

THE STORMS



A JOURNAL OF POETRY, PROSE & VISUAL ART

**PUSHCART PRIZE
NOMINATIONS
SO FAR...**

The Storms

Pushcart Prize Nominations

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Issue 1

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MARSH LANDSCAPE / Mark Ward

after Dennis Wirth-Miller

Soon, all the water inside me will breach
my skin, flooding the studio apartment.

All our furniture will become sodden.
I will turn on the heat but it won't help.

By dawn, the water will reach my ankles.
By dusk, reeds will have sprouted around me.

Now, in our bed, not touching, I know that
you've decided to go but can't say it.

I try to hold you but my hands crumble,
too long like this. I am bog. I am peat.

Burn me for light. Lose a body in me.

AFTERNOON TEA / Alice Stainer

We gauged climatic conditions by the crispness
of creases in immaculate cloth. When Danny was
locked in the supply cupboard for the third time,

something besides tea was brewing at four o'clock.
Scones squatted on willow-pattern plates like
cumulonimbus, hot crumpets soaked up her fury.

The day my father received the letter from the bank,
his tie was wrenched off in the flurry and cupcakes
skittered across plates as Granny passed them round,

lips tightly insulated. And nothing was actually *said*
after Aunt Cassie arrived unannounced, with bulging
holdall and bruised cheek, but we caught the updraft

from just-poured cups, the microburst of raisins
from a brooding barmbrack. We chewed in silence,
swallowing our questions. Consume or be consumed.

And even now, in the levelling blast of a cold front
I picture the perfection of her Victoria sponge, warm
the pot, form squall lines from my rock buns, and eat.

STARGAZING BEYOND LAS VEGAS / Lynn Valentine

We just made the sunset: saw canyon reds
arc to yellows then night birthed
in a white cram of stars; a great wash
of constellations, old light, old gods.
After Vegas, I knew I would always want this,
you by my side submerged in the heavens.

Forget the neon, the plastic, the X-rated mags
the dirt-filled motel room in that ruined city
of meadows, with no meadows to show –
only pimps, tourists and barflies,
dollar signs flashing their hard cold glow.

There are sandstorms massing a few miles out,
threatening to drown us both. But let's forget;
turn our backs on dust and broken things –
try to touch every planet – swim again in stars.

DNA / Tara A. Elliot
for my father

I hold your head in my hands,
watch the light ebb from your eyes.

I breathe for you, my breath,
your breath.

I can taste the cancer, Daddy—
but I can't bring you back.

The spiral is little more than a curve
outward from a central point.

Night, and the pier presses patterns
into our backs.

Here memory lingers thick among creosote,
diesel fumes, brackish water.

Mooring lines creak as they are pulled taut
and released; spider webs balloon in the breeze.

Above us,
the Milky Way unfurls.

Once more, it is your finger that trails galaxies.
Once more, it is your stories that spill from my lips.

We are all drawn toward a fixed center—
the hub of the spider's web, water as it cycles
down a drain, the empty eye of the hurricane.

THE LINE THAT DIVIDES THE SEA AND SKY / Doreen Duffy

I will take you to the sea
and when we reach the water's edge
I will pull the rowboat down
and help you step inside
and we will laugh so hard
because this is all so hard
when our smiles subside
we will push out
on the waves
You can tilt your face
toward the summer sky
reflect your eyes the deepest blue
and dream white horses riding by
and in that way you do
you will tell me not to cry
and then you will remind me

...this is only for a while

when we reach the line
where the ocean falls away
the wind will whip
and drown our screams
and lift us out of the deep

we will
let the waves support us
carry us ashore
on sand of glass and seashells
we'll feel pain like nothing before
each sparkling grain a jagged blade
will lacerate our hearts
our footprints deep behind us
will continue to make their mark
we'll turn and look
towards the line that
divides the sea and sky
and then we will remember
...this is only for a while

THE COMING DAY / Vicky Allen

On the day that I die
I want to be sleeping in the sun
grass-cradled, daisy-crowned

let fragrant, soft air carry
my final breath
to the welcoming clouds

On the day that I die
let my sun-warmed body
be held by my beloved, hand holding hand

let flowers be laid upon
closed eyes, green in the dark
and let the blackbird sing a lullaby

On the day that I die
I want grass to grow strangely about me
weaving a whisper-shroud

oh and let wildflowers wind about my fingers, cornflowers and honesty
let nests and burrows be made around me
let my leaving be a welcoming

On the day that I die
I want rain to fall, full-pelt, violent
a sudden baptising storm, with violet clouds and bright lightning

let the scent of dust-dry earth
rise surprised, intoxicating as incense
and brief, like passing memories

On the day that I die
I want the sea to come for me at last
I want the wind to raise my bone-and-flesh home up high

and then after the storm
under the setting sun
let someone remember with star bursting gladness
I am not lost at all.

Issue 2

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I am afraid of driving a car -
by myself.

I am afraid of seeing
the picture on my license, and
my reflection in the mirror,
and seeing the
slowly changing eyes,
look away, avoiding mine.

I am afraid of the power
I will feel as my fingertips trace
the edges of the key,
and as I hear my breath mix
with the soft sounds
of the engine.

I am afraid of being
seen, by a stranger at the
traffic lights, who will look me
in the eyes-
and think about me
for a moment.

I am afraid of my memories,
and watching the road go
blurry, when I miss her-

I will have to roll down my
windows, as the music presses
against the doors, so that
it doesn't suffocate me.

I am afraid of my thoughts-
and watching them mix with
my daydreams as they fog
up the windows.

I am afraid of when I crash-
and go up in flames,
to finally know the feeling
of warmth, of a hug,
of being touched-

THE SQUIRREL AND FAINTING / Elizabeth Gibson

I think the corpse is of a bigger animal, try to work out which,
in the split second before seeing and knowing.

It is like how the moments before fainting, or after dreaming,
last much longer inside us than they do outside,
and are looser as to what can exist. I picture giant rat,
tiny badger, or a creature I have somehow never encountered.

But one step, then one more, and there it is: a grey squirrel,
still perfect, intact, tail and body equally big and lush,
tiny face fixed forever on the next challenge. Car outrun,
is there a fence to scale, a birdfeeder to jiggle, a cat to dodge?
You can only live this way, otherwise you would just stop,
sit in your tree, never know.

I think of burial, the words *replant* and *repot* coming to mind.
The squirrel is a spring bulb, fossil fuel, a mass
of minerals and starry matter. It will give, as it sleeps,
and the earth will drink. Later on, I faint, thinking
about the blood test I am expected to book, about invasion,
about a *me* coming to exist outside of me, in a red tube.

Flat on the floor, I stare at a ceiling unit like a square frog
stopped in time, mouth gaping. I am gently told,
why get so worried about something you haven't booked yet?
I don't know how to live other than to keep moving.
When I stay still, I get so scared of dying. I am already
forgetting the squirrel. Somebody should remember.

SWIMMING LESSONS / Clodagh Healy

If you are reading this
I'm not sure how
but I have left you my
Tesco Club Card

You see I saw this man
back bent
gnarled
like a root of a forgotten tree
jump into the sea

I watched
as each step he took
his back straightened
eyes wild as he hit the water

Remember with me
how the rolling slap of every wave
became his voice
that voice
in the back of my head
crashing forward
relentlessly

Below me
the voice calls out
come into the water

I do not answer
(again) come into the water

I look behind me
wait
but still I see
nothing to walk back to.

Before you head to the Gaeltacht for the second time, your mother half-jokingly/half-not says, don't let any boys drag you behind a hedge. You redden and duck your head to read the ingredients on the Cornflakes box like you're intensely interested in Riboflavin. Stop thinking of me in that way you want to say through gritted teeth.

At the checkpoints, the soldiers eye the minibus driver. What are they thinking? What's a priest doing with a pile of school kids? Your teacher has organised Gaeltacht scholarships because no one can afford the college fees. The soldiers peer in the side windows like it's feeding time at a zoo. For a change they don't say *Awright darling, you sixteen yet?*

One week later. A tall lad from Ballymun monopolises the dashboard radio, skims channels till they shriek like needles when ripped off vinyl. In side profile a brown fringe hides the colour of his eyes and tiny pink scars arrow his cheeks where acne used to be. He has the start of a rough beard. He's far too old for a thirteen-year-old, but he's good for scrounging a smoke off. The priest in the driver's seat casts a glance at the languid Dub. If the glance had a sound, it would be a tut. Even the holy man's specs are glinting at this denim-clad youth slouched in the passenger seat. The song *Boogie Nights* explodes into the minibus while the Dub claps his hands at finding a station. He ups the volume and lowers his window. Beats the rhythm with fingers on the bodywork.

The song is pure funky, like one that will be banned. You remember Da rustling the newspaper when Top of the Pops made *Yes Sir, I can Boogie* a hit, and were told off by teachers for singing it in school. Something about the word boogie drives adults demented. Something about "boogie" means it's not about dancing. From the radio a deep voice is insisting *Got to keep on dancing, keep on dancing* while you and other girls sway and sing in agreement.

Then the priest punches a button and Radio na Gaeltachta diddly-di music fills the air; the disco is over. You take a fit of the giggles with the other girls, what is he like, it's only a bloody song? and catch the glint of the priest's stare via the rearview mirror which he adjusts with his left hand, showing a perfect band of white skin that bracelets the tan on his arm.

The rest of the journey is punctuated by disappointed glances in the mirror. This time last year he would glance in the mirror and say, "hands up who wants to drive my car?"

It's to do with reaching the eye roll stage about speaking Irish. It's to do with no longer wearing knee high socks. At your first Gaeltacht the previous year, it was the end of primary school, now it's the end of first year of secondary school, the end of being the youngest again.

This year you don't stay in the Bean an Tí's front room where Custard Creams are presented on doilies for his night time visits. You go up to the bedroom shared with three girls and smoke out the window while singing about heartbreak and substitutes. Changing "substitute" to "prostitute" you girls cackle wildly. One Dub girl remains downstairs and tells you you're very rude for not staying to talk to the priest who made the visit specially to see the Nordies.

The priest was a bit of a hero in the Northern town where you grew up. Legend had it that when he coached hurling and camogie in the council playing fields, a grim-jawed Unionist came to the field to protest about Irish games being played on British soil. Said the Unionist: "If you didn't have that dog collar on, I'd go over there..." The story goes that the priest removed his collar and beat the tar out of the Unionist. Is the story true? It doesn't matter, it makes browbeaten people glow with secret victory.

In your first year at the Gaeltacht, three of you Nordies stayed at the same house, and the priest would drive you with three Dub girls to a beach, instead of joining the main Gaeltacht activity, a walk to a different strand. The thoughts of a lift in a car instead of hauling a bag of swimming togs, especially when they'd be damp and sandy, double the weight on the return walk, and the certainty of crisps and fizzy drinks without causing a dent in your own small pocket money made it a treat. You'd all pile into the car, two squashed into the passenger seat, four lined up in the back.

The offer of the day trip was a given; there was no invitation, nor decision-making on your parts—it was an arrangement made between adults.

Once parked behind sand dunes you scramble from the car and run to the deserted beach. Change into swimming togs with awkward acrobatics beneath inadequate towels.

The priest emerges from behind a sand dune and lollops about, bare feet pounding the sand, hairy back and chest on display, a trail of dark hair reaching the band of his swimming trunks.

He commandeers you all into camogie teams. Calls you "fat head" for missing a shot and your face blazes with shame.

Maybe it's to work out who are his favourites, the best at camogie, but he saves the promise of driving his car until the last.

He has not dressed yet and sits on the driver's seat with a belly overhang on the waistband of his black trunks. Who wants to go first? Not you. Instinct says this is wrong. In the same way that gyrating beneath a towel to make sure no one can see a stray body part is a necessity. Excitement at the opportunity to ricochet a massive car around a stretch of sand cannot cancel out your absolute belief that your swimming-suited backside should not go anywhere near his bulging swimming trunks. He lets each bikini-ed girl sit on his knee, then pushes them forward with his torso, closer to the steering column to let them "drive", his arms circling their tiny bodies, his hands on theirs gripping the wheel.

At one point, there are two girls on his lap, while he squeals like a twelve-year-old boy. "Watch out for that rock, you fat-heads!"

In the second year of the Gaeltacht, you know that the only usual way for young underage people to drive cars is for it to be a stolen car. At home, you have an innocent version of joyriding. Like when you and your brother and the neighbours' boys rake about in Da's clapped out Mini. Or the boys "borrow" their parents' Datsun and do some damage to the door with a misjudged reverse. You live on a country lane and can always lie about a herd of cows that dented the car. None of the adults back home ever offer driving lessons by putting children on their knees.

There is a photograph in your parents' house, taken in the first summer at the Gaeltacht. You standing at a gap in a hedge, arm around a donkey's neck. You could be in a tourist postcard. Hair ragged, after drying in the sun and wind. You have clothes on, a red tank top and brown skirt, knee length socks and Moses sandals. After being for a swim, after being rubbish at camogie, after not driving the priest's car. The priest took that photo on one of his many trips with children to the sea.

OUTLINE / Bex Hainsworth

There is the ghost of a house by my bus stop.
Once a solid semi-detached, the other now stands
alone with the outline of its twin on a side wall.

A triangle of roof-stain like an open envelope,
the imprint of a chimney the colour of dried blood,
the cove of a fireplace with rubble at the roots.

The house seems to sag into the scar,
exposed brickwork red and raw
where its shadow was ripped away.

Each morning I stand at the bus stop, my back
to the empty, aching space. Ten years it's been,
but I still feel the outline of his body on my skin.

SAYING GOODBYE #22 / Robert Frede Kenter

In the After

We write ourselves into memory. We write, write ourselves
into existence. Water in the canal, shape beyond the windowpane.
Our heart-anxious-self in mirror. Water. Memory. You are

Gone, having left. Going through your papers, affairs,
prints, drawings. How can everything be so still? How can
everything be still. In movement, in the endless movement and
repeats of brush strokes, of notebooks, of notes, of remember to
do this, remember to do that. Simon says, “do this, do that.”

I put you down. Pick you up. I forget to spell, words.

The world is full of strongmen, the world has become an international wrestling
competition. War – a few hours away – by airplane; Berlin, no, Kyiv, yes, it started
as you were dying, leaving us, leaving words,

language, textures, drawn gestures, new visions, behind you, a hairpin turn. Speaking
of the light, your hair falling out radioactive snow,
the radio waves of ice floes and dogs barking with pitchforks, staffs,
walking stiff, walking sticks, oxygen tanks, bluster of winter.

The sound bytes of lyrical song, goodbye, goodnight, good morning,
speaking to one another in last conversations, heads on shoulder.

Turning you in a soiled bed, cleaning you up. What is dignity,
how fortunate to have known, and are you warm enough, are you
cool. Enough. Bang bang bang knocking on the door, hail in the
skylight, trees scratching the sides of abandoned houses,

the new rapid transit beyond the planning stages, house prices
dropping, the market falling out of commodities and Tylenol.
Pain meds, little white capsules like rat poison, canticles, strychnine.

We write ourselves into dreams; we have no other way forward.
Bone white wooden sticks left on the steps make a toy cabin for the table.

Issue 4

Dublin Days, from city to shore and across the sea

1 Ruby Murphy

2 Sree Sen

3 Nasouh Hossari

4 Mai Ishikawa

5 Clodagh O'Connor

6 Joanne Hayden

MOLLY MALONE | Ruby Murphy

The sound of too few coins embarrasses me as I shake my collection bucket, but then it is only midday and the lunch rush hasn't started yet.

"Hey, I love your outfit! Do you have a minute to talk about—" they walk right past me. It's easy to get discouraged when you face constant rejection, but each dismissal just confirms to me that I am on the right path. I also used to be ashamed; the sight of people who believed in something, who had purpose, it actually disturbed me, so I get it. I'd also walk past, believing I was surely too busy to stop and have a conversation. In reality, people are envious of genuine belief. Honest-to-God unironic faith in something is too painful to bear, because it reminds people of how divorced they are from sincerity. This rejection is a small price to pay for the chance to truly connect with someone.

Normally, we canvas in groups of at least two, but I find I work best alone. Besides, it's less intimidating that way; people don't like to feel hunted.

"You look like someone who cares about suffering, do you have a minute to—"

"Sorry, I don't carry change," the twenty-something shoots over her shoulder back at me. It stings a little more than the last. Doesn't matter, I've got a little routine down now, sort of staked claim to this particular spot in town and I'm doing alright. It's perfect; just off Dame Street, near a post office, in proximity to pubs so it gets students milling around. Not to mention the walking tours. Hundreds of groups of Americans mostly, but also some Germans, a couple Chinese or Spanish, all walking right through my spot. Most of them speak English, some even listen before asking for directions, nodding politely as they walk away mid-conversation.

The only problem with my setup is the goddamn statue. It's bronze, busty and frankly, I find it insulting. The breasts of the figure are shiny and golden from being groped by leery tourists. Honestly, I don't know where the tradition came from; probably someone British, most definitely a man. I didn't know the statue was meant to be Molly Malone until I was nineteen, and it horrified me when I found out. As a child in school, I learned a song about 'Sweet Molly Malone'. It ends with her dying of a fever and her ghost being condemned to haunt the streets of Dublin desperate to sell fish or her body. Most people remember the raunchy first verse, but the melancholic end is what lodged itself in my mind. Feminist activists have tried to shame people out of the practice over the years. Some even covered the statue's chest in paint and tar, but it was inevitably gone the next morning; scraped away, revealing the same polished exterior.

A group of American tourists amble up to the statue, led by a tour guide with a fake Paddy accent.

“Ladies and Gents, anseo we have the beautiful Molly Malone! She sold fish by day, and something that smelled like fish by night. Legend has it that if you caress her bountiful bosom, she’ll grant you good luck for seven years, seven days and seven minutes. Now don’t be shy, come on and give her a rub! Cailín or buachaill, we don’t discriminate, she sure wasn’t picky our Molly...” He trails off mid shtick checking his phone. I can’t concentrate on being my best approachable self with that ridiculous pantomime going on beside me. A squat little man wearing a ‘Kiss me I’m Irish’ t-shirt clambers up beside Molly. Still huffing with the exertion of the step up, he manages to form a grin for the camera as he goes in for the kill-shot. The smell of sweaty fingers grasping the dirty metal mixes in my nose, reminding me of blood.

“Every day innocent blood is being spilled. Want to know how you can help stop it?” I raise my voice as the campy tour guide starts back up.

“Gowan, get a picture with her to show the páistí,”

“Thousands of children are dying—”

“Oh, you dog! Keep those hands where I can see them!”

“Your contribution matters, please consider—”

My voice gets cut off by a surge of laughter from the group. The squat little man must have made a hilarious joke from the pleased look on his face. Everyday it’s the same routine, same joke, same men. I stand here comforted by the fact that I am morally superior. I am making a difference. I’m not jaded enough to whore out my heritage for a slightly above minimum-wage acting job, and that’s something to be proud of. I don’t care what my mam says, it’s not to feed my ego or assuage some white-guilt-complex. It’s because I genuinely care. The volunteering I do means something, I’m helping raising valuable awareness. I won’t sacrifice my morals or my city. I won’t be complicit.

“There is a human rights abuse happening on our watch, please, please, take just a moment to consider how you can help by signing our petition or even donating. Anything helps, even a euro could go toward—”

“Hey Sweetheart, we’re in the middle of something here. We paid good money for this so would you mind keeping it down?” A white lady with a southern accent coos at me.

My face flushes with a rush of embarrassment and anger, my throat constricting around the words I want to say. To my mortification, I nod and hear myself mumble something agreeable. Shame wells up inside me at the automatic deference to the assuredness that accompanies being of imperial culture. A submission that is so deeply ingrained it feels like fulfilling memory rather than committing an action. An

overwhelming need to please, to be part of a land of a thousand welcomes, almost takes hold.

But I am better than this. I am better than the tour guide, than them. They care more about a pair of fake bronze boobs than real people's lives, then me. Taking off my neon yellow vest, my shirt, I feel a rush of empowerment. Next comes off my jumper, then my tank top, until finally I am left totally exposed. Goosebumps trail my arms, my stomach, my chest. Molly, I'm with you, I understand. My nipples tighten against the cold air and a surge of adrenaline runs up my spine as I yell,

“Oh, now I have your attention! Living body more interesting than a statue? I'll promise you good luck if you sign this petition; you can even cop a feel if you donate more than a tenner.”

Blood pumps hard in my ears, a laugh bubbles up my throat at my own audacity! They're probably slightly stunned, maybe a little impressed or turned on. Bless them. What's that saying? Well-behaved women rarely made history. Well, I can feel their eyes turning towards me, and my chest. I have their attention now, now they care about me. Molly is my mirror, her cold dead eyes fixed on mine. Our bodies are mere instruments to devote to the expression of our nation, only as real as the buildings around us which are levelled and made, rented and turned into hotels by the whims of men. I will be seen and heard. I matter. What I say matters. I matter. I'm here now Molly, don't be ashamed, cast off those Magdalene robes, together we can—

“LIBERAL SLUT!” barks an American.

It starts to rain as I pick up my vest from the street.



shoes thud on refurbished floors
wood sinks and rises, curves and flattens
not unlike the history of this place –
first, a brocade mansion of satin lives
and then the lights dimmed
this tenement of nightmares, chiselled
arrowhead jutting out of the ribcage
each breath, sandpaper scrape.

i know something of hunger
the stench of rotten food clinging
to gilded furniture
history tells us how we lived
loved, ate, shat and died
yet memories sneak into our DNAs
passed on without consent until
panic attack in a swimming pool.

guided tour ends at the reception
(we are back to where we started)
i leave with the image of a girl running
faster than a piece of burning paper
free falling,
briefly lighting the staircase
to the three-bedroom flat
square feet neatly divided for the nine of us.



As I turned the corner into Grafton Street it wasn't a movement that caught my eye but a stillness. A man with a white-painted face and flowing purple gown stood silent, frozen on a wooden plinth. His face looked sad in the mask of make-up. He drew in a crowd. People curved around him as if in a vortex he created by not being. Standing there, I became a statue myself, unable to look away.

Someone sniggered on my left; a teenager placing a lit cigarette end on the statue's sandaled foot. I moved forward quickly and brushed it off. My reward was a long slow theatrical wink and a blown kiss from his fingers; I blushed at the attention.

I skipped down the alleyway to my bus stop, past the punks and goths hanging out on the streets; my body loosened and stretched into city life. A cloak of anonymity covered my shoulders like the winter smog that blanketed my suburban digs. My landlady was an ice-queen with hard eyes that slid past your face, unsmiling. I could have done worse, I suppose. I had my own bathroom, a comfortable bed and the ice-queen provided better food than I was used to at home.

I made the city my own, walking every inch of it, happily gawping at every landmark I passed. The yeasty smell of the Guinness Brewery fought with the tidal whiff of the river Liffey all the way up to O'Connell Street and every building showed the scars of coal fires in grimy brickwork. I muttered the words of a half-remembered poem from last year's English class

"Grey brick upon brick, declamatory bronze..."

I'd always liked that one.

Our art college tutors encouraged us to see the city as our muse. We explored the vast expanse of the Phoenix Park, trying to catch the leaps and bucks of the rutting deer as we lay in the grass with our sketchpads. We crept along the edges of the Zoo where the pungent scent of lions assaulted the backs of our throats. Their deep guttural roars rolled in our chests.

The next time on Grafton Street, the watching crowd was blocking the way and the guards came to move him on. He showered them with winks and kisses, much to the delight of the remaining onlookers. The performance changed from a fixed statue to a figure that moved at a graceful deliberate pace up towards Stephen's Green. I followed for a while but found I couldn't emulate that Zen-like slowness and took a left. Down a side street I found a shop selling face paint and magic tricks. I came out with a full kit of make-up. It took me a week before I tried using it. The face in the mirror stared back at me like a David Bowie album cover.

Winter, and we crouched uncomfortably drawing the wonderland of curios at the Dead Zoo. A Victorian style natural history museum with nightmarish small snarling mammals, their fur fading under the light from the glass roof. Skeletal leviathans hung from the ceiling, the length of the long room. At the back, covers that I hardly dared move revealed shining blue butterflies and, up stairs that were tiny and spiralled like a snail shell, a treasure of glass constructed into fairy-tale jellyfish and terrifying spikes and slugs.

Afterwards we rewarded ourselves with a trip to Burdock's chipper. We held the bags of chips to our chests, letting the warmth penetrate through our coats to our hearts, burnt our mouths on the first bite. Salt, grease, warmth and sustenance all wrapped up in one bag steaming gently into the December dark. As the bells rang out from Christchurch, celebrating the coming of Christ we finished our feast and kissed our greasy, salt encrusted mouths together.

A final time and there was another slow procession on Grafton Street. Those who loved him held him aloft. The crowd stood in silence, mirroring him as he had been in life. As the cortege passed I touched my fingers to my lips and blew.



DUBLIN, DON'T BE ASHAMED, MY BELOVED

| Nasouh Hossari

When my son broke the vase of roses, I wasn't ashamed
because he learned. When he burned a picture
from his memories, I didn't sorrow,
it was turning a painful page.

Don't be ashamed, my beloved.
What you did for those who come to you means a lot.
When they left hell, you were their paradise.
And when they sought knowledge, you taught them.
When they sought work, you prepared them.

Don't be ashamed, my beloved.
A handful of mischievous youngsters
won't tarnish your beautiful face.
You remain the brightest capital
and the most beautiful beloved.

دبلن
لا تخجلي حبيبتي.
حين كسر ابني مزهرية الورد لم اخجل
لانه تعلم.
حين احرق صورة من صور ذكرياته
لم احزن لانه قلب صفحة اليمّة من ذكرياته
لا تخجلي حبيبتي
ان ما فعلته للقادمين اليك الكثير.
عندما غادروا الجحيم كنت جنتهم.
وعندما طلبوا العلم علمتهم
وعندما طلبوا العمل أهدتهم
لا تخجلي حبيبتي
حفنة من المشاعبين الصغار لن يلطخوا وجهك الجميل.
مازلت أبهى العواصم واجمل حبيبة.

The cloud came too close to my face.
It sagged with rumours.

It served us void.
It carried suspicion in its womb,

nurturing. The wind blew
from the South, bitter and damp, danced

through people's hair and pulled
their sleeves – eager to share the secret.

I stood at the bus stop. The timetable
told lies; the bus disappeared and reappeared.

People glared at the rain; the rain lashed
their faces. The bitterness climaxed, but

I was saved by the bus. Oblivious,
I stepped aboard, escorted away

from clouds of hate the air couldn't hold. And
the hate was dumped like bombs, lighting the winter

bright. Like candles on a birthday cake,
or a pagan ritual mistranslated,

the city burned and burned in the dark until all
the songs were sung and all the wishes were made

and melted into black stains, shovels, rubble,
the dawn sky. But the flames stalk

my skin. My hair. My accent. Like vapours
hiding in the clear sky, scheming

more clouds.



DUBLIN, NEAR BODIES OF WATER, 1983-2024

| Featured prose writer **Joanne Hayden**

Burrow Beach

My cousin and I write a poem in the sand about our gran who is looking on. *Gran, Gran, where's your frying pan?* She has been minding us for over 24 hours and in that time we've tried to hoodwink her into eating potions made out of ketchup and shampoo, we've jumped on her bed, giggled during mass and set an alarm clock for midnight. We draw a cartoon of her beside the poem – huge curls, teeth and glasses – and walk with her back to her house on Howth Road where we pester her to play 'When the Red, Red Robin Comes Bob, Bob, Bobbin' Along' on the piano, then take off down the garden, past the snapdragons and apple trees, to peer into the disintegrating caravan again, hoping and afraid that there, safe in the mildew and darkness, we'll find Shergar, the kidnapped horse.

Howth Head

Assignation. The kind of word I like, literary and slightly obscure, but I'm not thinking about words or Molly Bloom, haven't read Ulysses. We're both seeing other people and, mostly, are careful about where we go. A summer evening. Midges. The sky clear over the bay. My dress clings to my body; I hate my body and at the same time want to show it off. I'm twenty-one, high on this movie version of my life and on being desired though what I desire is still a mystery to me. We kiss in the grass. His hand moves further up my thigh. I push it away. Rightness and wrongness. What if walkers come along? Plus I have my period and if his fingers continue they'll touch a sanitary pad and blood.

Custom House Quay

We march towards the Custom House, same banners and chants as before but this feels different, the size and mood of the crowd, like a power has been unleashed and now is finally unstoppable. I think of my nine-year-old self, obsessed with Shergar, oblivious to the referendum later that year. In my late teens, I interviewed my gran, discovered bits about her life: she once played Buttons in a pantomime, she did Celtic Studies for a term in UCD, left when she passed the civil service exams. Before she married and had to give up her job, she worked in the Custom House. She never made it to Paris. She had beautiful long red hair and always thought of herself as a redhead, even after her hair went white. She would have voted for the amendment, would have disapproved of me in this crowd, crossing the Liffey, a spectacle, shouting, *My Body, My Choice*. In truth I don't like shouting slogans or being part of any crowd but I can't stay home and this time my discomfort is outweighed by a sense of hope. I'm surrounded by women much younger than me, determined to refuse the shame, to call it out for what it is and push it back where it belongs.

Baggot Street Bridge

Every day I bolt, leave behind the excruciations of homeschooling: celery sticks in glasses of different coloured dyes, volcano eruptions made from baking soda and

vinegar, ancient Egypt, snap as Gaeilge, how to draw a bird. Every day I shout. Yesterday I cried over first class maths and 3D shapes. How does a cone have two faces? This is my sanctuary. First, I walk with ferocity, wondering what is and isn't my grief: my mother-in-law dead from Covid, my four year old's introduction to death and I didn't explain properly or in advance about the coffin and the grave and he's struggling now to understand, *When Covid goes away will Nana come back?* Begging me not to bury him if he dies, *Take me to Tesco with you, don't put me in the ground.* Eventually I slow down, watch the moorhens and coots, the swans and ducks in canal water that's dark but surprisingly clear. Someone has put a mask on Patrick Kavanagh. I take a photo of him and WhatsApp it to friends, ask the greeny bronze statue, *What kind of a world is this?* Not habitual. Not banal. En route, I took multiple photos of the signs at the junction of Leeson Street and Adelaide Road: *Play Your Part, Keep Your Distance, Protect Each Other, Stay Apart.* Building up some kind of record though I've no desire to write anything down. A dusty grey heron stands unmoving on the banks. How long is it fair to stay in this semblance of peace, the silence broken only by the occasional siren, a police car or ambulance.

Baggot Street Bridge

Miles of barriers fencing off the grass. A couple of tents on the path. Signs appear: *Refugees don't need more barriers*, but they get taken down too. Now it's the opposite of a sanctuary for people who have nowhere else to go. A few weeks ago, two men drowned close to Charlemont Bridge. On City Quay tents were slashed and thrown into the Liffey. I sit beside Patrick Kavanagh and stare at the banks through layers of bars. On my way here, on South Richmond Street, a man pointed at the boarded-up Bernard Shaw pub. His eyes were watery, he smelled of booze. Normally I'd have walked away. This makes me so fucking angry, he said, his arm sweeping towards the offices and, granted, the apartments, that have been built around the old pub. I knew what he meant: ugly new buildings; more empty office space; the housing crisis; the wrench for a once-thriving hub. On the day the eighth amendment was repealed, I brought my sons to the mural beside the Bernard Shaw: Savita Halappanavar surrounded by post-it notes and candles, the word *Yes* across her face.

Portmarnock Beach

Now he wants to be buried, he's been talking about it in the car, buried up to the top of his neck so that only his head sticks out. It's early summer. Warm and dry. My instinct is to walk away, leave them to it, go down to the shore but days like this are rare so I sideline my thoughts of graves and death, help dig the hole and fill it in, straighten his bucket hat and reflective shades and take a photo of him.

Howth Head

Alone with clouds and misty rain, white flashes of breaking waves. Earth under my fingernails. The freedom of temporary solitude. I am blood and bone and water and memories of my gran and my gran's memories of growing up in Howth, right next to the sea, watching the boats, the moon trail on the bay at night, her brother, Aengus,

playing the fiddle in the back garden and seals, drawn to the sound of his music, coming up onto the rocks.

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