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Deborah Brown  
Fred Johnston  
Frank Boyce  
Chisom Eze  
Jim Xi Johnson  
Terri Metfcalfe  
Jack Power  
Elaine Westnott-O'Brien  
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Kate Durrant  
David Lohrey  
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Alan Murphy  
Siobahain McLaughlin  
Aaron Kavanagh  
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Cormac Culkeen  
Kelsey Ammons  
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Adrian Harte  
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Lily O'Byrne  
Declan Coles  
Carol McGill  
Katie O'Sullivan  
Helen Jenks  
Úna Nolan

# **Published by The Martello Journal**

*February 2024.*

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# THE MARTELLO JOURNAL

VOLUME V  
DEGENERACY

## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to welcome you to our fifth edition. Degeneracy means different things to different people- something we're sure you'll notice as you lead through this collection.

To us, it is a rebellion. A turning. A move away from the expected and the boundaries of what is judged appropriate. We wish to question these decisions and those who make them for us. *We* wish to decide ourselves what *we* deem okay, let *us* not be afraid to push past that which is placed upon *us*. Let there be no gods but Us- to this, in these pages, we pray.

We are grateful to you, the readers. We are grateful to you, the contributors. We are grateful to you, the artists who never cease to take our breath away. We are also grateful, most of all, for each other.

We remain, as ever,  
Yours with love, Úna and Jack

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THISBE

*James Dowthwaite*

I dreamed of her in the groves of doom, the strange days  
where we lay upright and forgot the walls,  
forgot the heat of the afternoon and lived in each another's hearts,  
dazed by the beat of our own time and our breathing the colour of sand.

Her words caught the lift of the air;  
they formed gods in the shapes, drifting off towards the shadows  
and we prayed to them, naked, one shifting with the other in that sweating  
heartbeat,  
enveloping each of our subtle promises, and letting them go.

If the past hangs about us like incense before a household idol, then we took it  
within us and dissolved it in our selves,

if the whole weight of possibility can be seen between the lies we tell our  
parents and the stories we tell each other, then I would come to the wall filled  
with hope,

I would press it and wait for her along the length of my body  
and, hearing her voice, would be fulfilled in a way no god can grasp;  
that her music would compensate separation,  
that her words, being hers, would fashion a touch beyond the partition.

In a soft prayer, in the intimacy of whisper, she asks for me.

If I had my time again, I still would not have waited.

A BARGAIN  
*Caroline Morris*

I claw through the snow  
And dirt  
And maggots,  
Uproot her uncoffined body from the earth,  
Snapping the tubers that try to keep her  
From me.  
Brushing back her lichen hair,  
I press my tongue into the hollow where a mouth  
Used to be,  
Run my hands along her mushroom skin,  
Breathe in the sweet scent of rot,  
Take it for my own.  
Her flesh flushes toadstool,  
The white and red of poisonous life,  
Her once-scrabbling nails uncrack  
And her severed spine knits itself back together.  
Now she holds my failing body  
As the mold and moss take me.  
I feel her teeth growing back in as she presses  
A soft kiss to my bludgeoned skull.  
She lowers me into the unmarked, shallow grave we trade,  
And I rest, waiting for her to return.



## LIFE STAGES OF AN ARSONIST

*Deborah Brown*

i. my mom told me not to play with matches, not to talk to boys, not to leave the house past dark, not to cross the street. I brought wd40 for the door so the hinges stopped squeaking, learn to disappear like god did, so softly she never knew. I burnt my fingertips on my birthday, lighting candles alone in my room. of course I dreamed of hell as a kid, with the shrieking fire in the Alaskan woodstove right outside my bedroom.

ii. I guess I liked the risk in smoking out my dorm window; terror tastes like living, just like bruising feels like love. I can see you now, my little anarchist, in that first house we broke into. we spent the night drinking wine we hated just because it was worth so much. it tasted better on your lips, I guess; that bible on the floor behind me, I'd admitted I want as many things between me and god as possible. how altruistic, for you to offer me a sin this abhorrent. I bought a nicotine addiction to match the one you were gifted, tried to match you breath for breath, because just like adam, as soon as you leave eden, I'll be ready for death.

iii. gasoline. zippo lighters. the green sky's less nauseating behind orange light. I choked on the smoke, but you, already practiced, stood beside me, quietly, until the walls were gone completely, your green eyes so angry that I cried; it was hard to believe I was there to see the forests start the fire. now like jesus christ, I'm burning all my stages, crawling back to that first high.

## DIVINATION

*Fred Johnston*

*"I will be thy Gwyde" - John Dee.*

In the no-wheels caravan we'd made our home  
By a single candle and bottles of cheap beer  
A deck of playing cards, nothing Tarot  
Well into the wee cold unsleepable hours  
Harried by an unforgiving winter wasp  
The caravan rocking and rolling in a wet storm -

No women ever came there, I remember that  
None invited out of the musical pubs, the place  
Stank of unused maleness, private fretting -  
What woman would have lingered? None.  
And every day like every day; at night the cards  
Would crack like knuckles on the gummy flat

Table-top, a chart of irregular stains and spillage  
Fag-burns where the single candle played lighthouse  
To all the accidental drowning, the surfacing  
And the certain sinking; and we sitting like dry  
Bones, brittle as bone, waiting to be found  
Rapping the table in hopes the sound might surface.



TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE  
*Frank Boyce*

THE APOLOGY I WRITE MY FRIEND AFTER FALLING HEADFIRST INTO  
THE WOMAN HE LOVES:

*Chisom Eze*

Dear Chike,

They were playing Nonso Amadi's Tonight/  
And the club was smeared the colour of supple sin/  
She leaned into my sternum / your girl/  
With reckless abandon / with no fear of spiralling/  
The same way she has taught you to love/  
Her sweat sticky-sweet/  
Her eyes an oasis/  
I drown / before I learn/  
All the many names for water/  
You know I am a fool/  
For layered lipstick / and epileptic hips/  
For red dresses / and undressing/  
Twenty-three and clicks away from becoming / a criminal / the crime / the crime  
scene/  
I gripped her waist / the only way I knew how/  
Like a trigger / panga / a killing thing/  
I sometimes think I was born full to the brim/  
Of liquor and nighttime/  
Or I was born the liquor itself / and she/  
Nighttime / eclipsing the lights/  
I cannot say for certain/

Which or what/

Only that I tried/

In a moment of clarity / to disentangle our parts / root and shoot both/

To say / No/

This is all wrong / in every way a thing can be/

But she held me like a grudge/

Thighs built thick for entrapment/

And hummed/

If you'll do something wrong/

Better do it right/

Her hand / lava on my thigh / coaxing/

Her back / a byzantine arch / inverted/

I the dome into which she falls up / hip-deep/

I swallowed mouthfuls of her skin/

This is not the apology I started/

Out willing it to be / brother/

I think what I am trying to say is that lust is the unruly cousin of love/

I think what I am trying to say is that I kissed her/

And she tasted like forever/

I think what I mean to say is that I truly am sorry/

But / God / I do not know that I am



HEART  
*Jim Xi Johnson*

UNSOLVED  
*Terri Metcalfe*

A bracelet, a flowered skirt,  
a black rose tattoo on sun-dried skin,  
the dent left by a rhinestone tooth-gem –

gone –

now encased in a refuse bin,  
a suitcase failing to sink,  
a disused rainwater well,

a black notice.

Reduced to phenotypes,  
some rough size of you,  
your movements tracked by diet,  
known but unknown.

Someone left you malnourished,  
your age range the span of a generation.  
Someone rolled you in carpet,  
tidied away your frayed ends.

Shrunken gums cling to teeth worn down,  
like a mother who cannot let her child go,

like clouds heavy with sorrow,  
they search for a place to settle.

*The remains of 22 unidentified women were found across Northern Europe.  
Part of Operation Identify Me, they are all believed to have been murdered.*

## LOVER, FIGHTER

*Jack Power*

All I can see is a body in the gutter,  
Kicked to a pulp, within an inch of life  
And the all-seeing crowd fleeing.  
And there must be blood in those opal eyes  
Dying  
His hair a damp, stiff crimson.

But I don't know anything about him, really,  
Or the dark cloud that herded his thoughts  
And led him to cross the pitch,  
The greenest of miles,  
Into the alleyway before the terrace  
To settle, finally, behind the black rubbish sacks.

Something must have crawled in to rot,  
Some gross vermin or mania.  
Or was it just another way to cry for help, to scream my name?  
Himself, tossed to the tarmac tonight,  
Only to do it all again next week.  
Caught in a gory circle, spiralling.

I knew, insofar, he was growing aimless,  
Tracing a clockwise trail around that backward town  
That we had learned to loathe in silence.  
He grew up too quietly here,  
Humming and mumbling and grasping at straws.  
Oh, did I ever show him love? And did I even wish him well?

Down on his luck and breathing scarce air,  
He goes to fight another backstreet cat.  
He smiles through the tears of his wet nose,  
His schoolbag backpack crushed as his soul.  
And when I told him to not go quietly,  
I never meant to kick and scream and bleed.



RAMPANT- AN OPEN LETTER FOR FR. SEAN SHEEHY  
*Elaine Westnott-O'Brien*

A sin, you say?  
Sex between two men,  
Two women: a mortal sin?

We'll go to hell, you say?  
The promotion of abortion?  
*The lunatic approach of transgenderism?*

Take me straight to hell.  
Let me dance with Freddie Mercury,  
Sing with George Michael.

I will carelessly whisper  
To whoever will listen  
That I don't want to break free.

I am free.

Better to dance with the devil  
Of same love and true self

Than crouch in a pew tolerating  
The poison spittle of ignorance.

Better to be who you are  
And with the one you love

Than worship at an altar  
Of empty promises and full quivers.

I shiver at the thought  
That I am among those who see me,  
My children, my life, my wife,  
As a black mark.

I will not go back to the dark.  
I take up my pen.  
O trespass sweetly urged.  
Give me my sin again.



THRUM  
*Frank Boyce*

## DAYS OF THE WEEK

*Kate Durant*

'Does he know what day it is?' they ask.  
Head on one side. Lips forming a sympathetic purse.  
Silently tutting at the thought of Friday becoming Wednesday, or the horror  
of a never ending week  
of Mondays. Clinging to the layperson's diagnostic dementia tool of knowing  
what day of the week  
it is.  
As if it matters what we call these long days of doing nothing.  
Slowly.  
But as it happens, he does know.  
Except of course on those days when he doesn't.

'How is he?' they continue, not so sotto voce, with the encouragement of a  
raised brow and a head  
thrown vaguely in his direction.  
'Him?' I question rhetorically, 'Him sitting beside me?'  
I turn to Him, 'How are you?'  
He looks at me steadily, giving the question his full consideration, blinking,  
before replying  
carefully, 'I'm fine thank you very much.'  
He answers by rote like a child thanking an aunt for an ill-fitting Christmas  
jumper.  
He is nothing if not unfailingly polite.

We've known each other a long time this man and me since our eyes met  
across a crowded  
exhibition hall. Giving birth to a love that transcended the Ideal Home's  
offering of the multi-task  
vegetable peeler and the life affirming power of the wet-dry mop.  
What more can I tell you?  
It was, it is, love at first sight.  
Eventually, as was always going to be, drawers were cleared and space made  
in the wardrobe.  
A shelf in the bathroom was dedicated to his maleness, and our weekend life  
became our wonderful,  
fabulous everyday life.  
Until it wasn't.

It started with his body, leaving us feeling betrayed and bereft and  
bewildered.  
'Got that you know,' he said one morning as his coffee cooled on the table in  
front of him, eyes

looking past me, as we listened to the radio advertisement selling the magic blue pill of Tír na nÓg.  
And so it began.

The limpness of his body humiliatingly impossible to hide, the mind easier to mask but, as long day followed longer night, the disorder of his thoughts began to mimic the dysfunction of his body.

I read to him at night, trying to reassure him through the poetry of Gabriel Fitzmaurice and other men and women of great words, because it was true, 'Just to be beside him was enough.'

But no amount of poetry could stem the advancing tide of depression, with its unrelenting waves that seeped out under the bedroom door and washed around the house.

Making the easy difficult, and the difficult impossible, as this three dimensional man faded from the technicolour of our past to the sepia of our future.

Conversation waned.

The fountain of our conversation, always overflowing, had finally, tragically, run dry.

There was, it seemed, nothing left to say.

'We'll sort this,' I assured him whilst desperately trying to assure myself.

He looked at me briefly, saying nothing as he nibbled his finger nails. Looking in wonder at his

blood bruised hands as if inspecting the hands of another.

'Do you love me,' I asked as my pride blushed with embarrassment.

He looked at me blankly through cold eyes, not sure what I was asking, and even less sure of the answer.

'I don't know,' he shrugged, as he closed his eyes with indifference.

He packed his overnight bag one day with a book, a toothbrush and a pair of socks, only to leave it by the door as he drove off.

As bewildered as I, both of us trying to get away from this.

This thing.

Whatever it was.

His brother phoned that night.

'He's here you know,' he said carefully.

'I thought he might be,' I replied with similar care.

'He doesn't seem to know why he's here.'

'No,' I agreed, nodding into the sightless phone, 'I don't suppose he does.'

He came home days later, dragging his bewilderment behind him as the corner pieces of the jigsaw began to find their place, which is always the start of filling in the sky. Or of the sky falling in.

We made our way heavily to consultants and the unreliable, yet reassuringly omnipresent, Doctor Google.

‘What can we do?’ I asked following tests which provided evidence of that which we refused to name.

‘Where do we go now?’ I questioned, pen in hand, as I sat on the edge of the hard hospital seat.

Planning ahead.

Eager to start the journey on the road that would return him to me.

My eyes met those of the doctor, while he closed his with disinterest.

‘There are,’ she smiled kindly, this lovely lady doctor who carries the weight of so many endings on her slight shoulders, ‘Maybe some supplements that can help.’

I look up from my laptop as I type, he’s laughing at a much loved and often repeated episode of Fawlty Towers and I smile.

He feels the warmth of my attention and looks past me, his eye caught by the dog sprawled on the couch.

‘Hello Lucy,’ he says to the dog in a broad cockney accent.

‘Lucy’ jumps down and lazily licks him, she doesn’t care that her name is Ivy and that he is

speaking in an unfamiliar accent.

You see, it’s not about the days of the week.

Real love doesn’t care what day of the week it is.

## CROWS ARE ONE THING

David Lohrey

I.

She had this air. This way.  
Like a gull: over water, land, you name it.

II.

This is my life. My...uh.  
She was everywhere.  
She painted.  
Charming, fresh breath, fragrant.  
Plein Air. Not plain but *plein*; natural.

III.

Air borne disease.  
It'll soon die down.  
Sea air, sure. On the river, same thing.

IV.

We had to air out the room before we could sell.  
The realtor insisted on getting a pro. A *team*, he called it.  
Not a trace.  
They don't take writers. They don't want writers.  
They don't want you to have stuff going on, you know.  
They had a novelist once; it didn't work out.  
That is why they prefer losers. They're not looking for a star.

V.

He runs every day before sunrise, by the air terminal.  
His wife died there. Hit by a bus. Right out front.  
The bus was struck from behind and she got beneath, *trapped*.

VI.

There's not much air pollution here. Not *here*.  
Most of it's from China. Dust. Air's yellow. Yellowish.  
It hangs.  
It flows in; it swims. People can't see, let alone breathe.

VII.

Nothing wrong with a little air; we need air.  
Wanna join?  
Listen.  
Just listen.  
The gulls; there's a mist. The fog is like a mist.

VIII.

Yeah, that was her.  
We got to listen to her live. She sounded nervous. She was on the air, *live*.  
Around the world; it is hard to grasp

IX.

I don't like the air. I don't.  
Do you?  
Just a crack, yeah.  
More? I said a crack. It's the clouds; they look like rocks.

IX.

We'll be asphyxiated. Better open a window.  
Don't kid yourself.  
They're cunning. They *are*. They hide, suddenly vanish.  
Mosquitos. They're smart; and then come out while one is asleep.  
They're like fish. Not the bottom of the lake but the bottom of the room.

XI.

I can't breathe. I feel winded.  
Put on the air.  
There's a thing, a whatever: no air from 3 to 5.  
To prevent black-outs or brown-outs.  
The sun. We're not living; we're drifting. Floating.

XII.

We need trees; more trees, forest darkness, a black forest.

XIII.

There are long-standing grievances to be aired.  
They almost came to blows.  
It's the salt. Everything is sun-bleached, old and worn.

XIV.

I stepped out to get some air.  
You went by train?  
“Give me air.”  
You weren’t driving, were you?  
It’s all grass; as the crow flies, man.

XV.

Air, not heir.  
Air.  
There is no air.  
There is no money.



## GREG TWO

*Jenkin Benson*

Lesser Greg slandestine nicknames all the lifeguards had nicknames we murmured hot lips the breakroom shed grotesque dripping nearness he knew Second Greg he knew

80s baby millennial his body catholic cherub statue body he burned a lot stared a lot too. longed lounged strange he would ask sunbathers for their middle names he would arrive two hours early to pick the best starting place drop slide station 6

Raylyn. fake redneck manager not a real redneck aged ribeye loungeneck “hey Greg early Greg stop clocking” wild Greggy Greg not handled well. wasn’t a guyling to handle

hour into the shift he shat on one of the lifeguard chairs

retaliation prole squat forensically speaking

no feces in the water no shitty surface tension schmo careful tow careful the family aquatic zone quarantined by the head Mark parkhead Mark pitiable unapproximating Mark

Raylyn delegated the dourest 15 year old “shock it chemically” “shock it” “shock it” delvecessant

Des Moines so unknowably vast putrid primordial sentient at the ready to seep into our flip flops

blessed early dismissal best thing Lesser Greg ever shit appreciable act prodigious tenure

you could barely even see the stain the next day



CIGARETTE  
*Alan Murphy*

## FLAMINGO

*Siobhán McLaughlin*

In the garden it goes. Floozy  
of the bird world - neon,  
tacky, flashy, plastic -  
a stick-it-to-the-neighbours  
kind of garden gnome.

Not elegant or subtle,  
pink as a fist in the face -  
the flamingo is all flamboyance  
grace a lost case, just look  
at the neck on it, literally.

Occupies pride of place  
at my front door  
in fuchsia all-weather  
rebel flair. Says conformity is crazy,  
and life's a party –  
hurry, let's hula.

EIGHT O'CLOCK  
*Aaron Kavanagh*

He stood outside the hotel, looking at his reflection in the window. He kept pushing his cowlick back down. God, or whoever created this unjust universe, had only permitted three strains of hair for the front of his head, and one of them always refused to align with the others.

She said they would meet at eight. While he was the one to initiate it, she was the one to choose the place and the time. He was just happy to be there. Besides, he was always adaptable, never having to check a schedule.

He looked at his phone and saw that he had fifteen minutes to kill. Should he sit inside for fifteen minutes or text her that he was there early? Overcome with the burden of this decision, he did neither.

“When did it get so cold, all of a sudden?” he wondered, now suddenly aware of the conditions he was in. He could feel each little movement of wind go through his naked, ungloved hands; leaving a residual kiss of frost on his bones as they went.

At least it wasn't raining anymore, although the little impressions that the rain left on the just- barely oversized topcoat that his dad had unknowingly lent him kept the memory of ten minutes ago alive.

He remembered a factoid: somebody who had worked on the film *Barry Lyndon* had said that shooting in Ireland was difficult because Ireland is in the Gulf Stream and, therefore, the weather changes unexpectedly. For no discernible reason, he tended to remember things like that. He had never even seen *Barry Lyndon*.

He looked down at his body and saw stains on his shirt and jeans that hitherto hadn't existed. He licked his thumb and began rubbing the offending spots but to no avail.

He worried about the cold sore that his mother assured him wasn't noticeable before he had left the house and that the homeless man around the corner from the hotel, from whom he had gotten a second opinion, had conferred couldn't be seen. Using his two index fingers, he widened the side of his lip where the sore was and stared at it for twenty seconds straight. Truth be told, he couldn't see it either, but he felt it. He knew it was there.

His stomach cramped. Should he cancel and go home? He had never done this before. He had barely even spoken to a woman before. Cancelling seemed like the right decision; so much so that his stomach stopped aching when his brain momentarily convinced it into believing this was to be his course of action. He thought of the pain and embarrassment he could spare, and then he thought of the money he could save. He was between jobs, and he couldn't afford to be needlessly extravagant.

He decided that he had gotten this far, so he may as well go through with it. He looked at his phone again and it read 19:55. He took a deep breath, which seemed to ease his stomachache and, almost like his nervous system entered pilot mode, he walked to the front of the hotel. He went to the ATM by the hotel's entrance and took out exactly €150 and chose the "Continue without receipt" option while completing the transaction.

This was to be his spending cap for the night. The feeling of the three €50 notes in his hand surprisingly eased him. He felt a sense of confidence that this cash was tangible evidence of him going outside of his comfort zone, with an accompanying pang of pre-emptive regret at the monetary hit that he knew he would feel when it was no longer in his hand. Not only was this night out costing him the €150, but the additional bus fare in and out of town and the 50c that he had felt obligated to give the homeless man in exchange for his medical opinion. All of this money he was burning just to satiate his selfish gene's desire to replicate. His hatred for his own body now went beyond just aesthetics.

Walking into the lobby, it seemed grander and more elegant than the exterior had led him to believe it would be. Despite having spent the last ten minutes looking at his reflection, he couldn't even remember how he looked after taking it all in. All he could think of were the stains and the cold sore and how much more apparent they must be under this synthetic lighting.

"Good evening, sir," a man in a suit said to him, causing him to jerk suddenly out of his awe. The man in the suit appeared a bit startled by this reaction but professionally continued with his obligated civility. "Can I help you with anything?"

"No," he replied without complete conviction through a repeated forced smile that would only stay on his face for a millisecond at a time. "I'm fine."

The man in the suit gave him an understanding and courteous smile and a nod, then walked away.

His stomach rumbled again. "Oh, God," he thought. He had to go to the toilet. Public toilets were not exactly within his comfort zone, but then again none of the events of this night was. Reluctant but without options, he entered the men's room.

The restroom smelled like cinnamon and eucalyptus and was equally as neat and pristine as the lobby. Classical music played. Was it Mozart? Beethoven? Bach? None of the above? He had no idea. They all sounded the same to him, but he liked it when he heard it.

After waiting for the only other gentleman present to leave, he entered a cubicle and sat on the lukewarm toilet seat; all too aware of the little dins outside of his stall. He tried to distract himself.

He took out his phone and began looking at the photos of her from the website. He took in a breath and closed his eyes. As the sound of impact from the toilet water occurred, a notification from his phone went off and startled him. It was a text from her.

“Are you still coming?” it read.

“I’m here now,” he texted back. “Where will I meet you?”

“Room 308,” she replied. “Knock twice so I know it’s you.”

NATHAN

*Pippa Molony*

It is dark in this crowded room  
A makeshift carpeted commune  
Tonight there are  
Four of us children squeezed together in the sofa bed,  
Satelliting us maybe five others in bunks and bean bags.  
Everyone seemingly asleep  
But for us two.

I feel excited  
Lying beside him  
I am the only girl in the bed of four and the only one who is  
Wearing a shirt  
Because at nine I'm aware I should wear one? It would feel  
Wrong not to, even if I am hot in it  
Nathan has put his arm around me  
I think: This is love.  
I think he is probably the most handsome boy I have ever met.  
And he asks  
Quietly  
"Pippa, do you love me?"  
And there is a silence.

If I had really thought  
If I was truly convinced  
That we were the only two awake in this moment  
I'd have said Yes  
Because It feels electric, I feel electric and bold and afraid and  
All of these things at once.

And maybe it's for all of these things together that  
I laugh  
And suddenly the entire room erupts into laughter  
And Nathan is quiet  
And Patrick screams "PIPPA DO YOU LOVE ME"  
And cackles — and Tamara cackles  
And I join in the cackling too.  
I feel so wrong, again, to do it —  
Yet I feel I have no other option but to join in  
And Nathan is so quiet  
And it feels like the entire room is asking when James asks:  
"Pippa, do you love him?"  
"Pippa say something?"  
And I can't say anything.  
Nathan is quiet

So I say to Nathan:  
“I’ll tell you tomorrow.”

Nathan takes his hand from my shoulder  
And it takes me a long time to fall asleep  
And the next morning  
In the kitchen  
Saving face, I’d tell him... No.



## TENANT GUIDELINES (FOR OLD FRIENDS)

*Cormac Culkeen*

No late night parties  
or early morning ones.  
No freezing winter rain  
    bare knuckle boxing  
        rum fuelled wrestling tournaments.

No pissing in the fireplace,  
throwing kettles at guests,  
    peanut butter wall murals  
inviting the T.V licence inspector  
for beer and a spliff.

No death metal at six am.  
No techno WHATSOEVER.  
No vomiting in the fridge  
bonfires in the kitchen  
    warfare disguised as cooking,  
striding around in your undies  
sweat flecked with DTs.

No launching chickens at neighbours,  
wheelie bins containing the apparently dead,  
burying of kitchen implements in the garden.

No stacked speakers on the lawn  
pointed at the house opposite.  
**STAY AWAY FROM THE STEREO.**  
Just respect each other's boundaries:  
I'm sure we'll all get on  
Just fine.  
Just.  
Fine.

## ODE TO DUBLIN

*Kelsey Ammons*

I'd be a degenerate for you,  
Dublin. Maybe I already am,  
because I manipulated everything I ever told You  
& maybe I lied in that cafe on Essex Quay  
and again

I'm heartbroken in Blackrock,  
because I told you I'd be there next year.

(Fuck I'm such an asshole.)

A filthy, sticky conscience  
about You,  
Dublin.

That's what I've got.

I'd be a degenerate for you,  
Dublin. Standing at the Sandymount DART stop  
with a soiled temperament -

I see You in the pavement, there,  
dirty. and, again

I see you in that Sutton parking lot,  
scrubbed clean. and,

I see you in my carved and scared elbow,  
etched

so precisely, in the skin  
of this licentious person. Yet,  
I'm not there with You,  
& I'm the reason why.

I'd be a degenerate for you,  
Dublin. I'd do even worse for You. God,  
so much worse. But,

I'm repenting, I swear  
every few fleeting moments: flashes and slivers  
of greying sage green, and  
cuts of that Her's song  
are bleeding into my head. I hear You.

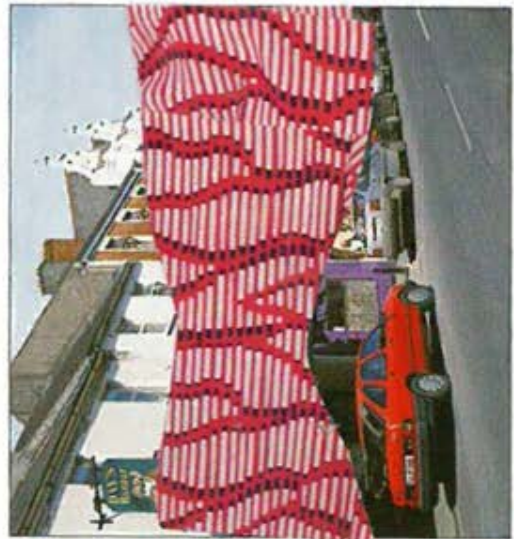
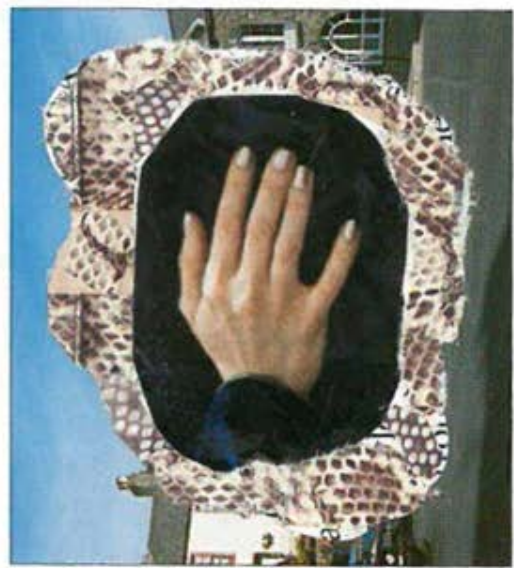
I'm home, sick for you;  
a disgusting little human I must be,  
for leaving you  
in the freezer aisle of the Lidl on Aungier St.

I'd be a degenerate for you,  
Dublin. I'd never write again for You.  
    (Fuck, I promise.) But,  
maybe it'll never mean anything.  
How can such an unprincipled corpse  
ever pay back those 20 quid?  
or auburn firelight at 28 Seapoint?  
or unfiltered joyous insanity  
felt hurtling down that hill in Howth?

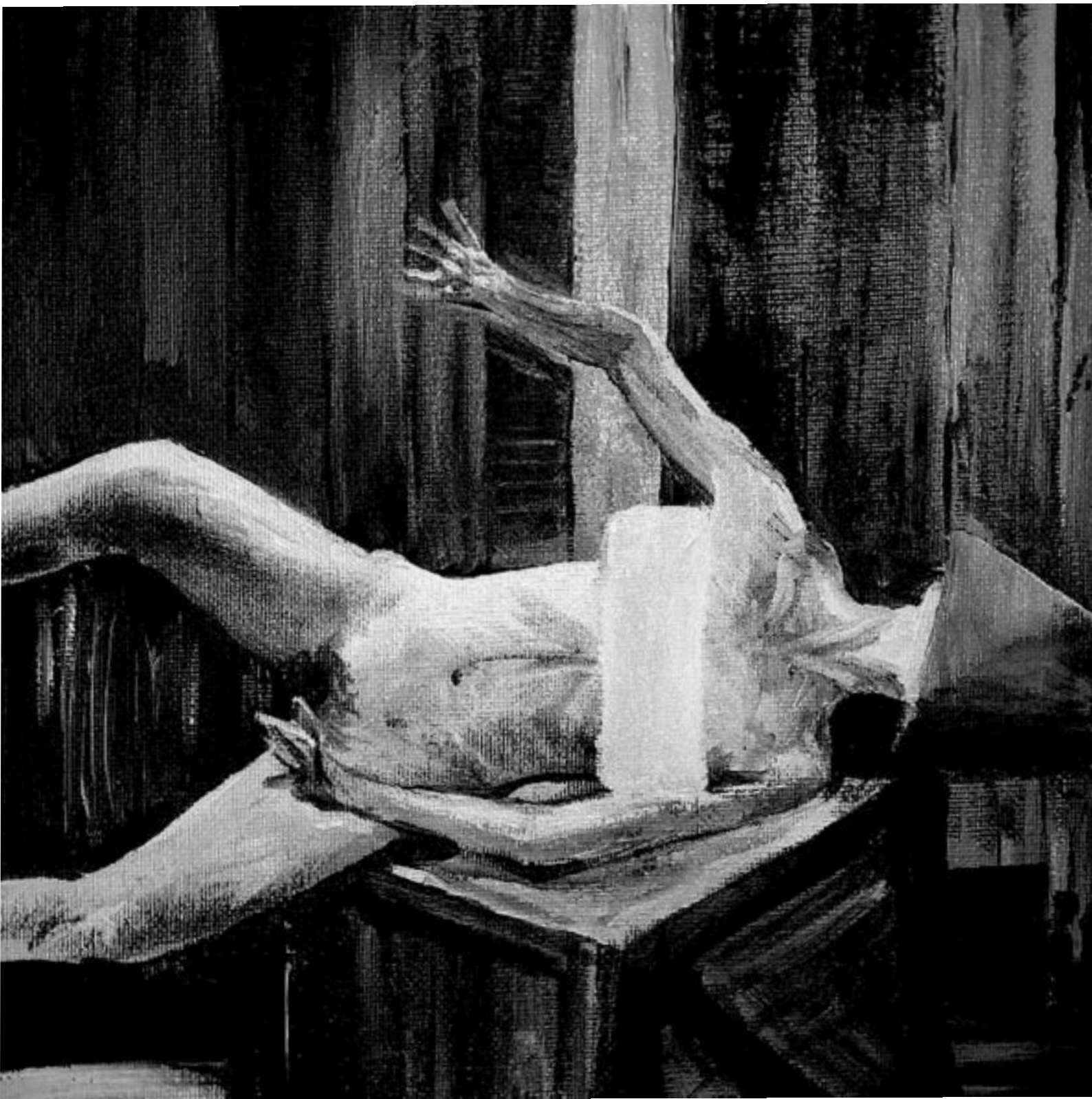
I'd be a degenerate for you,  
Dublin. I'd give up Cloud Picker,  
lattes for instant coffee.  
I'd practice an agnostic lent for You. But,  
what could You want (?)  
with such a slimy apparition?  
Maybe,  
you'd let me haunt you,  
just for October?  
(or be the silt  
washed down your storm drains in November?)

I'd be a degenerate for you,  
Dublin. Yet,  
I already have those tattoos and piercings  
from the shop by the Liffey,  
those dents in my shins  
from that skateboard You had.  
I'm a debased entity and  
I think I like the taste of it. But,  
not if I lose you.  
Can I be your sweet little fucking degenerate? Or,  
is this all too much for You?

I'd pitch a fit for you,  
Dublin.



POSTCARD  
*Alan Murphy*



DINNY GO IN DER  
*Shannon O'Doherty*

“I’VE NEVER HAD SEX WITH RYAN”

*Katie Foley*

she says, and every slut’s neck snaps.  
She’s sitting criss-cross apple sauce  
on the damp smoking area floor,  
cigarette ash surrounding her like sugar.

The sweetest girl in the club.

“I don’t know, just hasn’t happened.”  
Shyly, shivering all doe-eyed  
and I’m the head(giving)lights.  
Like she hasn’t just made me into a Black Swan.  
Scribbled “WHORE” in greasy lipstick  
on the bathroom mirror except instead of the bathroom mirror,  
it’s on my fucking face.

Anyway, femme fatale is fatal for a reason.  
I should have seen this coming when I first stuffed my bra  
with toilet paper and stared at myself.

I was a new-born teenager. It was time to be sexy.

I crumpled tissues for my arts and crafts project,  
and used the children’s scissors in the cupboard  
to slice the bottom off an old t-shirt. There was  
no need for that half of myself anymore.  
And when I was done, I took twenty pictures  
and never showed anyone. I think that’s when I  
knew what the word shame meant. Like, actually knew.

And when she tells me this, I feel older in the  
sense that I’ve realised how young I am.  
I must’ve spent a century being fifteen, squeezing  
myself into skirts and then pulling them off the second I’m  
through his door and has anyone else noticed that  
every 19-year-old boy’s bedroom smells the same  
or is that just smell of fear?

That’s not rhetorical. I want an answer.

## JULIA AND THE ARCHBISHOP

*Thomas Elson*

The church was quite basic. A converted nineteenth century Women's Christian Temperance Union meeting hall with simple icons, a recently-installed iconostasis, a fellowship area into which sixty or so souls gathered after Sunday services.

Julia may have been overlooked amongst the cluster of morning images - children squirming, men with freshly scrubbed red faces, women patting their hair, smoothing skirts, the movements of the parish priest whose assigned task on this day was to cater to the visiting archbishop.

As the archbishop walked through the open doors, a crescendo reverberated from the choir. He paused in the narthex, pulled at the stripes adorning the sleeves of his North Sea blue cassock, then strode into the sanctuary trailed by colourfully-attired priests, each carrying a small mound of white and gold vestments. In the narthex several adult acolytes were followed by a few women – their heads covered - carrying bouquets of red roses. Then – as chair of the parish council – I trailed behind them.

I had known the archbishop for a few years and witnessed his struggle to maintain humility amidst his privileged life unencumbered by the complexities of a family - albeit without its intimacies. The pull of his vow of chastity was evident as his eyes ascend the terraces from hemline to waistline to bust-line to hairline with periodic pauses at the exposures. It was a constant struggle for him – for anyone – to remain humble and chaste. It was his daily test.

As soon as I entered the sanctuary that morning, I veered from the procession and walked toward Julia, a young woman with a child's face radiating an eagerness that camouflaged her deep skepticism. One of that galaxy of twenty-first century women whose directness can sometimes be shocking - unburdened as they are by many of the contradictions and barriers that constrained their mothers and grandmothers.

For years during Sunday services we sat next to each other. I knew she watched intently imitating when I stood, sat, crossed myself, or uttered the Lord's Prayer. That morning, as I approached, she mouthed, "Hi, Mike. I saved you a seat." She had progressed from her first visit, when, after communion, I offered her a small square of bread. She had waved her hand, jerked her head back as if repelled, and said, "No.No." Over the course of the next two years, she would whisper questions during the service, and,

to my surprise, I could answer most of them.

She and I watched as parishioners parted creating a funnel through which to guide the archbishop into the centre of the sanctuary. After he donned his richly-ornamented vestments, he strode forward, carrying not one but two highly-decorated ceremonial staffs. The faithful crossed themselves and bowed. Several parishioners reached to touch the hem of his garment - continuing the tradition from the Gospel of Luke.

After the tediously long, incense-clouded service, the archbishop walked to the ambo, waved a broad sign of the cross with one staff in each hand as if Moses parting the Red Sea. Once his blessing was bestowed, he, attired in his dark blue cassock, nestled in the centre spot of a long table in the fellowship hall flanked by priests, deacons, and subdeacons all in black. His food was served to him by auxiliary members who smiled and bowed. They returned several times to fill his glass with his favourite bottled water.

Parishioners eager for acknowledgement interrupted his lunch, kissed his hand, then bowed as he extended a blessing, after which he would reach for his fork to finish whatever highly-seasoned concoction an elderly Greek or Russian widow prepared. When approached by a younger woman, his professionally dour face flushed, a grin appeared, and, as was his wont, his eyes grew active.

“Pardon me...” “I don’t mean to interfere, but...” “Could you...” “May I...” Each time, the archbishop raised his head, placed his fork on the edge of his plate, and repeated a version of - “Yes, my child” - if they were younger. Or “Certainly” - if older.

Later, in my capacity as head of the parish council, I sat next to the archbishop to offer the symbolic gift of bread. As tradition dictated, he sprinkled salt across the crust, set it aside, and continued to greet people.

Minutes later, Julia approached the archbishop’s table. She stood silently until the archbishop raised his head. “Yes, my child.”

Julia nodded, then replied. “Oh, I’m not here for you. I wanted to talk to Mike before he left.”



## DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

*Adrian Harte*

To your wristy, impasto  
strokes. Your unlined face. Your  
upward eyes and songs of praise.

Your nothingness. Your  
pianist's fingers. Tremble.  
What is it you fear? Seek

my scars and make new  
wounds. Our every act is loving,  
treacherous, and violent.

Kiss me like a crucifix  
on Good Friday. The priest  
will wipe it away. I need

more sacrament for my  
sacrifice. Let other girls  
create new loves. Mirrors fall

lights crack. You pierce me,  
spit at me, sometimes see me.  
I search you like a surgeon.

I leave her and him and every score  
and sore in the past and push  
into your present.

Let our bones glide and grind  
in stolen seconds. Pluck  
the ribs from this breast

for your bow and quiver.  
Let me kneel before you, watch  
you, make a new ritual. Soon

our dance will be done,  
You will watch me expire.  
Like all hope. Like 1959.

We'll return to colder beds  
and slower time, lower  
eyes and softer bodies. Now

this rent bed, this hidden hotel,  
this dark wood, these hushed phones,  
this middle of day are us and us only.



PYRE (DESTROYER OF WORLDS)  
*Alan Murphy*

## PYRE

*Kevin MacAlan*

Maybe I'm wrong.  
Maybe. I'll never know.  
Maybe the rubble and dust  
Has buried the truth  
With the newborn,  
And one day we'll stop;  
Stop asking,  
Stop caring,  
Stop feeling existential shame.  
Maybe we'll all grow older  
And shorter of time  
And just be glad  
For what we have,  
Forgetting what was taken,  
Forgetting light darkened,  
Right wronged,  
Might weakened  
And gave to pain.  
Maybe, as our lives shorten,  
Those that were cut  
Will fade.  
We'll submit  
To the narrative:  
"War is hell."  
"The right to defend."  
"Let's not forget  
Who the real victims are."  
Let's not.  
Let's not forget.  
Let's not forget  
What we may never know,  
But what we feel:  
The indisputable truth  
Of venerable victimhood  
Is belied by hate,  
Enfeebled by anger,  
Sullied as a scaffold  
For a pyre.  
Never again  
Meant never.

## A RÍASTRAD IN THREE ACTS

*Aoife-Marie Buckley*

I: Night

Tonight, the Tiresias in me has shown up.  
Back at this old feeling and reeling in the new -  
Tonight I'll write and writhe into he  
from she  
And tomorrow her memories will be a distant echo  
Felt in the tunnels of me -

II: Dawn

This morning of mine,  
The new - is - of ours,  
Never alone having already been her and now them -  
Sits with doppio vision,  
And knows, simply knows,  
The deepest movement has taken place, changing face -  
A multiplicity of being realised and already been.

My inner Panoptes, grown from my seasoned Gaia.  
Paint me now and I'll have six wings and be covered in eyes - a form only I'll  
recognise.  
And really the only difference overnight?  
— Trust.

The real in me is myth to you,  
and my letting go is to hold all of me,  
All of we.

III: Day

Awoken self is clawing her way out-  
A ríastrad interrupted,  
A mythic inner warp-spasm made real in sleepless battle,  
Always threatening, but not yet a hideous thing.  
Somehow even here the night not robbed me of the steer,  
With shooting star between the eyes, I'll try to strike down all my own cursed  
enmity.  
Energy un-bursting, body uncrusting,  
Every kingly apple spiked by my own  
words,

Oh, what bounty which feels lost -

## **BIG HEART (A MICROCOSM)**

*Blaise Gilburd*

Place moves like madness, fucking madness and it moves. Drink runs down my sleeve as I go over a foot. Need to piss, got to get through, find the bathroom. Round from the bar I reckon but Jesus this place is packed, the music is like a jackhammer in my brain stem.

At the toilets there is only half my beer left, more went on the floor than down my throat. Place smells seriously rank. I try not to breathe so much as I hold my cock in one hand and take a good drink from my glass and piss hard into the chipped urinal. I finish the thing and set it on the sink. Rinse my hands. Dryer is busted. I just rub them down my jeans.

It is not so dark that I cannot pick out the almost full pint left outside the bathroom. Bit cloudy, still looks good. I quick-sweep it from the side, move back out on to the floor.

We good. We perfect. We are okay.

I move to the centre of the dance and rock with the rest of them. Beer in the air and I try to have a good time and do my best not to think too much.

Sat down to piss the night before last, was dark when I came in but when I left the bathroom the light was streaming in. Pissed so hard I phased through time, I need to be more careful.

I wish I could stay down here, burrowed underground like a tick and everything blocked out by the thump of the speakers. Fuck, the beer tastes good, can't drink any without spilling it down my face though, going to lose half to the floor. People light up on the dance floor and boogie with a fag hanging loosely from their lips. The smell makes the craving begin to gnaw.

There is a sad song playing. Still a tune though, but I am listening to the lyrics too closely and can feel myself getting upset. That teary kind of drunk.

My beer is gone. I don't remember finishing it but I need another. I pat down my pockets to see how the funds are. From the jingle I think we might be able to manage another Pils. I move to the bar, through the thronging and the buzzing. I am shoved and stumble into the press of bodies and struggle to pull myself up again. All I have to do is find the bar. I push through the crowd, don't look at their faces, just push through until I get a hand on the bar. I heave myself onto a stool and let my forehead drop on the counter.

Cold and smooth.

I place my palms flat and lift my boulder head back onto my shoulders. My brain spins around like a sunk billiard ball as I become upright and exhale deeply. How I made it, *ich habe keine Ahnung*. I take a breath and peel open and focus on the row of spirits behind the bar, all green hued. I am fucked, thank fuck. The bartender is ignoring me I think, I am happy just watching it all rush around me. The floor is shiny, the air is thick and everyone is on the move.

A lad in a paddy cap swings in and leans beside me.

-Want a drink? he asks with an accent.

-Sure, why not, I reply.

He orders us *zwei Mexicaners*, thick and red in wide shot glasses

I lift the glass to my bottom lip and turn to face him.

-*Zum Wohl*.

And we chuck them back. It is like swallowing pulpy Tabasco and burns a little.

-Let's dance, he says and moves off into the crowd. I slide off my stool and hit the ground heavily.

He grins with his arms in the air, stomach isn't feeling so good now. I sway a bit with the music, the contents of my stomach rock like the ocean.

-Where you from, he shouts at my ear.

-Ireland, I say looking at my feet.

-Groovy, he says and steps back and begins to swing his head around.

We dance our way towards the DJ, the floor beats like a big heart under our feet. He isn't bad looking at all, but I can't take a man in a paddy cap seriously.

Chilli isn't sitting well, can feel the thickness of it in me.

-I'm not feeling so great.

-Are you okay?

-Just need some fresh air, I reckon.

-Lets go to the smoking area. He takes my hand and the place is collapsing around me when I close my eyes, I can feel the floor rushing up my throat. We reach the steps and go up and out. The air of the smoking area is like sticking my face in a freezer. The lad is in front of me, making long eye contact. Think about saying something but he has already swung in for the kiss.

Contents of my stomach rush over my lips and down his shirt.

-Sorr... more comes up, I grip his shirt with one hand and convulse.

-What the fuck, he says looking at the yellow stain down his front. He peels my fingers off him and moves back inside. I double over, hands on knees,

back undulating. I keep retching till nothing more comes up, and keep going still. Keep retching till it hurts, till I grip my sides and tears form in the corners of my eyes.

I spit onto the ground and my whole body moves in a wave again..

Do you notice when you are sad?

Place is so cold now, I shiver and feel more alone than I ever have. I pop the button and pull a joint from my shirt pocket. It looks a bit bent and sad; I hang it from my lips and dig a lighter out of my jeans. With a snap the first spark fails, then the second, then the third. This lighter is almost dead, I give it a shake and then try one more time and a flame springs to life, quivering delicately in my hand. I cup my palm around it and cradle it towards my face as the end of my joint begins to burn and crumble.

GIRLS NIGHT.



*Ella Mae Cromie*

Ate steak  
Talked about men who pushed their fingers into us  
Without asking

Blood pooled on the plate  
Ran down our chins  
we smeared it all down our white tops  
Over our chests and across our bellies

We threw back our heads//howled at the moon//danced barefoot over thorns  
Looped our arms through each other and poundedpoundedpounded on our  
breasts

Then,  
We rose from the table  
Ran the dishes under hot water and soap  
Brushed out our tangled curls  
Threw our gore stained clothes in the wash

And said,  
“this time next week?”



HEY HANDSOME  
*Helen Gwyn Jones*

IT'S 3AM IN THE CHIPPER AND A YOUNG MAN IS HAVING A CRISIS  
*Grant Burkhardt*

Long, dirty blonde hair shields his face,  
covers his stare, downward, empty between his legs.

The hands, heavy, holding up his forehead,  
ears begging, craning to hear his number called

so he can finally eat; the starch and bread  
soaking whatever he's done to his stomach.

Forty-nine, the counter hollers, and our man  
stands sharply, straightens up, then remembers

he's number fifty and plops back into his dwelling,  
lower this time, lower still, further into a corner.

I am familiar with this posture. Thank the almighty  
chipper that I have my food already. Chips can just be

chips, for me, tonight, thank god; they don't need to slop  
up a fresh chaos. I think of going over there to offer him

a few bites, just to get him through, but I can't bear  
the thought of seeing in his eyes what he's processing,

what he's coming to terms with—maybe the new knowledge  
of some capability, and then the culpability, and then the hunger.

Oh, my boy, what have you done tonight?

ROT

*Lily O'Byrne*

Old mould in our bathroom etches your face in my mind:  
Unclear, irregular, mildly inconvenient to get rid of,  
Few thoughts spared for but when considered,  
SIGH of exhaustion coming to find its way down and out.

See an opening, creep slowly down the walls, cling to pipes  
And damp unpleasant ceilings at every chance you get.  
Infiltration is your strongest asset, the ability to appear  
When least expected or desired, and try to disguise  
Your poisonous tendencies as a simple bother;

Nothing to be removed permanently  
And with force, banished forever

and clean, dry air only present.  
If only there was a fan assisted machine I could use  
To suck you out of my life, and pour you down the drain.

## THE NIGHT REVENUE WERE IN

*Declan Coles*

My head hurts.  
I shouldn't have went out last night,  
Definitely should not have gone to that second pub.  
My head hurts.  
I'm not nauseous, but I'm bloated and sickly.  
I never want to look at drink again.  
But alas, I work in a pub.  
Sometimes I wonder what my life would look like  
If I kept studying business?  
Not standing here serving the fucking  
Revenue Crowd. Fuck me.  
20 of them. All horrible.  
Each in their own agonising way.  
Rude, Loud, arrogant, stupid.  
And they're in charge of the country's economy.  
So many whiskey sours.  
I know most bars around here have barred them.  
But no, the owner's wife's aunt is organising the evening,  
So we can't kick them out.  
Typical Ireland. It's who you know.  
I know no one.  
Well, no one of any real importance.  
I can walk down the street and see people I know

The characters of Dublin society.  
the winos and pests:  
Pissy Pat and Racist Larry;  
They have been barred.  
Why can't one of the revenue get barred?  
That skinny one.  
The one who always gets four drinks  
In and then develops the attitude problem.  
Fuck, My head hurts.

Ciara walks in-  
She's the only reason I get through the night.

She's beautiful. Blonde hair with shimmering blue eyes.  
Why do you have to associate yourself with the revenue?  
I get it, a job is a job, but still.  
You're beautiful and kind

And got so excited that I remembered you  
From the last time.  
Was she flirting? Or was it that she was the only one there with any real  
decency.  
I hold silent hope, but it was shattered at  
The end of the night.  
She shifts the snot nose thin one.  
Of them all why him.  
They held on till last call.  
We Push them out with plastic cups  
And bribes to the night club across the river.  
Quiet.  
Eased the tepid flow of black water  
  
And creamy sea foam.

## APPLE

*Carol McGill*

My first bitter taste was the flesh of that apple. My tongue didn't know what to do with it.

Before that day, there was only sweet: mouthfuls of honey, sugary fruit always just in reach. I didn't know the word sweet. I didn't know there was anything else. It never occurred to me that I might need a point of comparison.

I blinked and realised the snake was watching me with inhuman eyes. Its long body twisted glistening round the branches of the tree. I looked away from it, around the glade, and wondered at the colour of the blooms, the grass, the sky. What was the cause of such a blue? Why couldn't I touch it? I had never thought to ask before.

A breeze ran through the glade and lifted my hair. I noticed the tang of my sweat for the first time. The curve of my stomach, swell of my breasts, knob of my knee. I flexed my muscles and touched my lips. I could still taste the apple on my fingertips.

I had never paid attention to my body before. On waking me, He told me He had made me. He mentioned Adam's rib and touched my side. I felt the bone inside me like it was glowing. I never questioned that I was His. If not His, then Adam's. Suddenly, though, my sticky fingers squeezed my own flesh, plucked at my hair. This body moved at my command. It was mine, it was me. There was a power in that.

Power all my own.

Was this the knowledge the snake spoke about?

It was still watching me. It had convinced me to take the apple, but I think it knew that I already desired it.

I turned my back on its cold eyes and went to Adam. I walked through soft grass, past the trees (pear and mango and pineapple and plum, all flush with fruit), through the stream (the cold of it shocked me as never before), through the glade of flower bushes heavy with the weight of their petals.

It all seemed made anew. I had wandered endlessly through this garden (these days I wonder for how long. There were no seasons, only sunshine and lush branches; I never bled until we left Eden, there was no pain to make me

count the days and months). Now I was striding, crushing the grass. I had purpose. I felt sharp. I was lush.

Adam was sleeping. His mouth a little open, his curls spilling. I shook his shoulder to wake him, my palm cupping his muscle. I felt a stirring low in me. He had touched me before. Somehow, though, this felt like the first time I had ever seen him.

I took another bite, and handed him the apple. He ate without question, without suspicion. Hungry for him, I watched him blink, and look with new eyes at the garden. I saw his wonder and anxiety, and I knew that I was not alone. I could have kept the fruit for myself. I didn't want to. I wanted him to feel as strong as I did. Adam has never forgiven me.

But he has never said he misses the ignorance of our former bliss.

Then Adam looked up, his eyes cutting over me, down to my toes. He looked at me with his new knowledge and I wanted him. Wanted him in ways I had never imagined.

Before I could touch him again, we heard His voice.

Adam's face flooded with fear. I could feel some of his panic – always being humble, we never had cause to dread. I realised I did not like the thought of Him looking at me. We went into the brush, tore leaves to hide ourselves. Adam's lip trembling.

I knew I had condemned us. I cursed the snake.

And yet. My mouth was still full with the flavour of the apple, and even then I did not regret the chance to taste it.

There were many punishments. For my sin, He told me, He would increase my pangs in childbearing. I did not know the meaning of that threat for years to come. (Adam and I had eked a living from the dirt for a long time already then. We knew the meaning of work, and hunger, and I would never tell either of them but I gleaned satisfaction from it. I liked the ache in my limbs. There was a dignity to creating the things we ate. It made me wonder, for my own amusement, if I had made us like gods after all. Of course, when my sons were grown, He played that joke against me.)

We were cast out of Eden that day. He put a guard at the gate, a flaming sword. Adam cried. I was scared of this new world.



He had told us we would die. Slain a deer and made us touch the carcass, to be sure we understood. She looked at me as the life drained from her eyes. Under His gaze I clutched her fur in my fist, to keep my hand from shaking.

Later though, in those first hours outside the gates, a thorn pierced my foot and I could touch my own blood. And it seemed appropriate. Death was the necessary price, to feel this alive.

We were given clothes from the poor deer's skin. Adam said they were a sign of His mercy. I wasn't so sure: though I was glad of the chance to hide my body from Him, I liked to see myself. And I wanted Adam to look at me that way again.

That first night we were cold. I'd never felt goose bumps before. We sheltered beneath unfamiliar trees. And I knew my own desire.

I wanted all of this life. I wanted to feel as alive as I ever could.

Once darkness fell, I stripped away our skins. I bit Adam's shoulder and pressed him into the dust.



STATUE  
*Jim Xi Johnson*

## UNOFFICIAL CHRISTMAS

*Katie O'Sullivan*

I lament for Mathias, the bearer of our sins,  
Of the various bodily fluids he so cruelly spills.

I mourn for the singers, the wannabe Mariahs,  
Who despair for the bathtub body slumped like a drunk Messiah.

It appeared in an instant, in the mixing bowl he spewed  
Every morsel he ever ate but only half-chewed;

Cornflakes, crisps and carrots diced,  
Scented with cider and old rum that's spiced.

'With the expulsion of the poison, now reckoning can begin'  
But Anna writhes in sorrow – she will never bake again.

Wielding an empty bottle, Bridgit yells, confounded,  
'Some sneaky motherfucker stole my gin and downed it!'

Three wise medical students were quick to step in;  
They dragged him to a borrowed tomb made of porcelain.

Adam sips apple cider, then stands to leave,  
Nods at Bridgit, 'Thanks a lot', and waves to David and Eve,

Who are bent over the body, trying to resurrect it.  
'Where'd Patrick go?' 'Well I dunno, I think he's in Electric?'

I glance about the tarnished room,  
At the crepe banner ripped clean in two.

We release our pained murmurs in the hall,  
Cradle injured hearts and weep for Man's Fall;

From Grace we'd departed,  
Though so gay and light-hearted;

We'd have never saw it come about,  
Had we not smelt a stomach turn inside out.

I will remember I lay witness to Man's original sin,  
When on that unofficial Christmas, Mathias stole Bridgit's gin.

## SMALL WAYS TO BE FERAL AND HUMAN

*Caroline Morris*

Break into a full out sprint when faced with a long stretch of flat road,  
Dip a finger directly into a jar of cream cheese frosting,  
Then a second when the first is not enough.  
Look at the moon and get an ache in your stomach,  
Swim in a dirty lake without worrying  
About bacteria and snakes,  
Jump between rocks and  
Fall and scrape your hand  
And jump again.  
Eat a dinner of meat and roots directly from a hot pan,  
Scream-cry and do not even try to muffle the sound,  
Sending it unapologetically into the vast, vibrating air.  
Dance to music with no words and a racing drumbeat  
Until you are slick with sweat.  
Until you, too, are something racing and without words.

## HE SITS IN O'HARE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT FOR 6 HOURS

*Jenkin Benson*

wifi fueled by orange juice pulp and divorce. signal frail chiropractors  
and cosmologists ask about the marx sticker on my laptop  
i tell them "no that's actually st. nicholas of myra" they shut they  
grin they "oh haha okay yeah" the fuck up crossing 1700 miles in a day  
the evil of it a. tattersall'd lad in the complimentary charger row  
whisperwhinges "*i review credit cards on youtube*" "*i'm up to 200 subs*"  
"*i make 85k a year deleting*" i desire a lake of attrition  
a feta and spinach croissant filled with pus financiers bully  
chrome and glass fitness tiktokers will be your next senators chicago  
cubs fans comprise the 4th largest terrorist organization on the planet  
"*i have sinned exceedingly in thought word and deed through my fault  
through my fault through my most grievous fault*" the geese snarl at  
the shins in my brain the geese murder the 4,370 engines in my shins  
(*even in canada geese are an invasive species*) i sip an iced caramel  
macchiato and suck up some mustache hairs they taste frankish and  
i think i'm into it the utmost pleasure of pissing alone heaven's ph 8.88  
dysward look at all this mobility all of these sapient tariffs  
"*uhhh folks all flights to the end of all things dallas have been  
delayed for three hours specifically cause you are all filthy and rotten*"  
to be devoured alive by several thousand pigeons how mirthful

HOW DIVINE

*Helen Jenks*

It goes like this:

breathe in, out.

How long has

your stomach been

empty, how long

have you feast

on rage?

Prone to anger

you shovel it

into your mouth

into your fingertips

as if you would use it,

you gentle creature,

as if you could tremble

just a bit more

and shake the earth

with each shudder

as if you could scream

in a language

someone could understand

as if every cadence

of the noise would

mean something, burn

something, for you have

felt fire as long as you

have lived

and every day you

stretch and touch some

unknown part of you

and cauterise it into

divinity  
for you are all of it  
the apples the sweet trees

the guilt which guards them  
and there has been guilt  
longer than you have lived

and when you shudder  
and hope the earth shakes  
with you, it remains

as it always has  
unmoved by prayer  
unmoved by tears

so you beg, and beg, and beg  
but the words simply  
aren't there



## SUNDAY EVENING BLUES

*Úna Nolan*

I thought it was loneliness until I realised I was not lighting enough scented candles and watching the flame or calling my best friend in Australia to hear her laugh or putting too much jam toast with too much butter and letting it all run off onto my fingers and wiping them on bedsheets so I could wash them again and have clean bedsheets every night for the rest of my life and maybe I should make my eggs a little differently this morning or maybe not even have eggs at all but pancakes with lemon that remind me of my granny when I was small and my legs were swinging off the ground maybe I should just be small again and swing my legs for the fun of it perhaps the fun of it is the problem and the solution all in one and it's a lot about food really but I'm a girl in my twenties and isn't it all about food really and sleep and love and whatever else fills up that heaviness that comes over on a too long bus ride and why don't you come over to kiss my forehead and tell me it will all be alright and we can light a scented candle and watch the flame for a little while.

