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POETRY & WRITING

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CONTRIBUTORS

POETRY

BRIAN KIRK
Broken Lights

ANTON FLOYD
By What Measure?

JIM BURKE
The West End House

LAURA J BRAVERMAN
Urdhva Dhanurasana

MICHAEL DURACK
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ALICE KINSELLA
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My Red Father

FLASH FICTION

JIM MEIROSE
Middle School, P.M. (With Janie)

SHORT STORY

GERALDINE MILLS
Missing Him Missing Me

Brian Kirk is an award winning poet and short story writer from Dublin. He was selected for the Poetry Ireland Introductions Series in 2013. He was shortlisted for the Patrick Kavanagh Award in 2014 and 2015. His first poetry collection *After The Fall* is forthcoming from Salmon Poetry in 2017. His novel for 9 -12 year olds *The Rising Son* was published in December 2015. He blogs at www.briankirkwriter.com



FORGET

After a month or two you will begin
to build a future where you do not grieve
all day, but only at fixed times give in
to tears – mornings, of course, and when you leave
the house. Looking back imagine you see
a face in the bedroom window, watching,
forlorn, accusing – that spectre's not me,
it is only my dim shadow living
in the daylight of your mind. Let me go.
I do not want to darken your time left
with my grim night – you had my days and so
I am happy, please do not feel bereft.
Because I was a fool, often unkind,
I want you to erase me from your mind.

FORGIVENESS

I met you when I needed someone most.
It was selfishness more than love provoked
my interest then. Later I often joked
that I was killing time, was not engrossed
the way you were; happy to let things coast,
while you were hooked, another drug you smoked
like cigarettes that satisfy and choke
at the same time – a parasite and host.
You lie awake nights, knowing you are right
while I sleep on, dreaming I hear the sound
of London buses passing in the night,
waiting for the morning to come around
when I'll forget the reasons for our fight
and offer up pale love to heal the wound.



ON LOSS

No matter what you think it makes no sense
now she is gone; the things you loved to do
are meaningless or just a chore, and you
dwell in the past, no future, present tense.
You lie awake at night until the sun
decrees another joyless day, alone,
of hunger and desire – you must atone
for your mistakes but you are never done.
After a while you'd think the pain would stop;
one morning you might wake and not be lame.
Your life has changed and yet remains the same,
the boulder rolls each time you reach the top.
When she was here you acted out a mime,
a shadow life that should have been sublime.

ON TIME

The hours unfold and sunlight reaches down
to touch our faces at the close of day,
and whether you're in country or in town
you know that things have changed. Old people say:
a grand stretch in the evenings all the same!
You smile, but wonder why they welcome change
the way they do; if summer never came
they would not age or die. It seems so strange
to want the days to pass when life is brief,
but if time one day stopped would we be glad?
Or would we yearn for death and his friend grief?
Would life lose meaning if it were not sad?
A never-ending day might seem ideal,
but I am of this world, I crave the real.



© Brian Kirk

Anton Floyd was born in Egypt of Irish, Maltese, English and French Lebanese parentage. Raised in Cyprus he lived through the Cypriot struggle for independence. With the outbreak of intercommunal hostilities in 1963, the family was evicted at gunpoint from their Nicosia home by Turkish Cypriot militiamen, making them refugees in a divided capital. He studied English at Trinity College Dublin and University College Cork. He has lived and worked in the Eastern Mediterranean. He is now teaching in Cork city and lives in West Cork. Poems published in *The Stony Thursday Book*, *The Ghent Review* and haiku in *Shamrock*. He won the IHS International Competition (2014), honourable mention (2015) and was runner up in the Snapshot Press (UK) Haiku Calendar 2016 Competition. He is a member of Irish Haiku Society. A selection of his haiku is included in 'Between the Leaves', an anthology of new haiku writing from Ireland (Arlen House). His longer poems are looking for a home.



WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR DADDY?

My father was reticent
about his part in the war
oddly quiet to a boy
of five or six or seven
longing for an answer.

His old army trunk
name and rank stencilled
in white capitals on the lid
was a boy's treasure trove
some trappings of world war two:

his helmet and gas mask
a sam browne belt
khaki tunic with pips intact.
These became a set of props
to tell a "boy's own" story.

Easy for my wizard dad
in a tale of derring-do
set behind enemy lines
to rescue Wolf and Chung
who'd lost his clicky bat!

Years later he said
*talking won't allow me
the burial of my dead.
I let a pall of silence fall
to honour all who fell.*

IN THAT DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT - 20 JULY, 1974

In that dawn's early light
a set readied as for a masque,
cue cicadas and birdsong.

Across a terracotta roofscape
the view from Nicosia
to the Mesaorian plain
was a canvas stretched
imbued with glowing amber
and men were drifting on it
like thistledown on the air.

Absurd this surreal imagery.
A dirty trick of the mind
to tell delicately how deadly
parachutes filled the sky.



© Anton Floyd



FRIENDS

*flowers in the bud
that will never bloom*

Thomas Hardy *The Dynasts*

i

There was nothing
mathematical that
Roger couldn't do.
He risked the draft
to get back home.
Twice his number
came up - first
in Boston then
Vietnam, in '72.

ii

When Arthur served
his first tour of duty
in southeast Asia,
flying Huey warbirds,
he witnessed there
his close friends dead.
A second tour then
was a dice with fate.
He gambled on snake eyes
and by living lost.

iii

Phivos was good at school
a body like a Greek god
and an athlete too.
Primed for the starter's gun
he changed his lyre
for a bow of fire
when he took to sea
to halt an invasion.

The report of the shot
that finished his race
reverberates round
the crusader walls
of his harbour town.

iv

Anyone could see
that for bookish Chris
the idea of military life
was an odd match.
He did his duty
by his country
yet the men
who bullied him
left his body
in the camp margins
a scibble in the dust.

v

Mikis was the hero
of our playtime wars,
in his element
ambushing us with
pine cone grenades.
When the time came
it was no surprise
he made the grade
a commando and
efficient at what
commandos do.
On that first raid
how could he know
when he drew his blade
he was cutting the voice
out of his own throat.

THREE TRIOLETS

TIME'S PLAGUE

prompted by Gloucester's line in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

It's the time's plague when madmen lead
the blind blithely towards the cliff
and blame's their one and only creed.
It's the time's plague when madmen lead
and clowns are licenced to proceed
with truth set rudderless adrift.
It's the time's plague when madmen lead
the blind blithely towards the cliff.

CROSSFIRE

The innocent all have voices.
The sounds replay inside my head.
Their futures and all their choices.
The innocent all have voices.
Hope is gone when fear eclipses.
The exile path fills all with dread.
The innocent all have voices
the sounds replay inside my head

FOR THE UNJUST

For the just held in unjust lands
plain words contest the stranglehold,
speak the thoughts tyranny would ban
For the just held in unjust lands
just words must wrestle rigged commands
to write the wrongs of fear control.
For the just held in unjust lands
plain words contest the stranglehold.

IN HONOUR OF MAHVASH SABET*

in Violette and for Ali & Bahiyyih who shared her light

In her prison cell
she writes recounting days,
cruel years within those walls.

There time itself plays
tricks and all she ever knew
is now a distant haze.

There where hopes are few
and life made sere and rough,
her lucid words speak true.

Against this hell - enough
to recall a friend's kind hands;
her shining eyes the proof -

proof against this living hell.
Her eyes shine on and in kind hands
she finds the light and in that light
she presses on, she presses on.

*Mahvash Sabet was once a leading figure in Iran's Bahá'í community. In 2010, having already been imprisoned for two-and-a-half years, she was convicted of fabricated charges and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment: an all-too-common fate for Bahá'ís in Iran. Her book, *Prison Poems*, in English translation by Bahiyyih Nakhjavani, was published by George Ronald, Oxford, in 2013. PEN INTERNATIONAL has campaigned consistently for her release.



© Anton Floyd

Jim Burke: Lives in Limerick, Ireland, and is Co-founder with John Liddy of The Stony Thursday Book. His poems have appeared in the Shamrock Haiku Journal, the Literary Bohemian, the Crannog Poetry Journal, the Stony Thursday Book, the Revival Poetry Journal, the Shot Glass Journal and the Live Encounters Online Magazine. He is a member of The Irish Haiku Society and is on the committee of the Limerick Writers Centre. Some of his haiku are featured in the anthology 'Between the Leaves' edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky.

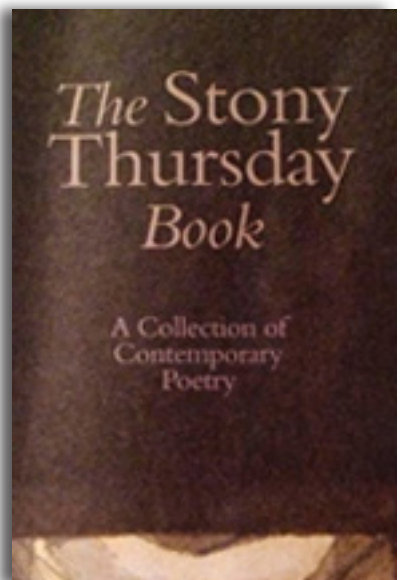


AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I am leading a quiet life
in County Limerick.
Under a green hill
and St. Patrick's knee-print.
I am an Irish man.
I was an Irish boy.
I became a hurler in the suburbs.
I had football boots
and an Ash hurley.
I turned it into a rifle.
I worked jobs in the summer vacations.
I can still feel those prickly scratches
on my knees.
I picked potatoes in another County.
I worked one job in a garage.
Couldn't reach the air hose
to the fourth wheel.
The foreman bollicked me
'That man could have died
if he'd driven away.'
I have seen my mother flip out
over the wrong beef.
I have heard her say she is leaving
and my father answer: 'Fine,
don't let me stop you'.
I am reading *Division Street*
by Helen Mort.
I have seen a union man
foaming with contempt.
I have seen him sign a truce later.

I have eaten beef burgers at Folk Festivals.
I have heard Donald Trump's address
and the Donald Hall address.
I have been to Africa.
I took a taxi from the hotel Kanta
to the village of Hergla.
I have been to America.
I watched Olu Dara, take a moment
before blowing into his trumpet
in the Symphony Space
on the corner of 96th street
in New York city
in the year two thousand.
I have stood in Times Square
listening to a white supremacist
and crossed the street to listen
to his black brother.
I saw a Hollywood star
walking on O'Connell street
in Limerick city.
I have dropped coins
into the paper cups
of my brothers and sisters
sitting on the hard ground.
I am leading a quiet life
in County Limerick.
The world is passing me by.
I once thought I was somebody
but I ended up someone else.

continued overleaf...



AUTOBIOGRAPHY *continued*

I loved my old man,
 my mother too.
 Home is where one starts from.
 I met Van the Man.
 I have seen the Cliffs of Moher.
 I listen to Rambling Jack.
 I have shaken hands with David Hildago.
 I have taken my kids up Ben Nevis.
 John Montague once called me a
 doubting Thomas.
 It is long since I was a believer.
 I am leading a quiet life
 in County Limerick.
 The daffodils stand tall as skyscrapers
 over tiny snowdrops.
 Nothing happens here.
 A crow eats popcorn.
 A black bird bosses a Robin.
 Up on the hill the children's din
 in the school yard
 is loud enough to deafen Holsteins.
 There is a rat down near the river
 watching a tractor.
 But nothing happens here.
 I am taking up patience.
 I have no plans for the future.
 Let it come.
 Let it bring the new.
 I am not as young as I'd like to be.
 I am not a drinker.
 I have been drunk.
 I have been sick the morning after.
 I don't drink enough water.

Let tomorrow come.
 Let it bring music, poetry, romance.
 Adrian Mitchell, once drew me a dog
 on the fly sheet of *Blue Coffee*.
 I am leading a quiet life
 in County Limerick
 it is three in the afternoon
 and is not warm enough yet
 for a horse to come to water.
 I walk up a hill of poetry
 between swathes of grass.
 I am a note on a guitar
 hanging on a wall.
 I am for the refugee.
 I have seen the Mona Lisa.
 She was small.
 I allowed her eyes
 to follow me around the room.
 I am leading a quiet life
 in County Limerick.
 Nothing happens here.
 One man fixes fences
 and walls.
 Another turns a piece of wood
 into a bowl.
 A friend of mine
 joins the Thursday night club
 'For company,'
 he says.





THE WEST END HOUSE

Dear James,

This is just a note.
Today, I saw your mother's house,
I stopped outside.

At first I wondered who runs it now—
It is painted in grey and white.
Whatever happened to the library room?
Did some of its books travel
To Milwaukee!
The wild Atlantic beats under the house yet.
And your kind words fail to leave me.

I am keen to learn.
I think I am.
And you—
Is there a poem bigger than all of us?
Have you found it?

After your mother changed locks
At the turn of the Summer season.
Kilkee, in January!
I can't believe I broke the rear window
Slipped my hand through, undid the latch.

Just an hour after hearing the farmer
Blow his saxophone at the crossroads.
We took your Fiat that was
Parked in a field, you had slept
Like a log, under the long wooden table
In the pub where your cousins called out to you
For a recitation, let's say it, James,
Poetry did find us.

I turned away from it for many reasons.
Sometimes I fluttered in the breeze
As a butterfly does over a bed of nettles
At the roadside,
Didn't know if I should
Be searching for something else.

Maybe poetry comes too late for me?

The wind blows and flows around Corca Bascinn.
The sky is blue and white.
The air smells fresh as the Kilkee Football jerseys.
The mayflowers burst from their hedgerows.
The irises are ready to stand up for a new season.

James, you were always the creative one!

Should I put my face to the door of the West End House
And listen to you struggling with a gas regulator,
On a freezing morning, me, pushing a wooden board into the hole
In the window, while the kitchen sings out its noise?

Laura J. Braverman studied fine art and apparel design at Rhode Island School of Design, and worked internationally in apparel for many years. In addition to painting, she now focuses on writing, having completed a writer's certificate in creative nonfiction with Stanford University; taken numerous courses in poetry and essay at the New School Continuing Education Program and, participated in workshops Her work has appeared in the prose anthology *Mountain Stories*, and the poetry journals *Live Encounters*, *The BeZINE*, and *Mediterranean Poetry*, and will soon appear in *California Quarterly* and *Levure Litteraire*.



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URDHVA DHANURASANA

Body is the bow—
spine, the stave.

Spine grows long
extends and arcs:

bowstring tightens,
prepares for flight.

The arrow shaft
is Om—infinite hum

of a fixed source—
quiet mind, the arrowhead.

And the target?

Towards what end
does the arrow glide?

INITIATION

Join the circle dance in fields flower-deep
right arm crossed over left
hands held—
one step forward
one step back.

Let your fingers seek the differences
between things.
Heel of hand
and bowl of palm willing to give—
willing to receive.

Crawl over black earth,
dig up wet and brown—
build the walls
around all that's ether in us—
unseen, unsaid.
Then take them down without shame.

Time widens to let Patience pass—
a procession paid all necessary dues.
You may find a rabbit hole
and the map to guide you:
to treasure and bleating lamb.
No treasure without the lamb.

Walk the path between the pines.
See a tapestry of shade stitched
with dappled light.
Find the place you go to hang
your head between your hands.
Rest the sun-discs of your knees
to the ground.
Your head meets the earth—
bone to rock.
Wait for Dawn. She holds the sky
with both arms—will come
with roses and gold.

HIDE AND SEEK

You listened
as a tree does—bending
towards my thoughts.
You listened, yes.
But so you also spoke:
with silences
I tried to comprehend.
Silence left me empty-handed,
left me
to my solitary imaginings.
Sometimes you dove down—
down—as roots do—
to some defended place,
far beyond our reach.
Your faith, too,
you sheltered
from the quadrangle of us—
a discrete practice.
Quietly, you left the house
in your dark suit—
your well-worn book of sacred
stories tucked under one arm,
a folded cap within its pages.
And quietly, you broke
with your faith's custom
to shrug
your body off
through fire.

Ten years on
the trees give me hints of you
and where you've gone.
You trained me in their language.
Have the years altered
your leaving?
Perhaps now I find
a little more than I seek.



© Laura J Braverman

NOW

there is no leaving
and no staying.
No searching
nor finding. No
treasure lost. No
moving towards.
Only this.

We are not late
we are not early
but gathering up
what was surrendered—

souls bent over
the harvest
in a field.

3:00, BALHAM PARK

He's French, boyish and untidy.
His name means gold
or golden. But he isn't to me.
I'm stuck on other things
like the in-between
life of my illness
and the divorce
that's left me limbless.

I meet him—
not inappropriately—
at the Méliès Café.
It's down the road
from Sophy's class.
He asks me:
do I want to do *cerf-volant*?
Fly kites.

So we find a bleak excuse
for a park.
He walks ahead—
untangles
two long cords,
prepares the earthbound kite
for me.

The wind these days
is sense-abrading,
pushing to be let in.
If I hear it hurry by once more
I think my skin will hurry
far from me.
But it comes again—full—
against my will
and I'm still here in Balham.

The kite takes flight.
I'm holding on
two cords with loops for grips—
holding on and whispering:
one stands for body
one stands for spirit.
It's not a kite that flies up there
but me.



Michael Durack grew up on a farm near Birdhill in County Tipperary. He was a founder member of Killaloe Writers Group and his poetry has been published in a wide range of literary journals in Ireland and abroad, as well as airing on local and national radio. He is the author of a chapbook, *Nothing To Write Home About* (Derg House), a comic narrative in verse, *A Hairy Tale Of Clare* (East Clare Telecottage) and a memoir in prose and poems, *Saved To Memory: Lost To View* (Limerick Writers Centre.) He has collaborated with his brother, Austin on a programme of poetry and music, and together they have produced two albums, *The Secret Chord* (2013) and *Going Gone* (2015.)

<https://www.facebook.com/michael.durack>



NO BRIDGES

Thanks to the Athlone Ten and the Rome Three
who fought and hewed to death or glory,
the bridges of Shannon and foaming Tiber
lay in poetic ruins (*Even the ranks of Tuscany
could scarce forbear to cheer.*) And we cheered on
the celluloid saboteurs of Toko-Ri and River Kwai
(cue a whistled *Colonel Bogey March.*)

On the west coast of Clare
Atlantic waves sap and batter.
Sea stacks mock the erstwhile arches
of the crumbling Bridges of Ross,
while from Diarmuid and Gráinne's Rock
gulls taunt the gazers on the dizzy Loop Head cliffs
across the fathomless gulf of Lovers' Leap

VENUS AND MADONNA

(after Botticelli)

VENUS IN GALWAY

This comely sand-haired girl,
 plucked from a cross-roads west of Spiddal,
 has ditched her jeans and jumper
 and her Dunne's Stores lingerie
 to surf naked, but demure, upon a shell,
 as zephyrs practise their diving headers,
 and a flower child of the sixties
 holds her bath towel at the ready
 on the sea-front at Salthill.

MADONNA WITH POMEGRANATE

Home and dried,
 and modestly dressed for a photo-shoot,
 flanked by a coterie of wary boys,
 she will offer to the little barrel of a photographer
 a stunning, impassive face,
 while supporting with equal inattention
 the ripe pomegranate and the plump child
 who waves to the call of Cheese.

THE DEATH OF THE SHAN VAN VOCHT

(after The Death of Sean Bean by Edward O'Dwyer)

Remove the invisible, but by no means inaudible
 síne fada from Sean, and you've got *sean*,
 Gaelic for old.

And silence that noisy e in Bean,
 leaving *bhean*, woman in Irish.

Run them together, adding a séimhiú:
 that's *sean bhean*, an old woman.

Steep her in poverty: the *sean bhean bhocht* -
 the poor old woman of the four green fields,
 aka the *spéirbhean* of the *aisling*,
 aka Kathleen Ní Houliháin,
 aka Róisín Dubh (Dark Rosaleen),
 aka Éire (personified Ireland.)

But the fourth green field's no longer hers,
 the others turned to ghost estates,
 the *spéirbhean* surplus to requirements,
 Kathleen in Sydney, Róisín in Dubai,
 the *sean-bhean* fucked.

Nothing is right with our world,
 the sun of Éireann sinking over and over,
 her best days in the past.



THREE LADIES IN PINK SCARVES

Allegros of violins and cellos;
And a flourish of shocking pink scarves,
In the holy grounds of All-Hallows.

Outside, a choreography of swallows;
In the room, each cold eye observes
The bowing of violins and cellos.

But the fickle June breeze billows
Those gossamer identical pink scarves
Within the holy walls of All-Hallows.

Small wonder that such peccadilloes
Should rotate heads and tickle nerves
Amid the playing of violins and cellos.

On stage those Ivor Novellos
Take the applause their art deserves
In the holy grounds of All-Hallows;

But out of the greens, blues and yellows.
Witness three sisters in pink scarves,
With the music of violins and cellos
In the holy grounds of All-Hallows.

THE JUGGLER

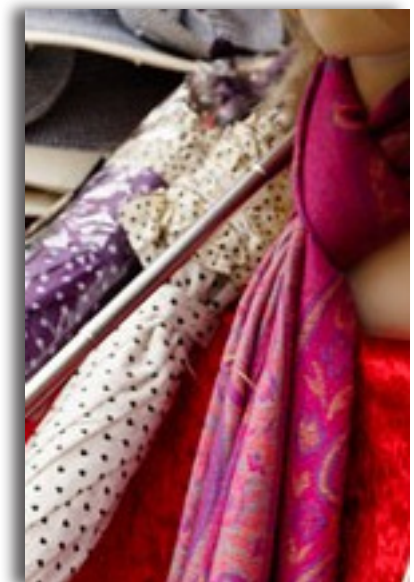
The spotlight is on the juggler,
four balls orbiting,
flying the colours of his psyche –
red for embarrassment, yellow for funk,
purple for hubris, green for yet-to-grow-up.

This exercise in equilibrium
is complicated by the steel wire
that slackens beneath the stilts
he walks upon.

Nor does it help that his route
intersects the firing range
of the blindfold knife-thrower
who scores with perfect symmetry
the hilted outline of a buxom lady.

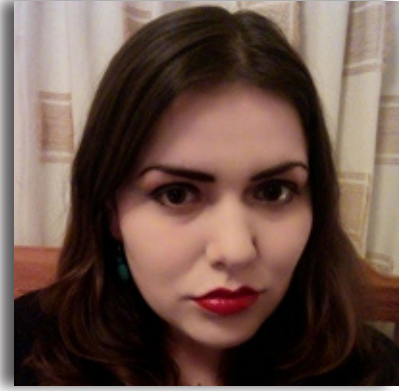
For the juggler it is a matter of necessity
that he dodge the swishing daggers,
preserve his balance, juggle the balls
to the ultimate roll of the kettle drum.

Only then can he contemplate
making love to the shapely girl
he will conjure nonchalantly
from the false pocket of his top hat.



© Michael Durack

Alice Kinsella was born in Dublin and raised in the west of Ireland. She holds a BA(hons) in English Literature and Philosophy from Trinity College Dublin. Her poetry has been widely published at home and abroad, most recently in *Banshee Lit*, *Boyne Berries*, *The Stony Thursday Book* and *The Irish Times*. Her work has been listed for competitions such as Over the Edge New Writer of the Year Competition 2016, Jonathan Swift Awards 2016, and Cinnamon Press Pamphlet Competition 2017. Her debut book of poems, *Flower Press*, will be published in 2018. For more information visit aliceekinsella.com or [Facebook.com/AliceEKinsella](https://www.facebook.com/AliceEKinsella)



THE DRESS

Because it's short notice,
I can't find anything to wear.

Leaf through sheaves of dresses
leftover from weddings, birthdays, graduations.
Not one fits this occasion, they all have stories already.

I choose one of forgotten origin,
a black dress with the white orchid silhouettes.

Not black enough,
the light always forces its way in.

During the service I finger the petal images,
praying in my mind to a god I don't believe in,
just to find somewhere for my words to go.

I bring the dress home and hang it in my wardrobe,
keep it in my eye-line, a daily reminder of you.

MEA CULPA

Alleyway that ran between estates,
October moon out on full show,
beaming her smiles at us.

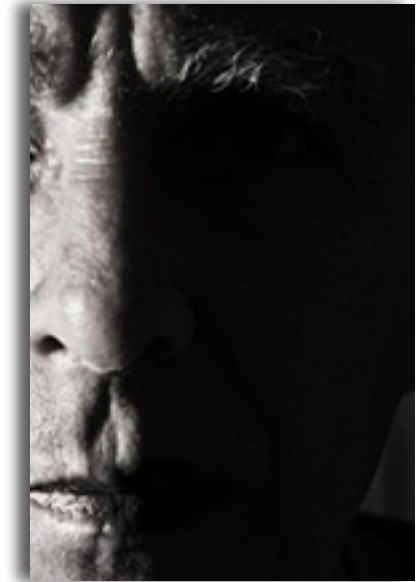
Cleaving of something within,
taste of vodka on breath-
white heat- a new burning.

The rust water running in the toilet bowl
and everyone asking where we'd been,
how he kept his hands in his pockets.

First frost of a new year, same old moon,
sitting in the playground doing multiplication
in my head, thinking *It's my own stupid fault*.

The shivering shadow of my feet as I swung higher
than I ever had done when parents were watching.





THE FLU

There's a fever rising in my blood,
brewing bubbling bloody hot.
Body slick with sweat pooling
in every corner, crevice, curve of me.
Sweat cold as sea water,
but it does not soothe me.

He brings me oranges
and peels them by my bedside.
Hands nimble like a monkey's,
cracking the casing, tearing back the skin,
slipping slivers of the succulent meat between my lips.
Leaves nothing to waste.
The juice squeezed from rind
until it is dry and curling, looks sun dried.

He brings oranges to my sick bed
and admonishes me
for not getting enough Vitamin C.

He feeds me oranges like a priest,
except, purely-
no corruption of man like communion.
Oranges straight from the sky like sunbeams.

And the chill of them warms me,
and my fever subsides.

ARCHITECT

For Conor McBride

In a blur of beer and students spurting spoken word
your poems unfurled into the air like turf smoke.
I, a mirror hungry for reflection, saw a glimmer of myself
in you, a communing of romantics drunk on words.

This was the year that I quivered over lost loves and memories
left unsaid, before I found the fight, the strength it all involved.
Which I heard in your words so bashfully delivered in that room
of strangers swilling pints all eyes upon the mic the spot you put
yourself upon. I pounced and blathered, cigarette in hand feeling
like a wildcat stalking a gazelle, to urge you please keep putting
pen to page I want to read it, give me poems, your modest wisdom.
Now, whether inked in verse, rehearsed on roofs in baking July
heat, or just the wine fuelled banter of late night Facebook chats,
I hear the revelations you've discovered, the beauty found in fears,
the possibilities that you've designed across continents and years.
It's that which you have etched across your chest, the maps
you've made upon yourself, the lines you've drawn upon this life.

And though the years have dealt you blows
like cars on rainy nights, and left the smile
of an older man peeking through your eyes,
you give no time to licking wounds or hanging
head, but instead rise continually, patient as a gardener,
potent as a poet, the architect of your own life.

Carl Scharwath, has appeared globally with 100+ magazines selecting his poetry, short stories, essays and art photography. Two poetry books: *Journey To Become Forgotten* (Kind of a Hurricane Press). and *Abandoned* (ScarsTv) have been published. Carl is the art editor for Minute Magazine, a dedicated runner and 2nd degree black-belt in Taekwondo.



NATALITY

Every baby is born to greatness
there is a stainless beauty
installed in a clean heart
love and tolerance
wired into the soul

The Latin Vulgate
an icon of purpose
imbues and cicerones
the steady hand
of a mother and father

Lost in luminescent daylight
and memories of thermal water
to what end
humanity awaits
its glorious creation

SNOW

Today everything is wrinkled
They are the mushrooms, strawberries,
Abstract,
Of an endless canvas.

But last night
Really deceived. Snow on a blanket-like
Married schizophrenic camouflage
Cold kisses and delicate erasing
The dust of compassion, dwindling
With care of the seed to rescue and touch
Post a song. Life woke up, emphasized
Grown to the peak of affirmation and
Coldness, within their souls.

Morning snow from a lazy sky
Artificial replacement,
Slowly falling,
In the resistance of loss.



DREAM CABIN

Alienated defective existentialist
binary in utterances

a linguistic rupture
rains letters down

the realms of
imagination in the

search of ourselves
within the painted faces.

Amidst empty expanses
we find you.

the night brings
a wake sleep

revolution and dreams
erased in daylight.

Will any of
these name you?

QUIETUS

Sun slants fractured in the mist
Pharmaceutical rivers
Discharge in your blood

Never finding yourself
in the sexless rapture
and wilderness of the soul

A cry announcing
you were not made for this world
professing you were needed in mine.



Bob shakespeare is a regular reader on the Dublin open – mic scene since 2004. He has just recently appeared in the latest issue of the New Ulster Anu, the 40th. Issue. In this Anthology the following Poems appear: *Auld tripe*, *Ashen Sun*, *Toddles*, *A thin white line* and *After Philomena*. Also awarded 2nd.place in the New York Literary Magazine, in the category of Life/Death. Recently received 3 commendations from the Jonathan Swift Writers Awards.



FIRST FLUSH

Tunisian sunrise
amber peach sky
no alarm to wake you
from sun-down slumber

instead

sparrows gush to life
a bursting melody
only
my ears hear

now I watch you
breathe bare breast
urging a hunger
from earlier

performance
complete
silence
rouses you

its quiet
you mumble
I smile
amused

DOLLOP

Across fields of autumn joy
We skipped in excited chatter.
Heavy laden branches of promise
Soon picked by hungry hands
Turning purple black
Soaked in berry dye
Matching lips to tell.
No handled pots
Splintered enamel bowls
Our tools of harvest
Brimming in overflow
Like our swollen tummies
Before days end.
Trekking slowly home
We boasted
How each one had picked
Or seen the biggest berries
And how tricky it was
Leaning flat on branches
Reaching to our fingertips
Almost sinking in deep fright.

On reaching home tired out
Ready for a wash
Just like our blackberries
Stemmed and tossed
In that big old pot.
Eager eyes watched
The fruit broth bubble
Its sweet coloured smell
Telling mother to add the sugar.
Leaving us to day- dream
Of the many ways we could spread our jam
Turnover bread cut thick for breakfast
Rice pudding sweetener...or
On sore throat days
A generous dollop to comfort
Like sneaky visits by fingers unwatched
Adding to the pleasure.



© Bob Shakespeare

BIRTH

An idea at first
becomes a word

it nests
my mind

growing slowly
it alters

expands to a thought
and gains

breathing space
more liberties

before it bursts
its pupa

BORROMEAN ISLANDS

Carissima Isola Bella

Your beauty
pulls me
to look
upon you
and the Islands
Isola Madre- Isola Superior.
Centuries could not change
your charm
a titled aristocrat
prompts me
to delve the lore
among the tiered gardens
virgin white peacocks
fanned soft air
leaves me musing
to be of that age
rousing dreams
of milky-thighs
to kiss.

No woman bears this likeness
set upon my mind
the image
mirrored in the gallery
so true

Carissima Isola Bella



Hongri Yuan, born in China in 1962, is a poet and philosopher interested particularly in creation. Representative works include *Platinum City*, *Gold City*, *Golden Paradise*, *Gold Sun* and *Golden Giant*. His poetry has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada and Nigeria.

Translated by Yuanbing Zhang.

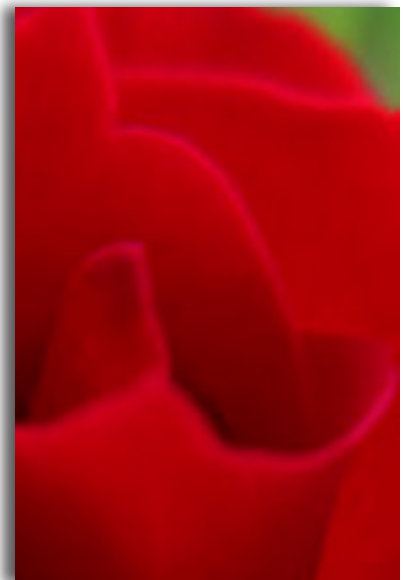


WINGS OF THE PHOENIX

Carve a window in the wall of the phantom of the world
 Let the rain of fragrance from heaven in to bathe the soul
 When you hear the madadayo song of the angels
 You will see the golden transparent skin of the earth
 Your eyes will twinkle like stars
 Yesteryears will disappear like clouds
 A golden scepter held in your hand
 Will create picturesque mountains and rivers
 Transform the heavens into jade
 And the sound of the dragons will help you reach nirvana
 Like a phoenix spreading its huge wings.

I PULLED A SWORD OUT OF A ROSE

I pulled a sword out of a rose
 I repelled the eternal night with a starlight
 I made God retire
 Return the golden stick in his hands
 I carved a spell in the mask of the sky with lightning
 Made the stars dance
 Made the sea sweet
 Made the giants return from the outer space



Nasrin Parvaz became a civil rights activist when the Islamic regime took power in 1979. She was arrested in 1982, tortured and spent eight years in prison. In 1993, she fled to England. Her prison memoir is being crowdfunded by Unbound publisher. Nasrin's stories, poems, articles and translations appeared in Exiled Writers Ink; Modern Poetry in Translation series; *Write to be Counted*, *Resistance Anthology 2017*, *Words And Women 2017*, *100 poems for human rights 2009*, *Hafiz*, *Goethe and the Gingko 2015*, *Over Land, Over Sea, Poems for those seeking refuge 2015*, A novel, *Temptation*, based on the true stories of some male prisoners who survived the 1988 massacre of Iranian prisoners was published in Farsi in 2008. <https://unbound.com/books/womans-struggle-in-iran>
<http://nasrinparvaz.org/>



YOU AND ME

My hands tied, I had been hanging
 from the ceiling for Eternity
 my dangling feet just above the floor
 night finally came and the guards left.

Bloodied and bruised, but not tied up
 you crawled towards me
 and lay down, beneath me
 taking the weight of my body on yours
 my feet rested on you all that long night.

Where are you now?
 Are you alive somewhere?

MY RED FATHER

It was the day
after my fifth birthday
mummy went out to the shops
and daddy started telling me a story.

There was a hard knock
on the front door
daddy went to open it
I heard rapid bangs and a big thump.

I ran to daddy
he was in a red heap by the door
a man stood over him with a gun
I think he looked at me
and walked away
into the weekend afternoon.

YOUR WATCH

They gave us back
your clothes, your
final letter and your watch.
It showed
the time they took you
to be shot
ten past nine, September 10th, 1988.

So we can never forget
even if we wanted to
which we don't.



Jim Meirose's work has appeared in numerous magazines and journals, including Calliope, [Off-beat/Quirky \(Journal of Exp. Fiction pub.\)](#), Permafrost, North Atlantic Review, Blueline, Witness, and Xavier Review, and has been nominated for several awards. His E-book "[Inferno](#)" is available from Amazon. Underground Voices. His novels, "[Mount Everest](#)" and "[Eli the Rat](#)", are available from Amazon. "Mount Everest" has been adapted to a play by a leading west coast playwright. www.jimmeirose.com



MIDDLE SCHOOL, P.M. (WITH JANIE)

Ho, yes! The big boss alarm bell yelled across the cafeteria in its heavy baritone, Lunch away, lunch away, down, and gone; and the Disney-style knockoff rotating stage only Janie could see, and that always struck her funny, revolved with a shudder and slid she and the other three friends who had just finished lunch away into the appropriate respective classrooms of the entire three thousand identical classrooms in the nearly planet-size fully automated middle school, and for the rest of the afternoon she listened not even to a single word from the loud blank hole of a teacher; why the hell to listen, hey; when it makes no difference what she learns or not because it's already decided what her remaining sixty or seventy years of life will spend its time doing as she rides happily along atop it, rattling through one year at a time.

The class buzzed by, and she must have been in post-moltskin shock, because none of her pores were open enough to soak in whatever the teacher had been talking about these through the seemingly few-dozen days from the end of lunch to the class dismissed bell. Janie did not notice what had begun happening deep inside her where she could not see, as she proceeded further into her twelfth year; the speeding forward dragging invisible moments started pulling her along in much the same way a big ten-ton dredge is pulled along a noxious black mud slightly polluted river bottom, sucking up swaths of feet-thick scum of brand new knowledge into her head, too much, too fast, really, so her inner spinning double counterweight steam engine style extremely complicated governor apparatus installed by God to protect his machinery as he learned more about through trial and error of created-creature technology, went to work.



This governor, the type which had snatched the arms right off many a sleepy maintenance man back at the sooty slimy dawn of the steam engine, who had made the mistake of dozing on the night shift, while leaning over on the hot filthy engine frame in the back where the cruel red-eyed fatboss wouldn't see, and as the merciful anesthetic sleep covered them, their relaxing arms accidentally lowered toward, closer, and into the snappy steel blurry-fast whirl of the governor's multiple rods pulleys and weights heavily spinning and whipping around, which took the arms off instantly, splashing gouts of blood exploding over the surveillance cameras that they really didn't have back in those early days, but that we will assume did for the purposes of connecting together this fast moving unstoppable roll of text you are reading, but never mind, that's okay, just get the picture; the blood rendered the camera's recording quality much too poor for release to the public, but it didn't matter.

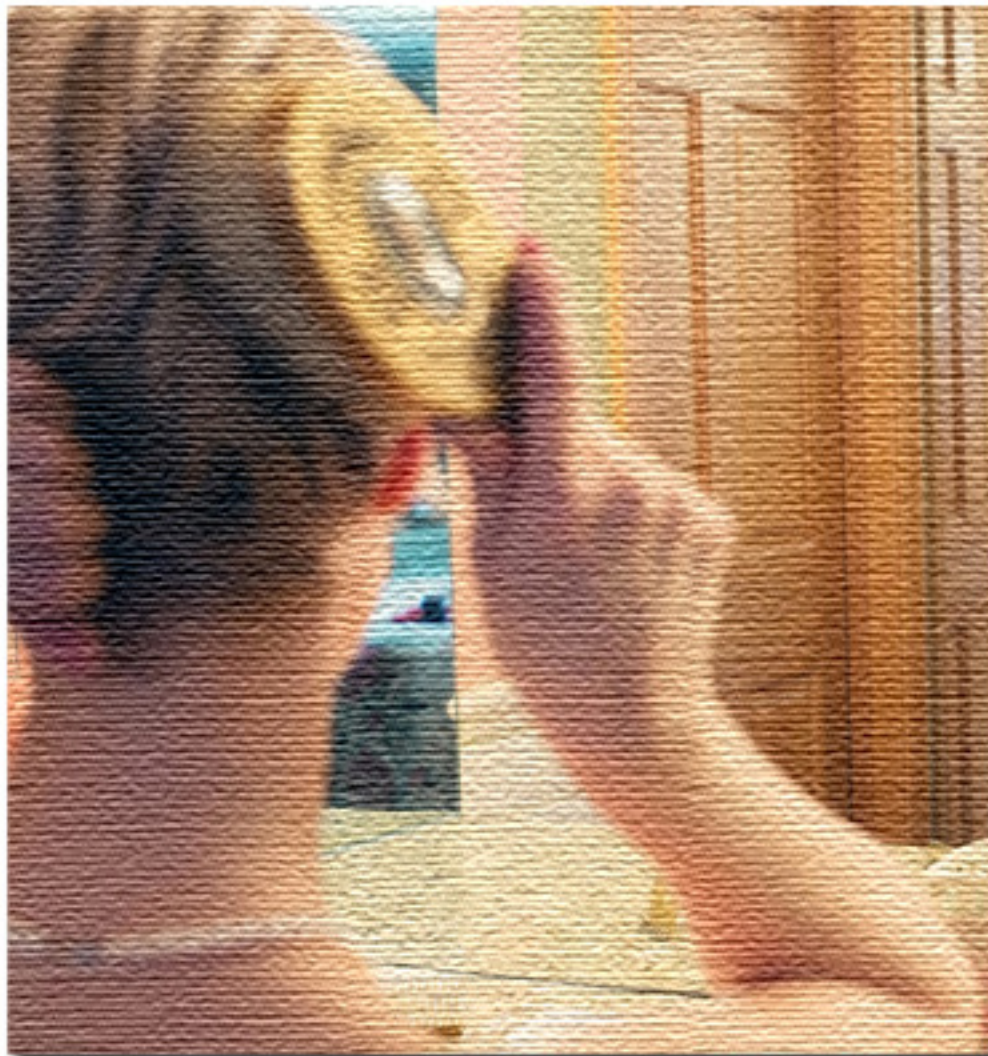
In those days gory live dismemberment films were destroyed by the police anyway after it had been decided based on them and any other hard unmentionable physical shredded stinking evidence gathered at the crime scene not to be named or shown to children never, ever, never, no, but which needed to be kept on ice to stop all rot until the trial was settled, and other testimony expert or otherwise including that of the through no fault of their own newly crippled maintenance laborer, sometimes referred to in Law and Order or Judge Judy reruns as the plaintiff, filtered out every one of the impossible to be remembered facts and details and whatever that flood in onto the developing twelve year old.

So, voila, the governor performed as designed to boil everything down to a few simple facts to actually be consciously realized by Janie, these being that her parents were in no way Godlike, but were nutty, embarrassing, and blind; blind, embarrassing, and more and more nutty, and the bag provided for free for her to funnel this incoming gross-flow of knowledge into as a good-luck courtesy,

blew up to bursting and required replacement with more robust models as these simple facts about her parents ballooned into such a giant swirling mass that Janie's mind protected itself by abandoning the process of bagging up the exponentially increasing knowledge, and internally pushed big red buttons turned big red knobs and pulled long red levers in the control room near the bottom of her brainstem in the deepest dimmest most elemental lizard-thinking-machine place in her brain, to start fashioning words from the expanding mass of gory dripping spattering knowledge, and to have her speak out the facts in thousands of different combinations of words and phrases to her also increasing peer-group, that her parents God bless their hearts, were totally blind, nutty, and embarrassing.

When she shared this she was surprised that this matched the way all of her peers regarded their parents, and so forth; this was the completion of another full circle of the mental development of the whole pre-adolescent human horde. Whew! And this only step one of—too many to come. Growing up is a sonofabitch! But the inventor of the steam safety valve must have progressed since that great day, to sainthood; but how many children must have expanded and expanded and finally exploded, lives wasted in vain, until someone woke up and decided it was time to mutate some DNA patch into place to install such a safety device, the results proving that again, as in the automotive world, thank God, it's true they don't make them like they used to, God. Thanks again.

Geraldine Mills has published three collections of short stories and four collections of poetry. She has been awarded many prizes and bursaries including the Hennessy/Tribune New Irish Writer Award, two Arts Council Bursaries and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship. Her first children's novel titled *Gold* has just been released and is available at www.littleisland.ie/shop/gold/ www.kennys.ie/gold-2179.html www.geraldinemills.com



MISSING HIM MISSING ME

There I am checking my teeth in the shop mirror just to make sure there are no little dots of poppy seeds lurking between them when I notice it. The side of my face, around where the crows' feet pitter patter, has disappeared. In its place is someone else's. Putting up my hand to touch it, my fingers touch the rough, swarthy skin. That's not mine!

My neck on speed dial, I pivot around the aisles but no one else seems to have noticed, so taking the clip out of my hair I finger-comb the strands down over the stranger's jaw in case I frighten myself. Then gathering up what's left of me, I rush out to the car park, my mind an underworld of think, working out how to get the keys out of my pocket to put in the lock before anyone I know sees me. Please, please, open. I throw myself into the driver's seat, grab my sunglasses from the glove compartment, slip them on, reverse out of the slot like my butt is ablaze and somehow get the car home. In a very shaky state.

Beyond my own hall door, I knock back the last of the gin, open the vodka. Have a few slugs of that. With Dutch courage now coursing through my capillaries I brave another gawk in the mirror. Still no side of my own face. All that time wasted trying to get rid of them crow's feet but now that they've gone AWOL I miss them. Aahh.

Nothing else happens for the rest of the day so I settle into the new me, the new hairstyle, telling myself that a bird sings no matter how bad his day is. It's time to brave the new world so pulling the glasses on again, I force myself out the door; go on a little ramble just to see the reaction. With the dark shades, the hair all exotic and mysterious, I feel like a celebrity, hiding from the paparazzi. A car drives by, then slows. Just when I think a camera is going to peek from one of the tinted windows, I hear it thunk, thunk over the speed bump and it carries on its merry way.



Up the street, Ciara Snow is cleaning bat pee from her windows. The vermin live somewhere under her roof; a protected species, so she cannot get rid of them or the long white streaks that river down the glass. Her neck swivels as she spots me, starts waving her bingo wings like a mad bat herself, hoping for some deep meaningful conversation with me about her problem. This is my moment to practise a bit of echolocation and I'm twirling on my heels, back the way I came from and in my own door before her neck knows it's swivelled.

There's nothing for it but to ring into work sick. Well, you won't get me arriving in wearing the shades and swaddle. You know it would be easier to push soft noodles up a wild cat's ass than have them thinking that Doug has dumped me and I'm back in my virgin bed. Can't you see them sliding up to me putting a pitying hand on my arm and whispering 'you poor thing' when what they really want to say is: Loser!

Funny how Doug liked that side of my face. 'My better side,' he used to say anytime he took photos of me. Which was all the time. And the orders he gave:

Stand this way

No, a little bit further back. (If I was on the side of a cliff I'd be over it.)

Move nearer the window

Move away

Let the light fall this way and that, as if he was Lychfield or Stephen Curry. He had this mad notion that one day *Hello* magazine, *National Geographic* would have a big AHA moment, come knocking at his door and pay him a fortune for his soulful photos of people. Well, HELLO, I soon put a stop to that pie-eyed dream. You see, one evening while I was cooking up a storm for him: Connemara Carbonara, his favourite, I caught him downloading unsavoury shots of naked women. That soon whipped his appetite from him when I told him if that's what gave him his kicks then he might as well be on Route 66 because he wasn't going to do it on my watch. Oh, he tried to persuade me it was research, that all photographers did it. I told him right enough he could do his research somewhere else but not in my bed.

Still that butters no parsnips or brings back the side of my own face. I pull the place asunder looking for it but cannot find it anywhere. It's not in the freezer between the fish fingers and that stewed apple that I forgot to throw out. It's not in the boxes above the wardrobe. It's not in the cornflakes.

'Come on, God,' I plead. 'You're a woman, you should understand. Bring back my face and I'll never, complain about those crows' feet. Ever.'

But just when I think that things can't get worse, they do. This time it's my schnozzle. There one minute, and then, bat's pyjamas, it's gone. I used to think my nose wasn't half bad: shapely, a little turned-up, yet attractive nonetheless. But the one I'm now staring at is broader, crooked, broken like a boxer's, or like someone dropped me when I was a baby. Hmm. Now who's does that remind me of?

This is where I need to do a serious body search so I check out my toes: all accounted for; my knees, knobbly but still intact, my bellybutton. Of course, I can't find that because of my muffin top. There it is wobbling away at the top of my jeggings, all adipose and stretch marks. Now, wouldn't that be a service to humanity to take it away, to have it quietly erased without the cut of a knife. But it doesn't seem to be going anywhere. In fact, it looks even fatter.

That's because in my demented state, I've eaten all the noodles, the bread, the potato waffles, 'awfully versatile'. The cupboard is bare, not even a doggy bone. I'm now down to the last of the lentils, some sugar, cockroaches. There isn't much a body can do with those ingredients so I have to bite the bullet and head for the shops.

The sunglasses don't fit very well on my big hooter so I burgle my wardrobe for a pashmina, all colourful and expansive. Wrap it around my head. Across my nose. Have a look in the mirror – Hmmm. Almost impressive. It's not saying who I am but I could be someone. If anyone used their imagination.

What would my friend, Mandy, do in this situation? She's one of them beauty aficionadas. Loves to spend gazillions on the latest face cream that has some highly-potent magic ingredient from the scrotum of the aardvark or zebra or whatever scrotum is the hot topic of the moment and is purporting to restore a woman's skin to its new-born radiance. Even if it costs half a mortgage, I have no choice but to go for it. The thing is, Mandy'll freak when she sees me. That's what I am: a freak from a nineteenth-century circus, right up there with the four-legged chicken and the two-headed calf.



Roll up, roll up! Get to see your wonky-faced, crooked-nosed specimen.

But needs must and I head off to the shopping centre full of hope that she will be able to restore me to my new-born something or other. There I am at the store but I can't bring myself to go up to the counter. I'd have to take off my scarf. Show her. No, I can't do that.

I scuttle to the restaurant further down the way and sit in the far corner. The waitress comes by with her dark hair swept back from her brow and tied in a ponytail. No fear she's hiding anything. She raises her false eyelashes at me as she brings me my macchiato, my double Danish and I refuse to un-scarf myself. Only when she turns her back do I release a corner of it and gobble sugar-rush and caffeine all in one go.

That's as much as I'm able for, so it's home again, home again, jiggy jig. Sit into the car, have a look in my rear-view mirror, still no resurrection of jaw or nasal passages. Then the car starts to get stropy; it insists on turning left when I'm turning the wheel right. It's got a mind of its own and short of getting out and lashing it with a stick I can do nothing but go with it. Fighting with a car is nearly as bad as fighting with your ex and it feels like I've driven the whole length of the M50 and back again when there was only two miles to cover.

Everything comes to light by the time I get home. One of my shoulders is heftier than the other. The one with the bigger chip on it is now in control. It's not so much the bulk of my new shoulder as the way it makes me look so lopsided. It's too big for my new jacket. Only one arm will fit in. The other hangs limply against my side. My 'deportment' as my mother used to criticise, is in the wrong department now.

Oh, no, my lips! They're gone and they used to be so luscious, full, and all my own too, never any need for the bee-sting-trout-mouth look. I've become one of those mean thin-lipped women. And even worse, a chin wattle has appeared, as if I have no neck. All folding into one, making my face look like fried dough. A flat, fried dough face. I am no longer me. All's changed, changed utterly, a terrible beauty is being created before my eyes.

I curl up on the sofa, whining that I'll never get a man to look at me again. Maybe I was too harsh on Doug. At least all bits of me were intact when he was here. What a big hole he left in the bed after he had gone out the door with his bags and his photographic accoutrements.

For some reason, he left one of his photos behind. I could use that as an excuse to text him, see how he's doing. It's sitting on the shelf opposite me. A pink sky, a blue tree. And him standing there, his broad shoulders, his stare. He was mad for transforming the backdrops. He could make the world into a place that didn't exist for anyone else. I never liked what he did, turning nature upside down, believing that he was god and could make things more beautiful with the press of a button.

Then Friday, brushing my teeth, one eye looking out at me is brown where it used to be blue. It changes whatever is left of my face. My hair colouring is now too pale. It makes me look like I was put in too hot a wash. Staring out the window the trees are purple, the sun green. A man walks by with a five-legged dog.

I knock on the glass to call him, ask what happened his mutt.

The knuckles that hit the pane are not mine, either. My beautifully French-manicured nails are now bitten down to the quick. The hand, weathered skin, is big and hairy with a sport's watch on the wrist. Then I remember what Doug said as he went out the door. That I'd be sorry; someday I'd realise what I was missing. And then my breath catches in my throat. No! He couldn't have, could he? But he has. Doug has finally started to photoshop me. Into himself.



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