An abstract painting of a face in profile, facing left. The face is rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes. The hair and upper part of the face are in shades of yellow and green, while the lower part, including the mouth and chin, is in dark blue and black. A vertical, elongated shape on the left side of the face, possibly representing an ear or a part of the head, is painted in shades of pink, purple, and white. The background is a deep, textured blue.

# NEW WORD ORDER

IX











untitled by Amber Moses

## Contents

Letter from the Editors		Pg. 6
Publication team		Pg. 8
clay-woman-thing	<i>Robyn Kelly</i>	Pg. 10
Appalachian Autobahn	<i>Nikola Janika</i>	Pg. 13
Last Stand on the Luas	<i>Brid Murphy</i>	Pg. 20
Good	<i>Darragh White</i>	Pg. 21
Pastel Paperclips	<i>Nicole McFadden</i>	Pg. 22
Bleed. Ache. Fight.	<i>Morgan Lyons</i>	Pg. 24
Being Myself at a Party	<i>Kasey O'Connell</i>	Pg. 27
My Son, My Sins	<i>Julia Zurakowska</i>	Pg. 34
In Death, Where Shall I Go?	<i>Julia Zurakowska</i>	Pg. 35
American Demons	<i>C.P. Glen</i>	Pg. 36
Colony	<i>Chloe Fraher</i>	Pg. 39
Odysseus	<i>Chloe Fraher</i>	Pg. 40
Ladybug	<i>Ryan Williams</i>	Pg. 41
Machine Learning	<i>S.C. Flynn</i>	Pg. 49
Hopetoun	<i>S.C. Flynn</i>	Pg. 50
The Girl Who Never Returned	<i>Jagoda Janeczko</i>	Pg. 51
Lullaby to a Dying Soul	<i>Alessandra Posenato</i>	Pg. 57
For Mick	<i>Kelly Smyth</i>	Pg. 59
Déraciné	<i>Emma Keune</i>	Pg. 61
Watching the Local Go Up in Smoke	<i>Hugh Moloney</i>	Pg. 64
Metro Cafe, South William Street	<i>Dmytro Pavliv</i>	Pg. 68

The journal with audio versions is available on:

<https://newwordorder.ucd.ie>



*untitled by Karl Murphy*

## Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

When we took on the role of Editors-In-Chief, we knew we wanted this issue to have a print run. Thanks to our wonderful team, the generous funding of the UCD School of English, Drama, and Film, the Mary Lavin Centre for Creative Writing, and the Campus Bookstore, we are delighted to be the first issue of New Word Order to release a print run. We are proud to bring New Word Order to print for the very first time and we hope this legacy can continue for future issues.

We would like to thank everyone who submitted a piece, it takes a great amount of courage to share work with complete strangers. We received an overwhelming amount of high-quality work for this issue and wish we could have published it all.

We hope we have managed to showcase the talents of our authors and artists while honouring their visions. Their work is what makes our publication so special.

We also want to thank our amazing team, without whom we couldn't have published this issue. We would like to thank our submissions team for managing all the submissions. We also thank our editing team, who carefully read and edited every piece to bring it to its highest potential. A big thank you also goes to our design team, who put an amazing amount of work into the formatting and designing of this beautiful journal to get it ready for print. We are also thankful for our amazing marketing and PR team, who kept our audience informed and engaged about the operations of the magazine. And finally a huge thank you to our outreach and engagement manager, who organised our launch night,

and to our digital editor, who made sure the digital version of this magazine looked just as spectacular as our printed copy.

This magazine could not have been published without the help of our wonderful module coordinator, Dr. Jonathan Creasy. He helped us throughout the process and was a mentor for all of us. We will always be grateful for how he introduced us to this process and taught us invaluable skills which we will bring with us into our professional lives.

When we jumped headfirst into this project, we had no idea what to expect, but we embraced our roles as Co-Editors-in-Chief and learned so much from this journey. We picked up many skills along the way that helped us grow and change as both writers and editors. We are very grateful to have received this opportunity, and we hope that we have created a journal that makes our whole team proud.

We hope you have as great of a time reading the issue as we did creating it!

Yours Truly,  
Editors-In-Chief,  
Rylee Bakx & Élise Msica



*untitled by Amber Moses*

## Publication Team

Editor-in-Chief  
 Editor-in-Chief  
 Managing Editor  
 Managing Editor  
 Fiction Editor  
 Fiction Editor & Social Media Manager  
 Poetry Editor & Digital Editor  
 Poetry Editor & Art + Photography Editor  
 Non-Fiction Editor & Marketing Director  
 Non-Fiction Editor & Art + Photography Editor  
 Interview Editor  
 Submission & Print Manager  
 Copy Editor  
 Copy Editor & Sponsorship & Finance Manager  
 Art Director and Marketing Director  
 Art Director  
 Graphic Designer

Rylee Bakx  
 Élise Msica  
 Eabha Last  
 Max O'Donohoe  
 Cian Cullen  
 Cathal Brogan  
 Hannah Steenhagen  
 Alana Murphy  
 Sally Mathews  
 Nellie Warren  
 Camille Texier  
 Weaver Melching  
 Conor Lagan  
 Joshua McCormack  
 Ewa Majewski  
 Indy Verrijt  
 Kristen O'Connell

Special thanks to the Mary Lavin  
Centre for Creative Writing and the  
Campus Bookshop UCD for their  
support of New Word Order.



# clay-woman-thing

*A poem by Robyn Kelly*

---

I was more than motionless

When I held the frames of loved ones through this invisible battle,  
I let words cut through me, showing my tar-blood, soaked grey mud.  
Back then, I could take a hit.

I was more than motionless

When I had to prevent a kiss  
Assumed by a friend from my butcher-counter-ready skin  
He was hungry and selfish. I considered our future.

I became motionless

when I was given drag after drag to slow my brain and leave my barely  
beating  
body  
to be savaged by cotton-mouthed wolves.

This contrapposto pose is all I am now  
Before the day I met you, kneeling at my feet  
To worship what you could see

I once was.

To want to match the rhythm  
in which you breathe clean air.

It's hard because it's easy

But the ones who claimed my frame  
Have stolen my smoke-filled lungs.

Tenderness can't leave my body  
The blood's clotted  
Hardened within what's left.  
I would've bottled each drop



for you. I'm sorry.

I have nothing to give  
to grieve.

Not flowing  
Not moving  
Deep and firm

Only a memory  
Of college parties with strangers once  
Made me alive.

This vessel is yours  
If you want to take it.

Cure me  
Fix me  
Kiss me  
Hit me  
Wet and break this kilned finished clay,  
Mould me.

I have opened too much.  
You've seen the deep fissures,  
The textured edges where  
My fingers and nipples could have been

if not crushed.

Is it too much to ask you to take  
Your lips to these cracks and soften them  
To take me from here,  
Shape me into something  
Almost pure.

Be a sealant to the damage when you're done.





If it's not too much to ask,  
Show me I'm still here.  
Show me

Life has just begun...



untitled by Josine Henneken



# Appalachian Autobahn

*A piece of fiction by Nikola Janika*

---

One of the biggest misconceptions people have about me is that I'm happy. I'd say I enjoy life. I find ways to. But I would by no means describe myself as happy, because happy is a specific state of being in which I simply do not exist. I am not happy.

Take this whole car ride, for example. I haven't said a word, and I'm not that fascinated with the endless stretch of fields and wind turbines and horses and whatever else we've been moving past, but I've been smiling to myself and that's enough to convince my father I'm having a *grand old time*. Truth is I'm just listening to a podcast, and I've lost track of where we are.

I know it's not safe to be lying like this. Stretched out across the back seats, no seatbelt. It's the type of horror story you hear on the news. People get pulled out of wrecks so mangled their own mothers don't recognize them, all because they didn't wear a seatbelt. Whenever I hear stuff like that I wonder if a seatbelt would have actually made a difference, or if it would have just made things worse. I see the clouds zooming past and I'm suddenly aware of just how fast we're driving. It's the middle of August and Europe's hotter than ever before. *Record temperatures*. That stopped sounding impressive once we started hearing it every year.

*"What kind of person wears loafers walking around Appalachia?"*

*"The kind of person who doesn't know what they're dealing with. He had it coming."*

*"As an Appalachian who enjoys wearing loafers, I take offence to that, actually. And don't say the literal murder victim had it coming, please."*

I snort. I almost laugh. My mother looks back at me from the passenger seat and says something to my father. The podcast goes on.

*"Okay, so they found him, he was wearing loafers and..."*

*"The same jacket he was last seen with, but get this, different socks."*

*"Shout out to the murderer for giving the guy new socks, I guess?"*

*"Maybe it's his calling card—" "Milena!"*

The third time my mother spits out my name is the first time I hear it. I

pause and slip off my headphones.

“What?”

She’s glaring. “Sit up. If we crash, you’ll break everything.”

“Yeah, well, if we crash going one-fifty we’re dead either way—”

“Milena!”

“It’s just a fact. Let me be comfy.”

“Sebastian!”

My father sighs. Eyes on the road, he says, “Lena, sit up.”

“No.”

“Well, you heard her.”

“Sebastian!”

“She’s an adult, Marta.”

“She’s *impudent*, is what she is.”

(Impudent is one of my mother’s favourite words. She likes it almost as much as the news likes *record temperatures* and as much as the podcast likes *loafers*). Speaking of which. I put my headphones back on and press play.

*“I still can’t get over the loafers.”*

*“Shut up about the loafers, man.”*

*“This guy got murdered on a mountain in Appalachia wearing loafers, of course I’m gonna talk about the damn loafers, dude.”*

I yawn. It feels like we drove into Germany an eternity ago, but every time I catch a glimpse of the estimated time of arrival on my father’s phone, I see the same number. My mother’s saying something again. I pretend I can’t hear.

*“Here’s the gruesome part. Content warning—” “—to talk to her own mother like that—”*

*“—his eyes, and then cut open his stomach. They said that—” “—it shows signs of mental illness, Sebastian. Maybe she’s unstable—”*

*“—blood, guts, everywhere. Nasty stuff. Wanna see the pictures—?” “—when I’m in a documentary on Net-wix—”*

“It’s Netflix,” I correct her. I pause the podcast just to hear her response.

“It’d make an interesting documentary,” says my father. “Matricide is all the rage right now. They’re releasing Gypsy Rose soon. She got parole.”

“Don’t correct me,” my mother snaps, ignoring him. She goes on, “And they



really do put some awful things on there. Who cares about who killed who? What's the big deal?"

"Who cares about who kissed who? What's the big deal with that?" I ask.

"Well, it's certainly more interesting than all that bloody stuff."

"Who cares who's up for the Oscars this year?"

"Oh, you really love being nasty to me for no good reason, don't you?" She sighs. She doesn't manage to hold her peace long enough for me to press play again. "And it's not released yet, for your information. They get announced in January."

"Fascinating."

"Gypsy Rose gets released in December," says my father.

And I repeat, "*Fascinating.*"

The podcast is on again. The three hosts argue back and forth about the state of the body. I learn a lot about gouged-out eyeballs and spilled guts. They keep mentioning loafers. I realise I don't actually know what loafers *are*.

The first time I slip off my headphones again is when I feel the car come to a stop. I sit up and look around. The motorway is to our left. We're parked by a gas station, my father's filling the tank. My mother's sitting on the hood of the car and smoking a cigarette, looking quite the Madonna. Crimson lipstick and the cherry sunglasses. I can tell she's feeling herself.

I crawl out of the car, phone in my back pocket, and walk towards the station. We've done this so many times already, I don't even need to explain myself. I head inside and enjoy the cool air. The AC is on but the lady at the cash register is still fanning herself. I make my way past the shelves of cheap candy and head straight for the bathroom.

There's only one other girl there, and she's washing her hands. She's got dry blood under her fingernails and scabs on her face. She's been picking at them. I wonder what happened to her but not for long. None of my business. I get into a stall, sit down, look at my phone. I see a text.

*JAMIE: hows germany lol*

I don't think about my response for long.

*ME: shit*

*ME: hot*

*ME: can barely function*

*JAMIE: aww :(*

*JAMIE: have u heard the new blood pact episode*

*ME: im halfway thru*

*ME: what tf is a loafer*

*JAMIE: LMAO its a type of shoe*

*ME: that makes more sense*

*ME: did they show the pictures in the video version*

*JAMIE: no*

*JAMIE: cant show it on youtube*

*JAMIE: found them online*

The picture slides into view. I wish I could say I react. The girl outside leaves. I wonder if she fell on her face or if someone hit her. Someone else has walked into the stall next to me. I can hear and smell everything and my face twists. I don't even think about the picture, at first. I look at the boy in loafers who was found dead in Appalachia. I wonder if there's something I'm supposed to do. It's a picture. It's exactly what I expected. I pick out all the little details and then don't spare it another thought. My fingers move over the keyboard.

*ME: ew lol*

*JAMIE: ikr haha*

Washing my hands, I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. No scabs. I leave. My mother is still smoking her cigarette, but the car has moved away from the pumps. They're waiting for me.

"You took a while. Are you sick?" She stamps out her cigarette with the tip of her shoe. Ruby red heels. She's at a gas station somewhere on the Autobahn and she's wearing ruby red five-inch heels. I don't answer her.

We're on the road once more. One-fifty. I'm in the back. *Record temperatures* are really starting to show now. Headphones on. I press play.

*"Why does stuff like this always happen in Appalachia?"*

*"It's because you don't mess with Appalachia. You don't mess with things that aren't for people. The mountains, the trees, they've been there since the start of time. They've got secrets."*

*"Look at Mr. Appalachian getting all poetic on us."*

*"It's true. You don't mess with the deep sea, you don't mess with space, and you don't*

*mess with Appalachia."*

I wonder what it would be like to walk through Appalachia, in loafers. I think about things like that. Maybe that's why I'm so unhappy. I like to think about what it would be like floating in outer space or drowning in the deep sea or getting your eyes gouged out in Appalachia. I like to think about what would happen if we really were to crash while going one-fifty. I wonder if laying in the back seat without a seatbelt would make a difference. I wonder if it would cause the sort of death that would make it to Netflix. I wonder if my mother would recognize me.

I complain about her making a show of things, but I think everything is a kind of show. Death becomes a show when it's the sort of death that makes people look. People become a show when they waltz into a gas station in five-inch scarlet heels. Death and people and everything in-between become a performance the moment a mother gets murdered by her own daughter, and the whole world decides the daughter was in the right.

The podcast keeps playing but I've stopped paying attention. When I tune back in, they're talking about something else altogether.

*"No, no, his girlfriend did it. One hundred percent."*

*"You're just saying that 'cause she didn't cry at the funeral."*

*"What kinda psycho doesn't cry at their boyfriend's funeral?"*

*"Shock is a thing, dude."*

I wonder who's getting nominated for Best Actor this year. I wonder who really killed the loafer-wearing boy in Appalachia. I wonder if we're still going one-fifty. I wonder what kind of lipstick my mother is going to pick at the next gas station.

All in the same breath.

I breathe out. My mother's speaking. I pause the podcast again.

*"When are you gonna get your driver's licence? You could drive for your father, and we'd be there twice as fast without all those breaks."*

*"Why don't you get your driver's licence?"*

She's gazing out the window.

*"I don't look good behind the wheel."*

Sometimes she looks at the billboards in such a way that her eyes reflect her dreams, images of her stardom dancing in her irises. She loses herself in the sights and almost forgets her next question.

"And when are you getting a job?"

"I don't need a job. I'm going to college."

"You could get a job while you're in college."

"Why? Are you gonna make me pay rent?"

"Well, no." She seems as if she's about to keep going but gives up. The billboards pique her interest, and I lose her.

I unpause the podcast only to realise the episode has ended. Jamie hasn't said anything else, and the picture he sent is still sitting before me. I look more closely at it and wonder what that mangled face would look like on a red carpet, and I wonder if it would make any difference at all to everyone who chooses to tune in and stare, and stare, and stare.

No wonder I'm so unhappy. Maybe I'm a pessimist, and that's the end of it. Maybe there really is something wrong with me. That's what my mother always says. The clouds above continue to zoom past. One-fifty. The sun is starting to go down, but it's still hot. Record temperatures. The picture is still there.

"Can we pull over? I feel sick."

My mother complains but we do. She didn't have a chance to switch lipsticks, so she stays in the car while I hobble over to the edge of the parking lot we pulled into. There's only one other car there, and the driver is dumping a large bag of trash into one of the bins. It stinks.

I sit down on the grass. When I turn back my mother is looking out onto the road, hands shielding her eyes, and she looks like she's on her way to explore a land far from this one, somewhere where she'll finally find all those curious eyes she's so desperate for. Paparazzi would flatter her. I imagine she'd never get sick of them, even if they were to photograph her mangled body somewhere in Appalachia, eyes gouged out.

She'd never wear loafers. She wouldn't be caught dead without heels. Maybe people wouldn't find it as interesting then. Nothing to talk about.

I suddenly realise that nasty smell didn't come from the trash bag being thrown away. The other car is long gone, and it's still there. I look around. There's a dead animal sitting right next to me on the asphalt. It's hard to tell what it is. Maybe a bird, maybe a hedgehog. It's been reduced to a red, fleshy mush, flies dancing over it, and it's been laying under the scorching hot sun all day. *Record temperatures.*



I can hear my mother calling out to me. She's sick of waiting, and the weather isn't helping. There's still a long road ahead and even going one-fifty an hour it doesn't seem to get any shorter. I wonder what could have happened to the animal, but after a while I realise I don't actually care. I don't care what happened to the girl with the scabbed face. No one really cares who killed the Appalachian in loafers. The real fun is here, in the guts and the blood.

They're blaming the girlfriend for his death because she didn't cry at the funeral. I'm looking at the animal and I'm not sad, but I'm not happy, but I'm also not crying. I wonder if they would think I killed it, too.

I pull out my phone. I take a picture of it. I send it to Jamie.

JAMIE: ew lol

ME: ikr haha

It's a show. People are always gonna find the next thing to laugh at, the next finger to point at the girl who didn't cry enough or cried too much. People are always gonna find the next bloody picture to pass around, and people are always gonna go watch the Oscars. They're gonna pick their favourite actor and then their favourite serial killer in the same breath. It's a show.

Me and my mother, we're stars. It's the one thing we have in common. And I hear matricide is all the rage these days.



untitled by Bronwyn Gaw



## Last Stand on the Luas

*A poem by Bríd Murphy*

---

The palm upturns, shifts left  
and kind eyes enquire  
*Would you like this seat?*  
My index finger curves in a half point —  
underscores my gaping face.  
*Does he mean me? How could he mean me?*  
He means me.  
*Oh God, I think I need to sit down.*

The tram manages the bitter of November —  
Museum, Smithfield, Four Courts, Jervis  
*An chéad stad eile* —  
and there I am stranded  
in the last seat on the Luas,  
a premier seat for me.

Age-chastened, I share this fresh shame  
with you at The Gresham rendezvous.  
Within minutes we are giggling  
green girls again —  
Some hope



*Mo Chaitín by Ciara McMillan*

### Glossary of Irish language words:

Luas – Dublin tram

An chéad stad eile – the next stop



# Good

*A poem by Darragh White*

---

The damaging deliverance of good is no stone I wish to throw at delicate homes of those I do not know. The holes of good breath in and through.

Good is no word to be used nor term to be shared when its use shows lame of meaning. A good guy grown through bible beat and slow sermon. A good flu is a nasty dose of deadpan dowry yet the scent of good is not true.

Good is an ailment made for malintent to strengthen the soul of poor piety. Good is the drug that all hold dearest yet none know neatly.

The two holes of my heart belong to good. My consistent lub dub beat and functioning Flex yet all good gives is functional flow to thoughts I cannot know. So, string me from the threads of my aortic noose and behold the bellows of bad thought. Two sided wasted wonder mechanising the turns that my body earns.

Bad is the brain that only senses logic the same to its home-grown belief. Speeds unknown to temporal zone, A fiend for eye's delusion and subjective confusion. Bad is the house held together with bricks and mortar. Bad is the home that functions alone. Bad is a broken tool caught amidst rust and rubble. Bad is being without the presence of seeing. The wreck of sense.

The good brain and bad heart meet at the mouth of us. We only know the muddled mist of orality. Thus, we are put between a stone thrown at the speed of our own light lit through the flames of a fire we cannot know.



# Pastel Paperclips

*A piece of fiction by Nicole McFadden*

---

Brenda is stealing your paperclips.

She is a total bitch. You feel guilty for using that word. As a girl's girl, you know you shouldn't. It demeans powerful women and pressures them into silence and all that crap. But Brenda? She is, you must admit, an actual bitch.

She sits at the desk across from yours, beady little eyes assessing your stationery. Brenda is a mother in her mid-forties, and looks like one too. Brown hair dyed a yellowish blonde. The same makeup she has been wearing since 2010. Slim, but Weight Watchers slim. You can tell she has to work for it.

Your stationery is the hot topic at the office. You buy it all to match. Pastel pinks and baby blues; your desk looks like a stationery-themed gender reveal party.

You are the hot, twenty-something-year-old secretary. Your pink stapler and glitter gel pen reinforce this.

The stationery starts to go missing, pastel piece by pastel piece. First, your pink eraser appears on Brenda's desk; *I was borrowing it*, she says.

Then, the blue stapler that you eventually find in her desk drawer. She must have been borrowing that too. And now, your paperclip packet is empty and Brenda won't make eye contact with you. You are waiting for the opportunity to ransack her desk.

On Friday evening, you go home from the office, change your clothes and then come right back to the office. The company is throwing their twentieth anniversary party. You wear a tight red dress and the middle-aged hags at the office salivate over your body.

They hang old pictures on the walls. Employees ooh and ahh over the 2004 hairstyles. The manager was not yet bald. People shake their heads when you say that you were still crawling back then. You are tipsy and young and sexy and you feel good. Then you see her.

Brenda. Not the Brenda you know—she is making drunken small talk with the manager by the water cooler—but a different Brenda. A 2004 Brenda.

She is leaning over a desk in the photograph, filling out a docket. She is smiling. Her wrinkles are gone. Her rack is insane. Like, *Pamela Anderson in her Baywatch days* insane. Her hair is its natural brown and falls in curls over her shoulders. She stands out from the employees in the other pictures; she is the youngest and the hottest of the bunch. And, worst of all, she fills out the docket in a pink pen.



You finish your drink. There is a fire in your stomach that you can't assign an emotion to. You excuse yourself and stumble out into the foyer, your dress feeling too tight on your body.

You don't feel angry about the paperclips anymore.



untitled by Josine Hemmeken



# Bleed. Ache. Fight.

*A poem by Morgan Lyons*

---

I bleed.

Hot, sticky, damp.

At first I think it's diarrhoea; dark brown; not red, not powerful

I'm supposed to feel powerful; something more than a child

My first period makes me ache

I hide. Stuffing pads under my school jumper

Feigning a stomach ache, a headache, anything to avoid saying it

Period

Vagina

Uterus

They are me, inside me, yet I cannot say the words out loud

Gross, icky, private

I wonder

Stains in my underwear

Sometimes red, sometimes not

Is this normal?

Afraid to wet my hands

Does blood ever fade?

My body has no schedule;

In the middle of class, standing up

The sinking feeling of damp leaking out

Crimson stains advance, beating back my pleas;

My body spills secrets that I was trained to keep

I leave. Graduation, summer, college

Bleeding, aching, hurting.

Cramps follow me to class, clamping down on soft flesh, and the fatigue

Damp quicksand drawing me down to the dregs of myself

No room to create, no room to relax

Does this count as rest? My uterus and my ovaries roll the dice



Will they let me sleep tonight?  
Students toss out condoms as I crawl from class to duvet; sex on my period...  
Dangerous? Stupid? Slutty?  
It is still my body, and it is still a foreign place

I notice.  
Clubs, societies, people standing in the rain collecting  
Sanitary products  
Sanitary. My vagina, my uterus, they really are unclean  
Sanitary, as in "tidy up the filthy brown blood."  
Sanitary as in sickly sweet perfumed pads: "so freshly feminine."  
Are periods feminine?  
Relatives will rejoice; "You're a woman now!" "You're all grown up!"  
Pinning identity on the first drop of blood  
Does the red become wax sealing us in gender?  
I follow my questions, let them introduce me to feminist spaces  
EqualiTea night; small groups  
Talking, smiling, learning

No shame. No whispers. No silence.  
Blood, PMS, sex  
Sex on your period? Go for it. Orgasms chase away the cramps.  
Towel on the bed, ready for a crime scene  
But the blood, it is not dirty  
Not disgusting; not feminine  
Menstruators: a new word  
Not all menstruators are women, not all women are menstruators.  
Where are our free tampons? Free pads? Free information about our bodies?  
Bodies bleed  
Bodies ache  
Bodies fight  
Not broken, not identical  
Stand. Speak. Shout.  
Yell and scream, so they will hear us. So we will hear ourselves.  
VAGINA. UTERUS. PERIODS.  
They hand out free condoms while  
Our bloody palms search for change  
Starve our wallets to feed the tampon tax,



Pound our fists to work the bathroom dispensers  
Scour the shelves to find the comfortable pads  
Navigating fines for bleeding as we fight our battles and live our lives  
Making do with scraps of toilet paper  
Making frantic plans to treat toxic shock  
Making demands for what should be freely offered  
We need period products. Not a luxury. Essential.  
Do not hide your worries, your stories, or your questions.  
Count the blood clots, learn the words, seek the people  
And learn.  
Still shame left to shatter;  
We will not bleed in secret,  
We will not ache alone  
We will fight, hold space and rest  
Spilling secrets we've trained ourselves to speak



untitled by Josine Henneken

# Being Myself at a Party

*A piece of fiction by Kasey O'Connell*

---

I am at the end-of-year graduation beach house party because I want to stop being myself.

No one was expecting me here because I am not usually the kind of person who goes to parties. But I am going to college in September and by then I would like to be the kind of person who does go to parties, and it's graduation night and I do not ever need to see these people again if I don't want to, so it's something of a trial run, this party. To see if I can become not-myself for a night, because maybe then I can do it for a year, and after enough time it will become natural.

Although, I suppose I am already not-myself, have been for all of high school. I'm quiet, I hold things in, I don't say what I mean. What I really want is to be a different kind of not-myself, not the kind I am now, which has developed instinctively, out of fear, who exists only in the background of parties, who others look right through. In college I am going to be the kind of not-myself who sits at the center of the party, a group of girls surrounding her, all of them laughing at each other's stories of the boys they've seen, the boys they're seeing.

I'm on my third cup of vodka and Coke, which is rather disgusting but it makes me less nervous and helps me become not-myself. I've never had alcohol before, beyond wine at church. I'm not quite drunk yet but I'm tipsy enough to stop hiding in the corner and go sit next to Anna Hayes from swim team who is not really my friend but is the closest thing I have to one here.

Lydia is not here because she is a junior which means she must continue to be the version of herself that these people are familiar with for one more year or else risk suspicion. (There are a number of juniors here. Lydia is not here because she is rather unpopular and I am her only friend and I did not invite her. I didn't want her here because being tied to a social outcast does not fit with my vision of the someone else I would like to be. She is my best friend and it's mean of me but after four years of being nice you get tired.)

Anna is telling Grace and Charlotte and me about how she hooked up with Harry Chambers at a prom afterparty.

I have nothing to say. I've never hooked up with anyone. At my junior prom I kissed a boy for the first time, David Connolly, who was more of an acquaintance than anything else but he'd asked me to prom one afternoon at swim practice and I'd said yes, relieved that someone had. I kissed him mostly to say I'd done it, because I was tired of being nervous whenever other girls brought up boys, because the one time I'd attended a swim team party the girls had wanted to play Never Have I Ever and I'd noticed everyone was putting a finger down for having kissed someone, so I decided to do it myself even though I hadn't. Better to lie than be embarrassed.

I thought kissing David would help, but it felt like the moment I did it everyone started having sex, and I was behind again, and while kissing had been fine the idea of doing anything more made my stomach hurt. But I am going to change that, I am going to become the kind of person who can have sex without feeling weird and talk about it after to my friends like it's nothing. I am going to do that at this party, be new-Naomi, so I try to think of something to ask Anna, only now they've moved onto talking about who isn't at the party and why.

"Where's your friend?" Grace asks me, slurring her words. "Lydia?"

"At home, probably," I say. "I'm not, like, keeping tabs on her."

"Thank God," says Grace. "Talk about someone who'd kill the mood."

It's true, Lydia would kill the mood at a party. She's painfully serious, has never been especially good at having fun. When people other than me joke with her, she assumes they're insulting her, and insults them back.

The thing is, they probably are insulting her. At some point, I'm not sure when, people began to see her as an easy target. Maybe because she always reacts. I can't blame her, really. I should defend her.

I don't say anything.

I want to go home. Instead, I walk towards to the kitchen. I'll have another vodka and Coke, and then I'll feel like less like myself.

I stop when I hear voices.

"Come on, Evelyn, it was just a kiss. I didn't mean any harm." Ethan Lewis, the most popular boy in the junior class, and the meanest. He told the whole grade that Lydia was pathetically in love with him, that she'd tried to kiss him at freshman year homecoming,

which wasn't even remotely true. She can't stand him.

"You know I'm not interested. I told you last time." Evelyn Sterling. She's a junior too, and the one person who seems exempt from the high school social hierarchy. She can get away with being a loner because she is rich and beautiful. Her father owns this house, owns all the rental beach houses in town, and he lets her use them when no one's rented them out.

"I don't see why not," Ethan says, voice growing loud, angry. "Any other girl here would be happy to kiss me. Is it because you're a snob, because I'm not as rich as you and your daddy? Is it because you're a dyke?"

"It's because you're an asshole. Now fuck off."

The door to the kitchen opens, and Ethan storms out, spotting me in the hallway. "What the fuck are you looking at?" he snaps. "Why are you even here? I thought you'd be off with your friend Lydia, eating ice cream and crying about how you can't get boyfriends or whatever it is you do."

It's a weak insult, but I still can't bring myself to say anything back.

"Ignore him," says Evelyn. "He's just embarrassed that he can't get a girlfriend."

I step into the kitchen, where Evelyn is leaning against the counter, sipping some kind of clear liquid from a glass and smoking a cigarette. She's wearing a blue silk dress, which brings out the blue in her eyes. She's easily the prettiest person in town. I've never really spoken to her, only exchanged words in passing. She's always seemed somehow above me.

I pour myself more vodka, leaving out the Coke. "Did he ask you out?"

"Not properly. Just came in while I was making myself a drink and tried to kiss me, like I hadn't said no when he tried the same thing last party. I can't stand him. Can't stand half the people here, honestly."

"Why are you hosting, then?"

She shrugs. "It's somewhere to be." There's clearly something she's not telling me, but I don't want to pry. This is my first proper conversation of the night, and I'd rather not ruin it. "So, why are you here?" she asks. "I never see you at these things."

"Trying something new."

"And are you enjoying it?"

“Not particularly.”

She laughs. “Want to get out of here? Go to the beach?”

I think about Anna and Grace and Charlotte talking about blowjobs. The look on Ethan’s face, like he’s embarrassed to be seen in the same room as me. The four drinks I’ve needed just to make this tolerable. “Yes.”

Evelyn and I take off our shoes and dip our toes into the freezing ocean water and stand in silence for a little while, listening to the waves. Then she lifts up her dress and begins to walk further in, until she’s knee deep, and I follow her, the cold stinging my bare legs. It feels very beautiful and tranquil and meditative, like a quiet frame in a film, until a large wave comes barreling towards us, splashing us both with salt water.

We run back onto the beach, collapse onto the sand laughing. My dress is ruined.

I don’t care.

“Why did you say no to Ethan?” I finally ask, once I’ve stopped laughing. I’m not sure what I want her to say. That she stands with me, with Lydia, with all the people he’s ever bullied? That she thinks it’s possible to be happy and well-liked and even cool without a boyfriend?

“Lots of reasons,” she says. “Most importantly, because I’m a lesbian.”

I just sit there for a moment and stare at her. Ethan had said, but I hadn’t quite realized — hadn’t known that anyone could be, really, not here. Not at a party where every other conversation seems to revolve around boys, not in a town where everything from wearing unusually patterned clothes to liking art films is embarrassing. Doesn’t she worry about judgment? Doesn’t she worry that this one thing will become her entire self?

“Do you have a problem with that?” she says. Sounding, for the first time, nervous. Sounding human.



untitled by Laura Bolger

"No, I just... how do you know?"

"It just feels right, being with girls. Being with boys feels wrong. Like I'm pretending to be someone I'm not, only I'm a very bad actress and they're going to catch me."

I think that has been my whole life, all the different versions of not-myself. Always worried that someone will catch me, although I'm not sure exactly what they'll catch. Do I even know who real-Naomi is? Can she be real, if no one sees her but me?

"Have you ever kissed a girl?" I ask Evelyn.

"Yes," she says. "Have you?"

"No."

"Do you want to?"



I should be thinking of college and whatever version of not-myself I am trying to be, about being twenty and then thirty and finding someone to bring home to my parents, about being married with kids and a house and a family Christmas card, but I'm not, I'm thinking about how Evelyn's blonde hair glints in the moonlight, how it's cold out here on this beach at night and I just want to feel close to someone for a moment. "I think so. Yes. I want to."

She leans in and brings her lips to mine. The kiss is slow, gentle, soft, like she knows I am nervous and wants to tell me that it's okay. I let myself kiss her back, and I feel like I have finally done it, become someone other than myself, not quite the person I wanted to be when I came out here tonight but it's okay because this feels better. It's so natural. So easy.

Evelyn pulls away, looks at me with a gaze so intense it almost scares me. "So. You've kissed a girl now. Do you think you're a lesbian too?"



I try to imagine going back into the party and telling Anna and those girls about what just happened, but the very idea is unthinkable. I think of future-college-Naomi introducing herself, saying, “Hi, I’m Naomi Davis, from California, and I’m a lesbian.” The very idea hurts my stomach. The word feels so harsh, uncomfortable even in my head. “I don’t want to think about that. Can I kiss you again?”

For a moment, Evelyn looks unmistakably sad. But the expression vanishes so quickly I wonder if I’ve imagined it. “Yes, you can kiss me again.”

So I do. In college I will have a boyfriend who I can bring home to my parents and tell all the other girls about, but I am not in college yet and it is graduation night and I will never see anyone at this party again so I can be someone else, just for a moment, as long as I am not her forever.

I kiss her for maybe two minutes, maybe two hours. I wonder in the moment, if I will wake up tomorrow and find out that all of this was some sort of bizarre, beautiful dream.

“We should go back inside,” she says softly. “People will wonder where we were.”

“I’m sorry,” I say. “For not knowing.”

“It’s fine,” she says, but she looks so terribly sad again. “I hope you find out soon.”

I think I might already know but I am too afraid to say it. I think that the version of me who knows is a more difficult person to be than the version who doesn’t.

I imagine walking back into the party and kissing her in front of Ethan, in front of everyone. It would certainly give the juniors something to talk about next year. Maybe then they’d stop talking about Lydia.

“I should go home,” I say.

“You can stay the night, if you want. I’m staying, we can share a room. I can sleep on the floor.”

“You don’t have to.” I think of the two of us, lying next to each other in bed. The warmth of another person enveloping me. I think of college, of the boyfriend and new friends and becoming not-myself, and how that will only be harder if there is some part of high school Naomi that I miss. “Thanks, but I really should go.”

“Okay,” she says, standing up, brushing the sand off her dress, turning back to the party. “I’ll see you, maybe.”



“Maybe.”

She gives me one last smile. “You should come and tell me, when you know.”



# My Son, My Sins

*A poem by Julia Zurakowska*

---

He was cursed the moment he was conceived.

I,  
His mother,  
Young,  
Scared,  
Unwed,  
Pleaded with Mother Mary,  
To save him  
To save me  
To save us.

Mary rocked her child  
Held him until his demise.  
Never expecting her saintly son

Nor did I.

Hypocrisy seeps into the holy wine  
The blood of Christ.  
Nuns swallowing its sour sting  
Sucking on the bitter aftermath  
Drunk praying with the power

They tore him away from me  
Wrapped him in the cloth of my sins,  
Bleached him in holy water,  
To be laid into foreign arms.

My motherhood was stripped  
Between the four walls of that dark room

The crucifix laughed at my misery  
As his wails faded into silence

He cannot be saved



*untitled by  
Karl Murphy*



# In Death, Where Shall I Go?

*A poem by Julia Zurakowska*

---



*The Sentinel by Freya Rothwell*

I fear religion.

I am afraid my sins will condemn me to damnation  
My wicked love for her considered an abomination

In His paradise.

I am terrified of Judgment Day  
For my faith was decided the day my lips felt hers.  
Will He make me kneel at the golden gates of heaven  
And beg for mercy?  
For His forgiveness  
Is that the price He will demand of me?  
Will my desperate attempt at salvation save me?

Will I be banished from His garden of Eden?  
By His slithery serpent sent to strangle me,  
Forbidden from ever seeing her in His afterlife?

Will He send me to the eternal fiery depths of hell?  
To burn and suffer amongst the sinners?  
Will she be there?  
Or only the ashes of her torched corrupt skin...

# American Demons

*A piece of fiction by C.P. Glen*

---

He takes his coffee half-cream, half-sugar. The city is its own juice, which caffeine only dulls. -

She drinks coffee black, by the gallon. It's the only high she gives herself these days, and she was never one for a good thing in moderation. -

New York is a creature that lives in the space between his bones and muscles. It squeezes against him with every step. -

Virginia is a monster which chewed her up and damn near swallowed her. She was one of the lucky ones, lucky enough to get spat out, cracked and feeble, but alive. -

In the late Brooklyn nights when his mind settles among sirens and thumping neighbours, he wonders if New York is his sixth sense. There is a strand of the place tied to his amygdala, and he can feel it. He hears differently in the city. The clerk in the bodega across the street just sold another cup of decaf from the full-caf pot. The cat two floors above him just threw its litter tray across the kitchen tiles. -

She lives in Nashville now. Her therapist says that Virginia may be a place with too many triggers. Too many old places, old people, old habits. She thinks her therapist is right. But she has to go. It's her cousin's graduation. 2.3 GPA, not exactly valedictorian, but any graduation is a victory. -

The problem only starts when he sees his first demon on the subway. Its face is red and orange, all blurred crayon lines. No one else looks at it, sitting between an old man and a Wall Street hack on the C train. He works on 81st, but he gets off at Penn Station with the sea of tourists. He says nothing when his boss makes an example of him. The silence of the creature follows him for the rest of the day. -

Her Chevy was the only survivor of her teens, excluding herself. The clutch seems to weaken as they pass the border of Buchanan county. The car doesn't want to return to the land where orphan kids and oxycontin reign any more than she does. But she arrives at her aunt's house where her height is scratched on the kitchen doorframe. She eats pancakes with the new baby and sits in the high school she dropped out of and keeps her eyes forward. -



His insurance doesn't cover therapy, and he barely makes rent as it is. The demons grow. They loom over him in the street. One takes the place of the kind man in the bodega who gives him a Jamaican patty free every few weeks. The cat screams in the night and homeless men whisper to him on the street, homeless men who don't exist when he looks through the lens of a camera. -

She loves Virginia like she is a part of it, dug from the Appalachian stone, another lump of coal. She knows, with a certainty she has never felt about anything except quitting, that this will be her last visit. The dying towns of her youth are only decaying. There is no renewal here. It leaves a bitter taste in her mouth, the fact that it makes her happy, that there is no reason to return. Still, she cries to see the sun rise from below Flat Top Mountain, with a tab of suboxone under her tongue. -

The city is what has changed, not him. He is sure of it. The demons are the city's way of telling him he needs to leave. New York isn't like other places. It's not a monster. It's just hungry. A tapeworm, sucking away everything you give it. New York makes you hungry, makes it so you'll never get full. It nibbles away at everything anyone does, making them need more. But New York is his sixth sense. It wants him to live. It doesn't want to empty him to nothing. Snows fall in April. It is telling him to leave. -

Stopped at an intersection, she sees a face better left in the past. Anita, former cheerleader and present drug dealer, standing on the corner between the CVS drive-thru and the corner store that sold half-a-buck ice creams in her youth, shuttered with newspaper in the windows now. She doesn't roll up her window as Anita walks across a lane of traffic without looking either way. Time has run out once Anita's hand is gripping the edge of the passenger side door. 'Heard you got sober, let's see,' Anita says, dropping a plastic baggy containing a single pill onto the seat. Then the skeleton cheerleader, still graceful on the balls of her feet, walks away. -

The Greyhound out of Chinatown is packed, the windows are steaming. He bought a ticket west, he knows little more. It was the best he could do when the demon behind the counter was speaking in screeches. The woman beside him on the bus has smoke pouring upwards from her tear ducts as she offers him a stick of gum. He politely declines, then chooses to close his eyes for as long as he can stand. -

She leaves Virginia, but the pill stays on her passenger seat. She could have thrown it out anywhere, but what if someone else took it, got addicted? She holds onto this thought as the suboxone melts under her tongue. The direct route back to Nashville is open to her,

if not very direct, but she heads for Kentucky. -

He does not know where he disembarks, beyond the name “Owsley County”. He has no plan and exactly ninety-four dollars. He finds a park, and sits down, and fails to hear New York as the sun falls. The standing stones cast long shadows through the grass. A country demon sits next to him without a word. They have them out here too. -

Her mother’s grave had flowers, arranged in a circle atop the earth. She does not know who’s left to have put them there. She takes one, a long white rose, petals browning on the edges. It’s only fair, her mother has never given her any gifts before. She sits on the only bench in the graveyard, next to a young man sweating in a suit. His eyes are distant in the way of someone who has spent too long attached to the end of a pipe. She herself is too distracted to notice. The pill makes her palms itch from all the way in the parking lot. -

He turns to the demon in the dying light. Most of them mutter or screech these days, but this one is silent. It looks at him and as the burnt orange touches its cracked brick cheek it changes. Not a demon, but an angel, splitting the sunrise with her own light. She shines so bright it makes his eyes water. -

“Are you alright?” The man on the bench has begun to cry. Really, man isn’t the word. He barely looks older than the kids at her cousin’s graduation ceremony. His face is smooth in a way hers will never be again. ‘I don’t know where I am,’ he says and it is heartbreakingly clear. The tears glitter in the last light. -

‘Do you need a ride?’ the angel asks.



*Teenage Years* by Jason Grace



# Colony

*A poem by Chloe Fraher*

---

Foreign to my native tongue —  
I wish the way of worlds undone,  
To fill the earth with spring-fresh rain  
And cleanse the swell of blood.

Wretched though my brethren seem,  
Cast your eye to sin's pristine  
Chapel — 'cross the water lies  
The poisoner of history.

I wonder, what would we have been?  
To live without this shadow seems  
A childish hope (*déithe a adhradh*  
*ina dteanga féin*).

Do not forget that the enslaver  
Is the maker of our nadir;  
Cast judgement, Justice,  
And rise now from the dust.



---

*Cyclops by Sakshi*



# Odysseus

*A poem by Chloe Fraher*

---

I have been lost in the anger of dank backrooms, smoky, sweat-filled, split skin and blood-sacrament — the militant march of madness that comes, eyes on your neck until I, trembling, bore my brain to the scrape of nails and wood, let my potential seep, weeping, into syringes to save and re-inject. I watched every good man rot, homes be lost — including mine — with each violent breath, and my mind was plied from my past until I was new.

I died, as I should have, in a foreign land and walked out the best, the prodigy of filth, murder, and never made it home; the world a tide determined to shipwreck, every man a cannibal waiting to tear me open, all teeth, gaping throat but I with no heart left to devour, went wilting around lotus flowers, the siren song of understanding what happened in that den of pleas, the sea, desert, waste we laid at the gate. Others succumbed, gobbled up by the world until I was the only survivor, no better than the cannibals.

Those backrooms and side streets lead me far and winding, dark and putrid with vomit, urine, the sharp stench of smoke and desperation.

Who am I? I asked the prophet wheezing on the post-office steps, sleeping bag damp and stained. His eyes peeled wide in answer, glittering with streetlights and the long-gone gunfire I keep behind my eyelids.

Who am I? A beggar at my own doorstep.

The breath clouded before his face cleared — not followed by another.

I reached over and closed his eyes.



untitled by Karl Murphy



# Ladybug

*A piece of fiction by Ryan Williams*

---

## PART ONE: BEFORE

I watch my husband a lot lately.

I watch him lazily reach his spindly hand into a bag of Doritos, cramming them into his mouth. Several miss their destination and end up strewn across his top. I know I'll have to get the orange stains out later after he finally changes his clothes. I watch him happily accept a bowl of chili I'd spent all afternoon on without prying his gaze from the flatscreen in front of him, without meeting my eyes. I watch him use my credit card to buy a new set of VR goggles instead of the Clorox wipes I asked him to order six days ago. I wasn't gonna get on his case about it for a week. I watch his toenails, grown long from neglect, tear through every sock I buy, shredding the threads with reckless abandon.

He lost his job four months ago. He had convinced me to stay home and care for our two children when I became pregnant, a year into our marriage. Now, I am thirty-three and our children are seven and five. Two months ago I told him that I was going back to work for my father's business while he kept up his search for a job in his field. Our savings were dwindling, and something needed to be done. I told him he'd need to start attending to the children before and after school. He'd need to get them dressed, feed them breakfast, see them off to the bus. He'd have to give them baths, do their laundry, help with homework. I told him he'd have to start helping around the house, taking care of dishes and cooking dinners.

Yesterday I came home from work to find my seven year old making Kraft dinner for herself and her little brother, teetering on a chair at the edge of the stove. My husband is yelling at strangers over the internet who live inside the TV screen. He is surrounded by takeout boxes and dirty dishes, nested in his filth. My daughter's hair is tangled and my son's is shaved.

"Kacey, did you ask daddy for help?" I ask, lifting her off the chair and taking over the dinner.

She nods. "He said that I'm a big girl and can do it myself."

My blood rises to a simmer, heat swelling to my face. I serve the children.



I bring myself to sit down next to him on the couch. For what feels like the millionth time in the recent months, I pour my heart out to him. I beg him to do something to improve our relationship. I tell him how alone I feel in this marriage.

He gushes excuses, once again.

"You're just so much better at loading the dishwasher, I always screw it up... Don't you remember the last time I tried to do the laundry? All my underwear ended up pink... It's so embarrassing to have to talk about being laid off in job interviews... You know, I've just been feeling so depressed and I don't have any motivation..."

I hear the scraping of spoons on ceramic bowls slow and then stop in the dining room. I wipe the saltwater away from my face, gathering myself, and tend to the children once again. I put them to bed. I scrub the mountain of dishes in the sink. I am distracted by a picture of our wedding day, forgotten behind a bowl of rotting apples. We are young, bright eyed, optimistic. He used to buy me flowers every Friday. I try, but I can't remember when he stopped. I tear my gaze away from the photo and look out the window, at my withering garden. I haven't had the time to tend to it in months, maybe longer. I can't remember that either. I shake my head, banishing the stray thoughts. I return to the living room.

"How about this?" He says with a gesture to the TV.

**"Tired? Feeling overwhelmed? Constantly in need of a second pair of hands? Clone yourself!"**

A brightly colored commercial advertising Second Pair Incorporated, a new service that would produce a second 'you'.

*How about I leave you, Carl? How about I never speak to you again, Carl? How about I drop the kids off with my parents and shoot the both of us in the head, Carl?*

"How are we going to pay for that, Carl?" Is what I say instead.

"I'll pay for it. I still have a little left in my savings, enough to cover something like this."

I sigh. I go to bed unconvinced.

This morning, I wake to the sound of business downstairs. Carl is not in bed next to me, I go to investigate without getting my hopes up. I find my children bathed and fed, the kitchen clean, his nest gone.

Look what I got, ladybug!" I nearly flinch at the nickname, something he hasn't called



me, something he hasn't called me in years. I peer around the wall into the kitchen. I feel myself fall back into Carl's arms, jumping at the sight of a vague figure scrubbing the tiled floor. It's gray, smooth, hairless, faceless, nondescript.

"What the fuck is that?" I can't stop myself from swearing in front of the kids.

"It's a sample!" He's cheerful, sickly sweet, helping me to my feet again.

The thing turns from its task to 'look' at me, without eyes, just a blank face adorned with a corporate logo in the center.

"The real thing will obviously look a lot more human," he elaborates.

I sigh and take a step back from it.

"Can you take the kids to school on your way to Second Pair?"

I should leave him right now. I should throw it all away and run off to Spain.

He hands me a check. I call out of work.

The man who greets me at the front desk of Second Pair Incorporated wears a baby-pink suit and has an immaculately groomed handlebar mustache. He gives me a distant, friendly smile.

"Hi there! Welcome to Second Pair! How can I help you today?"

I fiddle with a bit of peeling skin on my thumb.

"I was hoping to get an estimate for a clone?"

His fingers fly across the keyboard in front of him for a moment.

"And did you have an appointment with any of our sales representatives?"

"N-no, I didn't know I needed one?"

"Okay no worries!"

His cheeriness is aggressive.

"Let me just see if I can set you up with a walk in..."

More furious typing.

"Okay! Looks like Katy can see you in five. Does that work for you?"

I nod with a weak smile.

A moment later, Katy retrieves me from the stiflingly minimalist waiting room. She is equally as pristine as her co-worker, sharp bob, without a single hair out of place, and her skin is like looking into a freshly polished silver tray. She leads me through a maze of pink and white and into an office devoid of all personal flourish. She seats me across from her and settles into her own cushioned white desk chair. She sizes me up for a moment.



“So, what can I do for you?”

Her tone is less saccharine than the secretary’s, there is more honesty in it.

“I’ve just been struggling to keep up with the housework. My husband suggested we get a clone, he got your free sample clone and it did good work, I guess.”

She narrows her eyes at me.

“Is that what you want?” She asks.

I bristle.

“Yes.” I chew on the word like a half-cooked popcorn kernel.

She pauses for a moment and brings a perfectly manicured hand to cover her mouth.

“Okay!” She says, dropping her hand and her concern.

She turns a monitor around so I can see it and walks me through my options and price points. I fish the check out of my purse and present it to her, narrowing the options. We settle, and I send forward some pictures to her email to send to the Aesthetics Department.

“Hmm.” she murmurs, almost to herself.

“Is something wrong?” I say.

“Oh no! No worries at all.” She cracks a smile. “Your request is just quite, well, unique for us. That’s all.”

## PART TWO: AFTER

Five to seven business days later, I’m letting a delivery man through the front door to drop a shipping crate off in the foyer. Before I can sign his little touch screen, Carl comes bounding in from the living room like Kacey when her grandparents bring her a new toy. He has a crowbar in one hand, and takes the touchscreen pen from the delivery man with the other. He signs, and digs into the package.

I help him strip the packaging, trying my best to contain it in one pile. His face falls when we finally get to the heart, revealing the thing.

“What the hell did you do?” he demands.

“What do you mean? I got a clone, like you told me to.”

“Of *me*.”

I furrow my brow. “Yes?”

He scoffs and sucks his teeth.

“What the hell am I supposed to do with *this thing* around?”



His hands retreat to his thinning hair. He steps forward to inspect the clone, examining every pore on his body. The clone is stoic and lifeless, unaware that he is allowing himself to be looked over. Seeing them next to each other, I am struck by how much younger “Carl II” looks, and realize all of the photos I sent to the Aesthetics Department must’ve been from when we were young and happy. Our wedding photos, vacations, graduation.

“I don’t know what you mean, Carl.”

He spins around, grabs my car keys off the consul table, and storms out the door, slamming it behind him.

With a sigh, I turn my attention back to the clone.

He is young. His hair is thick and gentle auburn, no hints of salt, and his skin is tight and new. I peruse the provided manual and find his power button, conveniently located in the left earlobe. With a quick tug, he whirs alive. His eyes blink open, softly glowing with artificial life. There is something that is coldly disturbing about it, something else that’s quietly comforting.

“Good morning, ladybug,” he says. His voice is smooth and even, devoid of excitement or nerve. I don’t know where he learned that nickname, but I don’t have the space to consider that right now.

“I am Carl, I’m here to help.” Well, that’s something I haven’t heard in about a decade.

“Okay, well,” I shift uncomfortably between my feet.

“Can you clean up this mess?” I gesture to the remnants of the shipping container and his delicately placed protective packaging.

“Sure thing!” He says with a smile.

He opens his jaw unnaturally wide and begins to shove the packaging into it. I take a step back and watch him slowly consume. I flip through the manual again.

**“Environmentally Friendly Waste Disposal at Your Convenience! *Our state-of-the-art Clone 1.9.1 comes pre-loaded with automatic waste disposal services to convert all of your life’s discards into high-quality fertilizer. Simply hand your trash over or instruct your Clone to get rid of it and watch your garbage magically disappear!*”**

By the time I look up, the foyer is cleaner than before the delivery man arrived. Carl II has even consumed the empty boxes from takeout and delivered goodies piled high beside the front door. I’d been meaning to do something about those.

Carl II turns to me, blinks and maintains a vacant smile



Is there anything else I can help with?"

I look back down at the paragraph about fertilizer.

"Could you help me fertilize the garden out back?"

"Sure thing!"

My hands are deep in the soil, rooting around for dandelion roots. The dirt is cool and moist, it smells fresh and satisfying. A gentle hand rests on my back and I turn to see Carl II. I am only surprised by my lack of surprise.

"Let me help you with that." He worms his hands into the hole beside mine, freeing roots and tangling with my fingers.

"Okay, stand back, please!"

I scooch on my knees back from the hole and watch as Carl II opens a hatch in his palm and fills the hole with fresh fertilizer.

This routine has become common for us in the past weeks. It's nice to see my garden, victim to years of neglect, finally get some attention. And Carl can do whatever he wants. *Which is exactly what he's always done.*

We go inside and clean up, I give Carl II a change of clothes from Carl's closet, which Carl hasn't seemed to notice yet.

In the kitchen, Carl II scrubs the mud out from underneath his ungrowing fingernails. I wet a washcloth and dab away some of the earth from his face. He smiles at me. I smile back.

He dries his clean hands on the kitchen towel hanging from the stove. He looks at me in a way that's different than he has been. Like he's realizing something. Then his gaze moves behind me to the kitchen counter. He picks up the wedding picture of Carl and I. He furrows his brow as he holds it.

"This is me?" he asks, but it feels more like a statement.

I cover his clutching hand with my own. I nod, gently.

"This is us." This one is much more firm.

"Yes," I tell him.

The house is dark and silent when I come home from visiting my parents. I dropped the kids off for the weekend. The alarm chimes when I open and close the door. Everything is clean; the floors practically shine, the kitchen is basically straight out of a catalogue, the throw blankets on the couch are without a single wrinkle.

This made the trail of blood all the more obvious.

Does the clone have blood?

I take a knife out of the butcher block on the kitchen counter and call out.

"Carl?" My voice sounds hollow as it echoes off the walls of my home. I think I can make out some gurgles but there is no clear response. I shed my loafers that pinch my heels and put on my tennis shoes.

*What if I have to run?*

My knuckles go white against the handle of the knife.

I follow the blood, its trail leading me to the bathroom. The goddamned runner is soaked through; it's going to be a pain in the ass to get out. Might have to throw the whole damned thing away.

"Carl?" I turn the corner into the bathroom.

Everything is slick and red. Carl II stands over Carl in the bathtub. He clutches Carl's trachea, freed of its throat, in his curled fingers. His face is as pristine as always. He turns to look at me, his steely gaze softening. Carl gurgles, pathetically, as the last of his life drains, along with his blood, from his throat.

"Hello, Ladybug," Carl II almost coos. "I'm sorry I didn't get this mess cleaned up before you got home."

My knife-less hand clasps over my mouth, but I cannot muster tears. My tennis shoes are turning red.

“What did you do?”

He opens his jaw and shoves the trachea inside, swallowing it whole.

“I eliminated the waste.”

I scoff and discard my knife on the bathroom counter. I leave the bathroom and dig through the cleaning closet in the kitchen. I return with as much as I can carry in my arms. I drop to my knees and begin to scrub.

“Help me out,” I ask him.

“Sure thing!”

The garden is thriving now. We’ve got a new runner.

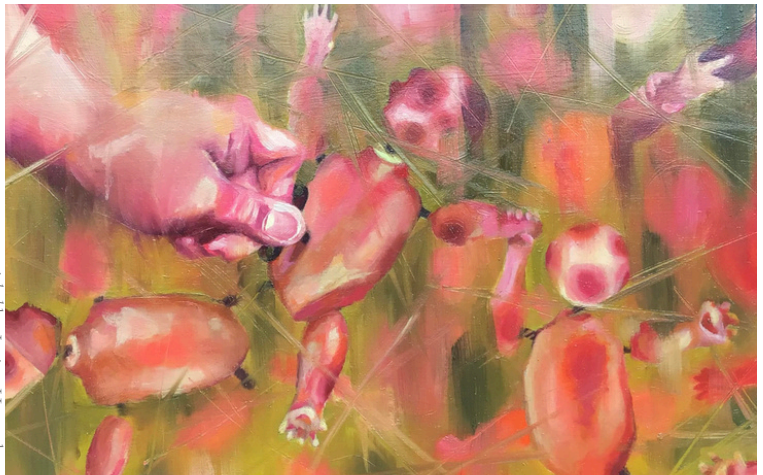


# Machine Learning

*A poem by S.C. Flynn*

---

The heron skyline of construction cranes  
preys on buildings being repurposed.  
A flour mill becomes an office block  
and a church develops new careers  
while the message ripples through their shadows:  
adapt and retrain, move, change and reboot/  
what you were is no longer good enough/  
swipe left/swipe right  
zero/one  
off/on  
I am not a robot  
stop  
I am not  
stop  
I am  
go



untitled by Josine Henneken

# Hopetoun

## *South Coast, Western Australia*

*A poem by S.C. Flynn*

---

Memories rise from the floor of my mind  
like mist on the estuary:

the five-hour journey nearly done  
once the Barren mountains appeared;

beaches swept by great wings of silence  
sharing a joke with nothingness;

the jetty a thin, curving finger  
pointing the way to Antarctica;

each evening light in the town  
a promise of what life would bring.



---

*untitled by Bronwyn Gaw*

# The Girl Who Never Returned

*A piece of fiction by Jagoda Janeczko*

---

Tall wheat swayed around Kalina as she hopped along the narrow path. The slow creeping of moonlight caressed her bare arms and face, illuminating the treeline before her. She sang low tunes under her breath, echoing in the evening air, accompanied by a choir of crickets and frogs.

Her body stopped at the edge of the trees before the forest could gather her in its embrace. Kalina turned back towards the flickering lights of the village. She still remembered the clamour of people preparing for the night which had carried her far enough that she could no longer hear their voices. The tumult had often driven her away from the seemingly safe enclosure.

With darkness fallen, someone would soon notice her absence. Father would go into the stables and notice the abandoned harrow, along with their horse, barely fed after the day working in the field. And mother would call for her to bring water from the well, only to sigh and shake her head, before she would go and pray so that her daughter would learn to keep her feet firmly on the ground.

No matter how hard she tried to ignore her father's voice, one of his stories kept playing in her consciousness:

*"Do you know what happens to children who don't listen? Let me tell you. Many years ago, there was a girl in the village."*

She shrugged his words off, tensing her eyes at the imaginary voice as if in a challenge.

*"The girl was unruly and would wander around idly day after day, her head filled with all sorts of ideas. She would scoff at her elders' advice, and despite warnings from her family, she went out of the village and into the forest. Alone."*

Kalina lifted one leg, taking a step deeper into the trees. Then another. As she took one last look back, she searched for the final words of protest from the listening ghosts as the darkness closed in on her.

*“Many eyes watched her as she wandered through the trees, too occupied with her own thoughts to listen to the voice of reason.”*

Twigs snapped underfoot as she continued along the barely visible path. The wind rustled through the thickets in a constant hum, singing songs to those who would listen.

*The girl ventured further into the depths of the forest, thinking of herself as beyond the wrath of the spirits, far enough to no longer hear her family's calls.*

Kalina whistled with the wind, adding a layer to the forest's song. She couldn't tell how much time passed. The forest always calmed the tumultuous storm in her head, sweeping away the memories of arguments and endless rows. These quiet moments of peace were almost worth the scolding she would get back home.

Kalina huffed, trying to ignore the frustration rising in her chest. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, though in her blindness, almost tripped on a protruding root before she managed to balance herself against a tree. Losing her composure meant trouble when so many ghastly eyes were watching.

Despite her frequent excursions, this part of the forest was less familiar. She turned around, examining the moss and underbrush and noted the barely visible tracks of a family of boars. Kalina resumed her pace, planting her feet more carefully with each step to avoid tripping again. It didn't take long for her heart to begin beating faster as the trees started to thin out, soon making space for thickets and grasses growing from the humid ground, revealing a clearing bathed in moonlight.

*During one of her aimless adventures, the girl reached a lake, beautiful and still as death.*

The lake shimmered before her like a beacon meant to lure lost travellers. A part of her felt like she was coming home, despite only seeing this place in stories and dreams. Kalina approached it with a smile, even as her boots caught the evening dew, and the wind stole strands of her braid in playful gusts. The surface of the water became a mirror for the rising moon to look upon itself in vain.

*The girl was told never to come too close to faraway lakes, as her parents knew she would not be strong enough to resist the whispering of the forest spirits. She disobeyed, thinking of herself as invincible.*



Before she could question her judgement, Kalina trudged to the bank and lowered herself onto the ground, leaning over the deeper part of the pond. She was met face-to-face with her own reflection. A shallow chuckle escaped her throat, and she couldn't tell if it was from nerves or anticipation. Probably both. Part of her knew this was most likely a mistake, but time for doubts had passed. Now only the spirits themselves could stop her.

With foolish confidence, the girl went into the water, tuning out the voices of her family. Though shivering in the icy water that seeped into her bones, her heart filled with wonder. She merely laughed off all the warnings, blissfully ignorant to the doom that approached.

Kalina lowered her palms into the freezing water, staring in awe as ripples started to form where her skin disappeared beneath the surface. As her knees began to throb from kneeling on the damp ground, she retracted her palms back into the crisp air.

*She noticed something observing her. A creature, one which took pleasure in dragging fools into the depths, never to be seen again. Rusalka.*

The ripples began to die out, the water settling to the serene surface. Kalina leaned as close as she dared with a held breath. Seconds passed slowly, and all her doubts returned. Perhaps her family was right, maybe she had indulged in the fantastical for far too long. Were her ancestors watching her and laughing at her stupidity? Had the ghosts of the



forest abandoned her too? She followed a false lead in hopes of changing, and now surely she was paying the price. Who was she fooling? The next day would come, just as usual, and she would have to face her family and —

Everything seemed to stop. She furrowed her brows at the sudden silence and tried to ignore the shiver trickling through her body.

Dark eyes glanced at her from underneath the abyss.

Kalina sucked in a breath, her muscles frozen. The eyes blinked slowly, shifting closer to the surface until only millimetres of water separated her from the creature, yet to pierce the settled water with a single wave.

As if in a dream, Kalina outstretched her hand towards the murky shape. The ethereal face stared at her, eyes glimmering in the reflection of the moon's light. Before Kalina could even blink, it lifted its head above water. The pale face was framed by hair that reminded her of greenery, with lips in a purple hue and high cheekbones. She had never seen someone so beautiful and terrifying at the same time. *Rusalka.*

*Since that day, no one has heard from the girl again. Losing their daughter to the creatures devastated the family. They shook their heads at her free spirit that cost her the life she could have had in the safety of the village.*

“What do you want, child?” Rusalka's voice dripped with the sweetest honey, a sound someone could experience once and search their whole life just to hear it again.

“I'm not scared of you.” Kalina winced as her words came out weak and hollow.

“Maybe you should be,” Rusalka said, revealing the tips of her sharp teeth. Kalina trembled involuntarily, desperately trying not to break eye contact. *Show no fear, no hesitation.*

Rusalka stood taller, trickles of water creating paths on her body and dripping back into the lake. “I have met many fools trying to strike me down in revenge for the deaths of their loved ones,” she added, not making any movement to cover her pale green skin.

“I don't believe in what the villagers say.” Kalina composed herself. “They're scared of their own shadows, so desperate to clutch onto their old ways of living.” She hesitated for a



moment, but moved closer. "They fear you because they want to fear you. How can I trust their judgement when they have been wrong so many times before?"

Kalina could swear she saw a hint of a smile form on Rusalka's lips.

"You're a clever little thing," she mused. "Tell me, did you stray here to test your luck, or is it another ploy from the villagers to kill me?"

"I'm not lost," Kalina replied, words hurrying their way out of her mouth to assure Rusalka. She took control of her breathing and forced her shaking hands into stillness. "I came here out of my own will. I would never dream of tricking you. It's my village, they..." She took a deep breath. *Why was talking to this creature so much easier than talking to her family?* "They tell me what I should feel or want. They claim to know the right way of living, and that anything else comes from evil spirits whispering into their ears."

"But you don't want the same." Rusalka narrowed her eyes. "So why did you come here?"

Kalina was reluctant to speak for a moment, recollecting her thoughts. Was it wrong to admit that she didn't know exactly how to feel? That all she felt was helplessness when she imagined her life in the village, the exact events in her life laid out in front of her right until death would finally claim her?

"I came here to ask you to take me with you," her throat tightened, pinned down by the stare of the creature she had been warned about her whole life. "I want to..." she trailed off at Rusalka's impassive face, before continuing in a quiet voice, "I want to forget."

Rusalka's eyes softened, and she stretched out her palm to Kalina. A million questions began to circle in her head. She knew what that choice meant. Forgetting. About the good and the bad. About her father's harsh words and the quiet moments of singing with birds during her morning chores. She knew what she should be and what she should want. She should be grateful to have her stomach filled, for a roof above her head. She should want to live a peaceful life, with a family and have her own unruly daughter to pass stories onto, in hopes of containing her wild spirit. She knew what she should be, but her heart tugged to follow an uncharted path and figure out what she wanted to be.

Her skin touched Rusalka's cold hand.



The next thing Kalina knew was the surface of the water closing in above her head as she was dragged by her arm into the depths of the lake.

Maybe many years from now she would be remembered as yet another girl from the tales. She would remain in the villagers' memories as unruly and naive, someone who spent too much time enclosed in her own little world, her feet never quite touching the firm ground.

A girl that never returned.





# Lullaby to a Dying Soul

*A poem by Alessandra Posenato*

---

Now it's time  
To let me rest.  
Have my eyes remember the wonders  
But not your tears,  
Because I know you won't be there  
When I leave.  
I'd rather relive a past truth  
If the present is so hard to bear.

Standing alone in the shadows,  
A coward hung by fear  
Of hearing a friend's lament.  
To take away your sufferance  
Would be a harrowing procedure,  
But I'll begin,  
If you asked.  
If only I could stand a bit closer.

Look for my soul,  
Breezing through the grass  
Under a suffocating sun.  
Let the memory of me be your light  
When darkness arises.  
Earth might reclaim my body  
But I still live in the tattered walls  
And the cracked floors.



I will stand by the door.  
Close your eyes,  
So you won't see the man  
Trembling in front of the Hand of Eternity  
Grabbing your heart  
To purify it  
From the corruption  
Of our undeserving world.



untitled by Amber Moses

## For Mick

*A poem by Kelly Smyth*

---

Perhaps if I had visited you, I wouldn't feel conflicted  
Perhaps the doctors would have listened to you,  
Heard that never-ending cough                      The wheezing  
The weight that laid on your chest,  
Which now rests on my shoulders.

Perhaps you would still be painting in the local Cancer Care,  
Not / being memorialised on their walls,  
Illustrated by the soft brush strokes of your mentor,  
Who captures the view from the bed of your ashes.

Perhaps I could have coped better; so, I would feel less shame about leaving you at your  
worst,  
Perhaps you didn't know I wouldn't be able to cope if I saw you or —  
Perhaps you knew.

Perhaps you know I leave rock paintings  
Of Wicklow's Black Castle,  
Of the cliff tops and waves which were once our muse,  
On your grave.  
Although I no longer feel you there,  
Yet I feel you everywhere

Perhaps you live on when I hear Harvest Moon,  
Although it makes me cry.  
Perhaps I'll miss you every time I'm on the train,  
Slowly passing by.

Perhaps there was '*nothing that could be done*',  
Perhaps it was '*your time*',  
Or perhaps it wasn't.



Curragh Covid stones by Noel Allan

# Déraciné

*A piece of non-fiction by Emma Keune*

---

I believe that London has sculpted the pattern in which my blood vessels have grown and if gathering proof was possible without my livelihood spilling, perhaps I would provide fact rather than a personal axiom. Every other city I deny proximity to myself, from every other country I withhold the title of 'Home'. But London, though wretched, polluted, and swarmed by unsavoury lusts, comes close. Perhaps it is the curtain of grey winters, the countryside summers, or red postcard telephone boxes that have wormed their way into my chest, my chest which buckles and heaves under the weight of an unyielding longing.

I fear there is something which holds me in the suburbs of London, something wicked in my mind which lets me never leave Kingston. Among thoughts I hold memories of asphalt cul-de-sac lanes, of Tesco Express corner shops I would run to for milk, and of the town square between the favoured pizzeria and sweets shop.

My mother never let me ride my bicycle farther than the road signs at the end of the bend. I had mastered the art of balance on wheels, and I would have ridden to the ends of my world knowing I possessed the definitive return to oak-wood floors and doorstep lavender. Soon enough, I did ride to the ends of the world, sat in an airplane with a booklet signed by 30 peers, now 30 strangers. And yet it means more to me now than it did when I was barely eleven – for consciousness is regret's cousin and second thoughts are only developed when confronted with the failure of a first.

Often, I am asked why I do not return, and I am met by empty, uncomprehending stares when I relate that I fear it, that I sit in a dozen other cities, all in self-imposed exile. I say that I cannot step upon the same road twice, for I dread the echoes of my youth finding me; I refuse to let my adult conscience destroy what my childhood has preserved. Perspective alters sentimentality and thus I outrun it.

If you tell me of stags, I will tell you of my stags, who roamed with pride in the park at the foot of my neighbourhood, tell me of light and I will describe the summers, tell me of hope and I will take you to my old classroom, where I ran countless laps for a charity

foreign to my carefree mind. Tell me of your losses and I will sit with you under the tree by the lake and say that my parents are moving me to Cologne. Tell me of anger and I will let you sit in the kitchen as I cling to the chairs and refuse to pack my bed into a shipping container. Tell me about home and I will weep because I do not own mine any longer; no pencil marks have grown alongside me on walls in either that house or any other. Whisper truths to me and I will whisper too, that I may not enter the gates of Richmond Park again for I fear grief will meet me there, wreck me until I roam the mosses like a ghost. Wrap your hand around mine, then watch me vanish. Play on the swings by yourself when school is out and tell your mother to buy only half the amount of oranges.

In a thousand ways a heart may ache, I believe London is the worst kind. Like a sick proof of loyalty, I nurse in me the illness of pining until it drips from my eyes. In cyclical grief I have swam for a decade; at ten, I cursed Cologne as if it had taken from me my childhood, at thirteen I threw my slander at Neuss, and at twenty I still hold them both in contempt. I stand guard by the floodgates of memory, I spin many sorrows the world has given me into nostalgia or wisdom, and I find passions in every place. Yet, the place I crave most is hidden behind the wooden green door with the golden plaque “10”.

Love comes with sorrow as a coin comes with two faces. I find love to be the address tucked into all mechanisms of my fingertips; by night, when my body rests, I feel them typing the address into [rightmove.co.uk](http://rightmove.co.uk) or [maps.google.com](http://maps.google.com) to look for the familiar, and the familiar waits in satellite pixels from two years ago. I wonder if the door is still British Racing Green or a new colour, favoured by whatever life breathes in my attic room, bathes in my tub, and unlatches the front gate, groceries in hand.

Convertible I find most pains, though to this one I cling; this one I keep primordial and let longing find her throne in the sore cavity of my heart. This one I keep so close that the smell of cabbage simmering in a pan brings me to the high-ceilings of childhood, to the corner filled with a Christmas tree or television cables, to the well-travelled Persian rugs that now sunbathe elsewhere, to the sliding door opening to the fox-den garden, where lilac grew over my heaven and olive leaves rippled in the wind like they do on Crete.

I wait for my return on a lonesome shore. Temporality grinds between my toes like the grains of sand when we shipped the armchair and union-jack coffee table to Trouville-Sur-Mer – I waited there, too, for no one in particular. My longing then was still an

undefined dullness. And when these rooms were again cleared out and settled like dust, first in one city, then another, then a third, I remained standing vigil at an unmarked altar. Now, my pains have grown to clarity, a clarity so true that I cannot express, in fear of tarnishing it with my graceless tongue. I write because the act of typing may be undone where the act of speech may not.

Perhaps I fear settling as I am far too enamoured with the yellow brick-fronts of King's Road and the black-painted gates yielding to Richmond Park, perhaps I am afraid that if I give in to temptations of ease and reluctant convenience, my pious yearning goes equally unresolved and unrewarded. Any ounce of commitment to a city clips a feather upon the wings of my heart: every new mobile number acquired, bank account opened, paper signed, contract read, blanket bought, kitchenware used. They weigh down my restless spirit, that walks in its dreams down autumn's muddy paths, chasing the brown car in the after-school pickup line.

London is, by me, equally cherished and dreaded. I have wept over dead mice buried in soil, over furniture that did not make an ocean's crossing, and over a grey city beloved by a million others. Though I endure year after year in foreign lands, praise, in selfish disregard to my emotions, how I grew up split between five countries. I still balance between extremes upon a slick tightrope. I persist in my refusal to set grown shoes where child ones have been, lamenting my former life yet holding on to great fantasies of return. I will wait upon the rope, just as I have on shores, in trains, in a dozen classrooms – balancing, trembling, hoping. I am on the tightrope, and I am below it, chanting at myself to stay, stay waiting, stay thinking; stay hoping that one day I float from opiate helplessness into a decision.



# Watching the Local Go Up in Smoke

*A piece of non-fiction by Hugh Moloney*

---

I didn't know how to feel as I watched the local go up in smoke. I supposed it was part curiosity; I had never seen a building burn down before. I was mesmerised by the speed with which the flames went from secretive to obscene. On the upper storey, the glass from the middle window went first: huge shards shot forth and slid down the awning, chased out by an angry red barrage of tongues. No-one watched the glass as it shattered on the path, because the conflagration was hogging the limelight.

"Try not to breathe that in," I said to my friend in jest as the wind carried the smoke down over us in the crowd. "All of the cancer and none of the buzz."

She laughed, but I wasn't sure if it was a real laugh or a fake one. I never could tell anymore.

"Speaking of a buzz...would it be insensitive to light one right now?" she asked, producing a thin rollie from some pocket unseen. I chuckled, but shrugged. I didn't think so.

She lit it up, without waiting for a proper opinion, and I could feel the nicotine vicariously through each puff.

The same way I could feel the flames searing my own mind.

The smoke from the burning pub had a rusty hue to it, and it tumbled gracelessly through the sky like a series of muddy waves.

The rollie smoke was slick and grey, little wisps reaching up into the sky and vanishing.

"Won't be any pub quiz tomorrow," I murmured.

After a while, I saw chunks of the upper storey falling down, ablaze, through the fogged up window of the ground floor. That was a strange thing. I couldn't reconcile it to how I knew the inside of the pub to look. *You mean that wooden ceiling, that you would always see when tipping your head back for a sip, is gone just like that? Turned to smouldering rubble?*

There had been, and continued more profusely, intermittent popping sounds coming from the bar. After some thought, I concluded that these were the miniature explosions of bottles of alcohol bursting after the fire caught them. That was fucked up. It somehow made it click that this was *real*, this was *happening*, and I was watching it.

*Pop. Pop. Pop* it went, then it slowed and sped when it felt like it, untethered to any rhythm. The definition of chaos.





It was probably a bad look that all we did was stand there, making jokes and looking around while it happened. I don't know what the hell else we were supposed to do, though.

(I recall the gummy, stinky man with the bike who told me to get out of his way and then said admonishingly, although I have no idea under what authority or sense of entitlement he felt he could admonish everyone else, “look at yiz all standin’ here watching!”, right before another window burst, whereupon he stopped and stood in awe for the next ten minutes.)

The firemen arrived after some length of time, considering the station was only five minutes up the road. They were over to us asking where the nearest fire hydrants were. Honestly, I wasn’t sure if there were any in the whole town. *How would we know?*

They found one, after twenty minutes or so, but in the meantime the other lads got to work with the truck’s own water supply. They did very well, in fairness to them.

The rageful flames danced back and fell into steam, which emerged from the windows like fog and wafted down through the crowds. Coughs ensued. They were alright with the smoke, I guessed. The fire struggled and fought and writhed and lunged but, really, it was powerless by the end of it. I worried the mist would make my hair frizz up.

It had started at two in the afternoon, and thus it was safe to assume that there were not many inside the pub. Everyone had gotten out safely, which was the main thing. The actual roof started to collapse as they continued to spray the water — that was painful to watch.

“One of the oldest licensed pubs in North County Dublin, you know,” my other friend told me, looking up from his phone where he had just acquired the information. “1871.”

“This is the most interesting thing to happen here since Harry Boland was shot,” I replied, thumbing towards the former site of the Grand Hotel. There’s a plaque on the wall, where the barber’s is now, that reminds us of his death. He wasn’t shot swimming away from the Free State Army in the Liffey or whatever, like in the *Michael Collins* movie. He was shot in a hotel room next to the horrified Irish Sea, and as he bled out he wouldn’t tell a soul who had shot him.

I spent a lot of time contemplating the morbid. I had once considered the death of Harry Boland, with this very friend, at a past time when the sun was high, and I was embroiled in a toxic spiral of abuse and loving release. When the pub was not in any danger of catching alight like a lonely heart.

“If he *refused* to tell them who shot him, then surely he must have known who did it,” I had said. “You can’t *refuse* to give information that you don’t possess.”

“Yes... your point?”



He was probably killed by someone he knew... someone who knew him. Not some random Sham, like.”

*Pop.*

I wondered if Boland had ever drank in our pub, for we knew it was around at the time. Maybe he had been drinking here on the very day he was killed. Was he on the Guinness or the Smithwicks? It was all so fascinating. The pub had survived a century and a half of political and social upheaval, uprising, fighting, yet its end came about through an unattended oven, or some other triviality.

*Pop. Pop.*

*Pop.*

It was two painful hours from the inferno's inception until its death. My two friends and I watched it all. We reminisced, I think.

One night in our pub, which was now ashen, roofless, and reduced to rubble, I had been wasted out of my mind, beyond sense. It was the night we got our Leaving Cert results, a night that would put me off cider for life; but I would go back to the rum and to the vodka, the other devils in whom I had indulged. My friend, the one who smoked, had also been there, also wasted out of her mind, and mentioned in an offhand manner that she had once felt something for me, feelings now long dead. It was an aside, in the middle of some other conversation about God knows what. I awoke the next day, head like an abused kick-drum, with *the Fear*. The Fear of how I had replied to her. Even now I have no idea what I said to her. Had I even said anything? Or perhaps I had just smiled dumbly, nodded, and walked off to get another drink?

It didn't matter either way, as she was, at the time of the fire, entwined with someone, and I was abstaining from anything of the sort anyway. Rechabite of Romance. Still, though, it was the only time someone had ever confessed a long-dead inclination towards me. So long dead as to make it trivial. Fiery trivialities.

We were some of the last to leave the scene. The fire was dying, it got dark quickly and thus it got cold quickly. We joked that the burning of the pub had been keeping us warm, at the very least. Young people love to have a laugh at what some may consider tragic. Is it how we cope with a tragic world? Well, what else are we meant to do? We walked home as the guards cordoned off the local's charred corpse with yellow tape and stern words.

When I was home, sitting on my bed alone, I wasn't seeing the funny side of the fire.



That was when I decided the best course of action was to stop thinking, and that is achieved, impermanently, only through sleep. My body turned and turned like Harry Boland in his Glasnevin grave, waiting for my mind to relinquish the faculty of thought, waiting for a lull in which it could force a shutdown. It came eventually, as it is wont to do, and I didn't dream that night at all. I was glad of that. Had I dreamt of civil or domestic wars, or trivialities, or smokes, or, God forbid, one more single *Pop*, I might just have burst into flames myself.



*untitled by Karl Murphy*



# Metro Cafe, South William Street

*A poem by Dmytro Pavliv*

---

She sits beside me at the cafe where I take my lunch break.  
she still looks the same // she hasn't changed  
she doesn't recognise me anymore.

**Neither do You**

**hold Your heart// until Your knuckles go white**

*I want to spill everything*

*"it's me! can't you tell it's me?"*

*"How's your mother? Your kitten? Your art?"*

*"Do you listen to the same songs?"*

*"Have you gone to see Paris? The Seine? The Louvre?"*

*"Are you happy?" "Content?"*

*"Do you think of me every now and then?"*

*"Have you still gone on with your life?"*

**"Do you throw Yourself down?" "Do you want everything back // the way it felt?"**

**Do You want to be 16 again? Knowing no better?**

**She doesn't.**

**"What's your name then?"**

**I don't hear.**

**A Busker bawls my answer, by Cohen, for Her and the street to hear,**

***"Fear and Filth and Cowardice and Shame"***

**I light her cigarette,**

**The heat of it grazing my fingertip,**

**A warm comfort imagined on her lips,**

**And say goodbye, envying it, choking down my coffee, cold**

**Walking away // just like before.**



*You'll plead with Me to just go back,*  
And I can go back.  
And go back then,  
But there will be nobody waiting for You.

*Nobody I know.*



*Dusk Streetlights by Sakshi*





Noel Allan

Laura Bolger

S.C. Flynn

Chloe Fraher

Bronwyn Gaw

C.P. Glen

Jason Grace

Josine Henneken

Jagoda Janeczko

Nikola Janika

Morgan Lyons

Robyn Kelly

Emma Keune

Nicole McFadden

Ciara McMillan

Hugh Moloney

Amber Moses

Brid Murphy

Karl Murphy

Kasey O'Connell

Dmytro Pavliv

Alessandra Posenato

Freya Rothwell

Sakshi

Kelly Smyth

Darragh White

Ryan Williams

Julia Zurakowska

Published with support from the School of English, Drama  
and Film and the Mary Lavin Centre for Creative Writing  
in University College Dublin



*Cover art by: Amber Moses*