



# *Sólás ón Scáth*

An anthology from the Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe  
community writing programme



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## Focal Brollaigh

Tá bród nach beag ar an phobal san Uachtar Chluanaí agus ar na laochra neamhaitheanta a bhfuil barr feabhais bainte amach acu i gcónaí, faoina gceannródaíocht a thug deiseanna le haghaidh cruthaitheachta, seiftiúlachta agus frithbheartaíocht neamhleithleach. Tá ardmheas ar mhana mhuintir Ghaeltacht Bhóthar Seoighe, ‘Ná hAbair é, Déan é’ i gceantar Bhaile Uí Mhurchú, áit a bhfuil fréamhacha Fhéile Pobail Iarthar Bhéal Feirste, Amharclann Pobail an tAthair Des Wilson, Comharchumainn Fhéinchuidithe Pobail, an feachtas ‘Sábháil an Sliabh Dubh’ agus athbheochan phobalbhunaithe na Gaeilge. D’eascair Glór na Móna ón chúlra chéanna agus tá muid bródúil a bheith inár seasamh ar ghuaillí fathach agus muid ag éileamh úinéireacht chomhchoiteann ar an tsaibhreas luachmhar a fágadh againn.

Ba sin an smaoineamh a bhí taobh thiar den fhéile Bealtaine, Féile na gCloigíní Gorma a bhí go mór i mbéal an phobail agus a tugadh chun críche trí chur chuige comhoibríoch, go háirithe lenár gcomhpháirtithe ar Foireann Óige Uachtar Chluanaí. Bunaíodh an fhéile in 2017 le dul i ngleic leis an éadóchas a bhí ag teacht chun cinn sa cheantar, áit a raibh drochthionchar ag an choimhlint, ag an bhochtaineacht is éagothroime leanúnach ar shláinte is folláine na ndaoine. Baineann an fhéile úsáid as siombail na gcloigíní gorma agus iad faoi bhláth ar Thuapháirc an tSléibhe Dhuibh le cur i gcuimhne do dhaoine faoi aoibhneas an tsaoil, faoina dtimpeallacht nádúrtha agus faoin tábhacht a bhaineann leis an tsláinte agus dlúthpháirtíocht phobail.

Is leis an mheon sin a d’eagraigh muid imeacht do scríbhneoirí Bealtaine 2019 i nGael-Ionad Mhic Goill. Ar an oíche, rinne na scríbhneoirí iomráiteacha Michael Patrick MacDonald,

Stephen Murphy agus Seán ‘John-Boy’ Ó Muireagáin sleachta a léamh as a gcuid saothair sular iarr muid ar an lucht féachana a bheith páirteach agus nach orainn a bhí an t-ádh. Cuireadh siamsaíocht ar fáil agus spreagadh muid leis na focail ó chroí a chur idir gháire is bhrón orainn. Bhí an lucht féachana ar dóigh agus bhí siad faoi dhraíocht ag an tallann cheilte ar tugadh ardán di sa deireadh. Tá go leor de na scríbhneoirí sin, a roinn a saothair go poiblí den chéad uair an oíche sin, a bhfuil a saothair anois i gcló sa bhailiúchán iontach seo. Is minic a tharlaíonn na tionscadail is fearr de thaisme agus is fíor sin do Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe agus don fhoilseachán iontach seo.

D’aontaigh muid láithreach le clár scríbhneoirí a eagrú leis an ghrúpa iontach sin a thabhairt le chéile. Mar a tharlaíonn go minic, bhí tionscadail eile ag titim amach agus ansin tharla an phaindéim Covid-19 agus dianghlasáil. Ach, in ainneoin na héiginnteachta, na péine is na himní comhchoitinne, tugadh deis dúinn don athmhachnamh agus b’éigean do roinnt mhaith againn athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar ár nósanna saoil. Inár gceantar féin, bunaíodh ‘Ar Scáth a Chéile – Freagra an Uachtair Chluanaí ar Covid’. Tacaíodh leis na mílte daoine agus cruthaíodh fíis úr fhéinchuidithe agus chomhoibríthe atá mar bhunchloch againn.

Ní raibh teorainn leis an nuálaíocht agus an cruthaitheacht sna seachtainí is sna míonna luatha sin agus muid ag obair linn agus ag iarraidh sochaí úr a thógáil bunaithe ar ár luachanna is ár scileanna is fearr. Bhí Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe mar chuid den chomhrá sin agus tugadh an deis dúinn le linn na paindéime plé a dhéanamh ar an choincheap sin a bhí níos tráthúla i ndiaidh an chaitheamh agus i ndiaidh dúinn bliain a chaitheamh faoi ghlas.

Nuair a ceapadh scríbhneoir Gaeilge as Baile Uí Mhurchú, Seán ‘John-Boy’ Ó Muireagáin le bheith ina éascaitheoir ar an chúrsa Gaeilge, rinne mé teagmháil le mo sheanchara agus chomhghleacaí Dr Michael Pierse le teacht ar éascaitheoir don chúrsa trí Bhéarla. Mhol sé Dr Scott McKendry láithreach, a thug léacht den scoth faoi Séamus Heaney i Márta 2020 mar chuid dár gclár oidhreachta pobail. Gheall Michael go mbeadh cúlra an lucht oibre a bhí ag Scott, a dhearcadh sóisialach ar an tsaol, agus an cur chuige teagaisc a d’úsáid sé foirfe do phobal Ghlór na Móna. Agus nach fíor sin.

Sna seachtainí ina dhiaidh sin, cruthaíodh spás fíorúil sábháilte trí Zoom, áit ar nocht scríbhneoirí an bhailiúcháin seo a raibh ina gcroí go seachtainiúil agus inar thug siad suaimhneas dá n-anam i spás teiripeach comhroinnte. Do go leor acu, bhí an spás teiripeach sin claochlaitheach agus bunaíodh caidrimh thábhachtacha a bhí bunaithe ar chomhbhá. Mar uirlis léiriú cruthaitheachta agus scaoileadh mothúcháin, bhí próiseas na scríbhneoireachta agus léiriú an tsothair ina aistear féinfhollasaithe inar mhothaigh na scríbhneoirí ar fad an leochaileacht.

Thóg an spás teiripeach féinmhuinín agus trua iontu siúd a bhí páirteach ach nochtadh cumas chomh maith. Trí thuigbheáil a fháil orainn féin, ó bheith rannpháirteach i spásanna cuimsitheacha comhchoiteanna, aithníonn muid an cumas ceilte i ndaoine eile. Tríd an dearcadh sin, is féidir linn agus ní mór dúinn ár bpobail, ár dteaghlaigh agus ár sochaithe a shamhlú, a chothú agus a fhorbairt ar bhonn inbhuanaithe.

Tá spiorad uathúil iarthar Bhéal Feirste, agus na héachtaí cróga iontacha atá bainte amach anseo le brath sa bhailiúchán. Tá frithbheartaíocht agus neart ann: tá teacht aniar ón phian, an cailteanas trámach agus croíbhreisdh ann ach tig an greann dubh, an grá, an dlúthpháirtíocht agus an cairdeas

fríd fosta. Ba mhaith le Glór na Móna buíochas a ghabháil le Scott McKendry go háirithe, a chuir an bailiúchán seo le chéile agus a rinne eagarthóireacht air. Ba mhaith linn buíochas ar leith a ghabháil le Michael Pierse a d’oibrigh le Scott ar an intreoir agus le Seán Ó Muireagáin as an ábhar Gaeilge. Tá muid buíoch as Odhrán De Ruiséil a thug tacaíocht teicneolaíochta ar son Ghlór na Móna do na ceardlanna Zoom – agus a ghlac páirt é féin sa deireadh!

Tá súil againn tógáil ar Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe amach anseo. Níl ann ach an tús!

**Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh,  
aistrithe le Seán Ó hEacháin**

## Foreword

The people of the Upper Springfield have always prided themselves on forging fresh pathways for creativity, ingenuity and selfless resistance. There has been no shortage of unsung heroes who've written the area's name into history. The Gaeltacht Bhóthar Seoighe dictum of 'Na hAbair é, Déan é' found fertile ground in the greater Ballymurphy area, where the Irish language community revival found grassroots expression. Community self-help co-operatives, the West Belfast Community Festival, Father Des Wilson's People's Theatre, and the Save the Black Mountain Campaign have all flourished here.

Having spawned from the same activist milieu, Glór na Móna proudly stands on the shoulders of giants as we claim common, collective ownership of such a rich legacy. Our May Festival, Féile na gClóigíní Gorma, was established in 2017 to challenge an emerging sense of hopelessness in the district, where the residual horrors of the Conflict and persisting levels of poverty and inequality were having a clear detrimental impact on people's health and well-being. Brought to fruition with support of many collaborative hands including our partners in the Upper Springfield Youth Team, the festival's success can be measured in how it has captured the hearts and imaginations of so many.

Féile na gClóigíní Gorma uses the symbol of the blooming 'bluebells' on the Black Mountain's Hatchet Field to remind people of the simple joys of life, their natural environment and the importance of health and community solidarity. It was in this spirit that we organised a makeshift writers' event in May 2019 at Gael-Ionad Mhic Goill, where we invited acclaimed writers Michael Patrick MacDonald, Stephen Murphy and Seán 'John-boy' Ó Muireagáin to read from their work.

The floor was also opened on the night to local people, who simply took the roof off the centre as they regaled, entertained and inspired us with words from the heart that drew laughter and tears in equal measure. The response from the audience was palpable; everyone there was mesmerised by the hidden, occluded talent that was finally finding a platform. Many of these writers, who shared their writing publicly that night for the first time, now have work in print thanks to this wonderful anthology. The Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe programme and this publication prove that some of the very best projects often happen by accident.

We immediately resolved to organise a writer's programme to bring this gifted group of local writers together. As often happens, a plethora of other projects intervened before Covid swept us all off our feet and had us locked up at home. Yet the uncertainty, pain and collective anxiety of the pandemic also opened a space for critical reflection, where many of us were forced to review the those hard-to-shift habits of a lifetime. In our own area, the spontaneous 'Ar Scáth a Chéile – Upper Springfield Covid Response' network engaged thousands and recast our own unique vision of self-help and co-operation. Those initial weeks and months were marked by innovation and creativity, as we dug where we stood and attempted to turn our skills to building an alternative society based on compassion and regeneration. Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe was part of this conversation and Covid allowed us to to revisit the concept – which, after a year of enforced isolation and loss due to the pandemic, felt even more relevant.

Having asked Ballymurphy writer Seán 'John-Boy' Ó Muireagáin to facilitate the Irish-language writers' course, I contacted my long-time friend and colleague Dr Michael Pierse

to source a suitable facilitator for the English-language workshop to be held in parallel. His first suggestion, without hesitation, was Dr Scott McKendry, who he'd already sent our way in March 2020 to give (what turned out to be an excellent) lecture on Seamus Heaney for our community heritage programme. Michael assured me that Scott's working-class Shankill roots, his socialist world view and his participatory and horizontal teaching methodology would be a perfect fit for the Glór na Móna community. And never was there a truer premonition spoken.

In the weeks and months that followed, a virtual *safe space* was created via Zoom, where the contributors to this anthology poured their hearts out and soothed their souls in a weekly communal healing place of their own making. For many, this medicinal corner-of-the-week was transformational; meaningful relationships were built based on empathy and compassion. As a tool of creative expression and emotional catharsis, the act of writing and sharing became a journey of emotional discovery and cerebral excavation where collective vulnerabilities were felt and held by a tribe of scribes.

As a healing space that built up self-confidence and self-compassion in those who took part, it seemed to also uncover the potential of what's possible. In finding and discovering ourselves, through participating in inclusive, collective spaces, we begin to see the real and untapped potential in others. Through this lens, imagining, cultivating and developing our families, communities and societies as sustainable collectives becomes all the more possible and thus all the more essential.

The unique spirit of West Belfast, in all of its courageous and awe-inspiring achievements, are captured in the pages that follow. There is resistance and resilience in equal measure: the

endurance of pain, traumatic loss and devastation, whilst dark humour, love, solidarity and friendship shine through. Glór na Móna would like to thank Scott McKendry in particular, who compiled and edited the work of this anthology. We also give special thanks to Michael Pierse for working with Scott on the introduction and Seán Ó Muireagáin for the Irish-language contributions. Thanks too are due to Odhrán De Ruiséil, who provided tech support on behalf of Glór na Móna during Scott's Zoom workshops – and who ended up taking part himself!

We hope to build upon Scribhneoirí an tSléibhe in the time ahead. This is only the beginning!

**Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh**



## Introduction

Being creative in language isn't some life *add-on* or *expansion pack* to our increasingly digitised and commodified reality. Poetry is something we *do anyway* when spending time with our friends and family having a laugh, telling a yarn or expressing our love and adoration. In the public sphere, it can become the slave of ideology as much as a device for the disaffected. Writing forces us to revisit the past and imagine the future, transmitting any number of ideas — philosophical, psychological and political — but beyond its utility, the act itself can be medicine for the individual. And where these markings find a readership, be it two or two million, a community is formed.

In February this year, Feargal Mac Ionnraichtaigh invited the writers Seán 'John-Boy' Ó Muireagáin and Scott McKendry to facilitate two online creative writing workshops — one in Irish, the other in English respectively — as part of Glór na Móna's Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe programme. McKendry, inspired by the community writing initiatives of his friend, the South Boston memoirist Michael Patrick MacDonald, agreed without hesitation. As applications flooded in (from the Upper Springfield and other parts of West Belfast, but as far afield as Tyrone), Mac Ionnraichtaigh said he expected a 'great surge of creativity'. Over twelve weeks, participants shared their (often devastating, as often hilarious) stories through memoir, testimonial, fiction, poetry, song and script. Friendships formed, collaboration came quite naturally, and Mac Ionnraichtaigh's prediction came true.

Amongst the contributors to this anthology are teachers, a bricklayer, a filmmaker, a social worker, musicians, language rights activists, social activists, environmentalists, wholistic therapists, project co-ordinators, arts facilitators, people on benefits, househusbands, housewives, struggling parents, voluntary workers, sufferers of chronic illness and survivors of a gamut of physical and

psychological trauma. Many have been affected by suicide, addiction, social deprivation, and the ever-present recent Conflict. This diversity of life experience becomes more than a set of themes in the pages that follow. The reader bears witness to the horrors of our times in our specific place, but paradoxically, this is mediated through the beauty of human expression. There are love stories, family anecdotes, descriptions of transcendental encounters, invectives against political injustice, rejoinders to systemic failures in our education system, vivid (if not always seemly) imagery of the city and its surrounding counties, heightened language, the *auld slabber* of the everyday and much more besides in this impressive anthology.

Aisling Nic Eoin's evocative journey in 'Town' captures the profound in the seemingly pedestrian. From the cacophonous in Castle Street, to the dubious delights of sharing a black taxi 'mashed between Crisp-eater and Chatterchops', to the poignant bewilderment of a girl disoriented by her first sexual experiences, it's a poem that captures what's mesmeric amid the apparently mundane. People-watching on a page. Siobhán Marken's 'The Wall' proceeds with a more cryptic lesson that speaks to the triumph of nature and hope in the darkest shadows; Chrissie Nic Phóilín's ode 'The Black Mountain has always had my back' takes this a step further as the very landscape becomes part of the family. Edel Quinn's 'After' meditates on the fleetingness of life — relishing in the simple things: making soup, going for a walk, being *with* people. Its assertion that 'We find a way to / endure' perhaps embodies this anthology's unifying theme. Dolores O'Neill's 'Through the Room of Echoes' follows suit with an evocative exploration of a traumatic family past. The tone is haunting, the imagery dream-like. The waking world is a nightmare against which dreams fulfil wishes, while also dragging reality 'through mud / by a thinning rope'. A lost loved one emerges, 'alive as you and me!' like the famed Joe Hill, in defiance of injustice and death.

Local dramatist Christine Poland's poem, 'You Only Fail if You Quit', also delves into a personal past, recalling the pressures of the Eleven Plus exam and the black cloud of 'You're a disappointment' it cast over many a child's future. The pain of her childhood self having decided 'there and then, "I'm not smart after all"' is palpable. But there is hope here too: Poland's achievements since speak of the enabling powers of community arts (where she cut her teeth as a dramatist), and of shedding the doubts that came from that moment in her childhood, finally finding the 'courage to take a chance on me'. It's an experience familiar to many working-class people, and one that dovetails with the purpose of the *Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe* project as a whole. Bookended by two images — one of present urban decay, the other of past cohesion and warmth — Dan Gregory's 'White Paper Bags' mulls a moment of insight occasioned by another familiar local memory, a 'burnt-out stoley'. The poem serves a rich taste of dialect and the harsh realities of deprivation in its epiphany among the ruins. Here, a smouldering stolen car takes us on a journey that evinces a cityscape of loss and alienation. It's a piece that will touch any of us who have watched the streets of our childhoods suffer dereliction, stigmatisation and neglect. Later in the anthology, Gregory has a song, 'Creamy Dams', which speaks more to the fun and high-jinx of working-class childhood. A tongue-in-cheek cautionary tale.

Sara Boyce's 'Irish People are Raring Up' casts a cold eye on the diet of flashy consumerism and brazen individualism that's been served — like the expensive 'box of incandescent cereal' she ruefully describes in the poem — to the present generation. It's a frank and timely reminder of the shallowness of many of the gains of the post-Peace Process decades, where so much of community and solidarity has been cast aside and the working poor are still oppressed and surveilled. The rhetoric of 'peace dividend' and 'new dispensation' that became mantras in the 1990s echoes hollowly here. Odhrán de Rúiséil returns us to the themes of stigma and neglect in his poem 'The Hierarchy of Struggle',

though here the struggles are internal rather than communal. The poem's quick-cadenced rhythm beats out the travails of personal anguish in a manner that recalls the recent rap-poetic work of Dubliner Emmet Kirwan. Maura McParland's piece, 'Care', is equally skilled in capturing the inner turmoil and struggle of coping, or not coping, in difficult circumstances, her poem's replication of introspection and confused worry — its rushed enjambment and meandering snatches of thought — wonderfully capturing the challenges of the everyday. Sharon Pickering's lyrical 'Warrior' proceeds along similar lines, reminding us of the heroism of those who face the less-celebrated battles fought on less-hallowed fields, though their 'roots' be also 'twisted in ancestral soil'. Her personal essay in the anthology, titled 'An Act of Love', expands on this theme, discussing — in a deeply personal and touching way — the trauma of a cancer diagnosis and surviving through to recovery. Pickering's wonderfully moving recollection of 'a true act of love' that sustained that recovery lingers long after the reading. Sean Fitzsimons' pithy poem, 'Exposed', captures a moment of realisation — of understanding about the overcoming of fear. Of the poems that articulate the pain of loss and trauma, Dolores O'Neill's 'Walking Behind Coffins' is a particularly painful and powerful read. It pays tribute to a mother who suffers poverty and state violence through the worst years of the Conflict, and who suffers also the loss of thirteen of her twenty-one children, most to 'natural causes innocently', one to an RUC gun.

Poems from Maura McParland and Siobhán McCallin follow this intensity with some balm for the soul. McParland's contribution, 'Beady-Eyed Robin', entreats an injured bird to find 'strength in patience, be still, hold tight', nursing us back to tranquility. McCallin's 'Labyrinth' deploys a Joycean theme — the maze of twists and turns that she characterises as the human condition — from which there may be no escape but in which we must find joy: 'dance at every roadside', she advises. And this bright sense of resilience returns in McCallin's later poem, 'Emerge', where, if we

feel pain, ‘Just like the caterpillar /upon entering the cocoon’ we can hope to feel it ‘dissolving, / feeling it will die’.

Aedín Ní Thiarnaigh’s prose piece, ‘An Té sa Scathán’, grapples with a different kind of transformation, in the silent struggles faced by a young person, a transwoman, hiding her true self. Ní Thiarnaigh reminds us of the taboos that remain around gender and transitioning, and the hidden pain suffered by those who must distort ‘an té sa scathán’ to fit what orthodoxy, and their peers, deem acceptable. Ní Thiarnaigh’s poem, ‘Slán le hInish Meáin’, a paean to the western island, captures, in richly adorned language, her enraptured bliss on this ‘cuilt bhreac chlocha’.

The transitions occasioned by the death of a loved one is the subject of Sara Boyce’s second poem, ‘Not a Mantlepiece Kind of Person’, in which the speaker and her sister tease delicate and affectionate memories of their father’s personality from their musings on where in the house to place his ashes. If light in tone, however, this poem also leaves us with an acute sense of the gaping hole — filled with heartache and longing for a lost loved one — that’s left in the lives of the bereaved. Aisling Nic Eoin’s ‘The Black Place’ chimes here, in its description of the dashed dreams and jolted reality of ‘blackness, bleeding — / bleeding onto rocks / that line the bottom of the night’, which accompany the disorientation of grief. Fionnuala Ní Mhealláin’s piece, ‘Cumha’, also deals with the aftermath of death and the ‘pian millteanach í ina cléibh; i gcroílár a croí’ that lingers after the loss of a spouse. It’s a heart-rending piece, where the imprint of sorrow engulfs all around: ‘Chonaic sí é sna crainn, sna tithe, sa spéir agus go fiú sna daoine a bhí ag dul thar bráid’.

A different kind of mourning is portrayed in one of the other Irish-language pieces. In her short story, ‘Ligthe i nDearmad’, Ní Mhealláin’s narrator comes to the end of an era, moving from the home in which she has spent most of her life, ‘a cuid staire [...] greanta i ngach coirnéal is i ngach seomra’. Here, the act of packing unpacks the

memories — often unwanted and unexpected — of years past, unleashing feelings of nostalgia and loss, but also some gain: despite the recollections of difficult times that her rummaging provokes, our narrator takes some comfort in the realisation that ‘tagann ciall le haois’. Ní Mhealláin’s poem, ‘Stoirm Breithe’, is a wonderful tribute to the ‘Géilliúlacht don chinniúint / Ómós don nádúr’ of childbirth; here is the circle of life. ‘John-Boy’ Ó Muireagáin’s ‘Díobhadh an Iora Ruaidh’ turns to the circle of life and death in the natural world, articulating a mournful lament for the long-suffering red squirrel; equally a playful meditation on cultural devastation, the poem fits a tradition of disgruntled Belfast poetry such as that by United Irishman William Drennan or the Revivalist Joseph Campbell. Some levity emerges, however, in his short story in the anthology, ‘An Cat, na Colmáin agus an Coimheascar’, where a man plagued by stray cats engages in a perilous gladiatorial battle with his feline foes: ‘Bhí crúba lofa an chait mar a bheadh claíomh samúraí iontu, ag crúbáil chraiceann lámha Dhónail gan trua’. Soon some more local heroes join this epic battle of Man v. Cat (or is it, Catzilla?), Ó Muireagáin’s amusing tale veering between horror and farce.

In ‘A Lure’, Linda Byrne turns to the perilous terrain of budding romance, which she evokes in imagery of ‘hills and mountains’ that bring both elevation and (implicitly) the threat of precipitous falls, which are hinted at in a lover’s perhaps deceptively ‘clever eyes’. It’s a rich piece that captures the mixture of excitement and trepidation that is new love; and her second poem in the anthology, ‘Andy Bell’, returns to similar themes, though the mood here is darker — a meditation on the abrupt harshness of teenage girlhood in working-class Belfast. It broaches too the (often under-appreciated) role of pop lyrics in steering our adolescent paths (in those ancient times before Spotify, when we’d replay, on cassettes or vinyl, the same precious few tracks like incantations!). Edel Quinn’s piece, ‘Dusk Meanderings’, similarly mulls the gap between youthful pressures to fit in, to meld with a ‘soul-

destroying false shape’, and a more confident maturity that refuses *to take any shit*. This enchanting poem speaks of the solace to be found in that maturity, and in ducks and greyhounds, spaniels and cymnets.

Nature provides a more Yeatsian promise of escape into a magical, timeless place in Sean Fitzsimmons’ ‘Where the Wild Things Grow’. This poem highlights an evolving theme in the anthology: of bowing out of the rat race, of appreciating (as with Nic Phóilín’s poem) what the titular Sliabh Dubh has to offer. Yet ‘bowing out’ can have its own set of fallacies, can’t it? Michael McFall’s ‘Twelve Steps’ probes the stories we tell ourselves — and the misshapen myths we force from others’ lives — in our desperation to drag meaning from messy circumstances. It’s a brave and thought-provoking poem that confronts the lies we feel compelled to tell in order to retrieve redemption from our despair. ‘In the Name of the American Dream’, Lynda Sullivan’s non-fiction piece, turns to the stories behind the exploitation and brutality that extracts valuable commodities from poorer countries. She charts the consequences of conflict over expropriation of gold in Peru: a massacre of the innocent, clouded in state-manufactured lies and corruption from which thugs in uniform have escaped without consequence. It’s a finely-crafted, compelling and heart-breaking tale that resonates closer to home, and is, fittingly, followed by a poem dedicated to a local victim of sectarian violence and suspected collusion, the much-loved and respected Terry Enright. ‘Colin Glen’, by Colum Mac Giolla Bhéin, recalls, in a rhapsodic tribute to the natural world, Terry’s and his late father’s mutual love of the outdoors. Mac Giolla Bhéin’s later poem, ‘Requiem for a Planet’, turns to our looming ecological crisis — a theme that would also have been close to both Enright men’s hearts.

Beyond the tree-lined avenues of south Belfast, this remains (sometimes openly, always covertly) a heavily militarised, sectarian and disintegrated society, as Boyce’s poem suggests. Siobhán Marken’s ‘Walls’ reminds us of the work ahead of us in this regard. Because of the historical imperative to watch what you say (encapsulated

in Heaney’s *whatever you say, say nothing*), people here are profoundly attuned to the subtle nuances of language. The ear is cocked to accent and tone. Humour is habitually used to disarm, beating about the bush is justifiably commonplace, and accuracy of description is highly valued. What is said is carefully considered — a tendency which readily lends itself to compelling writing.

There’s a desire to diverge from the language of the schoolhouse amongst these pages, a rebelliousness. It’s perhaps unsurprising that in the last province to be degaelicised, in the city where a revival defiantly flourishes, authors aren’t afeared to put words on the page exactly howr they’d say them. To quote the late Belfast musicologist Hugh Shields, there’s an ‘expressive energy’ to the work collected in this anthology. Shields attributes this near ineffable characteristic, common in Irish writing, to the turmoil of colonialization — specifically, disruption to standard forms of language.<sup>1</sup> We can attempt to define work which exhibits this ‘energy’ as *linguistically rustic, rhetorically brazen and thematically daring*. It’s writing which happens after and in spite of sociolinguistic ruptures, amidst regrowth — the sort of shrewd and startling antics that come rushing at you in the poetry of Pádraig Fiacca or, more recently, in the prose of Louise Kennedy.

Siobhán McCallin’s hopeful injunction, in one of her pieces, ‘Emerge! brilliant beautiful butterfly!’, is as good a phrase as one could find for our hopes for this anthology. This is a many-coloured and richly rewarding book that will now take flight along the foot of An Sliabh Dubh and hopefully far beyond. It is a wonderful example of what writers’ projects and movements like *Scríobhneoirí an tSléibhe* can do. Maith sibh, a chairde; coinnigh oraibh ag scríobh!

**By Scott McKendry and Michael Pierse**

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Shields, *Narrative Singing in Ireland: Lays, Ballads, Come-All-Yes and Other Songs* (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1993), p 90.

## Aisling Nic Eoin

### *Town*

In dim yellow morning – I squeeze in – if only I'd been someone thin –  
mashed between Crisp-eater and Chatterchops.

Every red light makes our bodies rock.

Thighs closer. I clutch my knees,  
getting grosser, I feel Crisp-eater's sneeze.

I try anything to engage my mind. Bright yellow and rust  
on the Subway sign.

It's not fresh but it's better than a sausage bap.

Taxi driver consoles front-seat passenger.

First day in new job. Says he knows he'll be crap.

The half-asleep hospital porter dreams deep as we land.

The mummy, who has to get to Primark, can't afford the brand.

The schoolgirl on the beek stares at feet with phone in hand  
buzzing. Out of control –  
first blowjob last night; sore jaw, sore soul.

We share this place we call Town. Some of us lost here, some of us foun'.

The comedy and tragedy of Castle Street.

The sting and the joy of booze; hoarse laughter till the bottle dries  
into a heavily coated snooze.

Then evening comes, more dim yellow skies. Lights go red to green.

Preachers and their dodgy speakers in Corn Market making a scene.

Grannies own the bus stops here. Their bits in hand,  
rushing home for their stories.

Young mothers rush home carrying workday worries.



Couples linger on, listening to each other speak  
they're younger still, in love and can always drink mid-week.

The hoots and shouts of Town –

you givin' me cheek?  
five lighters fer a poun'  
i'll knock your fuck in  
spare any change?

giz a feg  
giz a 50 bag  
can't get 20s now

meet my dog, Tyson  
he's my best mate

he shares my steak  
my blame, my shame.

We share this place we call *Town*. Some of us lost here, some of us foun'

A memory now, two metres later.

A mask our common denominator

We're all more alone than ever before.

Crisp-eater can't eat her crisps anymore  
and Chatter-chops' waffle's a muffled hiss.

To be mashed there again might just be  
bliss.

We share this place we call the town. Some of us lost, some of us found.

## **Chrissie Nic Phóilín (Chrissie Poland)**

*The Black Mountain has always had my back*

For as long as I can remember, no judgement and no lies.  
It keeps me company at night – exploring on it, time flies.

I look to it with courage and it back at me with promise and adventure.  
It's been with me all through life  
and directly behind it, on a good day, you might capture the sunrise.

Different seasons show its beauty – fog gently simmers down,  
in the rain it gets wet. But no matter the weather, it doesn't fret  
only encouragement reflecting with a glimmer.

After quarrying, after war, after murder and more  
its true colour shines blue on that special day in May  
upon the mighty hatchet field when the gcloigíní gorma awaken once more

## **Siobhán Marken**

### *The Wall*

The hedgerow grows behind the wall.

The roots shaded by the wall are stanch.

Slowly at first

the hedgerow grows.

Tentatively climbing, clinging to the wall

here and there,

hiding sometimes in the shadows, peeping

through the cracks and crevasses.

When eye-to-eye, the wall

and hedgerow meet.

They learn that on them both the sun shines.

The rain falls in equal measure.

## Seán 'John-Boy' Ó Muireagáin

### *Díobhadh an Iora Ruaidh*

Ba fhlúirsí do chineál fadó  
Ag dul ó choill go coill  
Fásmhar i do ghnáthóg  
Trí bhiaiste agus sheascach  
Do dhóigh agus do dhúchas féin

Go dtáinig an coimhthíoch  
Ar láidre é ná thú  
Gabháltas na críocha á síolú,  
Ag alpadh do chuidse siar  
Cá'l tú anois a iora rua  
Ach i do bhreacdhúiche bhocht

## Dolores O'Neill

### *Through the Rooms of Echoes*

I feel the pull,  
like being dragged through mud  
by a thinning rope.

I grip on and always manage  
to reach there,  
where once my family were as one.

I wade through the thick sludge of despair  
in the direction of their laughter  
and calls to me.

When I arrive, they are gone

but the house is  
just as it was when we left it in 1972 ...  
A burnt out shell of rustic brick and sorrow.

I walk through the rooms of echoes  
finding toys and curios of the past –  
the old tin bath still clings to the wall.  
I listen to the whispers of happiness,  
sadness and fear as I hunt in each room.  
When I come to the parlour,  
I stall, hesitant to go in there  
yet knowing I must.  
But there he is, as alive as you and me!  
telling me he isn't dead.

I cry with joy as we walk  
out into the vesting, smouldering street,  
where our old betraying neighbours  
lowered their heads in shame.  
I want to scream at them.  
“You didn't kill him, look, he's alive!”  
But he tugs my hand and we walk on.

I wake up with a damp cheek  
and search for him through my tears.



## Edel Quinn

### *After*

your face has filled  
not so taut  
more lived-in  
less chiselled  
not as attractive  
more beautiful

your hair's a sight  
not washed  
not brushed even  
longer  
more grey

you make soup  
slowly  
you cube carrots  
slice garlic  
share your secret  
spice

you talk of yoga,  
call yourself  
vulnerable and  
cry

you talk to me  
more than ever  
you did before

I put tulips in water,  
coral and lavender  
they swoon

I drink your soup,  
chicken.

I listen

We walk the fields  
falter at a sheugh  
steady each other  
with a firm grip

stand among saplings  
we planted  
alder, rowan – soaring now  
willow – tossing in the wind

We find a way to  
endure  
together and  
apart

## Siobhán Marken

### *Walls*

Visible and invisible, I do not know what is worse, people  
playing mind games or being separated by the first.  
When a brick wall is before you, you're forced to make a choice.

Will I stay on this side? or take a risk, scale its height, penetrate  
its depth and embrace the other side?  
When a wall is invisible to the naked eye, it can be a wall

of distrust, discrimination, bigotry and lies.  
To scale the height or penetrate the depth of this wall  
takes vision of a different kind.

It takes courage, conviction, compassion, tolerance and love  
to demolish the invisible walls  
in the hearts and minds of those we find it hardest to love.

## Dan Gregory

### *White Paper Bags*

I seen a burnt-out stoley  
on my way to work this morning  
nothing new like  
but something new in it  
something of the unseen  
of the metaphysical  
an unspoken agreement suddenly proclaimed  
and the dead silence of it  
like a sad painting  
when every other cunt's in bed  
where they should be  
in that stereotypical housing estate  
just by the new swings  
only an occasional crackle or hiss gives its permis-  
sion to my ear  
in our moment  
in our void  
together  
me  
and It  
and the freezing morning air

and the cold silence  
and the lazy gray sun just up ten minutes  
and the smell of its carcass  
like a bad omen  
like it all meant something  
and where did time fuck off to?  
something in the engine exploded  
the shock broke the spell  
broke the magnetization of it  
the importance of it  
just gone  
like it was never there  
like the good dreams  
I carried on walking to work  
past the estate  
where the bakeries used to open early and the  
contents of their white paper bags  
would stay warm for the dander

## Aedín Ní Thiarnaigh

### An té sa scáthán

Ar shiúl abhaile dó, bhí an tiúb beag ina phóca ag clingeáil in aghaidh a eochracha.

Shiúil sé ní ba thapúla – dá b'airde an torann, bheadh sé thart ní ba luaithe.

Níor bheannaigh sé dá mháthair ná dá deirfiúr nuair a bhain sé an teach amach faoi dheireadh. Bhíodar suite i dteannta a chéile sa chistin, cúlchaint gan chiall ar siúl acu mar ba ghnách. Suas leis go ciúin, chuig an seomra folctha thuas staighre.

I ndiaidh dhó an doras a dhúnadh le *dic*, chas sé, agus bhreathnaigh ar an duine roimhe sa scáthán; buachaill cúiseach ard, tanaí, craiceann geal gan mhácáil aige ach é breactha le póigíní gréiné, a chuid súile uaine frámailte le fabhraí fada.

Shleamhnaigh sé a lámh isteach ina phóca, agus chuimil an tiúbín mín idir a mhéar is a ordóg. Ar sheiceáil go raibh an bolta ar an doras, thóg sé é amach agus bhain an caipín ór de.

Le lámh shocair, leath sé an béaldath ar a bheola, agus rinne meangadh gáire leis an gcailín sa scáthán.

Chuala sí an doras tosaigh ag dúnadh de phlab. B'shin Mam agus Úna imithe ag Zumba, mar a rinneadar faoi dhó sa tseachtain. Lig sí osna faoisimh as, bheadh an teach aici féin ar feadh uair a choig, ar a laghad. Bhain sí an bolta den dhoras an athuair, agus le céim ní b'éadroime shiúil anuas an staighre.

Bhí an chistin folamh, agus rinne a coiscéimeanna macalla leis na tíleanna agus í ag siúil i dtreo an chuisneora. D'oscail sí é, agus ransaigh sí thart isteach ann, ag bogadh glasraí agus uibheacha go dtí gur aimsigh sí é, ar chúl ar fad; an leathbhuidéal fíona.

Tharraing sí amach é agus thóg gloine síos ón gcófra. Ní thabharfadh Mam rud ar bith faoi deara. Ní ba mhinic do Mham a bheith ag ól, agus í seasta ag coinneáil súil ar na calraí. Caith-

fidh go raibh an buidéal seo ann ón uair dheireanach ar tháinig Aintí Síle ar cuairt na seachtainí ó shin.

Leag sí an gloine ar an gcúintéir agus shín a lámh suas chun an raidió ar an tseilf a chasadh air.

Líon popcheol an aer mar a líon sí an gloine go barr. Bhí an fíon fuar, tar éis a bheith ar chúl an chuisneora chomh fada sin, agus d'fhág a méara rian ar an gceol ar imeall an ghloine, nuair a d'ardaigh sí é le bolgam fada a ól as.

Líon sí an gloine an athuair. I ndiaidh súimín eile a thógaint, choinnigh sí idir a dá lámh é, a súile dúnta agus í ag luascadh le rithim an cheoil, aoibh shásta ag teacht ar a haghaidh de réir mar a chuaigh an fíon i bhfeidhm uirthi.

Níor airigh sí an t-am ag sleamhnú thart, go dtí gur bhris *'ping'* trín gceol ar an raidió. Óna fón póca ar tháinig sé, a bhí caite ag bun na staighre. Chaith sí súil leis an gclog ar an mballa; ceathrú chun a sé. B'shin an meabhriúchán a bhí socraithe aici don treanáil. Bheadh uirthi a bheith ann faoi cheann leathuair a chloig.

Shín sí leis an raidió a mhúcadh, chaith a raibh fágtha den bhfíon searbhmhilis aniar agus leag an gloine anuas ar an gcúintéir. Bhí rian a méara le feiceáil ann fós, agus dath bándearg a bheola fágtha ar an mbéal. Thug sí aghaidh ar an staighre arís, chun a feisteas a chuir uirthi agus a brógaí reatha a lorg.

Bhain sí a cuid éadaí scoile di agus tharraing uirthi a bristí gearra, a barr traenála agus tar éis cúpla nóiméad á thóraíocht, d'aimsigh sí an leathbhriúchán reatha á bhí ceilte faoin leaba.

Iallacha ceangailte agus mála pacáilte, d'fhill sí ar an seomra folctha. Ghlan sí a béal, agus d'fhág sí slán leis an gcailín.

Bhí a chosa trom agus é ag siúil anuas an staighre, faoi dheifear anois muna raibh sé le bheith déanach don traenáil. Scinn sé isteach sa chistin agus chaith an gloine folamh isteach sa mhiasniteor sular rug sé ar a eochracha agus thug aghaidh ar an mbóthar, an doras á dhúnadh de *chlic* ina dhiaidh.

## Maura McParland

### *Beady-Eyed Robin*

little bird with the broken wing  
shelter, call, to protect thy sing

nest and rest, breathe, be alert  
remain in the sanctuary, free from hurt

be open to all that intervene  
to assist you back to that sense of serene

strength in patience, be still, hold tight  
nurse the wound, prepare for flight

one step at a time, beady eyed bird  
remembering all that you have learned

off you go, discreet and slow  
a hop, a worm, to build, to grow

mind slinky cat not so shy  
rise from the hedge, fly up, rise high

chirp chirp, sing sing, attend the fragile wing  
ádh mór, beautiful thing



## Seán 'John-Boy' Ó Muireagáin

### *An Cat, na Colmáin agus an Coimheascar*

Sráid bheag de thithe sraithe measartha ciúin a bhí ann, an tsráid ar a raibh Dónal Ó Dálaigh ina chónaí. Bhí seanbhean béal dorais le Dónal. Biddie a tugadh uirthi, ach ní thug Dónal ach a bhean Uí Dhochartaigh uirthi. Le roinnt blianta anuas, bhí cúpla cat fáin ag crochadh thart i gcúlgharraí na seanmhná. Cat mór rua agus cat dubh, a bhí rud beag bídeach níos lú.

Chuir Dónal gráin an diabhair ar na cait seo. Bhuel, déanta na fírinne, chuir siad scanradh a anama air. Ina theannta sin, b'fhuath leis gur bheathaigh an tseanbhean iad achan lá agus sin an fáth a raibh siad go fóill ag crochadh thart. Ach ab é sin, bheadh na cait ar shúil agus ní bheadh air a bheith buartha arís fá dtaobh daofa.

Ar an lá fáidhiúil seo, chuaigh Dónal amach lena bhocsa féin bruscar a chur amach do lucht tógala bruscair. Bhí an cat mór rua ina suí ar an bhocsa. "Hup, hup, imigh leat a chait!" a scread Dónal. Ach níor bhog an cat mór rua. Shuigh sí ansin ag stánadh air go magúil. Shiúil Dónal chuici, ag caitheamh na ngéag go bagarthach san aer, nuair a léim an cat mór rua air go tobann. Níor bhagairt é a thuilleadh ach éacht. Bhí an cat mór rua ag déanamh beart de réir a briathair.

Bhí crúba lofa an chait mar a bheadh claíomh samúraí iontu, ag crúbáil chraiceann lámha Dhónail gan trua. Rith Dónal ar ais sa teach leis an méid a bhí ina chnámha agus an doras ag greadadh do phreab ina dhiaidh.

Bhí a chéile, Pádraigín ina suí sa chistin ag ól tae. "Dár fia, cad é a tháinig ortsa a stór?"

"An diabhal cat mór rua sin béal dorais. D'ionsaigh

sí mé, gan ghríosú! Beag nár mharaigh sí mé. Bhí an t-ádh dearg orm gur éalaigh mé." Seo uilig ráite agus é as anail agus a chroí ag preabadaigh ina bhrollach.

D'fhreagair Pádraigín é agus níos mó ná beagán den tarcaisne ina glór. "Beag nár mharaigh sí thú, an cat beag sin!"

Ní raibh Dónal ag gabháil a ghlacadh go humhal leis! "Tá sé chomh mór le madadh an cat sin, bíodh a fhios agat! Amharc ar mo lámha!" A d'impigh sé uirthi.

Chonaic sí ar a aghaidh gur goineadh air. Níor bhréagach é, bhí a lámha stróicthe go maith. "Ó, a Dhia, a stór, tchím anois é. Beidh ort labhairt le Biddie agus iarraidh uirthi fáil réitithe daofa."

"Dhéanfaidh mé sin!"

D'fhan Dónal go raibh Pádraigín imithe chun a cuid oibre sular labhair sé le bean Uí Dhochartaigh. Chnag sé an doras tosaigh go dtáinig sí amach.

"Tá mé buartha cur isteach ort a bhean Uí Dhochartaigh..."

"Biddie atá orm. Tá an leagan sin ró-aosta!" Dúirt sí an rud céanna leis achan uile uair.

"A bhean uasal, amharc ar na lámha s'agam. An chat rua sin a rinne é ar maidin. Tuigim go bhfuil dúil agat sna cait sin..."

Bhris an bhean bheag isteach. "A mhalairt ar fad atá fíor. Scanraíonn siad as mo chraiceann mé. Ach, tá eagla orm. Ní thiocfadh liom gabhail amach sa chúlgharraí mura dtabharaim greim bí daofa."

"Ó! Tchím. Shíl mé... Is cuma. Bhuel, ar mhiste leat scairtigh ar lucht srianta lotnaidí le hiad a thabhairt ar shúil? Gheobhaidh mise uimhir duit más maith leat?"

"Dhéanfainn sin go cinnte a Dhónail. Cuirfidh mé scairt orthu anois más maith leat!"

Las aghaidh Dhónail go bun na gcluas. “Níos mó ná sásta a bheas mé a bhean Uí Dhochartaigh, beidh mé ina bhun go deo duit.”

Níos moille anonn sa lá sin, thug Dónal faoi deara veain ag tarraingt isteach taobh amuigh de theach na seanmhná agus fear óg ag léimnigh amach as. Rith Dónal amach le labhairt leis, le rabhadh a thabhairt dó.

“Haigh! Tá tú anseo leis na cait sin a thabhairt ar shúil?”

Níor fhreagair an fear óg é, ach d’amharc sé ar Dhónail mar a bheadh amadán ann.

Labhair Dónal amach arís. “Tá mé ag inse duit, tá na cait sin ar fiáin. Bí an-chúramach!” Ní bhfuair sé ar ais ach radharc Bhaloir agus shiúil an fear óg ar aghaidh isteach ar an chosán idir an dá theach go dtí an cúlgharraí.

D’fhan Dónal siar go dtí go gcuala an t-ionsaí marfach ag tarlú sa chúlgharraí, go dtáinig an fear óg amach ina rith agus an chuma air gur ionsaí an diabhal féin é, agus gur sciob sé uaidh a anam. D’imigh an fear óg thar tar Dhónal gan smid as a bhéal. Léim sé isteach sa veain agus chualathas na boinn ag díoscarnach leo go bun na sráide. Agus straois bheag shotalach ar aghaidh Dhónail.

An lá ar na bharrach, tháinig an veain ar ais, ach an t-am seo, bhí beirt acu ann agus iad gléasta sna héadaí cosanta ba láidre dá bhfaca Dónal ariamh. Bhí dhá chuaille fhada agus lúb ag an cheann acu, leis na cait a ghabháil.

Lean Dónal iad lena gcoimhead. Fuair duine amháin de na fir greim ar chos amháin dheiridh an chait mhóir ruaidh.

Bhí an cat ag gabháil ar mire an t-am ar fad, ag bocléimnigh thart, gan smacht, gan srian. D’imigh an cat agus an cuaille leis agus é ag luascadh go contúirteach in achan treo, ag bualadh achan rud fá dtaobh dó agus an bheirt fhear sa tor uirthi. Ba bhocht an scéal. Sa deireadh, rug duine acu greim

ar an chuaille arís agus chuir an duine eile an lúb eile thart ar cheann an chait.

Bhí an cat go fóill ag léimnigh agus ag preabadaigh mar a bheadh diabhal Tasmánach ann agus an bheirt fhear á dtarraingt anonn is anall, amhail dhá dhuilleog mhóra páipéir á stroiceadh sa ghaoth.

Fá dheireadh thiar thall, agus cuma spíonta, traochta orthu, d’éirigh leo an cat a chur i gcás i gcúl an veain, áit ar cuireadh faoi ghlas é. Bhí siad réidh le himeacht nuair a tháinig an tseanbhean amach as an teach ag scairtigh orthu, “Tá ceann eile amuigh ansin go fóill, ní thig libh imeacht gan é.”

Scairt fear amháin acu ar ais uirthi. “Cuirfidh muid gaiste síos leis an cheann eile a cheapadh.” Agus d’imigh siad leo.

Go luath an lá ar na bharrach, tháinig siad ar ais leis na gaistí agus cuireadh sa chúlgharraí iad leis an chat eile a cheapadh. Ach níor fhan siad féin thart rófhada le dúshlán an chait eile a thabhairt agus d’fhág siad an tseanbhean leis an dá ghaiste a choimhead.

Tá cara ag Dónal, Tarlach atá air. Tá cónaí ar Tharlach trasna na sráide uaidh Dónal. Is é fear mór na gcolmán é Tarlach, agus chonaic seisean an ruaille buaille uilig ag gabháil ar aghaidh. Thug sé faoi deara chomh maith lucht srianta lotnaidí ag cur gaiste isteach i gcúlgharraí na seanmhná.

Tháinig sé anall agus bhual sé cnag ar dhoras Dhónal. “Táthar ag cur gaiste síos leis na cait sin a cheapadh?” A d’fhiafraigh sé de Dhónal.

“Tá.” Arsa Dónal. “Nach gcuala tú fán rí rá uilig a bhí anseo inné leis an chat mhór rua sin?”

“Chualaidh. Rud beag, ach is cuma sin. Tá gar uaim a Dhónail. Tóg ceann de na gaistí sin domh, le do thoil. Bíonn an cat dubh sin istigh ag na colmáin s’agam achan oíche agus ba bhreá liom greim breith air agus é a mharú.”

Ba chuma le Dónal anois ach an dá chat a bheith imithe agus ba leor gaiste amháin leis an chat eile a bhreith. “Gheobhaidh mé ar ball é, nuair a bheas an tseanbhean amuigh. B’fhearr i bhfad é dá marófá féin é, ná é a fhágáil ag an tseanbhean le déanamh.”

Nuair a bhí an tseanbhean amuigh ag na siopaí tráthnóna, fuair Dónal an gaiste. Thug sé anonn chuig Tarlach é.

“Beidh craic agam ar maidin leis an chat sin.” Ar Tarlach le Dónal. “Cuirfidh mé scairt ort ar maidin.”

“Déan sin a Tharlaigh. Tchífidh mé go luath ar maidin thú mar sin de.” Chuaigh Dónal ar ais chun tí agus d’fhág Tarlach leis an ghaiste.

Chuir Tarlach an gaiste i mbothán na gcolmán an oíche sin agus chuaigh a luí. Go moch luath an mhaidin ina dhiaidh sin, chuaigh sé amach agus iontas na n-iontas, bhí an cat dubh sa ghaiste, ceart go leor. Rith sé anonn chuig Dónal. “Tá an diabhal cat ceaptha agam! Tá sé agam! Níl le déanamh againn ach é a mharú. Ach, cad é mar a mharóidh muid é?”

Rinne Dónal machnamh tamall beag. “Cad é fá, é a bhá san fholcadán.”

“Bulaí fir a Dhónail. An-smaointiú go deo.” Rith sé ar ais chun tí agus Dónal sna sála air, gur chuir sé an cás ina raibh an cat fiáin, isteach san fholcadán, agus chas an sconna. Bhí an folcadán ag líonadh go fadálach agus bhí an cat ag gabháil ar fiáin sa chas. Nuair a bhí an folcadán lán, bhí píosa beag den chas go fóill le feiceáil ag gobadh amach as an uisce, agus beolaí an chait ag sú acir isteach go fraochmhar.

Lig Tarlach don uisce rith go fóill agus é ag gabháil thar bhéal an fholcadáin agus ag fliuchadh an urláir agus ag rith amach go dtí an forhalla agus an cat ag análu go fóill.

“Faigh maide beag tanaí domh a Dhónail, níl an diabhal cat seo ag bá”

Rith Dónal amach ar lorg maide go dtánaig sé ar cheann beag ina luí sa chúlgharraí. Isteach leis arís.

“Seo dhuit a Tharlaigh.” Shín sé an maide chuige, ag amharc ar shúil le nach leagfadh sé féin súil ar an chat bhocht ag iarraidh a hanáil dheiridh a tharraingt isteach.

Bhí Tarlach anois ag cur truilleán leis an chat síos faoin uisce, go dtí sa deireadh, stop streacailt an chait, agus bhí sí anois ar snámh ar bharr an uisce.

“Fá dheireadh thiar thall!” A scread Tarlach, “Shíl mé nach bhfaigheadh sé bás go deo.”

Chrom sé anonn agus tharraing sé an stopallán amach as poll an fholcadáin agus shuigh sé ar imeall an fholcadáin ag fanacht go dtearn an t-uisce an bealach síos sa pholl stopalláin.

“Buíochas le Dia go bhfuil sin thart.” arsa Tarlach go hard, “Beidh mo bhean chéile ar ais i gcionn fiche bomaite agus rachadh sí ar mire dá bhfeicfeadh sí a rinne muid ansin. Tá dúil mhór aici sna cait. Mharódh sí mé dá bhfeicfeadh sí a leithéid seo ag tarlú ina teach féin. Tá sí millteanach beadaí fán teach seo.”

Nuair a bhí an t-uisce ar shúil d’fhoscail Tarlach an cas. Ar luas lasrach, léim an cat amach as agus d’ionsaigh sé Tarlach; ag stroiceadh agus a réabadh a chuid lámh. Bhí fuil achan áit; ar na ballaí, ar an urlár, agus achan áit fá Tharlach féin. Bhí an cat ag scréachach, bhí Tarlach ag béiceach agus bhí Dónal féin ag screadach in ard a chinn le heagla. Chuaigh an streacailt ar aghaidh ar feadh an cúig shoicind is faide ariamh, go dtí gur chaith Tarlach an cat uaidh agus rith amach as an seomra folctha ag ghreadadh an dorais ina dhiaidh.

“In ainm croim! Amharc an crut ar an áit seo. Beidh Bríd ar buile. Beidh sí anseo gan mhoill. Cad é atá muid ag gabháil a dhéanamh a Dhónal?” Sheas Dónal gan chorraí.

Bhí ag cat go fóill ag gabháil ar mire sa tseomra folctha agus níor chualthas ach cnagarnach, clagarnach agus, siosarnach agus ruabhéic, mar bhí tornádó ag stróiceadh an tseomra agus achan rud ag briseadh fúinn agus tharainn, agus an cat ag déanamh smionagar d’achan rud sobhriste.

“Déan rud inteacht a Dhónail, sula dtiocfaidh Bríd ar ais, ina ainm Dé. Maróidh sí mé!”

Rith Dónal isteach agus d’fhoscail sé doras an tseomra folctha. Rith an cat amach agus suas an staighre leis agus é ag déanamh torann polltach a scoiltfeadh do cheann agus ag leagan aon rud sa chasán air.

Rith an bheirt fhear amach as an teach agus sheas siad beirt sa gharraí chun tosaigh, Tarlach agus a lámha ar a cheann agus Dónal go fóill ag cúlú siar ón teach, mar chladhaire, ag iarraidh éalú.

Bhí na doirse uilig druidte thuas staighre, rud a chur bac ar an chat agus tháinig sé anuas an staighre arís, ag rith ar nós na gaoithe móire. Rith sé isteach go dtí an seomra suí. Rith Tarlach isteach gur dhruid sé an doras ina dhiaidh agus rith amach sa gharraí arís. Lig sé scread marfach as féin. Ba deacair a rá arbh é, go bhfaca sé Bríd ag caint le duine de na comharsanaigh, caoga slat síos an tsráid, nó, go bhfaca sé an cat ag stróiceadh achan pháosa troscán sa tseomra suí. Bhí Dónal anois ag siúl anonn an bóthar ag éalú leis, mar ba cheart a dhéanamh. Sheas sé ag a gheata féin ag coimhead an rírá agus an marfach uilig a bhí ag tarlú ag teach Tharlaigh.

Mheall an callán uafásach seo cúpla duine dá chomharsanaigh amach le feiceáil cad é a bhí ag gabháil. Duine acu sin Pól, a raibh madadh beag aige. Brocaire beag toirtiúil a bhí ann. Madadh beag an-láidir agus an-chróga, mar a mhaíomh

Pól as gan stad. “A Phóil a Óglaigh, déan gar domh. Scaoil do mhadadh isteach sa tseomra suí ansin leis an chat sin a ruaigeadh. Le do thoil, sula dtiocfadh Bríd!”

“Fadhb ar bith!” Arsa Pól. “Cuirfidh Butch níos mó ná ruaig air, fan go bhfeice tú.”

Sheas sé ag doras an tseomra suí gur fhoscail Tarlach é. Rith an madadh beag toirtiúil isteach, ag tafann go bagarthach agus ag drannadh leis go cróga. Go tobann, stop achan challán. Bhí bearna beag de chiúnas marfach ann, nár mhair ach trí nó ceithre shoicind agus ansin thoisigh sé arís. Ach anois, ba é an madadh a bhí ag scamhaíl is a sianaíl. Sheas siad beirt ag an doras ag éisteach leis an mhadadh ag scríobadh an dorais le teann éadóchas agus é ag scréachach go pianmhar agus go truacánta.

Tháinig scaoll ar Phóil. “Foscail an doras sin anois. Scaoil amach mo mhadadh, anois láithreach!” Bhí sé beagnach ag caoineadh.

“Fan bomaite a Phóil.” Arsa Tarlach leis agus an scaoll céanna air féin anois.

“Foscail an doras damánta sin anois, nó dhéanfaidh mise é a chiceáil isteach.”

D’fhoscail Tarlach an doras agus rith an madadh amach as agus an cat sa tor air amach ar an doras toisigh i dtreo theach Phóil agus Pól sa tor ar an dá ainmhí.

Shiúil Tarlach isteach arís agus d’fhoscail sé doras an tseomra suí. An radharc a bhí roimhe. Ba deacair cothrom na Féinne a dhéanamh dó. Shílfeá gur Phléasc buama sa tseomra. Bhí na cuirtíní ina luí ar an urlár stróicthe as a chéile, mar a bheadh ribíní iontu. Bhí an tolg ar nós seantolg a bhí ina luí taobh le tine cnámha le coicís. Ní raibh ruid slán den rud. Ní raibh aon ornáid shobhriste, ná dohriste, nach raibh ina luí briste ina smidiríní. Bhí fuil an mhadaidh achan áit thart ar na ballaí agus ar aon pháosa eile troscáin sa tseomra. Bhí

an taobh sin den doras stialta stróicthe. Sheas Tarlach ag amharc ar an scrios agus bhris an gol air.

An lá ar na bharrach, bhuail sé grág arís ar dhoras Dhónail.

“Tá gar uaim.”

“Rud ar bith a Tharlaigh, cad é thig liom a dhéanamh?”

“Tá do veain a dhíth orm, le gabháil suas chuig an ionad dumpála. Caithfidh mé troscán an tí a dhumpáil agus stuif úr a cheannacht; as mo phóca féin. Bríd a d’éilligh é, sin nó go ndéanfadh sí féin an rud céanna domhsa.”

“Cinnte, a chara, cinnte. Tabhair cúig bhomaite domh agus rachaidh mé anonn le tú a thógáil.”

“Go raibh maith agat a Dhónail.”

“Níl aon bhuíochas ort a Óglaigh, tuigim duit. Ní fiú í a chrá níos mó ná atá sí fá láthair.”

“Níl sí cráite. Ní leor an focal cráite, a Dhónail. D’fhéadfá pianpháiseach, nó, nimhneach a úsáid, nó, gangaideach, iad uilig le chéile agus go fóill ní bheadh go leor agat le cur síos a dhéanamh ar an spionn atá uirthi. Níor fhulaing mise oíche chomh holc sin ariamh i mo shaol, agus níor mhian liom an dara ceann mar é a chaitheamh arís.”

“Bhí sí feargach mar sin de?”

D’amharc Tarlach ar Dhónal agus dreach díchreidmheach air. “Fergach! An bhfuil tusa ar mire? Bhí sí ar buile! Bhí sí ar an daoraí. Chuir an rud le báiní í. Agus thug sí fógra deiridh domh; na colmáin nó ise! Mo cholmáin a Dhónail, mo cholmáin!”

“Cad é a dúirt tú?” D’fhiafraigh Dónal go soineanta.

“Cad é a dúirt mé? Níor dhúirt mé a dhath, faic, dada! Shuigh mé ar an tseantolg an oíche aréir gan

smid asam. Ní bhfuair mé ach an tsúil cholgach an oíche ar fad agus nuair a mhaolaigh an scréachach, níor labhair sí liom. Agus níor labhair sí liom ó shin. Mhúscaíl mé ar an tolg sin ar maidin agus bhí nóta ag fanacht ar an tábla domh. “Réitigh achan rud sula dtiocfaidh mise na’ bhaile arís anocht, nó réitigh tú féin as an teach!” Sin an fáth a bhfuil mé anseo, anois.”

“Tuigim.” Arsa Dónal go cosanta.

“Tá súil agam go dtuigeann, a Dhónail. Nár thusa a thug an diabhal chomhairle domh ar an chéad gabháil síos an cat sin a bhá san fholcadán!”

“Is é, thug, ach, leis an fhírinne a dhéanamh, níor bháigh tú mar is ceart...” Stop Tarlach ansin é.

“Ná habair oiread is focal amháin eile! Sin é! Tá deireadh leis an chomhrá seo anois. Tar chugam i gcionn cúig bhomaite leis an veain!”

Shiúil Tarlach ar ais chun tí agus rinne Dónal é féin réidh don turas chuig an ionad dumpála.

## Odhrán de Rúiséal

### *The Hierarchy of Struggle*

how do you begin

to let yourself feel,

to give yourself a break

to not be a machine?

I find it hard

because I feel very blessed

I've got money in my pocket

and I'm seldom poorly dressed

how do you begin

to treat yourself like others?

to let people in,

to let yourself recover

are my problems, real problems?

I've got food on my plate

and If I need to talk

I know there's a safe space

how do *I*

say I'm not alright?

if asked am I ok I'll probably say I'm fine

if asked once again I'll probably start to cry

But how should I react

when I'm feeling overwhelmed?

because it feels like I've no right

when so much goes so well

how do I begin

to go through

what I'm going through

without feeling like it's unreasonable

not to flow through

so, I do find it tough

to admit when I'm struggling?

I feel like I'm privileged

and my problems amount to nothing

I want to begin

to address what I'm feeling

to not just be strong

to actually start healing

I understand that life

isn't just point A to point B

but when I see what people struggle with,

how can I feel bad for me?

## Fionnuala Ní Mhealláin

### *Stoirm Breithe*

Stealladh uisce  
Mar eas ón bhroinn;  
Arraing ag teacht,  
Arraing ag imeacht;  
Luascadh na dtonn  
Anonn is anall;  
Toirm na dtonn  
Gan sos, gan staonadh.

Géilliúlacht don chinniúint  
Ómós don nádúr;  
Búireach na dtonn  
Ag réabadh is ag stróiceadh;  
Ansin go tobann –  
D'aon turraing amháin,  
Béiceach sinseartha.  
Tost suaimhneach –

Gol úr nua; Saol úr nua.

## Aedín Ní Thiarnaigh

### *Slán le hInis Meáin*

Fágaim slán,  
ag Brat Bríde,  
cuilt bhreac chlocha  
de dhéantús blátha is goirt,  
ar dhromchla an Atlantaigh.

Carraigeacha crua  
sníofa go snasta,  
a shú an ghrian isteach  
sular fháisc sí thart orm,  
do mo choinneáil te teolaí  
agus mo cheirteacha féin  
á bhfuáil le chéile agam.



## Siobhán McCallin

### *Labyrinth*

Your journey is the path  
where you dare to tread.  
Loaded with adventure,  
sometimes filled with dread.

If you believe in travelling  
to your hero's destination.,  
beware of that shadowy figure  
Procrastination.

At each crossroads you will  
recognise many a special call.  
The path is fraught with dangers,  
sometimes you will fall.

Get back up, dust the dirt off,  
get up off the ground.  
It's in these times – dreams  
are recognised and found.

The path of a hero, like the labyrinth,  
can be met with dead ends.  
Retrace your steps, take another route,  
but your journey don't suspend.

The many pathways within this maze  
will require you to start over again.

A journey worth travelling is not  
devoid of hardship, grief or pain.

So keep on keeping, keeping on,  
one step at a time –  
dance at every roadside,  
embrace the rhythm and the rhyme.

Each of us are on a journey –  
*man's road of evolution* –  
but the true journey  
is one of internal revolution.

No matter what you seek,  
you can triumph on your quest.  
Living fully presently is  
when life is travelled best.

## Fionnuala Ní Mhealláin

### *Ligthe i nDearmad*

Chaith Lucy a cuid súl thart ar an áiléar. Bhí an áit beagnach glanta aici agus bhuaíl píosa d'faoiseamh í. Ba dhoiligh di creidbheáil gur seo a lá deireanach sa teach seo, an tearman inár chaith sí mórchuid a saoil. Is beag go raibh an Domhnach ar fad curtha isteach aici ag socrú boscaí móra a bhí clúdaithe le deatach is le líontaí damhán alla. B'fhuath léi damhán alla i gcoitinne – ní hé fuath – 's é níos mó d'eagla a bhuaíl í nuair a smaoinigh sí ar na cosa gruagacha dubha a bhí orthu. Caithfidh gur tharla rud inteacht di is í ina girseach siar in am. Thosaigh sí ag smaoinreamh ar rud éigin eile le héalú ón fhóibe a bhí aici.

Is é mí ó shin a chinn a máthair go mbeadh sí ag bogadh isteach chuig teach nua, ar shiúil ón cheantar. Ba dhoiligh a chreidbheáil gur chónaigh sí i 27 Sráid na Séice, Bun na hAbhainn le cúig bliana is fiche anuas. Deireadh ré a bhí ann agus ghoill sin ar Lucy píosa beag. Amárach, bheadh teaghlach eile ina gcónaí sa teach seo. An teach a thug cuimhne is grá do Lucy le linn di fás aníos. Bhí a cuid staire i bhfolach istigh ann, greanta i ngach coirnéal is i ngach seomra. Is fíor go raibh a máthair ag éirí níos sine agus thug Lucy faoi deara go raibh sí níos uaigní le déanaí fosta.

Is nuair a tháinig an teach i gCois Abhann Doinne ar an mhargadh gur smaoinigh Máire Uí Cheallaigh ar bhogadh. Chónaigh Cáit, a deirfiúir agus a teaghlach sa tsráidbhaile ansin ar an phríomh-shráid. Bheadh cuideachta mhaith ag Máire ansin ag caint is ag comhrá lena deirfiúir. Ní bheadh an t-ímní céanna ar Lucy a thuilleadh anois go raibh sí ag caitheamh níos mó ama ag obair i mBéal Feirste.

Is cinnte go gcrónódh Lucy an teach seo a bhí suite ar imeall na farraige. Thaitin fuaim na dtonn léi agus an ghaoth fhiáin a shéid ar a haghaidh léi.

D'éirigh sí ón urlár cruu agus shiúil sí a fhad leis an fhuinneog bheag Velux a bhí ag binn an tí. Thiontaigh sí an hanla agus chas sí timpeall é leis an fhuinneog a oscailt amach. Chonaic sí sléibhte Albain go glinn i bhfad uaithi. Chonaic sí cúpla bád iascaireachta ag seoladh ar na tonnta. Chonaic sí na faoileáin ag tomadh is ag eitilt. Ó is cinnte go crónódh sí an radharc amach os a comhair.

Thiontaigh Lucy thart agus thug sí aghaidh ar na boscaí a bhí ina luí ar urlár an áiléir athuair. Níor chreid sí an méid litreacha is an méid cártaí a tháinig sí orthu ó na blianta roimhe. Bhí meascán de chártaí Nollaig is breithlá ann. Bhí go leor litreacha a fuair sí ó chairde a d'fhreastal ar na coláistí gaeltachta léi i measc rudaí eile. Rinne sí gáire beag léi féin nuair a tháinig sí ar a céad cárta Vailintín. Bhuaíl idir náire agus cion í ag smaoinreamh ar an am sin a ndeachaigh sí sa tóir ar Thiarnán, a céad grá. Ó dá mbeadh an chríonacht agus an t-eolas atá aici anois ag an am sin ní chuireadh sí cuid mhaith dá cuid ama amú ar ghasúir mí-aibí agus ar dhaoine amaideacha. Ba ghnáth léi bheith chomh buartha fá bharúlacha dhaoine eile agus bhí sí bródúil as an iarracht a bhí déanta aici ar na malluibh leis an drochnós seo a athrú. Chuala sí macalla an tseanfhocail ina cloigeann – Tagann ciall le haois.

Bhí leasracha Lucy ag éirí nimhneach de bhrí go raibh sí ina suí ar a gogaide barraíocht. Fuair sí greim ar shéan-cheannadhairt a bhí ina luí sa chúinne agus chuir sí thíos faoina tóin é. Bhí sí sáite sna cuimhneacháin uilig a bhí ag seoladh thart uirthi cosúil le brat scamall. Ba dheas theacht ar ghrianghraif óna hóige fosta. Chuimhnigh sí siar ar sheanghaolta nach bhfaca sí le fada an lá. B'fhéidir go ndéanfadh sí cuardach ar chuid acu ar Facebook nó ar Instagram níos moille nuair a bheadh níos mó ama aici. Thóg sí cúpla seát scáileáin lena guthán d'ainmneacha a bhí scríofa ar chúl ghrianghraf le cur i gcuimhne di féin.

Sheas Lucy suas agus d'amharc sí thart ar fud an tseomra. Shiúil sí chuig cúl an tseomra agus shuigh sí síos go cúramach ar rachta adhmaid. Bhí

a géine clúdaithe le marcanna dubha ón salachar a bhí thart uirthi ach ba chuma léi ag an pointe seo. Shonraigh sí na cairn dhifriúla a bhí socraithe aici le tabhairt anuas agus amach chuig a carr. Bhí sí níos scaoilte inti féin de bhrí nach raibh ach bosca amháin fágtha aici le socrú. Cá bhfios cad é a bhí istigh ann – sean-bhillí nó páipéarachas de chineál éigin a shíl sí. Thosaigh sí á tharraingt ina treo – bhí sé measartha trom is stróic coirnéal amháin ag barr an bhosca go furasta. Bholadh sí tais ag teacht ón chairtchlár – sean-bholadh fann coinclí ag teacht uaidh. Bhuail taom chasachtaí í de bharr an dusta uilig. Tháinig sceitimíní uirthi ag smaoineamh ar an seoid a thiocthadh sí air taobh istigh. D’oscail sí na taobhanna go cúramach is bhreathnaigh sí isteach.

An chéad radharc a bhuail í ná éadach uachtar línéadach a bhí ag clúdach beart measartha mór. D’iompair sí amach é agus chuir sí a lámha thíos faoi le cibé ní a chosaint a bhí ansin. Bhí meáchan ann is bhí sé fada go leor le cruth aisteach. Mhothaigh sí taobh amháin a bhí cuartha agus an bun a bhí caol. De réir a chéile, bhain sí an t-éadach. As eireaball a súl, chonaic sí cruth sorcóra is dath órga lonrach. Bhuail splanc chuimhní í. D’aithin sí an patrún fiarláin, an t-adhmad garbh. Bhain sí an chuid eile faoi dheifir. Bhí an ceart aici. Chuala sí a croí ag preabarnach os ard. Bhí mearbhall ag teacht uirthi agus bhí sé doiligh aici anáil a tharraingt mar is ceart. Is fiche bliain ar a laghad a bhí ann ón uair dheireanach a chonaic sí é – an vása órga Spáinneach.

Thiontaigh sí thart an t-iarsma agus rinne sí mi-onscrúdú air le cinntiú nach rud dul amú uirthi. Rinne sí a seacht ndícheall cuimhneamh ar an aois a raibh uirthi nuair a thosaigh na hargóintí uilig idir a tuismitheoirí. Chuala sí macalla na nguthanna ina cloigeann – a máthair is a hathair ag scairtigh is doirsí ag druidim. Chonaic sí í féin mar chailín óg ina suí ar an staighre ag éisteacht leo. Ag an bhomaite sin, thóg sí a lámh is chuir sí ar a cléibh é óir mhothaigh sí an pian, an brón, an ceo ón am seo chuaigh thart. Níor aithin sí, go fiú, go raibh na deora ag titim go flúirseach óna

leicne is go raibh sí ar crith. Is fada an lá ó bhuail na mothúcháin sin í. Is fada an lá ó chonaic sí a hathair féin go fiú. Is é an lá a tháinig an vása órga chun tí a bhfaca sí don uair dheireanach é – b’shin é an lá a d’athraigh gach rud ina saol.

Caithfidh sé gur chuir a máthair an vása i bhfolach ag barr an tí go luath ina dhiaidh an lá cinniúna sin. Chuimhnigh Lucy ar na laethanta a chaith a máthair ag siar – chaoineadh agus ag luí ina leaba. Níor thuig Lucy ariamh an fáth ar imigh a hathair ach thuig sí go raibh baint aige leis an vása a tháinig an lá sin. Chuir sí a méar ar bhun an vása, ag mothú an chríoch uigeach. Thiontaigh sí bunoscionn é agus is ansin a thug sí faoi deara go raibh bearna ann. Dhírigh sí a súil i dtreo an phoill go bhfaca sí píosa páipéir istigh sa chroílár. Chroith sí é ag úsáid a dá lámh go dtáinig nóta amach ina glac. Ba léir go raibh fuairín cúng déanta de sa dóigh is go dtiocfadh leis fanacht ansin cosúil le rún marbh. Tháinig scanradh ar Lucy anois ag smaoineamh ar an chinniúint a bhí os a comhair.

Bhí a lámha ar crith Bhí sí ar tí an nóta a oscailt nuair a chuala sí guth ag teacht ó bhun an tí. “A Lucy, a stór. ‘Bhfuil tusa go fóill thuas ansin. Tá sconnóga úra faighte agam dúinn – na cinn bhlasta le seacláid bhán ‘s sútha craobha iontu.”

D’fhill Lucy an píosa páipéir faoi dheifir agus bhrúigh sí isteach ina póca cúil é. Chuimil sí na deora óna haghaidh le muinchille a geansaí. Thóg sí a guthán agus d’amharc sí uirthi féin sa cheamara ar eagla go raibh mascára faoina súile. “Ag teacht anois a Mhamaí. Bomaite beag.” Tharraing sí í féin suas le tacaíocht ón bhíoma adhmaid os a cionn. Ghlac sí anáil mhór isteach is amach arís chun í féin a shuaimhniú. Rinne sí athuair é lena cuid súl druidte. Ansin shiúil sí go cúramach i dtreo na dréimí ag oscailt an áiléir.

## Linda Byrne

### *A Lure*

Hills and mountains  
in my way  
but I'll take a step  
a step closer  
to be undressed by you

The textured cotton  
the textured wallpaper  
the worried bed  
the crying carpet

In the midst of  
hills and mountains  
you can pretend  
pretend to be magical

To forget your day-to-day  
not washing the dishes  
not feeding the dogs  
but drinking in the lure

A lure so delicious  
it'll consume your whereabouts  
and place you  
rolling  
undulating and swallowing  
in the hills and mountains

It's all  
hills and mountains  
hills and mountains  
closed curtains in the daytime  
stranger's things on your floor

And he is good  
and the climb is strong  
and the trail is set  
instinctive and animalistic

Don't look down  
from heady headless heights  
down into his clever eyes  
it's too soon

We are both pretending  
both reaching and traveling  
happily tearing at tree roots  
as we climb the hills and mountains

It's all  
hills and mountains  
hills and mountains

## Sean Fitzsimons

### *Where the Wild Things Grow*

I love to go, where the wild things grow, and the oak trees know,  
yes the oak trees know  
about fairy doors and ancient wars, tribal tales,  
before the cross and the nails.

I love to go, where the wild things grow,  
where the snails can talk and the plants can walk, where the  
free birds fly (and they don't ask why), where there is no time –  
there is only now.

I love to go where the wild things grow, where wild cats be hissinn',  
tall trees be kissinn', an' there's no missing you,  
an' no missing me, 'cause all is One  
an' One is free.

I love to go where the wild things grow, where the shrooms are funny  
and the bees make the honey. Where the wild things grow  
there is no money –  
if this sounds appealin' and you need some healin'

please go where the wild things grow.

## Dan Gregory

### *Creamy Dams*

*goes G, D, C*

back a good ole while ago  
maybe it was '92  
me and few other boys  
went on the beek from school  
the sun was burning in the sky  
and we thought *fuck this lark*  
so we registered in our form class  
then fucked off to the park  
when we were on our way there  
we robbed McErlain's  
and got ourselves some creamy buns  
and took a good long chase  
for the fellas in the factory  
were always on the watch  
but they gave up all their chasin'

when we got to the park  
we were eating our creamy dams  
on the top of a grassy hill  
when two fully grown twin brothers appeared  
below on the football pitch  
they punched the fuck clean out of each other  
then wrestled to the ground  
then they started kissing violently  
and rolling all around  
we all ran like hairy bears and handed ourselves in  
and we didn't give a flyin' fuck  
for the trouble we'd be in  
so don't be being bad boys  
and don't be beekin' school  
especially in the Falls Park  
or you could end up getting tooled

## Aedín Ní Thiarnaigh

### *Dán Chinn a Bhaile*

Oíche mhaith ó Chinn an Bhaile;  
nóiníní is bleachtáin 'mithe chun suain,  
an aolchloch ag síneadh go bun na spéire,  
is na Beanna Beola i bhfad uaim.

## Linda Byrne

### *Andy Bell*

My mate fancied Andy Bell.  
So did her gorgeous glamorous sisters.  
They made Poleglass shine  
with their fashion, beauty and laughter.  
The idols of Colin.

With a gift like that  
comes responsibility.  
A flower that draws the Bs.  
A single mum of three gorgeous girls  
fighting off the swarm.

In my life, I've watched the physical change  
of men  
to wolves.  
The beauty of being a weed.  
And it frightened me.

Away from her luminosity,  
I attracted other weeds.  
You can't escape those hills and mountains.

Cathy Burke says, a man will  
shag a vacuum cleaner.  
So there is hope for everyone.  
Even an Electrolux.  
I am so grateful.

So my mate's brother had his three older sisters.  
He was shy. They didn't get on.  
Until he began to be beaten by other boys  
and his girlfriend.

A plant can't run.  
A plant survives in the ground  
yielding to the atmosphere,  
being blamed for drawing attention to itself

in this atmosphere of under-age drinking  
and trying to get snogged. Street patrols and  
joy-  
riding.

Her scent was soon picked up.  
And mine too.  
From one year of Andy Bell posters  
to the next  
of 26-year-old men taking us out.

I don't recognise myself in this.  
The desperation was so desperate.  
You need to wise up.  
Cheer up for fuck's sake.  
Be more confident, fool.  
We were being, good grown up, mature girls.

Sure the teachers were touching my face.  
Dating the students.  
And rolling up their sleeves.

Though hats off to  
a man teaching a room full of sweating beauties.  
Sprawled along the back desks  
in open-neck blouses.  
While he talked about power and equality.  
From a book by a Mr Haralambos.



Erasure are a great band.  
My farmer uncle had never heard of, homo,  
sexuality.

He went to see them in the Kings Hall.  
Full of queens.

He had a queer expression and questions after  
his night out.

He'd tell me he went. Take a far-off expression.  
The sentence trailing.  
Me smirking, waiting. He'd say,  
No more.  
I loved that he went.

Anyway, point is, Andy Bell.  
This writing came because I woke up thinking,  
"I  
don't wanna know  
like some kind of fool.  
I'm building a wall.  
Every day it's getting higher.  
This time I won't end up another victim of  
love".

Yesterday,  
Tina Turner sang  
"What's love got to do with it?"  
in Asda.  
I bought a microwaveable lasagne. Serves two –  
I don't think so.  
Ding.

## Michael McFall

### *Twelve Steps*

Red raw and indignant like a wet baby, I shuffle  
to the front of the room. A dishonest man's  
procession.

The group of eyes that bore into me sense my  
shame at simply being and taunt my every step.

There's no redemption up there, only more  
looks and recrimination from the peanut gallery.  
They want a story. They want a character arc  
that eventually leads to catharsis and hope.

They want me splayed and supine before them.

They need my agony and remorse to show.  
They need it because otherwise their agony is  
invalidated and their remorse is self-delusion.

Quid pro quo.

Unspoken agreements have been reached here  
between these lost and useless souls.

Let's talk about anything so that we won't have  
to talk about THAT thing.

But it doesn't work.

The beast is here among us, make no mistake.

He rips and tears at the parts you can't see.  
The parts that made us who we were before  
we drifted away like so much detritus after a  
shipwreck.

What can I possibly say to them?

What exactly is it that I tell my tattered flock  
tonight when all I really want is a large drink and  
a dark room?

**Lynda Sullivan**

*In the Name of the American Dream*

One year short of a decade ago, as North Americans were preparing to celebrate Independence Day and the American Dream – as they were buying in the drink and dusting off the barbeque, further south on the same landmass, also in the name of this American Dream – four souls were killed. A day later, as revellers watched fireworks light up the sky, another life was taken.

I know these souls. Not through their lives, but through their afterlives. I wasn't present on the day they died, but I've lived that day many times over – through the reliving of it by those who survived them. Their memories are now my memories, their pain now my pain.

It was the killing that drew me to Celendin, a small rural town in the Peruvian Andes. As a freelance reporter, I was interested in conflicts caused by mining – and in 2012, the Conga project, proposed by Colorado-based Newmont Mining, was the biggest conflict on the continent. Gold was sought at any cost, and the highest price was paid.

It was incurred by Doña Santos – whose son was shot in the same plaza that held the church where she was hiding. Father Antonio had barred the doors to stop the army storming in and killing everyone. She prayed that Joselito was far from the shots she heard just outside the door. Her prayer went unanswered.

Doña Maximilla paid with the life of her eldest son, who was still a child. The blood drained from my limbs as I read the autopsy report of 16-year-

old César Medina Aguilar. Killed by a shot to the head, from above, from a long distance. It was the helicopter, I was told – they shot him from the army helicopter brought in to 'keep the peace', but instead fired live bullets into the people-filled streets. César's former teacher believes he was targeted – he was the school mayor and was organising the students to protest against the mine. And he was effective. Charismatic and smart, responsible yet courageous – and so a target. I have sat with Doña Maximilla as she wept. I saw the shattered pieces of her life, held together by César after her husband died two years before the massacre, now desperately scattered. Who will care for her young children if she falls apart?

'It was like a war movie', said Jesi one day, as a group of us gathered in the Casa de Promotores de Salud to make soap. With our hands occupied the stories flowed. Jesi told us how she had to run for cover across the plaza, ducking from every sound, trying to locate her family. Jovana spoke of César, how she knew him well, how she saw him die. She watched as he fell, and she watched as his blood spilled out over the pavement. She remembers the relief when she saw an ambulance coming down the main street – but this quickly turned to horror as she saw soldiers emerge from the back of it instead of paramedics. So they wrapped César in the Celendin flag they'd be carrying and they ran.

I listened to Doña Adelaida, the widow of Paulino Garcia Rojas, as she had to recount, yet one more time, to journalists or lawyers how her husband wasn't even involved in the protests, how he was working in Lima and came home to visit his family just the day before. How he'd went out to buy bread and never came home. He was also shot in the head from the helicopter. Most

of the journalists who interviewed her never came back, and the lawyers disappeared along with the justice they promised. No police officer nor soldier was ever held accountable for the lives they took. I saw videos of them pocketing the many spent bullets that lined the streets on the day the people of Celendin saw their state turn against them.

Dona Yeny's story stings like salt on an open wound. She had to watch as the police hassle the mourners the day they buried their dead. She watched as the coffin holding her husband's body is thrown to the ground. As she cried out the police reply 'Motherfucker, get out of here! Or do you want to die like a dog too?'

But they were violent dissidents, said the media. Terrorists, drug lords even. Tried to burn down the town hall. What wasn't reported was how the rooms near to the municipal door were mysteriously cleared days before; how those that lit that fire were not previously known to the locals. In the 40 days of sustained protests in the lead up to that fateful day, with each neighbourhood taking its turn to organise, no violence was used. The communities were united and strong. They had to be stopped. Many believe

it was a conspiracy, to stamp out the growing fire of resistance, to instil fear into their hearts.

And it worked. The fear was always palpable in this town. The trauma, raw. But the embers of that resistance could not be extinguished. It glowed bright during the many vigils that were held to honour the 'Water Martyrs'; it shone down from the murals on the walls; it rang out in songs. And in the countryside, in the villages and hamlets scattered across the mountains that outnumber the towns, it positively roared.

In this David and Goliath story, the giant didn't get his cream. But in his scramble for it many lives were torn. And in the shadows, he lurks still, yet he now knows the strength of enduring dignity – surpassing even life. I carried the flag that carries César's blood years later, in another march, to resist another mine. César, Joselito, Antonio, Paulino, Faustino – you did not die, you multiplied.

I dedicate this to the families who have lost their loved ones to state violence – from Peru to Colombia, from Palestine to Ballymurphy.

**Colum Mac Giolla Bhéin**

*Colin Glen*

*in memory of Terry Enright  
father and son, lámh ar lámh*

It was summer great and good  
In the early morning wood  
A choir of birds announced the dawn  
The chorus lingered on and on  
A riot of colour everywhere  
Sweet perfume pervades the air  
Insects hover here and there  
The animals begin to stir  
As I offer up this simple prayer  
Let it be like this, everywhere

## Edel Quinn

### *Dusk Meanderings*

ducks circling in threes, like they're coked up,  
land in a line  
near the others loafing in the lake,  
heads sandwiched under their wings  
high above, Brent Geese in loose formation,  
head for Island Hill,  
where the pickings are good, so they tell me,  
in their wild thousands

a baby greyhound corseted in a high-end number  
double takes my heart, all the size of her,  
being led by the neck by a tense couple  
bewildered eyes, skinny-legged, gormless

a man notices me, smiles and in the space  
before my outbreath I've noticed him too  
still smiling, he long gone, I'm walking taller,  
shoulders back, braless breasts –  
a little more spring

no longer the young pup in fancy clothes  
no longer the desire to truss myself into some  
soul-destroying false shape, left with  
what's left, gormless and flushing  
with possibility

as I join in the craic with the robins,  
mistle thrush, finches  
and tits – the only souls I've spoken with today –  
I feel the mercy of an easeful belly

and find that when I step lightly on the land,  
I open to the quiet sparks on the ripples,  
the darkening sky, trees teaming  
in sparse silhouette  
and the bats, running about in the air,  
the eejits, oh!  
the fluttering surprise of them, flickering  
little joy machines

a man with seven spaniels on five leads  
at him like chickens round a handful of feed  
heads off to walk the night fields  
and scatter like confetti across the grass

I haven't even told you about the cygnets yet –  
I wonder  
are they still bereft since their mother left?  
or has it eased, have they forgotten?  
or as they turn white  
do they learn to live with it and move on?

children shriek and roll down the dark hill,  
till a car horn summons  
a young boy asks 'Will I play hurley with her,  
Mum?' – 'Aw,  
I think she's ran enough today.'

She doesn't miss a beat,  
out in the wild east tonight

she doesn't miss a beat  
a beat, a beat, a beat, a beat  
I think she's ran enough today

she doesn't miss a beat

## **Colum Mac Giolla Bhéin**

### *Requiem for a Planet*

mother earth is taking her leave  
a weary rock on brink of night  
is struggling with all her might  
against the fading of the light

forgive, for she knows not why  
she has to bid us all goodbye  
she gave us warnings, all the signs  
but avarice has made us blind

she never understood just why  
some people plunder, cheat, and lie  
bless themselves with fingers crossed  
chalk it up to yet another loss

down on Wall Street, they rang the bell  
the one that announced our departure for Hell  
loudly clapped, raucously cheered

as she, was throwing off the years  
while letting out a mournful sigh  
the kind men make, before they die

## Christine Poland

### *You Only Fail if You Quit*

You're a clever little girl, how about this?

You can do the 11+, primary 6 you'll miss.

You could tell the time in P1 when you started,

It's a shame school wasn't the same by the time you'd departed.

Clever little girl, how fast you learned to read and write –

you did your sums and all they taught. You were very bright.

You'd believed them when they said "you'll go far" –

oh, how daft the adults were. Some still are.

You knew you'd passed the 11+ by the fat envelope in the post

that Saturday in November you looked forward to the most.

When you went running down the stairs to get your envelope,

you were shocked to see a skinny one. You quickly lost hope.

The look you thought your daddy had as you glanced up at him

said You're a disappointment. Oh, God, didn't that feel grim?

You decided there and then, "I'm not clever after all.

I don't belong with smart people". Far from grace you did fall.

You spent the next thirty-five years living in that world –

like Cinderella, to the cleaning yourself you hurled.

You worked in all sorts of places, getting on with life,

but always as a skivvy. That cut you like a knife,

till one day you discovered you'd made the story up.

You knew you'd have to change it; would that be hard? Yup

You'd been bored so stupid, there was no stimulation,

you've an active little mind. Imagine the frustration.

So you started going to classes, in many a setting, but your dark place thought you'd get caught, so – you were often fretting.

It took a long time before you started to believe you could get an education, what a reprieve –

above the voice in my head that had told me every day,

"You don't belong with clever people, so stay away".

I somehow found the courage to take a chance on me,

I still loved learning, 'cause it makes me happy. you see.

I got to university when I was 47 – didn't care what it would take,

I felt like I was in heaven.

In the year that I was 50, I was finally free,

leaving university with a first-class honours degree.

I have cried for the child, the teenager and the young mother,

then the middle-aged woman decided, Tears? never another.

Now I believe I'm clever, my life has been transformed.

I'd taken the bull by the horns, into education I stormed.

I've certificates in this, diplomas in that, even teaching qualifications underneath my hat.

I don't look back now, to wish away my life.

It could have been much worse with years full of strife.

If I find myself re-running, I'm not clever. I don't belong

but I will contradict it, knowing those thoughts are wrong.

I reward myself with wisdom for the years that got lost,

I know who I am now ... and self-doubt? It's never worth the cost.



## Sean Fitzsimons

### *Exposed*

a morning walk exposed my shadow  
on the earth it did appear  
as the sun shone down upon my back

something became so clear  
this shadow that is in my sights  
represents my fears

it lies down there on the ground  
but I dwell  
in here

## Sara Boyce

### *Irish People are Raring Up*

in the name of god and the dead generations  
about needing an appointment to call in on neighbours

the same neighbours whose front door is opened  
by care staff who sweep through three times a day

about care staff who are paid by the tick-tock profit clock  
the price of their uniforms docked from pay packets

about the demise of meat and two veg, the rise of ready meals  
in shopping aisles with *Bia Úr* signs hanging overhead

about people driving Range Rovers to the corner shop,  
all-terrain tyres mounting the footpath outside

those hanging-on-for-grim-death wee corner shops  
mourning the absence of kids' bikes blocking their doors  
about parents paying eight quid for a box of incandescent cereal  
in American Candy stores with classy, sugar-frosted windows

about the emergence of a new class – the working poor  
who fork out fifty pounds for a turkey that comes in its own box  
a stuffed, cardboard box they didn't order

about street lighting dimming the star-studded sky  
a night sky still raked by helicopter lights  
searching for anything that doesn't seem right.  
Mar dheá.

## Maura McParland

### *Care*

'It must be very hard'  
'Na, you get used to it'  
Do I fuck!  
adrenaline pumping through my veins  
twelve hours solid, all be it, with good gains  
eyes like saucers  
forget to breathe  
*Is* dotted, *Ts* crossed before I leave  
no hourly rate through the night  
twenty-four hours putting up with shite  
am I nuts?  
am I burnt out?  
Hierarchy, listen, hear my shout  
it's not their fault  
it just is what it is  
you can't help what you're born into  
I'm left to mop up the mess  
but fuckin pay me for it  
look after me  
the public don't know our silent plea  
vicarious trauma, lack of sleep  
my own as well as others, that's too deep  
fuckin poor kids, I'm all they have  
help me self-care, I need you bad  
look after me to look after them  
can only take so much, think I've come to the end  
three of my own, sacrifices made  
just leave now before precious time fades  
maybe to be whole again, dedicate me to me  
I'm still doing it, we'll see, we'll see

## Dolores O'Neill

### *Walking Behind Coffins*

*for my mother, who is much stronger than me*

Three scores ten and more  
twenty-one children I have bore  
ten died in infancy  
natural causes innocently.

A council home – disallowed  
we bought our own, this made us proud  
too many children of the wrong creed  
“Education minimal, is all they need”

In a mixed community things were fine  
then came the troubles of '69  
neither mass nor school without a price  
my children beaten, the sacrifice.

Doused with petrol, filled with lead  
our home in flames as we slept in bed.  
Sitting in hospitals to nurse my kin  
defeated, tired, I still can't win.

One of my son's employment he found  
four days later slumped on the ground  
a bullet in his lunch box, a threat to leave  
only twenty-one years since he was conceived.

Anguished and weary, when will it end  
walking behind coffins – Ireland's new trend.  
Neighbours watched without Farewell  
as we left our home, a burnt-out shell.

Years passed by, still the sacrifice is made  
my home being wrecked by British Army raids  
my sons arrested, taken to Castlereagh  
tortured, interrogation for seven days.

Three weeks later, a knock to the door  
bearing the news that my son was no more  
shot in the chest, by a RUC gun  
to the RUC, another Irish Hun.

Another child's coffin to walk behind  
the path to the cemetery is so easy to find,  
he was just a lad of twenty-three  
with a wife and daughter who was only three.

A price I've paid to every creed  
my mind may be strong but my heart still bleeds.  
Why is it Lord that your price is so high  
and twelve of my children had to die?

Some say I'm brave for all that I've lost  
sympathetic words don't justify the cost.  
It's not just me, but the rest of my kin  
whose hearts swell with sorrow blocking a way in.

In July of '98 I lost my first-born  
another one of my sons we had to mourn.  
Walking behind coffins, through motherhood  
has slowed me down, burying my brood.

I expected my children to live longer than me,  
from twenty-one you took ten and then three.  
With my seven daughters and a remaining son,  
I'll walk behind coffins until I am in one.

## Sharon Pickering

### *Warrior*

bloodied hands imbedded on the dark, drab wall  
barefoot and grounded, roots twisted in ancestral soil  
each glorious day with a new warrior call  
a life to live well, in memory of them all

fantastic flushes and rattlings of needy pills, start every bloody day  
“catch yourself on love,” I hear the wee woman say  
each glorious day with a new warrior call  
a life to live for me, in memory of them all

pearls of cultured sweat, a noose of what might be  
thick stealing mist, blackened thoughts that still haunt me  
each glorious day with a new warrior call  
a life to live for mo chlann, in memory of them all

## Sara Boyce

### *Not a Mantlepiece Kind of Person*

There's an empty space on the mantlepiece  
in my father's living room;  
between the Child of Prague, a deck of cards  
and a stopped carriage clock.  
You see, we can't agree,  
my sister and me, on where we should put him.  
She insists he's to remain where he's always been,  
here in his own home, with his footstool, reading glasses  
and last month's Racing Post.  
I argue that he's not an ornament, and besides,  
our father, a craftsman, who could turn his hand to anything,  
who'd carved his own wooden urn,  
was not a mantlepiece kind of person.  
We agree to let his dust settle and then decide.

## Scott McKendry

### *Dump*

*for my ma*

That day we go down to drop off the fucked microwave, old shirts  
and shoes at the 'household recycling centre' your eyes light up  
when you spot yer man

you say hello so warmly to, who stares straight through me.  
Sorry, he goes, I don't *know* ye.  
He works here.

He shakes his head – his eyes play that sad, sad song – when you ask  
whether he's back with the mother of his kid.

I carried *his* mother's coffin down the Oldpark Road,  
must be two decades ago, and near dropped it

when I saw the tears beat down his rosy cheeks  
onto his school shirt.

They say he was cursed in being so 'deep'. I was deep too, but lucky.

## Fionnuala Ní Mhealláin

### *Cumba*

Níor amharc Síle Uí Dhoibhlin siar. Dhíriigh sí a súile donna ar an chosán fada os a comhair. Cé go raibh sí ag siúl, níor aithin sí na daoine ag gebaireacht thart timpeall uirthi ná na carranna ag bogadh faoi luas ar an bhóthar. Céim i ndiaidh céime a ghlac sí gan smaoinemh. Mhóthaigh sí siochta ina corp agus ina haighe go fiú. Shíl sí go raibh sí ag amharc anuas uirthi féin is go raibh sí scartha óna corp. Bhraith sí deora na fearthainne troime ag bualadh in éadan a grua is thug sin faoiseamh nó sólás de chinéal éigin di.

D'fhill sí a sciatháin trasna agus thug sí barróg di féin gan fhios di. D'ordaigh sí dá cosa sos a thógáil ón siúl. Is ansin a shínigh sí a haghaidh go fadálach i dtreo na spéire agus thug sí faoi deara an dath liathbhán a bhí os a cionn. Ba bhreá léi dreapadh ar dhréimire i measc na scamall le dul i bhfolach, le héalú ar feadh seal ón saol seo. D'oscail sí a béal agus chuir sí a teanga amach lena tart a mhúchadh. Bhí bolcán te ag búireach go domhan ina lár; áit éigin ina bolg. Gan sraithradharc, thosaigh sí ag bogadh arís. Ba chuma léi nár tháinig a cuid éadaí lena chéile. Ba chuma léi go raibh a mascára ag silleadh óna súile is go raibh a cuid gruaige in aimhréidh is go raibh sí féin ina líbín.

Le fírinne, ní raibh mórán de chuimhne aici ar an chúpla lá deireanach anuas. Ní raibh sí cinnte an i lár scannán uafáis a bhí sí. Thuig sí nach raibh sí ag iarraidh bheith páirteach i gceachtar acu, agus go raibh sí ag dul in éadan a tola is í sa bhomaite seo. Tháinig cúpla athbhladh ar ais chuici – an chónra adhmaid, an uaigh chlabárach, na focail dheireanacha. Rinne sí a dícheall ruaig a chur ar na cuimhne seo. Go tobann, bhuaill pian millteanach í ina cléibh; i gcroílár a croí. Bhraith sí go raibh sí féin ag dul bás a fháil; go raibh sí ag bá inti féin. Bhí taom eagla ag teacht uirthi is bhí uirthi greim daingean a fháil ar gheata miotail taobh amuigh de theach strainséir. B'éigean di crann taca a fháil ar rud éigin. Chrom sí síos is shuigh sí ar a gogaide. Lig sí do na deora fearthainne preabadh anuas uirthi. Chuidigh seo léi ar bhealach.

Níor chreid sí é nuair a smaoinigh sí air. A fear céile imithe ar shlí na fírinne. Marbh. Finito.

Mhóthaigh sí an giorrúchán anála arís. Chuir sí a lámh ar a cléibh athuair. Sheas sí suas de réir a chéile is thosaigh sí ag siúl go fadálach arís lena lámha i bpócaí a cóta. Pócaí s'aigeasan. Cóta te tolaí s'aigeasan. Boladh s'aigeasan. Bhí sé gach áit thart timpeall uirthi. Chonaic sí é sna crainn, sna tithe, sa spéir agus go fiú sna daoine a bhí ag dul thar bráid.

Harry s'aici. Anam cara gleoite s'aici. Bhí a fhios aici go raibh sé tinn is gur dhúirt an otharlann nach raibh mórán ama fágtha aige ar an saol seo. Ach tharla gach rud chomh gasta ag an deireadh. Bomaite amháin anseo léi is bomaite eile imithe. Cén áit? B'fhéidir go raibh sé anseo léi i measc na gaoithe. Chonaic sí a shúile gorma, a bheola álainn. Chuala sí a ghuth séimh ag caint léi, ag rá a hainm. Lean sí uirthi ag fánaíocht cosúil le bean fhiáin.

Tháinig tuireamh ar an lá agus bhí cuma níos soiléire ar gach rud. D'aithin Síle go raibh bean ar chomhaois léi ag stánadh uirthi le trua ina súile. Dhíriigh sí a haird ar an sliabh os a comhair. Ní raibh sí ag iarraidh tiontú le pilleadh ar an teach. Teach s'acu. Teach folamh s'acu. Cathaoir fholamh ag amharc uirthi, ag cur in iúl di nach raibh sé ann níos mó. Bhuaill arraing uafásach arís í ina croí. Shiúil sí ní ba ghaiste. B'fhearr léi bheith gan dídean ná dul ar ais chun na bhaile.

Thosaigh sí ag cuimhneamh siar ar an chéad uair a chonaic sí Harry; an chéad uair a bhuaill sí leis. Bhí siad beirt i Meiriceá ag obair le linn an tsamhraidh. Í féin i mbialann Iodálach agus é féin i mbeáir Éireannach. Tháinig miongháire ar a béal ag cuimhneamh siar. Bhí am iontach acu an samhradh sin. A cairde féin agus cairde s'aige ag dul amach ar an ran dan gach oíche go maidin. Bhí siad beirt sa bhliain deireanach ar an ollscoil ag an am sin. Laethanta ar an trá faoin ghrian. Laethanta gan buaireamh. B'iontach dul siar chuig an am soineanta sin. Laethanta órga a hóige.

D'amharc sí anuas ar a fainne bainise. Chas sí timpeall ar a méar í. Bhí a fhios aici go raibh Harry léi, greanta inti. Thuig sí go mbeadh uirthi géilleadh don chinniúint. Is é seo mar a bhí agus a bheadh go deo. Thuig sí ansin go mbeadh uirthi tiontú ar ais i dtreo an tí. Lá i ndiaidh lae, bomaite i ndiaidh bomaite, céim i ndiaidh céime. Bheadh na páistí buartha fúithi. Thug sí aghaidh ar an bhaile.



## Aisling Nic Eoin

### *The Black Place*

We lie; merged in place,  
in a spell of stillness  
where the longest breath meets the deepest sigh  
and the blackness of the night holds ours bodies.

We are settled there; conjoined,  
drawn into the hum of our thoughts.  
The world merely a tiptoed hush  
and the blackness an unflinching veil.

The black place, where our dreams made plans  
and burned bright until the gloom of morning.  
Where passions made illuminated illusions  
of forever and tomorrows.

Then, to lie, alone.  
The twitching hours.  
The encompassing roar of the world  
and the blackness; immeasurable fear

Fear of what night does  
to a lonely soul away from being.  
An ethereal shape, almost bodiless  
in the blackness, bleeding —

bleeding onto rocks  
that line the bottom of night,  
smoothing them with internal reflection.  
Nothing to do but listen

smoothing them, smoothing them,  
smoothing them until they glisten.

in the black place, shards of light ...

## Sharon Pickering

### *An Act of Love*

Thirty-nine frenzied years. An eventful life packed to the rafters. Each memory carelessly wrapped and thrown on a neglected heap, willing for the day when I would care to remember ... Those achingly delicious belly laughs at a heavy-headed love's failed attempts to eat dirty ribs with a fork; those first precious moments of life and the unspoken promises made to eyes of piercing blue and glassy green; that time when I travelled in convoy by camel across the rippling waves of the Sahara; flashes of dance and song with old friends in a protected nook, far away from home. Each day caught up in the mundane, too busy to stop, terrified a slight pause might shatter the stunning illusion. It wasn't my time – I had too much to do – to accept the burnt offerings of the past.

Alone, I stood propped against the comfort of that cold concrete, afraid my wee short-arsed legs might give way. The harsh summer wind cruelly taunted me as I watched the scattering of people in slow robotic motions, the shuffling of worried feet and swirls of expectant smoke, calling to appointments that would determine their fate. The world no longer as hopeful and bright as when I walked through those inviting doors of transparency, just sixty minutes before.

It may sound quite obvious to write this but there is NEVER a good time to get cancer, there is NEVER a good type to get. ANY TIME sucks, ANY TYPE sucks, no matter what some people may say. Oh, I could write a book (that old cliché) about some of those things people say – some from the heart, some from the brains in their arse but that's a story for another day. The irony is, the worst thing you can do is say nothing, even those half-arsed comments are more welcome than those vessels of emptiness, which just feed fear and loneliness, that darken even the sunniest of days.

If this was in chronological order, I would take you on my journey. (It sounds almost like an epic tale of adventure in some far-off exotic land) in reality, it was a shitshow.

Operations and Frankenstein scars. Endless hospital stays. Waiting rooms and scans. Being poked and prodded like an oversized bloody pin cushion. Veins pumped with poison. Forced to projectile vomit. The unwanted gift that kept on giving.

I remember, after that first “to kill the Bastard” session of poison (sounds almost like the morning cure after a drunken night, fuzziness and projectile vomit included), having a sudden realisation that my thick, coarse locks had only days to live. That thick dark hair I hated as a child – many combs and brushes were lost and broken in that graveyard and yet as each day brought the inevitable, I began to mourn for hair long gone!

Each day another unwelcome development of once healthy, glossy hair, falling out in strands and clumps, forced out by a poison fruit. I helplessly watched as the darkened clump swirled slowly down and clogged the bloody drain. As I looked at my reflection in the fogged-up mirror that morning, I felt an inner sense of calm and readiness of what was to come.

That heavy headed love's “true act of love” was to walk with me every step of the way, to prepare the stage as if his life depended on it. As I sat on that kitchen chair, I watched his reflection – a face filled with pain as his weathered hands caressed my weary head. The melodic humming of shavers and the nest of dark locks at my feet.

The watchful eyes of piercing blue and glassy green, and his soothing words of comfort to us all, helped him to carefully manage that final act. To cut and shave my bumpy head that had never saw the light of day (even at birth).

In that new first moment, he gave me the time and space to catch my breath. As I looked at that bald reflection peering back at me, he wiped the silent tears that flowed for a life long gone. A true act of love.

## Siobhán McCallin

### *Emerge*

The path to enlightenment requires constant change. Suffering is key, the old Self one must rearrange. Just like the caterpillar upon entering the cocoon – dissolving, feeling it will die.

Adversity is required. You lie in isolation, silently crying

but as you dissolve you transcend all of what has been. A new state of consciousness governed by intelligence unseen. Accept and acknowledge that much of the old needs to die. Through this we emerge.

Emerge! brilliant beautiful butterfly!

