

WORDLEGS PRESENTS:

POST TIGER STORIES





FOREWORD

Elizabeth Reapy
(July 2013)

I've always found it fascinating to give a group of creatives the same topic and let them roam with the idea. See what happens and be wowed by the breadth of the human imagination. So in collaboration with 10 Days in Dublin's Spoken Word section, I wanted to give a theme - the modern Irish landscape - and see what it inspired.

We ran a series of prompts over on our Facebook page. We were

open for submissions for a week and we intended that the chosen pieces would go in a special issue for the duration of the 10 Days in Dublin Festival (July 4th- 13th) and the writers would read their work in a showcase event in The Workman's Club.

The following selected pieces capture snapshots of life in Post Celtic Tiger Ireland and handle the theme delicately, objectively and with hope.

Unfortunately, our site was targeted, and being less than 24 hours live, the 'Post Tiger Stories' issue was attacked and destroyed by hackers. So we've decided to bring this special issue out in PDF format.

Read it, enjoy it, share it.

And check out the writers reading their work this Saturday 6th of July in The Workman's Club at 7.30pm.

Thank you,

Elizabeth



COLM REYNOR

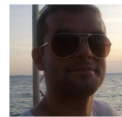
“Smack”

(FLASH FICTION)

The sound’ve it hittin the ground is like breakin a biscuit in half. I’m sittin there in the shade under the archway next thing crunch. So I pu’ down me flagon an’ go over. Not a lotta blood bu’ its wings are spread weird like they’re bein pulled apart an’ its beak is tucked into its body like the way cats an’ dogs do be at themselves. I squint up at the sky bu’ all I can see is the sun real bright an’ yellow an’ big like its hungry like its feedin on the bright blue around it. I squint an’ can see the sun bouncin off the big glass windows of the buildin

above the archway. Bouncin back ou' into the bright blue an' I think the bird musta bounced off tha' glass too. Lucky the buildin isn' bein used, jus' left there, abandoned or whatever. Imagine sittin there in your office next thing a bird smacks into the window. Probably leave a stain. Imagine bein the bird thinkin Ah lovely bitta blue sky, then smack. Smack into a buildin that's not even bein used. The sun is nice on me face an' I close me eyes. Then I hear a voice say Jaysus. Two aul' ones lookin at the bird. I ask them for some spare change. They ignore me an' walk off. The look on their faces. Suppose I should get rid've it. The sun is nice on me face an' I get me flagon an' take a good sup. A young couple walkin past look at the bird an' walk wide around. Suppose I'll have to get rid've it. The flagon is nearly empty. I look around, nothin to pick it up with. Not usin me hands an' not usin me blanket. So I sit back down under the archway an' finish me flagon. Then some fella in a suit walks past an' I can see the newspaper under his harm an' I shou' Mister giz tha' paper. He's on the phone bu' his face is blank an' stiff like wood an' his mouth is openin an' closin like somethin ya knock a ball through in crazy golf, anyway he kinda turns an' throws the paper at me an' it goes swoosh an' opens ou' an' lands all messy. All headlines abou' the usual. Picture of some blonde girl stark-ers. I take a couple of pages an' leave the rest with me blanket an'

me empty flagon. I go an' lean over the bird an' me shadow goes across it. The air is hot an' the bird is black an' hot an' heavy in me hands. Then I go over to the bin over at the traffic lights an' stuff the bird into it.



Colm Reynor is twenty-seven, from Tallaght, and works as an Electrical Engineer. He has read his work at the Lonely Voice readings in the Irish Writers Centre, and been published in a number of online journal's and magazines, such as Wordlegs and Boyne Berries. He has been shortlisted for the Fish Publishing Prize, the Over the Edge New Writer of the Year Award and Francis MacManus Short Story Award.



MICHAEL NAGHTEN SHANKS

“Why Am I Looking in Your Bush- es?”

(FLASH FICTION)

Because the last time I was here I dropped a bag full of hash. Why did I drop the bag? Because I was about to be arrested. Why was I about to be arrested? Because my drunk mate was perving on me instead of keeping look out. Why was he perving on me? Because I had me pants around me ankles and was screwing some young one in a bush in the middle of the day. Why was I screwing some young one in a bush in the middle of the day? Because I was about to get married to this old fat bitch from Africa. Why was I getting married to her? Because she needed a husband and I needed the

money she offered me. Why did I need the money she offered me? Because I'm an alcoholic drug dealer. Why am I an alcoholic drug dealer? I don't fucking know, but I'm not gonna blame the recession. Only difference the recession's made to my life is that posh old bags like yourself are home in the middle of the day when I go looking for my hash in your bushes.



Michael Naghten Shanks is a writer of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry from Dublin. His writing has featured variously, online and in print, in publications such as Boyne Berries, The Bohemyth, The South Circular, theNewerYork, and in multiple issues of wordlegs. He is one of the featured writers in the wordlegs anthology '30 under 30', published by Doire Press. He will also feature in the forthcoming anthology 'New Planet Cabaret', published by New Island Books in association with RTE ARENA. He was shortlisted for the Fish Short Story Prize 2013 and was a finalist in the Uniquely Dublin competition. He is the founder and editor of literary journal Samizdat Plus and is a consultant editor for The Bohemyth. Follow him @MichaelINShanks



EMMALEENE LEAHY

“Miracles”

(FLASH FICTION)

It got bumpy once we turned onto the lane. I adjusted my seatbelt.

“Obviously we’ll get this resurfaced. I’ll go slowly.” He cringed as the scraggy bushes clawed his car.

“You might need to trim those hedges too.”

The sandwich from the garage expanded and clogged my guts. Battery-acid heartburn in my throat. I rummaged in my handbag for a chalk-tablet to fix it.

Typical of our generation, we were sucked into the vacuum of a recession caused by others. We got married and became house-owners mid-boom. Then bang we both lost our jobs.

It's okay. I have a plan he told me. I'm going to do something with the redundancy money, a surprise. He was keeping himself busy and didn't want to stress me with the details so I just left him at it. I didn't imagine this.

The roof first peeped over a verdant clump of trees. Like the teeth of a bareknuckle boxer after a brawl with as many slates missing as intact. He had it all figured out, down to the last penny. The owners sold for the cost of the plot rather than allow the place fall into further dereliction. The rest of the money would pay for the renovation. He hired structural engineers and architects and drawings were made and calculations and estimations. He had builders on board. Some honest hard-working men, glad of work that would allow them to raise their children in the country they were raised in.

As we pulled around the elbow-bend where overgrown shrubbery stood guard, the house was revealed to me, panes of cracked glass, walls veiled by ivy, a far cry from the idyllic country house I had in my mind when he described it.

We got out. Vertiginous expanses of fields surrounded us. Tiny insects buzzed around our heads. Hot with panic, I felt him scrutinizing my reaction. I couldn't let him think I was disappointed but I wasn't exactly over the moon. I had to be honest about my reservations without hurting his feelings. Humour was the only way out.

"I thought you were an atheist?" I said to him turning towards the house.

"I am?" He folded his arms puzzled looking. "Why?"

"Well you must believe in miracles to have bought this place."

He raised an eyebrow at me, as if to say don't be stupid of course I do. Then he smiled eyes wide with enthusiasm.

With a dart I was suddenly kicked in the ribs and after some more wriggling, the life inside me settled into a more comfortable position. Another heart beat pounding away inside my body with grit and determination. I was reminded that my child was made of the same genes as my unrelentingly optimistic husband with a strong instinct for survival.

With my perspective adjusted, I rubbed the newly positioned shape inside me and re-examined the potential of what stood before us.



Emmaleene Leahy worked as an English and French teacher until the birth her daughter in 2011. Now she is a stay at home mammy and surreptitious scribbler.

She read at Flash Bulbs for Big Smoke Writing Factory on International Flash Fiction Day and previously read her work at readings in the Irish Writers Centre and Fingal Arts Festival. Her fiction has been published in FlashFlood and Cake.shortandsweet. Her poetry appeared in journals at U.C.D. and T.C.D. She was long-listed for Fish Publishing Flash Fiction Prize 2013 and participated in Flash Mob 2013.

She has an M.A. in Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama and has criticism published in New Voices in Irish Literary Criticism. She is a member of Argillan Writers' Group and will co-edit their forthcoming journal The Muse.

w: emmaleene.wordpress.com



PHELM KAVANAGH

“Pipe Dreams”

(FLASH FICTION)

The recession made my humour heavy. I had eyed ropes hung on the beams, where pigeons perched in my father’s barn.

Familiar farm noise is fogged out and I daydream. I escape to an imagined London finding freedom in the theatres around Drury Lane.

Away from the farm I am a writer and Ita is my soul mate. She brings me to the show she dances in, cafes where we meet the cast and afterwards to where no one else can take me.

When I read my work she praises and suggests ideas so wild; my
mind races to sponge the thought.

My lines become strange and mesh stories that are fresh and new.
Oddities feel right.

My stories evolve beyond discretion and become impulsive so as
no joy is wasted.

My mind is jolted. My father is calling – John! Where are you John?

Some pigeons pulse out the barn windows unsettled by his
approach. Their flight is frenzied, finally returning to their perch, as
if trapped under a low cloud sky.

Wild eyed, they watch us throw heavy glances, dreamtime over for
now.



Phelim is a member of Carlow Writers Co-op who recently have published an anthology
- 'What Champagne Was Like.'

His poems have accompanied the OPW National Art Exhibition - 2012. He was recently
short listed for Radio 1 Arena - New Planet Cabaret.

For more info visit::

www.phelimkavanagh.wordpress.com/

www.carlowwriters.org/phelim-Kavanagh



ROZZ LEWIS

“In the Event of a Sudden Loss in Cabin Pressure”

(SHORT STORY)

Lukas was wearing the same outfit that he had worn when he had first arrived in Ireland, just under a year ago. A pair of light bleached jeans. A ribbed jumper and bomber jacket. Shiny shoes. He had grown his hair but that was the only physical difference.

He had a carry on case, the same one as when he had arrived. He had left all of the clothes he had bought in Arklow in his rented room. Donal, his housemate had said he would mind them for him.

“You’ll be coming back for the wedding?” Donal had said. “With the wife and the babby.”

His wife had never wanted to come to Ireland. She was pregnant and he only had a single room. A bed, chest of drawers and a cupboard. They’d be no room, she had said. When he had suggested a hotel in the town as a treat, she had said it would be a waste of money and that he needed to save. Otherwise, the whole thing would be pointless. Them being apart. They could suffer it if there was something to show. So, he stuck at it.

The evening he arrived in Ireland, he had called her on Skype, and he had cried for the first time in their short marriage. He told her he felt lost and stupid and that he felt like a Lithuanian for the first time ever. She had smiled. He had thought about that and how strange it was that while he wiped his tears away, she had smiled and said I told you so.

“Are you willing to help?” the air hostess asked him. “If there is an

emergency?”

He nodded at her as she started her first speech to the nonchalant audience in their highlighter yellow coloured seats.

“In the event of a sudden loss in cabin pressure, you can find your mask here.”

She dropped down to his level and stuck her hand under him.

“And here for you, your mask and lifebelt are stored here.”

He was hoping for a small drama, something that could turn the plane back to Ireland and away from his country.

The company had asked him to relocate; they were willing to give some provision for his wife to move too.

“This is a silly thought,” she had said. “I have no interest in Ireland. I am happy here at home in Lithuania. What would I do all day? I have job here.”

“It might be good for us,” he added. “An experience?”

“No,” she replied and that was that. He had booked his tickets with Ryanair, landing down in Dublin Airport. He had good enough English to get him by. He had to break into a run to make the airport bus and he sat by the window on the bus to Arklow, looking out at

the view. Not a myth, he thought, those green fields really exist.

He was met off the bus by someone from the company.

“You are very welcome,” the little man had said, pumping his hand up and down though Lukas had not understood all of it, he got the sentiment.

“Let’s get you a pint.”

He was brought to a club near to his new house. An football club with a handful of men, hanging at the bar. His new housemates were there and he listened to them and walked with them, back to his new home after a mayonnaise sodden kebab. When he got back, he was sick, which the lads put down to a change in the temperature and Donal said it was the new diet.

“Lithuanians don’t have kebabs like that, lad. Ye are all mad into your vegetables, we can get you to Lidl tomorrow after work.”

Lukas knew it wasn’t any of these things. He felt like he was heaving every bit of him out of him, to toughen himself up, to prepare for the

next empty few months.

But it hadn't been empty at all. He was accepted straight away, in a way he knew an Irishman would not be back in Lithuania. He was the only non Irishman in the company and the rest of them loved this. One of the women even made a banner and food on National Lithuanian Day.

That was Michelle. A naturally pale skinned woman who liked to keep it that way, he had removed every bit of her from his possessions. The photo of the two of them from a staff night left on his locker.

The plane started to rock. The air hostesses sat quickly, strapping themselves in. Always look to them, he thought, he had seen a TV program about crashes and if the air hostesses look anxious then it was time to worry. Except, he was already feeling anxious. His wife had said she wouldn't meet him at the airport and that he'd have to catch a bus. Airport bus costs very little, I can save on petrol, she had said.

He done well from Ireland but had little to show now. Nearly all of his wages had been transferred into their account in Lithuania. She wanted to build a house out in the country where she was from. He liked town life and had mentioned this. He wanted to have a conversation with her, to tell her he wanted something different now.

The plane was still in spasms and the air hostess picked up a buzzing intercom. As she replaced it, she motioned to the other air hostess.

“Can everyone make sure they are all strapped in securely? In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, please attend to your own masks first and then your children,” she rushed it through to get back to her seat, her security.

Lukas felt calmer than the women, he felt his body loosen out with the push and pull of the plane. A baby started wailing behind him and his ears pinged. All around him, the passengers were putting their hands in their ears. He looked back at the crying baby and made contact, giving it a smile. The baby was saliva ridden, eyes tightly closed while her mother tried to sooth her. This made his

stomach come up into his throat. He put his hand over his mouth.

“So, where will we have the staff night?” Michelle asked the team.

“Luigis,” one man said. “It does a great feed. Nice wine.”

“You just fancy the waitress there,” said another .

“The wine bar? Some tapas?” the boss said. They had many good nights there. It was never about the tapas.

“Where does Lukas want to go?”

He felt the room stop and look at him. At them.

“I’m happy to go to the club. Where I began in Ireland and became an Irishman.” He knew this would get him a laugh.

And where I saw you first, he thought, looking over ever so briefly at her.

The air masks dropped, a first for everyone on the plane. Some parents ignored the warnings, trying to put the masks on their children first. The air hostesses tried to help, their bodies were being slapped across seats, hitting off people’s heads. Lukas

watched all of this. He took his mask off. He had to get something in his case. It was not the best time for this but this might be the only time and he wanted to be sure.

As he got up, the air hostess who was now sitting erupted.

“Please, sir, sit!”

He pretended he couldn’t hear. He found his case and brought it to the floor.

As he unzipped it, the air hostess reached her hand out and shouted.

“Sir, I have to ask you to go back to your seat. For the safety of you and your fellow passengers.”

He found what he wanted and sat back, leaving the case on the seat beside him. The air hostess glared at him; She would deal with him when he got down. He would have to deal with it all then, if he survived it, he thought.

The staff night was simple. Pints and chicken nuggets, wedges and pink mayonnaise. A TV in the background played lightly. Lukas settled up on a tall stool surrounded by his men.

“Jesus, we’ll miss ya, you fecker.” Donal said. “The house will be a kip now. Your wife trained you well.”

Lukas smarted at this mention, it was enough to wreck his night but then he heard Michelle.

“We have something small to say goodbye to our adopted Irishman from Lithuania,” she said. He went over to her, accepted the envelope and she whispered in his ear.

“I have my own present for you, I’ll give it to you on our walk home.”

Michelle had anointed him as some sort of security guard and he was the only one she wanted to walk her home. He liked it, it felt old fashioned. Like what should happen before you date a girl. Be friends. He had met his wife at a loud fancy dress party. She had been dressed in a Snow White outfit complete with the red apple. He didn’t get to see what she really looked like until the next morning. They hadn’t used protection and when she told him he was going to be a father, he couldn’t understand how her pill had not worked.

His house was a short walk from Michelle's and she started to rummage in her bag when they got there.

"Here it, something small, something to remember us by."

She waited as she handed it over. He kissed her on the cheek. He was still married and nothing could happen while he was.

"Don't open it now, wait till the plane," she had said. "And no goodbyes. We'll see you at the wedding with your wife, I suppose."

"She will not come back with me. I have told you this before."

"We're beginning our descent now into Kaunus. It's a hot thirty two degrees. Thank you for flying with us and we hope to see you very soon."

The passengers applauded as the plane hit the runway nicely, his stomach felt worse than it had on his first night landing in Dublin. The air hostess would never let him use the toilet now. He would have to wait.

He looked out the window at the scorched, beige ground. He would miss the growth of Ireland. He would miss the freshness of the morning air coming in through his window. He would miss her.

He ripped back the wrapping paper. It was a top. A Wicklow football strip with the receipt. He shook it out but that was all there was.

“Sir, what you did was very dangerous. I had to report you to our airport police. They’ll probably have a word with you but you may be delayed for some time. If anyone is meeting you, they’ll have to wait,” she said, smirking at the thought of this.

Lukas looked at her as he stroked the top. It was his size. Large. He would not need the receipt either way.

“Aš nesuprantu,” he said. “No speak English.”



Rozz Lewis a principal teacher in Carlow Town. She runs her own literary blog at rozz.ie and is a member of the Carlow Writers' Group. Her stories were published in the group anthology *What champagne was like* which was launched in June 2013 by Jamie O Connell. Her flash fiction was long listed for Fish Publishing Prize this year and a short story of hers was also recently shortlisted for New Planet Cabaret on RTE Radio 1 with Dave Lordan



LAURA CLEARY

“Three Bottles of Beaujolais Later”

(SHORT STORY)

Pope John Paul the Second is still smiling from the end of Mammy's sideboard. He's dead a good four years at this stage. But that doesn't make a blind bit of difference to Mammy. In our house JP2's still Il Papa.

I said it to her the last time I was home. About why she hadn't changed over the photo. She said it was because of the new fella. Said she couldn't take to him. She didn't know why, but for some reason he just wasn't the Pope. I said maybe it was because he

had the cold, dead eyes of a killer.

She laughed out loud and asked me where I'd heard that. I told her Phil Jupitus had said it on some show I'd seen. Then I gave her the bottle.

"The Beaujolais?" she shrieked. "Well aren't you only the best girl? Oh this one's my *favourite*. Reminds me of back when I had money!"

She opened it and left it stand beside the fire for a few minutes. Then she poured two glasses and handed me one. It would've been mean not to sit up with her.

It wasn't until the second bottle that Barry entered into the conversation. That's a good bit longer than usual, so I shouldn't complain. Small mercies and all that.

Mammy was acting channel jockey and flicked onto one of the music channels. Wanted a bit of Nirvana or something angry like that she said. Instead – perfect as if she had planned it – there he was. The Man Himself. Knee deep in candles and wrinkling his lips round 'The Fragile'.

Fuck you Trent Reznor. You and your little Nine Inch Nails too.

I looked at Herself out of the corner of my eye. She had folded back into her chair, smiling dreamily at the screen.

“You know—,” her voice was almost too thick to make it out of her throat. “You know, your brother would often sit up here of a night and sing this song out loud to his Mammy.”

“Would he?” I murmured.

Of course he fucking did. She tells me about it every time I sit up with her. Tool of a young wan that I am.

“Oh he would,” Mammy recited. “We’d be here and the two of us’d be *ab-so-lute-ly twi*-sted. But Jaysis on it, my boy’d sit there and he’d remember every single word. Sing it to me from beginning to end he would.”

She smiled on at the television, even though it had switched to an advertisement for a steam mop. I stared past the multiple uses of the X Five 100 and thought about Barry. His grubby hands. His empty wallet. His basement apartment in San Francisco. His lithe Hispanic girlfriend. His knack for not getting caught.

Mammy fumbled in her lap for another cigarette.

“Sure we’d be at each other’s throats in a heartbeat. But that’s the

great thing about him. You could fuck him in and out of the ground and ten minutes later he'd be down asking me what's for dinner." She flicked a glance at me. "That's where you're useless God love you."

I turned to look at her. It's a fairly standard remark but even now it still stings.

"You know the way you'd get upset over me havin' a go at you," she clarified.

"Oh I know what you mean," I said. "I just don't see the point in fighting."

She laughed like I was a child trying to pronounce a difficult word. "Jaysis, sure if you're not fighting you're not living. D'you remember that time Barry told me...Christ what was it he said? My mind's gone altogether. It was something about the war in Yugoslavia. Something ridiculous. Like it didn't start until 1992. D'you know, I think that was it actually. And I sat here and I said it to him, I says 'Barry, you're wrong.' 'You are totally and completely incorrect.' And he sat there all night and argued with me, the whole time knowing he was wrong. You know how I know that? He went out *the next day* and bought that big book on the war – you know the one out

on top of the washing machine? – and he read the whole thing from front to back.”

She took a long drag on her cigarette. “Jaysis he was some man to disagree with you.”

I didn’t say anything. I wasn’t supposed to. Not yet.

“You’d show him a blank piece of white paper and he’d swear blind to you that it was black.”

She swung around to look at me, ash fantailing onto the rug.

“D’you know, maybe that’s why you’re so shite at fighting with me. You know that your Mammy’s always right!”

Not yet.

“I was right about that fuckin’ eejit of a boyfriend wasn’t I?”

Almost.

“What was his name? Oisin? Brendan?”

I inhaled.

“Fiachra”

“That’s right,” Mammy nodded, squinting at the television. “Fia-

chra. Sneery, good-for-nothing know-it-all. D'you remember when I came back off my holidays that time and he says to me he says 'Oh. You're not as brown as last time.' The cheek of him! I'm out there working every hour God gives so that I can go away on my holidays and he thinks he can look down his nose at me and shite all over it? I tell you he made me very upset that time he locked Barry outside. Barry said he sat him down and told him to get help for his 'drinking problem'. Drinking problem? And his family all out starting fights the length and breadth of Kilcullen! I tell you he'd want to look a little closer to home before he starts telling other people how to go about their business!"

I held my hands up.

"Mammy do we have to talk about this? It's not like I'm still goin' out with the bloke."

She sat up straighter. "Well, I know! But I'm just saying. The cheek of him. The way he'd sit here call you in out of the kitchen. As though I had you out there scrubbin' floors. Oh, it was all right for you to be paying rent for the two of you up there in his parents' place but the minute I ask you to pay a bill or help me with the Christmas presents I'm the worst mother in the world? As if he knew what it was like for us down here. As if he'd ever seen anyone

work a second job, never mind a third one.”

It was pointless, I just let her go on.

“I tell you I did you a service getting rid of him. He’d have just broken you like the rest of them are after breaking me. They’re all the same. Him. Your Aullad. That crowd at home. That God forsaken place I was working in. The lot of them.” She covered her eyes with the back of her hand. “Will you run in there like a good little girl and get your Mammy that bottle that’s on top of the microwave?”

I did. Sure why wouldn’t I?

She balanced the bottle between her knees while she sank the corkscrew in. “Will you have a glass of this?” she asked through stiff lips, holding her cigarette steady.

I’d had plenty. I shook my head.

“Are you sure?” Concern clouded her face. “Would you like a gin? If there’s any out there you could take the bottle. Your Auntie Helen is going to bring me back more on her way back from Lanzarote next month.”

She kept staring at me in that bald, vulnerable way she does. I shrugged. “Sure I may as well,” I said.

I walked out to the kitchen. I didn't turn the light on. The semi-darkness and the cold tiles seemed to go together.

I poured a little less than a full measure in a tall glass and filled it with ice. I've always liked the sound of ice cracking when drink seeps up through it. And I still love the way the tonic froths up over the ice when I pour it too fast. I made sure to cut an extra slice of lemon and brought the bottle of tonic into the sitting room with me. I sat down and handed Mammy the lemon I'd saved for her.

"Oooh you're a good girl!" She placed it in her mouth as though it were some rare delicacy. "Mmm, hm." She took the rind out of her mouth and threw it into the fire. What was I saying?"

"Something about Helen," I lied

"Ah!" Mammy hoisted herself up in her chair. "That's right I was. Sure God love her you know what she's like, always watching everyone. And it's all the more important now that she's the last of us with any money. I don't know, maybe the problem's with me, but I don't understand it. That *meanness*. She's there and she's checking up on how much you're earning, how much her kids are earning, she's fuckin' obsessed with your Granny's pension. But I

tell you I'm going to fall out with her over this job business. 'Oh Ger you have to get a job', 'Oh Ger you've got to take responsibility for yourself', 'Oh Ger you can't stay on the sick forever'.

"I told her, I says, I don't think you understand Helen. I am *burned out*. Thirty six years I'm workin'. Sure I'm at it since I was fourteen. Workin' and workin' and workin' and for what? To pay for legal fees getting' rid of your psychopath of an Aullad? To pay off Barry's debts and send him off away to the States? To light and heat this mausoleum of a house now ye're all gone? It's no wonder I'm worn out."

I swirled the ice in my glass. The soft clink filled the space between us.

I remembered my line.

"You're a lot better since you left work."

"Ah I don't know myself," she replied, refilling her glass. "But sure I had no choice. I had to stop. The doctors all said it to me. I had a full nervous breakdown. None of the rest of them believe it, but I did. It all just got too much for me. So fuck the lot of them. They can take their poxy job and shove it up their hole. Sure with all the new taxes I was coming out of there with next to nothing as it was.

Between the medical card and the allowance I'm about as well off."

She muted the television. A woman in the corner of the screen signed along to David Attenborough's undersea narrative. Mammy must have found it crude to have the sound on. Or maybe she just wanted more space to think.

"I would love to go away again though," she went on staring at the Galapagos beach. "A bit of sun on my back and I'd be sorted. Remember how I lived in that place in Lanzarote? 'Welcome Home' they'd say to me when I got to the hotel. By the end I'd have got back that inch and a half I'd lost during the year."

She stared on in silence for a moment, then suddenly looked up looked up, as though she'd just remembered I was there.

"Make sure you take that gin with you when you go back to town, right? There are tins of tomatoes out there too. You'd cook with them wouldn't you? They're only forty-nine cent in Aldi this week so you can take the lot of them."

I shook my head. "You're very good Mammy, but it's grand, I've plenty in town."

Mammy's face slackened.

“Are you sure? I don’t like sending you back without anything. I mean, it’s not like before is it? Time was I’d be able to put you out in the car and take you over to Newbridge or Kildare Village and you’d go home with a new pair of runners or maybe a nice dress or something. But all of that’s gone now. They just wouldn’t let me be. They wouldn’t let me alone and do my work and live in peace. They just kept on and on and now I’m here and there’s piles of paper coming in the door and I’m fucked if I know what to do about it. Your sister can’t get more than a three month contract in Dunnes. And God knows if I’ll ever see the money your brother went away with. God Love him.”

I poured more tonic into my glass. The ice clinked against itself again.

“Would an extra two hundred quid make a dent in it?”

Mammy turned and looked at me for a long moment.

“It’d get us through a few weeks alright.”

I nodded.

“I’ll transfer it in the morning.” I smiled at her “I probably wouldn’t remember my PIN right now.”

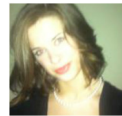
Mammy laughed. “Ah I’d say you’d remember it out on the lash.”

I smiled wider. “D’you know, I probably would.”

“Here,” she said, pouring the end of her bottle into her glass, “Tell me that story again where you ended up sitting out in the rain with all the homeless people”

So I retold her favourite story – where I nearly pass out in Temple Bar Square at four in the morning – while we finished our drinks.

I haven’t been home since.



Laura Cleary is a poet and writer (among other things) living in Dublin. Her poetry has appeared in Ascent Aspirations magazine, wordlegs, barehandspoetry, The Poetry Bus and the recently launched Bare Hands Anthology as well as the forthcoming issue of can can. Her poem “Breaking Point” was shortlisted for the 2011 iYeats Emerging Talent Award, and she was a featured poet in the recent Ash Wednesday series in Ranelagh, Dublin. She received first prize in the inaugural Heart in Mouth competition for her performance of her poem “Note to a Mislaid Friend”.

She currently lives in Dublin with her partner Colm and an extensive nail polish collection.

For more information please visit www.lauraclearypoetry.com



ROBERT HIGGINS

“Despair in the Departure Lounge”

(SHORT STORY)

The departure lounge in JFK was chaotic. There wasn't a single seat unoccupied by the legs of a sprawled out backpacker or the arse of a suited business man. The sound of babies bawling and passengers complaining drowned out the robotic voice attempting to restore order over the intercom. It had been three hours since the 19:40 to Dublin had been delayed and the lack of movement was beginning to agitate the crowd, the air conditioning doing little to cool the rising sense of indignation.

James, positioned on his hunkers by the window, stared down the runway and watched the planes jockeying for takeoff positions. He had yet to spot one with the familiar green trimming of Aer Lingus and he was getting restless. His body was shaking, outing him as the secret nervous flyer that he'd been since his youth. He had drank a few stiff measures at the bar earlier hoping that they would calm him but he would need a few more of the tiny bottles from the drinks trolley if he was to keep steady for the duration of the flight.

'It's just typical,' said a pale Irish middle aged man looking out of sorts in Hawaiian shorts and an Abercrombie t-shirt.

It had been a long time since James had heard a voice so harsh and nasal. James tried to place the accent. It was rural anyway, not far from home, his guess would be somewhere near Cavan direction. Its familiarity disgusted him more than he would ever openly admit.

He squinted across the concrete landscape and tried to make out the skyscrapers of Manhattan in the distance but his eyes couldn't focus. He wasn't sure if the New York he had lived in for the past year had been real at all. He had come to the city with his vision of it already fully formed and part of him wondered

whether the whole thing had simply been pilfered from bits of old books and films and Simon and Garfunkel songs.

A plane slowly taxied up to their gate and there was a collective sigh of relief as the boarding began.

We are now boarding business class.

A stout man in a suit stood up to make his way to the gate and James helped himself to his vacant seat. He tried his best to dry his sweaty hands on his khaki shorts. He looked down at his bare legs and knew that it would be the last time his shins would be exposed to sunlight for the foreseeable future. It was hard to believe that it had been a year since he had touched down on US soil. 12 months had seemed like an eternity to him then but it had managed to slip by in a flash. He had spent the most of it working in an Irish bar off Broadway. It had been nothing special but the generous tips and the attention of the women had given the job a gleam of glamour. He had lived off his accent, used it as currency to get to the right places with the right people. He only now wished that he had appreciated it more. This was how things always were for him. Happiness was only clear in retrospect. Things had to be viewed from a distance.

The crowd had reduced itself by almost half and there was finally space to breath. The television monitors above showed CNN and switched behind Obama and a picture of Mitt Romney's dog. It seemed to be all that they had been showing for weeks.

We are now boarding all rows.

The last stragglers made their way to the gate and James pushed into the queue. The woman took his boarding pass and held it under the scanner which beeped once before she waved him on. He walked into the tunnel and took his final breath of American air. In the stuffy plane he found his seat in row F by the window. The usual clamour for the blankets and pillows started and an elderly American woman sat in beside him and gave him a warm smile. He spoke with her for a few moments while the safety video started to play and the flight attendant showed how to inflate the floatation devices. After the demonstration, the woman swallowed two small white pills and was asleep on his shoulder before they had taken off.

The plane slowly started up the runway and James grasped the metal armrests and clenched his teeth as they started to gather speed. They went faster and faster, the sound of the wheels grinding against the runway got louder in his ears until they gracefully

took to the air and the passengers all leaned to one side to get a look at all the pretty lights of the city below. They grew smaller and dimmed until there was nothing but darkness and they were soaring out over the vast black ocean.

James felt as though he were glass. He was finally on his way home and he was terrified. He wondered if anything had changed over the past year. His mind rewinded back over how things had been before he had left. He remembered the six months of unemployed before he left. He also remembered the few menial jobs and a lot of kipping on couches and the desperation deep down to find something new. His degree seemed to be of little interest to employers and most of his friends were in Australia. There would be big decisions to be made when he got home and even the thought of them sent a shiver up his backbone. He had cried the day that his visa renewal had been rejected.

We have now reached 30,000 ft. It is now safe to move around the cabin and turn on electrical devices.

Everyone fumbled for their laptops and iPods and James felt somewhat calmer as the plane steadied. James focused on a sitcom playing on the tiny screen in front of him while the woman beside him began snoring loudly. James knew that there was little

chance of sleep finding him. He would sit upright for the entirety of the five and a half hours and analyse every patch of rough air or any sound he deemed unusual coming from underneath.

The drinks trolley came around after an hour and James bought himself a whiskey. The attendant filled a plastic cup with ice but as she was handing it him, the plane suddenly shook causing her to drop it. James' heart was immediately sent racing. He could sense that something was wrong right away. The attendant assured them that it was only turbulence but he could tell from her expression that it was something more serious than they were willing to let on. The trolleys were wheeled back up the aisles and a hush fell over the flyers. Suddenly the screens were static. Panic flooded the cabin. A moment later, they began rocking ferociously from side to side and it was no longer a secret that there was a problem with the plane.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is an emergency. Please remain calm.

Oxygen masks dropped down from above and everyone tried desperately to remember how to put them on. James fitted one around his face and pulled the elastic tight around the back of his head. It all seemed to be slow motion. He felt a desperate fear

lodge in his stomach like never before. It was a scene that he was well familiar with only in his nightmares.

‘It’s just typical,’ he heard a sunburnt woman mutter to her husband across the aisle as the plane went into a nosedive.

Hysteria took hold as the plane hurtled towards the earth. Everyone was instantly virtuous, willing to confess and forgive any sin. Spouses apologised for long forgotten indiscretions, siblings squared decade old disagreements and old women said Hail Marys down the back for everyone’s souls.

James closed his eyes and tried to block out the screams. He slowed his breath as much as was possible and tried to think of calming thoughts. To his surprise, he found himself thinking back to home. His mind brought him to his hometown, his family and his friends. He realised in that moment that he did want to go home. He wanted to wake up in his own bed one more time, stare out to the farm and sit in the woolly warmth of his parent’s kitchen. He wanted to hear his mother’s sharp voice calling him for dinner. He wanted to have one more pint with the lads on a Saturday evening in Daly’s. He wanted the rain. He wanted the complaining. He wanted the happiness. He needed it all at least one more time.

Something was happening beneath them. There was a loud humming starting up and it was though the plane had been brought back to life. Everyone looked at each other, too scared to speak a word of hope. James opened his eyes.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have stabilised the engine. We're very sorry for the scare.

The atmosphere was suddenly joyous. Everyone was filled with the wonder and possibilities of life. Old Irish men chatted amiably with American tourists without any of the usual underlying hostility while couples hugged and kissed and ignored their outpourings from a few moments earlier. Opinion was split on whether the pilot was a great fella altogether or a complete head the ball for losing control in the first place. The American woman beside James woke up as they were starting their descent, curious as to what all the commotion was about.

James stared out at the cloudy skies and waited for the green fields of home to come into view, stone walls dividing each one from the next. They glided in with ease, a palatable sense of excitement pulsating through the cabin as they drew closer to confirmation of their survival. There was a round of applause when the wheels touched down in Dublin and, for once, it was justified.

James felt as though he was walking on air as he made his way through the terminal. He took in deep breaths of a cold Irish September. He had forgotten how Ireland felt to breathe in his lungs. There was none of the humidity or moisture of American air and he was strangely glad of it. They made their way in a steady line down the escalator, everyone giddy after their brush with mortality. They stood at the baggage collection and waited for the carousel to start. Twenty minutes passed and there was still no movement. The crowd grew restless once again, eager to get outside the confines of the airport so that they could go live the lives that they had always wanted.

‘It’s just typical,’ said a man in a faded Irish soccer jersey from the early nineties.

James’ battered brown case found its way onto the conveyer belt forty minutes later. He took it in his hand and walked out into the new day. His eyes were wide with possibilities. He knew that nothing had changed. He knew that even if their plane had plunged into the Atlantic Ocean there wouldn’t have been any change. None of that mattered to him though. In that moment, he was just glad to be home.



Robert Higgins is 23 years old and currently living in Dublin. He studied the MA in Writing in NUI Galway in 2012. His work has appeared in anthologies by Doire Press, Ropes and Abandoned Darlings. His stories have been featured on RTE Radio One's Arena. He won Short Story of the Year at this year's Student Media Awards.



JAMES PATTERSON

“Office Romance”

(SHORT STORY)

It's funny how love is sometimes. Sitting in the booth at the end of the thoroughfare between your desk and the way out to the lift. This was a time when I thought the way people were won over was to remove anything extraneous from the equation. Target somebody without commitments or hang-ups. That way you got an answer which was a straight up 'Yes!' instead of an 'Ordinarily I would, but...' or worse, 'Omg wow! I can't wait for you to come home and meet the kids.'

Of course, it's different when things finish. I found it hard - and still do - to rectify that attitude with any kind of corresponding maxim for loss and, really, the closest I've ever come is to say, 'it's natural to be upset, who wouldn't be?' Except that, when you finish with somebody on bad terms - especially when it's their fault - you're not finishing with the person you thought you loved in the first place. You're saying goodbye to a stranger. You're standing in greeting with an enemy you've never fully met before.

Which is why I was so reluctant to say anything to Kathleen. We had a good working relationship as things were and it would've been stupid to jeopardise it in favour of a rendezvous which was probably a bad idea in the first place. I was on the phones. Kath was supervisor. Supervisor in fact to, not only me, but everyone on the entire billing and complaints department of the upper call-floor.

James Rath used to rag on me about fancying her so much. "If it were me" he'd say, "I'd have fucked her at the staff dinner two years ago and got on with my life."

He used to sit beside me during the weekday evening shift and for three years all he ever talked about was saving enough money to get out and go to Australia. In fact, such was his lack of motivation for the job that he probably exerted even less time and effort

than I did. "I've a system all worked out" he used to brag, "I call it 'call dropping'. What you do is - when someone phones in to bawl you out over bill payment or tariff changes - call through to another department, put the bastard on hold, press the transfer button and *voila!* It's Bristol's problem now..."

Of course, James was a decent enough guy. He got away with murder and had this way of making people think he worked a lot harder than he did but he also was the one who first taught me to cover my tracks. So much so that the only people who ever really suspected me of slacking off were Kathleen - when she was doing her rounds - and Stephen O'Hagan.

Kathleen simply used to laugh it off as some imagined quirk in my personality and, more often than not, used it as an opportunity to engage in some outrageous flirting.

"Derek," she'd say, her tongue firmly in her cheek (nobody called me Derek), "Everyday you come into work ten minutes late. Your slacks are crumpled, you never wear a tie and you keep insisting on covering yourself up with that ridiculous denim jacket. What am I going to *do* with you?"

"I can think of a few things." James would mutter.

“Well?”

“Give me a raise?”

“Ha!” She’d wink, “Maybe if you applied yourself a bit more... got a few more sales. *Tidied* yourself up a bit!”

“I’d get a raise?”

“No!” She’d say, laughing, “But I might be able to arrange a bonus. And then, who knows? A fellow like you who scrubs up pretty well? *Anything* is possible...”

“I think he already has a raise.” James would mutter.

Stephen O’Hagan, on the other hand, kept quiet because that was his natural inclination. Not that I ever suspected he harboured any kind of resentment toward me for slacking off. Just that he noticed I slacked off, and kept quiet about it.

Nine out of every twelve months he’d top the sales chart through sheer diligence and this was something which used to gripe with the more “confident” members of the team and which used to baffle the entire call floor generally. I happened to know it was because he had a kind, practical streak; something which most of the other callers lacked completely and couldn’t understand that it was pa-

tience and a knack for problem solving which motivated Steve to do a good job.

For others it was fear. To some degree everybody maintained a certain level of professionalism in their work so that they wouldn't be fired, but the two worst examples of this were Ted Brennan and Keith Doyle. The only two people in the office I can actually testify to having hated completely.

Ted was an arrogant, loutish shit-spinner who used to try and bully Steve into taking escalated calls. It never worked. Steve was so good at ignoring him that often Ted would just give up, rub the back of his head with his knuckles and amble off toward the vending machine talking to himself. All of this as Steve lay buried in the pages of some tome by David Foster Wallace, smiling quietly and anticipating the next call through.

It was Doyle who worried me more. A former taxi driver, he was laid off in 2009 after numerous traffic violations led to his license being revoked. He was an older man - I would've guessed in his early forties - and after a fairly acrimonious split from his wife, the story was that he'd hit the bottle and took to living on his brother's couch in Dundalk.

It wasn't a secret. In fact, apart from the things that filtered through from co-workers who knew him in their own time, Doyle was wont to brag about his personal circumstance by himself. He wore his failure as a testament to some imagined lifestyle as a vagabond or mystic and I often suspected he thought it gave him credibility when he bad-mouthed the other co-workers.

On one particular occasion he spoke to me when I was waiting for coffee during lunch and said, without the faintest idea I had no time for him, "Would ye look at that black box cunt there?" (He was talking about Kathleen) "I could do her job in half the time with half the effort and get twice the fuckin' results." Then he smiled, "But the nigger probably has her talents elsewhere, eh lad?"

I said nothing. People who talked like that were liable to "go postal" and - if this had been the United States - stalk into work on a Monday wearing an overcoat and gunning down his co-workers with a nine millimetre Beretta. The very idea made me shudder, but closer than that was the relief in remembering that guns weren't so readily available in Ireland. Psychos here killed themselves with drink and that was fine by me. Doyle was already well on his way.

I was pissed I hadn't challenged him for being insulting about Kath though. It reminded me of a song I'd long since forgotten; one that

used to play in the back of my mind as a kid when things were in my control and I'd let them slip through my fingers. Like forgetting to do my homework and then remembering right at the point of the teacher asking for it to be submitted. Or being brave and getting on a ride at the funfair which secretly scared me and flouting the catcalls of my mother or big sister just to impress my friends. The whoosh of spinning cars and the snare back and forth between the coloured limbs of the spider. The rise of the chorus right before the verse and the carnie screaming for more even though nobody wanted it. Remembering that I didn't want to be there and scared because I knew it was my choice that had put me there in the first place.

That's how I felt when I looked over at Kath and realised finally why I could never tell her how I felt. Why I didn't deserve such tolerance when I slacked off and why I definitely didn't deserve to expect that she liked me as much as I liked her.

I wasn't the protector she needed, and I sure as hell didn't have it in me to even try.



James Conor Patterson is a 24 year old Irish poet and short-story writer who, over the past few years has seen his work published in a number of publications including: Cyphers; Wordlegs; The Poetry Bus; Southword; Bare Hands; The Open Ear; Outburst; The Bohemyth; and The Bell (University College Dublin).

In 2012 he was featured in the Wordlegs '30 Irish Writers Under 30' e-book publication and also in its print anthology which was published in November by Doire Press. He currently lives in his home-town of Newry, Co. Down.



PHIL LYNCH

“Here is the News”

(POETRY)

‘Good evening’, said the newsreader
in his serious newsreader voice,
‘tonight the news will be different
we are calling it “viewer’s choice”

so for one night only, viewers,
we are going to let YOU choose
the main headlines we will bring you
in tonight’s television news’

he pulled three envelopes from his
laptop and voice in steady tone
said, 'here are the nominations,
you can text us or tweet or phone

first up we have "the recession"
when you vote call it "headline A"
preference will be given to
those viewers who offer to pay

to end this mean austerity
for the plan we deem best devised
the winner can forever say
their solution HAS been televised

next up we have "the troubled spots"
grouped together in "headline B"
vote for the war you like the most
with the outcome you want to see

it matters not which side you take
or how many may have to die
there are gods enough to pick from
at least one can be on YOUR side

our final choice is “headline C”
for which we are giving no clues
we want YOU to write this headline
about any subject you choose

remember that it's news we do
our programme is not like the rest
the story to make the headline
will have to depress us the best

none of your positivity
we want “nasty” in “headline Cs”
the pundits expect nothing less
the public wants value for fees’

the newsreader raised both eyebrows
as he looked straight into the lens
‘those are the three nominations,
when I end, the voting begins.’



Phil Lynch lives in Dublin. Recent publications in which his work has appeared include: Revival Literary Journal, Bare Hands Anthology, The Poetry Bus, Circle Time, Census 3, Bare Hands Poetry, Outburst, and the Boyne Berries Series. His work has also been featured on national and local radio, most recently on RTE's Arena programme. He is a regular reader/performer at spoken word events in Ireland and has performed on the Word Stage at Electric Picnic. He also read at events in Belgium, Paris and New York. Phil is a member of the Dalkey Writers' Workshop and participates in the Dublin Writers' Forum.

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