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POETRY: Send no more than three poems. Each poem should be under 50 lines.

PROSE: Stories should be under 2000 words

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To the memory of
Kevin Donnelly and Eoghan Garvey
Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anamacha

Think It Enough For Me ..

Elegie xvi ... Donne

On my way to see you early on
I walked through Edgewood Park.
The part from the Boulevard to the small hill
Rising from West River. The music of the
Fallen leaves at my feet; the tease of
Coy late sun seen through trees;
Leaf colour on black boughs, autumn evening.

I read poetry as I walked,
My own store of words inadequate
And my way of saying them;
The river at flood, making swamp
Of firm ground, leaping
Its banks, sweeping everything
Away, a rush, an inarticulate babble.

I walked home that night as well.
Traded the bus for one last kiss
And something else to say.
Home down the late night desolate
Boulevard: two old cemeteries,
Three junkyards, fear of ghosts and
Fear of Italians through their neighbourhood.

I whispered poems.
We became prose when autumn
Became winter and, trees forlorn,
We parted. So long ago.....
Now I hear that you have died
I can see still your rainy face
Rising to kiss me at your back door
That I might catch the last bus home.

Kevin Donnelly (from Crannóg 9 autumn 2005)

Waking Up To Cold Tea

If I can't slip out
ease out into the silken air
and liquid sounds
of the short summer night ...
If I can't sway
to Latin music
or snake through town,
snared by the music
and the beautiful people...
If I can't sweat the moon
and the morning sun,
and arrive at the end
better and brighter
than when I began ...
then at least
let me not drink the tea beside me
if I wake and it's cold in the cup.

Eoghan Garvey

CONTENTS

Julia Fairlie	
Autumn At The Chester Beatty	8
Barbara Taylor	
Villanelle To Geraldine	9
Moya Roddy	
Desert	10
Emily Cullen	
Galway Mould	11
Eddie Stack	
Blue Money	12
Quincy Lehr	
If God Is Good	19
Gerry Galvin	
For Catherine, The Painter, On Her 60th Birthday	20
Kevin Cahill	
Strain	22
Liam Guilar	
Rereading Wyatt	24
James Lawless	
Walking By Woods	26
Lisa Frank	
Dog Day Afternoon	31
Anne Babson	
The Method	32
Deborah Tyler-Bennett	
River Dredging	33
Maureen Gallagher	
Dream	34
Patrick Moran	
Ruts	35
Sandra Bunting	
Tide	36
Phrionsias Mac a' Bhaird	
An Litir Dheireannach	37
Tom Lavelle	
It Killed The Cat	38
Alan McMonagle	
The Night My Sister Almost Fixed Me Up With A Porn-Star	39
Jarlath Fahy	
Beatitudes	45
Patricia Holmes	
Tillsonburg	46
Alan Garvey	
Something Sacred	50
Edward Boyne	
Tuscany	52

Susan Millar Dumars	
Vacant Building	54
Brian Kirk	
Disenchantment.....	55
Laura Bentley	
Violoncellist	60
Mags Treanor	
When Nights	62
Bibliographical Details	63

They have shut out the sky –
plants climb towards a glass ceiling in vain,
grey without rain,
sad, dusty, lacklustre.
Plants are climbing the whitewashed walls
that were once exterior,
from force of habit. They reach for light:
hapless plants struggling
to maintain a semblance of life.
They are sapped, sagging;
they try to gain height,
but with no breeze in their leaves
the heart is gone from them;
they are hard-pressed not to give up the fight.
They try their best, a brave effort,
but they leave me dispirited
and I must escape.

VILLANELLE TO GERALDINE

BARBARA TAYLOR

Irish Australian poet 1967-2009

Come gently to this day, she said, meaning
Relax, breathe fresh air, re-evaluate,
Take all the time you need. Hear the birds sing

Welcome to the seasons. Their music brings
Sweet harmonies a human can't equate.
Come gently to this day, she said, meaning

Search in your heart for that innermost thing
That sets your soul towards a cosmic state,
Take all the time you need. Listen, birds sing.

Drop everything; that telephone can ring –
Don't answer it, stop now, control your fate,
Come gently this sad day, she said, meaning

Be aware, count your blessings each day brings
Knowing well we have our use-by dates,
Take all the time you need. Hear peace doves sing,

Listen to the didge and sax of wailing,
Tomorrows come at an alarming rate,
Come gently to every day with meaning.
Relax, breathe fresh air, re-evaluate.

He saw it as the arse end of Ireland –
a scraggy piece of land
with a few scabby cows,
acres of nothing to do.

To pass the time he read cowboy books
roaming the great prairies
camping in the Mojave Desert
where the call of a coyote thrilled,
and he could tell at a glance
which cactus yielded water.

Green hills blazing with furze
the eternity of a blue gentian
held no sway.

When his father died
he sold house lands
went to see for himself.
He bought a camper van
a hill of beans
lit fires to ward off the circling dogs.
But the pale brightness set him yearning
and the endless blue sky reminded him
of a flower he had no name for.

GALWAY MOULD

EMILY CULLEN

We take the damp for granted here.
Blinds draw back to reveal
colonies of galaxies:
tiny black holes
in our new collective space.
“It’s only condensation,”
Next Door concedes,
“the weather’s too wintry
to open the windows.”
My wooden bangle by the sill
slips into a mildewed coat of green.

For fun, I bought you mouldy cheese
but last night, it took revenge on me,
inducing a vivid dream
of a white chandelier of mould
that slowly lowered
through our kitchen ceiling:
a wondrous lichen lantern,
till its lattices became milky spores,
mouths that started to open and close.
Then I awoke,
vowed to spray away
our wall of condensation,
diffuse for good my fascination
with Galway mould.

Sunday afternoon was warm and lazy and those who could went to the seaside. Deep in the glen below the town, John and Marty fished by an old chestnut tree that arched over the bank, darkening the water with its shadow. Only quiet river sounds dimpled the stillness: the distant pop of a rising trout, the worried hoot of a water hen in the reeds.

Rods resting on the grass verge, they sat against the tree and watched their floats. Bored and penniless, they were sixteen and just finished school for the summer. Marty flicked a pebble into the water and said, “What d’you think of knockin’ off those donation boxes in the church?”

“For fuck sake,” John muttered, “you can’t be serious?”

“It’s handy dosh and ...”

Marty stopped when he heard voices approach. John heard them too: the giggles of young women. Linking each other, a pair of young ladies slowly walked up the tree-lined riverbank.

“Jesus,” whispered John, “who’re these two?”

They were strangers. One wore a wide brimmed straw hat, tight white T-shirt and shorts; the other had a purple bandanna around her head, black halter-top and denim mini-skirt.

“Christ,” muttered Marty, “look at the legs of ’em.”

Engrossed in their own conversation, the women didn’t notice the youths peering from behind the tree until they were ten steps away. They quietly exchanged ‘hellos’ and the one in the straw hat called, “Catch any fish?”

“No,” the lads replied in unison.

“What are you fishing for anyway?”

“Trout, fluke, eels ... whatever,” Marty said.

“Would any of you have a cigarette?”

“No,” said Marty and John shook his head.

The women joined them and hunkered down on the bank by the tree. Out-of-state by their accents, older than the youths by a few years.

"I'm Suzy," the straw hatted one said, "and this is my friend Blue."

The boys introduced themselves and smiled shyly.

"Are ye on holidays?" Marty asked.

"You could say that," Blue replied, "are you locals?"

"Yeah, we're from the town," Marty nodded.

"Beautiful little place," Suzy said, "you live in a lovely part of the country."

"Are ye staying in bed and breakfast?" Marty inquired.

"No," Blue said, "we're camping."

"Good weather for it," mumbled John, his eyes on the fishing line, too shy to look at the strangers. Marty took side glances at them and noticed neither wore a bra. Their legs were bronzed and shapely and his heart bombed when he looked right up between Blue's thighs and saw no underwear. She caught him peeping and when their eyes met, she grinned and he quickly turned away and fumbled with his fishing rod.

"If you catch any fish," she said, "can we have some?"

"Sure," Marty said and John nodded.

"We're camping in the little wood below," Suzy said, pointing downstream, "so if you get lucky, you know where we are..."

"Okay," Marty smiled and the women left, talking quietly as they strolled down the riverside path.

"Jesus Christ, what do you make of that?" Marty whispered.

John shook his head quickly and blurted,

"Fine things, aren't they?"

"For fuck sake, they're mad for the ride...no bras or knickers or anything...fish my arse...it's fellas they want..."

They caught no fish, though they waited under the chestnut tree for another couple of hours. Women on their minds, they returned home for Sunday tea when the Angelus pealed from the church across the river.

Later that evening they hung outside the chip-shop, looking down towards the river, wondering what the women were doing; where they were from; why did they come here, above all places. As the sun went down,

Marty became frustrated.

“Listen, they want us to ride them...I bet they're waiting below in the wood for us.”

“We can't just walk in on them.”

The Sunday drinkers came to town and packed the few pubs, livening the summer's night with the rumpus of card playing and dart throwing. Marty rambled on about the things he was going to do when he became a man: drink, gamble and bed as many women as he could.

“It's the only job,” he muttered, kicking his toes against a telegraph pole, “that's what we're here for.”

When they went to the river the next morning, Marty had a pack of cigarettes he nicked from his mother's handbag. The weather was heavy and overcast and looked like it could rain at any time.

“It might be a good day for fish,” John said as they cast their lines by the chestnut tree.

“Let's leave the rods here and go down the wood to these dames,” Marty urged.

They walked quickly in single file, Marty leading. Wild woodbine and rambling rose scented the air with anticipation. Marty stopped at the old stone bridge and said quietly,

“I want the one with the straw hat, you can have the other one.”

“Blue?” John whispered and Marty nodded.

Eyes scanning for sign of the camp, ears perked for female sound, they followed a path by a swirling brook and went deeper into the wood. Finches fretted, blackbirds fled and a grey heron rasped from an oak tree as they passed below. They smelled smoke, heard voices in the distance. Marty grinned, gave the thumbs-up sign and moved quicker.

Suzy was bathing naked in the stream when they came into the campsite.

“The fishermen!” she greeted and Blue stood up from a small crackling fire, a blackened can in her hand.

“Any fish?” she asked.

Marty shook his head.

“Not yet,” he smiled, “but we brought ye cigarettes.”

He looked at Suzy, sitting in the water. He'd never before seen a nude woman in the flesh and his whole body tingled.

John glanced at the fire and the makeshift camp: a sheet of brown tarpaulin draped over a fallen tree. The others spoke but he hardly heard them, his eyes roaming over the objects hanging from sticks impaled in the soft ground: a dead crow, rabbit skins, a long yellowed bone, a cow's skull with one horn. He wanted to retreat but Blue was offering him tea.

“Hope you don't mind drinking from a jam jar.”

“I'm fine,” he muttered.

Suzy came dripping from the stream and Marty drooled as she dried herself with a torn towel. He opened the pack of cigarettes and offered them around. Everyone took one except John. Suzy teased him and he blushed.

“We were going to come down last night,” Marty said, blowing a smoke ring.

“You should have,” Blue said, “we love company.”

Marty smiled and sat on a stone by the fire.

“So do we,” he chuckled, “nothing happens in the town...it's dead as a graveyard.”

John nodded, testing sentences in his head.

“Are ye staying long?” he asked eventually.

“It depends,” Suzy replied, buttoning a long shirt that came to her thighs.

“Yeah, it depends,” agreed Blue.

“Ye've a grand spot here,” Marty said, offering another round of cigarettes.

“Can I take a few of these for later?” Blue asked.

“No problem,” Marty said and gave her four.

“You're really nice guys,” Suzy smiled.

A slight breeze rustled the treetops overhead and heavy drops of rain pattered on the leaves. John looked skywards and announced,

“I better get back to the fishing rods.”

“They're alright,” assured Marty, “stay where you are...you'll get drenched.”

But his mind was made up and he dashed away.

Back by the chestnut tree John watched the river boil in the heavy rain, peeping down the path every once and a while for Marty. He waited an hour, then another before his mate appeared running, a delirious grin on his face.

“They'll ride,” he panted, “I asked them ... they'll do it.”

“Jesus!”

“Yeah ... anytime, they said ... but we'll have to pay them.”

“Pay them?”

“Yeah ... they're broke ... they want fifty euros.”

“Are you serious? Are they ... are they prostitutes or something?”

“No ... they're just broke.”

Marty went to the church that evening and knelt at the back near the statue of Martin de Porres. He waited for the worshipers to disperse after Benediction and slipped into a confessional when Joe Tobin the sacristan was at the altar quenching candles. In the dark he heard Joe swish by, greeting statues as he passed, saying a prayer here, making a request there. He heard the heavy doors creak shut and the lock snap home. Then the church was quiet and peaceful, apart from the rain drumming on the roof.

When Marty left the confessional, the air held ghost smells of quenched candles and incense. Empty and bigger than he had ever seen it, the church was dimly lit by evening light coming through the stained glass window behind the altar, and the flickering red glow from the sanctuary lamp. He went to the wooden Vincent de Paul collection box and lifted it. Disappointed that it was so light, he wondered if there was more money in the Foreign Missions box under the statue of Saint Patrick. That was heavier alright and with a box under each arm he went into the sacristy and out through a window.

In the graveyard behind the church he tried to force the boxes open with his penknife but the blade broke.

“Fuck,” he muttered, “fuck, fuck, fuck.”

He looked at the church clock: it was nearly nine. The girls would be waiting, John would be waiting. He'd better hurry. But he couldn't walk over the bridge and through the town carrying two collection boxes. Better to cross the river below the cascades, on the stepping-stones the poachers use to snatch salmon.

The river was swollen and the stepping-stones were almost covered by the flood. He took off his shoes, tied them together by the laces and slung the brogues around his neck. A box under each arm, he stepped on the stones, wary as a tightrope walker. Water rushed against his feet and halfway across, he felt it hard to keep his balance and wondered about turning back. He glanced around and saw Tobin the sacristan on the bridge above, waving madly.

Downstream by the old chestnut tree, John sat between Suzy and Blue. He felt uncomfortable and wished Marty would arrive soon. It was almost twilight and the river was running fast and urgent with the flood. Rubbish and debris from the town floated past and then on its own, like a baby's coffin, the wooden Vincent de Paul box. John recognised it and said,

“He'll be here soon.”

“Good.”

“You sure you got no cigarettes?” Suzy pressed.

They waited another ten minutes or so and then the women suggested John to go and look for his friend.

“He owes me for a favour,” Blue said, “I want my money.”

“Otherwise we're taking these rods,” Suzy said.

Hurrying upstream towards town, John stopped when he saw dusky shapes by a pool called the Salmon Hole. From their helmets and caps he picked out the silhouettes of policemen and firemen. He saw them haul something heavy from the river. A body. John's heart thumped. He watched

from behind a tree and saw the men take off their headgear and bless themselves. He blessed himself too and wondered if a poacher had fallen in and drowned. Names flipped through his mind. That's what's delaying Marty, he thought, he'll arrive when all this drama is over.

IF GOD IS GOOD

QUINCY LEHR

If God is good, and if the weather holds,
and if the horse comes in, we might allow
a glint of teeth between a face's folds –
a smile that promises, at least for now,
that God is good, and that the weather holds.

If life is chance, if chaos is our lot,
and if the math can't quite be reconciled
– even with itself – then what we've got
is probability. But dice fly wild,
since life is chance, and chaos is our lot.

If she were near, and I could hear the sound
of placid breathing up against my ear,
her reassuring sleep might bring to ground
the migratory urge that brought me here
if she were near, if I could hear the sound.

If God were good, and if the sky stayed blue,
and she were here, and all the numbers fit,
and all the things that I believe were true,
would I notice, even for a bit,
that God is good, and that the sky stays blue?

**FOR CATHERINE, THE PAINTER,
ON HER 60TH BIRTHDAY**

GERRY GALVIN

Her heart is loud with knowing and unknowing
Eloquent instrument leaking red like a ripe tomato.
It's not just the taste you see
But the blowsy loitering — ruddy, ready.

She's clear as consomme and dark as it, deep,
Too young to be old,
Hiding her long-lived secrets
In the back of the Volks or under undergrowth
Making inroads on the limpid light into the studio.

Light detonates
And we are present at a bristling and a bridling,
Seizures of puce and cerise,
Marooned in an island of colour,
Cut off on our own with this red-hot tinted woman
Who explains nothing.

Nothing needs no explanation
But it is risky.
Don't rush into it.

Out there in studio fathoms
Katherine floats with the swans.
You need some strokes to keep up with it
Threshing about in her wash,
Swallowing mouthfuls of things to come.

Afterwards from her hovering kitchen
We watch her coltish in the yard
Among the sundered chickens,
Buns rise in the oven,
Velvet figures materialise from the periphery,
A stern portrait steps out of its frame.

Tea time.
There is more than opinion in a blooming vase,
More than tea brewing.

God and the angels are under pressure
like a poem. – So flimsy a thing.
Their tale is pulled by the iamb and foot,
their measure is pulled by the neck.

When Moses stood on the mountain
and the branches of the bush blazed
like the forces of a villanelle, like the
impregnable knot of a Miltonic toll,
who could have known the twanging skull
of Darwin could finger-in like a fracture,
splitting like a hair the satisfying whole?

Random children pick bones from a beach
like iconoclasts ruining the trochees.
Poked in a dish
they split the serenade that permitted our souls.

A most mournful coda. Once, the offices of the day
uttered like a bell, each pillar cut with emblems
and motets clasped like a knot of hair.
Minutes were full of rootwork and couplets, angst
full of arras and bestiaries, the story
tough as ghosts, its glutinous core stuccoing
our souls, stroking the imbricate pipes and oak consoles
with grand transports, the scansion unfaultable,
the strapped lauds pouring into the hollows of the ear.

Flapping like a penny-ballad now, or Stephen-martyr,
his ruts and holes, his unclipped fretboard
spitting like a flambeau, his flanks
full of moot, and mulish gestures,
his broidered neck hanging with grace-notes,

his corpse full of refrains.

Two angry voices, muddled by the wind
and tangled in the sound of passing cars
How could you something something him
The party's starting up. This could go on for hours.

Thomas Wyatt speaks of Anne Boleyn
I know it's he, not she who lives,
but while I read both seem to be alive
though Wyatt's hurt, refusing to forgive.

The moon's above the bougainvillea.
Across the road, the party's winding down,
the traffic's gone and distant surf
provides a gentle, but insistent ground.

Young lovers bicker in the dark outside:
You told me that you loved me and you lied
Her answer's lost but somehow I suspect
It ends, *He is the King, He will not be denied.*

I've never heard words used like this before.
Poetic and creative? No, he's drunk
and hurt and howling in the street:
You f--king c--ting bitching whore,

birthing a version of himself dragged up
his throat and spewed across the night:
a vulnerability he doesn't want to recognize;
a howling rage his words can't organize.

Friends intervene. I still can't hear her voice.
Doors slam and cars accelerate away.
Now Wyatt, left alone, tries to describe
what he saw and felt that execution day.

In a net he says, I tried to catch the wind.
He trapped his own pain raging at her choice:
raw ugliness transformed to something fine.
The poem's magic, lie, distortion, take your pick,
to make art from a wounded angry voice.

I see the same lady most afternoons walking by the woods along the river bank. She is small and middleaged with a headscarf and is stooped into the wind, or maybe just bent over in preoccupation. She leads a minute dog on a lead. We passed each other without acknowledgement the first few encounters. Then one afternoon I took the initiative and said, 'It's holding out.' Her head rose up from the gloom of the tarmac path and a smile shone on her face like a sun coming through a cloudy day.

The next afternoon I became bolder. It was after rain and the leaves of the old lichened oak trees were dripping their stored drops. She was carrying a little foldup broly and she and the dog seemed to share a common purpose in sniffing out the pathway as if the grit would throw up secrets, as the stumpy legs of the dog marched in harmony with the short legs of the woman.

'We might make it between the showers.'

A smile, an affirmation with small sharp eyes up to the sky. 'I hope so.' And then the eyes down and forward march once more.

The following afternoon she appeared at the wood at her usual brisk pace but this time without the dog. It prompted me to enquire in a half statement. 'You haven't your dog.'

'Not mine,' she said, 'my son's. They're back from their holidays.'

'Ah,' I said. 'A little holiday then.'

She looked at me suspiciously for a moments as if to say I was getting too nosey and then she said, 'They go a for a week every year to Majorca. Or is it Menorca?'

'Everyone deserves a holiday,' I said, remembering the last time I had one was three years ago just before Anne died. Couldn't muster up the courage to go since, on my own that is. I mean who would you ask to put sun cream on your back? Would you say it to a stranger, 'I say, let's get

tactile.’ Not me. No way. Besides, what would you do on your own on a holiday? It would be like carrying a vacuum, like trudging around with an empty suitcase, feeling the weight of air.

I took the bull by the horns in a manner of speaking the next time we met. It was a sunny summer’s day with a clear blue sky. The fields bordering the woods looked like an impressionist’s painting full of poppies. Colour at last had come into our lives after the dull spring. She no longer wore the headscarf and revealed a dyed auburn sheen of hair and appeared less stooped as if her preoccupations had now moved up a floor. The smile on her face was there long before we came close.

‘Isn’t it lovely today?’ she said.

‘It is indeed,’ I said. ‘Your son, he’s keeping well?’

‘Oh, he’s fine.’

‘And the dog?’

‘Oh the dog, yes, he’s fine too and his wife, all fine.’

I felt I had made a *faux pas* by putting the dog before the wife in my order of enquiry, so rather than backtrack, I decided to advance. ‘Your husband,’ I said, ‘does he ever go walking with you?’

‘Can’t,’ she said, ‘gone ten years.’

‘Oh, I’m sorry.’

‘Quite all right,’ she said.

I told her, as we stepped together shortening my stride to keep pace with her, that I go walking most days before my night shift in the computer factory, and I told her about my wife Anne, how she died suddenly only two years ago.

‘My husband,’ she said, ‘went to get milk for our tea. “Back in a jiff,” he said. They were his last words. Hmm,’ she muses, ‘and I waiting like an eejit with my black tea going cold.’

‘I never went on holiday since my wife died,’ I said.

‘Every year,’ she said, ‘I go on my own. You get used to it.’

‘You think so?’

‘Sure,’ she said matter of factly. ‘You bring the emotion with you. You

just pack it into your suitcase with all your other accoutrements. And you carry on. What choice have we?’ She looked to the sky thoughtfully. ‘Back in a jiff,’ she repeats, ‘his last words. I never say that to anyone, never say, ‘I’ll be back in a jiff. I just say, Cheerio, expect me when you see me. That’s what I say to my son and his wife every time I set out even on my walk. But don’t expect it if you don’t see me. I say that too.’

‘A good philosophy,’ I said not quite knowing how to respond.

We walked on for a while and then I said, ‘They never go with you when you travel, your son and his wife I mean?’

‘Wouldn’t have them.’

‘No?’

‘They’d be bored with me. I do all the churches and cathedrals you know when I travel. I pick the places I want to see. I’ve been to Rome and Seville. There’s a whopper of a cathedral in Seville. The architecture, you have to marvel at it and all that gold. The path to heaven you know.’

I didn’t know how to respond to that either. Like religion and gold and stuff were never my cup of tea.

She looked up from her rant which had been directed downwards and I became conscious of the silence between us, the human silence by the woods. The birds were still at their business and the breeze was still making music with the leaves and the river was roaring as it always does as we approached the weir.

She examined me. ‘So you see if a little lady like me can travel alone, there’s no reason why a lanky fellow like you can’t,’ and she smiled up at me with a slightly superior air.

‘What do you do for the absence?’ I said.

‘The absence? You mean do I sit at empty tables?’

‘I mean your husband.’

‘There’s no need to state the obvious,’ she said.

The temerity of the woman I had to admire. I pictured her diminutive frame perched on a high stool in some far away bar or café, her short legs

yards from the floor, as she engaged in the cut and thrust of conversation with everyone and anyone, holding her own in an endless spiel.

‘Life is an adventure,’ she said. ‘So when I get the opportunity I take off.’

‘To see all the cathedrals of the world,’ I said.

‘Nah, that’s just a pretext,’ she said. ‘What I tell my son.’ She paused, ‘So he won’t be worried. Next week,’ she said, ‘the beginning of autumn yes, I have an assignation in New York.’

‘An assignation?’ I said.

‘Through the Internet. I’m going to meet someone.’

‘Ah.’

‘A widower with Irish roots. He’s pining away over there on the banks of the Hudson. Hasn’t the courage to come home.’

‘No?’

‘Too proud. Feels it would be an admission of failure to return.’

‘So you’re going over instead.’

‘I’m going over to see what I can do. To work on him a bit, see can I maybe make him rethink his decision.’ She smiled, ‘And who knows there may be a bit of romance in the air. I’m good like that you know with men, not with women mind, but with men I have often changed their outlook. That’s right; I have the flight booked and everything. There’s only one problem what I’ve been musing on in my walks.’

‘What’s that?’ I said.

‘The dog.’

‘What about the dog?’

‘See, my son and his wife want to go away the same week to a wedding over in Spain. They just take it for granted that I will mind the dog. They never put the dog into a pound. They don’t believe in that sort of thing. A dog needs TLC. That’s what they say. I believe it too. Just like us you know. We need TLC, don’t we?’

‘I suppose we do.’

She looked me up and down. ‘I feel I know you. I can confide in you. I know your geography, your architecture.’ She laughed. ‘Don’ mind me.

Your high steeples, your gothic spires.’ She was going into a convulsion. ‘God, I could go on. It would only be for a week,’ she said. ‘You’re familiar with the dog?’

‘Yes, he seems quiet enough but...’

‘I’ll be sure to bring him next time so you can get to know him better. You only feed him once a day you know. I’ll give you his food, that’s if...’

‘Ok,’ I said, ‘if it’s only a week. I can manage a week. By the way, what is he?’

‘What, a dog?’

‘No, I mean what sort?’

‘Oh, a bit of this and that,’ she said, ‘like all of us. And after the week we can rendezvous again here by the woods. I can tell you how I got on with the Yank. I’ll fill you in on all the details.’

She brought the dog along the next day. She showed me how to get him to sit. She was so effective in her commands I almost felt like sitting down myself beside the dog. ‘Now pat the dog,’ she said, ‘and take his paw.’ All her instructions I duly complied with and I felt myself being carried along like a family appendage as I quickened my pace this time to try to keep up with her and finding myself holding the dog’s lead.

So here I am by the woods walking the dog. He’s no trouble; gets a bit frisky and whelps now and again, and I have to stoop down as I walk because of the short lead. Walking by the fields with the faded poppies, by the roaring weir that gets him excited and he barks challengingly at the waters, by the rustling of the old oak leaves most of which have fallen now. Every afternoon we take our stroll. She never gave me his name, no more than his pedigree, come to think of it now, or her name for that matter. It just didn’t seem to arise between us.

I could give the dog a name myself now that I’m getting used to him. I’m getting to know him as days turn to weeks, and the cold spell hits, and months change the season.

DOG DAY AFTERNOON

LISA FRANK

I pulled myself in through the door
my tail heavy between my legs.
I brought you the newspaper
as kind of a joke
so my two-hour escapade wasn't all in vain.
But the newspaper annoyed you –
the sound of it rattling
on the table outside.
And the chocolate I bought
for you as a peacemaker of sorts –
well, you weren't having any of that.
'Just go outside and sit in the sun,' you said.
So I walked back out, my tail in place
and sat quietly in the sun
like a good little bitch.

THE METHOD

ANNE BABSON

A metal bar under his tongue, the method
From the old regime, and they burned his gums with
 The juice from the car battery. His
 Mouth swelled – he had the mumps, they told the guards

When they put him back in solitary, and
He could not object. He smelled like gas burning
 Rubber, but then he had not bathed for
 Lack of water in days. What the other

Guards did not know they did not venture to guess.
The method worked like a charm that way. After mumps,
 And the other welts, the suicides,
 They did not think about them, either. The

Howling down the hall, that did not belong in
The answer to the question asked at the door,
 “How was your day, Hun?” Kiss. Kiss. And so
 Some things that happened just never happened.

The method worked like a charm that way. In his cell,
He knelt, clasped hands, but prayer was a spoken thing,
 And his tongue cauterized was as good
 As cut out. The silence of his smoked flesh –

Its wounds in oaken blossoms along his back
In cigarette-lighter rosary beads -- was
 His only litany. The gangrene
 In his gaze that turned maggoty, it screamed.

RIVER DREDGING

DEBORAH TYLER-BENNETT

The missing, milk carton photographs,
bus-side messages replace penny-
plains, museum oleographs.

Along river-paths, tow rope blooms
shivered curtains billowing
green sunk rooms.

Steps - Bundled blankets could be empty
or sleeper's catafalque,
forbidding entry.

Steps where fictional murder happened,
Sikes bludgeoning Nancy, eyes two lime
lamps, heart un-softened.

Old maladies expire hard, low
tide discovers oyster-catchers
razors wedged below.

Ripped coats, discarded flip-flops,
condoms, lug worm casts (whorled
Celtic shields) glistened top
of something - Roman coin, token, ring pull?
Weed, hair, sofa stuffing
bright in tidal lull?

Rising rope, white knuckles
of drowned clerk's ghost,
last cry lost,
jade face buckled.

DREAM

MAUREEN GALLAGHER

Last night I dreamed I had dreadlocked hair,
A carroty iron-rust red.
And curly, to boot, it seemed so unfair.
Last night I dreamed I had dreadlocked hair.
The counsellor nods, shifts in his chair:
What cannot be changed must be endured.
Last night I dreamt I had dreadlocked hair,
A carroty iron-rust red.

RUTS

PATRICK MORAN

Risen out of the wild
African bush, Salgaa
is a highway truck-stop

where, at dusk, truckers come,
lured by the prospect of
cheap sex, disposable

couplings in neon-lit bars:
The New Paradise,
Good Times, El Dorado...

The big wheels turning
the primitive streets to
oozy, foot-sucking mud.

Even as feverish
young women — whose flesh
is suppurating sores;

whose bones push against
papery, rash-marked skin —
are dying of AIDS,

slipping into history.
Beyond yearning, beyond
the moulds of time and place;

beyond the clocks ticking
towards another nightfall,
the trucks still hurtling in.

It comes in quickly.
There is no time
to run back to shore.
In Doolin many years ago,
a baby in my arms,
it sneaked up on me.
Against the current
you pulled us out;
dangerous to stare too long
at the reddening sunset

and just last weekend
absorbed in collecting shells
on the little coral beach
of Lettermullen,
we found ourselves cut off,
stranded on seaweed-covered rocks.
You, with your wellies, carried
me to safety on your back,
coaxed the dog to swim across;
the pile of shells left behind.

You now find yourself on a beach,
the swift tide coming in
and I go to the sea every day
to practise my strokes
so I can swim under water,
tug you back to dry land.

AN LITIR DHEIREANACH

PHROINSIAS MAC A' BHAIRD

Tháinig sí chugam le breith Lúnasa.
Freagra níor thug mé uirthi
go dtí go raibh Samhain na Marbh
ag druidim chun deiridh,
an litir dheireanach a scríobhadh
chuig mo mháthair.

Litir ó chigire chánach
á cur ar an eolas faoi chúrsaí pinsin:
bheadh an trí scór slánaithe aici
dá mairfeadh sí inniu.
Cúig líne thúr a thug mé mar fhreagra
chomh tirim leis an pháipéar fhéin.

Glanfar a hainm anois
bainfear a cuimhne de na comhaid
fógrófar marbh go hoifigiúil í,
is b'fhéidir go gcuirfear nóta chugam
ag gabháil leithscéal as litir
a tháinig naoi mbliain is fiche mall.

Suífidh mé síos liom féin
am inteacht roimh thitim na bliana
chun litir eile a scríobh chuici,
litir bhreá fhada a bheas ann
tógfaidh mé m'am léi
an litir dheireanach sin.

IT KILLED THE CAT

TOM LAVELLE

Sent Columbus west,
Set the sleuth his task,
Called for the question mark,
Made archaeologists dig,
Apollo rise
To Armstrong's first small step,
Tempted Eve to taste,
Newton to ponder the apple fall,
Gave us the Talk-show host
The *Sky News* anchorman,
Must take responsibility for
The eavesdropper, the peeping Tom,
Delivered the test tube baby,
The deftly weighted punch-line,
Proposed the door-to-door enquiry,
The Large Hadron Collider tests,
Shed light on black matter mysteries,
The speed limits of the Universe,
Gave us Eureka moments,
Countless nights of unrest,
Made Stevie wonder,
Lot's wife turn her head,
Prompted me to write,
You to read this verse.

THE NIGHT MY SISTER ALMOST FIXED
ME UP WITH A PORN-STAR

ALAN MCMONAGLE

Jennifer is always trying to fix me up. “Hello there,” she says to many a bemused beauty. “This is my only brother. He has poor coping skills but will make a considerate lover.”

I am not exactly sure what it is she is trying to accomplish with this provocative introduction. Nor, as far as I can make out, are her chosen targets for my selfless though flawed affections. “There is no such thing as a considerate lover,” a girl said back to her the other day. “He is no good to me if he cannot cope,” replied another. Neither reaction deters Jennifer from her romantic quest. Little is accomplished when I speak out against her methods.

“Daniel, you are grieving,” she declares. “You need a woman.”

“Jennifer, I don’t NEED anything,” I reply. “Least of all love-advice from a celibate older sister.”

“Nobody knows what they need,” she answers, with a petulant wave of her hands. “But I know one thing. There is nothing nicer than a woman’s body.”

Here we go again, I murmur to myself. As do other family members whenever Jennifer gets it inside her head precisely what it is any of us needs. We tend to tolerate Jennifer because she is the eldest, likes to spend her money and practices an extreme form of Tai Chi. Meantime, the rest of us mark our own lives according to some forever-fixed moment of personal crisis. The time I fell from a rooftop, for example, and smashed head-first through a pane of glass leaving me with a cross-shaped scar in the gap between my eyebrows. Or the time Frankie decided that she wanted to save Uganda and legged it without bothering to tell anyone. Or the time Lorraine announced to everyone that she was getting engaged to an eastern-philosophy student who liked to steal cars. Or the time the same sister announced that the engagement was off and that she was five months pregnant.

Not for Jennifer these life-is-stranger-than-fiction fiascos. Her rumble through life's jungle is a more modest affair. Putting herself behind people is her preference, and surrendering her own priorities to the wants of others. Jennifer parcels out her life in favours - keeping an eye out on my behalf, babysitting when Lorraine has a hot-date with the latest contemplative felon in her life, maintaining contact with faraway Frankie to ensure the runaway has adequate supplies of Cheese and Onion Taytos, Chef Brown Sauce and Oatfield Chocolate Emeralds – as though these little acts of worth represent the anchors Jennifer must reach for whenever she finds it all getting away from her. For Jennifer, affirmation arrives by way of her pocket book of good intentions – as opposed to the elaborate dramas orchestrated by her nearest and dearest. “Someone has to be the lookout,” is her claim in defence of her constant vigilance. This heightened sense of responsibility leaves her in a state of permanent unrest. She can never wait to be a good-doer.

“Sexually, I’m self-destructive,” Jennifer says when I ask why she doesn’t apply any of this finding-love assistance to herself. “For me there is little hope,” she continues after an intense moment or two - as though she has just sourced and accepted some higher judgement in the matter. “I suppose I’m a bit like you,” she concludes. “I don’t know how to translate grief into language that can be understood.”

“What grief?” I say back to her.

“There, there,” she soothes, going at my back with her hand.

When it comes to finding my elusive maiden the music gig is Jennifer’s preferred arena. Jennifer and I go to a lot of gigs together. Before life as an office girl, she worked in a record shop, and the shop manager still passes her the occasional complimentary. The shop manager loved Jennifer because she was so enthusiastic in her work. I used to think it was a fake enthusiasm, put on for effect, to reassure an uncertain country-&-western fan, to sway a dithering jazz-lover, to charmingly persuade the entire music-buying public that she had a special place in her heart for their favourite brand of music. “I have to tell you, that is an excellent choice,” she would say no matter what ridiculous music CD her customer was on

the verge of purchasing. One morning, I was browsing in the music shop and I looked on in horror as she fell over herself to compliment a businessman wanting to buy for his wife a CD of *Roxette's Greatest Hits*. "I can't believe you let that guy think he has taste in music," I said later. "Everybody has taste," she threw back at me. "Some like it with the merest touch of zest. Others prefer it lumpy and without meat. In the end it doesn't matter - we all end up in the same cooking pot."

At tonight's gig *Goodtime Ray* has returned - by popular demand. I remember seeing him some time back. If memory serves, Goodtime Ray's idea of a good time is to sit on a low stool with his guitar and sing about the rain. Tonight, he begins his set with a number called *Persistent Drizzle*. "I like this town," he caws in between his guitar chords. "It reminds me of a sad story. Let me share my sad story with you beautiful people."

Beside me, Jennifer is a finely-tuned antenna. Already she is scanning the venue, looking to pick out some ambivalent angel likely to inspire untapped reactions inside me. Soon, she ventures out on patrol. Returning to where I stand she reaches out to drag me.

"I think this could be the one," she says, hauling me across the crowded floor. "I've had words. Found out a thing or two. Boys where this girl comes from are a lot like you. They're not territorial or physically capable. They have a vague sense of belonging. They do not acknowledge stop signs or seek comfort in late-night football. In her town she says that thanks to girls like her grieving is a thing of the past."

I listen to this little speech and wonder what stop signs she is talking about. Also, I'm as willing as the next guy to watch football through the night - if Brazil is playing.

"Daniel, this is Carlene," Jennifer says when she finds who she is looking for. "Carlene is from Portland. She speaks husky English. She has crossed the Atlantic to find a man. Carlene, this is Daniel. He has poor coping skills but will make a considerate lover."

Her good work done, she then disappears.

The Portland girl is sucking a straw pointing out of an umbrella-cocktail. She is lean and sallow-skinned - athletic-looking - with straight

sandy hair reaching half-way down her back. She is wearing a short denim skirt and an imposing black singlet with glittery writing. *Lazy Days* the writing says. She also wears an ankle bracelet and a pair of Birkenstocks. Her toenails are painted to match the glittery writing.

“I knew of a tennis player called Carlene,” I say. “From Toronto. I think she once made it to round four at Wimbledon.”

“It’s Carling not Carlene.”

“Your name is Carling?”

“Yes. The tennis player too.”

“As in the light-hearted lager?”

“I don’t know if it’s light-hearted. I don’t drink it.”

“I hear it sells well in England. Carling, that is.”

“Never been there,” she says.

“Portland,” I say. “That’s in Canada, right.”

“Wrong. You don’t often ask questions, do you?”

“You can ask a question if you like.”

“What is your porn-star name?”

“I beg your pardon.”

“I need to know your porn-star name. It’s one of the ways I have of telling.”

“Telling what?”

“If we are meant to be together.”

Before I have a chance to respond, Goodtime Ray takes time out from his set to engage with his audience. “I realised something when it rained,” he caws, idly strumming his guitar. “My girl no longer had the hots for me. Let’s sing a song about the girl I lost.”

There is respectful applause as he launches into a burdensome number called *It’s Raining In My Heart*. At first, it’s just a localised shower. Soon, it becomes a torrential downpour. By the time the last chorus comes around the whole world is underwater. Throughout it all, however, Goodtime Ray can still glimpse the stars. “How can he see the stars if it’s raining all the time,” someone calls out a little too loudly. “I was in a great humour until he opened his mouth,” says another.

“What do you think of the musician?” I ask Carling.

“He’s like the weather,” she answers. “Goes from bad to worse.”

“He’s a local musician,” I say. “He’s been banging on about the rain for a long time. I don’t think he’s ever toured. I’m pretty sure he’s never set foot outside this town.”

“This town is a lot like Portland,” Carling says. “The weather. The bridges. The vibe.”

“There is a good vibe,” I say, like someone who has never before heard the word.

“All my stuff is in Portland,” Carling says. “My clothes. My records. I have a car in Portland. You should come. We have a chance of being together.”

“I don’t know my porn-star name,” I say.

“Yes you do,” Carling says. “Everybody has a porn-star name.”

“What’s yours?” I ask.

“Fluffy Carty. I’m not crazy about it. But I’m stuck with it.”

“Why are you stuck with it?”

“It’s how porn-star names work. You take the name of your first pet and combine it with your mother’s maiden name. It’s the golden rule with porn-star names. So I am Fluffy Carty.”

“I’m Rex Maguire,” I say, after taking a moment to apply her special rule.

“Rex Maguire,” she repeats after me. “I like that. I like it a lot.”

“I think I like yours,” I say back.

“Rex and Fluffy,” she says. “I think I can see a future for a couple called Rex and Fluffy. Are you really a considerate lover?”

“Only in my dreams. In reality I’m actually quite the lazybones,” I reply, looking at the writing on her singlet. “And I also have poor coping skills.”

“Where I come from I am considered extremely forbearing. I can help you cope.” “It’s looking good for us,” I say.

“It is, isn’t it,” she says.

“What other ways have you of telling?” I say.

Before Carling has a chance to answer, I am grabbed and hauled away. Jennifer shuffles me towards the exit door, glancing anxiously over her shoulder with every step she takes. “I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry,” she whispers in my ear as we move.

We reach the door and I turn back for one last glimpse of the Portland girl. But it is difficult to see through the bunching crowd. Steady but persistent hand-clapping is encouraging Goodtime Ray to do another song. “I realised one last thing in the rain,” he says to his devoted followers, plucking at his trusty companion. “A guitar and a six-pack – that’s all I need. This is my last song. It’s called *I Hope It’s Raining On The Day I Die.*”

“That was a narrow escape,” Jennifer says, after she has dragged me around the corner from the music venue, all the time checking over her shoulder. “I take back everything I said about that girl. She definitely is not the one to take you from your grieving.”

“What grieving?” I say back, throwing my arms into the cold night.

“There there,” Jennifer says, and she starts rubbing my back in slow circles.

BEATITUDES

JARLATH FAHY

blessed are the crispmakers
for they shall make crisps

blessed are the risktakers
for they shall take risks

blessed are the bankers
for they shall give
one hundred and ten percent loans

blessed are the borrowers
for they shall take the
one hundred and ten percent loans
and they shall be unable
to pay it back
and they shall blame the bankers
for giving it to them in the first place

blessed is charles darwin
and the laws of natural selection
and the laws of free enterprise
and when a bank goeth unto the wall
overladen with toxic assets
it goeth unto the wall

but blessed be the government
that seeth the bank casteth down
and sendeth forth its angels
that not a hair on its head
be put out of place
nor should it stubbeth its toe

In the summer that I was ten, my family moved to Tillsonburg, a small agricultural town in Southern Ontario known for its big old redbrick houses, large maple trees, and wide streets. Every summer Tillsonburg's population increased by thousands, mostly men, looking to make money in the nearby lucrative tobacco fields. My father landed one of these jobs and so we left the farm he was working on up north and rented a small house on Concession Street.

In the early days I biked around familiarising myself with my new life as a townie. The centre of Tillsonburg was only a ten minute bike ride away. The highlight was a brown shopping mall built in 1980 that stood out among the tall grey stone buildings built a century earlier. Joan Jett and the Blackhearts was my favourite band and Africa by Toto was my favourite song.

I met Chantal in the food court at the shopping mall. She talked with a thick accent and soon taught me French swear words. Chantal was the first Quebecois I'd met. Her hair was jet-black in a curly fuzz from her shoulders up. Heavy eyeliner framed her eyes and bright blue eyeshadow highlighted them. Her cheeks glowed from too much blush. She taught me her makeup techniques and I let her borrow the eyelash curler I'd stolen from my sister. I played her Joan Jett and she introduced me to Motown music and the song 'The End of the World', which she played non-stop.

"Don't they know it's the end of the world?"

It ended when you said goodbye."

We were the Young Turks of Tillsonburg; me and my bike and Chantal with her blue satin jacket and tight jeans. We sang 'Let's Get Physical' and thought aerobics was cool. My father saw her in the town centre mall one day and returned home to tell me how ridiculous she looked. Like a clown, he said. He wouldn't ban me from wearing makeup, but take a look in the goddamned mirror he said.

Chantal's family was the first I'd met that was like mine. They were from Trois-Rivières and her father had brought them to Tillsonburg so he could make money in the tobacco fields just as my father had. They swore and smoked and fought and loved without regard for who was watching. For the first time, I considered that one of my friend's families might get along with my own. But I never invited her over and the few times she knocked on the door, I was out on the path with my bike before my goodbye landed on my parents' ears.

I had credibility in this new neighborhood with Chantal as my friend. Boys stopped and talked to us. One warm July evening Peter Hahn asked us if we wanted to play truth or dare in his garage. Chantal and I had played before and while the truths were impossible products of our wild imaginations, the dares usually consisted of flashing our flat chests to passing-by cars. When we arrived at Peter Hahn's, the game had been upgraded to truth, dare, double-dare, promise to repeat. The last inclusion mostly consisted of repeating 'I am gay' to a chorus of laughter. But when Chantal's turn at the bottle pointed to me, she double dared me to kiss Matthew Farrell. You could blag your way out of a dare, but a double dare was a serious matter. Unsure of what to do and not wanting to disappoint Chantal, I leaned over and kissed Matthew Farrell.

"More!", "Longer!" The other kids wanted more. He brought his head forward where his lips met mine for five whole life-encompassing first kiss seconds. When I sat back and looked over at her, Chantal was smiling at me. I knew then she was the best friend I'd ever had.

While my parents began to question our friendship, I spent more and more time with her. By late August, we were resisting the idea of returning to school and trying to push back the oppressive constraints of our curfews. In the warm evenings we'd watch the sunset and end our day with a walk around the leafy streets of our neighbourhood.

We were probably talking about Ebony and Ivory. By this time I was a Paul McCartney and a Beatles expert and she knew a lot about Stevie Wonder. Then, all of the sudden, she clubbed me. She was pointing upwards. On the third floor of an old brick house, a man had forgotten to

draw the curtain as he dried himself off from his shower or bath. I remember not knowing what I was seeing.

We stood there with our mouths open and arms dropped to our sides. After he put his pyjamas on, we sat on the curb and tried to decipher what had happened. At first Chantal was just as stunned as I was, but she got over it quicker and moved on to the analytical phase while I dawdled in shock.

The next evening we showed up a few minutes earlier and hid behind a tree. Soon we cut the walk out completely and loitered outside until show time. My shock had fully subsided and now I found it hard to stand up because of the laughter. Even my bladder was in danger of forgetting itself and I had to keep my legs crossed. This was the state I was in when I arrived home after about a week of the nine o'clock show. My brother was watching TV. He asked me what was so funny and I made him promise not to tell.

The next morning my mother hauled me out of bed. She threatened to ban me from seeing Chantal again so I was forced to tell her everything. My big mouth brother stood behind her only for the wall that supported him during his fit of laughter.

She called the police. She suspected the man knew we were there. I begged and cried, but soon enough I was pinned against the sofa, held down at the shoulders by my mother's grip, explaining to two male police officers what had happened. My brother sat behind them at the dining room table trying so hard to contain his laughter that he started to squeak. He occasionally composed himself long enough to divert my attention from the police while he drew his finger across his neck.

I snuck out that night and told Chantal of my brother's betrayal. Her parents had found out as well, I suspected from my mother. We walked by our man's house at the usual time to find the curtain closed and lights out. The police had been back in touch with my mother. The man was mortified. He apologized and asked the police to keep his name secret.

My parents were certainly going to ban me from seeing Chantal, but fortunately for them summer was coming to a close. Chantal told me her

family was moving back to Quebec. She gave me a copy of Motown Hits before she left. The third song was 'The End of the World'. I played it every hour of every day until my father threatened to break it if he heard it ever again.

We moved back up north soon after that summer ended. My heavy makeup didn't make sense anymore and did look ridiculous. My expletives lost their impact when no one understood. I never talked to Chantal again after that summer. In fact, I don't even remember her last name.

It's not the tang of autumn leaves burning in the air,
for this is May and though it's been a day of steady rain
this week has been summer's first heave into the year;
the grass is all wet but could do with another cut
and there's a list shooting up of 'to-dos' and 'musts'.

The iPod can go – even though it's wound me back
to mixing tapes; fast forward to the end of the spool
then flip over to the other side with a practised cool,
that plastic-on-plastic rattle of lid-click and catch,
auto reverse was luxury, God help you if the tape snapped...

There's something sacred in tonight – a presence
I associate with a phalanx of votive candles,
their serried ranks of wicks flickering in a wave
(eyes left) whenever the church door creaks open
and a draught of outside slips in, not even a hint of sin

but the streetlights are gathering warmth tonight;
kids spill onto darkened concrete and shining tarmac
with pedal-cars and bikes, making deals and promises,
the most earnest pleas with parents about a day inside
and summer's growth-spurt of weekend half-light.

The whole evening is gold: dandelions and dock,
clover-sprawl over the verge mown only a week ago;
a low cloud settles the town, softening its sodium glow.
Tonight, I do not feel alone as I ease into each step –
no hurried feet beat their way in earphone insularity

on the footpath leading back to the growing estate
though it ends at some neighbour's pebbledash wall
instead of a cinematic sunset or the great beyond –
I feel the draw of home, a familiar elbow breathe in
and out, a cello song. I hear the bow tremble and sway.

Below us the barn door is stuck ajar
since the day its heavy hinge
slipped with the frame's slow rot.

Lizards dart up like shrunken dragons
from the barn's flat straw ground,
take the cleaner air and size us up.

Tuscan farmers lived like this above
their livestock, witnesses to intimate noises,
breathing animal sweat-scents and excrement.

Wood pigeons strut the roof, make
clacking sounds like close gunfire.
Their hollow cooings hint of subtle peril.

Rain-drops panic on the tiles, then stop.
The aftermath of showers sharpens tension,
clarifies the grain of conflict.

Outside, swallows fan out, air-warriors
slice the wind in pairs then disappear
between clay bricks under eaves.

At dusk we are perched between
bickering birds above, lizardly rustlings below.
The wakeful in a sandwich of the wild.

Feral dogs bark earthy frustrations out
in the dark. The beasts are waiting
for us, forever beyond our lamps.

Daylight through the shutters announces truce.
We search the internet on a mobile handheld
for the day's forecast, perhaps an early flight.

DISENCHANTMENT

BRIAN KIRK

Once upon a time my life was full of love and comfort.

Last evening it was almost dark when I got home from work. I tripped on the path through the park, spilling the meagre contents of my shopping bag, cutting my hand on the broken glass that perpetually lies in wait. I ran home, almost colliding with a hooded youth at my gate in my haste to get inside. Safe in my kitchen I quickly washed and dressed the wound, and stood in the twilight for some time, as I often do nowadays, watching the last light fade, thinking of nothing in particular. I noticed the garden shed door was wide open, my few tools strewn across the grass. I went to the door quickly, flicked the switch for the external light and stepped out into the cold night air. Someone had dug up my grass and shrubs, emptied all of my planters, broken my sundial. I thought of the youth I had seen at my gate. I looked at my hand. Wine red blood seeped through the dressing.

Once upon a time my life was full of love and comfort, and it sang with the prospect of only greater love to come. Now I feel as Oisín must have felt when he returned from the Land of Youth. The thoughts that must have assailed his mind as he rode on his great white horse across the country, appalled by the puny specimens that passed for men in a land that once bred giants. I feel as I hurry home across the park after a long day at work. I am surrounded by hooded shadows, lurking, robed in gloom, belching smoke into the dark air, drinking from bottles that soon will be shattered.

My father called me Niamh, after Oisín's fairy wife, Niamh of the Golden Hair. The poor man was a dreamer, a teller of stories, a man who sought to avoid the squalid detail of real life. Sometimes in my imagination he becomes Fionn's illustrious son, and he elopes with me, his faery bride, never to return. I miss him almost as much as I do Grainne, but I would not have him back. Not to witness this... this degeneration.

I named my daughter Grainne, after Fionn's intended who ran away with young Diarmuid in another story, but I never told my husband that.

Tom wouldn't have understood, grounded in the actual world as he was. Puny man. Perhaps I'm being hard on him. Perhaps I purposely excluded him. Perhaps I should have shared more with him, let him play some part in mine and Grainne's childish games. He always seemed too busy. He worked all hours, arriving home when the stories had been told and Grainne was in bed – wanting his dinner in front of the TV, inevitably fast asleep by the time I took the tray away. I noticed him less and less after Grainne was born, and when she died I took no comfort from him.

Tom and I were selfish when we married; the hallmark of love and youth you could say. We both worked and had plenty of money to spend on each other. We never thought about children for years, and when we did, typically, fate intervened. I was told I was unable to conceive. Miserable, we became closer than ever before, we turned our backs on the world, folded in on ourselves, our two ardent hopes pinned on one shared unattainable wish.

Then she arrived, out of the blue and contrary to all medical opinion, our long-awaited and miraculous daughter. Those first few months I could not relax. I was waiting for the catch, the witch to come and claim her, the fairies to change her for one of their own. When I confided my fears to Tom he laughed abruptly, but did not answer. Perhaps that marks the moment when I stopped sharing my thoughts with him. Nonetheless both of us would stand in silence over Grainne's cot at night, on edge, waiting for the next breath to be taken.

As Grainne grew my fear subsided and I learned to enjoy her for the gift she was. I set aside more time to spend with her. When she started school I arranged to work short hours so that I could collect her every day. We would spend the dark winter afternoons drawing, painting or reading stories. Like all girls she loved horses, so as soon as the weather grew milder I booked riding lessons for her. Tom was against it from the start, I remember; he thought she was too young.

Today was Halloween, or Samhain as they used to call it in pre-Christian times. The last day of the Celtic year, the day of the dead. The

one remaining vestige of our pagan past that Christianity cannot fully assimilate. Not with any confidence.

This time last year Tom and I stood out under the streetlights with our neighbours while Grainne and the other children from our road raced around in carnival disguise amid the noise of flickering lights. This year I am on my own, inside my house, the curtains drawn, sitting in the dark. The power went earlier, just as evening fell, just as the smaller children set off door to door. I would not answer to their knocks. I found some candles and lit one in the back room where its light would not be seen. I tried in vain to read; the mute light flickered and my wounded hand throbbed.

The darkness seemed to heighten silence, and in between the occasional reports of rockets I could hear the pitiless clock in the front room measure time relentlessly. A year ago we seemed content enough. Eight months ago Grainne fell from a pony and cracked her head against a stone. She seemed alright at first, but fell into a coma the following day. We watched her sleep for weeks, waiting for her eyes to open, but they never did. A perfect child, no mark upon her body, an enchanted princess in a grotesque fairy tale, waiting for a prince who would never come to wake her.

Six months, two weeks, four days ago, she died. There was nothing I could do for her. I was mortal, a mere woman after all. I had prayed with all my heart, but God was not at home. Two months, five days ago, Tom left me. He said he couldn't bear to be near me anymore, the way I buried Grainne every day. He said no one was to blame, but I knew that he blamed me.

A crash of shattering glass woke me from self-pity. I rushed into the front room, and by the light of burning curtains I saw the remnants of a rocket and smashed glass upon the carpet. I quickly pulled the curtains down and trod on them until the flames were smothered. In darkness once again I peered out through the broken window into the street, but could see little. Freezing bituminous air masked my face and gloved my hands. I could smell sulphur and I heard voices, running footsteps, brittle laughter, but all was shadow. By candlelight I swept up the shards of glass and stuck black bin liners across the broken window, before returning to the back

room.

The cold was in me now, so I went to the kitchen to boil water on the gas hob for tea. The wavering flame of the candle threw hideous shadows high on the walls as I moved between rooms. When I opened the kitchen door my candle sputtered out and I knew that there was something there with me, a presence. I stood perfectly still just inside the door. I could feel cold air on my face. My eyes strained in the darkness to discern the outline of the intruder's form, and I saw it, then another, then another, my vision failing to see and compensating by creating one false image after another. I felt along the worktop slowly until my good hand met something heavy. I gripped its handle and swung at one of the forms with all my strength. The implement fell to the floor upon impact – what was it, a pan? – and I re-lit the candle as quickly as I could.

The thing lay on my kitchen floor. Did I know it or did I fool myself into thinking it was the same one who had smashed my window, who had destroyed my garden, who had sneered at me the day we buried Grainne? There were so many of them around, impossible to distinguish one from the other. I bent down to look more closely at it. Blood as black as oil leaked across the kitchen tiles. The pale and pockmarked skin stretched sheer across a bony skull was like a mask, the same mask they all wore, shrouded in a hood.

“Oh Jesus missus!” it begged, “you’re fucken crazy.” The flicker of light behind the empty eyes was going out.

“Who are you?” I asked it. “Who sent you here?”

“God missus help me! Get an ambulance, please,” it groaned.

“Are you the one who wrecked my garden?”

It groaned again, a little weaker this time.

“Are you the one who broke my window?”

It’s breath was short now.

“Are you the one who laughed at me the day I buried her?”

It no longer made a sound.

“Did you think it was funny to see a woman cry in the street? She was dead. She was only a child.”

I stood over the body and the face seemed less threatening, more human, almost boyish, now that the life had gone out of it.

Isn't it fitting it should all end here, looking down on Glenasmole, where Oisín's saddle slipped causing him to fall from grace to pain and blindness, severe old age and certain death? In some versions of the story Oisín is converted by Saint Patrick, but in others he scorns the new religion that makes clerks of warriors, and its god who is petty and small, a god who sets traps for his own people.

Puny mortal that I am it took some time to dig a shallow grave among the bent roots of trees on the hillside. With great difficulty I managed to drag the body from the boot of my car to the hole where I unceremoniously let it fall. I covered it in rough stones and earth, skeletal branches and the fallen golden leaves that lay all around. My work finished I stood looking out over the city, alive with blinking lights from mountains to sea, broken only by that one small black patch. The dark place from which I had come and to which I would return.

In the morning the sun will rise again, light will prevail, men and women will set off for work, children will go to school. By evening the power will be back, lighting the streets, houses, shops and pubs, giving us the impression of normality, that we are defeating the darkness. But outside each single pool of light, the night lives on, the darkness waits for us, as black as pitch.

No light can break my darkness now.

VIOLONCELLIST

LAURA BENTLEY

After the painting by Simon Samsonian

A wooden ear curls against hers,
conjuring the surf

of a dead sea.
Her donor heart thrums

with druid fantasies each time
she draws

the horsehair bow.
She plays

a lightning rod rhapsody
that impales

the whole-note moon.
She plays

a solar-eclipse sonata
with eyes shut

to bass clef braille.
For everything mute,

she plays
until there is nothing left

to see.
Forgotten quarter-notes

sink
like odd teaspoons,

to the bottom of an orange vase.
Street-corner harmonies

beget, beget, beget
in the sediment

to beg the question up a winding staff
to the tower room.

“Did she leave the window open?
Did she?”

WHEN NIGHTS

MAGS TREANOR

When nights we wrestle words until the dawn,
That throw like punches pushing us apart.
I always swear, tomorrow I'd be gone
If common sense would dare to rule the heart.

I wish your words were two fists hitting hard.
Or mine – sharp stabbing wounds from cutting knives
To map the twisted carnage. Jagged shards
Of language, pouring blood between the lines.

But you're a place that's not my native tongue.
No fluency. Nor do I comprehend
The compound structures where our words are slung.
A victory of wits – our weapons verbs.

Then in the aftermath that one word "Truce!"
Leaves traitor tongues join forces and seduce.

Biographical details

Anne Babson, a Coney Island poet, was nominated for a Pushcart for work in *The Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal* and *Illya's Honey*. She has won awards from *Columbia*, *Atlanta Review*, *Grasslands Review*, and other reviews. Her work has been published world-wide. Her libretto for Su Lian Tan's opera, *Lotus Lives*, is being produced by Meridian Arts Ensemble in 2010. She has four chapbooks, is featured on one hip-hop CD, and her spoken word CD, *Messiah*, is due from the Artists of Faith label later this year. Her blog about uppity women in Brooklyn and beyond is at www.annebabson.wordpress.com.

Laura Treacy Bentley is a poet and fiction writer from Huntington, West Virginia, who divides her time between the mountains of West Virginia and western Maryland. *Lake Effect*, her first book of poetry, was published in 2006 by Bottom Dog Press. Her work has been published in the United States and Ireland in literary journals such as *The New York Quarterly*, *Art Times*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Antietam Review*, *Rosebud*, *Wind*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Kestrel*, *ABZ*, *Crannóg*, *Now & Then*, *3x10 plus*, and in fifteen anthologies. She received a Fellowship Award for Literature from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts, and her poetry has been featured on the websites of A Prairie Home Companion and Poetry Daily. In 2003 Laura read her poetry with Ray Bradbury. She has completed a literary suspense novel set in Ireland and is busy revising it. Currently, she is writer-in-residence for the Marshall University Writing Project. Visit her website and contribute to her blog, "Open Mic," at www.lauratreacybentley.com.

Sandra Bunting grew up in Canada and now lives in Galway. Her poetry collection *Identified in Trees* was published in 2006 by Marram Press. Besides poetry, she writes fiction, works in journalism and is involved in printmaking, batik and silkpainting.

Kevin Cahill is a poet from Cork City. To date his work has appeared in a number of journals including *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Magma*, *Southword*, *The New Writer*, *Poetry Nottingham*, *Revival*, *Envoi*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Quattrocento*, and *The SHOP*.

Emily Cullen recently completed a Ph.D. in English at NUI, Galway. She directed the Patrick Kavanagh Centenary celebrations in 2004, and was selected by Poetry Ireland for their 'Introductions Series'. Emily's first collection, *No Vague Utopia*, was published by Ainnir in 2003. She is also a qualified teacher and performer of the Irish harp.

Jarlath Fahy's first collection is *The Man Who Was Haunted By Beautiful Smells* (Wordsonthestreet 2007)

Julia Fairlie has lived in West Cork for twelve years and works as a freelance copyeditor and proofreader. Her poems have appeared in *The Shop*, *The North*, *Agenda (online supplement)*, *The New Writer*, *Stinging Fly*, *Snakeskin* and *VirtualWriter*.

Lisa Frank was born and raised in Los Angeles but has spent most of the past ten years in the Pacific Northwest. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Eastern Washington University and has had work published in various American literary journals, as well as in *Boyne Berries*. In 2007 She moved to Connemara, where she works as a freelance literary editor.

Maureen Gallagher's first collection of poetry was published by Wordsonthestreet in 2008. She was a prizewinner in both poetry and prose categories in the Wicklow Writers' competition 2008. Her website can be viewed at www.maureengallagher.net.

Alan Garvey's work has been published in various magazines and anthologies. His first full collection, *Herself in Air* (2006), was published by Lapwing Publications, Belfast. His second, *Learning To Crawl* (also on Lapwing) has just been published.

Liam Guilar lives in Australia. His poems have appeared in *Crannóg*, *The Stinging Fly*, *The SHOP*, *Shearsman* and *Under the Radar*. His most recent collection, *Lady Godiva and Me*, was published by Nine Arches Press in England in December 2008. (<http://www.ninearchespress.com/publications.html>).

Patricia Holmes has been published in *The Globe and Mail* and *Geist Magazine*. Currently she is a doctoral research fellow in English at NUIG.

Brian Kirk was shortlisted for an Hennessy Award in 2007. In 2008 he was shortlisted for the Over The Edge New Writer of the Year. One of his poems appears in the recently published anthology *Night and Day*, edited by Dermot Bolger and published by New Island. He has recently completed his first novel, *Winter Journey*. He lives in Clondalkin with his wife and two children.

Tom Lavelle is originally from Mayo but has lived in Galway for many years. His poems have appeared in *West 47 Online*, *The Cúirt Annual*, *Revival*, *Boyne Berries* and *The Stony Thursday Book*.

James Lawless lives in County Kildare. His first novel *Peeling Oranges* was published in 2007. His latest short story is in Stinging Fly's new anthology, *Let's Be Alone Together*. A study of modern poetry, *Clearing The Tangled Wood* is forthcoming from Academica Press in 2009.

Quincy R. Lehr's first full-length collection of poetry, *Across the Grid of Streets*, came out in 2008, and he is the associate editor of *The Raintown Review*. His poems have appeared in numerous journals in the U.S., Britain, Ireland, and Australia. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Phroinsias Mac a' Bhaird. Is as Árainn Mhór i dTír Chonaill do Phroinsias Mac a' Bhaird, cé go bhfuil cónaí air anois ar an tír mór. Tá ceithre leabhar scríofa aige agus tá sé ag obair ar chnuasach filiochta san am i láthair.

Alan McMonagle's first collection of stories, *Liar Liar*, was recently published by Wordsonthestreet.

Susan Millar DuMars is an American poetry and fiction writer living in Ireland. Her first collection of poems, *Big Pink Umbrella*, was published by Salmon Poetry in 2008. A second collection, *Dreams for Breakfast*, is due out with Salmon in 2010. She published a mini collection of short fiction with Lapwing in 2007, and is at work on a full length collection.

Patrick Moran collections are *The Stubble Fields* (The Dedalus Press, 2001) and *Green* (Salmon Poetry, 2008). He has been published in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Shop* and in *Best of Irish Poetry 2007* among others. He has won the Gerard Manley Hopkins Poetry Prize and been short-listed for an Hennessy Poetry Award.

Moya Roddy lives in Galway. Her work has been published by Penguin, Serpents Tail, Attic Press, Arlen House, *Irish Times*, *Ropes and Cúirt Journal* among others. She has written for TV, film, radio and stage and recently completed an MA in Writing at NUIG.

Eddie Stack is from County Clare, and lives in San Francisco part of the year. He received a Top 100 Irish American Award in 1991 in response to his book of short fiction, *The West: Stories from Ireland*, originally published by Island House (US) and Bloomsbury (UK). He is the recipient of an American Small Press of the Year Award. His work is included in *State of the Art: Stories from New Irish Writers*; *Irish Christmas Stories*, *The Clare Anthology* and *Fiction in the Classroom*. His stories have also appeared in literary reviews *Fiction*, *Confrontation*, *Whispers & Shouts* and *Criterion 83*. Stories from *The West* have been read on radio worldwide and a CD of four stories read by the author, with music by Martin Hayes and Dennis Cahill was released in summer 2002. His latest collection of stories, *Out of the Blue*, was published in Spring 2004. In Feb 2009 he won the Caomhnú Short Story Award.

Barbara Taylor's poems appear in literary journals and anthologies, including *Modern English Tanka Landfall*, *Atlas Poetica*, *Letters To The World*; *The Salt River Review*, *Shamrock*, *Haibun Today*, *Poemeleon*, *Magnapoets*, *Loch Raven Review*, *The Blue Fifth Review*, *NewVerseNews*, *Contemporary Haibun On Line*, and elsewhere. Poetry with audio is at <http://batsword.tripod.com>.

Deborah Tyler-Bennett's first collection was *Clark gable in Mansfield* (King's England, 2003). A programme on her work was broadcast on Romanian National radio in 2008 and translations of her poems appear in the Romanian journal *The International Notebook of Poetry*. She is co-author of the Victoria and Albert Museum's creative writing package (www.vam.ac.uk/creativewriting). She has won the Hugh MacDiarmid trophy and was runner-up in The Poets' Poet Award. She was editor of *The Coffee House* for ten years. Her second collection, *Pavilion*, is due from Smokestack in 2010.

Steve Woods lectures at the National Film School at IADT Dun Laoghaire, where he teaches experimental animation. He has in development a feature documentary on the great Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin. His last film - a short modern dance film - "Eternal" was shot in Palestine in April 2008 and he is currently producing two short animations - both "Frameworks" awards from the Irish Film Board. www.stevewoods.ie