

Joaquin Rodrigo Gets Carried Away	
	
He had coped with his gift far better than most would suffer such impairment. Still, the flaw in Rodrigo's blind head which allowed inspiration prey on him for decades received medical intervention in 1982; some surgeon weeded the garden. Not since had he to buckle with composition, crack open into sallow Spanish planes his quavers say.	
But, enough was already enough by then. From Victoria's tears for their unborn child hadn't he twisted staves, stubborn as pig-iron into a stairway the infant might clamber from limbo up into the arms of Christ, or so moth fingered Pepe Romero says to camera his hands idly releasing every nailed-down note alive.	
Now, you and I, we might well regret roots which delved beneath this air-troubled creature henceforth were disinclined to grapple at such a depth; rue the day he was'n't tap tap tapping away nerve-white cane poking eternal light from minor tonics that we might see more into creation, listen as the blind old man points the way	
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water	
	
Moon was in Gemini, Orion and the dogs sharp as thorns behind scudding cloud, before sunrise but long past time to cast	
your horoscope, splayed out not in the stars but in the livery of bruises across your pale pale skin. Like the rhythm of the cards laid down, deliberate, as a breath is, but instead of bones or the flight of birds I read muscles move beneath the skin of your throat and back and shoulders as they work to take a breath, a breath again, when your waters, like a traitor, rise to drown you inside out.	
This sound my mind makes up at six a.m., of rainfall on a bedroom window, is from fear of floods, not fire.	
<i>Martin Meyler</i>	
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Earthy Noises	
	
Language is slipping from our tongues, our mouths grow into hollow caves that echo uselessly and emit	
guttural sounds punctuated by glottal stops. Uh – Oh, a plosive Shut Up. Our teeth and glottis work	
together, to displace air our breath is ragged as we lose our voices in the babble.	
Now we gesture wildly with our hands, fingers splayed like a new-fangled phlange alphabet spelling out	
a future that no one can read or yet sound out amid the hubbub. If all else fails, we will raise our voices	
in a vibrating hum and sing in chorus, to make earthy noises.	
<i>Jean O'Brien</i>	
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Search Party	
	
I have experience of two search parties. One for a friend whose torso washed up on rocks months later. The other for my then husband. I had found his keys in the ignition and an empty bottle of vodka on his passenger floor. His Winfields and matches on the seat, his wallet on the dashboard. I had walked ankle deep through water to find these details, a neap tide having made an island of his abandoned van. It was my evening routine; driving to quiet beaches and down lonely dead ends. Checking on him with our baby boy in the back. It was our secret, these jaunts. I told him stories and sang him songs. Felt his curled hand at the end reach of my extended arm. Caught his wide-open eyes as I reversed slowly back up a remote lane. Watched him give in to sleep in the weak light of quarter moons. There had always been a sighting. Headlamps or cigarette light, music or his shape in the distance. Signals for us to go home. This latest absence was new and had to be called in. A guard asked me what he was last wearing and I couldn't say. It didn't seem to matter and he quipped, 'We'll bring him home and you can kill him yourself.' The attempt of reassurance jarred in the air. I lay down at some late hour, in bed with my restless baby. Looked at the ceiling, trying to recall when I had seen him last in the full light of a normal setting. At breakfast or fireside before bedtime. We slept and woke to sounds of fumbling. The familiar chorus of sorry on the threshold. A stranger's voice then saying, 'It'll be alright.' To him, not to us.	
<i>Julianna Holland</i>	
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The Darkest Hour	
	
The coldest hour, the darkest hour, when night's long tendrils tighten for a final struggle. Green-eyed crepuscular shapes skulk and stalk the hedgerows and ruminants stir, snorting dew drops from nose and hair.	
As the breeze wakes to freshen the sleep dusted fields an owl returns to feed its young and pigeons seek out tarmac's heat. Then at last a rent appears, silver along the seam of land and sky. Slowly, inch by inch, the pall of night is torn.	
<i>Andrew Pelham Burn</i>	
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Slievenamon	
	
You always came home late, often a little drunk. Only on Sundays did you give some hours. You found it strange that I didn't like sport, I found it strange that you weren't there.	
One Paddy's day, the two of us climbed Slievenamon. You at sixty. Heart pounding. Straining to please your only boy. Like I was Fionn, and you my only suitor.	
You reached the top. I was there waiting. I ran to the top of the cairn. You edged up slowly behind me. You pointed, read the landscape, translated its meaning.	
<i>There's Kilkash Castle. The River Suir. Kilsheelan. Carrick. Clonmel. Cahir - the town I was born in. Galteemore - the highest mountain in Tipp.</i>	
I breathe in the curve of Slievenamon. Its quilt of heather and scree. The roar of a winter wind. Sheets of mist rising and falling.	
A raven appears out of the clouds. Repeats old words. Retells stories. All the things a father teaches a son. The mountain listens. Remembers. Forgives.	
<i>Billy Fenton</i>	
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Blackout	
	
Ink drips from the nib and I think "not yet, no, let me finish the sentence"	
The pen has run out as I write "I love to love." I pick up a new one and finish it in a different colour.	
After sunset I lie in the grass and my skin itches from the insects.	
The sky is where all the ink went. I go inside and close the blinds before it begins to drip back out of the sky and stain my face and hands.	
In the morning the pond is fully of it. The tadpoles thrive in poetry. The cat's fur is matted with it. It is dirt under her claws. The plant pots are overflowing with ten years' worth of words.	
Always more, I think. How can I hold it? always more.	
<i>Oili Diarmuid</i>	
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Driftwood	
	
Up in these latitudes we remember peaches warmed by the southern sun. Truth is, the northerlies blow bitter and purple towards Libya: whipping up the midwaters, where knees and elbows poke up – salt-rimed and knotty like bleached driftwood.	
<i>Karen J McDonnell</i>	
I Saw A Hole	
I saw a hole, Deep and dark, A cave, A channel, A space, I knew if I entered I would find them, Could find them Deep in it's centre.	
My father and her.	
The possibility was Worth the risk, The journey Worth the loss.	
<i>Bernadette Donohoe</i>	
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Montbretia	
	
Daniel says, 'Those flowers hurt my eyes, they offend me,' and I roll another fag and imagine stabbing him, and the gush that would fountain from his chest, fiery as montbretia. 'Crocosmia,' I say, blowing smoke at him, which he dislikes. 'Where's my money, Danny Boy?' 'Don't spout Latin, Mary, you sound like a gobshite.' 'Money, I say. 'Pecunia.' 'Fuck you, Mary.' We dance like this for a while: <i>spar spar spar</i> . Once, we were wholly in step and Daniel doesn't like that he's no longer the Daddy, I'm no longer the girl perched on his feet. I wiggle my arse further into the sofa and swizzle my thumb and two fingers at him. He shrugs, empties his jeans pockets onto my coffee table, and we both examine the detritus: a fuse, an orange plec, two elastic bands, and a condom pack, so grubby and worn it says 'urex.' 'Jesus, Danny,' I say, 'you're too sad to cope with. Lookit, have a baggy on me. Pay me next week. Whenever.' 'You're a doll, Mary.' His skewy smile flickers for a second. 'A living saint.' 'Go on,' I say, shoving him out my door. I watch him skin-up under a streetlight, which makes me want to kill him all over again, though I love him with every belt of my stupid heart. We were the beginning and the end always, Daniel and me; we were the before and the after.	
<i>Nuala O'Connor</i>	
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it could be a vase	
	
he hasn't cleaned it in a while; resin is caking the dim glass like turf mould, and the smoke tastes burnt and hangs around inside your mouth	
but still I hold the match inside the bowl; still, I press my lips to the pipe; still, I inhale, long, deep still, I pull him into my lungs	
<i>Caragh Maxwell</i>	
Things we saw on the table in Grandad's front room	
	
An Old Moore's Almanac from 1994. The tides page open. One entry circled for 6 th June: 11:44 PM IST 4.21 m. A silver bowl full of sugar. The top layer petrified into arctic crust. Awaiting the tip of an encroaching spoon to precipitate trickling liberation. A plastic poinsettia in a festive ceramic pot. A poor approximation of the real thing. The radio with the broken volume knob. His pipe. Its briar wood bowl seasoned inside with the tar of a hundred thousand thoughtful puffings. The photograph of granny sitting on the pier wall. Never smiling. A magnifying glass resting on its surface. A newspaper clipping from the same year detailing the search. My mother's tears as she leaned on the back of a chair before boxing it all up. The note. Outlining his reasons. A clock. Stopped.	
<i>Adam Trodd</i>	
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Horses at Mullaghmore	
	
Here the wind howls in painful sob's I take to the field and wade through wild gorse. I squeeze under the electric fence, They are both waiting for me, Standing still, still as death. Becky the brown one licks the saucepan clean. Buried beneath her mane is a white star. She presses her head against my hand. There is nothing her dark eyes do not know. Somehow they know our grief, our pain, What has been lost here. Orlaith the white one stands back, Continuing to nibble the grass. Now shyly she nuzzles my back, Then pulls away. I touch the deep mark on the bridge of her nose A blow inflicted long ago when she was given away. I tell her you love her. She plods around me Hooves sinking into the salt-wept earth, Her left eye burrowing into some part of me hidden from myself. I turn to leave, crawling under the electric fence. Closing the gate, and hooking the rusted chain.	
When I look back at them They have let me go. Already they have become part of the wet fields, the stone walls, the distant echoing of waves, the emptiness.	
<i>Nora McGillen</i>	
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A Place for Bees	
	
In pale blue scrubs and with a safety mask covering her face, the mountain screams in the delivery room. A litter of pupp's slithers all out takes to her teat for its sky larks and hawthorns, the husky sustenance of Knocknarea where colostrum clouds grow plump as cherubs.	
At sunset, the hull of Benbulbin edges into port. She sits high on the water with her hold, empty of all cargo, as Coney Island tugs her in to the breakers yard at the Rosses.	
Shards of the vessel are broken for parts on these barefoot days when the tar on the roads is soft under thumb, and tender as the primrose. We will gather the flowers from her hedgerows now while scrap from the mountain is winched away and set them in a garland about her head as a gift for her when she falls to pieces and a place for bees, to rest.	
<i>Cróna Gallagher</i>	
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Araby	
	
The way he begins with North Richmond Street being <i>blind</i> – not a dead end, not closed off; the way in the dusk hush of the stable the coachman smoothes and shushes the horse, or shakes music from the polished harness, and the way a fairy-tale might be implied slightly in the rope sway of the sister's hair;	
but especially when the boy is on his way belatedly to the Araby bazaar, towards ornaments that out-bronze the sun, silks like the hint of perfume-breezed evenings, horse-steps as gentle as the first lift of dawn; when, as the train slows through crumbling houses, and over the chill of the <i>twinkling</i> river,	
he tips you the wink that as it happens, more already has; that this voice is surface, that he has, with aplomb, perfected this form, which by its nature must fall short; so although the boy won't reach Araby, there is to come, you can see, so much more runaway love for treasures already here.	
<i>Jain Twiddy</i>	
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Froth	
	
Macchiato. I will guess your coffee as, clad in disposable rain poncho, you peer through the window. You will enter, wagging international plastic, asking if I'll take this. <i>On the chin.</i> I'll say, smiling. You won't get this. You'll speak, flown-in Stetson drawl or 'mainland' news, and I will assume the brace position against small-mindedness. Yours and mine. <i>Macchiato.</i> Your upward intonation will question not your order, but my understanding. Filling the pitcher with cold milk, I'll warm the tiny cup by conduction, not with steam, readying it for two-thirds expresso. You will reel knowledge, still wet, of profundities freshly analysed from the Murals Tour and 'Troubles' pocket guide. You will know better than me. Clarity from objectivity. I will feign both interest and ignorance, having tired of your conversation before you spoke. Sensing your soapbox, you'll justify your presence with our need for tourist cash. <i>Contactless?</i> <i>Sure. Northern Irish default. Social distancing is easing. We assess risk differently now.</i> You'll recite statistics. <i>Lockdown is easy. It's opening up takes courage. After devastation, rebuild.</i> I'll concur. <i>Impacts are felt for years, mental health, trauma.</i> Without consent, you'll take permission to be blunt. <i>Folk should move on. Face-covering is for cowards.</i> From behind my plastic interface, I'll wise-crack something around cultural acceptance of masks and movement towards a new normal. You'll spiel a broadside about herd immunity and opening mindsets. <i>Just get over it.</i> I'll ignore your final joke about subtitles for my accent, just like I'll mute any mention of your supremacist assumptions or patriarchal thinking. Instead, I'll tap the pitcher, pour steaming milk and, in the froth, draw a heart. The customer is always right. <i>Have a nice day.</i> You'll leave, knowing you've enlightened my take on Covid. I'll stay, reflecting on parallels with peace, lost in translation.	
<i>Sue Divin</i>	
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Well	
	
Down the two-way laneroad towards big pharma Ringaskiddy or to old Protestant Monkstown or even to the burgeoning satellite town of Carrigaline is a place called Millionaire's Row or Horseshit Lane; the first of its names is the derogatory one. The houses are set back from the road and many have gramineous front gardens you can see over the low hedgerows, with maybe flagstones and a gravel driveway and japonica, geranium, red hot pokers. You won't see scotched playthings or capsized goalposts out front because the kids as a rule play round the back, where there is more green land and no road. Had you passed here in the spring daytime you would have seen all or most of a barefoot young woman in or near or dangling her feet in a hole of about her height in circumference and of a depth that, had you stuck around, you would have seen as the days advanced swallow her up even as she stabbed and hurled the earth out upwards or after a time carried it in a bucket up a ladder that poked with diminishing rungs from the pliable earth. The mound she displaced becoming too tall for her and so recast into a wedge-shaped bank that followed the meek slope of the garden in no particular direction down towards Ringaskiddy. She in some combination of Musto salopettes, soiled Senior Cup rugby shorts, sports bra and ultra-lightweight raincoat, her shoulders and face and even feet clean in the morning and begrimed by the evening according to the weather or, you supposed, the care with which she could bring herself to work that day. Here, as anywhere, things grow unplanted.	
<i>Fiachra Kelleher</i>	
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Boil Water Notice	
	
<i>Where's the scoop, where have you put it? You know I need that orange scoop. Ah there it is! Why is it always my things that get moved? Why can't you put things back in their proper place? A measure of porridge outs, just so, then two parts water, placed in the microwave for 45 seconds. Have these blueberries been washed?</i> Twenty-two years of the same. I turn the radio up to block out the slurping noise you make when eating. I take in with satisfaction the smudges of yoghurt blotting your lips and the purple-stained blotches darkening your chin. You keep on giving out, talking when eating, spraying grey droplets onto the countertop, some, falling short, coagulate on your tie. <i>...Boil water notice has been extended indefinitely ...</i> For three months a boil water notice has been in place. The supply infected by cryptosporidium. I twist the tap and let water splash into the kettle. The liquid runs clear and when it reaches the fill level of the jug, I stop the flow. Peering in, I imagine millions of tiny one-celled parasites roiling within, invisible to the eye. Legions of invaders, carried in mouthfuls swallowed down your throat to your intestinal tract, embedding themselves in gastric walls. Reproducing and shedding massively within you. <i>For God's sake where's my tea woman!</i> I return the kettle to its base and flip its switch. I watch the stilled water start to boil. Sudden heat creating bubbles that expand, rise and explode. My blood rages. Peritubular cells in my kidneys react, secreting messages deep into my marrow, hosts of new red cells replenish me. Calmly, I wet the tea leaves gathered patiently in the pot. Whilst the tea brews, I fill your water bottle for work directly from the tap.	
<i>Mairaed McCann</i>	
22	

Luna-tic-tic

Circa 1986

The chalky beams of a sickle moon infiltrates a window, defenceless, single-glazed. The room's warm-black hides behind the backs of things. We lie on the ground she sleeps, I, nuzzled into the small of her back. Its sudden light didn't startle her, her breaths are long and deep, pulling the moon's light over and back the smooth bones of her shoulder, eclipsing the colony of new freckles affixed to the taut skin over the ball-joint. Her bra, cotton-white frames her silhouetted skin, blemish-less, but for the café-au-lait cluster centred on the spine column above the clasp, the sole constellation on the youthful universe of her back, I throw my small arms around her and love the full rise and fall of her, My mother.

Present time

We sit opposed in the front room. The pallid light of March takes to the tops of tepid tea filled mugs on the coffee table. We pick apart the small-talk like leftovers, avoiding the sore conversations stitched into the carpet, the wallpaper of this room. And as I take my leave, she takes me by surprise- arms outstretched, holding out for me to hold her- and as I do, I feel the loss in her, like a bag emptied of its contents, her husband, an organ, the flight of her children- her blood slowing, thickening, calcifying her sabre-sharp wit, and I think don't hold too tightly lest she break like chalk and turn to dust, My Mother Moon.

Jennifer Bracken

23

A Great Uncle

after R.S. Thomas

Matt to familiars, Maloney to his enemies; the book of whom was fat and ancient and always being written. One word accidentally out of place and you'd get life without parole on the version of Devil's Island he had purpose built in his head.

He'd enter a room like the premature onset of twilight. Whiskey chasers in the brown saloon bars of Headford and Shrule quickened him, fixed his anger's shotgun on its preferred targets. Though he never killed anyone that way. That incidental whose head went against a kerbstone came in for an argument, and got served one.

The Tuam Herald and Western People taken into back rooms and read away from the eyes of children. Manslaughter. Sentence suspended. The accused's exemplary life and two elderly parents who must be cared for.

They die. He sells first cattle, then land. Tired of driving wonky green vans off the same old roads and having to be rescued. England. The lodging houses of West London. New Year's Eve arguments picked with visitors about the naming of nephew and nieces.

That nursing home, and antiseptic death in a different century.

Kevin Higgins

27

Veteran's Day

At Veteran's Park, every day is Veteran's Day. We celebrate by walking on our hands, panhandle cyclists for change, slip into makeout spots under azaleas, smoke dope behind the granite plaque honoring the fallen from each of the Wars. Sometimes when the buzz hits Tina, she reads aloud the list of names etched in granite. Sometimes she'll rub her face, her palms flat against the cool stone on a hot evening, squinting as the sun recedes and Jody lights up what's left of the spliff. Tina's an expert hand walker and she flips upside down, steadying her dangling legs as she reads the names closest to her face: "Pvt. Grayson Stalton, Pvt. Martin Stetson, Pvt. Ladislaw Szyzniewski ..." she pauses. "Laddy, that's you!" I crouch to Tina's eye level, trace my finger over the letters, as the familiar cluster of S's and Z's of my childhood writing nightmares returns. Then I realize it must be my grandfather, a man my mother never wanted me to know, a man I never knew who, until this moment, apparently served in the Korean War. A man who shares my name. "Dude!" Jody says, and hands me the spliff. I inhale deep, feeling the crisp hot on my tongue, the roof of my mouth, my lungs as I read and re-read his name. My name. Tina hand-walks toward Jody on the needles of the tall pines as I stare at each letter of my grandfather's name, and mine, trying to fill the space between us.

Erica Plouffe

3

Ballet Class

You'd have asked if you could watch your only grandchild dance. While undertakers cleanse your skin and dress your now unstiffened limbs in your best suit, paint your nails a matching shade and pencil on your eyebrows, a two-year-old in flesh-tint tulle jetés and pliés, unwatched, behind that heavy door, and I sit in the waiting area, staring at a half-eaten rice-cracker under the low bench where children change their shoes. The woman next to me nods towards my belly where my palm rests, and smiles. Won't be long. *Three weeks*. How exciting! Yes. Irish? Yes. Is your mother coming over for the birth? I don't say, my mother died yesterday, that her funeral is today; she's going into the ground in a wooden box and I don't know what music they're singing, what flowers cover her coffin. I don't tell her this because I don't want to make a stranger cry.

Audrey Molloy

1

The pandemic experience in west cork

The pandemic hit me as an Irish citizen In a chaotic period of March Spring the season when schools and businesses closed As a SuperValu worker I was sent home during the lockdown

We spent over a month at a building project We built a polytunnel ourselves Digging framework cementing and planting The polytunnel gives vegetables a new life

The traditional Baltimore Wooden Boat festival, The annual Fiddle Fair Other events likewise were called off This makes it a quite weekend for festivals in Baltimore

I have done many cycles near and far from home Baltimore, Loch Hyne, Union Hall Bridge and Glandore in West Cork I had a memorable cycle on the Aran Islands, Once I cycled along the Canal Du Midi in France

Close by home is Lough Hyne hill and lake A nature reserve which very few tourists visit during spring, autumn and winter But is very busy with tourists in summer It is suitable for kayaking walking or swimming. It is a traditional world I live in I realise As I hoist up the maroon sails and set for sea The family and I drift serenely through the waters As we sail away for the day

During the lock down We surveyed our trees We got the trees chopped down to small logs for firewood Then we stacked the firewood for the winters to come

A green sailing boat has cruise the Caribbean and the North American coast As a sailing adventure crew I met it in Tenerife and Toronto and I'm proud To be a part of their sailing adventure story

Life for me during the pandemic Gives time to reflect on life On Memories and Dreams I will return to work in SuperValu again

Donnchad Kennedy

24

Archaeology

Bit by bit you chip away sixty years of moss and silt to show a wall your mother built.

You trace blue raised veins on the back of my hand. I feel the random rush of years.

Nineteen years ago today my anger's shotgun died. Snow was falling then, as now. Across the street

our neighbor's house stands strangely empty. Ruth is in hospital. We wait for winter's inevitable harvest of souls.

They reckon the difference between the living and the dead amounts to twenty-one grams. But who can calculate the algebra of loss?

A young woman shoulders an infant and stares at Benbulbin's distant profile from the second storey of her brand new house.

Did she know it takes time for rock to become treasure, and an eye to see the worth of one revealed at last by the intimate archaeology of the heart.

Joan Gray

28

Bluegrey

Rumbling on the Intercity past Limerick Junction Toward Mallow where we'd get off the train

To visit the family seat at Doneraile as kids I wonder at how many shades of bluegrey

Are held by a low Irish sky in September There is a swirl of pitch and something like

The blue of baby boys and bright peeping Arrows of almost white. Smears of ambiguity.

I have a friend with a womb taken out alongside A deadly lump, a nephew with malfunctioning blood

Who doesn't even know he's ill - he's that young. I have a bright-eyed niece who can tell me that

One million plus one million is two million, who Doesn't need passwords to get past magic doors.

I have a belly filled with gratitude, digesting a week Of home comforts - stout, the lord's beef and

A multiverse of spuds. I have a cellar of the best Wine, and a sore head. The skies here drip honesty

Promising nothing and everything, the darkness And the light, birth and death and all that lies

Between heaven and here.

Daragh Byrne

4

Note on Bonfires

Just the thought of winter takes me back, morning cloaked in its pelt of cold, the lawn all smoulder and smoke where the fire had been.

We broke off leafless hazel branches, and poked around in the black patch of grass, thin curls of ash-smoke climbing hook by disappearing hook up the ladders of sky.

Embers bristled. The heat cracked against the bones of itself. This was years ago: November like a whetstone for the day's sharp edges.

Almost everything glinted: spiderwebs of hoarfrost crusting over pines, the spruces wet with light.

And kneeling down on the scorched grass, we picked out relics of the Guy: a jacket's zipper, two brass buttons, charred soles of dad's old shoes, fire-chewed and spat back out again.

Everything else gone: the t-shirt we'd dressed him in, the straw with which he was stuffed. Even the rusty safety pins we'd used to hitch his legs.

I still have the shoebox stash of fire-salvaged bric-a-brac, worthless but worth holding on to.

Occasionally, I take them out and put them back again, remember how for a whole day our denim jeans were knee-patched with round Os of ash: mouths gaping gunmetal and memories of fire.

Thomas Bailey

2

Icarus' Mother

So now you all may judge me; fairly caught, impersonating a man no less, what a thought! This woman who can never be content with the sweet confinement of kitchen and hearth.

And as for you, quivering there in righteous rage, Daedalus, prince of repetitious polishing and daily hammering of iron rods, so sure of your limits you beat them into metal words you hung above your door, grateful creator of this squeezing labyrinth, walls without end holding all close to your infinite dullness.

Oh, Icarus. If I could have flown with you! I who came to your door, dressed in your father's cloak, holding out the taut wings I crafted from kitchen tools and the plucked down of domestic fowl. All my lost love of life and just suppressed I breathed on your plumage. What else had I to give you? Only the will to fly, a chance to taste the sky.

So now you may judge me. Yes, he died. But first I helped him feel a joy as fierce as the sun that finally burned him. Icarus knew transcendence while Daedulus beats out daily the bars of his own prison.

Peigin Doyle

25

Rosas

When people learned your name was Rosa They spoke to me of two others – Luxembourg and Parks – Assuming your name a leftwing statement from Your young parents - it wasn't but I liked the associations, Your strong freedom fighting namesakes: a lineage of heroines.

A hundred and one years ago the first of these Was taken from a car and killed, on her way to prison, Her body dumped in a canal. She had dared to say that the system was in disarray: That people were being used as tools. She was a slow burning Hero, in the 1960s her assassination still deemed legal and just.

65 years ago, the second one was taken to a Minneapolis jail - You were gifted several copies of Children's books about Rosa Parks, Bright engaging cartoons depicting a Small woman who quietly refused to Give up her seat on a bus after a long hard day, tired of "giving in".

They held precious mirrors up to the world, spoke of the Brokenness of things. You ask me at six if the wars are over. I say Mostly. But there are still Rosas fighting for their rights to seats, To space, to fairness. You laugh and think I'm joking: I wish - That you may always think of injustice as a joke, And sit where you like.

Sarah Murphy

29

Halloween in the Nursing Home

We do not celebrate Halloween in the nursing home.

Mrs Matthews in the room opposite mine was once married to a Free Presbyterian minister. Though her husband is now dead she will not allow the Devil so much as a pumpkin-sized foothold. This, I point out to the care workers, is not fair.

"It's not a democracy," I say, "if one Holy Joe says no, and all the ordinary folks say yes, and the minority still holds sway."

"Welcome to Belfast," I say the care workers. None of them are from here originally and I am amazed that they have picked up the local humour so quickly.

"Stuff Mrs Matthew," I say. "I'm celebrating Halloween anyway." I dress myself up as a ghost in a faded nightgown and white cloud hair. I pale my cheeks and sit in the corner of the day room all afternoon, going "Woooo, woooo" at the visitors, with my hands waving about a little. No one says anything. No one seems to realise I am celebrating Halloween. Yet they keep their distance and I tell myself they are scared.

Jan Carson

5

Lost change from strangers

Its closing time, all the dead men gathered on the counter, sweeping the evening from the floor, fag butts and memories, lost change from strangers, for the poor box, dogs for the blind drunk at the bar arguing with himself.

Mary Black is past the point of rescue on the jukebox in the corner, a sleeping soul on a low seat, longing for a soft bed and sanctuary and a soft touch no longer there.

Spider webs sway on forgotten crepe paper illuminations, smoke and stale beer hang in the air, hailstones against the window, devils at the door.

Kevin McManus

26

Wild life

A stranger Me A city boy Never saw or felt or dreamt about Alchemic animated seasons Never could and still can't name a flower or a tree Never saw or noticed when the blooming started Nor when easterlies caught cold and stole the failing leaves Never set my mind or eye to rest To settle on – be overcome – Unfettered by unmeasurable space Where I'm found now, undone, unsettled Blown in at the compass point Wild westerly – as pewter cloud – rain-bearing, low Skits and skittle-scurfs the stuff of bog brown hills Lower still, tethered – shadowing Purple to indigo – jazz-misted blue notes Shakes me down from nape to ankle – and I, cold-footed in this peated scape, stand Wind-wetted to the hair-lined scalp Just another woodland creature – Caught – foxed – badgered – Bully-blustered by the bragging wind

Chris Sparks

30

Cillini

remembered by Tommy Weir

These cillini are at chest-height

So we can open our arms widen our eyes

Inhale this moonlit grief

Feel the spade in our hands

See it slice through the earth

Lift the weight of that hole hold it

Bend down, kneel and place the child

Alone, into the opened ground

Breathe deep what that means

Listen – the cillini are singing

Directly to your heart

Jessamine O'Connor

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The Cormorant

a broadsheet of fiction and poetry

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Elizabeth Kinsella, *The Submariner Dreams of the Beating Ground*, acrylic on canvas

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