Away with

Are you a witch or are you a fairy or are you the wife of Michael Cleary?

Men held her, stripped her, fed her milk and herbs. She fought, fussy as a new-born.

A shrieking pig passed over fames three times in Christly ritual to prove she was no changeling,

Bridget Boland Daughter of Pat Boland, wife of Michael Cleary, *In the name of God.*

It was his mother, she said, the woman before her, not she, who'd gone to them willingly.

The coin she rubbed to ward off bad luck was conviction enough for a woman not herself, or too herself.

A douse of oil by the flames burned the magic right out.

They said he waited for her return at the fairy fort for three nights, while the ash cooled in a shallow grave.

Alice Kinsella

Glass eels

By the time the European eel (Anguilla anguilla) reach our shores, they have developed into tiny glass eels that swim against the current into Europe's rivers. **Eels: A Natural and Unnatural History** Christopher Moriarty

Once elvers, rammed tight like matchsticks, reflecting burnbridge amid infinite journey swam a freshwater daytrip in my growing mind: harvest of eels, jellied fish, or cold alien yet also translucent and touchable; they made the water apparent, walkable.

A stream contoured by pencils that map Atlantic crossing distances science thought too far. Until tagged eels, one metre muscle, Galway-released, relocate south using a pump of current rewriting the subtropical gyre system; jetpacking open ocean into Caribbean spawnbeds.

At night these eels pulse shallow in warm water: pilgrims-in-a-desert, they forget food and spend their days at depth, perhaps to confuse predators. Contrary coldbath delays spurts, avoids the lumps and bumps of fertility; let's them swim sleek by night in streamline.

Until they themselves birth tides. Eggs hatched into leptocephalus, transparent larvae in gulfsoup, floating a Sargasso sea furrow; still shards, the sinuous snap in our tight channels. And somehow synapse logic breaks. Somehow the glass eels relight the home burn.

Bridget Khursheed

Seapoint

Cormorants flock and land to dive with outstretched necks A music to their movement as there is in everything on the coast 'In my younger days,' he stops to tell me, 'I'd get in all year 'round' It's true, the edge of earth is really where your younger days are spent In the sea, the tin can, eight degree sea, where the cormorants flock and dive together

Dotted along the shore the bright red bodies of the swimmers, Burnt by the cold, scorched with life

Laura-Blaise McDowell

Netflix and...

You are like a really good TV serial that gets cancelled after a few You engage, and you endear; you have that flair for drama, and you create these moments of suspense. But when something good is about to happen, you disappear.

The Mermaid and the Lighthouse Keeper

Three weeks after the gorse-fire, he notices

fingers of green clawing through the embers

brighten and the grey ash darkens with rain,

on the cliff path, he knows that the flowers

to the fishermen dropping lobster-pots in the bay.

he will gather enough to make a lavish hand-tie,

on the small outcrop of rock below the station,

beside the metal struts of the old diving-board.

He saw her there, that single time, stretched

fresh growth among the stubble,

and, when a summer squall whips

the walking trail, dispersing

like a scarf around the hill, the spines

forms runnels down the incline, across

into the capillaries of the earth below.

After many years of hiking alone

will soon appear, flaring yellow

When they are at their brightest,

wrap them in stalks of lavender

on a ledge above the foaming sea,

Maurice Devitt

eyes dazzled by the sweeping beam.

from the kitchen-garden and leave them

Ahsan Rajib Ananda

Fracture (1982)

The names on the desk scratched at an angle behind bored cupped hands captured the imagination when the mind wandered in need

The pale wood was old and lifesmooth, silked by layers of varnish slopped sullen in golden age detentions by boys who never saw the

to war? Did they come home from it? Did they love the way they dreamed they would?

I wondered at their fates. Were these their best days? Did they go

Were they caught in the act of immortality and whacked across the knuckles? They still did that when I was there. The duck, the draught, swinging till they hit.

I sat steeping in history and watched a man certain in his knowledge of events and human physiology pretending not to see me.

The names of these children left when they had so much hope, the questions they beg, were a distraction from the pain of my injuries

I watched the man teach who had that morning pulled me this way and that after the crack that the whole school heard, then diagnose that I was sound

I saw him through the proscenium arch of my broken arm as it bowed farther from the desk minute by minute, his performance slick and by the book

They got me through it, those lads who'd lived and died and fucked after they sat there bored by these failed men who thought they know the workings of a boy

Barry Fentiman Hall

Blue Danube

She learned to waltz standing on her father's toes. When she missed a beat—leaned left or right a picosecond off—he squeezed her hands until the knuckles crowded together. Later, her mother took two bags of Bird's Eye petit pois out of the ice box and laid them across red swells.



Walking to the subway, her kitten heels tapped out threequarter time. Glass doors parted like stage curtains and a single jeté bridged the gap. One step forward, another to the left, then back in the crowded carriage. A morning and evening refrain. She avoided the frozen veg aisle in the supermarket.



At her thirty-year reunion, former classmates joked about 'Disco Dad' chaperoning the prom. A flame crept from her core along each limb. She spread her fingers, dabbed sweat with a cuff. The spiked punch cut an icy river down her throat. A few glasses in, she became a bumper car on the dance floor.



3:1 Illness came. Her mother passed swiftly, but her father lingered, sounding a final bass note. Afterwards, she sold the old house, changed neighbourhood, city, country. She forced a new rhythm. Yet, in transit hours—dawn and dusk—he formed in the opaque blue, took her in his arms. She could not silence the measured chant that echoed through her head.

Marie Gethins

Love's End at The Circus of Grotesques

A final performance endured, lights and music fade. The Tattooed Lady and The Pierced Man exit the stage for the secret revues of their separate lives.

Dressing room mirror enraptured with The Lady's azure and emerald twin, curtsying as she draws down each stocking; unblinking eyes look out from a shorn head.

The Pierced Man once waltzed the twins for luck, spinning them like a double-headed coin. Now he sees only the swollen, drowned skin of whatever creature holds the sea on its back.

Spotlit on an empty stage, probing fresh puncture wounds, he bows to the mocking velvet seats of quarter-full venues. The house lights plunge, a door slams in the wings.

Packing the remnants of the life they shared: coffin nails, smoke machines, two-sided mirrors, garter snakes making their holding sack shapelesseach memento a jolt to the heart.

At the Stage Door, The Lady waits in the rain. A night-bus sears briefly like a distress flarewide eyes flash in a window, crimson lipstick blurs, her twin waves once, and is gone.

John Paul Davies

Constant Bay

There didn't need to be a storm for the bay to be wild. The dark water pulling, dragging the midnight underbelly of a restless dragon, surging the tiny artery that fed the once golden town.

It was an Irish man who first found gold there, many more then that followed, until her shores were burst with them. Yet they came and went as the tide, a single hotel left where there once stood

We camped there in high school, set a bonfire in the sand that lit the roiling waves, the silent cove that held thousands. We tried to imagine those who tested her strength, who came up against her fury, only to find the next morning a lonely graveyard hidden in the scrub, her many slabs engraved with the same seven letters.

Drowned. Drowned.

Drowned.

That they had come all this way only to see the bottom of a different ocean.

20

Claire Loader

False Monument

In Plaza Mayor, a bronze horse stamps on air, his belly filled with sparrow corpses.

For centuries, they sought the promise of shade

within, hopped onto his tongue, went deeper, fluttered down a throat, found themselves

trapped, unable to fly back up into light. Hundreds died in his belly, suffocated by fiery darkness.

Cardboard shelters fill the porticoes around the square, the city's homeless

hiding from the searing heat. At café tables, people sip coffee

under shade of frescoed buildings, eyes hidden by sunglasses reflecting sky.

During the war, someone threw a bomb into the horse's mouth which opened its guts

and belched out the corpses entombed inside sending them skywards, back into air.

About when Aunty Kathleen was dying, me and Delia hit Fuengirola.

What if she died when we were away? I investigated the small print

with the magnifying glass she'd used for radio bingo: sitting in bed,

listening to Mickey-Joe call the numbers. I'd think the radio had

packed in, he paused that long between reading his balls. Dab-dab.

Coverage was listed in size-zero font: mother, father, sister, aunty,

granny, hijack, avalanche, disablement. "Que sera sera!" I scrunched

the form and chucked it under Kathleen's bed, "Kay, don't die on us

Middle of the night, we got a hackney. By lunchtime we were basking

in our balcony that was like a shark-cage tacked onto the hotel. They

At the bar we threw Screaming Orgasms down our gullets and lobbed

I woke up holding a clump of hair. Delia was bawling around the dance

floor. I dragged her out, promising shishes. "Shick of you shushing

On the beach, three lads shared cans. I wanted the lanky fella, spider

Hup! Delia waddled to the sea, undressing. Her wide-screen arse

disappeared into the waves. Dead calm, then oh the way she hurled

The lads with their dirty grins. Lanky's beer dribbled over his chin.

It brought to mind the whipped egg-whites in milk that I spooned

I puked foam onto the night sand. Its cool fizz on my parched lips.

tattoo on his neck. He was boney-angled, like a bag of pencils

herself out of the water! A blur across the orange slice of sun.

while we're in Fuengirola." Comatose, she refused me a sign.

fence you in on account of jumpers lepping into the pool.

She never gave me a dabber of my own.

paper umbrellas at the barman.

onto Kathleen's slack mouth.

me." I'd said shush kebab I was that mouldy.

Nicola Heaney

Costa

This bag was big and black and made of leather. The awkward gold clasp made a clunky sound when it was being opened or closed. She tipped the contents onto the floor. A Polo mint, the last one with the silver paper wrapper congealed to it. A bottle of 4711 Eau de Cologne, the kind you tip onto your finger, like holy water. A child's bootee wrapped in tissue, a child she had lost, perhaps.

Various coins: two and sixpences and a thrupenny bit with a the words barely legible.

A receipt from a dress shop, Cassidys in Georges Street, for a could get the scent of her aunt.

Rosaleen Glennon

Fire

If I saw your world was a raging inferno Singeing your brow and the palm of your hand I would build us a house of stucco and red tiles Take you inside and soak you with me And you would be safe from the flames

Digested

Nuala Roche

She mixes the spell in her own mouth. Sage under the tongue, stray pieces filtering through the gap between her front teeth. A bay leaf tucked into the inside of her cheek. Coffee grounds from that morning's late breakfast. They'd sat across the table from one another, drinking the coffee out of lumpy clay mugs, the drink so thick you could stand a spoon straight up in it.

Now the mixture in her mouth is thick with saliva. She breathes in through the nose, takes the wine and swallows it all. She can still hear him outside the house, calling what he thinks is her name. She double checks the bolts, snapping them more securely. Adjusts the hat upon her head, the brim starting to sag now from age. Feels the blood still sticky where her dress clings to her thigh with the stain of it. Takes more wine for good measure. Her stomach is churning with the spell, pain radiating up to where she can feel her pulse.

It's beginning to take effect. He isn't knocking anymore. His syllables are becoming slurred, further and further apart. She sits on the floorboards and waits. The spiders gather round, crawl up her sleeves, nest in the hat's brim. There's a gurgle from outside. Then nothing.

It's been five minutes since he's made a sound. She yanks back the bolts, creaks open the door. He's nestled among the thistles, blood dried around his mouth and crotch. Mirroring hers. She returns inside, washes in the sink with acrid soap, burns the dress.

The next morning, the body is gone. Taken care of. The spiders scuttle in the bushes. One hangs from her hair, skitting up the side of her face. She smiles.

Olly Lenihan

Outward, Bound

I thought of something, thought

as staves of bulrush, reeds rigid

takes off from arid platforms

as staccato oaks that cross our trail,

and soon passed, this fleeting sense

and me forgetting in the leaf litter

and tangle of an unkempt rucksack,

or rhythm, or something like a tune

I wanted to hum. Honestly, thought,

my sweater cuff against dry spring skin,

issuing like songs we sang back when,

frail words swept away on a train

that departs a station over and over

each fibre affixed to its hollow neighbour,

heading for undergrowth and what's unsaid,

and restless as the trees, again, the trees

linked into wide but ceaseless returns,

and out to the cadenza of the night

Martin Bewick

in months of blackthorn suddenly at speed

feeling for an adaptor to use for connection

carpet of shingle, slip through shoals of indifferent fish, and make for the eddy near the shore. The boats never found me. For weeks, hulls loomed above me,

lights shuddered and faltered. An unseeing diver touched a glove to the stones that snagged me, then left, kicking currents into my face. When the stones released me, I circled long days and nights in water cold as death, searching for mother-warmth. Once, I almost touched

It's dark, so dark down here, the early sun a bare glimmer on the water. Closer to the surface, I see as through a window smeared with

You are older, thinner, more alone. You may be crying. I call to you but all I hear is the mockery of the gulls.

You crouch on the seabed, curled like a shell, and for a moment I think you will stay with me. As I reach out, you slip past to the

whorls of my nostrils encrusted with living things. It comforts me that I am fed upon, that I nourish the living. What I want is to dissolve, to surround you, so that you find me in every stroke.

the greasy open window, pane cataracted from dirt-drift the poor eye doesn't blink recording forgetting

The bottle is the first to go charring on the wall wine-time is surely over the glasses are crushed the kitchen packs itself up carries the boxes out the window a floating head, I can only imagine my own, as our house of light fades the only thing to do is not look away

Then real night arrives, lays out a groundsheet

22

I never left you.

My hair is pulped with weed, my skin is barnacle-rough, the

Barbara Leahy

Stars burn silent and furious

Hey, look out staring into the stormbreak's

what a life We sit in the dusk smouldering

we both disappear without any movement the blinds are drawn from the uncertainty: what existed in the light still remains in the dark while overhead outwindow stars burn silent and furious

Lover, aubade

and everything

smells like

You leave

secretly stained thighs

raked through my hair where I gave you my neck.

for days

between my sheets

And I let it.

Nidhi Zak/Aria Eipe

Handbag

hare on it. When Grange Gorman, the mental institution, fell into disrepair and eventually closed down they found all these handbags in the attic. They belonged to the women who were incarcerated there. Also found were family photos and letters worn at the folds,

taking-in alteration made to an already tiny waist. A pair of white gloves with a lace frill. When she opened the bottle of 4711 she

Lindsay Bell

Find Me

Today, I would have been 15 years old. At dawn, I rise from my

It wasn't your fault.

I love you almost as much as you love me.

At first I think it's a bird, then wings stretch into limbs and I see the long reach of your overarm through the water, the kick of your legs against the tide. Every movement entwines me, releases me.

Things I want to say to you:

in your black halterneck, you are luminous

our eyes have grown tough; insensitive Jack Andrew Lenton

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.

hemmed in, or off, from interpretation; discordant inflections and glottal stops sharp undertones intimating.

They seemed to speak in foreign tongue

"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 cowls 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

Jaki McCarrick

some yet-to-happen disaster.

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

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 Guadaloupe 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 Mav 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 Guadaloupe 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

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

"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

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 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 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

shaped like a body

opal and shallow sea snip snip marrying in the sky scratch good morning they say street below stirring smirking man sketching the waiting gap of one sheer drape to the next room in pencil

painted dark or a gleam the shops yawn gold tooth still bleary joke you don't get yet no coffee muggy outside on seventh in sight

oily grease on boards

you notice what the avenue empty the shadows do bar those while we fume awake this early finding time at the queue

to get our moustache taken in Mícheál 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 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 Faoite

Thirst

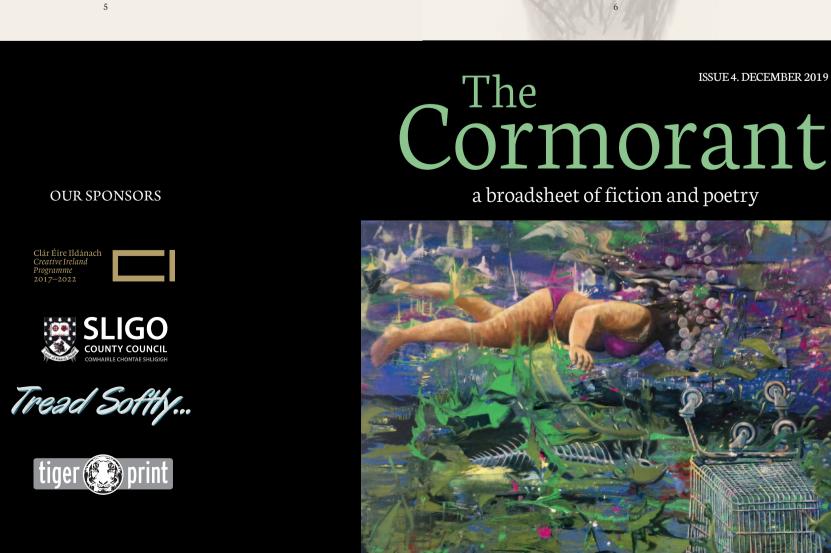
My porous anatomy thirsts for larger bodies of water than my own. I capture puddles in plastic bottles, place them by my bedside, ponder mudded transparency till I fall asleep. The moon's pull wakes me, parched before dawn, reservoirs depleted.

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



Helen Chantrell, Trap - Oil on canvas Lindsay Bell, Martin Bewick, John Paul Davies, Marc de Faoite, Maurice Devitt, Barry Fentiman Hall, Marie Gethins, Angela Finn, James Finnegan, Bairbre Flood, Rosaleen Glennon, Nicola Heaney, Dominic Howell, Rose Jordan, Alice Kinsella, Bridget Khursheed, Barbara Leahy, Olly Lenihan, Jack Andrew Lenton, Claire Loader, Mícháel McCann, Jaki McCarrick, Laura-Blaise McDowell, Francesca McDonnell Capossela, Elizabeth Moura,

> Tom McLaughlin, Maeve O'Lynn, Ruth Quinlan, Ahsan Rajib Ananda, Julie Rea, Nuala Roche, Peadar Somers, Nidhi Zak/Aria Eipe

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