

CELEBRATING 8TH ANNIVERSARY 2010-2017

Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
DECEMBER 2017

ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE

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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Civil and human rights activists, animal rights activists, poets, writers, journalists, social workers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of the magazine.

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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DECEMBER 2017
Celebrating our 8th Anniversary
2010 - 2017

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To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

- William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

CUSTODIANS OF FATE

Many years ago when one was shackled to a wooden desk with its surface mutilated by successive students, year in and year out, I came across a tome of Rudyard Kipling's poems. It was, for a time, a refuge from the gruelling studies that nearly extinguished the free spirit within. In later years it was replaced by Tagore, Blake, the local poets and writers... some who were trapped in an existential time warp while feasting on the self.

And when my first love came along I discovered Shelley and Byron, whom I christened custodians of fate.

Now having spent more than a decade on the road confabulating with the spirits, talking to poets and writers, listening to them and moving to the rhythm of the metre, it becomes evident to one that this world, bleeding from its gums, with beauty lurking beneath festering scowls, with cruelty displayed like the dance of a peacock in mating season, with the ecstasy of witnessing sudden violence erupt is, in a manner of speaking, muted by the lyricism of the poets... a hope that is generated between the cry of a new born and the death rattle, a breath of fresh air amidst the unimaginable pollution of humanity in its conceited throes of self-indulgences.

The custodians of fate are, for me, not just Shelley and Byron anymore. They are the preservers of life, some featured in this magazine, who work tirelessly with words... conjuring, crafting and composing filigreed utterances transformed into an incense that intoxicates those that inhale its fragrance. And from this intoxication another dimension is formed into which the intoxicated can retreat to rejuvenate the soul.

And I am not talking about propaganda.

Poets and writers are custodians of fate who delve into the ebb and flow of life, pondering over the fertility and futility of mind and action, rescuing even the blasé from hara-kiri of the tongue. And they are often condemned to penury, living on the *refuse* of others' whims. Beauty resides within and reminds them constantly of the heavy burden they must bear for being custodians of fate, for salvaging, nurturing and resurrecting the soul of humanity through their creations of finely engraved thought. Perhaps they are fallen angels redeeming themselves within the confines of blood and bone.

Live Encounters Poetry & Writing was created to give free rein to the lyricists from every by lane in the world, those standing on the side lines crying hoarse their thoughts. This magazine is for the custodians of fate to be seen, heard and read...their words seeping into the great wide net and nestling in minds contaminated by vulgarity and despair. One yearns that all such minds are cleansed by hope and rejuvenated by words of wisdom emanating from the custodians of fate.

Live Encounters Poetry & Writing is a mirror in which to see our faces....

a constant reminder of how beautiful and fragile we all are...

and yet pathologically self-destructive.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

I am working on
'Time Capsules',
a poetry manuscript for young people.

*If you come upon
this book in two-hundred years
how will we appear to you?*

I have read and discussed the poems in classrooms
and have been encouraged by the response.
The work is aimed at young people from about ten into teenage years.



Giant sand sculpture on the banks of the Mekong river. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas



Terry McDonagh poet, translator, dramatist, taught creative writing at the University of Hamburg and Drama Director at the International School. Residencies in Europe, Asia and Australia. Publications: 9 poetry collections, letters and prose. Translated into Indonesian and German. 2015 *Out of the Dying Pan into the Pyre*, was long-listed for Poetry Society Prize. 2016, highly commended in Gregory O'Donoghue poetry comp. Included in Gill & McMillan poetry anthology for young people 2016. *Lady Cassie Peregrina* – his latest poetry collection was published by Arlen House.

2017

January 2017 snow outside
ice caps melting elsewhere
fear of global warming
seas keep rising
druids don't make a difference.

A boy sits reading a book
a bell rings
in the far distance
where his future waits
for him to catch up.

In two-hundred years
you will know our destiny
but not your own...

will a blade of grass
be a blade of grass?

Knowing the future
is like fixing fresh air.

FOOD CHAIN

Food chain's on everyone's lips
nutrients and energy
from creature to creature
plant-life to animal-life.

A baby carrot looks up
sees the rabbit coming
and shouts *oh oh oh no!*

The rabbit grows big and strong
the carrot keeps its head down
a farmer snares the rabbit
the farmer grows big and fat
gets old
joins the carrot and that's that.

A little girl plucks daisies
to make a daisy chain
and all of nature looks on
waiting to join in the fun.

TRUMP

It's a tired time...still no woman president
after two-hundred years of democracy and
the USA can only come up with this Trump card.

Tear up rules of behaviour
Rip into morning silence
Undo the dignity of woman
Mess up the environment
Plan the demise of our universe

and some people strive
to grasp his hand
in the land of the free.



BREXIT

Brexit and breakup
wannabe despots
so loud
thunder and rain
has no chance of being heard...

even dogs and cats
have given up on finding
a silent corner...

how happy is a lilting stream
making way
for spring raindrops.

TERROR

It is said by some
that a god smiles
on bomb makers...

on sad young people
detonating themselves
in public places
till there's nothing left
but silent streets
a silent earth
and all for a life of plenty
in Paradise.

There are anointed leaders
that say
women can leave earth
easily
as they have little to lose...

but gods don't say such things
I think
nor do they dance
out of sight
out of reach
till they cannot be found
in eternity or between
any of the four winds.

A god doesn't dance
to any tune...
but you'd wonder.



© Terry McDonagh

Alex Skovron is the author of six collections of poetry and a prose novella. His latest book, *Towards the Equator: New & Selected Poems* (2014), was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. *The Attic*, a bilingual selection of his poetry translated into French, was published in 2013; *Water Music*, a volume of Chinese translations, has just appeared; and his novella *The Poet* has been translated into Czech. A volume of short stories, *The Man who Took to his Bed*, is due later this year.

www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/skovron-alex

The poems *Silhouette* and *Transaction* have been published previously, in English with accompanying French translation, in the Paris-based journal *La Traductière* (in 2014 and 2013 respectively); *Motherboard* has never been published.



MOTHERBOARD

It was the foggy morning you called me in
because your hard drive had suffered a conniption!
That was exactly the way you put it,

and when I shook my head and laughed
you stared at me, uncertainly, but then you twigged
and we broke the ice together there and then

with a scotch at the formica dining-table your bills
were paid online upon, not to mention
the poems you'd been clacking out fastidiously

until the screen froze and your annoyance
over the crashed computer had rattled your default
composure. I said I thought your motherboard

had died, which amused you all the more.
So when we subsided to your op-shop chaise-longue,
still giggling and tangled a bit remarkably

in randomness, and when from the blue
you unbalanced me, your bare knees mock-playful
on my arms, your face right above mine

and I wondering at this novel turn in our hitherto
platonic consultations – well, to record
how it crossed my mind (for just an instant)

that I *could* stop pretending to resist; how you then
paused, triumphant, having pinned me
down in all four quadrants, your breath coming

sharp, iambic, your face enshadowed; and to report
how I closed my eyes (for just a second)
to weigh, for that second, my wild impossible options,

and how what then flashed before me
was not my villanelle life but a free-verse sestina
of my demise – well, to muse fantastically

on that fractal moment when switchpoints clashed
would be like trying to reboot a poem (your very phrase)
that I can never savour the risk of rewriting.



TRANSACTION

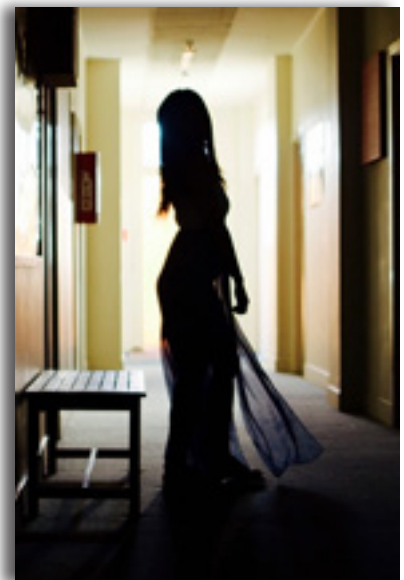
A poem is somehow alive. (Seamus Heaney)

I suppose you thought you were the maker
And I the poem you made. Well, I have some news.
It's true my physiognomy, the way you break a
Line or pick a word, is what *you* seem to choose
At any given turn to tailor your voice,
And that the credit, as it should, carries your name;
But let me gently disabuse you of the choice
You think you exercise within our little game.

You see, those rare and fragrant stanzas you compose
Are not merely your mind constructing me, but *I*
Lending a coloration to your soul – the way a rose
In perfect bloom incarnadines the soil it's lifted by.
The difference lies in this: the rose withers and dies;
Our poem, if faithful to us both, survives.

SILHOUETTE

She was our brand-new neighbour, saucy, very single,
maybe a decade older than we two brothers next door,
a pair of precocious sixteen-year-olds. I found myself
indulging in steamy fantasies. This was Vancouver, 1972,
the summer unusually warm. I put it to Marcel, my twin,
that I would do just about anything to bed her. He scoffed
at my bravado: 'In your dreams!' he said. 'And anyway,
she doesn't turn *me* on.' He gave a yawn, turned back
to his Molière. My hubris dented, I devised a plan: never one
for the direct approach, I improvised an outfit, a few props,
and two days later rang her bell, explained I was collecting
for the Blind Appeal and could she maybe spare a donation.
(From there, I'd figured, my charm would ensure the rest.)
She made me wait, went to the bedroom to locate her bag.
I ogled her silhouette as she slipped inside. And then I froze.
Beyond her door, half-naked on her mattress, Marcel.



© Alex Skovron

Richard James Allen is an Australian born poet whose writing has appeared widely in journals, anthologies, and online over thirty years. Former Artistic Director of the Poets Union, Inc., he has written nine books of poetry, edited a national anthology, and combined a unique international career as a multi-award-winning writer, director, choreographer, and performer for stage and screen.

www.physicaltv.com.au [Fixing the Broken Nightingal](#) [The Kamikaze Mind](#)



THE REBIRTH OF DOUBT

You once wrote,
“To confess is not unusual”.
But actually,
to confess is unusual
if by that you mean
to tell the truth,
the whole truth
and nothing but the truth.

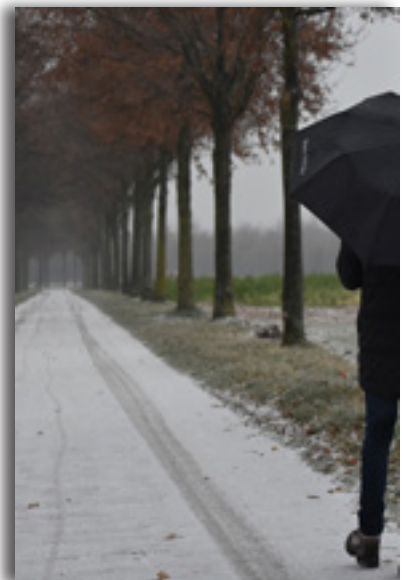
The truth would take
more volumes
than you could fill
in an entire lifetime
and by the time
you got to the end
of the whole truth
you’d have to start
all over again.

Maybe that’s why
reincarnation
was invented.
A nothing but the truth-
telling daisy chain.

WINTER TIMES

the little girl
knows
it is snowing

but has no idea
of the winters
that await her



“NEARER THAN KNOWING”

Even though you are far away
I feel you in my heart.

Is this what Krishna meant
by “nearer than knowing”?

Is it blasphemy
that we have become

for each other
as precious as gods?

Or do perhaps
the inner

-present drops
of our personal worship

divine our way
towards the universal ocean?

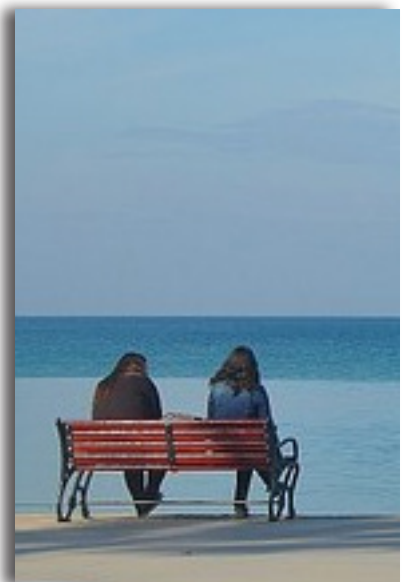
A STRANGE HYPOTHESIS

When I was a landscape,
you asked me to write a poem
in the old-fashioned way
about people I didn't understand,
including myself,
a study in brittle magic.

In sudden hibernation
while I sought for words,
sometimes I thought I was
the reincarnation of
Boris Pasternak –
a strange hypothesis since
mostly I felt that his poetry
was lost in translation
and he died twenty-six days
after I was born.

But we were both
at the mercy of:
why is the wind.
Equally fell in love
with the epic:
what makes the stranger sense.
And, coeval across time,
found ourselves left with:
whose inside are you on
when you say goodbye
with your eyes.

Today I am
far from the ground,
a storm brewing,
waiting for
a heavenly translation
of my brother Pasternak's words
to whirl into the fields
like immaculate snow.



© Richard James Allen

Colette is an award winning poet who resides in Galway in the West of Ireland. She writes in both Irish and English. She has fourteen publications which include a volume of short stories, *Ádh Mór*, as well as an academic study of the blind poet Anthony Raftery, an 18th century bard whose songs and poems are still recited and sung today. She has one volume of English poetry, *Sundial*, which was published by Arlen House Press, She also has two dual language collections of poetry by the same publisher; *Between Curses: Bainne Géar*, and *In Castlewood: An Ghaoth Aduaidh*. Her work is on the syllabus in Primary, Secondary and Third Level colleges. Colette's latest collection (bilingual) is titled *Bainne Géar: Sour Milk*, which is available in hardback and softback, published by Arlen House, 2016. : Colette is pursuing postgraduate studies in the English department of NUI Galway; she also has a master's degree in modern Irish. *'Magyar Dancer'* is her forthcoming collection of English poetry.



DEDICATION

This poem is for you
but I really cannot commit
to writing your name
in black newsprint
to disguise the fact
that this poem
is for you.

Perhaps if I had a clear
notion, as it were,
that you might have
even a slight inclination
towards this poem,
not to mention this poet,
I would shout from
the top of the tallest horse chestnut,
a tree endowed with magic power,

but as it stands
there are no leads
as to where your heart rests
on this matter.
So just act
as if this never happened,
because there is little chance
of you ever uncovering
this most heartfelt dedication.

LEAVING HIGH KINGS

On the crossing from the fortress of Laoghaire
son of *Niall Naoi nGiallach* or Niall of the Nine
Hostages, brother of Cairbre-
I struggle with alliteration
in our native languages.

Searching for strains of ancient chivalry
as we close in on Cymru;
a host of modern motorways
instead of firey red dragons battling
the knight of Y Gododdin
or Ambrosius Aurelianus,
as visualized by Gildas.

Scrutinizing landscape for any trace
of Bedwyr from Pa Gur Yv Y Porthaur
who returned Excalibur to its rightful lady,
night sky is diluted pots of Indian ink,
and I dream of carpet the colour of sunflowers.



© Colette Nic Aodha

MAKING SHAPES IN WORDS

(after painter and poet David Jones)

Solemn chuckles, in parenthesis,
bloody heroics of poppies replace dreams,
foxes and birds of battle scrape the dark.

Jingoism creates its own make shift crosses,
palette for copper, wood or paper,
high pitched screech of shrapnel shell.

Coerced to paint silence behind trees, slay demons;
the other side of windows shaped branches and twigs
for brush and page.....

I have to write monsters in words,
trace veins of fiends with pencil or ink.
Sometimes charcoal from the burnt embers of fallen dreams

adds weight to paper.

Forget order, colour padlocks on foreheads
put breasts on doors, turn ciphers inside out,
silence the light, paint the past in shadows,
crowd life with afterlife, water grand illusions...
Threads of time fading...
Briefly..... Heart imitates mind.

SECRET DREAMS

My lips with gentle kisses you trace
this dream of you when alone in my bed,
longing to wake up in your embrace.

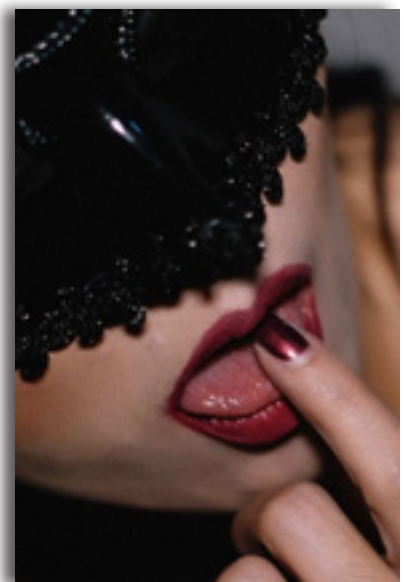
Your tenderness gives my heart solace
weaving mythical worlds, we bonded,
my lips with gentle kisses you trace.

Touching me softly you lead me to your palace
of orchid, orange blossom and fireweed,
longing to wake up in your embrace.

Your sweet tenderness restores my peace,
how could imagined sin feel so blessed?
my lips with gentle kisses you trace.

I take this unravelling heart of lace
And place it at your feet; it needs to be mended,
Longing to wake up in your embrace.

Soul to soul, skin to skin I place
flower petals on your chest, beloved,
my lips with gentle kisses you trace,
longing to wake up in your embrace.



© Colette Nic Aodha

David Graham's six collections of poems include *Stutter Monk* and *Second Wind*. He also co-edited with Kate Sontag an essay anthology: *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*. Individual poems, essays, and reviews have appeared widely in journals and anthologies as well as online. He retired from college teaching in 2016, and now serves as contributing editor for *Verse-Virtual* (www.verse-virtual.com), where he also writes a monthly column, "Poetic License," on poets and poetics. He lives in Glens Falls, New York.



SAND AGAINST THE WIND

*Mock on, mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau;
Mock on, mock on; 'tis all in vain!
You throw the sand against the wind,
And the wind blows it back again.*

--Blake

As even turtles know, sunning themselves
on an afternoon rock in the barely moving
stream, there are only so many hours

in a day. Yes, and only so many years
in a life, though that's perhaps beyond
a turtle's ken—who can say for sure?—

but surely there's not much excuse
for the likes of me spending
one more hot minute online, scanning

the vids and memes, political outrage,
traveling vicariously to Grand Canyon
or blue Danube, witnessing

many a flash-blasted plate of pasta
and a richness of rickety smiles.
And there's definitely no reason

to read, much less share, a Facebook
post mocking some hapless soul
who doesn't know how to spell "cologne"—

as in, "When he passed by, I was
intoxicated by the smell of his colon."
Which is funny, sure, but just reminds us

how paltry a thing is mockery,
how poisonous and soul-deadening,
unless perhaps directed at the rich

or powerful in their eternal pomposity
—but even then it's risky, for the mocker
can easily confuse ridicule with wisdom

or virtue, which is itself a mockable offense.
Better to just feel sun warm your shell for
as long as you can, then plop back in the pond.



© David Graham

JUNK SHOP SHADOWS

I like the idea of junk shops more than
being in one—the dust and clutter,
renegade odors of failure and loss,
the sag in the shoulders of someone's
old wedding suit. Nothing lasts,
and not a soul scrawling their chipper
weather reports in these racks
of sun-faded postcards has the slightest
idea. It's the smell of almost successful
air fresheners, shadows between
the aisles mumbling and coughing softly.

So what's to like? That you can
almost see how every miserable
doo-dad was once someone's
luminous dream. I like how no one
pretends to have a plan, but just
shuffles one day to the next
in comfortable shoes. The impossible
abundance of the past, like a kettle
of soup before you ladle out
the first bowl. That long moment
when everything is still delicious.

NOCTURNE IN THE MANNER OF O'HARA

Walking at night's a cinematic pleasure—
O neon and fog, O purring of closed shopwindows--
as long as there are streetlights and sidewalks,
so I'm not apt to trip over a tree root, step
in a hole, or mutter into the gloom
of a bear's lair—bears are so irritable
when disturbed in their sleep! –rather like
my grandfather, who was someone
else's grandfather at such times,
half blind and rusty-voiced yet still able
to land a few blows
that left carbon-paper bruises. . . .

He was perhaps remembering
his youth, the poor fellow, who had
the papery skin, withered shanks,
pale and unemphatic tattoos,
and wandery mind of a true ancient, yet once
was a beast to be reckoned with,

but what did I know, after all,
being myself but a stork-awkward and literally
snot-nosed boy with too many coins
in his pockets, my eyes easily
dazzled by flesh or flashbulb alike?



© David Graham

From her latest book *Parts of the Main* published by Ginninderra Press. www.ginninderrapress.com.au

Jane Williams is an award-winning Australian writer based in Tasmania. Her most recent book is *Days Like These* – new and selected poems. Her sixth collection of poems *Parts of the Main* is forthcoming. While best known for her poetry, she writes in a variety of forms and genres for both adults and children and combining photography with poetry. She has been a featured reader at venues in several countries including Slovakia where she held a three month artist residency in 2016. www.janewilliams.wordpress.com



EVERYTHING ABOUT US

Everything about us makes us strangers here. Out of place tourists waking into another Ramadan day. Into a culture we are privy to but not part of. A neighbourhood free from souvenirs, from brochures and itineraries. The taxi driver asks Why? The memory-making of everyday living elsewhere is a blueprint for home. The call to prayer echoes across tiled rooftops, dipping and rising through alleys and stairwells. Our hosts invite us to celebrate Eid al-Fitr: the sugar feast, the sweet festival. But this morning and for seven days more their first meal of the day must be eaten before sunrise, sate them until sunset. We buy street food from vendors who smile at us curiously. Our cameras become dangerous pets questioning intent; tourists bring back photos, travellers bring back stories. But labels are blankets we hide under, revealing selective truths by torchlight. Empty beer bottles replicate like drones on the laminate bench top, then stop. We moderate. Abstain. Our bodies thank us. A new ethos sidles up to the old one, we let parts of it in – no more or less than we need. Children signal our unbelonging in hand-cupped whispers. The mosque's blue domed minaret, zigzagged with gold is striking as lightning in a cloudless sky. Motorbikes and pedestrians move in practiced, haphazard synchronicity, suggesting accidents happen anyway, anywhere. Hijabs form part of the landscape - their colours and patterns individual as dreams. A woman and child cross the road slowly, a small sway over their journey's end. As she bends to his level, the traffic adjusts itself around them. She kisses his left cheek, right cheek, then again - before watching him disappear through the school gates. And this is the familiar. The anchor I hold to. This gesture of loving separation. This unified prayer that all we see in our children will be seen. As we hand them over. As we let them go.

CLIMATE CONTROL

Respect the wind drawing machines,
give them enough slack to reinvent the wheel

(there's a lot you can still do
with a piece of string and a small sail).

Embrace patience
which is the opposite
of waiting.

Be willing to learn how to Be
pre - effect.

Play around with algorithms
and pendulums,
molecules of hair and feathers,
shell grit ...

Believe once again that dreaming
is the fulcrum of imagination.

Respond to change in kind,
from zephyrs to twisters.

Acknowledge the kinship patterns
of science and art -

the striving of each to reveal
veracious beauty in the universe,

the symbiotic relationship
between intellect and desire,

between your breathlessness
and these warming winter winds.



© Jane Williams



RENEWAL

It was before mobile phones and predictive text. Before GPS. They were out walking together and there was a pothole or maybe a crack in the pavement through which the root of a tree had begun its necessary search for water. And one of them tripped (accidentally or on purpose) and the other was jolted. They became distracted, untethered and before they knew what had happened, she turned one way and he the other. They found themselves walking streets peopled with neighbours who did not recognise the him or her of them. It was a strange skin-tingling tightrope walk. They walked through exhilaration to exhaustion. They walked until they each found a resting place; a prayer room or maybe a watering hole. Where she could let her slip slip and he could run his hands through his hair and they could take stock for a moment, embracing their alien beings. Remembering all they hadn't yet shared - old odd things they hadn't thought worthy until now and new startling ones they were on the brink of discovering. They walked on, singly, somehow renewed. And when they turned a certain corner, there they were, more pleased to have been lost and found than they ever had been to simply be together. We must never, they agreed, each catching the breath of the other, we must never stop meeting like this ...

COMFORT

Tonight it's Chinese food tweaked to accommodate a Western palate, white tablecloths encouraging at least entry level table manners, attentive waiters, warm wet hand towels, the ocean in a glass tank. We're out with friends, swapping travel stories, listing but not naming animals we've eaten, when a neighboring table becomes a medical emergency. Mid-sentence, mid-gesticulation a woman has stopped. Stopped talking. Stopped moving. Her cutlery and crockery, the perfect mound of rice – all still lifes now. Her panoramic vision turned inward. The voices of family members beseech strangers to inhabit their titles: Doctor. Nurse. First aider. Soon someone is monitoring pulse and breath, time and tide. Someone is whispering *mini-stroke*.

While the maître d discreetly scans the room for undesirable ripple effects the rest of us offer our kindest clichés and grapple: Looking. Not looking. Eating. Not eating. Getting on. Getting on. The woman's husband, (whose only enemy now is inaction) phones for the ambulance, strokes his wife's hair. Repeats her name over and over as if it is the last, the very last magic word. Then he turns. And we watch as he turns from mounting anxieties to the comfort of a single sauce-drenched spring roll, and this would be darkly funny if not so familiar for which of us could deny him this simple affirmation, the vivifying sweet and sour of its call.

Caley O'Dwyer lives in Los Angeles where he teaches creative writing and psychology at Antioch University. His poems appear in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Cream City Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Warwick Review*, *Curator*, *Ekphrasis*, *Washington Square*, and other venues, including the Tate Modern Museum in London. He is a winner of an Academy of American Poets Prize, a three-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize, and a recipient of a Helene Wurlitzer grant for poetry. His book, *Full Nova*, was published by Orchises Press.



SPLITTING UP

Her finger came off in the seated
leg extender. As clean
as the curvilinear line by which

the up-swinging ankle bar
swished the air, her finger
dropped onto the floor.

I picked it up and handed it to her.
We got a couple tacos
and went to the hospital.

It was there she disclosed
the knowledge that she'd been
losing appendages

since birth and that loving her
would hurt. I had been hurt
each time before,

and the prospect of either of us
falling apart entirely
made me curious. Everything

went fine, until the evening
at the Poconos Restaurant.
We had lasagna and soup de jour

followed by pellets of pink ice cream
on a tremendous plate
when she began to talk about

the war. *Which one*, I said?
She said she didn't want to talk about it.
This is when I snapped and said

please, what are you talking about?
And I wish I hadn't because her head
fell off in the bread basket.

We had dessert in silence. She was
headless, upset. I helped her
get herself together,

paid and left the tip.
I grew nervous, detached.
Is this really what we want?

We went to therapy.
Like riding a shopping mall escalator,
there were expensive ups and downs.

I came to see these bouts of self-abnegation
as signs of trust. She wouldn't fall
completely apart for just anyone.

When she split in half over our disagreement
about the number of keys
to duplicate for our house,

I wept, holding both of her in my arms.
We were enmeshed, but not for long.
When she realized I was just a jerk

making her nuts, she kept herself all one,
and split, leaving me to wonder what went wrong—
where had my good, other half finally gone?



TERMINAL A

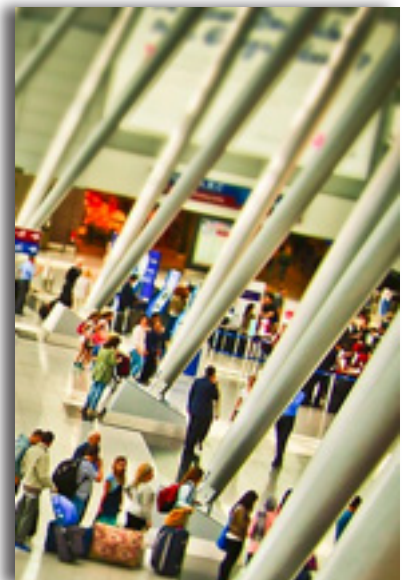
Between failure and possibility
is the airport: interior railways,
shoppers roughly in sync
with the hidden metronome.
Someone with intelligent hair
knows the destination.
Simon says he will now smoke
in the enclosed patio.
Bridget buys a cell-phone,
Patty uses the bathroom,
Mildred chews gum.
Henry says he'll be
"right back, cat's got to
poo." I begin to wonder
if we will ever fly at all.
Will we ever again
do anything at all?

"Just a few more minutes,
says Mildred," as she buys
snow globes and bite-size Snickers.
"First thing I want to do
when we arrive is lay down,"
Patty says. "I want to lay down
the whole time," I say.
A voice, disembodied,
preternatural, reminds us
"watch your belongings
at all times, shop at Starbucks,
and frequent the adjacent
convenience store." On TV,
the terror alert changes
from blue to orange.

Someone on a freeway
has been abducted.
The football game
is four to six—two safety's
and a missed extra point.
"Final call for flight twenty-one twelve."
Mildred's card is unreadable.
"Could you swipe it again?"
"I did." "It's not working."
"I'd like to see that cat dead,"
Mildred says, as Henry returns,
smiling, terrifically relieved.

What folly to think we'll finally
find ourselves moored
somewhere ahead, the green
fairways and sand pockets,
palm trees sculpted and plain,
endless, desultory. The heavens
go on and on, brightened by
our wishes, our maybes breeding
with the passion of bamboo.

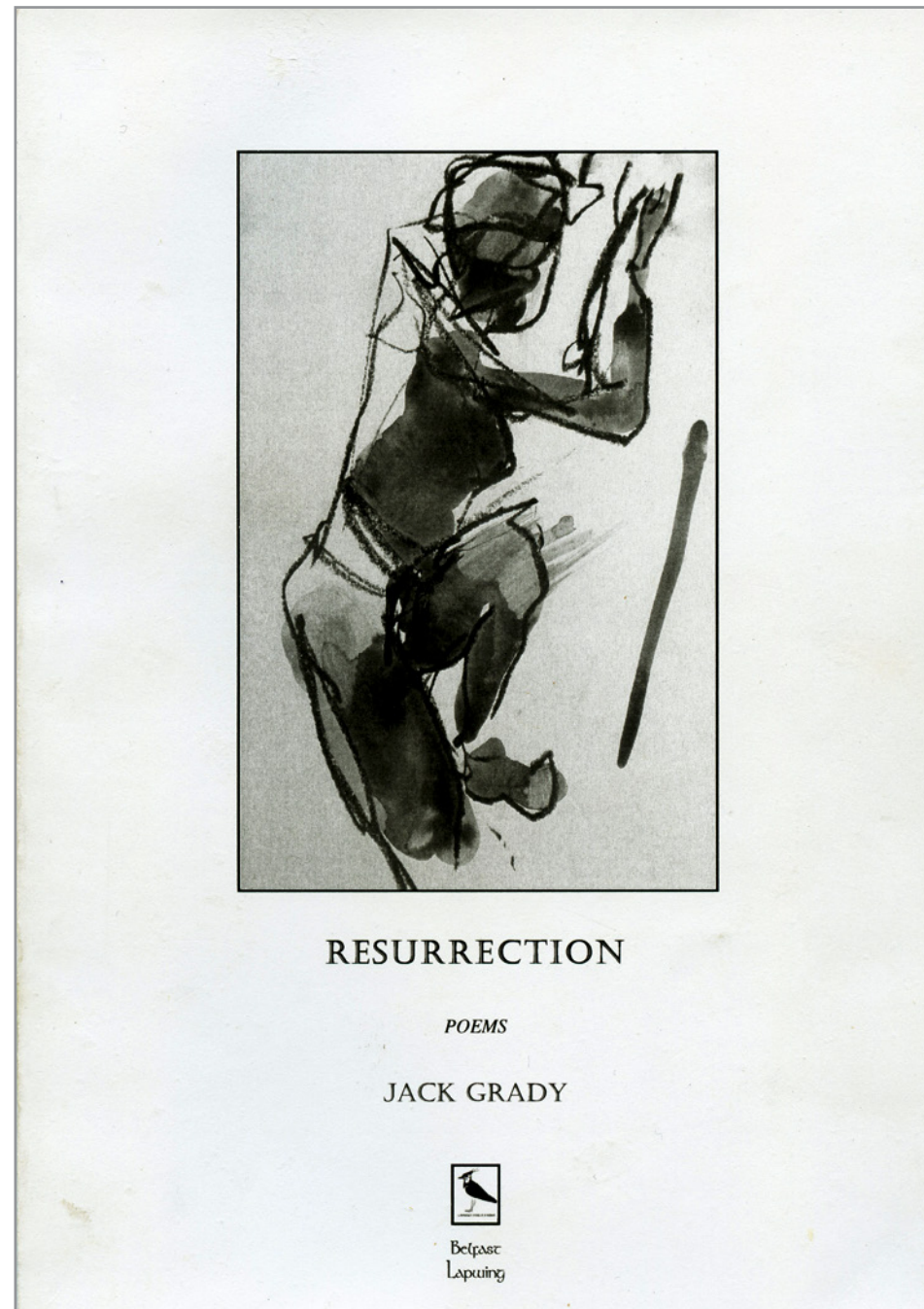
In the early summer evening,
fireflies will rush the camellias
where children and their parents
wait to pet the furry animal
for a dollar. The streets are wide,
swimming pools in each backyard,
large pomegranates, the blueprint
for the city framed in gold
beside a statue of the Mayor.
Fragrant white blossoms
perched just so over a pond.
"Hey, look, it's a new kind
of chocolate bar—Now More Air."
"Let's get out of here, Mildred," I say.
"Hold on," she says, "I see an opening."



© Caley O'Dwyer



Jack Grady is a founder member of the Irish-based Ox Mountain Poets. His poetry is widely published and has appeared in Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Canada, Indonesia, and Portugal. His work has appeared on two other occasions in *Live Encounters* (January and July 2017). He represented Ireland at the third international poetry festival in Marrakesh, Morocco, and he has been invited to represent Ireland at the third *Poesia a Sul* in Olhão, Portugal. His poetry collection, *Resurrection*, was published in Belfast by Lapwing Publications and was launched in October 2017.



Available at [Jack Grady - Lapwing Store](#)

HEARTBREAK

After Guy Goffette's 'L'adieu'

She believes you can seize the sea
by the ringlets of its surf
and shake it out like a dirty rug,
make a ship from a forest
with the rivets of your dreams;
harness the wind to a water-witch stick
to discover a secret spring.

She knows such magic
is as easy for you as plucking
the petals of daisies in fields
in a game of I love her, I love her not,
when her heart is in your pocket,
and you treat it like a bauble,
a trinket, a worthless glass bead.

But, to be deaf to her breath –
that gasp before her scream –
when you sever the ropes
of your last bridge to her world
and let fall the last cling of your need:

that is unpardonable; never
should that be.

RESURRECTION

*I have a dream that one day ...the rough places will be made plain,
and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of
the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.*

– Martin Luther King

I have a dream that one day
armies will shoot with songs instead of bullets
generals will shed uniforms for the saffron hues of Hare Krishnas
Buddha will hold conference calls between New York and Geneva
St. Francis will cradle again the birds of Assisi
and even insects will have no reason to fear us
Lao Tsu will return to expound on mountains
that freedom never crowns conquest
never plants flags beyond borders

The dead will rise to expose
those who killed innocence and blamed the innocent
those whose lies hatched our hatred and turned us into murderers
those who will hear their sneering laughter silenced
by their own spontaneous cries of confession

Machiavelli will erase The Prince as a fraud
Wolfowitz will tell us all Neocons
are trapped in the chaos of the clueless
the Kennedys will unmask their assassins
and spend a week granting absolution
to plotters who never imagined it possible

Isaiah will weep with joy as Israel abandons Dimona
and its shell is claimed by sands of the Negev
Wahhabis will intone the poems of Rumi
Shia and Sunni will greet each other with kindness
while sabres of rage remain sheathed
and lions purr as they sleep with lambs
and shepherds in a world redeemed

Nuclear arsenals will explode with a pop
harmless and hilarious as clouds of balloons bursting
we will at last hear the trees speak
tell us why they are rooted
and how their quiet peace
resurrects flowers and leaves

Gandhi will walk with Jesus on water
and they will hail a resurrected dreamer –
Martin Luther King –
while he hauls into his boat
constellations of fish
with silken nets of starlight



David has been a professional editor and journalist for over thirty years beginning his career on the subs desk of the *Morning Star* newspaper. He is editor of numerous historical publications under the Socialist History Society imprint. David's interests and research include Turkey and the Kurds, literary figures like George Orwell, Edward Upward and William Morris, British anarchism, the 17th century English revolutionary era and the history of psychoanalysis. He has contributed towards many different publications and writes review articles, commentaries, opinion pieces, polemics and poetry.

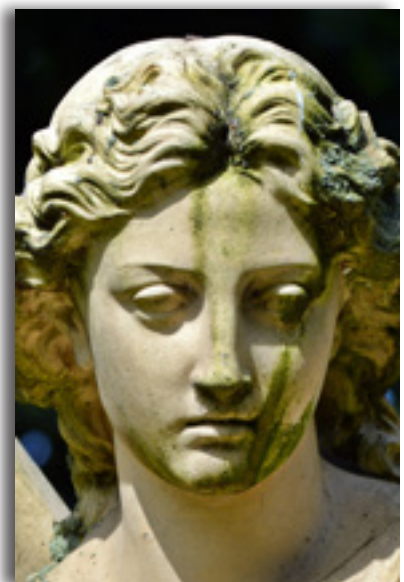


A HAT FULL OF BLACKBERRIES

A hat brim full of blackberries
 The booty my reward for negotiating the brambles
 One chance encounter with a wild bush in full fruit
 Thousands black and swollen
 Hanging there for the taking
 It would be quite foolish to refuse
 All ripe untouched before the birds eyed and pecked
 All that Nature's garden doth provide
 Picked in abundance till my hat overflows
 Like I did as a kid with parents much missed
 My wise guides in the gentle art of survival
 Sustenance shows life will plod on
 So let's doff our caps to Nature
 As we stride on and carry on
 Our burdens ever so slightly undone

ABANDONED

First mum then dad pushing up the daisies
 It's solitary me alone against the world
 Nurtured, cultivated with such tender care
 So abruptly left, now they're not there
 Abandoned, adrift, all at sea
 Darkness, bleakness and fear
 Are all that awaits me
 From now till eternity



AUTUMN GRIEVES

With the autumn leaves
As the summer leaves
As leaves all leave
To reveal the naked trees
Our hearts appeased
And our minds at peace
While our only thoughts
Are of autumn leaves
And the only sounds
Are of falling leaves
Companioned by yearning
Of the rustling trees
It's the silence that doth please

MAKE ME HAPPY

Make me happy
With your dazzling magenta faces
Reflect the light before our day is done
Make me happy
Once one's journey's long begun
Make me happy
My brown-eyed Helianthus
Smile at me, caress me
With your thousand translucent fingers
Stroking and stoking
Assuage our deepest distress
Heal the heartaches whose pain you cannot guess
You bringers of the happiness that lingers
Make me happy
Your fragility the surest source of strength



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.



LOUGH GUR

A summer Sunday morning,
Limerick is humid.
We cycle out of the city.
The haze like a miasma
is already swallowing
the spire of St John's.

Alone on the road
it's good to be out of the city
like voiding a confessional.
The roadside grasses
the dappled hedgerows
are flags to spur us on

until we catch
a first view of water
a horse-shoe lake
a clear unpeopled space
Lough Gur serene and
supple as a swan's neck.

The limpid lake
in the day's sun
is now an eye
now a polished mirror.
It carries the sky and the world
to its heart.

A place both here and beyond
makes possible belief -
the goddess ambushing us
into being at one
with the rise and fall
of her landsong.

The cold water
alerts the skin like fire.
Ripples lap us
a circle dance
seeking alignment
with the shore.

To plunge in,
this total immersion,
is to feel an ancestral touch
seaming the present with the past
to sense the power of the lake
to grant succession
over all who have come and gone
over all who will come and go
over all that is dull and terrible
in the telling of the stars and stones.

PEBBLY WITH STARS

Roily clouds stream
along currents of air
filling the night sky.
Of a sudden,
it is dreamtime -
an inky pool appears
to my naked eye,
pebbly with stars.



ĒOSTRE RISING

Last summer the field
boxed in by clipped hedges
was carefully tended.
From a distance
it looked manicured

you'd take it for the lawn
of some great estate.
A flock of gleaming sheep
shorn and equally attended
had grazed it clean.

This year they planted
a for sale sign in the field.
It has remained ungrazed.
Time for silage making
has long since passed

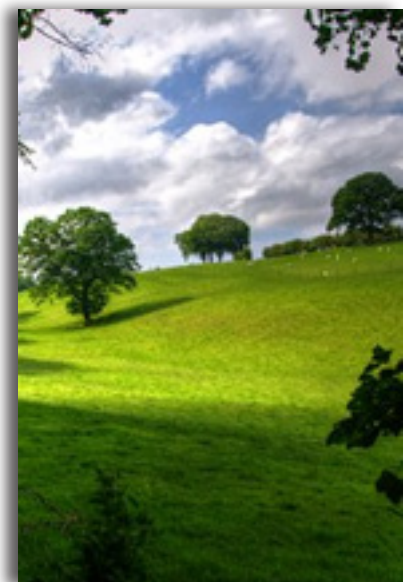
and the long grass
its nervy filaments
auguries of the season
bend rhythmically
to the slights of wind.

The earth appears now
gently to be breathing
as if the mythology
of the mother goddess
her wisdoms were true.

Here and there pioneers
trees and meadow seedlings
have already taken root,
nature's mood for motley
mocking the old regime.

OUR CLOTHES SWAY

In a testing breeze
our clothes sway
this way and that
upside down
on the washing line
like tight rope walkers
in a topsy-turvy world
our antimatter selves
in restless interplay
shadows and light
toing and froing
minds weighing up
balancing this world
its wavering realities.



© Anton Floyd

M. L. Williams is author of *Other Medicines* and co-editor of *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals and anthologies, including most recently *Western Humanities Review*, *Miramar*, *The Journal of Florida Studies*, *The Cortland Review*, *Stone*, *River*, *Sky*, and *Clash by Night*. He teaches creative writing and contemporary literature at Valdosta State University.



RAMADAN CHRISTMAS 1999, CHICAGO

After sundown, the Hyatt would teem
with dark-haired children attending a conference
for Muslim teens, tired of fasting all day,
tired of activities and meetings and panels.
I'd lunched on the Christmas buffet alone,
early for my conference, away from home,
from anyone I knew, first time in Chicago,
first time for deep dish in a dive, the cook
arguing on the phone, the crust a perfect
gold wreath around the sauce and cheese,
first time at the Art Institute, Joseph Cornell
boxes and their perfect gatherings
of dust, feathers, screens, odd objects, Michigan
and Wacker, Lakeshore, shopping, and each night after
exploring, I'd go to the bar for a glass of wine,
talk to Dana, the bartender, about my hopes,
my interviews, watch the kids patrol
the hotel for food and fun, remember the man
in front of his car parked on an empty bypass
road, knees on his carpet, bowed in *sajdah*
in the bitter cold as I walked quietly past,
Holy Ramadan, Holy Christmas, peace.

SLIPPING AWAY

You speak of the cistern
that collected the rain,
house full, brothers,
sisters all there, picking
cotton for a share
of the crop in Deport—
the good times, you say,
everyone together. *Terrible*
days, your mother said,
brutal work picking
bolls with a baby
in swaddling.
But they were all alive,
house full of voices
and you slip
back, visit, and,
though you're right
in front of me,
I miss you.



NOR SPANISH NOR MOSS

beard bromeliad
white fall
of city oaks
down canopy roads

ghost silver winters
on swamp cypresses
black water
mirrors and mist
unsettling vultures

what wires tangle
what your tiny bell
flowers have seen
and rung out

YET

*Then are two things the same when they are what one thing is?
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 215*

The indefatigable
silence this desert road
trip window cranked
arm resting bent
there they had wind
wings for cigarettes
oceans rising in the hot
distance vanishing
like radio stations
thrum of this slow
going and being
here chrome
and vinyl glance
and sigh



Books: *The Day Judge Spencer Learned the Power of Metaphor*. *Old School Superhero Loves a Good Wrist-watch* (chapbook). Prizes, partial: Tusculum Review, Red Hen Press, Willow Review, Smartish Pace, three Pushcart Prize nominations. Journals, partial: American Literary Review, American Poetry Review, Barrow Street, Cimarron Review. Georgetown Review, Gulf Coast, Plume, Tahoma Literary Review, Texas Review. Anthologies, partial: Narrow Chimney Reader Volume II (in which these poems first appeared), Even the Daybreak, Drawn to Marvel, Emily Dickinson Awards Anthology. 2nd full-length poetry collection forthcoming, 2017: *Horn Section All Day Every Day*.

ON THE MIND SUMMITING IN A POOL OF SWEAT has been published in *The Day Judge Spencer Learned the Power of Metaphor* (Salmon Poetry, 2012). Originally published in *Gulf Coast*.



ON THE MIND SUMMITING IN A POOL OF SWEAT

Not sunup yet, but that same caliber of gray
as dusk on its way toward dark
except there are bits of cream dropped in it, and the kitchen
is strange, in this light like night but not. Coffee
would percolate me if the kettle would appear. Because
darned if I don't see a thing outlandish I'm afraid to say.
Outside corner of the backyard there, a scrawny
silhouette of a small man, he darts, jabs
as a sparrow caught in the rafters
aspires to blue sky. I've just moved into this house, I
do not know it; my mail delivery isn't flowing yet.
Some thirty years, widowed, retired, my real house
gone, and here I am. Perhaps the landscapers
didn't yet get their last invoice paid up
and a cease service note from the prior owner.
After all, he might be about to fertilize something—but where's
his edging equipment, the bags of manure, a shovel—

And he approaches; sidewinder. My glass arcadia door.
A decorative garden rock, helmet
clutched to his breast. If he admires it
I could gift it to him. Some people possess queer
penchants for decorative rocks. Whatever I do, I do
not run. This will infuse him with courage,
and game. Running prey can be delicious.
I might holler through the as-yet-unbroken glass,
I too have a gun. And I do, which I do
not, and which he does not, although he too hollers it,
which of course I do not know yet for certain. And now
a new idea is knocking, except he is demanding
where is my car? And I say I didn't say I
have a car, why do you think I
have a car, what are you talking about, car..

As if this is philosophy class and I am a babe
and shining again for the sexy professor
from New York City, his tight black pants and sharp
black shoes, long wicked hair, two black eyes,
and hammered gold
wedding band worn knuckle to knuckle

on the third finger of his right hand, like
an exclamation against gullibility. Him
in whom I possessed a slobbering crush, oh
to exhibit debatable powers
of deductive reasoning rather
than be a goat to a crime scene and I
at the helm of it and if not helm, certainly
first goddamn mate, nautically speaking,

but like a bag of wind, I digress. Seems
the two skittish mahogany Doberman pinschers,
who sleep deeply as if pill-addicted,
now groggily navigating the kitchen table's legs
for the metal chink of the breakfast bowl, stir me,
the idea widens into a cauldron,
my mind enters as a tugboat, ugly, ill-starred
and perspiring, but all engine
into this moment of my life mine and not mine
for I want my soul to persist in my body
and I want the skies to hail down whatever they please
but upon me too, and when tomorrow brings
its eleventh-hour appreciation
in a classic frock, I want to attend
with the fanfare of the unrecognized, the barely-by, fully-
grown, touring the uproarious strains of what love sounds
like to the living.

UNBLUES THIS PASSPORT is appearing in a forthcoming collection by Salmon Poetry, February 2018

UNBLUES THIS PASSPORT

Like sweet relish, people whose music you feel hip to
always look to be smiling with him, all teeth
in the old pictures. Arms creased
casually over each other's shoulders.
One very long time ago he fouled the lean
back row of the tour van, smoked crack, cramped
and frankly in peril, fishy-eyed,
blotchy-faced, vein-roped
but still that strong popper jaw.

So it is not without the greatest incongruity of happenings
or the possibility of entry into some atmosphere of grace
that here tonight he plays out every "dear diary"
chestnut—hitched in wedded union
to an authentic medical doctor,
a licensed *Italian* doctor who *doubles*
as six-string bass guitar
there behind him onstage. Proprietary in her tight
blue jeans. He fronts the stage lip like *Viva Zapata!*—
leather crisscross bandoleer chest,
each harmonica smirking or winking
in its own precious cocoon.
Can't sing worth a house wren but yes,
he can play. He can suck up notes and blow out
different ones in the same dollop of air.
The drums, seen everything,
speaks merely now. Guitar and keyboards, they slip
under-table bets this bass woman lasts—
except, back in their trailer, come 4 A.M.:

Buzzybee,
when do we go back to Italy
for Mama Sophia's basil linguine?
I want to swing in the hammock.
Hang out with the goats with their neck bells.
You have hospital rounds soon.
Let's squeeze in the one-night show at the Apollo,
then we hightail it for the hills.
I promised the gang. It's all-star night,
c'mon, it's bigger than the both of us.
Rosie sewed on crystals
to my new stage pants. Turn around,
that dress looks good on you.
Keep the change. Buzzbug,
help me with this collar.
There's not a thing I can do.



Poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. Her new volume of poetry called 'The Shipping News and Other Poems' came out in August 2016. The German translation of her book 'Under charred skies' has now been published in Germany under the title 'Unter verbranntem Himmel' by Eulenspiegel Verlag. She is the chair of the Socialist History Society and has organised joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, London University, where she is now an associate researcher. Her Particular focus is now on women's emancipation and antiquity. *Twitter: g4gaia. Facebook.com/greta.sykes. German Wikipedia: Greta Sykes.*



A SONG TO LOESS

In the 'little Brockhaus' encyclopaedia
On the page with Lorca and Lorelei
Stands the word loess,
The yellowish fine beads of silicate,
lime and clay.

It lies here in Berlin, in Hamburg,
The north German plane,
Deeply anchored into the warm earth
In vertical walls of geology
For aeons of time,
Sifted and shifted into the fabric
Of the earth's mantle
Since ice ages reigned,
Blown by the freezing winds.

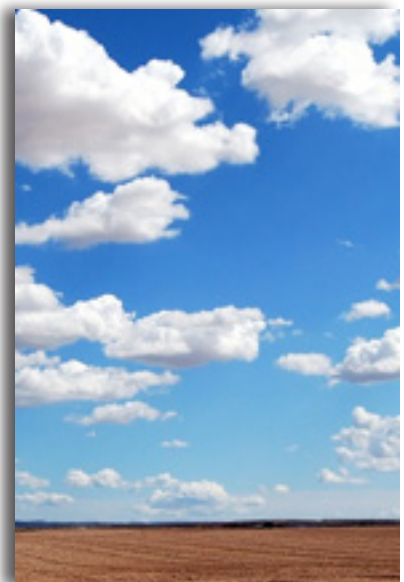
For so many years I have wandered
On the grounded, thin and rich
yellow sands made of loess
From the icy age of the planet,
It has become loess in my heart.

Sand of Loess in my childhood shoes,
Sand on my wanderer's clothes
After a night of love
On the beach by the shore,
Sand of Loess in my pockets, discovered
Years later, a trace of memory
Like a wound of tears in my eyes.

Sand of memories,
Sand of things remembered,
Things understood,
Sand of my soul, my belonging.

FATHOMLESS SKY

Fathomless sky – perhaps heaven-
Below tiny humans
And other creatures with a will to live,
Some caught in storms
While fishes watch.
Fathomless sky
With a lust for disturbance, turbulence
Circulation of winds and rain
From overheating oceans,
Perhaps hell.
Fathomless sky,
Perhaps heaven,
If you believe nature's geometry,
Her symmetry, logic and reasoning.



Bernadette's poems explore the nuances of memory and experience ranging from the personal and local to the universal and global. They include poems on life, love, humanity and nature to poems on refugees and war. Her poems have been published in a number of journals including Boyne Berries, ROPES, Stanzas, in the US peace journal [DoveTales](#), [Cinnamon Corners](#) and online at [HeadStuff.org](#), [Picaroon Poetry](#), [The Incubator](#) and [Poethead](#). Born in Donegal, Ireland, Bernadette has been living in County Cork since 1986. [bernadettegallagher.blogspot.ie](#) [facebook.com/BernadetteGallagherWriter](#)



WALLS OF BONES

Eyes raised to Syria, Iraq, Turkey,
Lebanon, Jordan, Greece
Children drown in our artificial tears
We make lent to salve our conscience.

Eyes lowered; the sea washes
Over the sand covering and uncovering
Our sins, washed up bodies.

Eyes raised to play the Trump card
To build walls of bones.
Our fore fathers and mothers ask
What are we celebrating?

Eyes lowered; we sleep safe and warm
Arms sold to protect us by killing our own.
The dead stare with empty sockets.

HOME ALONE

Alone, we two sisters,
The rest at Mass.

Playing some type
Of cartwheel - I fell
And broke some teeth.

Nursed with sweets
I couldn't eat.



MAN AT WINDOW

From photo by Willi Ronis

He could be your father or mine
He could be without child.

Cigarette between fingers
Is he locked in or out?

Lines on forehead
Many roads travelled.

Moustache but no beard
Jumper over shirt

Staring
Why am I here?

PLUMBING HER OWN

After Rafiq Kathwari

Light follows the sun

Tugging at my work and other
life

Over-time night-time, my-time
Not one to walk alone in the dark

I walk alone in the dark warm Autumn
Dry under and over foot

High-viz, a torch on my forehead
I am the scary one.



James Martyn Joyce is from Galway. He has published three books, including editing *Noir by Noir West: Dark Fiction from the West of Ireland* (Arlen House). His work has appeared in The Cúirt Journal, West 47, Books Ireland, Crannog, The Sunday Tribune, The Stinging Fly, The Shop, The Honest Ulsterman, The Stony Thursday Book and Skylight47. He was shortlisted for a Hennessy Award in 2006, the Francis McManus award in 2007 and 2008 and The William Trevor International Short Story Competition in 2007 and 2011. He has had work broadcast on RTE and BBC and has won the Listowel Writers Week Originals Short Story Competition. He won the Doolin Writers Prize in 2014. He was a winner of the Greenbean Novel Fair in 2016 with his novel, *A Long Day Dead*. His second poetry collection entitled *Furey* is forthcoming from Doire Press in March, 2018



PUTTING A FACE ON IT

Depending on the season he was measuring,
my father stepped into our small fields,
spat in the hollow of his palms,
set his hands to the chosen grip,
and with our sheepdog circling
in the grass towards comfort,
he'd call a blessing on his task:
cut into the heavy scraw
or swing the scythe in narrow arcs.

He'd pause from time to time
to circle himself,
hold the picture in his mind's eye,
open the field to the future,
keep a balance:
putting a face on it.

BACKBONE

Brave, they said, naming a foreign country,
one seldom visited, day-to-day.

Courageous, they cried,
looking sincere and offering him a hand.

Wonderful, they chanted in unison,
carrying him shoulder-high.

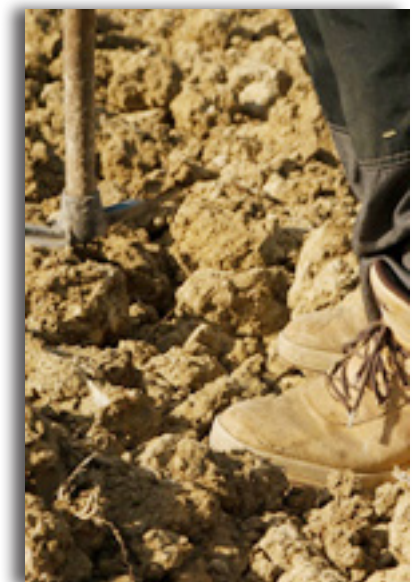
Forward, they called, funnelling off,
down side-streets, back towards the centre.

Persevere, clapped their footsteps,
clattering off the walls.

Foolhardy, the cobbles whispered,
stragglers falling free like so much chaff.

Hard-headed, came echoing back,
the streets almost deserted now,

Endure, his cry, hand to the blade.
Backbone, the cry its cutting made



MOTHER HEN

She kept her eggs
tucked in,
turned them,
religiously,
with her sharp beak,
never left the nest untended,
lived on scratch,
buried her warmth
in their thin shells,
tended them,
though they never hatched,
sat there,
waiting,
tucked them
to her grey breast,
forbade herself
the nagging doubt.
Believing her God
would work things out.

TALKING TO THE WALL

Shop Street: anthill busy in the splitting sun,
the young man in the Tigers T-shirt
pummels the wall with his fists,
forehead thrumming on the grubby screen
of the financially reticent Cash Machine.

His scream brings the street to a halt:
buskers hold their caught breath,
the juggler's baton freezes in the air.
The one-man-band, his left leg rigid,
forgets his elbow and the drumming dies.
The bongo players miss their beat completely,
and the sun-brown girl in the blue sarong shuffles to a stop,
the dance leaving her shoulders stuck
up around her ears.
Even Bernie-B pauses to stare,
forgetting for a moment the rents outstanding,
her shopfronts out there, earning nothing in all this heat.

As for me, shoulder to the bookshop door,
I hear my mother's voice again,
from the year accountancy didn't beckon,
telling me: "You think you know it all,
talking to you is like talking to the wall."



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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.



GIANT'S KINGDOM OF GOLD

Every day is like living in a dream land, a world you call the only one
When you retreat to your soul, you discover another *me*
No one can hurt you for you exist not in time but in paradise
Where the king of the giants is awaiting your return in his golden palace
A kingdom of gold created in prehistoric times, just like you.

PARADISE OF SWEET LIGHT FROM OUTER SPACE

Protect the sun in your body, the palace surrounded by numerous stars
The joyful wine, the souls of the people, like the eyes of prehistoric gods,
Like poems of the dawn that are as charming as diamonds.
Oh, the golden country in your being is wider than the universe,
The invisible paradise of sweet light from outer space,
Which makes the raiment of the world twirl gracefully
And fall like autumn leaves to the forest floor.

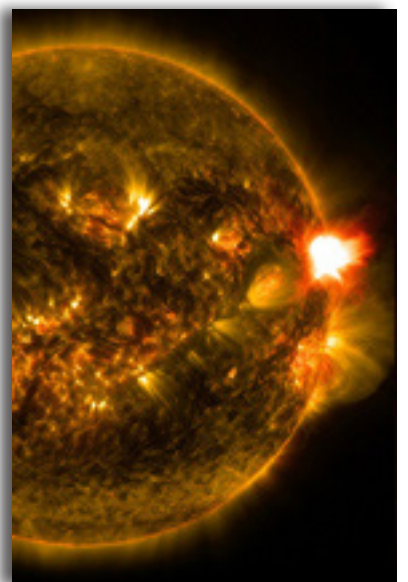


FLAME OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

On a summer night this year I bathed in cool moonlight on a hill,
The lights of the city below glowed like fireflies
I heard the roar of the dragon car driven by prehistoric gods across the sky
The heavenly experience was one of light and transparency
My head was filled with a great many stars.

BRILLIANT SCRIPTURES

Ask yourself if you are really alive and beyond pain and pleasure
Where Death is just a platform, where you will debus and wait for another dawn.
When the golden car of the soul will return from the red clouds in outer space,
Felicitations, you return to the palace of the kings in heaven.
And you will read from the book of gold that illuminates the world,
Brilliant scriptures inscribed by the gods billions of years ago.



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/>



NIGHT

Time froze
 at the call of the first name.
 The names always began
 being called at noon
 when the air was dank
 with hundreds of women
 confined
 breathing each other's breath
 longing for the darkness
 for no one was ever called
 for execution at night.

MILLION MOVING PIECES

Whenever I board a train
 I remember Yavar
 he worked in a factory in Arak
 making parts for trains.
 He used to point with pride and say:
 'You see that train!
 I made it.'

He heard the sound of trains
 in his sleep
 yet when he went anywhere
 he went by coach
 as he never earned enough money
 to take a train to go somewhere,
 anywhere.

He left some of himself
 in all these million moving pieces.



Arthur Kayzakian is an Armenian-Iranian-American diasporic poet, a teacher and an MFA graduate from San Diego State University. He is also a contributing editor at *Poetry International* and has served as an editor at *The B-Side* literary journal. He is a recipient of the Minas Savvas Fellowship, and his poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from several publications including *Pacific Review*, and *Rufous City Review*.



I USED TO DANCE

I used to break dance to a tape player without cassette
 doors to the glimmer of lights against the roar
 of the city blowing outside my window
 and I used to watch my mother bob
 her head watching my father sleep my mother watches
Dancing with the Stars we took
 the back street one night after drinking but handcuffs
 clicked around my wrists one year
 and every year after that I was a star for cops
 who held my hands up asked me and asked me
 to step out of my car outside my house walk a
 straight line kick-step the night away
 from me while my father slept to *Dancing with the*
Stars that jump start the heart of the night and
 I held my breath in seventh grade for Jill
 for Valerie for Melinda for Jennifer for Cassandra
 I used to smile more I used to not worry
 about my skin my nose I used to want to be
 more Armenian more American like
 a rock in starlight a lighthouse where I move
 to smile to numb to want asylum for stars
 for those who were trampled under the feet
 of boots for dancing the star owns nothing
 but the dance is all I did when I wanted to break

ODE TO BREAKDANCING

Yes, I troubled myself tonight
 when I stumbled upon squad of boys and girls
 who juked and whirled their slender bodies
 on light blue linoleum,
 with great vigilance rocked up their tippy toes
 then busted a back spin on the edge of the street
 to the *hip hop and you don't stop*,
 a squad of boys and girls in
 striped jump suits and fat-laced sneakers
 who hacked out a cemetery of laughter and coughing
 with the mirth of a rusted pipe,
 and when I jumped in the circle
 like a roll of dice flung among a herd of urbans,
 my legs with the precision of scissors
 shuffled into a cut of smooth moves
 as if I were a butterfly knife
 that liked to whizz inspiration toward the air,
 at which I slipped through the half-shut window
 of my opponent's heart and stole his balance
 against the crisp smell of summer.

A BREAKER'S PRAYER

I have never danced as well as I've wanted,
but I know how to reveal wounds

like no other art only because
there is no failure more comfortable.

I recall the summer I tried to breakdance
in Naham's garage.

When he pressed play on his silver boom box
I managed to do a windmill,

and for a short moment,
I spun on my back and felt like a star

like an angel blooming a secret to the ground,
but the only mystery I exposed was blood.

HEROES

history has never been straight with me Columbus stomped his foot on the soil of
America—wind blowing his sail toward land like a white wave men and women
didn't have much to say before the rope broke their necks the stool kicked from
beneath them but the ones who kicked the stool get to write history which
means they are heroes sometimes in place of titles I read numbers on the
spine of books that smell of gathered dust the numbers are cluster them into
factions like wearing arm bands a patchwork of the past and so the books
of conquest and blue-veined war become hard to recognize when I read my
body becomes a submarine under siege



© Arthur Kayzakian

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



A HOME COMING

I have been thinking a lot these dark days about the wolf that played puck with the three little pigs. How, in a few breathy huffs, he razed to the ground their ecologically-sound straw house, their sustainable wooden one, until he met his lupine demise in a boiling pot on the fire. However cautionary a tale this is meant to be, it didn't deter my family from making a life-changing decision to move out of Dublin to Galway in the late 90s and choose a home of timber. Like an Ikea flat pack, our house was built in a factory in Sweden and delivered to us on the back of a lorry on the winter solstice. It was pre-fairytale Tiger time, and in the long light of that summer I moved with the children into a small cottage close to our chosen site. We decided that my husband would remain in Dublin for the time being as he was the designated bringer home of the bacon.

So, I oversaw all the ground work. PJ, the digger-man, 'a tasty worker' by all accounts, broke the earth with the metal claw of his machine and soon the foundations were taking shape. A woman out standing in her own field, I worked with my two loyal neighbours to get the water pipes in place, organise conduit for the electricity cables, over see the septic tank, the incessant rain seeping through every stitch of clothing while my beloved sat in a cosy office in Dublin, his back to the radiator.

Light began to diminish. Berries started to ripen on the holly trees. We were making progress, getting closer to a home coming.

News soon spread throughout the village that it was to be delivered on the shortest day of the year. Another fairy tale. How could a real house be built on such a light-starved day? However, that morning when sunrise was heralded on the other side of the country as it cast its beam along an inner chamber, the sound of a truck was heard puffing along the low road. It drew neighbours from their beds to stand on mounds of earth and marvel with us at the sight of our home coming from somewhere beyond the Northern Lights.

Berries blazed as solstice rays began to gild the tops of the trees. Birds flew out for their days gathering, while a mechanical crane manoeuvred its wheels up our driveway. It grabbed a panel from the truck and a gable-end with three windows and the main door, swung precariously above our heads. Expertly lowered into place. Next to be positioned was the panel that held our son's bedroom window, followed by our daughter's, and then the large expanse of glass that would be the eye looking into the heart of our home.

Here was a triple-glazed barn-raising that the Amish would be proud of if they were ever guilty of such a deadly sin. Workmen, balanced like gymnasts, laboured on top of the now-secured walls with not a whisper of wolf-wind to unsteady them. We watched while panel after panel was slotted into the next as if it were a child's Lego set.

Light began to leach from the day and birds flying home to roost were stopped in their flight path. Scratching their tiny feathered heads, they tweeted to one another about the building that had sprouted, as if by magic, from the earth, since they had flown out at dawn.

Twilight witnessed the roof-felt being stretched across joists and beams, sealed from all weathers, and here was our house with its door open to the dark and the first lights glowing from the windows. In the shadows I'm sure I saw the slink of wolf. He could save his breath to cool his porridge. No amount of huffing or puffing would blow this house down.

Susan Condon, a native of Dublin, is currently working on her second novel. She was awarded a Certificate in Creative Writing from NUI Maynooth while her short stories have won numerous awards including first prize in the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award. Publications include *My Weekly*, *Ireland's Own Anthology*, *Flash Flood Journal*, *Spelk* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. Susan blogs at: www.susancondon.wordpress.com or you can find her on Twitter: @SusanCondon

Photograph of a Stranger was published in *My Weekly* magazine in 2013



PHOTOGRAPH OF A STRANGER

My eyes grow tired, as they focus on the black and white images of ghosts from my past.

The thin, rectangle stuck to the wall bears no resemblance to the bulky, square box I remember, taking pride-of-place in the front room. Two knobs protruded; one to turn the set on; the other to switch from one channel to the other. A set of rabbit's ears perched patiently on top; like a halved orange, placed flat side down and pierced with a pair of steel knitting needles. My older brother Joe, convinced us that Martians were tracking us through them, whenever we tuned in the TV.

Joe is long-dead, but not before he headed to the United States of America and made his fortune. He sent home money to support the rest of the family, during those lean years, and every Christmas a box would arrive full of wonderful presents. It was usually beautiful, coloured silk scarves for my mother and three older sisters and a new hat for father, but he would always send something exciting for Jimmy and me. The most memorable present, was a set of gliders, made from coloured paper with a brass tip at the nose. Jimmy was the oldest, so he had first choice. He chose the blue glider, so I had the red one. Every child at school wanted to be our friend that winter, as we tested out our aeronautical skills against each other. The airplanes would swoop and glide through the air as we ran along whooping with delight.

I lift my head and look out into the garden. The sky is blue, the sun fighting to appear and there is a hint of a rainbow. It would have been the perfect day to fly. I feel my forefinger and thumb twitch, itching to hold the glider between them, bending the wings just the right degree to ensure that mine would fly the farthest. I look down at the gnarled hands in my lap as I wonder where my life has disappeared to.

I hear soft-soled footsteps and a man appears with a tray. He places it on the table in front of me. It smells good.

"Here you are Dan, chicken soup, your favourite."

He places a napkin into my shirt collar and spoons soup into my mouth. It tastes as good as it looks, warm and creamy with a little white pepper.

"I'll do it myself," I say. He does not seem to hear me. No-one ever seems to. I try to take the spoon from him, but my hand shakes and he pushes it down, gently but firmly.

"Let me help you, Dan. Would you like some bread, you can dip it into the end of the bowl?"

I nod and hold a piece of dry bread, ready to mop up every last drop.

"It's Wednesday today Dan, Grace will be in to visit you later. We better get you spruced up and looking nice for her."

I nod my head. I don't know who Grace is; but it will be nice to have a visitor. He combs my hair, tugging it to the side and holds up a small mirror. An old, grey-haired man with blue eyes smiles back at me. As I move closer to the mirror, he does too, and I can see that he is in need of a shave. It is just a light stubble but I always prefer a close shave myself. I rub a hand across my chin. The man in the soft-soled shoes laughs.

"I'm not a fan of those electric shavers either, Dan," he looks at his watch, "we've just enough time to give you a proper shave before she comes." He places a hand on my shoulder, "I'll be back, in just a minute." He picks up the tray and I can hear his light footsteps as they fade down the hall.

The rainbow has become hazier and there is a light rain on the window pane, maybe not the best day for paper gliders, after all. It reminds me of the day my glider caught in Mrs Kennedy's tree. As I climbed higher and higher into the leaves, she came out her front door, stood below, with her arms folded and threatened to tell mother.

But when I jumped down, trying to hide the tears in my eyes as I looked at my battered glider, she took it from me and beckoned me to follow her.

Photograph: Humphrey Bogart & Lauren Bacall in "The Big Sleep" by Howard Hawks - 1946



She fixed the glider, gluing it back together so well, that it looked like new. When I returned to Jimmy and the others, they told me to throw away the shortbread biscuit she had given me, in case she was trying to fatten me up, like the witch in ‘Hansel and Gretel’. But it tasted so good, that I ate it anyway.

I hear two sets of soft-soled shoes approach and the man returns with a young nurse. He places a stainless steel bowl, half-filled with water, on the table. A drop splashes onto a silver picture frame. My eyes follow it as it rolls down the middle of the photo, dividing it in half. I squint and bend closer. It is a middle-aged couple. They are smiling into the camera. The man is tall with grey hair and blue eyes. The woman has chestnut brown hair, the same colour as her eyes.

The nurse picks up the photo and wipes the drop of water away, placing it back down in the exact same place. The glass is smeared and it is harder to make out the faces.

“We’ll have you looking your best for Grace,” says the nurse.

Grace must be important. They obviously want to impress her.

The rain is heavy now. The sky has turned slate grey and the trees are bending in the wind.

I feel something light and fluffy on my face. The man has a shaving brush in his hand. It has white bristles and a white square handle with black at the base. It reminds me of my father’s. Jimmy and I loved to watch him as he shaved with such precision. He would rinse his brush in warm water and shake out the residue, sometimes flicking it at us. We would run, screaming from the room, with laughter. We would always return to watch, as he rubbed the brush round the creamy white soap in the black tub, before painting the lower half of his face. Sometimes, he let us try it too.

“There you go, Dan, much better,” said the man, “oh, nearly forgot, just one last thing before I go!” He rubs his hands gently over my face. I inhale Old Spice. The man holds up the mirror again, “looking good, Dan.” I see the same face looking back. But this time he is clean shaven and his eyes are now a watery blue.

The credits roll up the TV screen; Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. But I cannot recall the name of the film. They made so many films together; maybe it was . . . I turn my head, hearing the clip, clip sound of high heels coming closer. It is a brisk walk, like someone with a purpose.

They slow and a woman appears in the doorway, taking a pair of worn black leather gloves from her tiny hands as she enters. She has grey hair, cut into a neat bob. A blue coat clings to her thin frame, but it is the beautiful silk scarf tucked into her collar that catches my attention. It reminds me of the scarf Joe sent to mother. The same year Jimmy and—

“Hello Daniel,” she says as she bends and kisses me on the mouth!

She squeezes my shoulders gently and looks into my eyes, “you look well today. And don’t you smell nice, Old Spice,” she says huskily, as she breathes in deeply and rubs the back of her fingers across my cheek.

Standing up straight, she gives a dry cough and shrugs off her coat. It smells damp. She drapes it over the back of the chair, places her umbrella on the floor at her feet and sits down. She rummages in her leather handbag and takes out a bulging, brown paper bag.

She pokes through its contents, extracts a cellophane wrapper and like a magician performing a magic trick, she pulls both ends to release a white iced caramel into my outstretched hand.

I gaze at it, turn it from side-to-side and examine it closely. I hold it close to my nose and sniff. It smells good. I feel my mouth water. I look up to see her watching me. My tongue darts out and licks the hard, sweet icing.

“Put it in your mouth, sweetheart” she says, as she plucks it from my hand and drops it into my open mouth.

She has a melodic voice. I wonder if she sings. It soothes me to listen to her. But I do not understand why she tells me stories of people I do not know.

As I suck, I feel it melt; toffee, sticky and chewy oozes out and I resist the urge to chew. Instead, I let it sit on my tongue until there is nearly nothing left. Only then do I chew, using my tongue to prise the remains from my teeth.

“This is nice, Daniel, nearly like old times; the pink for me and the white for you.”

I hold my hand out and wait for another.

I notice her pink lipstick matches the splashes of pink in her scarf. She has beautiful brown eyes, but they look tired and there are dark shadows beneath them. She looks vaguely familiar. I feel I may have seen her somewhere before.

The man returns with a plastic beaker, a mug of tea and a plate of shortbread biscuits.

“Well, doesn’t he look nice today, Grace,” he says, “all ready for your visit today.”

So this is Grace.

She nods.

“Make sure you drink that tea. It’ll help keep you warm on the journey home,” he gestures towards the brown paper bag, “and if that’s empty, I’ll bin it for you.”

It is no longer bulging.

“You’re very kind, Brian,” says Grace, squeezing the last of the wrappers inside and passing it to him.

“How’s Daniel doing?” she nods her head in my direction. I wonder why she does not ask me.

“He’s having a good day, today. Watched one of his Bogart movie’s earlier, didn’t you Dan, you know the one—“

A porter comes into the ward waving a brass bell. The clanging sound announces the end of visiting time.

Grace stands up and puts on her damp coat, tucking her scarf around her neck before fastening the buttons.

“Goodbye Daniel,” she whispers, as she kisses me on the mouth again, “I miss you.”

She wipes a tear from her eye. I admire the light dancing from the diamond in her ring.

I remember Grace now. I knew I had seen her before.

I look up to catch her stare at me, her head to one side. I smile.

She is the woman in the silver picture frame, standing beside the grey-haired man with the blue eyes . . .



The Francis MacManus Short Story Competition was established in memory of the writer and RTÉ radio producer Francis MacManus. It has been a critically important launchpad for new and emerging writers since its inception in 1986 in Ireland. Past winners have gone on to receive national and international acclaim, including Claire Keegan, Molly McCloskey, Anthony Glavin and Nuala O'Connor. Doreen Duffy was recently shortlisted for this competition; you can also listen to her short story "Tattoo" by clicking on the link: www.rte.ie

Doreen Duffy studied creative writing at Oxford University online, University College Dublin & National University of Ireland (NUIM) Maynooth. She is a member of Platform One Writers. Her work has been published internationally. She won The Jonathan Swift Award and was delighted to be presented with The Deirdre Purcell Cup by the Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival. Doreen is a Creative Writing tutor with Creative Writing Ink. <http://doreenduffy.blogspot.ie/>



TATTOO

She held her arms around herself, y'know, like she was comforting herself. She was good at that, my mother, when it came to herself.

I went upstairs to my brother's room. Robin's room, it said on the door. Everything was exactly the same, the guitar slung to one side on the stand, as if it had just been left there, the bed slightly crumpled, like an impression of him had been left on this earth.

I walked over to the window and looked out. The view outside was dull grey houses. A watery sun was dipping below the roof of the last house on the road, Bradley's house. I went back downstairs. Bradley was pretending to look through a magazine. He looked good in his suit. The room went quiet. Bradley came over, stood beside me. I thought he was going to put his arm around me but he didn't. He got me out of there though, away from all those sideways glances from 'family and friends'. Well that's what they were called on the cards. They read, 'The Atkins family announce with sadness the death of Robin Atkins'.

Bradley went over and said something to my mother, quietly; he leaned in close to her ear. Too close. I saw some of the 'family and friends' watching. She looked me over for a minute then nodded.

We took off, climbed over the fence at the end of our road and squeezed through the gap in the hedge. He'd stopped then, looked awkward, pulled his fingers through his hair.

"Ah, you okay to come up here Suze?"

I liked the way he shortened my name. It made me feel special.

"Sure. Of course," I added so he'd know he'd done nothing wrong.

He looked pleased then and broke into a run. I was out of breath trying to catch up with him. It felt good to have my lungs full of air till they hurt.

By the time we'd got to the edge of the lake the light was really coming down. He put his hands on the outside of my arms and rubbed hard.

"You're cold." He told me.

I told him I couldn't feel anything.

"Not anymore anyway." I said.

But I knew I was just trying to make him feel sorry for me.

I hadn't felt sad about Robin, not once.

All I could think of was that day at the lake when I'd sneaked after them. I wanted to see what was so great that they spent so much time together up there.

For the first while they just stood at the side scuffling their shoes in the gravel, skimming stones. It was hot that day, Brad said they should swim. He took off his shirt. Robin said he wasn't in the mood.

I wondered why he lied. Robin hadn't ever learned to swim. All those swimming lessons, he just sat at the side of the pool scrolling through stuff on his phone. He used to buy sweets for us on the way home with his money.

Robin had tried to walk off when Brad started laughing at him.

"C'mon what have you got to hide Robin Atkins?"



He'd started pulling at Robin's shirt until they were both on the ground; it turned into one wrestling the other. Dirt was getting kicked up. Then suddenly they were both completely still. Bradley's hand was on Robin's face, stroking fingers. I could hear them breathing hard. I heard Robin say he was going to get out of this shitty place, his voice got stronger,

"Brad, you should come with me, there's nothing to keep you here either."

They started making plans, they were going to steal a car, get as far away as possible.

Bradley reached over and laid his lips on Robin's mouth for the longest time and Robin let him.

I left when I knew they wouldn't see me.

I didn't know for how long I'd been in love with Bradley. They hadn't been living there long when I heard my mom telling Robin not to hang around with him. She said he was wild, later she called him 'a born liar'. That's what she said.

"He's a born liar Robin, you stay away from him."

But he didn't.

"Mom's a psycho," he said to me when I asked him about it.

So I looked that up. I reckoned he was right.

I was good at swimming. Coach said so. He called Robin over one day at the end of my lesson and asked would our mom be coming to collect us any day, said he'd like to talk to her about me joining the swim team.

He never did tell her what coach said though. When we got home that night the chain was on the door, there was a chink of light between the top of the front room curtains.

Robin pushed against the door, kept his thumb on the doorbell; it was loud, even outside the house.

I saw the light in the front room switch off, we heard a lot of scuffling and then the back door shut.

Mom came through the hall then. Robin had stopped pressing the bell. She asked him what was his problem making all that racket.

"No need for it," she said

She pushed the door then took the chain off. She was wearing her blue silky dressing gown and she had nothing underneath. Robin ran past her up the stairs and slammed his door.

"Put your stuff in the wash and get to bed," she called back to me.

She tied her belt around her more tightly and took a cigarette out of the packet on the counter. Her eyes were kind of glassy looking in the light as the flame flickered and caught the tip of the cigarette; she folded her arms and smiled to herself.

I pulled my togs and stuff out of my bag and shoved them in the machine, put the soap in the drawer and switched it on.

"Night Mom," I said, but she didn't answer.

I went through the front room on my way to bed; the couch was pushed back too far. I went to fix it.

There was a pen on the carpet. I picked it up and thought for a minute. I tucked it inside my pillow case. I knew I'd seen that pen before, it was Bradley's.

I saw mom check her reflection in the mirror before she went to answer the door one day. She'd spent all afternoon with her music playing loud. She was topping up her glass,

"Well I don't mind if I do." I could hear her say to herself every now and then.

She was trying out make up, cleaning it off and starting again, fixing her hair, but she still hadn't got dressed properly. Sometimes she'd stay like that and the next morning her pillow would have black streaks from the print of her face beaten in to it.



Mom knew Robin wasn't home that day, but she'd asked Bradley in anyway, said she was making coffee, asked would he like some? Or would he like something stronger she said pointing to the near empty bottle. She was talking to him like he was her own age. It was weird. I was in the dining room, doing homework. Bradley was sitting at the table one foot hooked through the other he was turning the pen between his fingers. Her dressing gown fell open a little, and she laughed, lightly, a laugh I didn't recognise. Bradley didn't blink. He just kept his stare. I saw her step in front of him, the steam rising out of the coffee. Her hand reached out and stroked his arm, she pushed back his sleeve. The tattoo was dark ink but all around the edges were pink. She barely brushed her fingers along it.

"It's new," he'd said wincing.

"I love it," she said.

I felt so hot I thought I was going to be sick. She sat beside him and asked him to draw something for her. We all knew he was brilliant at art, there were loads of drawings rolled up in the corner of Robin's room. He'd held her wrist and traced the pen along the inside of her arm but when he reached the soft skin in her pit he brought his hand up and I could see his fingers press into her flesh while he drew. My face was burning; I crept through the front room and left the house.

I sat on the school wall and waited to meet Robin. He'd brought a note home yesterday to say he had detention, something about a fight in the yard.

I think it was only when I saw him coming towards me swinging his bag looking like he hadn't a care in the world that I had the idea.

I told him mom was passed out on the couch and said we could go up to the lake. He looked at me, squinted for a second, like he was trying to read me.

"I'm going to teach you to swim." I said.

"No way. Forget it."

"Seriously Robin I know I can do it. It's coming into summer. What are you going to do all day while Bradley an' all are at the lake swimming; you'll look like an idiot."

"Right then, we can go up there, but I'm not promising anything. It's only 'cos I don't want to go home."

Robin was hopping on one foot trying to get his jeans off. I slid into the water. When he stripped down to his underwear, the outline Bradley had drawn on him was faded, like shadowy veins running all over his body.

It was a good hour or more before I could get him to leave the shore. I showed him where the water was up to and I was shorter than him. I kept my arm beneath him and started to wade out. Coach had showed us at lifesaving how to move someone. This time I took him all the way to the middle. His eyes were closed. I kept talking. I could feel the reeds below the water waving against my legs. I was treading water now and the cold blackness felt good. I told him then I'd seen Bradley put his hands all over mom and how much she liked it. His body dipped and he flipped away from my arm, his mouth filled with water and he gurgled and spluttered while he reached out for me. He was really struggling now his head mostly below the water, his face screwed up lips clamped shut, his eyes staring when he managed to bob up for a second or two and then he seemed to slide down and away from me. I waited there, treading water for a while and then swam for shore.

I wondered when Brad was going to ask me to go with him. I'd help him steal the car; I'd be good at that. I had determination, that's what coach said when he found me swimming laps until I puked.

Bradley pulled me down beside him. The sound of the lake lapping at the edge made me feel calm. I imagined telling him what really happened that day. He'd understand, we were alike me and him, we knew what we wanted and how to get it. I reached into my pocket and took out his pen. I stood in front of him and peeled off my clothes. He kept his stare. Draw something for me I said as I lay down and laughed lightly as he started to draw on my skin, long sweeping strokes at first the entire length of my body and then swirls in and out connecting without ever lifting his pen. My eyes were closed but I knew what he was drawing, a tattoo, my skeleton, but on the outside, every bone bared for all to see.

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