

CHR
ON MIA AOG
RAPPHY

**EDNA O'BRIEN YOUNG
WRITERS BURSARY 2021**

**AS ABOVE,
SO BELOW.**

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WRITERS BURSARY 2021**

**MOLI
EDITIONS**

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FOREWORD

A NOTE FROM THIS YEAR'S MENTOR

Here at the museum, we often emphasise our desire to encourage visitors to explore their own creative potential. Nowhere in our work does this noble goal find more expression than in our annual Edna O'Brien Young Writers Bursary. Now in its second year, and once again in the alternative reality of zoom calls, a new crew of 'bursarinos' - incredibly talented young writers - were encouraged, cajoled and high-fived through a week of seminars by writers, academics, publishers and industry professionals. Under the watchful and magical gaze of mentor Sarah Maria Griffin, they collectively produced this most beautiful collection in that week.

A note of sincere thanks and humble gratitude to our patron Suzanne Lopez whose vision for this programme has had such a profound effect on its participants. A special note also to our judges and guest speakers who have given valuable time to the bursary. Huge thanks are due to Sarah Maria Griffin, a truly inspiring mentor whose energy seemed limitless, and of course the museum's Learning team for their truly vocational and committed work on the programme.

A final note of thanks to our young writers - for sharing your time with us, and giving us these wonderful pieces of writing. We salute you as you continue to explore the colours of life.

Simon O'Connor

Director, MoLI

October 2021

I'm not a natural teacher. In my early twenties, I found standing up on just about any stage or in front of any class very simple: energizing, even, but that waned with time. I wasn't sure, after the long and strange planes of the pandemic, that my introverted nature combined with whatever being indoors for a year did to me, that I was equipped to sit with fifteen students over Zoom every day for the week - I wasn't sure I'd be able to offer them anything helpful. I was nervous, frankly: I'd been handed this honour and it felt like it didn't fit in my hands, and if I dropped it, it would be a disaster.

From the very first moment on Monday morning, staring into the panels across Zoom, I knew that whatever I felt I couldn't hold was being suspended in the air by the team at MoLI - and the energy, enthusiasm, focus and generosity of this gang buoyed me to such an extent that a new confidence grew in me, in this tiny digital room. I think that magic that was conjured there was a willingness: from everybody, to make something gorgeous happen. The EOB cohort were hilarious and silly, but they were paying attention - they gave all of themselves to each challenge I handed them from moment one. They gave such detailed, ambitious questions to our guest speakers - they gave each other patience during our workshop sessions, and they showed immense humility in receiving edits in front of each other, too. They were a brilliant riot, and every day I felt my own courage grow from the energy they brought to the room. By the end, I was devastated to leave them: but like any gorgeous time and equally any story, the beginning-

middle-and ending of it matter equally. How rare to look back on a period of your working life and think, man, that was a perfect job, and I enjoyed every second of it.

To my bursarinos, I wish you luck – though you have everything already to create any luck you might need. I have faith in every single one of you, and can not wait to see who you become and what you write, or what you make. This book is a relic of a time that I hope you will look back on as fondly as I already am: for many of you, your first byline – but most certainly not your last. I'll catch you out there, some time, in the future.

To the staff at MoLI – Jennie, Katie, Lily, Simon and all – thank you so much for having me, for trusting me with this role, and for doing all of the work to build invisible, cleanly running infrastructure to make this project swim by with ease. There are more people to thank, notably Susie Lopez, and of course Edna O'Brien for giving her name to this project – and what a gorgeous position to be in, to have experienced good fortune passed on to you by good people.

Thank you for everything, and congratulations.

Griff

October 2021

Curiosity, my friend

As a child I searched for secret rooms, a hideout, a nook in all new places. I'd find something to make into a spy cave, a hollow bush I'd climb through to get to its cavern, an unopened door, a hidden staircase, any cordoned off area could be a starless sky

I loved them, they were all mine.

As I grew older it became challenging to find special places, and soon a rare occurrence. The great crashing waves subsided, the rocks worn, pieces missing and strange. Curiosity cast me off. I searched through bushes, in caves, inside shells, under teacups. Nothing. My world lost colour, the last strokes on my painting vanished, those that breathed magic and wonder into life, gone. A lonely unfinished canvas stored in a dusty attic, mundane. Side eyeing Monets and Van Goghs , complete and self-satisfied.

On a morning, hidden under the kitchen table reading, I found myself unwillingly sharing my space, with a nonplussed bronze beetle. Gilded, glowy, in a dusty stream of sun, long , slow, waxy, unapologetic. A treasure and despite the intrusion, interesting. They were still there, Curiosity. Quietened or maybe louder , a new frequency, maybe in the sharing, but there.

It was alive in the little girl who dived head first into an ocean of leaves and twigs in search of the heart of adventure, that secret lair under the kitchen table that helped plan all her schemes, caves full of insects that both scared and fascinated her.

Mounds of found treasure bagged and boxed, curated like priceless wonders. Curiosity had changed like all things must do, like I have. Along with hollowed bushes, it was going out with friends to figure out the world together, beside creatures in caves, it was facing a daunting test that loomed over me all week.

Curiosity hadn't left, they grew, they burrowed into different places, other minds, words, ideas, vibes, musical notes, geometric shapes, darkness and light. They became boundless, not only singular, through peers and connections, bloomed, strengthening in numbers, strengthening in diversity. Now I sit here under the same kitchen table with new schemes ahead, just me, a beetle and my old friend Curiosity - and, we even extend an occasional invitation to new friends, too.

Anna Dunlea is from Killarney and often found loitering in the books, art and music aisle.

Refuge

I've fallen down my trapdoor, head over heels to where she waits below
There is no ladder
I'm engulfed by the pools of her inky pupils, sinking into their depths; caged
by her eyelashes as they clamp shut like the teeth of a venus fly trap
Her scent intoxicates me; freshly inked pages and damp wood

the melody of her soft, sweet laughter lulls me deep into slumber
I could only have such a sleep, such blissful dreams, here
where my home is
She is my refuge

I'm startled, awoken
by the sounds of tutting,
cracking knuckles full of anger and tension,
snide remarks and muttered slurs that
fire down from above, like
arrows drawn from
the strings of their shriveled twisted hearts

They stare,
Eyes bulging in fury as they cannot charge
down to drag me out.
So instead, they strike their matches and throw them down below
I wait for the lick of the thousand flames, eating into my flesh

But it doesn't come
They extinguish in the sea of her eyes
I am afloat

Mai Nguyen is a 15-year-old living in Dublin who can be found jamming to video game music, drawing fan art of beloved animated characters and lying sprawled on the floor composing poetry. She has an intense love for bubble tea, graphic novels and strange earrings.

Yeah, We're Not Doing This Again

"Would you *stop* fiddling with it?" Mary finally snapped, snatching the lock away from her daughter. The girl was wasting time: No amount of teenage brute force could crack the four-digit-lock, not with under ten minutes left. The final door was a mahogany bully — one they couldn't seem to usurp.

God, introducing her kids to an escape room might have been the greatest mistake of Mary's life. Every second with them in this 'detective's office' nudged her towards insanity. Reeking with the stench of stuffiness, the room's air was too stiff to breathe. The place was disturbed beyond recognition— Books had long since been cast from their towering shelf, scattered across the floor. Puzzle pieces lay strewn about the room. A plastic shrub rested on its side in a corner— As for the kids, if her daughter was a mildly irritating gnat, her son was a dead one, doing absolutely nothing.

Swatted away, Mary's daughter recoiled. "I was just trying to... help, or something."

"You call that helping?" Mary practically spat.

"Well, at least I'm *trying!*" her daughter retorted with an indignant gesture towards her younger brother.

"Don't bring me into this." He rolled his eyes. The 13-year-old was sitting pretty, lounging across the scarlet armchair in the corner. "I said this would be lame."

"You could have at least played along! It's just been me and Mam working this whole time."

Fine, Mary would, as usual, do it by herself. The door still loomed over her— Less than five minutes remained. She only needed four numbers. It was possible, just a matter of where.

Closing her eyes, Mary retraced her steps. First, she had rooted

through the bookshelf, found the photos in the red books, and matched them up to the bulletin board. The desk drawer unlocked from there, which contained a block puzzle which she had never found the last piece for. While her daughter had flicked through all the crudely-painted phone books, Mary had found null in the fireplace, under the rug, or in the potted plant. Nothing, nothing, nothing... Wait.

"Get off that bloody chair!" She yelled, storming across the room to her son.

"You can't just... hey!"

Mary yanked him off the chair and with a mother of two's strength, knocked the armchair on its side. There they were: The four sacred digits, etched into the bottom of the chair.

"Nice one, Mam!" Her daughter buzzed, offering a lonely high-five. Mary didn't see; She was already at the door, shifting the gears on the turn lock. Click. One minute remaining. Click. Forty-five seconds. Click. Thirty.

Click.

The door swung open with a satisfying creak — Which soured as soon as Mary was greeted by a smaller sub-room with a dining table, more shelves, and... oh.

A siren blared throughout the space. Time was up.

"Yeah," Her son snorted. "*Real* nice one, Mam."

American-Irish and living in Clare, Ciara Miesle has somehow duped her peers into thinking she knows what she's doing.

Painted Hands

When I was young I knew a girl
A little girl I still know now
Who once was and still is

She was born with painted hands
Paint that never washes off
No matter how hard she tries

In the playground on the swings
She sways back and forth
And holds on with tiny painted hands
She holds on like the chains will crumble and she will fall
Sometimes, tears come, back and forth and back and forth
And those who see her pretend they don't

The swing is blue
With rusted chains
She watches, and waits
The queue to life is long, unmoving
She hasn't gotten there yet
She thinks she never will

Because she has paint on her hands
Paper-thin, it sticks to little infants' skin
Paint she must hide, hide in her pockets when the other children
come to play
Hide in her pockets, so she won't scare them away

And when she finally goes home
The bathroom door locks

With bitter soap and scathing water
Letters flow from spewing taps
And liquid words take apart young courage

She tries to wash herself clean
The paint that never leaves
Not for a moment of reprieve

Glitter sparkles coat the sink
Vibrant colours, many hues
But the layers remain paper-thin
No matter what she does

I want to go to her
And hold her close and kiss her hands
I want to tell her
It's okay
My hands are still immersed
In the rainbow paint
I couldn't wash it away

I don't want to
Not anymore

Shauna McNamara, 16, usually resides at her desk in Middleton, reading, writing and avoiding social interactions. Her hobbies include creating queer puns, torturing characters and making people generally uncomfortable.

Big Blue House

My grandmother has moved out of her big blue house.

It stands alone on the main road of a town that is truthfully just a downhill street in the middle of Cavan. It is the life and livelihood of my grandparents. A house built in the fifties as a hotel, that was bought by a couple with seven kids. It still has 1950's heaters and light switches, and in each room a button to ring a bell to alert the staff, but with no staff, it became brown and gathered dust. I know a story from each room.

There is a greenhouse out the back that hasn't been touched in over ten years, because that was when my grandad was alive. Raspberries have claimed the green stained walls and glass as their own, and the greenhouse is overrun with raspberries that go uneaten. A giant garden with a raised area for growing veg, where my grandfather wanted to place a beehive, now standing there a rusted clothesline. Behind the garden, a tennis court older than the house, never once used in the lifetime of anyone I know, the tarmac carpeted with moss.

Seven kids in a house that was originally a hotel. Nine people under one roof with 6 bedrooms. An original 1950s brown and red and green mosaic tiled the hallway floor. At the end of the stairs there would always be slippers. The most modern thing in the house is a bright white stair-lift that is seldom used by anybody other than the grandchildren now that Granny Anne has moved out. Following the stair-lift up the stairs are my grandmothers' paintings, seven or eight oil paintings of the coast or the garden which the chair looks out upon.

The creakiest room, due to the constant traffic, was my grandparent's bedroom. Now quite barren, trinkets dispersed on

windowsills and mantel pieces. The least touched, most clean surface in this room is my grandfather's desk, after being moved from his office was brought in here in memoriam.

This desk holds every family event from the birth of their first child. Every letter written between him and my great grandmother. It had been locked for as long as the greenhouse has been left untouched. It holds every memory he had.

My mother once took it upon herself to open it - she held every hand-written memory, but with that every secret he took to the grave. A letter written by his mother when conflict was tense in Derry, consoling my grandfather and grandmother on their untimely and unfortunate pregnancy. It was no surprise to my mother that she was unwanted, it was blatant. Another child, a seventh child, at the start of an Irish civil war.

She has since kept this letter. It's now just a secret to share with her father. My grandmother is oblivious - the desk is locked again. The secrets, hushed.

My mother is the youngest in her family. She grew up in this hotel house, watching her siblings move out. My mother, a keeper of secrets, is the Big Blue House. The Big Blue House on the main road of a town that is truthfully just a downhill street in the middle of Cavan, a building that was built as a hotel but turned into a house for nine people.

Ailbhe Barry is often found sporting a pair of paint splashed dungarees with a cat on her lap, having to hold herself back from talking about feminism and how much she loves her paint splashed dungarees and her cat.

The Sword

Ryan strolled through the great golden field of summer. It seemed to shine twice brighter in the midday sun. The heat driving out the sweet smells of Riot time, of fruit, nuts and the westerly wind carrying the scent of a hundred freshly mowed lawns, all surrounded by the choking heat of July.

Yet he paid no mind to the bubbling creek or the nest of elusive crickets on the horizon and instead made his way for the towering dark sword that lay staked in the earth like a warning. Ever gripped to the handle of this behemoth sword was its former owner's arm, all metal and twisted with wire coming out the end like a kind of confetti.

He sighed as he walked into its shadow, hearing nature's chirping dim and the sun's heat wane as he grew closer. He set his back against the blade and slid down to the dry ground, the familiar feeling of the many intercut runes once more tickling his skin as he descended. After a moment he took out his satchel and found his wine and sandwiches amidst his pair of spare glasses and a disused hunting knife which he only really carried because his Grandmother would have a stroke if he didn't, her mind still stuck in a time where Shadowkin were anything more than a nuisance. One of the little blighters had gotten stuck in his rear car exhaust the other day, could you imagine that? What bad luck.

Ryan considered the sheathed blade in his hand for a moment, he didn't even think he could hold it properly and she wanted him to have a sword. A sword! Like one of those conspiracy nutters, he'd be a laughing stock at the office. He toasted the hand lazily with pop and began to sip from his glass, nursing a ham sandwich as he did so. She'd kill him if she knew where he was now, leaning

back and taking a photo, a little reassurance was all she needed. They were gone.

When he finished his meal he closed his eyes for a long time, enjoying the last bit of silence before he stepped back out into the falling sun, and dreading the large amount of paperwork that was due tomorrow. His quadrant was hopelessly behind on their quota and compromise was not something Dalic industries would accept. Thinking back to it he really wished he'd taken the fully insured company car rather than the share in stocks, but he could hardly fault his younger self for back then Dalic had been the largest refiner of Dialiam crystals, now it was the second going on third.

He regretted not staying freelance longer, there was less security but gods was the pay good. He stood up with a groan, giving the sword a final salute before he set off into the outcrop of red tinted trees beyond which lay Renlaid, the risen city. Home.

Darragh Kelly is a 16 year old writer who lives in a place you have never heard of, up the side of some mountain in Wicklow. An avid reader of books and loves obscure indie content whether it's a hidden gem or has no inherent value, he loves them all equally.

cursed jam

he died when i was thirteen
i never really knew him at all
in fact he was the orb of my hatred
the guard to the key to the door
i never opened

we never spoke
yet he was the man i was supposed to love first
i mean isn't that what they say?

how do i explain to them that instead of love
hate filled that room
instead

i watched him die
i watched him cry
through glass eyes
flooded

not with tears
but with something dark yet so frail

which then haunted me

he shone
holding his knife

he cut me up
as his own gutted fruit
the pounded guts that created the jam
in which i craved

he fed this thing to me
a thing that peeled my skin
layer by layer
it slowly made me crack

it
stopped changing everything
everything

but it made everything
(i want another bite)

Aisha Sesay is a seventeen year old recurring hopeless romantic who claims to be from Dublin but is fueled with white mochas and the odd pure blacks. Her fingertips are often stained with black ink as instead of talking about feelings, she writes them instead. Her tears are often seen between the words that she writes and her cries can be heard when the moon is alight.

Hidden Under the Stairs with a Lock and Key

The basement was always such a scary place. Ghosts and ghouls, darkness and small noises that are barely there. Shadows of what once was taunting you into submission. A great pile of cardboard boxes are stacked in each corner, ready to topple at the very thought of movement, crushing you beneath their ungodly weight. Old newspapers filled with false truths litter the floor with words of what you once believed.

The light switch. That damned light switch of a ritual past. A constant reminder of obsessive tapping and ripples of explosive trepidation.

It's so cold. So cold. You lived here. You breathed in its dust and dread. You breathed out its grime and deceit. How stupid you must feel. How stupid you must feel to call this place a home.

You don't. This isn't home. Not anymore at least. Down a hallway with beaming light from arching windows that glows a glistening gold on your skin. From outside you can hear a symphony of life that sings a familiar tune so cheerily in the wake of dawn. Beneath your feet is a tiled floor with patterns of your childhood. Cold, but not unwelcome.

At the end, that's where you find it. Hidden under the stairs with a lock and key. Sometimes you watch as it changes. You watch the dust pile on books stacked atop its entrance. All baited breath and wide eyes. Sometimes, you place your hand on its dirtied wooden planks and write sweet nothings with the tips of your fingers.

Amelia May is a 17 year old aspiring writer from Wicklow, a professional frog enjoyer and lover of rocks. They strive to make their imagination everyone's problem.

There wasn't a wonderland

i once fell down below

Down

Down

Down

the rabbit hole

there wasn't a wonderland waiting for me

Things live there, Things that will scare the child out of you
They tear you apart, stitch by stitch, and leave you jumbled
They have words and whips,
whispers and a wild hunger for the truth

They break you and take you, plunge you into an obsidian sea
In this cold you're truest, in the cold you're free

And the Things, the creatures, monsters if I may
They pull you out and speak

“oh little one, you have half my worries
but you feel them twice as deeply.
physically you fell a foot,
but you tumbled much more steeply.”

their voices welcomed me, soft and sincere
home? they made me question
could home be here?

ah, but it wasn't yet my time,
so I was jerked and dragged upwards, gulping for smoky air
the terror that awaits me bleeding from my veins
as an open wound on my chest,
the water trickled off my body, or was it truth?

inside me there was a new peace. pieces of hope.
pieces of hope that thrash against my fear of leaving
my fear of new

fading fear

never enough time to change
or become less of a wreck
no time for a chrysalis
just enough to enjoy the trek
Tick
Tick
Tick

Molly Keating is a 17 year old plant lover and climate activist. She has previously worked with *Fighting Words* and *Bow Street Academy*. Molly can often be found eavesdropping on Dublin buses and cafes searching for stories.

The Hunt

Eleonora was the First Knight of Maya. Impossibly tall, she wore heavy plate armour with a half-burnt shield. A plume of red erupted from her helmet. Her sword dripped green, sticky blood on the gold coins at her feet. But she wasn't here for gold.

She stepped over the dragon's severed head, and stumbled toward a discreet wooden door to the side. Beyond was a dimly lit room, and there, a wizened old man stood on a trapdoor. The trapdoor. Her quest was at an end.

'I've slain your dragon!' Her voice was hoarse.

The man nodded.

'And you think you're the hero of the grail?'

'Aye'

The old man made a humming noise.

'Well, young hero, first, you must solve three riddles!'

She was so tired. Tired of quests, riddles, prophecies, and priests. But most of all, she was tired of wizards. She hefted her sword.

'Step aside'

'But-'

'Or I'll run you through'

He raised an eyebrow.

I've waited here for a thousand years, girl'

'Well, I've swam oceans and walked deserts. I've outsmarted kings and killed dragons'

'You're not the first'

'Two years. Two whole years I've been looking for this damned cup'

The wizard pointed a quivering finger.

'The prophecy tells of a wise warrior'

'Damn the prophecy!'

A stop in time. The little old man stood, bent, but unbowing. The knight gestured with her sword.

'I'll do it, you know'

She had never killed a man before. Hydras, cyclopes and dragons, sure, but a mortal?

'I am a ruby, a flowing river of life and death. Of war and lust and the hunt. I am the cornucopia of life, the font of the wild. What am I?'

'In my way'

He banged his staff on the wooden trapdoor below him.

'You make a mockery of me! Begone!'

She closed her eyes. She remembered the boat. The fire. The armies. The war. She remembered the face of her queen.

'I need the grail. If you want to live, step aside'

The man didn't move.

'Step aside!'

The man didn't move. She was so tired.

The blood was red. It stained the wood of the trapdoor. She rolled his body aside, surprised at its lightness. So damn tired. She twisted the trapdoor handle, and climbed down a rotting wooden ladder.

It was a small dingy cellar. The only light came from the gap above, and the dead man's limp hands cast shadows on the wall. The room was empty, save for an ancient wine barrel. She pried it open with her sword, and there it was. The grail. A deep ruby inset into the shining silver. And how it shone! She reached for it.

The smell hit her. Unmistakable. A warm wetness on her arm. The barrel was full of blood. A river of life and death. Of war and lust and the hunt. She kept grasping, her fingers searching for the cup.

It wasn't there. Only blood. Red, red blood.

Joe Reidy is from Westport, Co. Mayo. He writes fiction, plays and poetry. His work has been performed in the Abbey Theatre through *Fighting Words*, which he won't shut up about.

Things Ended // Things Soonbeginning

I'm sorry I haven't looked at you enough. Taken all the things you give me, have given me every day, for granted. As I sit here, looking at you once more, all your warmth, your sunny homeliness, I can see why I fell in love with you in the first place. Your walls have always kept me safe. They kept me warm in winter. Your windows, arched and painted cream, have allowed brilliant light to enter every room on even the darkest day. The floors my feet have landed on for decades as I get out of bed, small indentations made from listless footsteps on hardwood planks: they remind me of you. I have not forgotten, I refuse to forget, how you held me, wrapped me up in blankets, when life's cruel stiletto slid too deep into my flesh. I'll always remember the small things, like the stair's eighth step that creaks on the way down, the bottom drawer in the kitchen cabinet that's wonky, the mirror that was smashed and was never fixed. Thank you for being my needle and thread. The good seamstress who stitches me whole again and again.

//

You were nine when you first started keeping your bedroom door shut. Ten, when you began to slam it. You were fourteen when you stopped crying, and learned to hold it in. I have lived, stood in this valley, pastoral and green from when the earth still hummed and breathed. I have seen magic beyond your comprehension, wondrous things you will never know but still, I marvel at you every day. How neat you have learned to keep your bed, how good you've gotten at your sums. How strong you've become, how brave you are. I'm sorry I could not help you more, keep you safe from what happened outside of me, inside my walls too. My power was not strong enough to stop it. To end it earlier than I should have. I

apologise for the rage that festered and grew inside of these rooms, inside of you too. We were frozen over, we were dead cold things but still, we stand. A marvel of a house, a marvel of a person, a human, still a child, yet stronger than even the greatest monument I know. I love you, will miss you when you're gone, once you've escaped. But know that I'll always be there with you, a fragment of a person inside your precious walls.

Murray Sheehan is a writer from Wicklow who enjoys long walks on the beach, sunsets, eating copious amounts of peanut butter and creating unrealistic scenarios in their head as a form of disassociation.

Can of Wyrms

Chchch. KA-shunk.

The aluminium can of Syntax Blitz hit the bottom of the tray. Chrism pulled her gloves on (you could never be sure that no one had pissed in the pickup box, not because of a shortage of toilets - but out of spite for the next stranger to use it) and gingerly tugged her can out. Oh, a rare one - it had a holomorph print of a dragon, zig-zagging its way across a sky full of blinking diodes. It growled and tossed its head like a horse as she wiped it down with a disinfect sponge.

Chrism would usually drink from her kitchen sink, but the tap had begun to dribble out strands of thick black mucus, the consistency of dark wet hair. So, she jogs to the machine each morning, and pushes more wads of tissue into the paper-thin space at the bottom of the kitchen door. She began to order takeaways every night, and ate in the bathroom. The tub and tiles are so easy to clean, it's the best place to eat.

Just once, the mass from the sink had rushed towards the way out. As it heaved against the glass, it made a smacking noise, like a pair of lips puckering up. She dug her feet into the ground, and pushed squarely against the glass pane. Her stomach wrung itself out like a dirty cloth as she watched her careful line of cans along the windowsill be swallowed, with a loud, wet pop. The crunch of the cans seemed to satisfy it, and it slid off the window to churn and digest them. She hadn't dealt with it since.

The drink tasted of carbon, pixels, and the slightest hint of a peach's pit. When she finished the Blitz, she decided she'd keep the can. She checked her watch.

Chrism stood by the street corner, bouncing nervously on the

balls of her feet and looking out at the vehicles crawling past, lost in thought.

'Hey, Chrissy! Hey!'

She looked up from the cars, to see Meg waving frantically at her across the street. She gave a small, stiff wave back.

'Hi, Meg.'

Meg was clearly expecting her to walk over, so she sheepishly weaved between the rail-cars to her. She felt her cheeks begin to burn.

'Oooh, cute can. You save any for me?'

'Oh, um. No. It was gross, to be honest.'

'I kinda like it. Yeah, it's like they boiled a vat of rainwater, and forced a peach to spit in it, but looking at the can makes it taste a lot better. They're pretty.'

'Well, you could cut out the middleman. You want mine?'

Meg's eyes lit up like electrified fireflies.

'Chrissy, you're a total dote.'

When she passed the can over, Meg's fingertips slid over her knuckles, her hand and can enclosed inside, and she couldn't feel her gloves at all. She kept her eyes fixed down on their hands, and willed it to last longer. It felt like great wings unfurling.

Gráinne Meghan is a 17 year old writer from Dublin. She loves drama, gaming, reading and can commonly be found poking a story idea with a stick to see if it will move.

i am still here

the air in my soon-to-be-tomb of a room is stifling
oppressive
hanging heavy over my faint heart
it threatens to drag me down, deep under the turbulent waves of a
roiling
broiling
blood-coloured ocean

so I wait patiently for my body to shatter as my soul has
I can deal with Death because I've died
countless
times before

but how do I live with this Grief – the grief of the world and my own
soul?

that a boy merely months older than me died on his own from AIDS
I see him now, with hollow eyes that peer out at faceless doctors
still a Child, hoping hopelessly, that he can die without being
forsaken in a nameless grave

or the younger boy, pale body packed with bullets for no reason
whatsoever
silly wars and brutal deaths rage on
because greed always defeats compassion –
it takes a thousand virtues to wipe out a single sin

now the bullets sprout crimson poppies on his sullen, dirt-covered
chest –
because he dared to read and dream of life

and his unchosen enemies realised that an Idea was the boy's
weapon of choice

and, don't forget the broken boy made of shattered glass
shouted at
misunderstood
who eventually had enough

how much must life hurt for fatal drugs coursing through blotchy
purple veins, burning this boy to pieces, to bring pleasure not pain

finally, the boy whose identity was a burden – unbearable
who lives a half-life, a monochrome reflection of the vivid colour
bursting inside of him
believing that love is a curse
that what's inside him is rotting, when in reality it is
blossoming
but he razes the roses, sabotaging the soil with salt and tar, so *nothing*
can flourish
and worst of all
he believes he deserves it

soon I will be one of them.
the breaking, the dying, the lost, the empty

but I am still here

the thought breaks through the fog cloaking my mind, shows me the
world like I've never seen it –
in blinding, fresh light

I am still here

and what happens
if I find my way out of this house
this life,
this maze that I've lost fragments of myself down

I will live the lives that those people, whose only crimes were
breathing –
those echoes of my own self, reflected across time –
were denied
not out of spite, but redemption

I dare the world to destroy me
ruin me
burn me to ashes and
drown me in the deepest ocean

I will *live*
to make sure they never die –
carry their memory like delicate tattoos inked on the pale bones of
my skull
and I will believe in the *possibility of impossibilities*

grief is not a lead weight, but my buoyancy, a reminder to stay afloat
and I rage into the darkness – even though my words come out only
as a whisper
a wisp of air in the shadow of the dank, musty room

you, death and all your acquaintances,
will not kill us so easily

Eavan O'Keeffe is a 17-year-old aspiring writer from Kildare whose work is
always too long for the word count restrictions. He is passionate about canoeing
and delving into any novels he can get his hands on.

When The Watchers Come Home

The windows are open
Gold bars in between
A prison of grandeur
The earth trembles
The watchful are coming

Elephant hide
Ashy from smoke fumed into hair
Eyes look up to me
Salt down her cheeks
The watchful are coming

She sits in the corner
I almost missed her
We must do as told
The gore may be too much
The watchful are coming

Open her heart
To gaped jaws
Anticipation hungry
Cut valves with a butcher's knife
The watchful are coming

But she cowers
Lone and alone
A fly caught
Encaptured by damnation
The watchful are coming

Coward I
Hands held unsteady
Blade caught in the act
Sickly eyes glisten
The watchful are coming

I will cover her cries
Smother the sharp
Dull the blade
Pull the curtain
The watchers are home

Siobhán Fitzgerald is published in the anthology 'Empty House' and is living with silver for the Trócaire Poetry Competition 2020. She can be found reading by the beach and/or drinking expensive tea.

River Song

You stumble through the woods, furiously swiping at your tears. Remnants from the previous conversation threaten to overwhelm you: the anger, the shouting, the hatred – whatever. It doesn't matter. You're not there anymore.

Your feet carry you down the well-trod trail almost of their own volition. As you take another familiar turn, you feel your pace begin to slow. You quieten your breathing, focusing on the damp, heady smell of the moss-covered wood around you. Allowing the forest to seep into your skin, a second heartbeat as familiar as your own. A gust of wind rushes through the trees surrounding you – for a second, the rustling leaves seem to spell out voices.

'hello hello,' they whisper, 'back again? back to stay, to sleep, will you sleep awhile?'

You blink and the words are only the stirring of leaves on the trees. You move on.

After a time, you see a white glimmer amid the spectrum of green. Pushing your way through a copse of trees you emerge on the banks of a stream. You smile now, knowing it is not much farther. The familiar trail is nearly unrecognisable, the dirt path turned to a muddy swamp after the recent heavy rainfall – it is perhaps for this same reason that the stream flows along so merrily today, running fast and effervescent along the rocks.

Or perhaps it is simply excited to see you again.

As you tramp downstream, you listen as the water tells you its stories until its babbling fades to a murmur. Between one breath and the next, the forest opens up into what is undeniably a wide, true river. The stream pours itself gleefully in, winding over and throughout until it is simply one voice of hundreds that make up the river song.

As the water picks up pace, you do too. The voices grow – swirling eddies of stories and songs pool at your feet, but you hurry on. When the sound reaches a cacophony you know you have arrived, although you have to squint against the fine white spray misting the air. Careful, careful down the edge of the waterfall you go.

The stone holds memories too. Each groove brings a glimpse of a younger self, hesitant and unsure – so at odds with the forest creature you have somehow become. Each handhold and foothold comes as naturally to you as your next breath; you have walked this path so often it feels like an extension of yourself. So often, it feels like coming home.

Halfway down the sheer rock face you halt. Take a step. Jump.

Emerging from the wall of water to the cavern behind, you close your eyes at last. Sinking to the ground, you allow the pulse of the cave to course through you, following and flowing with the steady thrum of the waterfall. Taking a long, shaky breath, you finally let go.

"Tell me a story," you whisper, resting your head on the wall of the cave.

And the water obliges.

Jennifer Sheehy is a writer, musician and future London bookshop owner. She spends a lot of time with her dog and her guitar, and lives life like it's a Pinterest board.



MOLI
EDITIONS