's silver

like the rusted spoon scrubbed until it's just like new
 like the stormcloud after lightning has struck
 like the cold wet english sea that freezes at first touch

i see pictures of him sometimes
 from when he was young
 he's not my father in those:

he's me
 newly sculpted with pumpkin seed eyes
 and a smile with too many teeth

i can't hear it, but i know his laugh was the same
 and his sneeze — oh god, his sneeze! — was just as loud
 and dramatic as it is 40 years later

i went to the west end with him to see a play
 chekhov's *seagull*, the one with emilia clarke in it
 they said fuck a lot
 like fuuucking hell

i sat next to my father and i watched him watch them
 he laughed at all the right parts and for a moment,

i saw him regress into that russian language scholar he once was
 the boy who held his father's hand in a park in moscow
 the boyman who picked up phrases like yob tvoyu mat on the streets of st.
 petersburg
 the man who was let loose upon the world with a dictionary of russkiy in his
 head

now he was a manboy, clapping in that too loud way that he does

*it wasn't very traditional, he said
 there wasn't as much effing and blinding in the version i read*

(he never admits to enjoying anything
 everything is just okay, and good really means excellent)

but when we got home, he asked me if i wanted to go again
to see another show, or maybe a movie together at the local theatre
the one that sends out little pamphlets once a week

i rub my face into the fuzz of his jersey and think that someday
i'll grow old too, and then i'll be him instead
brackets running down my cheeks
wispy curl upon my forehead

what a wonderful thing it is to have been and to become

what a wonderful thing it is to be you

picky
Nat Raum

picky eater means *i don't eat crab,*
in the shell or out of it, means *i don't*
pick crabs on the shore with the family,
i don't eat sandy's crab cakes at easter
or christmas, means *i don't* know how good
those crab cakes are until my mother
is the one making them every holiday,
the dorr hands *i still wish i inherited* dropping
loose mustard and worcestershire handfuls
of jumbo lump onto a greased sheet pan.

The Handball Alley*Daithí Kearney*

Ivy covers its once bare walls
Where once were shouts now silence falls
Dandelions peek through cracked stone flags
Laughter fading into lore

Still standing in this barren place
A mark upon the landscape's face
Amidst long-forgotten homes
Built with only local stones

And care and pride by those who know
The skill required when kneading dough
Or secrets in a country stew
Treasures many never knew

The value that these walls once had
Even when the times were bad
Is lost to those who view it now
Leading me to question how?

Many people walk these winding roads
Burdened down by heavy loads
Surrounded always by the past
Ways that, perhaps, were lost too fast

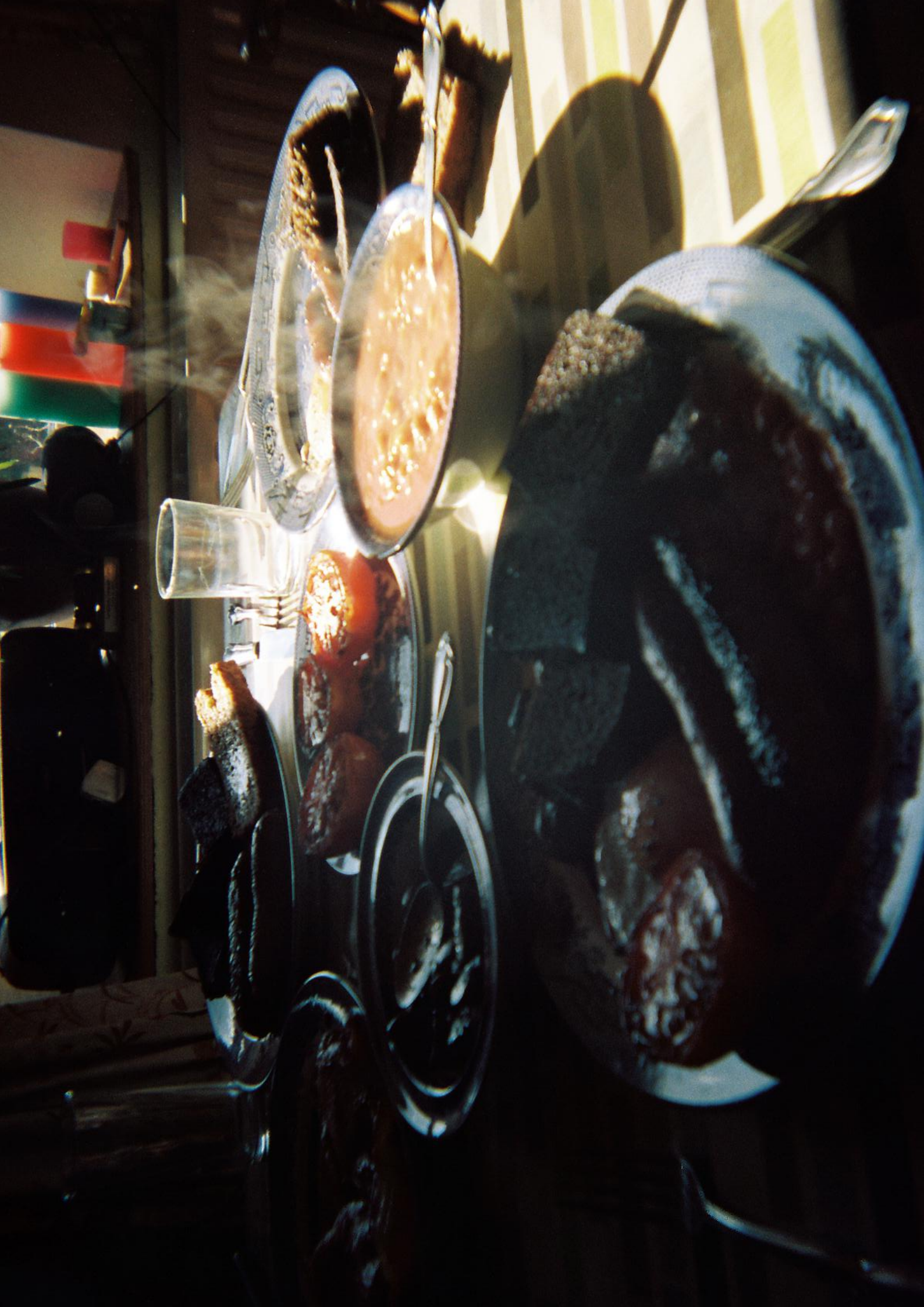
For here men gathered, ball in hand
When work was finished on the land
Their mirth mined from simplicity
Friendships furthered through activity

The winding roads were never smooth
Though we ran along them in our youth
But twists and turns and bumps bestow
Wisdom we cannot forego



Natalie Winterlich

MOVEMENTS
Natalie Winterlich



In A 1979 Ford I Heard My First Love Song

*Or— how my grandfather held my grandmother's hand no matter how mad
he was.
Kalie Pead*

In this dirt I am 8 years old and my grandmother is telling me stories in the pasture. She plucks lilac petals from wet branches, sticks them between her teeth and chews. In this dirt she takes her chances with bitterness. Her wrists are arthritic, age-speckled and creased in all their excess—I wonder if those old roans caught their patterns from her skin. She keeps a universe in her pockets; rusted nails from rotting fences, sugar cubes, my grandfather's tooth, half of his obituary. Brushing the pocket of her jeans she tells me: *If you love something*

Church grim*Annie Cowell*

By day he is a smudge on the pavement
outside M and S. This black, three legged dog shares
a space with the homeless man who leans against
the wall. always a gap between them, the dog,
with gnarled joints and filthy fur
refuses the blanket the man lays out for him.
Prefers, it seems, to own the slab.
At dusk the man packs his bags and moves
to the graveyard behind the tower. His grey head
bobs like the moon and the dog hops behind him,
a dark cloud, untethered
yet held by a thread of light. Strangers will whisper
of a hound glimpsed in the churchyard's dark crevices,
imagining Black Shuck, or some such demon cur.
But the dog and his man sleep in soft green
between the graves, eased perhaps by grassy arias,
spectral fingers of ground elder and scents of wild garlic
whilst locals turn a blind eye on their church grim
and the man who lives beside him.

NEXT: Guardian*Karin Hedetniemi*



Siena and the Sea

Maitiú Charleton

Rolling foam collapsed onto itself in anguish. Blue turned into brown so rapidly, like there was never any blue to begin with. He walked beside the sea and concentrated on the squishy impressions his shoes were making into the sand. He must have had an odd gait walking so flat footedly.

There were three dogs walking past, with one owner. The walker smiled at him the way people in the countryside do, breezily. He walked onwards with a new purpose. He could be a countryside walker for the next while. Stop. There it was, a rock. Imagine - a rock on a beach! He imagined picking it up as his shoe slapped past it. That rock could have been anywhere, it probably saw a lot more than him.

Siena's skin had a purplish quality to it. Maybe it actually was purple? That doesn't matter. She - she what? He looked at the sky for a moment and thought how the words 'fuck' and 'shit' combine so poorly in rapid succession. Fuckshitfuckshitfuckshitfuckitfcskifurt.

She needed an internship. She woke up most days in her flat in Rathmines and coughed for so long that she fell back into that bed covered in folds of rotting flowery duvet. Degrees don't just give people jobs. They give universities money and give upper-middle class people another excuse to inflate their egos. She had a big bank contact from her friend Lisa who had a bad relationship with morality. Once she pretended she was into a guy so she could break up with him just to see what it felt like.

That dark evening, she was getting ready to meet with this bank guy. Lisa told her that he was the type that liked to mentor finance graduates. Does that even happen? He lifted his arms up for a second and felt a rush of wind pass through him. She cleared the notes she had written about his firm into a messy pile beside the wall on her desk.

Walking down the steps in front of her apartment, she opened her phone and tapped into her last messages with Lisa.

What are you wearing?

no Lisa

What?

No no I'm helping here. I mean, like wooooo
what are you wearing I'm sure you look great

weird Lisa

i'm wearing that jumper Kevin got me and
the skirt I wore to grad

Great

He'll like that

He opened his phone. The beach didn't have any signal but he knew the chat was downloaded onto his phone. He hadn't gotten a reply since December. It was August. Was it romantic at all that he thought of him still?

Hey! I miss you, can I get some closure?

The sea was rows after rows of charcoal waves. The boat cut into it over and over again, like an expensive dagger. The banker sat wide behind the wheel. He glanced around incredulously, the wind whipped some of his hair up from his forehead. That part was totally unrealistic wasn't it? He almost smiled, but he didn't have anyone to say this to. As in, the dog walker had passed by and there wasn't any signal out here.

Do you want to tell me a bit about yourself Siena? He made a reference with his body towards her. She knew this one very well, she wove him into her narrative masterfully. They were both raised in the countryside, had done business as an undergrad. He did a lot of business in Lithuania pre-crash. Siena's dad was Lithuanian. His interspersed grunts egged her on.

One wave slapped up onto the deck of the boat like a huge tongue. It shattered into pearly rivulets and sprayed Siena. Her skirt stuck to her skin. She noticed he wasn't replying. Or, maybe that he just wasn't quite speaking.

He was frustrated now, crouching beside the watery sand and thinking about grabbing it in handfuls. Siena's prospects were upsetting him and that banker character was soulless. He had put her there. Was he being cruel? He pushed his hand into the grains and saw the moisture rush away from his fingers as they dug. Siena should have taken that rock he had passed a minute ago and murdered the banker with it. Shove it into some important pipe as he was inside the hull and let the boat quickly sink through the water's surface. He would grasp pointlessly at water once he realised his most impressive yacht was now his coffin. Siena wouldn't care. She wasn't real.

Another person passed by. She didn't smile at him, he had his hands deep in the sand beside the water. His sleeves were wet and heavy now. He looked up at her pink anorak as she passed by. He stood and held his hands out in front of him, sludge dripped down his fingers. The woman was looking at him. He had made a friend. She walked on.

NEXT: TIDEKEEPING
Alba de Juan I López



The closest I ever came to kissing you*Stephanie Holden*

You are talking to your parents in an outdoor brewery
in charlotte north carolina in the pouring rain.

The picnic umbrella is not stopping the water
from clinging to the back of your shirt.

I can see the droplets in your hair and the way your nose turns
toward the clouds and how you smile when your mom talks.

You have the beginning of a black eye. I am brought back
to the first time I saw you in living color
basking in the glory of a stiff arm to the face,
wearing the blue bruise on your face like a fitted suit.

Today you went to the emergency room
for the fracture bleeding rivers from your nose.

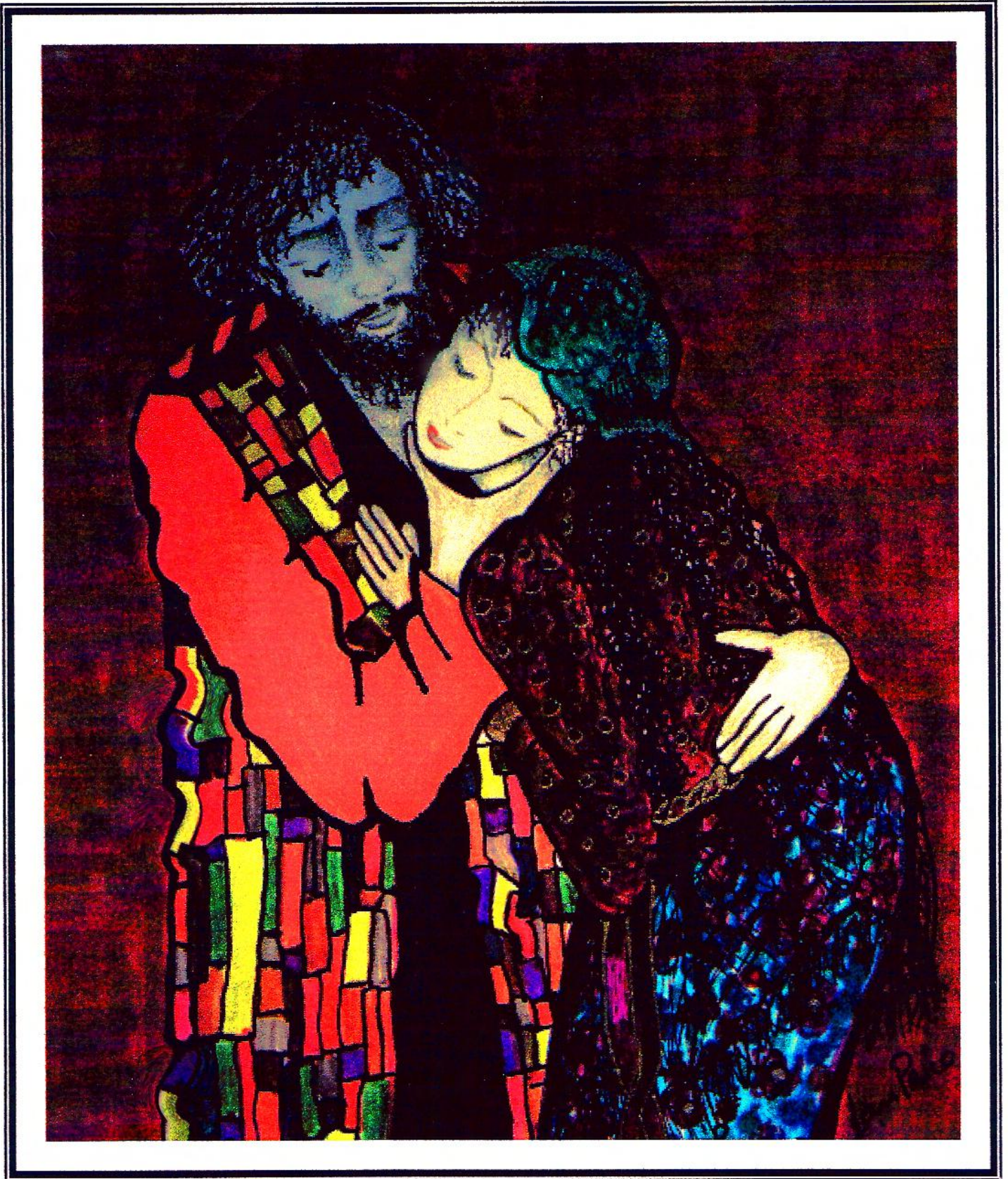
You came back with a prescription for penicillin
and the same nonchalant intensity that haunts my sleep.

Earlier I pushed you to the ground and your hands lingered on mine,
and then I was sure that you noticed me.

Now I am sitting at the table next to yours, turning my body closer with
every word and wondering if the girls beside me notice my dilated pupils.

We are in an outdoor brewery
in charlotte north carolina and the rain is letting up
enough that I think you might leave the safety of the picnic umbrella
to come sit beside me -

but someone else finds the seat
before my eyes can invite yours over.



Tenderness
Jan Price

flat 7/2

Róisín Sheridan-Byrne

You invite me around some morning under the pretence we're going to clean out your kitchen cupboards, no other reason, no ulterior motives, but we end up flat out on the floor. No - nothing like that! Nothing like that. We build a strange contraption and pull all the trees from the end of the garden through the back window, end up flat on our backs on the kitchen floor. No space for anything else, we lie in silence all afternoon - I mean what do you say in a situation like this? Your fringe sits all funny. There are birds nesting on top of the fridge. You build them a double decker bus of a home and feed me fruit under the table. You keep me at a distance while you can and when you can't anymore we call it a day.

September Skies*Jackie Lynam*

The weekend sweeps in and
 once again the living room's an occupied soccer zone
 and the teen girl is scrolling in the unlit lounge.

So we sip our whiskeys in the kitchen,
 hot for me with lemon and honey,
 yours; on the rocks.

Us in our Friday night best:
 pink cotton jammies for me
 blue checked bottoms and a worn t-shirt for you.

It's Culture Night in Dublin
 but from our positions on the groaning grey sofa
 we curate our own musical extravaganza,
 carefully chosen from 'Brian's List' on Spotify:
 Nick Cave/The Jesus and Mary Chain/Kurt Vile/Janelle Monáe

Alas, no flair for stage design:
 school uniforms and socks clinging to the clothes horse
 and carelessly strewn across unmatched chairs.

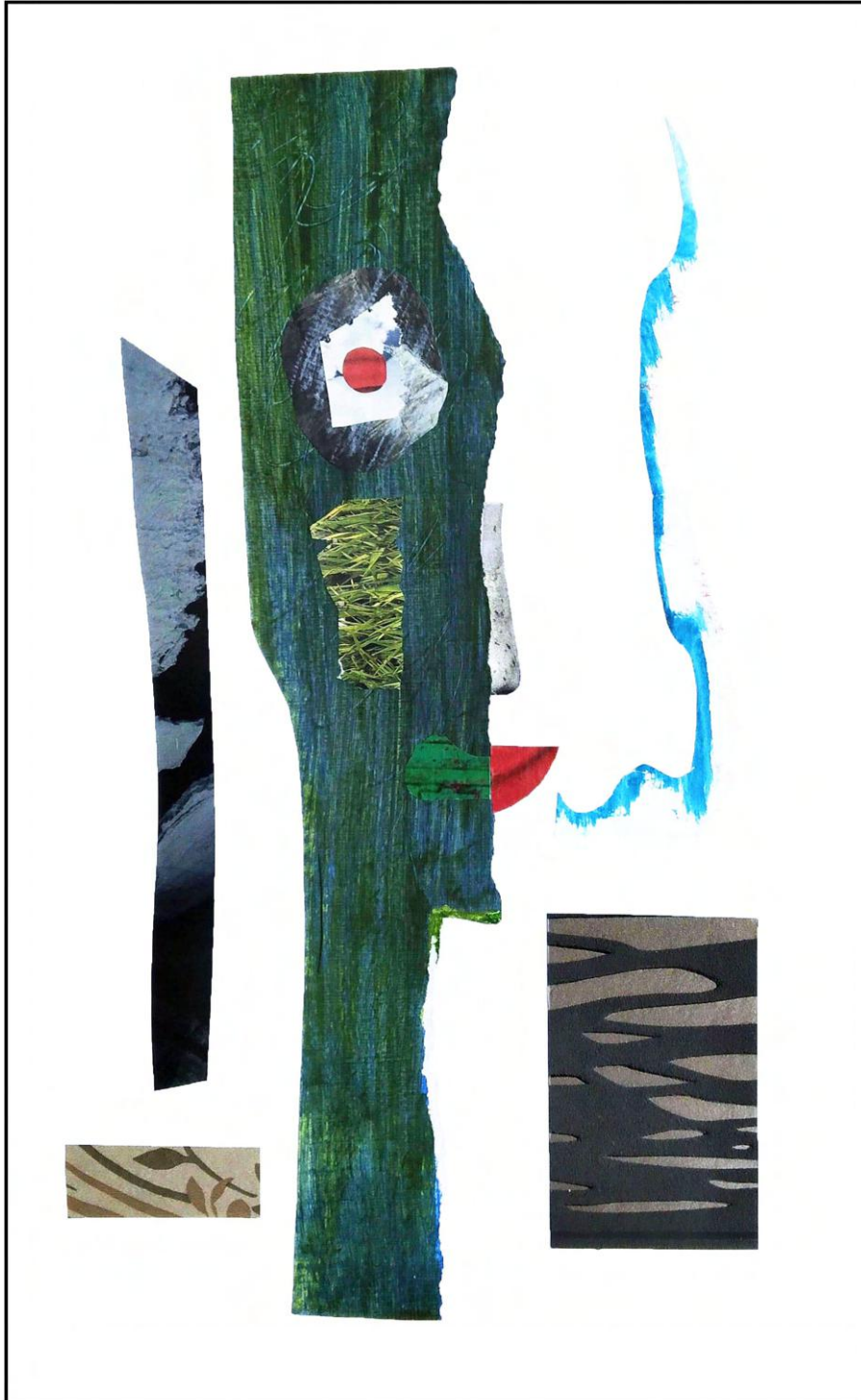
There's an ten cent coin
 beneath the table for a week now and
 the floor's crying out for a mop,
 the drained pots and pans begging to be put away,
 but we do none of this.

We chat and sing and
 sway our raised ankles from left to right
 our socked soles caress mid-air,
 hands held high for the dance tunes.

Middle-aged gallivanting.
 Our conversations traverse
 family/money/jobs/our lack of desire for promotion
 but it's always holidays for the chorus

Donegal, America, France
 We dream up city breaks
 send forth our wishes out into the September sky
 Bruges/Budapest/Bordeaux
 And then we hit the Cs
 Copenhagen/Chicago/Cologne
 Culture Night chez nous.

Green Man's Breath (In Lismore Castle)
Alan Murphy





The Beach Shop, Fenit
Alan Murphy

Tata Winger
Gene Murphy

I woke in the reception area of the Secrets Akumal Riviera Maya hotel in Akumal, Mexico at 7:45 a.m. My wife Eimear was shaking me by the shoulder, saying something about needing to quickly board our tour bus. She could've been telling me that my mother had just been gunned down in an attempted bank robbery and I would've remained as numb.

Barely three hours earlier I swayed among complete strangers in this all-inclusive resort's nightclub, Desires. I guess I thought these people would take to my 'Irishness', but instead of cheering me through an intestine-knotting concoction of free cocktails and beer, they looked on as if I were a whole abandoned travelling freak show.

And so, this morning, my one goal was to not spoil our honeymoon by vomiting on the pristine tile floor of the reception area. I couldn't let Eimear have that one over me for the rest of our married lives. I'd rather die.

Half-keeled and silent, I boarded the bus, a tawdry 15-seater Tata Winger. I ignored the four other tourists, two English, two Irish, and guide Emiliano whose nostril hair doubled as a bristly moustache. I lay my hungover self across the long back seat, the contents of my stomach raging like a rabid bat trapped in a washing machine.

We were heading to Chichen Itza, the sole tourist attraction we'd booked to make ourselves feel less guilty about spending our honeymoon by the pool. There we would find the Temple of Kukulcán, one of Mexico's greatest tourist attractions. An experience like no other, Emiliano promised.

The bus bounced on along through Tulum, Eimear and the others subjected to Emiliano's fanciful stories about mythical Mayan cities while I slept. At a petrol station outside Valladolid, Eimear woke me to have a drink of Gatorade. She said the electrolytes would ease my hangover, but I only took a few sips. I kept thinking that if I had to get sick, I didn't want it to be frost glacier freeze coloured.

Reaching Chichen Itza, Eimear guilted me from my bus bed, Emiliano led us into the epicentre of mayhem — the visitor entrance.

In sweltering heat people bumped their sweat-wet bodies off my sick-tired limbs. Tourists and tour guides shouted panicked instructions and vendors blew into their wooden jaguar toys without regard for our collective sanity, the rasping snarl terrifying my very soul. Then came rain from a cloudless sky, falling hot and heavy; drops of boiling tar sticking to my skin.

Caught in a moment of claustrophobia, my insides flipped. I suddenly felt as if I were in freefall, a skydiver coming loose from their parachute.

Frantically surveying my surroundings, I spotted a toilet arrow and made a run for it, stepping between several photographers and their subjects to steal the last free stall. I won't go into the details, but take the word *evacuation* as an offering.

A minute later came my worried wife, calling into the toilet to ask if I was alright. I called back to count me out of the tour, that they should carry on without me. Man down.

How long I knelt on that slippery floor I don't know, but I forfeited a little bit of my dignity to come through that Chichen Itza toilet disaster.

With no way of contacting Eimear — roaming charges were extortionate — I waited at the exit for the group to return.

Tourists passed, happy people without sweat on their brows or misdirected urine on their bare knees. Not my urine, of course. These people had planned correctly and given themselves every opportunity to enjoy the day, this "experience like no other". And then there was me, alone and despondent.

All I wanted was to be back on the bus. Not in a bed, not even the pool, just that crappy Tata Winger. At least there I could stretch out across the back seat and rest my head, safe from vendors and mosquitos and the carcinogenic sun. Its thin metal shell would protect me from outside evils and provide me some degree of comfort. If only to return me to the hazards of the real world in a few short hours.

SUNLIGHT AND CLOUDS*Debbie Robson*

It is Good Friday and my mother's birthday.
What a combination! I've rung her and
she's well but I haven't thought about
the other. Instead there is the sunshine
I don't want to leave after so much rain
and more pigeons than I can ever remember
in my backyard. They are ahoohooing
on the roof of the garage and next door's dog
is pattering up and down looking for owners
that will return tomorrow. The dog howls,
another dog beyond answers and then
pattering again. What does it all mean?

The pigeons, the sunshine, the dogs and other
birds besides. I can hear bellbirds, I think.
I am almost surrounded by trees in my backyard.
My dog is on the couch inside, the bellbirds
tinkle. There is pattering again of next door's dog,
sunlight outlining clouds, ahoohooos reverberate,
another howl, the distant roar of cars
and in all this I am content.

Wanted: One Hermit*Jennie Owen*

Must work well on own initiative,
 enjoy solitude, but willing to fulfil
 the duties of shaman/wise man/local kook,
 when uninvited tourists come looking for wisdom.
 Don't give it to them, stick to the outlined parameters:
 make something up. They are just searching
 for forgiveness and cheap thrills.
 These are your 'inspirational life characters.'

Comfy cave with all mod cons (apart from gas and electricity)
 Running water in the form of a stream (out of use November to February)
 You'll have reason to gloat about the hillside location, especially in Autumn,
 (must provide own coat)

Fully furnished with a south facing desk,
 coffee mug, paper, pens, framed certificate for show.
 Post box located conveniently on site next to the rain shower.
 Overnight guests will not be tolerated, although
 we expect you to work by candle long after hours.

No need to be a team player (the gruffer the better)
 Hair must be long and unclean (beard desirable)
 Must curse and rave in at least five personae (dictionary essential)

No religious inclination needed,
 it tends to get in the way of the story - just fake it
 with crucifix and rare voo doo charms.
 Smoke some sage, chant nonsense.
 Please beat your chest and pull your hair,
 until your pilgrims look quite alarmed.

We'd love to welcome you
 to our small exclusive community
 of one. (No pets allowed)
 In return, all the seclusion
 a hermit could need. We appreciate
 your suffering in turn for our art.
 You'll fit in so beautifully, so
 write to say when you'll start.

Salary: Unpaid.



IN THE WOODS SOMEWHERE
Rachel-Marie Cleary

Conversations With Colin
Marc Brightside

You meet me after dusk
when everyone's gone home,
tall shadow draped over me,
my fragile exoskeleton.
Can you see the moon
from where you are?

You would have hated this,
masked up, stuck indoors,
sanitised and fearful of connection.
At least, I assume you would.
Suppose I'm not the right person
to ask about these things, am I?

Sorry, just I like to let you know
how the world's been turning
since you left and stuff has gone
a little wrong right now and all
the signs tell us it's going to get
worse before it gets any better.

Mum's okay. Dad's still dead.
I'm coping like a glass jar
falling down a flight of stairs.
Tonight, you're slouched across
our sofa, punk rock scarecrow,
teasing me about my hair.

Christmas No More, but a Garden

Jocelyn Fryer

I dream of Christmas. More than I'd like. It always makes me sad after. The chasm between us. The intimacy in a dream. Us, as close as we once were. So very close. My lighthouse. My port of call. Just me and Christmas some days. And briefly, after these dreams... That Christmas has returned to me. But no. I wake. For real. And Christmas is as far away as ever.

We'd met, before it all, at an art exhibition.

He looked a little like Mos Def as Chuck Berry. Wild hair. And he was short. Compact. But boy, he wasn't short on charisma. And maybe, for me, who knows. It could have been love at first sight for all I'd grown cynical. No. Not cynical. Guarded. Shy. Afraid to love something, someone. Anyone. Bipolar can do that to a gal. If ya lose enough loved ones ya thought would last a lifetime. But I fell for Christmas. I just couldn't help myself and fell hopelessly.

Christmas said he had a painting he wanted to give me, or 'artwork'. I imagined a small sketch, a doodle. I'm not sure entirely what I expected. But it wasn't what I got. The next day he came over and unveiled her. A framed painting. Not too small. Just right. With a bionic arm upon which a blackbird was perched. Red dress. A garland of red flowers in her hair I immediately imagined to be bold red carnations. Hispanic. Cropped black curling locks. And an unapologetic gaze.

How was he to know how she would resonate? But resonate she did. And more. I hung her in my lounge in the prime position above my old-surgical-trolley-turned-liquor-table. That way I looked upon her most evenings as I reclined on my comfiest sofa with a glass of cheap box wine. I wasn't yet myself. I felt low. Deflated. Talentless. But looking upon her, Woman with Blackbird, for that is all we called her, and truly, looking upon her I grew stronger, and stronger still. Meanwhile my feelings for Christmas too grew stronger and stronger still.

I knew he was infatuated with another. I knew her well. And she was talented. And she was tall. And she had brown eyes that danced like butterflies. And the round face of a doll's. And the soft skin of a falling rose petal. But she walked around in army issue boots and oversized trench coats and at parties she got high and climbed trees like it was nothing. No wonder he was mad about her.

We all kinda were.

Even though I knew that Christmas was really mine.

Unspoken, we just knew.

But brown butterflies, she took her own life in the end. Young. It haunted me. For not all have a Woman with Blackbird. I stopped dreaming about Christmas and started dreaming about falling rose petals. But I've dreamed of Christmas again.
A memory.

In a bar.

He takes the loose string on my straw handbag and wraps it securely, protectively, around the clay toggle like he once did. Always looking out for me. Christmas always did things like that. A gentleman. A good guy. A great guy. Taking the returnable beer bottles out back at the gallery so that the vagrants could claim them and get a few bob for their troubles to buy a loaf of bread. That kinda thing. Once I turned up at the art gallery in tears and Christmas simply made me a cup of tea and sat with me in silence until I was ready to talk. A teacup in a storm I told him. He was always that little teacup in a storm.

There were times, the two of us watching movies at mine, just the two of us, I could almost feel the electricity, sure I wasn't imagining it. But Christmas wasn't for the taking. For all I'd never wanted anything more. And yet, not. I knew better. For I loved him all the more.

His mother had received a message, loud and clear, to bear more children. And so she did. And of this prophesied second lot, the first was the love of my life born on the very same birth day of the Son of God. My Christmas. And you just couldn't deny it. There was just something about Christmas. I couldn't even dream in my many dreams of kissing him for all it felt as tantamount to an unholy act. The platonic realm between us the most sacred. In him, my sanctuary, sacrosanct.

And so I kept it that way. And in the end, mania, sometimes my curse, and often my reckoning, well it tore us asunder, a chasm now, no longer my sanctuary, my teacup. But that is okay. For I have come to find it in a wild garden of milkwoods and clover and dandelions and nasturtiums and a bumblebee. For all I still dream of Christmas. And falling rose petals. And I never did teach him to swim.

Love Notes.*Jodie Doyle*

We shouldn't do that anymore. No, you know why. Yes, I want to, of course I do. I don't know how to talk to you. I don't know how to talk. Will you just close your eyes for me. Will you just trust me. I brought you a coffee - yes black, one sugar. Of course I remembered. It's late, I can walk you home. It's late, you can just sleep on the couch. It's late, we should open another bottle. Okay, I'll kiss you just this once. I'll kiss you just because I can't see my own hands. I'll kiss you just don't remind me in the morning. I'll kiss you because you're sad and I'm desperate, how does that sound? Yes, I'll hold your hair back. Yes, I'll sit on the cold tile next to you. You can retch and I'll just listen. I'll decipher some meaning from it. I know, I always do. You can have my last chewing gum, your breath smells like whiskey sour and bile. Please just close your eyes. Don't ask why. Please avoid my gaze. I'm really not good at this. I asked you to knock first. Oh, fuck off. Of course I'll stay on the phone with you. I don't want to go home. Can I stay - please. Will you stay up with me. Will you watch the world burn itself awake with me. Mouths glued shut. Hands on laps.

Okay, I think I'm ready.
Okay, you can open your eyes now.

A sock in the hand is worth two [_____] in the bush
Mike Guerin

I've been compiling the Carnival Walkabout Quiz for forty-four years. There is a modicum of status about the job. People seem to like my style, I try to use rhymes and riddles in my clues, a Duckhams oil sign on the side of O'Connor's garage was the answer to 'two types of meat in this not so tasty treat'.

There are five streets in town. I realised early on that I would soon run out of answers in our not-so-sprawling metropolis - if I wasn't prepared to get creative that is.

You are allowed up to four people in a team and the top prize has rotated between five different groups over the years. They are competitive. People would take note of what I looked at as I walked around town. I have been followed more than once. Now I compile the quiz in the dawn light of early summer; crows and chipper dross are my only company.

After ten years I started adding things that I could use as answers. A car number plate placed in a tree; a screw removed from a sign; a spot of white paint on a manhole cover. I did all these things. I know on some level that it is unethical but it's not as if we have a governing body that'll rap my knuckles, if I was found out though, I wouldn't even be left draw the balls at bingo.

If you look in over the field end of the Glaishe bridge you can see the brown shoes that I've just lowered onto bramble crossed bracken with my long-handled net. A passer-by would think I was after colliers. Now, answer in place, I must think of a clue.

A Francis Bacon Print*Rory Duffy*

I yearn to be irresponsible again,
to return to before this.
To take a blade to the knit and weave
that binds you and me to here, to now.
I long to walk out onto Eccles street,
to cross over and amble
down the mesh of Parnell Square.
In the cafe at the Hugh Lane
I'd order Americano for one
and a slice of lemon drizzle
with a lump of clotted cream.
There would be no spectres on Raven film,
no decisions of where to be.
It would just be me
and cake and the splay
of fiddlehead ferns
catching life from the boxed alabaster light.
You would still be in one piece
living your life
of Luas stops and umbrella days,
after-works and too many shoes.
Maybe you'd be in here too,
leafing through a lustrous magazine
or probing under the skin of your phone.
You would have your own slice
of cake, half eaten,
crumbs on a herringbone lap.
You'd get up to leave
and notice my far-flung stare.
"Agh here," you'd say,
it couldn't be that bad!"
You might ask if I wanted something
to read, our pupils fixed, dilated.
As you'd pass the pulp of magazine sheets
our benign skin would touch and the crimson would rekindle.
It would start again and we could walk out towards
the citrus sun, a Francis Bacon print under each arm.

Sanctuary
Deirdre Maher

Underneath the table
shadows pass.
Granny's shiny 'town' shoes
clack clack
along the stained
kitchen floor as
Roisín beag and Teddy
take their tea.
She lifts her pinkie
the way Granny does
when she's being posh.
Teddy doesn't have a pinkie
So Roisín holds her dolly teacup
to his lips
of black knotted thread.
Drink up now Teddy
or you'll get a whack
like Daddy says.
It's quiet now
Mam is resting.
So Roisín sits
in the safe place,
underneath the table
taking tea with Teddy
while Granny
clacks
and packs
and wipes
the stains away.
'We're going on
an adventure, Teddy'
Granny says,
one yellow finger held
to trembling rosy lips.
Ssh Teddy not a sound
beneath the table
as the shadows pass.

Scottish Rain

Beth Storey

The middle of nowhere is a small town some seven hour bus journey from Glasgow.

The pub is warm and crowded, the drink cheap, and the people kind. It's a good place to be a little drunk.

Two musicians – older men with neat white beards – are giving the place some life, the memory body. One of them is on an electric, the other an acoustic guitar. They're giving it everything they have.

Listening, smiling, are two girls from Dublin. A little drunk, very happy – they're away for a few days. They've had a long day's travelling (they're still in their bus clothes, in leggings, warm fleeces) and the music is a welcome surprise. They know already they'll forever associate the songs they're hearing with deep valleys and rolling mountain slopes, gentle sleet, and remote towns perched on sea water.

They feel at home here. The Irish, the Scots – there's much they share. It's lovely, in this town so far from everywhere, to hear the songs they were reared on.

A man gets up. He talks briefly to the musicians; he's offered the guitar, a stool. He tells the pub he's home for his aunt's funeral. She was originally from Galway, he says. For her, he plays *Galway Girl*.

Having made his tribute – he plays *Up the Junction* by Squeeze. On the last verse, he stumbles on the lyrics. The next table sings until he finds the thread:

Alone here in the kitchen, I feel there's something missing/I'd beg for some forgiveness, but begging's not my business/And she won't write a letter, although I always tell her/And so it's my assumption, I'm really up the junction.

One of the girls goes to the bar. Returning to the table with two fresh pints, she gestures to an older man at the bar and says –

“His aunt is from Ballymun.”

Of course – you can go nowhere. It makes them laugh. They're delighted.

Music plays; drink flows. Caledonia has the girls crying into their pints –

Let me tell you that I love you/that I think about you all the time/Caledonia you're calling me, and now I'm going home/If I should become a stranger, know that it would make me more than sad/Caledonia's been everything I've ever had.

The Irish, the Scots – there's much they share.

At some point, the man with the aunt from Ballymun is sitting at their table. He tells them –

“Whenever I'm in Dublin – I always drink in the Confession Box.”

“Off Talbot Street? Ah, yeah – cracking spot.”

The man is in his sixties. He has a thick Glaswegian accent but has lived on this island for thirty years. They tell him they like his nose piercing. He smiles –

“Ah, there's a story there, alright.”

It doesn't take much pressing – the music is still playing, the drink still flowing, and the rain outside still falling. Such nights were made for sharing.

He tells them – when he was young in Glasgow in the sixties, he met an Indian girl. They were together for a few years, but her family wanted her to marry someone from their culture. A marriage was arranged. They had to split up.

“I got the piercing for her – to match the one she wore. I've never taken it out. It's a reminder of her every time I look in the mirror.”

She was the love of his life, he tells them. He's been married and divorced since, but he's never gotten over her. He's never taken out the piercing out. Jesus, the girls ask him, would you not look her up?

“No, no,” he says, “I've thought about it, but – no. Best to leave it as it was.”

He tells them they're bonnie lassies. They tell him he's a stand up man. They say to each other –

“It's been really great to meet you.”

He requests that the musicians play Christy Moore's *Black is the Colour of Her Hair*. They drink, listen, and sway. At the end of the night – the girls polish off their pints, pull their jackets on. Outside, the night's dark is full-bodied, deep. They begin the short walk back to the hostel, Scottish rain falling on their coats.

CRADLE
ISABEL HAMILTON



Washing Away Your Past*Bethany Jarmul*

Soaking the regret-encrusted baking pan, scrubbing its caked-on exterior, your interior. Rubbing sticky desires off spoons, peanut-butter-iced butter knives. Mistakes, mashed potatoes, marmalade clinging to dinner plates. Squirting them with Dawn, the sun rising, yellow sponge behind blushing clouds. Fresh-start suds dancing, floating through the air, popping on your nose, your eyelashes. Rinsing off shame, spaghetti sauce, salmon skin, your skin. Spraying until not a crumb of guilt remains. Drying with truth towels and raisin-skinned hands. Stacking glasses until you see with clear vision, admiring the shimmering reflection of a new self.

Alpine Sunflowers*Amy Barone*

Alone together we drive through single traffic light towns,
past low clouds, lounging cows, and a mountain bluebird
high above the turquoise waters of Lake Bear.

Sprinklers shower alfalfa, barley, oats, and corn.
Purply green sage brush flanks two-lane highways.

Caribou and moose hide in forests from our prodding eyes.
A small cemetery sits in the middle of meadows.

Young mountains' snow-capped peaks seem ripped from a postcard.
Buttery petals set the front-drop for miles and miles.

Light and dark green trees intermingle,
dot the mesmerising rises of wild Wyoming.

THE DEAD*Emma Page*

Nearing you, I took a wrong turn,
found myself in the municipal cemetery,
on the wrong side of a neat brick wall.

I have never been good with maps.
You say you thought I wasn't coming.
I feared that's what you'd think.

You say the dead are buried out here too,
their graves more like barrows, at head-height.
I'm not spooked and that's not why you take my hand.

gluttony
Penelope Sanchez

pomegranate bleeds through our white summer clothes
 eager hands ravage the bowl as the seeds pitter out
 from the cracked font of my hands
 like all hunger, it taints and heaps and
 as the sun sets behind us
 i scramble for my camera
 with sticky crimson fingers, grasping desperately
 through tears of laughter and our little feast
 still i feel desperate to capture
 something.

(quick– hold still!)
(how could we?)

i'm greedy. i want this forever
 i want all my love in one basket to carry with me.
 the way children want the whole birthday cake for themselves
 i want to fill my stomach with this feeling
 every morning
 i want my lover's knees pressed into my shins
 while our best friends make eggs in the other room
 offering us coffee through the cracks in the bedroom door
(we've gotta get more privacy.)
(we never do.)

the lonesome night is defeated and the sun is recovered
 and still dread swims at the bottom of my empty bowl
 stomach swollen and howling
 aching for the coming bird song–
 it is no way to live or to feed.

i am made of want
 and want and want and want and want and
 there must be some kind of price for all this gluttony.
 what have i done to earn it?

(just five more minutes.)
(it's more than that.)

Terrible Lizard

Allan Miller

My son's favourite birthday present, besides the large empty cardboard box that had contained a new bike, was a handful of cheap plastic dinosaurs.

He immediately began reeling off their names, and relished in describing their various gory eating habits. For a just turned four year old his knowledge of prehistoric beasts is quite something, but there was one dinosaur I didn't recognise.

'It's a therizinosaurus,' said my son, as I began googling it.

'It's a therizinosaurus,' he repeated, but as I was ignoring him he went off to sulk in his cardboard box.

After a bit of searching I found the dinosaur in question. It was a therizinosaurus.

I was impressed that my son had correctly identified the dinosaur, but I also felt terrible for not listening to him in the first place. I was especially guilty because, one of my earliest memories of school is of being five years old, and standing up in front of the whole class, with a bag of toy dinosaurs, pulling them out one by one, and shouting their names. I was bursting with pride at holding their attention with my dinosaur knowledge. But then I pulled out a dinosaur, held it up, and told them it was triceratops.

'No, it's not,' said a small voice from the back of the classroom. 'It's a pentaceratops.'

I was struck dumb as a boy, I didn't recognise, walked towards me. He looked small, even for a primary one, but he snatched the dinosaur from my hands.

'It's a pentaceratops,' he repeated. 'It's got five horns. A triceratops only has three.'

My bottom lip started to wobble.

The teacher stood up, and asked the little boy his name, but before she could get close to him, he ran from the classroom taking my dinosaur with him. Miss Sangster followed him into the corridor, but the child was nowhere to be seen.

It was my first experience of public humiliation, and I realise now it may have led to a lifetime of social anxiety. I didn't want my son to feel like that, so I went over to his cardboard refuge, knocked on the top, and said I was sorry for not listening when he was telling me the name of his dinosaur.

There was no answer. I looked inside, but the box was empty. I figured he must have snuck out, without me noticing, and I was just leaving the room to go and look for him, when I heard my name. I turned around, and he crawled out of the box.

I was taken aback, but I gave him a great big hug and repeated my apology. I told him that he knew far more about dinosaurs than I ever did when I was his age. He gave me one of his winning smiles, and held out his hand. I smiled, and held out mine so that he could give me whatever it was he was holding.

I looked down, and there on the palm of my hand sat a small plastic dinosaur, but it wasn't one of the dinosaurs I'd given him as a present. This one was old. Then it struck me like an earth battering asteroid. It was the very same toy dinosaur I'd last seen when I was a five year old boy in primary school.

'It's... it's... my dinosaur,' I stammered, as I wiped away the tears, then looked in wonder at my child, 'It's my... triceratops.'

My son pulled away from me.

'PENTACERATOPS!' he screamed. 'IT'S A PENTACERATOPS!!'

Then he stormed off back to his cardboard box in a huff.

Home Late
Eoin Hamill

A late night, air cold, the house still,
Empty plates stacked high,
All lights off, save in one corner,
Resting weathered shoes.
To hand he holds gleaming silver,
Drawing forth it's trill,
Bottlenecks clutched between knuckles,
Pause to sip, to play.
Draining the bitter beer bottle,
He sighs, bitter breath,
Pursed lips pressed to the fragile pipe,
A familiar tune.
The flashing television screen,
Mirrored in glasses,
Wire frame clinging to rounded nose,
Perfectly balanced.
He shifts, gyrating, settling in,
Wearing fabric down,
As one with his comfy couch spot,
Crosslegged, floorbound, I watch.

Shrine to Nineteen*Charlotte Fong*

You were older than me, but only just.
 That voice you spoke with at 4am was
 different to what anybody else could hear.
 The tall stone steps had a tendency to trip
 and the ground looked slick with rain,
 despite unseasonably balmy days. Your
 heart lay cracked open on the plastic
 edge, next to the half-eaten kebab
 and garlic mayonnaise. Your chewed
 nails scratched through laddered jeans.
 I wore flat shoes that stuck to tiles, slapped
 the soles of my feet when they peeled.
 Second day of nineteen, sunset barely
 threatening the horizon. You'd chosen me.

We ate amongst clouds like ospreys
 searching for their old nest. You
 added sticks and moss you'd found
 along the way. I settled down
 for the summer.

But it was October and that was
 nine years ago. The moment
 rolls along with me
 like a stone that follows
 as I trudge downhill.
 If you were here, I'd ask
 did it help at all?
 Did you think of me, of that
 lifetime, at all?
 Did it cross your muddled
 thoughts, at all, before the end?

NEXT: Almost like the Sound of Wings*Edward Lee*



Crush*Clodagh Healy*

We were tragic
deliciously so
bloomed in pink at your glance
roared in red at my touch
we slurped milkshakes in Eddie Rockets
the day your dad kicked me out
for sneezing five times during the Angelus.

Sitting under the fluorescent lighting
in that Eddie Rockets in Dublin
I counted the blackheads on your nose
as you spoke to me
I did not hear your words
but I felt your breath
as you leaned in closer
the smack of spearmint
hits me every time

NEXT: BLISSFUL AFTERNOON*Justine Lepage*



Peace You've Given Me

Ellie Cameron

1. Sitting underneath your tree, the metal of the chair pressing against my pants. The breeze is blowing, and we sit in silence. The sun is shining, setting, and we soak it in. Sometimes the birds are loud, or your dogs come barreling through the yard, the four of them barking and playing. Sometimes the clouds roll in; they steal the light, or provide respite from the heat, or bring showers that force us to flee early. Sometimes we stay anyway. We stay through the little drops of rain, shielded for a time by the towering tree. We stay through the onslaught of mosquitoes, or sometimes it's flies or the occasional bee. We stay and we sit, sometimes silent and sometimes catching up on life, always finding solace together in the centre of your little grove.

2. Your hands comb lightly through my hair, taking each strand like a thread of fate and twisting it into a new shape. I'd never been able to do this before, my hair far too short until recently, and I haven't learned myself yet. You know that, and so you help. You know what it means to me, the simple assistance. You know the weight it carries. You know it's more. Sitting here in front of you with my eyes closed, I can finally slow down, finally breathe deeply. You know, and that's why I always know I can trust you.

3. Walking back with you—stumbling, really—through the familiar streets at night. You lean on my shoulder, or maybe I lean on you. You didn't want to go, or at least didn't mind staying, but you know I did, and neither of us wanted me to leave alone. The streets have grown familiar to me, sure—the traffic lights, where the sidewalk is uneven and broken, where we can cut through campus to get back faster—but they still aren't my streets, my town, even my state. We walk and laugh and even yell a little, the party still alive in our veins as we make our way further away from it. Sometimes we stop for food, the person giving us our warm cinnamon buns knowing that our vision is blurring; surely hearing our words slur through our laughter. It doesn't matter, not to anyone who works here; most of their customers are the same. Sometimes we skip it, for money or tiredness or fear of getting sick on the sidewalk. But every time, you walk with me. You know I want to get to my bed, what I thought was the closest I could get to a home here, but I was never too far from home. Home walked with me in the night.

At night, I make my offerings*Helen Jenks*

I.

I started as a small thing. I was always like this: curled up, blind, deliciously autumnal, a shallow sort of shapelessness slighted into meaning. I sat born at a hearth. I knew I was part of it, before the being, wood-damp and flamed, stone into bark into ash into girl. My girlhood was quick. There were frogs and mice and bugs. Stone was hard to transform from. Ash was gentler. I had a body suddenly; to grow of it was tiring. It grew well, I wanted better. All my goodness gathered in my spine.

II.

At night, peacocks came to the garden. We never saw them come, but they flew to the roof and shat on our windows and told Juno of everything and anything that happened in that place. My sister and I chased them down. I wanted to touch one, transform into one, eyes and hair fanned out behind me, large, large, growing. Peacocks were never good. They were silly and stupid and shit-stained. There was no grace for them. The coyotes ate until no eyes were left, half-feathers spat out on the snow. Ghost-birds are a strange company to keep, even stupid ones. They are always looking.

III.

I stayed at the hearth until even the stone quieted. I would have taken you there, if I could. But swifts came down the chimney and I changed from girl to tree to stag to snake, each form a nothingness, each body a terror. Hair into antlers, skin into scales, fingertips into bark or leaves or saplings, ready to be snapped and burned and laid to rest. My body a pyre, the sap-skin alight. I know it will burn well, each flame a goodness. I cannot be anything else. I beg you for gentleness. It is all I ask.

IV.

I think that all the things I loved I have loved well. 'So you're there, on Cyprus, on holiday, when Aphrodite rose out of the sea?' I repeat back to her in the dark because she, too, could be made of seafoam the way I love her, waterlogged girl of beauty. We have been girls together; there is nothing else that could live as I do for her. I have loved other things, too. I do not know if they matter as much. It is everything I miss. I am full of wanting. You know this, I have wanted you before.

V.

The days grow ever shorter. It is a loneliness and a relief. I am tired, though I say this too much. A magpie nests by my window. I put myths in my mouth and swallow them down. The taste is familiar, as if I've eaten them before. I ache for stone. On a dish I have put everything I have to give you. Take it, please, it is an offering.

Low Tide*Méabh McMahon*

Try to reminisce at the bliss
Of clouds with pink wisps
When your Dad pulled your jacket
Up against the wind's kiss.
You walked together along the spit
That cut the water into a slit.
Although you were eager for a dip
At low tide the waves were thin pursed lips.
So instead, upon your demand,
He let you bury him in sand,
The wet clay was cold comfort,
Like today, and the dirt
That you drop into his pit.
Each grain is a moment.
Countless; but not quite infinite.

Love and accessibility*Mira Cameron*

The cicadas are buzzing in the kitchen
baking Irish soda bread full of cherries
because you wanted cake and cherries are

my favourite. Our other neighbour, your little sister, and I
chirping, whooping, screaming out,
“There’s nothing we won’t do to show you’re loved.”

Especially if we can always be as silly as we were
while translating the blend of three cicada calls
to a deeper frequency your ear could also hear,
the world all together, falling in love in late spring.

Unexpected eviction

Kendra Jackson

You're asleep when you first hear the alarm. It starts as a muffled beeping noise, rhythmic and annoying. You can't tell how long it's been sounding, but you're sure that it shouldn't be

sounding yet, and certainly shouldn't be sounding so persistently. You decide to ignore it. Whomever it sounds for, it's certainly not for you.

You know that you should have plenty of time available before you must leave this place.

The space constricts around you, but you're still all tucked up securely. There's not a lot of room however, barely enough space to kick at the softness around you when you get restless.

The phrase 'as snug as a bug in a rug' comes to mind, although you have no idea who keeps saying that about you.

It's irrelevant for now, you're here, you're warm, you're safe and you have no intention of leaving your safe and secure surroundings in the immediate future.

And that's when all hell breaks loose.

The alarms are more glaring now, piercing through your brain, driving all thoughts of sleep from your mind. The very walls around you feel as if they're being pulled apart.

And then you feel yourself being wrenched from your nice warm cosy little haven, dragged bodily from your sanctuary, and pulled into a space that's cold and unforgiving. The shock of it makes you gasp for breath. This isn't right, this is surely not what you signed up for.

You open your mouth, ready to engage in vociferous protest with whoever calls themselves the manager around here, but all that comes out is a frustrated ululation.

Above you, you can hear a booming voice, its unfamiliarity making you cower, "Well well well! You've got a fine pair of lungs on you and no mistake! For all that you've arrived a few weeks early and given us quite the scare."

You wail at the indignity of it all as you are weighed and measured and tested. You feel a covering placed around you that restores some of the warmth of your previous home but not

enough of the softness that you'd treasured.

And then you are restored, placed upon a soft and yielding surface that embraces you as if it

has been waiting for you your entire lifetime. Soft words soothe your ears and beneath you, you can feel the rhythm of a heartbeat as familiar to you as your own.

You nestle into the warm softness and decide that maybe these new accommodations won't be so bad after all.

Clodagh Johnston

Some mornings, when you wake, when everything is still blurry and you are not fully real, a hand reaches out and tucks you into a warm chest. Sunrise nothings are whispered into the crook of your neck.

Slow sex follows, clumsy laughter breaking up the heavy pants. Sweat stains the bedsheets, the duvet falls to the floor, light creeps through the drawn curtains. It is bliss. The solid body. The fact that somebody is there. Taking up space on the worn mattress. Lying with you in the aftermath.

And then you leave the bed, feet finding a cold floor. You wrap yourself in a cotton dressing gown and open the curtains to Dublin bus rattling by. When you look back to the bed, it is empty

stew*Aoifke Madeleine*

mammy made stew—
 slowly chopping up carrots, dicing onions,
 sausages from a plastic packet. a bit of pepper, a lot
 of salt, as it's good for the bones. and, as she
 tells me, it's the only seasoning they really had back then.

so they covered the potato skin with it, to be coated in butter churned that
 morning, then strip
 meat from an old favourite cow that
 broke its leg a week back. milk gained from it first
 to pour into tea and lessen the bitter. I watched her hands
 stirring parsley into the simmer, hearing tales of the past
 folklore between me and her, those old wives' tales, previous superstitions.

starting with the basics all brought to boil,
 and when we eat
 she asks if I've had enough. about five times, peering over to see
 how much is on
 my spoon
 as though a mother's love in this stew
 its heirloom recipe
 that was passed down through
 whispers of women,
 that didn't know how to write,
 so over the stove, brought tradition to life
 couldn't soothe any chill of the mind.

NEXT: CUPPA TIME Jan Price





Centralia, Pennsylvania; I want to live there*Josh Fortune*

Presentation to the power of five:
 Diversity of knowledge + non-speciality = feel alive;
 Special, like your nan told you every time she saw you
 About to cry. A thousand days, a thousand nights
 To slay the dragon with all of your might, and a pinch of
 Hollow power to pulverise piles of shite.

I call her Centralia, PA, cus she's a perpetual catalyst,
 Equipping me for war with nothing but bone marrow in my fist;
 St. John, a bottle of wine with the 20-minute madeleines,
 Straight to the pub getting mangled on weak ale with no aid,
 Until the food coma starts to fade.
 Progressing through piles of shite.

Champions League final leeching-fly type of moth in
 The French House has nothing on Centralia:
 Her fire stays on like a tempermental projector
 In an ominous hall, and I'm the solitary head turning;
 Safe here in the spacious four walls, willfully led by the bonfire.
 I love how she burns tall.

Centralia, PA,
 Let it burn.

**PREVIOUS: ESCAPE,
 KARIN HEDE TNIEMI**

Bliss*Sinéad Mooney*

So we lie there, in the marshmallowy quiet,
Nested comfortably in dusk's extended tendrils, the television flickering red,
The glasses standing stalwart, you in my arms,
A perfect and exact fit, and I think to myself,
God, this is bliss. And it is.

Christmas in July*Ciarán Parkes*

You didn't like the sun
with your pale skin,
your vampire affectation
for love bites over kisses,
your dark clothes in summertime,
your trick of hiding
your face behind your long hair.

To make it cosy,
to make you happy,
I lit a fire
on a summer evening,
let the warm sunlight
strain against the curtain,
put on a CD
of Christmas music.

We lay on the carpet,
the out of season heat
melting our clothes off
like presents opening,
like Christmas crackers
quietly exploding.

To Be a Chocolatier*Darcey Dugan*

To be a chocolatier,
to paint.

To open the shutters of a café every morning,
snapping open table legs,
balancing stools on shoulders,
blooming parasols,
carrying out each large leafy plant.

To sell fresh lemonade in the heat
and hot chocolate in the rain.

To welcome the artists and musicians,
to write poetry at the bar on slow days
and read them out to the regulars.

To be able to afford the slow days.



GEORGIAN DOOR
Tommy Rogers

Lullaby*Karen Arnold*

Our first winter together. So many firsts in these last few months since you arrived in the dog days of a thundery summer. It is December now, and I'm standing at the window, holding you against my chest and we are watching the snowflakes fall, fat, feathery drifts of icy down, swirling out of the sky and softly covering over the little garden that has already become new and mysterious. It has been bone cold here for days. The water in the bird bath a sheet of glass crazed with fractures where I have broken it every day to stop the birds from dying of thirst. The buggy in the hallway still has oak leaves stuck to the wheels from our last quick dash to the park before the winter weather wrapped its arms around us both and ushered us into our cave.

A winter teatime in England. Lights are starting to blink on, and although the two of us are alone, it is good to see the lights of our fellow travellers. I keep our room dark apart from the candle, marking off another advent day, keeping the light low like two bears in a cave, we walk slowly through our den. I revel in my hibernation with you, feel the fierce pride of being able to keep you safe, fed, warm in the winter landscape. I turn away from the window, it is too dark now to see the snow, but I am comforted by the knowledge of its whispering presence outside, building up a soft wall between the outside world and the two of us. The blue lit snow laps against the door, makes a tundra of the garden path. deep to get to the gate. It will not be this way for ever, spring will open the world into a bee humming blooming. For now, it is a quiet, wild joy to have you to myself in this snow cave. You stir and grumble in your sleep, a tiny fist finds its way into your mouth and your eyes open wide, deep blue beneath a shock of black hair. Your weight in my arms is still new, I bend forward to switch on the lights of the Christmas tree and almost stumble, unused to my new centre of gravity. We sit together, and the lights are reflected in your eyes, on and on. I move backwards and forwards in time, my childhood winters and the winters you will see without me. You are so still, so serious as you watch the lights. I draw a blanket over us both as the wind sends a rattle of snow down the chimney. It hisses on the hearth and makes the window shake. A frown moves across your face. I will sing to you. A lullaby of frost and fire, of wind and stars and travellers coming safely home. A lullaby of safety in a wild, beautiful winter world.

Interlude between Cork and Kerry

Sara Buckley

I never had my weekends to myself. They were for calling on the family. My mom couldn't bear to be parted from them for a single weekend and my dad couldn't bear to disappoint her. She looked forward to those trips every week. Sometimes it was the only thing she looked forward to, as missing them seemed to have an erosive effect. She was never cheerier than in her mom's house, with the Elvis vinyl on blast and a noisy game of cards in the corner. Everyone shouting and laughing over the music. Plenty of sugar for us and alcohol for the adults.

I'd wear my favourite coat. The navy one with a red floral lining and a badly patched-up tear on the sleeve from when I fell cycling over the high curb in our estate. The curb all the kids had war wounds from and still braved regardless. I see the world with eyes unclouded, and I quote from books I don't understand to entertain the doting adults. Eager for approval even then.

There was no opting out for any of us. We dutifully filed into our maroon Toyota 7-seater every Friday after school. I remember its every feature. The dusky skylight and little plastic trays on the backseats. The windows in the boot that opened only a crack and the compartment on the right-hand side that thumped open regardless of how much force you used. My parents used to hide Christmas presents in it. To me, there's no better car. Mom and dad at the head, my sister and I in the middle and my brother in the back. When he was in boarding school my sister claimed the back for herself and stretched out gleefully.

The way there was much less gratifying than the return journey. Sunny and swift, my book snatched from me as we congregated to chant the rosary, counting on our beads with every verse. I was a cartographer, and my expertise was the ill-lit back roads between Cork and Kerry. A labyrinth unmasked.

Warm and soft, purring we would enter the car, each knowing the routine by heart. There was no prayer on the return journey. Just the drone of the late-night radio, no matter what time we left it would always be the same one. My dad grumbling as he changed stations, determined to find his favourite show, *The South Wind Blows*. My mom snoozing in the passenger seat, satiated at last. The ding of my siblings Gameboys muted by the radio. Too soft to take note of.

Usually, I'm accompanied by a Goosebumps book or if I was lucky, the latest Lemony Snicket. Reading by flashes of streetlights as we passed through towns, only to close the book when the streetlights gradually became more spread out. Until the light disintegrated into darkness. The steady cluck, cluck, cluck of the indicator, clicking its tongue in intervals imbedded in my heart. The hush of the heating. The dip of potholes, each one itemised.

The melodic drone of Philip King's voice lulling me to sleep as I lay in the back seat, legs tangled with my sister. Both of us staring up at the stars and lights flashing above off and on. Blinding then dark. The drive from Cork to Kerry at 2am is a smooth one. My body knew the curves of the road. If quizzed I could tell you exactly where we were at any moment. One in particular stands out. A

winding single lane road, with dead end curves that marked our exit from Cork. At end of those curves was a tiny, yellowed grotto. If I sat up, I could see the Virgin Mary illuminated in our headlights, foxgloves dotted around her.

Years later, when I realised just how sick my mom was, I sought to recreate the feeling of those long limbo-esque night drives. Lying in the backseat of my friend's car with my eyes tightly shut and the radio on. Even now I travel at night, if possible, like returning to a favourite blanket. I tuck myself in and drift off into reminiscences. Safe, warm and on my way home.



LET GO
Amy Harrison

Indulge Me*Barbra Dunne*

while I wait for my hot drawn bath
to fill. I turn off the brash bulb
and light a candle, watching steam weave
its way upwards through the flickering

flame, I hang my cares, like a winter coat,
laden with wet snow, on the hook
outside the door and shut it
to step into the steaming tub,

I take the oil, sweet and fragrant,
pouring it over my water warmed
skin. Kneading into folds, taking
the rough with the smooth.

Astro-Can*Eri Farrell*

Every time I see you in this tin-can city of ours,
dazzling as you are with your halo of bleach,
I am reminded of the delirious love
buzzing in my ears every Saturday night.

I am reminded of the sound of drowned-out-decades
blaring around us and steel-toe stamping in our joint
musical frenzy.

Soft Cell? The Communards? The Cure?

I can feel the blue breeze of the outdoor areas
on my arms, I can taste the smoke of
some inner-city charmer and I can hear the patter
of hearts circling around my head.
We left our kisses dangling in space
and I can feel them whenever I look at the stars.

NEXT: MOONRISE OVER CUWEEN HILL, CHAMBERED CAIRN

Amanda Ball





The Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin*Paul Van Sickle*

Georgian windows twice my height
 a grey sky soft as the pistachio
 and apricot paint, expansive
 as the friezes laced high
 against the ceilings, storm clouds
 lending to the flush of spring
 heliotropes sway in their tidy rows
 lady grey tea, a parchment funk
 April is a nap and I am lost
 in the gaze of a houseless man
 leaning against Merrion Square's wrought iron
 key the owners here would have used,
 to bar him entry in the last century
 I'm inclined to close the accordion shutters,
 light a fire under these marble mantles
 shrink away into the chimney space
 the flue and the ash, ebony is black
 the whole way through I'm told
 looking at the decay of an iron railroad
 in another setting I could say proud, unyielding
 but the cracks in the fine Irish stone
 the staircase steps reconstructed to avoid collapse
 the gaping hole of an absent chandelier
 despite the cameos missing from the fireplace,
 pride in the unyielding feels inappropriate
 Still, it's rare for a ceiling to feel unattainable
 for open space to speak louder than decoration
 It is deep and I am swallowed
 against my misgivings, in the quiet
 in the search for preservation
 I must say I feel at home

Egg by Egg
Úna Nolan

I wake up. I water my plants. I talk to my housemates. I set a timer to get my eggs the right amount of runny. I walk 10 minutes within my 5km to get a coffee. Oat mocha. The friends in my head I haven't seen in months make fun of me for it. I work on an essay for one paragraph and watch Glee for an hour. I eat a sandwich too late for lunch and too early for dinner. I think about showering and don't. I put my hair in plaits to hide the day's old grease. There are 9 empty bags of crisps at the end of my bed, rolled in blankets and abandoned jumpers. My floor is piles of paper and rubbish bags and mismatched socks. I get back into bed before the sun even begins setting. No one has texted me. I stare at the ceiling popcorn and change my LED lights' colours. No one has texted me. I ring my Mum and she tells me I don't come home enough. I get stoned to skip dinner and watch half a movie on our old velvet couch. My housemates wake me up at 1am. I go to bed. I watch TikTok for 2 hours. I sleep. I wake up. I water my plants. I talk to my housemates. I set a timer to get my eggs the right amount of runny.

I wake up. I check my laptop charged overnight. I take time putting on clothes I love my body in. I wear very little make up lately. I like the shape of my nose more. I eat eggs on toast and they are never the right amount of runny but I drown them in pepper anyways so who cares. The bus is nearly always full on the N11. I smile at the couples half-asleep on each other's shoulders. I have 3 classes on a Monday and I love two, zone out for a third. I'm behind on lectures for it. I was meant to go home straight after but instead I get dragged Clubhouse. I can't ah you will I can't ah you will I can't- oh fine! I buy three drinks and rob a fourth. I spill beer down my sleeves and split my seams laughing. I stumble into town somehow and end up dancing. I am with people I love and the world is so slow in these spotlights. I have never even heard of time. We miss the last train and I pay a fortune for a taxi. I talk his ear off on the way home. I fall asleep calling the boy I like, the one whose bed I've been sleeping in recently. I won't remember a word of it in the morning.

NEXT: I Sleep With A Window Open
DOMINIC J. SWEENEY



Recurring Sanctuary
Lucy Richards-Smyrk

I wanted to reach out again,

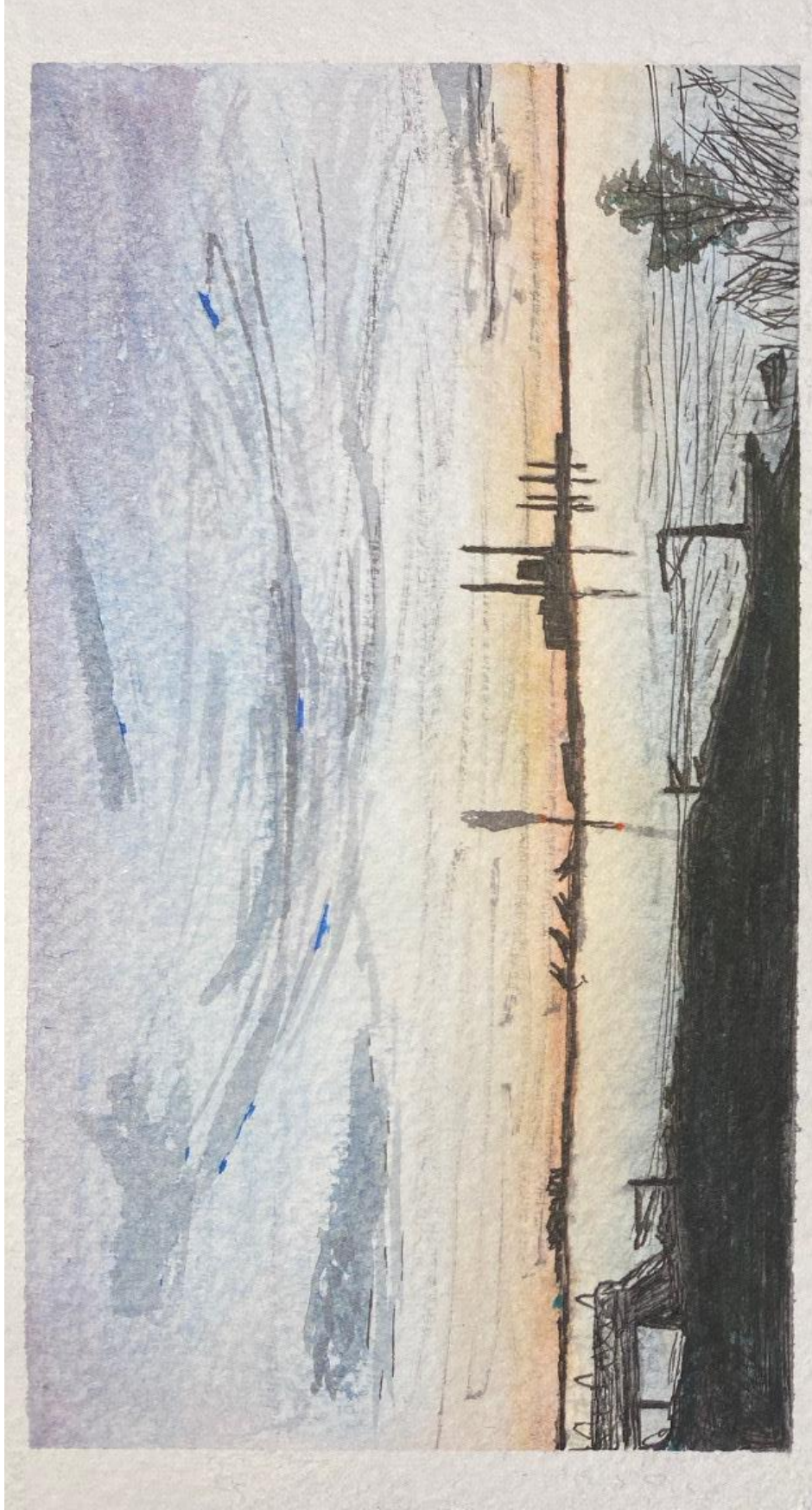
But the line I drew in the sand was at high tide;
Feet on the edge of the drift, thumb wavering over the glass.
The wind held me back, each forceful wave intoxicating me further,

My texts vanished into a sea of blank screens.

Yet, on the other side there'd be waves of ambitious attempts crashing on shores
of longing.

My ripple effect was wearing off;

And yet, I found comfort from dipping my toe in again and again.



DARTLINE
TOMMY ROGERS

Let's Get a Drink on a Saturday Afternoon*Úna Nolan*

We drink 7 pints in 3 hours. I skipped dinner because my stomach is fizzing. We sit on opposite sides of an overly large table, the chair awkwardly high with nowhere to balance my feet. I untie and retie my hair. Your eyes get very wide when you're concentrating, you can't make eye contact or you get sidetracked. You spend a lot of time trying to make me laugh. It takes us 45 minutes to ask each other a question. You roll cigarettes for me and don't tell me off for not knowing how. In the smoking area our knees are touching and we hold our breath. We walk up steps like children to bed and I feel your eyes on me. I also feel 7 pints in me. I ask you a hard question. We stutter and lurch and blunder our way through it. The barrell is sticky with beer and coats my elbows, keeping me warm. You take my hand when we leave the pub. It's dark already, and Summer is not even gone. We hold hands and it is new but not weird. I am wearing my favourite blue dress. I wanted to look pretty. I care very much about what you think of when you think about me. You turn to a side path and pull me into you. I kiss you and turn golden. We light up lower Abbey Street. I stay there forever.

How to come back from the dead

Ankit Raj Ojha

You begin
by getting your ass up
and making the bed.