Aubade with Tulips

I punch you in the arm the third time the alarm goes off. You ask for five more minutes. The bed is hot, snow dirties the window, clouding the glass like breath. I want to smother the phones, say of course, be your pillow, but you have places to be, and the morning is creeping on, relentless as aging. Soles against your back, cold, I push, peel back the duvet. You groan and tumble up. While you're out I'll clean the house, make eggs, brew coffee, shower, put my best face on. Downstairs, daylight shows the leftovers of love; lipstick kissed mugs; my bra on the chair; red feathers coating the tiles like leaves on a forest floor, like the murder scene of a parrot, (not the shedding of boa). I trick myself back upstairs,

smelling you on the pillows.
When I wake the house smells like coffee.
Your smile delivers tulips, every colour,
like the splitting of light.
Yellow, red, purple, blush, bright, a spring wardrobe.
February chills your clothes. I pull you to me.
Your skin slaps my warmth like a cold front.

We create lightning, a storm.
Outside, the day brightens.

rest my body, my eyes, just a minute,

Alice Kinsella

Two sizes bigger

Orla Kenny I.M.

Some days are just bright and the sun slides low across the fields. Occasionally, we took off to Raghley harbour at lunchtime to bowl around the head and catch lungfuls of light. With the slamming of the car doors, we zipped up and breathed the wild salt air. A gannet or oyster-catcher could be ankle deep in a glinting wave; or a goose or gull might pitch upwards with a cry. We spun out clockwise along the path. Benbulben and the inlet at Lissadell on the left; Knockrarea ahead and the Ox mountains across the bay as we bent back around. Our heads were full of tangles that we teased out as we stomped; two lots of curly hair bobbing between the thickets on the top side, belying the depths of thinking thrown over and back. The dog sometimes came running out with a bark. Tripping down the hill brought some sense of resolution, or fulfilment, or philosophical open-endedness. No time was ever free of worry. But hindsight casts a hue of simplicity. I am chasing them now; those simple moments. You set the pace – striding out; I fell into step.

And your feet were two sizes bigger.

Jo Holmwood

Photomechanical Reproduction of a Market Girl in a Senegalese Town

White men were not expecting a girl like me.

They gaggled together just like women from the market, who sold pine to make your man's covi hard and ivy to make your marriage bountiful. Questions flowed like my legs, legs that went to the sky, describing me like livery, my jutting bones, my dust rimmed eyes could still see they wanted me. I haggled back. Paris was what I wanted.

I'd make do with Wolofi French. I wouldn't eat much, stay famine skinny, walk everywhere. Away from the red dirt and too-many-bodies-under-one-roof life of here. Mother says that Yakar's promise of hope undid me; not to be another co-wife in the man's harem. No master but freedom. I had a cheek.

But no one wanted the real me in Senegal.

So they picked me and we haggle haggle haggle. Bones runaway walk me solid from here. Tight cap sun plaits swing and places me right in the centre of time. Elephant ivory buttons on his toubab linen suit caught my eye. White like an angel. He puffed a cloud and I am the market girl of Senegal forever, single string beads and bright cotton weave, eyes through you, jaw bones tight. No henna marked hands or indigo dyed frock of the upper castes.

Yet I knew what I was worth.

Too late I saw his eyes turn away from mine. Safara's Devil captured me on the streets of Barcelona, my body sold, but time is my patron and art will exalt me in the white walled salons of paradise forever.

Olivia Fitzsimons

Lapping herself up

With a start (like deja vu), she realised that She had been thirsty for years. So she went away to lap herself up. To drink up everything that was, ever had Been, or was yet to be herself.

Sipping and wincing at first, then chugging, she drank it all down:
Every last drop of ambiguity from her shoulders, and,
Still parched, she gulped every laugh and pang,
Every anguish, since her first cry to later groans of pleasure and wails
Of grief, to then unknown joys and pains lying ahead.

She relished every eyelash, fallen Out or yet to grow from its lash bud. She slurped her own lips and every morsel of Her body's smooth skin, swallowed every bone, Tooth and nail, sucked her bloodself dry.

Until she was whole (again) and came back
Then to the world. Full of herself, like the natural
Thing that she was, that could be no other,
A satiated animal, a fat cat, who is only ever
Itself, in a place, on a day, in the world.

Sarah Murphy

He Called Me All Sorts Of Things

There are no family photographs on his Facebook page, only highresolution shots of him standing in fields alongside men wearing flat caps, dogs sitting calmly at their feet. He's a country gentleman now, kitted out in a game bag and dummy vest, watching a quietly efficient trail dog stride across the grass with a floppy necked pheasant clutched between its teeth. The photographer knows what she's at. She has taken a side profile of him standing with his hands in the pockets of his tweed hunting coat. He has the same build, same facial structure I dream about those nights I wake up sweating. But if I zoom in and look closely I can see the looseness of the skin around his neck. His hair is grey, the corner of his right eye creased with crow's feet. He's squinting in the brightness but also sort of grimacing as if trying to concentrate on what's happening in front of him, yet his thoughts are elsewhere. In another photograph, he's reclining on his elbow amongst the reeds as if posing to be painted at a Roman banquet. One person has commented: Play boy. It's exactly the kind of thing he would do and therefore much less disturbing than the image of him clutching the top of his country walking stick with both hands, pouting. I'm embarrassed for him, the same way I'm embarrassed for myself every time I'm confronted with a camera. My first instinct is to pull a funny face, but when I do, I expose myself more than if I had just smiled.

Michael Nolan

4818

I do, he said.

He also said,

Vows

I'll give up smoking for Lent.
Just going to town for cigarettes, won't be long.

Battery in my phone died.

I won't be going to the pub after the baby's born

I only went for a fast one to wet the baby's head. Got delayed, Dad needed a hand pulling a calf.

I didn't do it to hurt you.

It was only a few calls to chat lines.

There's nothing wrong with our marriage.

You're an ass. A bitch. Can't please you, no matter what I do.

It's all in your head. You're depressed.

I'll burn the house down if you leave.
Top myself, then you'll get nothing.
I can't afford to pay you maintenance.
You've destroyed our family.

At the courthouse door, he said, Come home, the loneliness is killing me.

Anne Walsh Donnelly

Squirrel for Johannes

Can it be five years
Since you held us in thrall
Spellbound at autumn antics

And if not you then
One of your own
Or theirs perhaps

Holding my own In morning fascinations At fence leap and branch vault

The russet bushed dervisihing Along the cross beam?

Because yesterday
We found one of you
Spread-eagled
Flattened into the lane

We may never know

By a careless wheel

Maybe it is not you

Or one of yours

But a curious friend
On a fatal stroll
And if it is not you
Please come back soon

Before your winter sleep Before all our winter sleep.

John Kavanagh

Daisychains

my vitruvian man sprawls in sunshine, somnolently smiling as badgerlike I snuffle; rootling in the earthy mustiness of soft oxter; licking silken hair into line.

The tang of male sweat heavy on my tongue.

Tender is the mouth, liquid smoked honey.

Vulnerable is the throat, salty satin over steel.

Rosette buds flushing pointed pink under the gloss of saliva; trailing the scent of musth from navel to rearing ruby ensconced in scented curls.

As I wind daisychains around his maypole and crown his preeminence with primroses, lay a wreath of laurel around the pouch of his sons provenance, our laughter lays me supine at his feet.

Ready as Ruth.

Piebald against the palette of virescent meadowgrass,

Killing Frogs

Margaret Hoffman

We found them travelling in the sloppy damp patches of wet fields and bog holes. They were slimy to the touch. "Dirty, dirty, You'll get warts," the old people hummed. And so we set out to hunt them all down and force them into a small patch of green, where we could trap them in our narrow palms and stake them to the soil with wild blackthorn tines for the other frogs to see. Rory Duffy

Fort Brexit

The drive from Sligo to Enniskillen takes me through Manorhamilton where an elevated site above the car-park opposite St. Clare's Church offers a glimpse of a five-sided stone bastion belonging to an abandoned fortress, which brings to mind the work of W.G. Sebald, and a recurring theme in his works that the bigger the structure the bigger the shadow it casts of its inevitable downfall, its posthumous existence as a ruin, for "it is often our mightiest projects that most obviously betray the degree of our insecurity," he has the title character in Austerlitz say when he engages in an extended meditation on the fortifications of 19th Century Antwerp as each time a new ring of forts got built around the city, the time span required for their construction meant that advances in siegecraft left the fortifications obsolete before they were finished, so ever more elaborate defences were built, the complexity of which ensured these too were obsolete before they could be completed, the last and grandest outer ring utterly useless and, needing innumerable resources to defend its vast perimeter, it served no purpose until the Germans during the Second World War converted it into a concentration camp, and with wall-to-wall coverage on the car radio the prospect of Brexit rises before me like an edifice, larger and sillier than any of the mammoth follies doomed to destruction in the work of Sebald, which sets me wondering how can the political architects of Brexit not grasp the lesson of the Star Fort, that the more you entrench the more you must remain on the defensive and watch helplessly as more progressive forces outside your walls freely choose their ground, ignoring those caged behind ever more elaborate and perpetually redundant barriers of their own invention.

Brian Leyden

Aftertaste

The stench of sour wine breath lingers, even after the mouth wash. They never tell you this in training, never say that smell climbs inside you, pollutes lungs, infiltrates brain, never say the mind sees things the eyes don't.

The neighbour says he heard a commotion; not full screams, more whimpers, grunts, running.

The door is ajar, candles, Adele on loop. The body is warm, the left wrist at a strange angle, snapped probably. The head is face down on the cream shag pile rug. A world map pool of thirty minute-old blood, seeping from the gouged hole under the chin, has started to coagulate, tinting the blond hair, turning the streaked tips a sticky dark orange. There is a heartbeat, just about, and there are protocols. Recovery position, vitals. Tick.

2PM, he's wrapping a tuna sandwich as his wife attaches the shoulder lapels to his white shirt. The kids will be back soon, he'll miss that racket and they'll be asleep before he finishes his shift, if he takes the long way home.

She clocks off early, grabs a ready meal for two and some Australian white on special offer: a peace offering.

9PM, he's on his knees. Reaching across the body, he attaches the pads and leans his face an inch from the mouth, the tepid alcohol breath against his cheek, like shallow sighing, barely there.

Procedure; compressions, open airway, mouth to mouth, countershock, close eyelids. Tick.

He puts the wine bottles in the recycling bin, goes to the bathroom, showers and scrubs his mouth out. Reaching for his wife as he climbs into bed, she turns, her blond tangled hair falling against his face. She brushes a wispy kiss against his cheek, sighs, lies back and closes her eyes.

He sees it all over again.

Maeve McKenna

The Handprint

As the clock tolled three, the crowd thinned, the same never ending cycle.

The crowd passed by, familiar faces and new faces bumping and shoving continuing on their way.

My body stayed still, used to the occurrence; my lips pinched into the constant smile. Hands folded and perched on hips, head tilted to the left. My eyes never wavered from its stare out into the world. The sun's light shone through the window, rays enveloping my figure, illuminating my porcelain-perfect skin. Flawless in every aspect, the plastic stood rigid and hard.

My hair cast shadows over my shoulder, light unshielded by synthetic fibres.

The sun moved. My sight overtaken with such light, white the only colour I could comprehend. My neck rigid, my head and eyes fixed. A bang on the glass; echoed. A shadow stepped into the light. A woman, beautiful and tall, her hair pulled tightly into a top-knot. Her figure in striking difference to my own. What drew my eyes was the hand against the glass, following the arm, it stretched tightly into body of a child. Such bright red dimply cheeks, her natural blush making my insides warm as her face beamed with happiness. She turned half way, never removing her hand as she reached for her mother pointing at me with the most magical of words "I want that doll mummy".

A gentle shake of her head. A whispered "No", taking her daughter's hand, their figures blending into the crowd after one last glance back at me. I stayed rigid and as the sun shone brightly, my eyes wavered and turned to the small hand print on the window.

Aoife McQuillan

The Terrace Doors

Today I looked outside the terrace doors,
The sun shines upon the short green grass,
Painting some of the places yellow,
It also shines upon the bare brown trees,
To show how the autumn stripped them off their leaves,
The azure of the sky is covered with white cotton candy,
Now and then, I can hear the song of the birds,
Somewhere a dog barks and a cat meows,
There is no wind, so the world seems so still,

Today I looked outside the terrace doors,
Only to realize that every day is the same,
And the only thing that changed is the weather itself,
So, if I'll die today or tomorrow the days will be the same,
The birds will still sing their beautiful songs,
The dogs will bark, and the cats will meow,
Everything will carry on as normal as before I died.

Today I looked outside the terrace doors,
My phone is silent, and my house is empty,
The only person that comes to visit is depression,
So, I let her in and ask her to stay,
I no longer lock the door,
Because I need to have someone to talk to,
I need someone familiar to love.

Emil.K.Naw

Stepping Off The Carousel

When the time comes for me to leave the carousel, I'll have said my goodbyes. I'll find my armoured coat, my favourite hat. I'll gather the parcels of love and the pockets of joy.

I will not close my eyes.

I will slowly unravel the ribbons and squeeze the tiny pouches and the memories will emerge and waft and settle in an aura. I'll catch coloured droplets and let them pool in my palm.

I'll see Balbriggan beach, feel dry sand on my feet. I'll hear a rising rhythmic rumble. I'll look up and see the old black and orange diesel train slowly squealing to a halt over the limestone viaduct. I'll remember being able to tell the time from the arrival of the trains.

I'll blink and catch a glimpse of the cove at Magheramore, the wind turbines on the horizon.

I'll hear songs over the bay at Culleenamore.

Images of St. Patrick's Fort, picnics on Coney Island and morning swims at the old fishing port in L'Escala will float by, and explode into silver coloured firecrackers.

Another droplet settles on my cheek bone, yellow bows tied around the trunk of an Oak tree at Dowdenstown Cross, little crocodile wellington boots, gummy french bean smiles, a bear called Sundaisy, beach towels hanging in a row.

I'll wait expectantly for the explosions of light.

I'll close my eyes then, and think about driving westwards along the N4, chasing the sunset. Knocknarea on my left, the guiding moon on my right.

Emma Purcell

Swan Song

I split the skin with a Stanley blade and watch sticky scarlet spit on my stomach, pooling in my belly button, dying my underwear the colour of war. The determination outweighs the ache. With delicate, deft hands I spread my ribcage like a fan, like the wings of a swan.

Long fingers reach inside, digging, excavating, expertly maneuvering through webbed veins and empty chambers. I hear sinew and bone snap as I push my lungs to the side, probing for that ugly, pulsating thing. It evades me, burrowing further into my chest cavity, hiding from the grooves of my fingerprints.

[It is faulty, a defect; every day I allow it to remain is a mortal sin]. My palm meets the central heat, the drumming erratic under my knuckles. Deep breath. I've lived through worse.

I make a fist, fingernails plunging into muscle, nerve, tissue. One, two, three and I pull. It takes all my strength to rip, to remove it from below the hollow of my throat.

I feel the offending organ tear from its cave near the nodes of my spine, breaking down on its last beat. There - it's out. You can have it now.

Caragh Maxwell

Emily

Emily closed the bedroom door. We were alone. Standing in the middle of the room she placed her right hand between her thighs, her legs pressed tightly together in the black jeans I liked. She rubbed her right shoulder with her left hand, striking a 'Birth of Venus' pose. Her pale, innocent face gazed at me. An aura of radiance blazed from her. A thick strand of sandy brown hair lay ever so still on her right breast.

She turned away and sat on her lilac coloured bed. I huddled up beside her,

close enough for her jasmine perfume to intoxicate me.

"So...what do we do now?", she asked knowingly, her thin, beckoning lips possessing my wanting eyes.

She leaned in to kiss me and we fell back on the bed. She lay

underneath me,
her petite body perfectly still, tense with anticipation. I made sure
not to crush this immaculate creature, this girl on the cusp of
womanhood. Two weeks of longing exploded at that very moment.
I felt her arms wrapped around me, her fingers digging into my back.

I grabbed both her wrists and raised them above her head. We are lost in a wistful haze. But I noticed something. An indent. I studied her

wrists. Scars. I lowered my head, inches away from her.

"I'm sorry", escaped her cracking voice.

A flurry of emotion washed over my body. Anger, disappointment, sadness. Without thinking, I gently gave Emily's scars a tender kiss. "I don't care"

She lifted a hand over her rosy lips and tears filled her eyes. Two lovers embracing each other on a cold winter's night.

Kevin Gallagher

The Return of the Prodigal Son He looks different from the painting.

He is old now, one eye is without sight.
He carries a blackthorn stick,
And can no longer kneel.
His father waits no more.
Today he has taken the boat from Holyhead,
And driven all the way home on weeping roads.
There are no neighbours to greet him.
The wild flowers still bloom miraculous
Along the roadside in wild bursts of red.
Long ago he let go of the commandments,
But the prayers are coming back to him in gushes,
Like the water breaking against the side of the boat –
Great round repentant circles.
The salt taste is raw on his lips
As on the day he left.

Nora McGillen

The Photograph-after Tarkovsky

At the edge of a remote lake at dusk
Melancholy hauled itself ashore and floated
Between statues brimming with silence stretched
On both sides of an avenue leading to the big house
Where a mother with a dying husband was waiting.
Her lament filled the valley before a cello was heard.
Somewhere near an old woman was tying a cow
In a barn as if refugees were not flowing past.
Years later a grandchild in New York asked at a party
Who are the young couple in the photograph
With a boy playing around a strange mansion.

Gerard Reidy

Startling A Dog

A dog will run backwards onto a road. A driver will swerve. His car will veer towards a family sitting outdoors at a café. A mother will be injured, spending the next year learning how to walk again.

Out driving, he spots her, and honks. Will I wave, he thinks. Why haven't you answered my texts. You should've called. The tyres skim soft over the worn cobble-stones.

The woman sees him and looks away. Rage rises, her face burns dark, his short blares becoming swats to her head.

Her family gawp blank at the car, the beeps like a scattering of hand-claps.

Her husband sees the startled dog running backwards, the car braking and

swerving. He sees it lurch wild towards them. He drags his children aside.

He doesn't have time to reach for his wife. She has turned away, she can't

see the skidding car, she has ignored the sound of brakes, she's humming loud to herself, staring at the chalkboard menu behind them.

Later, he remembers hearing her read aloud 'Lemon Sole', with a question

mark, 'Sole?'

The car pins his wife against the wall, her pelvis splintered, a broken femur jutting from ripped skin.

Femur; the strongest bone, he'll reassure her during her recovery in the months ahead.

The dog bolted, terrified by sudden honks from a passing car. It ran in reverse, yelping, pulling its owner along. It wrenched its chain, shaking its head until it's free of the collar. Unsure where the ringing blares came from, it fled onto the road in front of the honking car. Its owner rattled the loose chain and collar, calling 'Roxy!' But the dog couldn't hear the jangling chain, or its owner shouting. It heard the car horn, the brakes, the skid, and a thud of flesh against wall.

Niamh MacCabe

22

Samhradh

They came down from the mountains To salute tradition Music from ancestors Pipes, horn and fiddle Dancing arm to shoulder Hands crossed and tightly held.

They came down from the mountains Old men On chairs dancing Clasping son's hands Affirmation Blackened sardines and wine A lost key

Bernadette Donohoe

The Iron Cottage

into this family reliquary

out and another squall forces us,

The April gust turns my new umbrella inside

two pilgrims from afar and I the local guide,

to brave the briar barricade, escape the storm

to find unforeseen sanctuary, dry, even warm,

the corrugated iron and seasoned timber still

the signs of slow surrender to the inevitable,

floorboards rotting, the roof sheets peeling,

and, like unhappy memories, erratic ceiling

boards hang loose. In a place apart, we pause

from opposite ends of earth, stand in sudden awe

at the very spot where our mothers were born,

her racking blood-flecked cough, gave warning.

Taken to the sanatorium, then back again

lying in that corner before her final parting.

this was their cosiest, warmest, safest shelter.

We touch the walls, check views from windo

take away with us priceless videos and photos,

then scramble out into warm, erratic sunshine,

the place, as it resumes its secret, slow decline

while we, gone far away, lightened, face the dark

which began here, in this desolate, proud landmark.

We take in the stove's outline at the dead centre,

she was waked in this room, maybe

the bare hearth, recall a time when

dim hills, whins and cut-away bog -

through briars that will soon re-seal

at the ends of the explorations

Michael Farry

effective, though the cottage shows

the sky peeping through iron gaps,

our hurly-burly, we cousins

where our grandmother's fever,

for Frances

Together

Their calls are coils Their cries whorls Spirals of lonesomeness. Their voices own

The still September night.

Curlews at Cartron

Where the departing tides

Out on the bay,

Have left their gifts

Of ooze and refuse.

Bladderwrack and ruin.

Mud reek,

The curlews are staying up late

A quarter moon is a listening ear Leaning in to catch the gist; Venus blinks to ponder Curlicues, arabesques.

Seán Hickey

The Bedroom Upstairs

Just to let you know, that as per tradition, frosts visit the cottage every new year to clear away the winter bugs and keep the place in order.

They thaw and freeze with muscular constriction until all the bugs are dead on the ground and the air, free of sickness.

As always, a key is kept under the mat and by the back door near stone steps down to the garden, you'll come across the flock of sheep-hardy snowdrops droving across this cold young year fearless of the frost. But pay them no mind.

With a shepherds' staff in each hand, they'll stoop past you on their Turas way with faces, grave as the black faced ram and fixed to the ground as donkeys looking into the ditch.

Shawls of heavy ice will hang from their shoulders like wicker creels of eelish wrack, collected from the sea pink gums of a long-receded shore and strapped to their pioneering backs, as they walk the long acre of frost-bitten grasses

for the cosy shelter of the crippled orchard with its grove of bearded apple trees that wait still near the mossy gable and the lights now not lit, in her bedroom upstairs.

Cróna Gallagher

Ouroboros

Beneath the flinty chop of Top Lake lies a giant, A Wild Goose battle savvy from The Seven

in my neoprene suit, turn summersaults in his brain cavity, snake eye-sockets, in one out the other, do slow laps to infinity.

Surface by Léim na Héilte where Cuchulainn's hound chased a deer out of time to other time they swim, hound on deer's tail-deer on hound's.

Crawl Castle Lake, past the mildewed mausoleum Margaret lies in a glazed sleep as Henry winds

howls out winter and grey heron draws enraptured trout to the beat of her stillness.

There the progenitors of my clan, blessed by eternal fishing, cast ideal flies in perfected arcs to the mouths of willing salmon.

The Amusements

Eve works at Redemption. It's where they put the new girls, where customers come to cash in their tokens for prizes: cuddly toys and key chains, fridge magnets, jumbo bags of squishy marshmallow sweets. It's also the place for Lost Children. Eve is not allowed to touch the Lost Children. She has to ask their names and be reassuring but she must not lay a hand on them, even if they throw themselves on the ground and pound it with their fists. She has to make an announcement to ask the relatives of Hannah or Abigail or Gabriel to come to Redemption to reclaim their child. She has to smile a lot and act like she's enjoying her work. It's better than being on the Orbiter where Joy works. Joy has her own packet of vomit powder that she has to scatter on the ground to absorb the sick, and her own mop for other accidents.

All the cute boys are on Relief. They're trained on all the rides so if it gets busy, or if one of the regulars can't make a shift, a Relief boy takes over. Eve reckons she's in with a shot with the ginger-haired, freckled guy. He's smiled her way a couple of times on his way to the Turtles. She reckons Hope has her eye on him too. Hope is one of the Café girls. She has a face on her that says, 'I'm better than this.' Hope and Joy are close. If Eve does well, she could be moved to Horses, or the Photo Booth or The Slip. It's something to strive for. Nobody wants to be stuck always working at Redemption.

Bernie McGill

Years War put him down. I swim there

a timeless gold time-piece. Slipstream now

to The Pool where the whooper swan

Eileen P. Keane

Welcome

the island speaks to refugees

I open up my craggy arms, my cliffs, this shift of whirling gulls, stretch my beaches wide, reach out my hands made of coral, stone and sand, scatter islands like roses or breadcrumbs, to show you where to land

and when you're close enough I'll lift up the rough cloth of my hedges, fields and loughs, wrap its patchwork cloak around you, gather the lush green folds and rolls of sequin blues to make an earth cocoon for you to grow in

because when you're rested and ready to stir it will be my pleasure to watch your wings unfold, unfurl in my cloud-thick hair, sprout your new roots feet deep into my lungs and feed me your fresh air.

Jessamine O'Connor

Out of Season

This frayed end of year I feed on summer; sea-green, graced like crepe de chine gathering pleats of sun and sand-eels silvering the corners of sight, the sluice of sand, loll of a lone jellyfish.

So far now from brine, from my body, slick, flicking a performance of pure pleasure.

We're out of season so, I skirt your edges, stamp my plodding prints and watch. A cormorant springs up, all sleek plumage and nonchalance.

I'm jacketed, buffeted, hands in my pockets finger stones, sea-glass and tiny nuggets of amethyst sucked clean from rock.

It's winter. These appeasements I must take from the tongue of the tide.

Denise Nagle

of the white path behind our back gate,

We never thought it a strange word, it's what everyone called the constellation of sycamores, patterned in a circle, at the end

The Clump

an exit that was always closed. We chased down the driveway, asteroids orbiting the corner, up the steep slope and on to the band of light leading to our hideaway of exploration.

Expeditions around the world, easily accomplished from one edge of our galaxy to the other; hide and seek between leafy branches and behind wide trunks; footballs were retrieved by young boys keen

to be supernovae and kick the ball back to their stars. We never questioned the wood's origin, or worried about its future, as we picked leaves for school projects to impress our earthy teachers.

Today's children, schooled in deforestation, would relish our tales of hut building and bluebell gathering in the forgotten stand of trees shining right there at their own back door.

She had been up early to bring in turf to light the fire in the range,

milk the cows, and feed the hens before she roused the children.

She urged them to get dressed quickly or they would be late. The

shoes she'd polished the night before were lined up at the door and

as they put them on she dug her chipped fingernail into the bottom

of the lipstick holder and scraped out a tiny bit of pigment to smear

It had come in her trunk from Boston when she came back home

to marry. The trunk bore the shipping stickers of her voyage to

Cobh. It contained her finery from her six years in America; taffeta

dresses in subtle shades of pink and blue that no longer fitted her

swollen waist and were now flittered by moths; stilettos that were

too small now for her bunioned feet; strings of pearls and compacts

of fusty gone off face powder. These were now the play things of her

growing family, who loved the clipping sound the heels made on

the bare cement floor in the kitchen. Anything else of use had long

since been cut up and painstakingly hand-stitched to make outfits

for her little girls. She said she didn't care; she had no place to wear

them anyway. Except the lipstick, she kept that tucked safely in the

on her lips before they went to first Mass.

pocket of her sensible Sunday coat.

Rose Jordan

Two Loughs

i.m. Cat McCrory

Introduced for the fifteenth time in ten years

we shook hands one night outside Voodoo

and since promises tell the future, vowed

At the megalithic tomb at Carrowkeel

a wrong turn is a shriek of agile sheep

who scatter and leap the dry stone walls.

In bed somewhere someone imagines this.

A path more stony pilgrimage than desire:

Lough Gill miles away in the sun

like a bowl of mercury;

horseflies, heather, banks of yellow hair grass;

an itinerary of weeping; but you know this—

wounded with all knowledge as you are now.

and stops me here, above the tesselate fields,

Word comes unfalteringly over these hills

and finds me deer-footed in espadrilles

the islands floating in the lough

Stephen Sexton

named for her who was called bright

and to whom every harbour was known.

from now on, to know each other by name.

The glasses of beer wouldn't drink themselves.

or the Duke of York or Katy Daly's

Jean Tuomey

Lipstick

Breaker's Yard

Tableau

She knew her mind was scuttled when she saw the rats jump ship, watched them tumble from the counterpane in a tangled hiss of brown.

had been missing.

Iulianna Holland

She repeated the old story: a ransacked house, the furniture upended, tables overturned, drawers emptied in a heap at the centre of each room.

before they come,' she whispered, 'take down the curtains, burn all the books. Topple

still she cannot settle. fidgets till she flakes like plaster; her words resist

sharp as broken glass, barbed as the slivers of the mirror she's dashed

It came from Islandeady in a truck, from a carpenter. A novelty to

the house full of other people's things. Furnished by thrift shops, all

other belongings came with marks. Desks stamped with trace

lettering and pooled ink. Coal-bruised rugs and frames with

dampened backs. Sideboards and candle trees with the dust of other

homes in their grooves. Revenant mirrors and books lined the walls,

inscribed with messages of 'At Christmas' or 'With love always...'

Room among them was made for the new table's arrival. The floor

swept, over scores of dancing heels on boards of splintered pine.

It was a disappointment at first. Oddly high, it made children of

them both; forbidden elbows and odd stretching. It had to be

pitched on its side, the rusty saw taken out and its stilts cut down a

measure. Capsized, they each wrote on its belly the date and

occasion. A practised signature and a young scrawl. Saw dust settled

in the skirting, the table was righted and found its place. Marked.

At home at last, its cut-offs bolstering where the casters of a couch

Where a plate chipped, where a leak seethed.

'We must break this one walls, fill up the roof with sky.'

We moved her out but like a dog she turns and turns,

positioning, refract in splinters against the nursing home wall.

Geraldine Mitchell

Escape

People arrive carrying dogs as if every dog in the county were about to be unleashed after bolted up days of recent storms.

The beach carries the scars and I still carry flotsam of an old fear. New Year's Day, relief falls through the air,

people count their steps as they do blessings. I survey the dunes, its low tide, I brave to walk at the water's edge,

the sea laps my steps. A Labrador charges to retrieve some missile thrown by its owner,

it speeds towards me. I drift back to the highest strandline,

stacks of bladderwrack, oarweed, alive with sandhoppers, seaslaters. I reset my sightline, draw strength from across the fetch, the full length

of the peninsula to Achill Head, over tidal channels, shallow sandbanks. Behind, shadowed in late afternoon light, the dark command of The Reek.

Edel Burke

last

After the shave, sits at the kitchen table, hard seat, cold seat, is he daft, why not the settee but he might never get out of the settee, sink into its foam so deep so wrapping it'll close over his head, but maybe wouldn't that be nice anyway sure? Irene's knick-knacks, statues with no bloody faces, they'll all go the same way, bucked in the skip with all the other rubbish, everybody round here with the same bloody stuff, same bloody nonsense, the nesting tables always fucking nesting, crispy dried flowers at the window. Last time opening the curtains, greasy old touch, orange ripples, and that cooker's been there twenty, thirty years, oven and grill filled with bills now and all the nonsense coming through the door, Chinese menus, blister packs of tablets in the old fruit bowl. Fair's fair, not been a bad old house, looking out on the green, hot day smell the cut grass, cold day the churned up earth if kids have been kicking. Saw them the other day, the kids, scraping the cement out your man's wall with sticks but he let them get on with it, nothing to do with him, scrape away scrape away, first time those kids clocked him wearing his new last coat they shouted stuff, look at that stupid old fucking bastard, but wouldn't he have done the same if he had been them and seen himself, yes he would, would've shouted you stupid old fucking bastard

Wendy Erskine

The Light From Here

After Dermot Healy

Tonight, up here – because the light's stayed longer – we fly kites. They weave and waltz and orbit. Tiny diamond trails shadow dance each jewel – the same as moons. We feel the pull between stone walls inside the fields on still grass. Stars slide out unnoticed, out of the blue so dark it's settled – the sky's always been like this.

Of course, I'm left to reel them in – the kites. Slowly. One by one. To make sure they're not tangled. In the clear it's me and just the stars. I see things. Draw lines out there of old shapes. Trace names into the nothing scattered across night's acres – remains that shone and died, unconcerned, leaving space

for unseen worlds to track tomorrow's suns. Years – millions of years from now – maybe someone (or thing) up there might in a moment treading water on a dark rock gaze out to their alien sky alone and – unknown to them – catch the light that slipped through here tonight, out of our fading star.

Patrick Slevin

Baby hare

His pupils had collected a basket of words given to them by neighbours, which his black pen tipped neatly onto a page in 1935. Pocharrion, puth dearg, push-a-haw, push-a-han, putch-ar-on. Repeated because the source word must have been unfamiliar to him, the original Irish chewed up and spat out in varying forms. Now, over eighty years later, the root word was unfamiliar to me too. With fair but fading book-Irish, I twisted and turned the sounds trying to seek out the mother form. Unsuccessful, I turned to one better versed in the tongue. He proffered patachán, meaning leveret or young rabbit. But that didn't quite make sense. Old dictionaries were in agreement, but also offered 'plump little creature' and 'weak young boy'. At first these seemed more likely, but as the weeks passed, leveret took hold. Leveret: a way of creating distance between a never-child and the community. A word that diluted a father's shame for allowing his newborn to die unbaptised; a word that absorbed some of the mother's grief. Less awful to pass a fairy fort encircling the bodies of lithe leverets, than a waste field choked with dead babies. Patachán, a word used in parts of 1930s Louth for babies who died before baptismal waters had cleansed their souls. These little lost leverets, soaked in original sin, were buried in unconsecrated ground, stranded forever in the grey nothingness and nowhere of limbo.

Marion Dowd

OUR SPONSORS THE CAT & THE MOON LYONS HARGADONS

Edited by Louise Kennedy, Eoin McNamee and Una Mannio





Edel Burke, Anne Walsh Donnelly, Bernadette Donohoe, Marion Dowd, Rory Duffy, Wendy Erskine, Michael Farry, Olivia Fitzsimons, Cróna Gallagher, Kevin Gallagher, Seán Hickey, Margaret Hoffman, Julianna Holland, Jo Holmwood, Rose Jordan, John Kavanagh, Eileen P. Keane, Alice Kinsella, Brian Leyden, Niamh MacCabe, Bernie McGill, Nora McGillen, Maeve McKenna, Aoife McQuillan, Caragh Maxwell, Geraldine Mitchell, Sarah Murphy, Denise Nagle, Emil.K.Naw, Mickey Nolan, Jessamine O'Connor, Emma Purcell, Gerard Reidy, Stephen Sexton, Patrick Slevin, Jean Tuomey.

Image by Michael Wann, Void Pastoral Series, Brooks' Wetlands, 2017, charcoal and wash on paper.