

Evening encounter with two chickens - variant 2

I met two chickens on the road,
they were looking discombobulated;
ruff plumage ragged, unpreened,
their two-step, syncopated.

They seemed to speak in foreign tongue
hemmed in, or off, from interpretation;
discordant inflections and glottal stops
sharp undertones intimating.

“Go back you foul and feathered fiends
you duplicitous *perigrini*;
feck off back East to Byzantium
or at least as far as the Schengen border!”

Thereupon they turned and headed East
Now contrite with their cowl combed down.
While I uneasy, pondered on:
“What if here was their place of salvation?”

Peadar Somers



The View from Dominick's Room

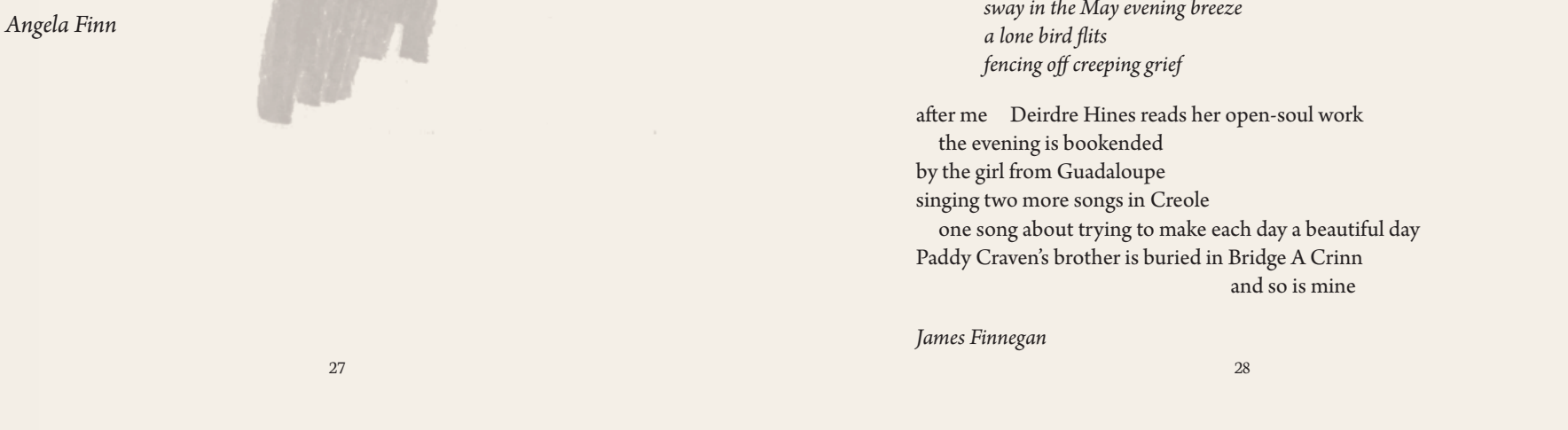
That evening, I sat at the end of his bed, stroking his cat. The grey and white bedclothes were crumpled. He was sitting on his fake leather chair with his back to me, playing a video game. It was late August. The air was typically humid, oppressive. I kept my hand on the warm cat's back while I looked out the window. In a gap between the houses, I could see a mast on the mountaintop lit with yellow lights. It occurred to me that I had never noticed it from his window before, and I said so.

The white and pastel coloured houses tapered off at odd angles and the suburbs took on a new dimension. The chimney pots were staggered. I could see that one of Mrs Hannigan's chimney pots was broken. What remained, was a dark-red jagged triangular silhouette.

The sunset was not pretty, not the sort of pink and orange sky, that might cause a heart to swell. The clouds were solid looking, dirty, beige, rimmed with a fleshy salmon tint. They hung stubbornly, above the roofs, across the mountain and the lit-up mast. The colour made me think of a train I had seen years before, in London, from the back window of a stranger's house. The train moved slowly - a chain of beige capsules - carrying nuclear waste.

I was about to tell this to my son when it occurred to me that he was wearing headphones. Somehow, that didn't matter. We were there in that space together. Me, Dominick and Billy, his cat.

Angela Finn

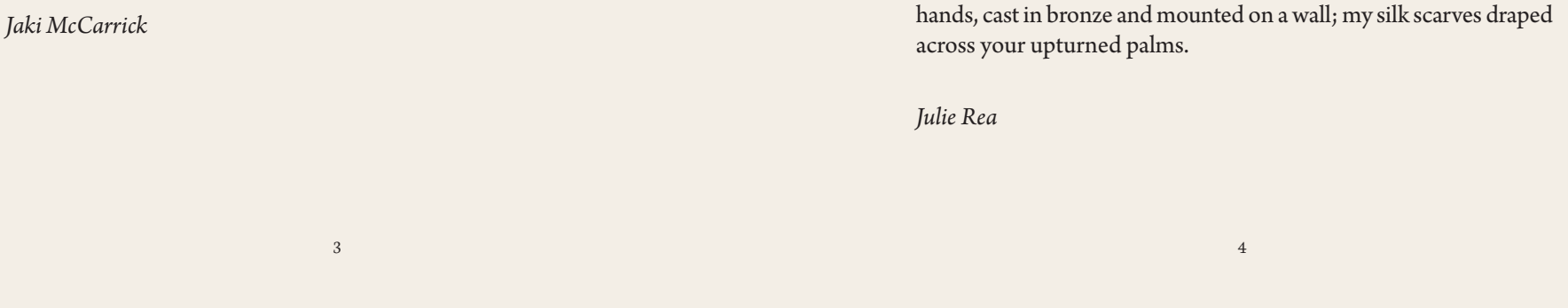


The Family Wolves

an excerpt

Suddenly, her breathing changes and she begins to break out of her sleep rhythm. More light from the risen sun fills the woods. She sees then that the animal is not a cat - but a dog of some kind. His tongue is long and thin and deep-red and hangs dripping from his mouth. He gathers himself up from his slumped position and, without a sound, walks lightly back and deeper into the forest, his head and tail bowed. He seems old, frail, perhaps even ill, thinks Hazel. His ribs are visible and protrude like the exposed hull of a ship. His fur seems mangy, too, is missing in places. She wonders who along the Peninsula might possibly have lost a pet such as this. Only that she has just emerged from sleep she might actually know what kind of animal it is, or who it belongs to, but she is still in a dream-like state and cannot be sure - not then and not later when she recalls this strange morning. Something inside her wants to call out to it, to follow. Thoughts and questions to do with 'reincarnation' flood her mind. About the dead coming back as animals, butterflies, birds. The things Joanie had said about returning to nature find new meaning in her brain. Was it possible, was it? Aidan, she wants to call out. Daddy, daddy is that you? But she does not. As the space before her empties of all sign of the animal, birdsong builds in the place as if the birds had been stilled before by the creature's presence. Hazel has the sense then that there is something ominous about this thin beast coming so close to the edge of his world, as if he has come to warn her or herald news of some yet-to-happen disaster.

Jaki McCarrick



The Morning After Pill

It came in one of those plastic prisons that only a blade can get through. But I did not have a knife, or even scissors, in the girls' bathroom on the fifth floor of my high school outside my Latin classroom. And so I worked my fingernail, into the tiny gap where the two slices of plastic met the doors to freedom. By the time I had made a small hole, smaller than the rupture that had brought me there, a freckle of a break, my little finger was poppy-colored with blood.

I sat on gray tiles. Two gray doors hid two white toilets. My hoodie was gray. The pill was white, a scar, a louse an egg. My hand lapped against my lower belly, searched for a nest of mucus and seaweed growing there the gully of uterus. *Read all warnings before taking* the package directed. That booklet of information was a tether to my great love, my books. I fingered the leash of that connection, imagined my mother's fingers against my collarbone the coastline of our touch.

I read. *Nausea, dizziness, fatigue, headaches, cramping, abdominal pain, heavy bleeding.* The white pill, freed from its binding, sat in the palm of my small hand. I poked it with my pointer finger, imagining how the little thing could ravage an eco-system. I suddenly wished for company to share this insight with.

It was bright against yellow hands bloody nail gray bathroom. So clean so virginal, with the promise of unmaking the suggestion of rewind. I placed it on my tongue. Mouth muscles moved it into the slot of my throat, and I swallowed.

Francesca McDonnell Capossela



Sooterkin*

The doctors say the things you watch
can shape the child that grows inside.
They talk about the dangers of Dutch women
who lift their petticoats to sit on stoves
or dote unduly on the household pet
and then give birth to grimy creatures.

How many hours have you spent
staring at the organ-grinder's wife
as she pegs out white sheets
until you almost feel an agitation,
the shadow of a stirring of strange limbs
unforming the moment that they form?
You try to pluck the image from your mind
like pulling out a tooth with string.

The doctors line the edges of the room
observing your convulsions and contractions.
They pull from inside you: a pig's bladder,
a cat's paw, a cat's head;
and then eleven rabbits, one by one,
that do not spring across the room
in joyful, leaping rows
but end up in the pickle jars
that line the doctors' shelves.

Tom McLaughlin

* a fabled small creature about the size of a mouse that certain women were believed to have been capable of giving birth to in the 18th century.

An Táin Poetry Evening

first the beautiful girl from Guadalupe
sings two songs in Creole
one song about being lifted by others' smiles
when feeling sad yourself
happiness is contagious
then Paddy Craven asks us to walk with him
near his homeplace
to recapture something of his poet brother Jim
who lost his life in a car accident

*I'm not away
I shine in all your shaven
faces
whisper through the
mystery of trees*

a young woman sings a Sean Nós song
my own I begin with the poem *Jack and Francis*
where Jack is JFK
and Francis my four year-old brother
hit by an old Ford car in sixty-four

*furl-leafed branches
above the wall
across the road
sway in the May evening breeze
a lone bird flits
fencing off creeping grief*

after me Deirdre Hines reads her open-soul work
the evening is bookended
by the girl from Guadalupe
singing two more songs in Creole
one song about trying to make each day a beautiful day
Paddy Craven's brother is buried in Bridge A Crinn
and so is mine

James Finnegan



Pharaoh

He had tubes in the veins of both hands. No cards lined the windowsill. There was that hospital smell, of day-old meat and stale piss. Plastic chairs, stacked on top of one another, were as yellow as his eyes. His fingernails needed cut.

The limos pulled up outside a hotel with a mock Tudor exterior. A faded plastic banner - '2 main meals for £10.99' - was tied limply to a fence and flapped in the wind. The manager greeted us as though he'd heard we'd flushed our winning lottery ticket down the toilet. A row of sullen teenagers, dishtowels over their arm, waited for us at the entrance. Death is something as distant as Pluto for them, I thought, jealously.

A clock ticked on the hospital wall. His feet were cold. I took off my socks, wriggled them over his toes, rubbing the stiff arch of his sole. This was the first time I'd ever touched my brother's feet. He leaned back on the pillows, open mouthed. I saw grey fillings on his back teeth.

I sneaked to the hotel bathroom; pink tiles, piano music piped in. I closed the cubicle and slumped against the door. Sweat patches soaked through my silk blouse. The last time I'd seen him - drunk in Tesco at ten in the morning, shouting at a security guard - I'd ducked behind the bread aisle, rolling my eyes just like the other customers.

You were vomiting blood, they told us, almost filled a basin; coughed up a clot, big as an orange.

I imagined him in his grave, arms folded behind his head; bemused, bored. Not even a fingerprint as a memento. I wished we'd kept your hands, cast in bronze and mounted on a wall; my silk scarves draped across your upturned palms.

Julie Rea



Dorothy has sex with cyclones

Everyone knew in the small Kansas town, but no one talked about it anymore. Dorothy was the atypical farm girl. She didn't go out with boys, so people thought maybe she was "one of those," but she wasn't "one of those." The truth was, Dorothy got off on cyclones. She went on the big ride as often as she could, and at certain times of the year, that was often. She made sure her gingham dress was never starched so she could hike it up when a cyclone came in. Sometimes she didn't wear panties, if the fancy struck her, or she was just edgy and in a hurry.

Her aunt and uncle didn't approve of her cyclone lust, but what could they do? When they were in root cellar, praying for the house not to blow away, Dorothy was out with her cyclone, saying things she'd never say to a man or a woman. The cyclone didn't remember, and frankly, neither did she, because every cyclone was different, they all had their different styles.

She had her little dog, it was her friend, and it went everywhere with her, but hid under the bed when she went out looking for cyclones. After she was done, when she floated back to earth, the dog would trot out to greet her, as she leaned against a fence post smoking a butt.

"It sucks out here," she said to the dog one morning after a little cyclone blew through.

The dog was staring out at the rough landscape. He yawned.

"Yeah, boy, you know it," Dorothy said, drawing on the cigarette. "But this is where I have to be, I guess. Only place you can find the big ones."

She started walking down the dusty road, the dog yipping at her heels.

Elizabeth Moura



An Ocean Just as Hungry

I always thought I liked the sea until the week we spent in Kerry;
At night you could hear the waves
And in the morning
And everywhere you walked or drove -
the relentless ebbing flowing needy tides crashing.

They told us the story of an English artist who rented the house to do his paintings
And the German lady on holiday with her two young sons who asked him where the beach was, the one in the picture? He told them
And they went to the beach
And one of the boys was swept out to sea
And his mother drowned trying to save him.

The artist never forgave himself, for the beach, the local people had told him already, was cursed,
Cursed by a priest, in the lean starving famine times
When the fishermen coming in wouldn't share their catch with the famished parishioners -
And now the sea itself is hungry; a monstrous thing.

They told him but he didn't think it was true:
He painted the water instead, so beautiful in its shifting shades of Persian blues and Prussian blues that it lured a woman to her death.

Then they gave us the WiFi password and a box of Lego for our son to play with
And we fell asleep that night listening to its sobbing roar, safe -
While others far away faced the dark in rubber rafts
Trying to cross a different sea, an ocean just as hungry.

Maeve O'Lynn



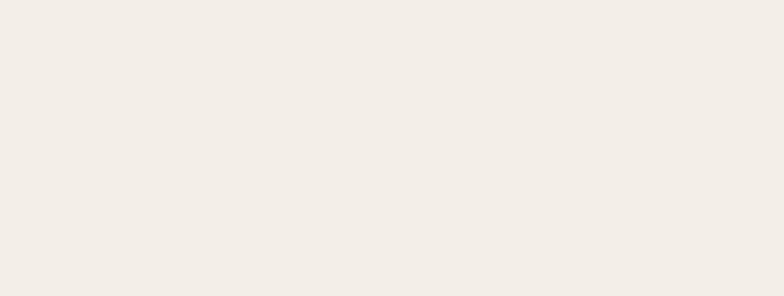
Edward Hopper: Early Sunday Morning, 1939

after, for Ciaran Carson

opal and shallow sea
marrying in the sky
good morning they say
street below stirring
gap of one sheer
drape to the next
shaped like a body
painted dark
the shops yawn
still bleary
no coffee
in sight
you notice what
the shadows do
while we fume
at the queue

to get our moustache
taken in

Michéil McCann



Crithir

The seaside town is packed up, shuttered, even though it's early on a Friday night. A group of men walk alongside the road. The bus lights are off on the inside, so they can't see us watching them. All the banter, the easy hum inside the bus, falls away. The gentle rock of our ferry journey of the past few days is over, and we stare out at a well-lit road, empty of cars.

We're all thinking about tomorrow. We've heard so many stories, been preparing ourselves. But nothing can prepare us for what we'll see in the camp. Even as we drive through its hinterland, warm in each other's company, full-bellied, with a bed to go to; it feels like something is being peeled away. Behind the white planked houses and shadowed concrete there are groups of people; desperate, resigned, trudging. A parallel universe previously off our radar.

'I never wanted to leave my home,' he'd tell me later. 'It wasn't a choice for me.'

He listened to the bombs for weeks before deciding. And still it wasn't really a decision. More a panicked stumble, a wrenched backpack, a wormhole.

I wonder if the men walking on the road have fairy stories like ours. Like the one sod of grass which lands you in a different world?

The bus carries us quietly, and we steady ourselves, not knowing the lie of this land. Not knowing what to expect. I remember a word: *crithir*, the vulnerability of solid objects.

'We had a life just like yours once,' he'd say, blinking. 'And it disappeared into war.'

Down the hatch, rabbit-eyed in truck lights.

Bairbre Flood



Onion

It was over from the moment I saw you cut an onion. Bitten-down sore fingernails slicing chunky-knit rings when we were supposed to be making stuffed zucchini boats. I mean, what the hell were you thinking? I watched as you nervously manhandled the knife handle. Like a shy fumbly-thick-fingered chimpanzee casually holding a Qianlong porcelain vase; with the best of intentions it was always a 'when' not an 'if'. Suddenly the cruel lotteries of life appeared to condense to just one irrefutable, unfortunate certainty: I wanted rid. You sliced the top off, then the bottom, and balancing it on its curved side nudged the blade in, splicing and spraying tears into the air. I pretended not to look. A skinned layer came free and as you pushed the knife in that second time, the body slipped from your grip and bounced across the wooden floorboards. You picked it up, with all the faux-casual-coolness of a dog-owner whose darling pet has just defecated while they're poo-bag-less and in view of a neighbour. You rinsed it under the tap, and continued to help me make zucchini boats. I'm dying. And then you tell me that you're proud of my efforts at trying to manage my emotions better; you tell me things will get better at work; you tell me you love me. I'm crying. "What's the matter babe?"

"It's the onion."

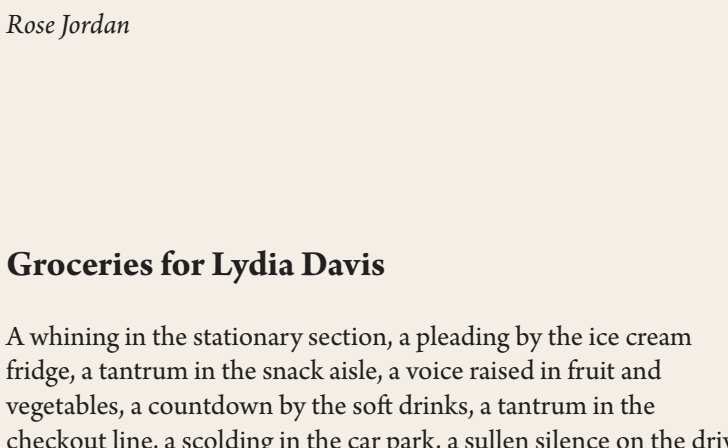
Dominic Howell



Daisy Circles

Kate the wicked childless widow who lived in Granahan
In her perfect little house with whitewashed paths
Who'd nab us on the way from school to bring in turf
Or scold us when the herded cattle
Bucklepped and skittered on her tended grass.
Kate whose husband willed away the place to a clotty nephew
Who'd inherit when she died
He'd have no time for mowing
Daisy circles in the lawn.

Rose Jordan



Groceries for Lydia Davis

A whining in the stationary section, a pleading by the ice cream fridge, a tantrum in the snack aisle, a voice raised in fruit and vegetables, a countdown by the soft drinks, a tantrum in the checkout line, a scolding in the car park, a sullen silence on the drive back home.

Marc de Faoitte



Thirst

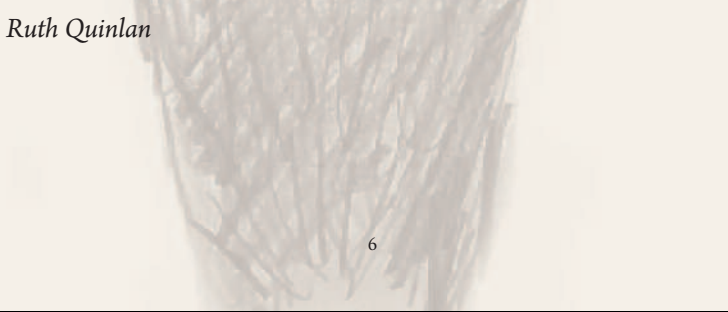
My porous anatomy thirsts for larger bodies
of water than my own.
I capture puddles in plastic bottles, place them
by my bedside, ponder muddled transparency
till I fall asleep. The moon's pull wakes me,
parched before dawn, reservoirs depleted.

Water escapes me frequently, in tears
when shocks of beauty cannot be contained,
when *Weltschmerz* hurts so much my teeth ache.
Pressure builds behind the dam, and I bring
hand-towels to watch sad movies, clutch cushions
to my chest, sandbags against the torrent.

I lose water when I breathe, it flees
from misted lips on frosted days, in steam
from scalded thighs after penitential swims.
I watch it soaking into clouds, massing
above the sea outside my window. As it rains,
I hear the release of a billion inhalations.

I have started to prolong my kisses,
veiled attempts to steal some liquid back,
my wet mouth lingering on theirs.
One damp, filched breath at a time,
I saturate these burning lungs
so that dry land does not drown me.

Ruth Quinlan



The Cormorant

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a broadsheet of fiction and poetry



Helen Chantrell, Trap - Oil on canvas

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