

KEEP
THE LIGHT
ON
EDNA O'BRIEN
YOUNG
WRITERS
BURSARY
2020

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FOREWORD

From its inception, the Museum of Literature Ireland has focused not just on the writers of the past, but as well on the writers of both the present and the future. In this, our inaugural Edna O'Brien Young Writer's Bursary, a cohort of precocious and talented young writers were joined by more established artists, guiding and mentoring them through a week of talks, workshops and close critical support. Much of this took place against the backdrop of a pandemic and zoom calls – not ideal, but these young writers rose stoically to the challenge. You hold in your hands the fruits of that work.

We are indebted to our patron Susie Lopez whose support and ideas have made this programme possible; to our judges and special guests who so generously gave of their time and expertise; to Alan McMonagle – our wonderful, calm and inaugural writing mentor; to MoLI's exceptional Learning staff who remain possessed of the energy of youth; and, most importantly, the our young writers themselves for pouring so much of their creative spirit into the bursary week. We hope the experience and support will compell you to continue to explore your considerable gifts.

Simon O'Connor

Director, The Museum of Literature Ireland
October 2020

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A NOTE FROM THIS YEAR'S MENTOR

Writing comes out of afflictions, out of the gouged times. What an apt quote from the great Edna O'Brien, in whose name this bursary has been created.

There are fifteen talented young writers represented in this collection. They hail from myriad walks of life; their writerly sensibilities cast a wide net to include love and loss; aspiration and despair; fear and uncertainty; courage and perseverance, the slightly strange and the surreal.

At the start of the week when asked as to their hopes and expectations, the abiding response was that they would learn. They did more than that. They learned, shared, engaged, supported, contributed, offered themselves wholeheartedly to the writerly cause asked of them. And having spent a week in the company of this diverse, remarkable, talented and surprising bunch, I feel I am the one who has learned, who has benefited and indeed who has been renewed in ways I did not anticipate. For this and more, I want to thank them.

A piece of writing is never complete until the reader as well as the writer gets to savour its language, its mystery and its particular energy. All that remains, then, is for me to steer you towards the early offerings of these impressive young writers.

Keep the light on.

Alan McMonagle

October, 2020.

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Paul Street

Hello Mr Homeless Man
Would you like a cup of tea?
Three sugars in your Barry's, I remember, don't you see?
It's a bitter day outside, a nice hot drink would warm you up
So wait two minutes I'll be back with your cardboard centra cup.
I got three sugars and two milks now that should be enough,
being homeless in this city's hard I can tell you must be tough.
I'm in a tricky spot here I've a sesh in half an hour,
I'd take my sister's I'd but she's being awful sour.
Would you pop on into Tescos and get me some alcohol?
I did just buy you Barry's, I'm a nice girl afterall.
Nikita, a full shoulder, 13 euros for the lot,
I'll stay here with the cuppa tea, make sure it's staying hot.
So I'll give you twenty euros and just see what you can find.
If they don't have Nikita stocked, get the next cheapest kind.
My friends and I are careful girls, we drink responsibly,
counting units constantly, unlike the buachaillí.
These exams are awful hard and I've been studying all week long
It's not as if we're craicheads, sneaking puffs from some pimps bong.
I've given you a twenty, I might let you keep the change,
So go on in and buy us some, mind stay within our range.
Oh thank you, Mr Homeless Man!
Make sure you do it fast!
I promise now that this time is most definitely the last.

Doireann Magee-Salawu is a 16-year-old girl from Cork City. She is passionate about activism and social justice. She hopes to use her love of writing to be a part of positive change.

Fifth Period

Sila sat at her desk. Her head on the table, the cool wood soothing against her forehead. She had gotten no sleep for the fourth night in a row and it was beginning to take its toll. She lifted her head and looked around the classroom. Most of the other students were in the same situation, with no one paying attention to the teacher except the goodie goodies. Some were sleeping, some biting their nails, some talking to each other. This class was a lost cause anyway, the teacher far too apologetic and timid to keep anyone in check. Sila figured she'd just flick through the textbook before the exam, she was sharp enough to pick it up quickly.

Sila glanced toward the windows, they were closed and it was getting far too stuffy in here for her liking. She looked beyond the panes of glass, watching the trees blowing in the breeze. She longed to be out there, at the very least she wanted to open the windows. Sila focused her gaze on the handle of the window, wishing she was a telekinetic so she could open it with her mind. Sila concentrated extremely hard on the handle, imagining it turning, imagining the window opening out, letting in sweet, cool air. Of course the windows remained firmly shut. Sila sighed at her own stupidity. Why on earth would she think she had gained telekinetic abilities overnight?

She was snapped out of her thoughts by soft, huffing laughter from behind her. It was that quiet girl. Sila wondered what she was laughing about, the quiet girl never talked to anybody, let alone joked with them. Sila didn't even know her name. Suddenly Sila felt a strange prickly sensation. It felt like someone was watching her. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up. She glanced around the classroom, checking if anyone was looking at her. The feeling left as

abruptly as it came. Sila had a thought. What if someone was listening to her thoughts? Sila was astounded by her own absurdity. The prickly feeling returned and Sila couldn't resist it. She screamed in her head, as loud as possible, and Sila turned just in time to see the quiet girl flinch. Sila felt her jaw drop open, her thoughts running wild. The quiet girl looked at her with real fear in her eyes. Next moment, Sila heard a voice in her head that was certainly not her own. "Please don't tell anyone."

Nina Roantree is a 15-year-old, aspiring writer from Dublin who spends far too much time with fictional characters.

Doors For Those Deemed Dastards

I glided my hand passively across the surface of the door. The series of splinters salute tall like a platoon of fresh baby-faced army graduates, aiming to seduce my dehydrated flesh into tangoing with the memory of plucking that shred of wood from your infantile knee, deeming yourself Purple Heart worthy upon returning to the battlefield deemed “a playground”.

I halted. I could feel...I could SMELL the putrid stench emitting from his gob, having it blown softly on my neck, like the warmish summer breeze that made her once go “Ah, sure isn't this lovely?”. I knew I couldn't confront him, though, he hadn't spoken since we arrived. I turned the handle, the creaking hiss of the rusted joints screeching out. The door opened to reveal what appeared to be a dimly lit hotel room. The stench of sweat pervaded. I crumbled on to the piss-yellow duvet, the mattress rising around me, reminiscent of the time before, when Liam would cackle at the sight of his Tellytubby-coloured fingers upon forcing his juvenile finger through the putty.

I turn over on my side, in hope to get a moment's slumber. He stares at me. Though I cannot actually see him, the shadow in which he resides whispers a “I can see you, though”. I glare back at him, because that's what they always say, don't they? To stare the predator right back in the eye, make yourself look big. He is no predator, though, he's as petrified as I am.

I wrestle with my pocket, engaging in familiar combat with the stitched fabric until my wallet surrenders into my grasp. I unsheathe my collection of polaroids, my remaining memories of her. They begin to move, orchestrating a scene, one all too familiar. Her tantalizing smile erupts into a visualized scream, the skin around

her mouth stretches back to allow her vocal chords to ring our their last ditch mayday signal. The urine-tinted oil splashes against her contorting figure, her limbs bound by military taught knots. The blazing light erupts in seconds, the lit match aimlessly chucked at her, her flesh melting from bone like ice cream trickling on to your hands on that warm summer's day.

I cannon the collage across the room, to no avail, however, as the seemingly prehistoric television springs to life, the static ringing throughout the room. Her scream begins to find its way through. I break down. Tears rappel down my flaky cheeks, like Tom Cruise scaling a skyscraper in the latest Mission Impossible. “WHY?? WHY HIM??”, the man roars out. Him? Who's him? Then I realize, this is MY punishment. He sees, hears and feels differently. How would he be to blame for what I did?

I leap up from the mangey mattress, stumbling to the door. I glide my hand passively across the surface of the door, the splinters saluting tall, aiming to seduce my dehydrated skin into tangoing with that embedded memory. As I press down on the unpolished handle, the joints screech out and the door opens up to reveal the hidden, like the curtains of a Broadway spectacle. However what I see is no Oliver Twist, no Hamilton. The same musty bed, the same fizzled telly, the same fucking room. The only means of escape, is knowing that I never will.

At 17, Niall Heneghan is one of MoLi's Mayo Maestros of Literature.

With Me

I still remember
start of September
i helped you get better
we promised forever

but you hoped her love was true
kept waiting, refus-
ing how she played you
But your best friend told me

how she lied
toyed with your heart
made you cry
please hold on
it's okay to cry
She's got you
hypnotised
While we die

Why would you ever want me?
how she treated you still haunts me
You gave her your promises
she did the opposite but you like her clearly
Wish I were Lily

Watch as she leads you
on helplessly. two
unrequited loves who
don't know who to turn to

But how could I scold ya?
when i long to hold ya
move on, yeh, i'm tryna.
yet every single night

i lie
wide awake
beneath skies
of stars that shine
like your eyes
we both failed
to realize
i apologise

but why would you ever leave me?
i know i'm not half as pretty
i gave you my number
but you're still her lover, both loves unrequited
Why do we fight it?

Wish you were with me
Wish you were with me

Why would you ever love me?
I'm dying inside, it's ugly
You gave her your heart
she broke you apart, but you love her really
wish you were with me

Amée O'Kelly, 16, a wordsmith, singer and thinker, is a Citizen of The World.
Lover of Moonlight.

The Outsiders

Outsiders don't understand, nor do they try to.

They just look from the safe side of the glass as the weight above you lingers, the snapping cord a plucking tune as temporary entertainment before detainment and the arrangement for your death is placed as the lingering threat but I shan't leave.

It is not your place to see me nor anyone's, so ropes tie me down and my skin is now raw.

The damage it inflicts causes so many conflicts where the hypocrites such as I watch in wonder to see who will try not to die but escape the dark shape across the room - making you stay, making you pay and it haunts you when you turn away but a mighty strength within and a soul full of sin where black blood boils with adrenaline in return for a naive heart that shall only be torn apart in the end.

Where safety is the source of paranoia and the words spoken you cannot destroy look into the eyes of the judgmental, experimental with the joy of purity and sickeningly sweet expectancy of being crowned queen of hypocrisy on the throne that was not my own as I was too foolish to try this alone.

The pressure of contradiction on a realistic mind filled with fiction is consuming in a world where a weight looms above my head.

I beg you to understand you threat, in the silence of death and destruction.

This rage addiction and sheer temptation where everything leads to a wound and a simple sound or simple crack is an attack - please, oh please stay back for it is a treacherous mind I have.

But you outsiders will never understand.

Patsy Culleton is a 15-year-old writer and musician who is fond of writing in riddles - not so much holding normal conversation.

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the truth

Part 1: overthinker

Oh why, oh why can't I think straight
when my mindset is as compact as my peers.

All I hear is the tearing claws of angry cats
scratching a blackboard and raping my ears.

Oh what a shame, I cannot fight this demon
who rampages in my head and torments my thoughts
oh what a shame indeed.

Yet I continue to think and work hard for what it is I think I need.

Will you hate me tomorrow or the next day or the next?

What's going to happen later on, is this a test?

Will you hurt me, hate me, leave me, what will it be?

I think only of the future because that's all I want to see.

Part 2: anxiety

I'm scared. The demons in my mind keep rattling
at the locks I've set for them.

I keep the small irritant feelings I have
but lock away the rotten corpses of shame.

My head is jackhammer, slowly drilling into my brain.

It's alright, it's alright

Wipe your tears, no more fears, just drift into bed.

The words they say to make it all go away
convinced I'll be ok

but right behind all the time

they're laughing at you, they're all laughing at you
say the demons in my mind.

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Part 3: depression

Oh you fucking prick, you beautiful insolent monster.
How you murder my happiness and drench me with pain.
How dare you take my loved ones, and turn their smiles vice versa?
How dare you take all my good deeds and burn them to ash?
How the hell am I supposed to kill my demons, when they are like
hydra?
And why the hell does nobody understand my smile? I am Loki.

Part 4: consummation

I'm sad because nobody is really happy.
I'm angry because of the way I live my life.
I'm lonely because I cannot love myself.
I'm an insufferable bastard because I am told so.
I am sad so let me take my happy pills.

Part 5: numbness

I don't remember what it feels like to feel.
I cannot tell you what you say is fake, nor can I say it's real.
I simply do not remember much of that word, feeling,
for I am way too comfortable in this state I am in.
I smile when they do, I laugh as they do, but I talk the way I want to
and that's how I'm dealing.
I remember laughing with humans that pretended to have similar
interests.
I remember the excitement I got just looking at pictures on
Pinterest.
I remember the burning sensation as she kissed my lips
and the butterflies in my stomach as he held my hips.
I remember the sweet taste of my blood as his fist connected with
my face.

I remember the painful slurs, used to put me in one place.
I tolerated it for so long, feeling is dumb.
I'll never feel pain, for now I am numb.

Seán Machingure, 17, *Dubliner to the fullest. I am an artist with no limits both in writing and in how many cups of coffee I drink. "Progress is irreversible". We rise from the ashes we are titans.*

The Apocalypse in Seven Parts

Part One

I remember reading about an artist, Byron Kim, who painted the sky on square canvases every Sunday for a year. The pages parted like feathers as I flicked through the photos of his gallery exhibition and noted how the colours were all blue and white, with middling tones a minority. I remember thinking: if I was to paint the sky here every Sunday for a year it would be grey, grey, grey.

Part Two

The money leaves first, as it always does. I am reminded of my father's town, before my time. Every morning I wake at six to book-keep in the village bank. I wander back home, find Marcus among the farm hands and together we go to the pub. There is nothing else to do here, in this barren elbow of the country, but work and drink and marry young.

Part Three

Next the clouds grow spirals, each rain pocket turning a delicate swirl outwards from a greying point – sky circle, if you will. Marcus paints their wispy, drawn out ill-defined nature with the loving attention of John Constable. He makes them glow orange, pink and blue in the late Summer sunsets. I want to be clear, reader: they looked more like a bad omen in real life.

Part Four

Julie from next door moves out the following Sunday. I used to tell the other boys I liked her when they pestered enough, in the days when everyone had to like *someone*. I gave her name up because everyone

was a little bit in love with Julie, even the girls, and no one expected her to do anything about it. She tells me she is going to the American Evangelist's camp, up north, to pray for our salvation. I wonder if I should start praying too, at least to my own faux gods, but I am too ashamed to ask her. She smiles and thanks me for being a kind man. I know that is forgiveness, as much as she is allowed to give.

Part Five

We must go north, my sister says, for the child. Her daughter. My niece. Marcus tells me it is cold up there; the winters are long and there is no good in a night that overstays its welcome. His poetry cannot change the truth: man has not marked the earth there with so much ruin. If the child is to survive, we must go north like confused geese. I do not want to leave him here, not where the sky is red, red, red.

Part Six

That Summer burned on, determined and wilful, wild thoroughbred at the starting gate. It chased us down, in sticking, soaking, soggy marshes under arm. We burned in portions, a series of compromises and half-lives. I knew, then, we'd be stuck in the sticky corners of history where all great empires whisper their last swollen sounds.

Part Seven

The last Sunday that summer, Marcus and I sit outside on wet grass and watch as the two soap-bubble moons are joined by a small red dot. "It's Mars," he tells me. "The closest it will be in three years." He laughs: "To think this is the last time man sees Mars." We are both in hysterics, and for a moment I feel like sunlight.

Caoimhe MacCarthy is a seventeen year old aspiring writer from East Cork. Hobbies include procrastination and sleeping.

The Woods.

I followed the trail of ivory petals
Wept by wooden giants from above
I fell into a world of colour
My senses blinded by love

The rising star had given life
A sky full of anything but clouds
I rushed to hear the chorus of joy
But it seems I have missed the crowds

Past the stream that spits shadows of boulders
Small rocks weathered by time
And the seeds that hide deep below
Waiting for shoots to climb

The light is escaping now
But I know better than to chase it
I lay my weary bones to rest
And wait for familiar faces

If the sun offers life
The moon grants resurrection
I lay an ear to the ground
Enchanted by forest's melodious inflection

I wished for angels to kiss the earth
To grant the gift of life
The sky began to fall apart
To rid itself of light

I came in search of Easter lilies
And my journey came up just short
It has been a long time since they have bloomed here
And I fear I have reached my last resort.

Ava Dolan, 18, Wicklow. Late nights spent writing have left her lacking in both sleep and empty notebooks.

BECKY

She struts by you in *Demonias* and a bombastic purple weave. Its neon stings your eyes - but in the good way!...You've convinced yourself. (Truth be told, the question's been rallying in your head for a bit now. But, yes, you think so. It's... bold. Suits them).

In the sunlight splintered by the willow she wanders under, it's particularly lovely.

Standing at the end of the road she walks, is the nurse's office. You sense her stalling. Walk over to her...

Ask, "Why is it we always go this way?"

A pause and a shrug... Before an answer - you know the answer, it's always the very same - "I could ask the very same."

You chortle. A dreg of energy's carried off on your breath. The stationary breeze holds it still. Debating whether to drag her to the office door or simply bide your time... You sit. The tarmac's rough, but warm; it gently sinks to cup you, welcoming your weight. It's softened by the heat of noon.

"You've never sat before," she remarks.

"You've never taken quite so long."

She does not sit. Notice her silhouette against the shelter of the weeping willow. Its branches beg for the wind to seize them, but don't allow it... linger in this moment. Just for a little while longer.

Your body has disdain for this stillness; it's aching muscles crave for you to dash from here. In a rare turn of events, however, you trust you know better than it this time.

Choose to stay.

Instinctively, turn to look back to Becky. "Are we not going to see her, then?" she asks. She's tucked one hand into the pocket of her leather jacket. You can hear, from inside, her balling and un-balling a slip of paper.

Your eyes drift over to the office door. "Not if it can be helped..."
"...Can it?" You feel the question on your cheek as she leans down ever-so-slightly.

Distracted for just a second, you sense the wind pick back up. Your heart steadily returns to racing, shuddering your limbs like a revving engine to the bodice of its car.

Pause.

Bring the quickening air deep into the core of your chest. Allow your belly to cradle it. And return to where you just were.

"Did I do the maths homework?"

Becky responds, blasé, "I think so..."

A sigh jostles its way out of you, "I just couldn't fi-"

"We just couldn't find the sheet," she completes.

In some future moment - the one ahead of this - the faint ringing of a schoolbell raps your eardrums.

Becky, though your gaze is turned from her, is giving you a slight smile. "You packed *Meanies* for lunch. They'll go stale if you don't have 'em.

"...Plus, Scarlett will kill you if she finds out you didn't eat-"

"I know," you spit. Becky's smile remains. Return it. It'll do you some good.

Whenever you turn back, a hand, laden with mismatched rings, is stretched out to help you to your feet. As you take it (do take it), you feel Becky absorb back into yourself.

Go, enjoy lunch.

Becky can wait for next time, should it come.

Walter McCabe is fuelled by a problematic caffeine addiction, queer anxiety, and a healthy amount of spite. They claim to live in Dublin, though, only really use 10ft² of it. Described often by peers as "smart" and "a young person".

Angelic

The eons passed and She remained. Unchanged but always different, it was her duty after all. To learn, create, dismiss, destroy. Thus was her penance.

To continuously walk to the top of the hill with bloodied souls and pray forgiveness. On bruised knees. Listening for the joy of her home which She had been forbidden to lay eyes on, covered with the ash of failed wars.

He was her beginning and only he would be her end, crafting her of both clay and flames. A perfect piece of pottery. The beauty be humbled as She walked effortlessly past. The brave be cowards when She spoke between her master and her lesser.

There She stood, on the top of the hill, alone with the fading laughter. Fading. That was a word commonly used by her. Fading was faith of preachers, fading was the memory of her purpose, fading was the flames at the bottom of the hill. Only one thing never faded.

What was her true design? Long ago She had been forced to abandon wings for legs, halo for seeing eyes and hearing ears. How long had it been? Why did he no longer answer her? Was he disgusted? Horrified? Disappointed?

The smell of apples and the freshest fruits in her mind. Her purpose: guard the garden gone. As bound to the soil as birds. Forever looking down upon it but always to return.

It was time. Sun beating on her back, he was calling her home. She expected a sense of joy, happiness and peace. All She received for her efforts was pain.

Instead of trumpets, the drumming of her heart filled her ears as all her bones turned to ash. Her back broke as pressure built

under the flesh. The maddening pressure, forever growing.

Skin tore. The taste of ash filled her closing mouth. For her crime She would be ripped apart, reassembled to be pure.

Her legs contorted. Arms broken, from her gashes grew feathers. White and wilting. Pity the lesser that behold the sight. Blessed be the non-believer.

The pressure stopped. The remaining bones using the ashes to create flesh, to be cut and sown with quill, it was truly a sight to behold.

Have you ever heard the cry of a child? That is the cry of all angels who return to his realm. Hands staring back through the gashes.

Why return home? If offered relief, if offered sanctuary. It was not the angel who rejoiced in the Kingdom. The flames reached her. The wetness of her blood dried. She finally accepted his warmth.

Kate O' Keeffe. *She is from County Kerry, seventeen years old. Don't feel bad for not understanding her, she has no idea what she's saying either.*

Rush hour

Her gloved hand wraps around the yellow pole
I watch her from my vantage
Her eyes cast in vain for an empty seat
I want her smile to be familiar

She resigns herself to standing, bags by her feet
I wonder who gave her that necklace, gold with a heart
She checks her phone, another minute wasted
I would've given her silver

The bus lurches forward
My stop. I offer my empty seat

Sarah Hannigan, 16, lives in Dublin city, commonly found in museums, galleries and other quiet places.

In the Lamplight

Curtain drawn, Mason sits upright, rigid in his armchair. Hand draped over the arm, thumb ritualistically drawing circles upon the soft material. Newspaper splayed, illuminated by a dim lamp, bulb near the end of its life. A draught coming down the chimney lures him from a daze. An article catches his eye. A car in a lake and a photo of a young man. "Huh, this reminds me of that time Harry jumped in the lake." "I know," Simon sighs, his breath matched by a whistle of the draught, as Mason sees his face return to his book.

"Your mother called, said she would drop a dinner for me. I can't think why. You didn't get your cooking skills from her," Mason chortles. "Because it won't be made otherwise." Mason looks at Simon sideways only to find his figure has moved to the window. "No, I suppose not." Mason averts his eyes from the window to feel Simon beside him, looking intently at the page. "Did you look at this picture?" Simon observes with an air Mason can't read. "I did. I did look at it. Why would you ask? Of course I did." Headlights pass the window, drawing Mason's attention from the paper to the light.

"What date is the article from?" Mason hears from the chair beside him. "It's today's, of course." Simon flicks a page. "No. What date is it from?" "Stop it. Why would it matter?" The book moves to the table. "Because it does." "No. No, it doesn't. Stop it!" The book is back in his dainty fingers. For a moment everything is still. Mason can't stand it. The silence. "You used to fly through those books. And you used to tell me all your theories." Mason sees Simon's head rise from the page. "Mason." He always loved hearing Simon say his name. "Why are you using past tense?" They both take a breath "Please, Mason, think about it. What is the date? Why is my mum coming around? Why aren't you looking *at* me? Think, Mason. Think."

“Shut up. It’s November 4th.” “No.” “And your mother is just, she’s just coming around. And I am looking at you? I am,” Mason says, staring across the floor until Simon’s shoes come into his view, his torso and then his face. “No, it’s not. It’s November 18th. And no, you aren’t looking at me. And that’s ok. You are afraid to, I know, because you don’t remember. You can’t remember where my freckles were or on what side I had my dimple. And that’s ok. Mason, look at me. That’s ok. Mason, you have to let it go. You have to let me go. Look at the picture, Mason. Please.”

And Mason did. For Simon, he did. And there he was smiling back at him. Simon. It was him in the picture, in the car, in the lake, in the grave. “Simon?” But he was no longer there. “Simon?” A tear rolls down Mason’s cheek, and the dim lamp finally gives out.

Daniel Madden, 18-year-old from Co. Monaghan is a self-proclaimed thespian and may take the Shakespeare quote of “the world’s a stage” slightly too seriously.

Disclosure

Sometimes I think clouds are made of emotions,
Spilled out, evaporated over time.
I read clouds, I watch people swallowing steam
From their coffee, alone, together, alone.
I watch the girl in the park wait for the other girl.
Warm fog clinging, she taps her phone.
Her fingers shake and she hopes, she hopes.
They walk, she turns, clouds her secret in breath.
They hug. It lasts no longer than it should.
Then there is only one girl and the sky is empty.
The fog lifts. A slow bruise spreads over the sky.

Sinéad O’Reilly is a fifteen-year-old poet from Wexford. She has an irresistible temptation to steal the postman’s van and take off to a quiet spot to read all the handwritten letters.

liquid lipstick

there's liquid lipstick on my toothbrush
for the past four weeks
there's glitter in my pores for days
and yet my eyes look bleak

i paint my nails to pick them off
my skin's peeling too
practice smiling in the mirror
it's all that i can do

my eyeliner can last for days
bloodied lips hid by cute masks
performative perfection
it can't ever last

Caitriona Spears Cahill; *she/they, 17-year-old artist, writer, and poet from Dublin. She's being gay, doing crime, and using words to do it.*

The Other Man (Extract)

Chris sat at the kitchen table lazily sipping some orange juice. His wife sat across from him fixing her lipstick. He stared at her momentarily. She was pretty for her age, he supposed. Theirs had always been a rather one-sided relationship. It wasn't really her fault. He just disliked the fact she had settled him down. He was too much a free spirit to abide by the bounds of marriage. To him, she was a convenience. Sex without worrying about stds. A warm dinner every night. Someone to keep the house clean. She always tried to go above and beyond for him, she had deluded herself into thinking that perhaps if she became better herself, he would love her. She was wrong. Their current arrangement suited him just fine. The less effort he put in, the more she tried to please him. What a silly woman she was.

He wished he hadn't married Julia. He was too young to see sense back then. He was freshly twenty on his wedding day and had scarcely more life experience than schooling. He'd been happy that day. He loved her so much back then it made him uncomfortable to think about it. What had happened to himself? Really, he had hit thirty and a frost began to permanently settle on his heart. He had nothing to show for his life except her. She was a tether, holding him back from the man he would've inevitably become otherwise. In another life he saw himself as a hot-shot working on Wall Street. The type of man who wore suits so expensive they could only be dry-cleaned. Not the part time accountant he was now, who wore some variety of the same brown suit every day to work. His other self would have some new ditzy blonde every week to entertain him – one barely legal enough to avoid a scandal. Yes, that was the life he was supposed

to be living. Not this monotonous day in day out drudgery without any real substance.

Recently Julia had become possessed with the idea of having a child. It was like every fibre in her body suddenly wanted nothing more than to have a baby. She tracked all her cycles now; their fridge calendar was now covered in a smattering of pointless dates. It had consumed her wholly. He knew what she was really up to, however. This was just another knot in her attempt to tie him down. She was delusional if she thought he would ever willingly become a father. He would rather shoot himself in the head. Children were for people who seemed to want to commit a long drawn out suicide of their own happiness. There was nothing appealing to him about a wailing little monster who would constantly need affection - after all, he already had a wife.

Amy Cahill is an 18-year-old writer from Gorey. She shares her name with a fictional book character but has unfortunately not yet embarked on her own danger-filled adventure to save the planet.



