





## Stolen

Standing by the fence at the end of my garden, I'm reminded of where I grew up in the city and the sprawling fields behind my parents' house that somehow every year sprouted a herd of cows overnight. They drifted through summer in the ripening grass, resting on hot days in the shade of massive elm trees, either close by with heavy breathing and the smell of cud and dung, or, dreamlike, in the distance with flat and angular rooftop silhouettes beyond. I would often sneak in and sit close to them and being North Side Dublin City cows, they never got excited. I graduated from penny toffees to stolen cigarettes and each year the new herd made the field their own and would amble by the bottom of our garden each evening just to see what the boy at the edge of their world had to say to them today.

It was a cool dusk when I found them motionless, all pointing in one direction with their wildness billowing around them in steamy plumes. They were staring at the car that had stolen into their field, tinted black and half submerged in the yellow sea of late summer and they were mesmerized by the awesome cracking noises trapped in the stillness between them, the car and me. A hollow explosion sent a ring of black smoke rolling into the sky chased by an orange ball of flames and the herd charged away into the distance with the rumble of their hooves fading forever.

Kevin Keely

## Resurgam

Archaeologists carry messages between the dead and the living. For two centuries a beech tree wound its roots down through the burial. When eventually toppled by winter storms, the root system snapped the skeleton in half, raising the torso up into the air but leaving the leg bones undisturbed in the shallow grave below. Days later the skull mysteriously disappeared, surviving only as an egg-shaped imprint in the earth. The deceased had been afforded a Christian burial - head to the west, feet to the east. It may have been a somewhat hurried affair as a rock at the base of the grave was never removed, tilting the corpse onto the right side. Weeks later the osteoarchaeologist identified a young man from the mangled remains. He was 17-20 years old and markedly taller than his contemporaries. He had good teeth, blemished only by occasional traces of plaque. Notches on four teeth in the upper jaw spoke of an activity or occupation now lost. Vertebrae in his lower back told of someone involved in heavy manual labour since childhood.

His early death was a violent one. Twice a knife had been viciously thrust into his chest. Shielding himself as he lay on the ground, he was stabbed through the palm of his left hand. The efficiency of the attack pointed towards an assailant trained in hand-to-hand combat who had met inexperience. Months later the radiocarbon laboratory placed this man in time: he had lived and died in 11th or 12th century Sligo. With little or no English, he would have known his final resting place as *Cill iáir dá Abhainn*, 'the church between two rivers'. His bones are but fragments of a once full life.

Marion Dowd

## Landscaper

It was perhaps his last conversation with Charles Harper. An hour of utter mischief and memories then talk fell upon the work.

Somewhere in all that Sean McSweeney said  
"I allow my condition have the paintings emerge just so..."

So, years of "condition" wrestling control of his life, his hands, was just another way for his work to go!

When it was time to leave we helped him stand  
- He would bloody well walk his old friend to the door.

At the threshold he steadied himself  
let go of us gently, like we were paper boats

Seconds later waving back to him from the gate  
and the man, beaming, was still as stone.

Earthed by a hand on the frame of his studio door  
it was all of Maugherow

bog pool, briar lane, stone wall and field slopes  
trembled slightly in summer light,

with the spatula tip of Ballyconnell  
knifing up a new colour neap-tide

Malcolm Hamilton

## a troubling; a charm

After the snow, she said the magnolia tree wouldn't flower and fretted she'd have nothing to look at. He bought a bird feeder, a fine mesh one filled with tiny dark seeds, and hung it from the thinnest branch. He turned her chair to the window, and all that week she watched for yellow flashes on the small wings that flitted between the boughs. On the last day she held up a hand and counted on her fingers.

Nine, she said. If we'd known. He took down a book to find the collective noun for goldfinches, but the answer was sad and full of portent so he kept it to himself. When she was gone, he turned her chair back to face the room. For days he waited at the window, but the birds didn't come. He found the feeder on the ground, mesh casing nibbled open, contents scattered. He couldn't tell the seeds from the flecks of shit the mice had left, and when he took a yard brush to them it scabbled strips off the lawn. She had been wrong about the tree, though. White starry blossoms had burst from the bare bark, a fortnight later than usual. Their fragrance thick and sweet and waxy, an old lady scent.

Louise Kennedy

## Split Rock

You slash your lightsaber through the air and slice open the rock. You check around it. Tiny animals grow under it. Whole housing estates of beetles and woodlice and spiders. They live on fungus and lichen, yellowed and greened by the sun. You collect some beetles in a jar and give it a leaf for a roof. Your mother is in the back garden freaked out by it contents. She thinks one of the spiders is caught in her underarm hair and screams and leaps trying to shake it off. She likes to garden half naked but she always wears gloves and wellies. You go back to the rock and climb to its top. You lean down the split middle and scrape off some lichen with your nails. Something sharp gets under one nail too much and you shout 'fuck'. Your mother pops her head over the wall. 'Fionn, you're grounded.' You tell her it's not fair and explain about the nail. Now you're giving her lip and she double grounds you for a month. 'Fucking bitch' you shout not caring if she grounds you for the rest of your life. You don't want to speak to her ever again. You walk through the crack three times, then sit in its middle and wait for it to close. You'll show her how sorry she's going to be when you're gone.

Rhona Trench

## Street Sibyl

I saw the messages before I ever saw her, taped to insides of windows, on the door, pen scrawls, asking to be left alone, show respect, stop spying. On backs of envelopes and paper bags, sentences multiplied - *no more breaking broken bottles* - syntax and synapse collapsing.

Hers was the last terraced house before the station. Kids crowded there for buses, smoked on her wall, shifted against her gable, dropped crisp packets and cigarette butts where she'd tried a garden. Brazen ones banged her door and ran. Out she'd come with a shrill cry, sweeping brush in hand, headscarf tied under chin, a portly shape in floral dress stumbling after them. A house hag, sibyl, cailleach.

One autumn, she painted the house silver, took a tin of red paint to the side and began. Injustices, dates, and names bled down the wall in the November rain. She wrote into the dark, intent, telling. Words wrapped to the front of the house, down the door, between windows, a body shrieking.

By January, in the amputated light, frantic thoughts spilled across the threshold onto the path into the street. Sentences truncated and jagged, in paint, in pencil in chalk, smeared by footfall and wheel track of passing suitcases, spiralled out and broke on strands that faltered back to her door.

And then it stopped. Once, drunk and alone, I stood in the faded text, read on her path loneliness - *nobody* - and on her glittering wall weather lore - *when sparks fall from stars* - and there in the dark all her broken lines seemed an architecture, the makings of a nest that might hold against storm.

Una Mannion

## from When Light Is Like Water

On the weekends or my evenings off, Eddie would pick me up and we would zoom through the countryside, his Triumph gripping the road, the hedges pressing in with their full summer growth. We went for oysters in Oughterard and smoked salmon in Westport. He took me to a castle in Kerry and another in Donegal, and to big country houses and tiny little pubs, where in dark nooks we canoodled over milky pints. He took me to an island of beehive huts, to the Shannon, to a bistro the far side of a border checkpoint where helicopters hovered overhead. He took me to an abattoir, and I saw the blood running down the gutters and met a man in spattered coveralls who was charmed by my interest in slaughter.

Sometimes we just drove and drove, to a waterfall or a piece of land he hankered after or a high-up borean with a particularly fine view. Everywhere cottages crumbled. I had the foreigner's eye - acquisitive, ignorant, romantic - and I would say as we passed, "What about that one? Do you think that could be fixed up?" and sometimes he would laugh, and sometimes he would weigh the possibilities, and sometimes he would tell me a story about who owned the land and the intractable knot the deeds were in. And I would be astounded that such places should be let go to ruin as though they were nothing, that you could buy a plot with a sea view for less than you'd spend on a car.

I recall a single midnight downpour, parked in Eddie's car above the beach at Rosses Point, the world through the windscreens a rich black smear, as though painted in oils. Otherwise, it was the sort of summer when every day dawned clear and blue, and the seas glittered in the sunlight. The sort of summer whose extreme rarity every person I knew attempted to impress on me, so that a certain unreality attached itself to those months.

Molly McCloskey

Excerpt from *When Light Is Like Water*, Penguin, Ireland

## Cormorants

They fly over like flagships of the devil  
with messages between the dead.

Fighting to keep a straight line  
they bring news to Ulysses,

then back again to Lethé  
with his letters for the boatman.

Only the cormorant is allowed into hell.  
That's why he stands with his wings out

on an unsheltered rock  
imploing the heavens

to forgive him for all  
that he's seen and heard.

Dermot Healy

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## Lament

(in memory of Thom Moore)  
for Aidan Mannion

Exiled into homecoming  
you sang a landscape.

That train left too,  
the exile's place exiling in turn

indifferent to a prophet.  
Sligo's dreaming sand,

unable to provide  
for voice and hand.

That raw March Saturday  
we reminisced you

in *The Record Room*,  
as someone high on Knocknaree

in sidelong gloom  
tipped an urn with ease

and your last plume  
fanned, singing on a bitter breeze.

John Kavenagh

## Bloody Sunday

(In Memoriam Jackie Duddy)

It is 2010 and I am declared innocent  
2010 and the whitethorns blooming.  
For thirty-eight years I have been marching  
towards the Guildhall.  
I am seventeen years old  
And do not show fear.

This is the car-park of Rossville flats.  
It is 1972 and no snowdrops bloom here.  
The gasp of the guns and the whisper of prayers,  
A bullet from behind pierces my chest  
'Father if it be possible let this chalice pass from me'

It is 1972 and they are carrying me,  
1972 and snowdrops cannot bloom here.  
Staggering, stumbling, breathless,  
they carry the Bogside, they carry the truth.  
In their holy hands I am almost home safe.

At McHugh's shop they will lay me on the pavement,  
And I will cease to breathe.  
But I remain here in the concrete.  
I am a grief that is bottomless  
I am a rock in Derry's wall  
I am rain falling on the Bogside  
I am St Eugene's bell tolling  
I am a snowdrop waiting to bloom.

Nora McGillen

## Sixteen Years On

Through blotch cheeked,  
teeth ground hours  
beyond the other side  
of night's inked spaces  
you arrived slithering  
into the metalled light  
of a delivery room.

A pencil tip of day  
traced on April horizons.

You lay, tiny blood-glazed thing  
sluggishly stirring on bared belly,  
air thickened with relief.

I took the proffered blades  
and scissored, a red-green rope  
of umbilicus, sinew tough,  
surprisingly resistant,  
releasing you fully into new elements.

Sixteen years on today, you stand  
sun eyed, clear skinned,  
already beaming down  
on my six feet,  
voice octaved below,  
and those endless, splayed arms  
widened in ever ready hug  
- a giant Condor tenting its young.

John Kavenagh

## The Violin

After a line by Michael Longley

Stained with blood from a hare,  
long-since written

into the ripple of the grain.  
Listen to the slow rasp of the bow

how it searches out  
that walled-up bawl of grief,

picks the lock  
and slides in like a thief.

It can strike anywhere;  
in a strange land

a crowded room,  
a dark auditorium

salt-scald, feral  
gravid as a mountain stream.

Peggie Gallagher

## The Horseshoe

Whatever detour brought us here,  
the depth of the gap is our measure.  
This high up, cleft above cleft,  
stacked columns plunged with gulleys,  
shale plates tipped sideways  
where the ice slid off.

Across the valley's chequered patchwork  
scored lines divide forest from field.  
High summer; the air hums, its blue  
combed into every fold of green.

Dearest, have you forgotten the dark  
cave we slept in, furtive days hunting  
our next meal, like the scouring eagle  
above the clean edge of the sea.

Peggie Gallagher

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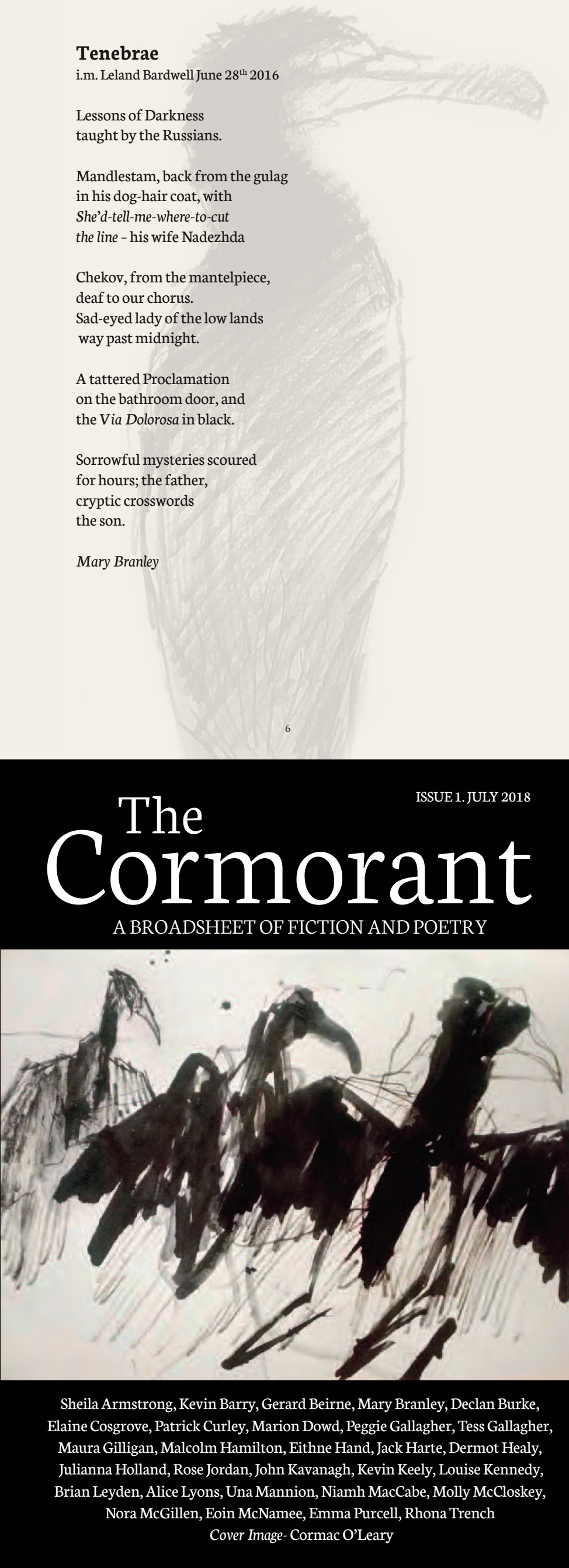
THOMAS CONNOLLY

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# The Cormorant

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