

**PLACES
WE'VE
TRAVELLED**

SILVER APPLES MAGAZINE

Creativity Worth Consuming



Issue 7 - May - 2016



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Silver Apples Magazine
Gráinne O'Brien, Alex Dunne and Una Hussey

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Silver Apples Magazine

Places We've Travelled

Issue Seven, May 2016

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Origami Handcrafted Gifts & Wedding Craft



George Dempsey Flanagan of Mojo Creations also known as 'The Maker of Magic' is a trained Graphic Designer and Artist based in Birr Co. Offaly.

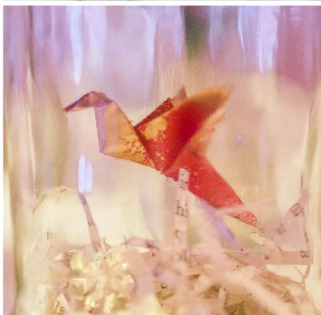
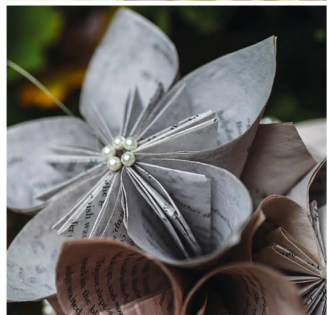
George studied Graphic Design in Limerick School of Art & Design - specialising in design for print. He prides himself in being able to connect with the client turning any vision into a reality.

George's other area of expertise lies in his passion for creating and teaching Origami - 'the Art of Japanese Paper Folding'



"As a child, before I ever knew what Origami was, I taught myself how to transform paper airplanes into birds. some years later, I learned it was an art and Mojo Creations was born!"

As well as teaching workshops, George has developed a range Origami Handcrafted products that include framed artwork and Miniature Origami Art Vessels Origami Pet's in jam jars known as Whimsy's, as well as creating bespoke pieces for weddings, these include everything from bouquets & boutonnières for the entire bridal party, to table decorations & centre pieces for the venue.



Custom orders and personalising requests are all part of the service. If you are interested in working with George to create your own bespoke wedding ideas or Origami Crafted Gift for a someone special you can follow the magic on facebook & email: g-dempc@hotmail.com

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Letter from the Editors:

In which we walk 500 miles (and then walk 500 more)

Gráinne O'Brien, Alex Dunne & Una Hussey

Dear Reader,

We are very excited to invite you to read issue seven of Silver Apples Magazine, "Places We've Travelled".

The investment you have made in buying this magazine is greatly appreciated not only by us, but by our published contributors because, for the first time, we are able to offer payment to our artists in a unique way.

From now on, Silver Apples will be a co-operative magazine. Simply put, the revenue from the first month's sales of each issue will be divided evenly between all published contributors.

By supporting us, you are supporting them. We have to be honest, we have no idea if this is going to work long term. But as is our way, we decided to try it and see what happens.

"Places We've Travelled" isn't just about moving from place to place. It is about the journeys we go on to become to people we are today. The submissions we have chosen reflect that, as do that travel photos we asked each contributor to send us for publication.

Please enjoy this issue, safe in the knowledge that just by purchasing it, you have ensured that our submitters are one step closer to being able to buy themselves a cup of tea on us!

Thanks for helping us continue to produce creativity worth consuming.

Alex, Gráinne and Una.

Paris

Clifton Redmond

Clifton Redmond is a member of the Carlow Writer's Co-operative. He's currently studying Humanities at Carlow College. He has recently had work published in Orbis, Skylight 47, and Outburst Magazine. This year he was long listed for the Over The Edge Poetry Competition and Shortlisted for the Fermoy International Poetry Contest.

Why we chose it:

Clifton's poem transports us to the City of Light for an imaginary visit of our own. We suddenly feel the urge to drink wine and eat baguettes (I mean, we're constantly battling the urge for booze and carbs but this time it's for fancy booze and carbs)

(after the 2015 atrocities)

I have never been there, not in spring,
autumn or anytime of year.
Though I have stalked her
from the safety of my computer-screen.

Blown away by the beauty of the Louvre,
the dark majesty of the Catacombs;
quaint looking cafés with stick bread,
sweet crepes and fine wine.

I have never had the pleasure
of taking selfies beneath the Eifel Tower
as it stands like a lit up tripod,
or strolling down the Champs Elysees

at sunset, if that is in fact what people do there?
And no imaginary visit would be complete
without taking the opportunity
of seeing the graves of Morrison and Wilde,

conjuring between us a ghost's debate
on music and poetry, on the steps
of Père Lachaise, while Lynott, perches
somewhere above us, and brags of his experi-
ence.

The Barstool

Tadhg Coakley

“That is one famous fucking stool you is sitting on, yeah?” he said, pointing beneath me. He pronounced it *fackin*, in his South London accent.

“Famous?” I said, looking down. Stupidly, as if it could give me a clue.

“That’s right, yeah? Three Irish nurses got pregnant from sitting on that stool.”

That got my full attention, which was his intention. He had reeled me in and I think he knew it. He’d recognised my Belfast accent, so he knew I was Irish. He had originally been sitting two stools away from me, at the bar, in the end seat, with his back to the wall and a full view of the room. That is the most prized and coveted position in bars all over the world but he had relinquished it and moved one seat closer, to the corner, on the pretence of a better view of the Man City-Sunderland match which I was watching on the television. But that game had been on for twenty minutes before he moved, so what he’d really wanted was to drop this nugget into my lap.

It wasn’t really my kind of pub, too big and loud and trendy. It was one of those restored quays near Tower Bridge, looking over at Canary Wharf and most of the customers, large groups of young men and women, were sitting outside on the boardwalk – which suited me just fine. This end of the bar was quiet and I had the perfect spot

Tadhg Coakley is from Mallow and lives in Cork City. In 2015 he took early retirement from his job of 30 years to write full-time. He is currently undertaking an MA in Creative Writing in UCC. He has been published in the 2016 edition of Quarryman, The UCC Literary Magazine.

Why we chose it:

Some of the most memorable moments from our travels have happened in the pub, and also, some of the moments we swore we’d never speak of again (the less said about a nightclub in Toulouse, the better). In ‘The Barstool’ Tadhg whisks us off to London to hear the tale of Deptford Don—a cautionary tale if ever there was one!

to watch the game. Normally I'd blank men like my new friend, or move away, but I had an almost full pint in front of me, a City game to watch, an hour or more to kill before my wife and daughter came back from their Oxford Street shopping spree and now a story to hear. Not too shabby at all - life was good, no complaints.

"like all Millwall fans, he took pride in how crap they were and how everybody hated them"

We had engaged in the usual man-chat up to then, about the football and City's rise to the top with Arab oil money. He was, of course, a Millwall fan, "man and boy, yeah?" And, like all Millwall fans, he took pride in how crap they were and how everybody hated them. But above all else - and I have seen this in so many men in bars, even trendy bars like this one - he was a storyteller.

Men, after drink, like, no, want, no, *need* to tell stories to other men; about themselves usually, and what they could have been, but also about those who impact most upon them - the women who plague them, the children who don't appreciate them, the bosses who ill-treat them, the team coaches who know nothing, and the politicians who know less. If only this, if only that. And so on, and so boring. But I could tell that this was about none of those things, so I settled in.

"Really? From sitting on this stool?" I said.

"Yeah, man. That's the one, isn't it?" *Innet*. He turned back to the television to watch a replay of an Agüero shot, just wide.

I smiled. He was going to make me ask the question.

"How did that happen?" I said.

"Yeah well that's the thing isn't it? They got pregnant from sitting on that stool 'cos Deptford Don was sitting on this one, yeah?" He took some nuts from the bowl on the bar and looked back up at the game.

This was getting tedious; he was gilding the lily. He now wanted me to ask who Deptford Don was. I've faced the need for this kind of self-important prompting before and I can do without it. I was tempted to shut the conversation down, but my gut told me to hold tough and to bluff him. So I did. I looked at him.

He was in his mid-forties, clearly a heavy smoker and drinker.

Dark eyes, straight nose (drifting into rosacea), a strong English chin, thinning brown hair. He might have been good-looking when he was young, but he was beginning to jowl up and he had a burgeoning beer belly. About mid-height, well-enough groomed in a pale blue open-necked shirt and jeans. Tasselled loafers, would you believe – a throw-back to the eighties. No less than four rings, one of which was, ostentatiously, on his left thumb. A basic hoop ear-ring in his left ear and no chain around his neck – which surprised me. Full of nervous energy, he couldn't sit still for more than a few seconds, scrolling his fingers down his cigarette lighter and rotating it against the counter-top. I put him as an I.T. technician, or in a call centre, or a clothes shop, or some low-level administration job in the city, full of envy and hatred for the upper-class big earners with whom he worked.

He looked back at me and relented. I'd won this one.

"See, Guy's Hospital is just round the corner isn't it? And all the nurses used to come in here after their shifts. A lot of 'em is Irish too, yeah? He had a thing for them didn't he? Must be gaggin' for it or something." *Somefink*.

I nodded. That was the best I could do. I knew now that his need to tell this story was greater than my need to hear it. So he continued. The game was pretty bad, too, I have to admit. Sunderland had no intention of coming out of their own half.

"Fucking legend with the ladies, Don, yeah? He is from down Jamaica Road, near the Surrey Quays, fighting the girls off since he was ten. They say he lost his virginity at twelve. Legend, isn't it?" He took a sip from his pint. One of those cheap tasteless lagers. There is a lull in the game. A clash of heads.

"Anyway, Don used to sit in this seat, right? And whenever, and I mean *when.ev.er*, right? Whenever a nurse sat in that seat – he pulled her. No sweat man. Straight up. No bullshit. One hundred fucking percent record."

I pursed my lips and nodded, impressed. Man-to-man stuff, the appreciation of a good swordsman. So long he is somewhere else and away from *your* women.

"Must have gotten careless with those nurses, though. Three of them getting pregnant like that?" I said.

"That's the thing, isn't it?" *Fing. Innet*. "That's the fucking thing! He was using condoms but it must have been a bad batch or some-

thing. No way, man.” He was highly affronted.

“Wow,” I reply. “Really?”

“Yeah man. Fucking crazy. In the space of two weeks - two weeks, man - he was finished. They all knew he worked down the Borough Market, everybody knew that. Couple of months later, they is all turning up at his stall and claiming that they is up the duff and he’s the Dad. Fucking hell.”

“Wow.” I was repeating myself but I couldn’t help it.

“Yeah, man. So he was: ‘how do I know I’s the Dad, yeah? We used condoms, isn’t it?’ And they all say they is getting’ blood tests. They say he’s the only one to have sex with them that time, so it has to be him. And he couldn’t do nothing about it.” *Nuffink. Abah ih.*

He shook his head in dismay. The injustice of it. His pint was finished. So it was payback time. This is another trope in the storytelling that some men do in pubs. If the story is good enough, or if the listener is foolish or bored enough, drink is offered as payment.

“Same again?”

He looked surprised. As if.

“Oh alright, yeah, thanks mate.”

But now we had a contract. He had to give me the rest of it. And I wanted it - I really did.

“So what happened then?” I said, getting the barman’s attention and pointing to the two glasses. I knew somehow that there was more.

“See, this is the crazy thing, man. You is not going to believe this.” We both looked up at the screen. City had hit the post. It was only a question of time before they scored, with Agüero and David Silva in the team.

“Okay, so he does the test and he’s the Dad, right? Straight up. No question of abortions or nothing like that - they is Irish right? So he’s bang to rights, isn’t it? Has to give them child support. Only then, right? Only then.” He tapped on the counter for emphasis. To raise the tension. He was a good story teller, I had to admit.

“They hear about each other. They hear on the grapevine or whatever, that they wasn’t the only Irish nurse what Deptford Don got knocked up and they meets up together! Forget it.” *Togever. Fogeh ih.*

“You’re kidding.”

"I ain't! I fucking ain't man, straight up. So them three nurses gets together and they starts this club or something."

"A club?"

"Well, not a club or nothing but they starts getting together and talking about their situations and that. And then they calls him to a meeting, right?"

Now I'm staring at him. It's halftime in the game but it wouldn't matter if it was the World Cup Final between Northern Ireland and England - and Northern Ireland were three goals up with ten minutes to play.

"And they gives him an ultimatum. He is living on his own in his Mam's big old house on Jamaica Road and they knows that 'cos that's where they done the business with him, right? And they is all paying rent and that, so they tells him they is all going to move in with him and have the babies there. Well, not there. In the hospital obviously, but they is going to live with him from now on."

He takes a sip for effect.

"And then, when they have the babies, he's going to look after them and sell his stall and them three is going to go back to work in the hospital."

"Fuck off," I said.

"Straight up. *And* he said 'alright'! And they fucking do, man. And they is still living there, four years later or something. All seven of them. And Don is looking after those kids and they is all in a big buggy or whatever and he is walking them around Southwark Park. Him with all the other Mums." He laughed at his own wit.

"Jesus," I said.

"Yeah. Poor old Deptford Don. But he's no mug either, right? So what does he do? What does he do? He only starts taking turns with them!" *Wivvem*. "With them nurses. Well he is the fucking Deptford Don! And they is fit, man. I seen 'em. They is."

"What?"

"Yeah, man. He's only taking turns with them. One week each. There is only three bedrooms in the house and he used to be on the sofa, right. But now he is in with the nurses, one week at a time, in their rooms. Bish, bash, bosh. Good, isn't it? And they is on the pill now, that's for fucking sure, Irish or not, yeah?"

And that's when I got a tap on the shoulder and I was never so

disappointed to see my wife and daughter behind me, full of smiles and laden with shopping bags.

“Oh, what about ye?” I managed.

“Hi,” Maggie said. “You look disappointed. Having fun with your new friend, there?” She always could read me like a book.

“No, no, I... youse is a bit early, that’s all.” I glanced at my watch and smiled at Elizabeth, my eighteen year old daughter with expensive tastes. She was grinning from ear to ear, obviously replete with new designer clothes and shoes.

“Yeah, well, looks like the card is maxed out,” Maggie said, peering suspiciously at my storyteller. “Bottle of Prosecco, we’ll be over here.” She pointed at a table in the corner. She wouldn’t deign to sit at a bar. I was relieved. I ordered the wine and turned back to my new pal.

“That is a lot of shopping bags, man,” he said, half-sympathy, half-mischief.

“Tell me about it,” I said, and ordered the wine. Sadly, I would have to join the women and share in their euphoria.

“Yeah but, here’s the best thing, yeah?” He is grinning. He is going to give me a parting gift. “They is all girls.”

“What?” I said, thinking of the nurses.

“The babies, man. They is all girl babies. So in ten years’ time or whatever, he’s going to be fighting off them boys, yeah? And like I said, if the Mums is fit, the daughters is fit. And he is gonna have to watch the three of them like hawks. Three teenage girls is a lot of watching, man. The shoe is gonna be on the other foot then, yeah?” He chuckled at the prospect and so did I, even though I was in a similar boat with my daughter.

I ordered us both another pint and then apologised to him that I had to sit with the women. He understood, and gave me a sympathetic ‘what can you do?’ shrug. I would have liked to have learned more about him. I didn’t even get his name.

City finally scored, and it had been worth waiting for. A beautiful Touré/Agüero passing move and a cool finish under the keeper. The floodgates would open now, but I was no longer interested. I barely glanced at the replay.

As I moved away from the bar he said: “Hey, you behave yourself tonight, yeah? Remember what happens when you sit on that

stool?" He pointed at the guilty piece of furniture, with its plain, dark, fake-leather seat wearing at the edges. He grinned, tapped his nose theatrically and gave me the thumbs up.

And of course you can guess what happened. I got it on with Maggie that night. She's a sucker for hotel sex. And, even if I do say so myself, I was particularly... virile, for some reason. "Well, well," she said, turning out the light as she returned to the bed after going to the toilet. High praise indeed. So much so, we even went around again in the morning - a rarity, because she doesn't really like doing it in the morning.

And on a wet Wednesday, six weeks later, when I got home from work, there she was sitting at the kitchen table, all red and flustered and she told me that she was pregnant. That the doctor had confirmed it.

"I'm forty-two, Frank, I really thought all this was behind me," she said. "Behind us."

"It'll be an adventure," I said. "We'll do right by the wee one. I'll go on the dry with you, love. Get all healthy. Don't you worry." I touched the side of her face and she brightened up.

Now I'm semi-retired even though I'm only fifty. James can run the business as well as I can and I'm always only a phone call away. On bright days I walk Sally - our precocious two year old - up the Malone Road and around The Botanic Gardens. She likes to talk to the birds in the water and throw them bread. And sometimes, as I pass the other Mums with their buggies, I think about Deptford Don, and his six cohabitants, and the stool in that bar, and my South London pal, whose name I will never know.

"I'm forty-two, Frank, I really thought all this was behind me," she said. "Behind us."

Tadhg's Travel Photo

Prague, Czech Republic



The Topography of Living

Lara Dunning

Los Alamos, New Mexico

You are born under an azure sky and taken into the bosom of the crackled, caramel colored desert. You suckle from its sage infused air that swells right before a rainstorm. Your mother's voice patters light as rain drops, and your father's can boom like thunder. At night, you burrow under your father's desk and trace the grains of the wood with your fingertips. Some are cracked and faded; you like those the best. During the day, you wander past prickly pear cactus and thorny bushes to eat Jell-O with your sister next to a dried-up stream. Fingers dip into the red powder and come out Kool-Aid red. Upon your return home your parents ask if you'd been eating Jell-O, again. Heads shake no even though the blood stained fingertip gives the lie away.

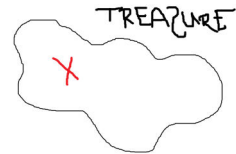
Lisle, Illinois

Woods, lakes, meadows. Praying mantis, June bugs, walking sticks. You find these as you flit from lake to lake on your green bike. You climb willowy tree limbs and shout from the top. You let grass scented wind blow through your straight, nut brown hair. Away from your crumbling home, you find joy in discovering the solitary moments when no one is upset, and the only sound is your own breathing.

Lara Dunning lives on an island in the Pacific Northwest. She writes essays, travel articles, and young adult stories. She's enthusiastic about small town living, locavore-inspired food and is the founder of Small Town Washington.

Why we chose it:

Lara's beautiful essay traces a map through the significant moments of her life. We have to admit, it's far more elegant than any map we've ever drawn (see below for evidence)



At night, after dinner, your parents have long talks in hushed tones. Sometimes they cry. Other times they speak in heated tenors. No matter what happens on those nights, your life goes on. You go to school. You ride your bike. You collect orange and yellow oak leaves that drift down like feathers. On Saturdays, your father takes you to the laboratory with him. You relish the tangy chemical air that drifts through the halls and spend hours drawing next to his desk. On weekdays, after school, you tell your mother you are going out to play, but instead, collect flowers, place them in a bowl, and ding-dong-ditch her. You hide in the red bushes and wait to see her broken spirit take flight when she gazes down at the colorful display.

Wabash, Indiana

Your ancestors tilled Indiana soil. The scent of it is in your blood and embraces you like a long lost relative. At fifteen, you stumble into your first love. Months later, you'll drive across country roads, investigate abandoned farm houses and make love in the fields and graveyards. You'll dream of a life far away, feeding the fracture inside you. You want to be alone with him no matter where it takes you.

Later you'll leave that first love behind. It cracks you wide open, but you harden yourself to it. The dream to be alone is stronger than ever. You long for a solitary life like Nell Porter in *Continental Divide with no one to hurt but yourself*.

Akutan, Alaska

That evening you sink into the damp earth, hoping it will fill the fissure in your body that keeps cracking. Your mother gave you the worst news you've ever had. Your first love had a child that wasn't born of your body. That summer, a single puffin takes up residence in Akutan Bay. You name him Wilson and watch as he surfs in the water by himself. It reaffirms your belief in being alone.

As those summer days turn into years, those isolated treeless islands will nurture the bitter cold ache in your chest. The purling waves, the harsh wind, the aroma of the sea and wet earth will buttress the growing rift.

Corona, California

This patch of golden brown, parched earth mimics your insides. Each morning the barren landscape clings to your chest like the purple wisteria blossoming in the arbor next to the glistening pool. In the sun's soft rays you absorb whatever warmth you can, hoping it will penetrate your frozen heart. Each day you plan to escape the man you are with, but like your mother you linger too long.

One evening you hike through the silent neighborhood. At the top of the hill, you sit down on the dusty earth and stare out into the dark valley. Nestled at the bottom is a large illuminated white cross. For several long moments, you consider trekking down the hill, entering the sanctuary and asking it to reveal what is cold and dark inside you. Instead, you walk back to the bleak house and go to bed alone.

Anchorage, Alaska

Snow whitewashes every inch of this landscape. It comes in all forms, brittle, supple, cottony and slick. All winter, city lights give it a lavender hue, like the color of a rare puffin egg. In this lilac world, your heart starts to thaw and love blazes its way into your life for the second time. Like Wilson you balance your flippered feet on land and move toward its warmth. The second chance won't last. It's not you who flees.

With each passing chilly day, the sun lingers longer, thawing the bitterness of winter. The toppled icefield covering the ocean melts into glassy water. As the waters shift your first love paddles back into your life and everything changes.

*“In this lilac world,
your heart starts to
thaw and love blazes
its way into your
life”*

Ireland, all over

Together you drive along treeless, green hills dotted with sheep, bend backward to kiss the Blarney Stone and drink frothy beer in Irish pubs. One night the past creeps back, cleaving at the wounds inside

you. The men in your past haunt him. The wives in his haunt you. The brawl is tangled and heated. That night, you barely sleep and in the morning sunlight tiptoes across his face. In the shadows, you realize we all have old scars that are slashed open, and then heal, only to be opened again. It's what you do next that matters.

Will you stay? Will you run? Time slows. Breath stills. Everything balances at this moment.

He returns to his job and for four weeks you crisscross the country with heavy brick feet that pound into the earth like a bodhran. To be with your first love you must move forward. You will every ounce of heartache out of your body. It is the only way. You need to forgive everyone you were running away from, including yourself.

Marion, Indiana

A large maple tree shades the house he built. You expect to feel the woman he married lingering in the doorways like a shadow, but as you wander through the vacant rooms, it's like she was never there at all. His children come over on weekends and in their impish faces you see yourself as a child. They're too young to understand the unspoken bond you share of commitments gone wrong.

One night, you'll visit your mother in Wabash, and an indecision of puffs will bite at your ribs and heart, cracking that fissure wide open. While your mother cradles you in her pale arms, you ask her why she brought you into a family that was already breaking apart. She will hold you tighter, but whisper no confessions.

Anacortes, Washington

You'll settle down in a modern house next to a blue-green sea with your first love. In the apricot colored dawn a familiar landscape is draped amongst the covers. Coarse reddish blonde whiskers cloak an angular chin and salmon colored lips. A craggy French nose rests below a pair of closed ocean blue eyes flecked with chestnut. His eyes flutter open and their brightness chases away the broken girl you used to be into the brilliance of the dawn.

To Canada

Gail Wawrzyniak

I drove to the store every day
even when I didn't need to.

I went the long way,
along the lake,
stopping to watch spring ice
crowd tired Canadian Geese.

But when they were rested,
they left, north,
in a tight family formation.

One Saturday,
instead of the grocery store,
I left, north, too.

But
I remembered

when I got to Duluth
that I had to empty the urinal
and help Dad back to bed.

When I got home,
even after six hours of an
Andy Griffith marathon,

Dad
didn't notice

that I spent all day
at the grocery store.

Andy and Barney
tired him though.
He went to bed
early that night.

Gail Wawrzyniak writes poetry, fiction, plays, short stories, and essays. Her writing is found in publications such as San Diego Reader, Amsterdam Quarterly, Halfway Down the Stairs, Yellow Medicine Review, and the anthology Stories Migrating Home. She lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, and can be found online at www.gailwawrzyniak.com.

Why we chose it:
Why is it every issue we find at least one poem that hits us right in the feels? Are we gluttons for punishment?? Maybe it's because it has 'Canada' in the title and Alex is weirdly drawn to Canada since, you know, she lives there and all.

Gail's Travel Photo

Tuscany, Italy



Silver Apples Presents:

Featured Author—Adam Chappell

Silver Apples Magazine has always been about encouraging new and emerging talent and we love showcasing some of the best writers, artists, and creators around (especially when we discover them first!).

When we heard Adam Chappell, an alumnus of our second issue, “Box of Tricks”, was gearing up to self publish his first novel, Thief - Omertà, ~~we just had to hop on that gravy train all the way to the bank~~—we thought it would be nice to give him a space to pimp out his wares.

But because this IS Silver Apples, we couldn't let him get away totally scot-free. So, for your enjoyment, we forced Adam to answer a series of vaguely travel-related questions under duress. Enjoy!

What is your book about in five words or less?

An explosive romp through Italy

What does ‘Places We’ve Travelled’ mean to you?

Sun bleached memories of my cousins diggin’ with me on some random European beach in the 80’s

What’s your favourite place you have ever been drunk and why?

Might sound a bit sad this, but my sitting room with my wife is best. I think it’s good for a relationship to occasionally get rat-arsed together and I’ve never laughed with anyone as much as I do with her.

Do you know the way to San Jose?

Given a map, a satnav and a compass...no. Not a clue. West somewhere if I had to guess.

Do you think that Irish people should be allowed ‘sun’ days off work and would you endorse a campaign to encourage this?

At least 3 a year! I’ll get my megaphone.

What's your favourite ice cream?

I spent too long on chocolate and strawberry as a kid, so I'm only really getting to experiment now. Peanut Butter was pretty good. Ooh and jaffa cake. I liked that.

Do you feel your name has an excessive number of 'P's' and 'L's'?

If anything I feel I am in deficit. Anyone saying my name should have to stutter through the middle and then get a bit naughty at the end: Chappppppppelllllll

Have you ever been to Tosche Station to pick up some power convertors?

No. I was told I could waste time with my friends later, but I never got to. *Sob*

Have you ever done drugs? And not the stupid drugs like weed and that. The good kind of drugs. Wait this isn't that relevant a question... Did you ever travel while you were doing drugs?

Only the boring kind, though I did attempt a camping trip through the Netherlands in that state. My girlfriend and I spent all our money in the first 24 hours and then left the tent behind at the train station. We ended up retreating to France with some "undeclared baggage" and holing up in a relative's holiday home for the rest of the week. After 2 days we'd adopted a cat and played house so successfully I knew I'd marry her. Only took me another 5 years to ask.

Is this the way to Amarillo?

Seems as good as any.

How many roads DOES a man walk down before you can call him a man? We think it's 7. Is it 7?

42. I'm pretty sure on this one because I think that was the question Deep Thought's computer came up with, only nobody noticed.

What is the best pub in the world?

Best pub I've been to or best pub generally? Best one I've been to was a place in Edinburgh. I went with a friend during the festival a few years ago. It didn't seem like a permanent fixture and I have no idea

what it was called but it had the effect of a beer garden crossed with a food court, only most of the stalls sold fancy alcohols (the rest had hotdogs and such). Otherwise the Dead Rabbit in New York is on the bucket list for sure.

What is the weirdest thing you've eaten on your travels?

Sea slug. It was exactly how you'd expect.

Adam Chappell, a thirty-one-year-old software engineer at MDS Limerick and father of two, is an active member of the Limerick Writer's Association and has previously been published in Silver Apples Magazine as well as being long listed for the RTÉ Guide/Penguin Ireland Short Story Competition 2015.

Described by John Stack, bestselling author of the "Masters of the Sea Trilogy" and "Armada", as "fast-paced" and "compelling", Adam's debut novel, Thief - Omertà, tracks Robert Forrester and Sophia Bianchi as their respective battles for survival in the criminal underworld pitch them headlong towards each other. Fate throws them together, but they will need more than luck if they want to live.

Adam began his writing career almost four years ago in culmination of a life spent reading and cites Raymond Chandler, Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace as major influences on his writing style. Since finishing work on Thief - Omertà, he has produced a number of short stories and is close to completion of his first novella, his own take on the noir genre.

Follow Adam on twitter @chappell_ad and be the first to hear when Thief - Omertà hits the shelves (well, not the first. We assume his wife, family, some friends, postman, and cat will all be the first to hear, but you'll probably be pretty high up on the list).

Diarmuid and Gráinne

Gráinne O'Brien

Gráinne O'Brien works in a bookshop and dreams that the books she sells are taunting her. She is a co founder of Silver Apples Magazine and has had work rejected from more literary magazines than she can count. She went to Africa once, and has talked about it ever since.

Why we chose it:

In Irish Mythology Gráinne was one badass chick who cast a spell on a soldier and took off with him through the Irish countryside. They had 3 children in the wild before eventually being forgiven by Fionn MacCumhaill and allowed to return home. In Silver Apples, Gráinne is the one who moves stuff around on the website and drinks wine while she tweets. So their lives are basically the same.

Smooth lips tripped their way across Gráinne's back, her sleep finally surrendering to the losing battle it had been fighting with wakefulness since the sun had begun to rise over her stone cold bed. Her opening eyes were confronted by the face of her beloved soldier, almost perfect but for the mole that marred the perfection of his round, chiselled face.

"We must move my love," he whispered, "the hounds are coming. I can hear them, sniffing through the fields. They are less than a day away, we have to carry on."

Gráinne moved as quickly as her rounded belly would allow her, the stiffness of the cold morning itching its way down her neck. She could not remember a time when her back had not ached in the morning. Probably, she thought, when I was still sleeping on beds, and not on stones. But lying pampered and tucked into the bed provided by the wealth of her father, had brought many sleepless nights. For the last three years, though her bed was a rock bracing against her tender back, the slow breath of Diarmuid by her side meant she slept more soundly and deeply than she had in twenty one years on that mattress.

Diarmuid had been up with the sun, Gráinne knew as she looked around their campsite. Everything they owned was packed and ready to be moved, the same as it was

every morning. Usually Gráinne would be up in time to help, but as her pregnancy progressed she found it harder to rouse herself with the same amount of energy as she once had. In truth, her enthusiasm for the chase had waned since the day she had realised she was expecting the baby. How, she thought, several times a day, were they meant to keep this up once the baby had been born?

"Which direction did we go from the last time?" Diarmuid was the one who did all the carrying and practicalities. It was Gráinne's job to remember, to out-plan, out-smart, and manipulate the soldiers that chased behind them, and the dogs that were sniffing at their scent.

"We went towards the beach my sweet. Remember, we tripped down the dunes and fell into the water just as the tide came in too far for those barking beasts to follow the scent."

"They lost us for three days at least the last time. Should we go there again?"

Gráinne wanted to say yes. They had found an abandoned cottage by that beach, and for a handful of days they had been able to act like two normal people in love. She ached for that kind of life, even if it was just stolen moments, days, or even hours, snatched along the Irish coastline.

"No my darling. It's too dangerous. Not twice in a row. We don't know how close they came to finding us the last time. No, we should go West. Through the Burren, and into the long grass."

"How will you manage the up hills?" Diarmuid spoke as he lifted the large backpack with all their worldly possessions, onto his back, bracing himself as the weight slightly unbalanced him.

"I'll manage my love. I will manage."

As they hiked towards the rising sun, Gráinne continued the train of thought she had turned over in her head during this time every day, for the last six months. It was this point of the morning, before either of them were fully awake and ready to begin their usual chatter, that she was left to reflect on the actions she had taken to lead them to this place. It had been fine when it was just the two of them, but now there was to be a third. A baby who had not chosen this life.

Though Diarmuid did not chose this life either, a small irritating voice tickled in the back of her brain. She shooed it away as she al-

ways did, noticing as is hushed that it was a lot harder to quieten these days then it had been in the past.

Like any other woman, Gráinne's wedding had been the happiest day of her life. It was, so gossip had informed her, the worst day of her groom's life; so heartbroken and devastated was he by her abandon-

“Gráinne's wedding had been the happiest day of her life. It was, so gossip had informed her, the worst day of her groom's life”

ment. Gráinne could scarcely imagine Fionn caring about losing her as a wife. More likely it was the fact that she had not turned up to meet him at the altar, bruising his ego and humiliating him in front of his people. She had little sympathy for the old man, and only experienced any remorse for her actions when she thought

about the shame her father must feel every time he thought about her. For Cormac was a good man. He kept his promises, even promises that were not his to make.

Gráinne was grateful that the sun was shining today. Her body was stiff and sore. The fact that she was reaching the end of her pregnancy had become apparent in the last few weeks. She was growing rounder, slower and more uncomfortable with each passing hour. The many days of rain that were responsible for Ireland's green scenery were both a blessing and a curse to the young fleeing couple. Though the rain made their infinite journey cold and miserable for most of the year, it also ensured the green grasses and luscious forests. She always grew nervous when they arrived at a place they had already been before. It was becoming harder and harder to find parts of the island they had not visited. Days rolled into each other since the day the lovers had fled Gráinne's wedding. Without a doubt two years had passed since, and three times they had circled the island, with no way of know how long they would be followed.

Fionn was vicious in his revenge, but old and senile. It was Gráinne's hope that he would die soon and call off this ridiculous hunt. It was bad enough for her, but for Diarmuid to be hunted by his own, his comrades and his friends, the betrayal was almost unbeara-

ble for him. At night, she felt tears drip on her shoulders, tears of fear, of exhaustion, of hatred. He was too enthralled a man to blame her, to hold her responsible. Gráinne knew the world better than him, she was not blind to her faults in the ways that he was. She was to blame for their predicament, but they could not go back. Too much time had passed. They could only keep moving and hope the day would come when they could return home and be a family.

Hours passed before Gráinne, lost in a world of resentment and bitter memories, became aware of their surroundings. She smelt the water before she saw it, the sharp sting of salt in her nose. She had blindly followed Dermot's footsteps, trusting that he would bring them in a different direction, but he had brought her back here, to the place they had been so happy. Panic rose in her throat, waves crashing in her ears. She called to him, but he either couldn't or didn't want to hear her. She was too far behind him, her belly too full, exhaustion from the day's climb ensuring she would never be able to speed up to catch him.

"Diarmuid, please, we can't go here. Not again." Convinced as she was that he could not hear her, Gráinne's voice barely carried over the wind that whipped through her hair from the torrid ocean. He spun to face her so suddenly she stopped in her tracks, the weight of her belly throwing her off balance, she nearly fell over.

"No. You do not call the shots any more." He spat the words at her with such venom, breath caught in her chest. She did not recognise him. The beauty of his face was terrifying and awful, and the harsh tone of his words was one she had never heard before.

Gráinne was many things in this world, liar, temptress and magician. She was no fool. The spell she had cast those years ago, was starting to wear off.

"I was happy here. And to hell with you, and with that." He threw a courtesy look of hatred at her rounded stomach, and turned away from her, from them, and made his way through the hedges,

"Gráinne was many things in this world, liar, temptress and magician. She was no fool"

into the abandoned cottage.

Gráinne stood staring as the spot where Diarmuid had slipped through that hedge. Her eyes dry, her heart strong, she was not one for whimpering and apologies. She had known what she had done, and known this day would come. The spell was easy to cast again. In a matter of moments, Diarmuid would love her again. He would be willing to sacrifice anything to keep her happy. But to what end? Her marriage to Fionn may have been a prison sentence, but was this any better? Were she to bind Diarmuid to her once again, would she be any better than Fionn was?

A nudge to her bladder and a jab to her back reminded her that she was not just responsible for her own life anymore. Ethics could not be decided while hounds barked at her heels and water crashed in her ears. She knew he would never forgive her, but she didn't need him too. Diarmuid only needed to love her, and as she turned to force herself through the thorny hedge towards that cottage, she knew exactly how she could make that happen.

Gráinne's Travel Photo

The Dead Forest, Namibia



Away in a Manger

Thomas Elson

Thomas Elson lives in Northern California. His short stories have appeared, or are scheduled to appear, in the Pennsylvania Literary Journal, Red City Literary Review, Avalon Literary Review, Clackamas Literary Review, Perceptions Magazine, Literary Commune.

Why we chose it:

This story takes on a journey to prohibition-era Kansas, so not only do we travel through space, we also travel through time. We're basically Timelords!

John inhaled his unfiltered Camel, and then exhaled his next sentence, "The owner of the Webster Hotel cannot afford to operate it." He nipped from a half-pint of Four Roses bourbon, swallowed, then continued, "We are going to buy it. We can take it over by assuming his monthly payments." The ash of his cigarette grew longer, but never wavered.

He waited for his daughter, Josephine, to object. She had worked with her father for years, so she waited. Her father, "We'll have a full-service private restaurant. Like a country club, but with much lower monthly dues." Looked at Josephine as she nodded, then he added, "Plus we'll have a drug store on the opposite side of the lobby."

The drought and depression combined to reduce crop yield, plunge prices, and accelerate property seizures; nevertheless, in 1920 the 18th amendment resuscitated businesses spawned well before statehood. Since 1881, there had been statewide prohibition. In 1933, the 21st Amendment made liquor legal, but in this state, prohibition was constitutionally fixed. No open saloons, no liquor stores, no county options; however, John found a loophole.

Most evenings after supper, John and Josephine met inside a hidden circular room the center of the Rock House accessible through a door in the back of his bedroom closet. They hatched plans to offset the im-

pact of the collapse of wheat and cattle prices.

“Look at this,” said Josephine as she handed her father a hand-written projection of their bushel per acre yield, “Our harvest will be down by 60%”. Waited while her father reviewed her hand-drawn bar graph, then said, “Last year, our wheat sold for \$1.32 a bushel, and this year it'll be a miracle if we get 40¢ for it.”

Though born in this country, Josephine carried the resonance of her father's Volga German accent. As astute and sturdy as her mother, her tight smile and suspicious eyes told the story of a daughter who saw herself valued only for her utility to the family. She joined the family business eighteen years earlier to handle the numbers - yield per acre, cost of doing business, margins, and the family bank accounts lodged in three states.

John, whose first wife had died from complications of the Spanish flu, was now a widower for the second time. He refused to hold his second wife's funeral until their youngest daughter, Elaine, arrived. He wanted all his children there, but Elaine, the only child born of his second marriage and the only child he read to at night, was over six hundred miles away with a husband who chased oilrigs in eastern Montana. Josephine, the oldest child, now twenty-two years from the burial of her own mother, would be at the funeral; however, the other children had their own families and rarely visited.

Outside the persistent wind swept unimpeded through Canada, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, and changed everything. The wind hit and delivered a sharp twist, then coarsely shifted while dust whirls, combined with baseball-sized dirt clods, attacked the barn. Its walls had become a graveyard for grasshoppers.

Droughts, floods, fires, wars, recessions, depressions and death passed through this state, but it was the wind that controlled. Flags whipped, trees cracked, shingles flapped with a drum roll then flew

“Droughts, floods, fires, wars, recessions, depressions and death passed through this state, but it was the wind that controlled.”

away leaving ripped tarpaper and slatted wood as poor protection for what was to follow.

There were four hotels in Berdan. The three-story Calabeck where a few traveling salesmen shuffled in and out; the four-story Briggs where pool sharks hustled hubristic locals; and the flat-as-the-plains Maxwell where very few travelers stayed. Then, there was the Webster Hotel. A new eight-story, blond brick building with marble wainscoting, polished brass doors, a palace-sized lobby with a pharmacy on one side and a full service restaurant on the other. The solid walnut reception area dominated the north side of the lobby.

“When the wind blew in, and the land blew away, the water evaporated and the money dissolved.”

For John, this was an exploitable moment. “Our way will be to run whiskey from Canada into Ninnescah County. We’ll sell it through the pharmacy with doctors’ prescriptions, and through the bellhops to the guests in the hotel rooms.”

John had inherited the homestead from his father and bachelor uncles who had carried their legendary jars of Turkey Red wheat from the Volga German region of the Ukraine. As soon as his father proved-up the homestead, he replaced the sod hut with the limestone Rock House that John inherited in addition to the ownership of over 3,800 acres of land in three states.

There had been a hard freeze in March, then wind and erosion were followed by inflated prices and deflated income. When the wind blew in, and the land blew away, the water evaporated and the money dissolved.

In a normal year, John’s crops were knee-high by the fourth of July, but it was now late August, and the blistered crops had grown no higher than an inch above his ankle. Last year, his land was moist, his grain amber, but even with two growing seasons each year, the last two yielded negatives - no ale-colored husks of corn, no golden bales of hay, no amber waves of grain.

“We’ve got damn dry land,” said John, “Less than half the normal

rain." He pulled his long-ashed Camel from his mouth.

"Maybe it'll rain," said Josephine.

"If it did rain, it'd fall on brick-hard soil and bleached-out wheat." John waited, then quoted from the state constitution, "The manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors shall be forever prohibited in this state," he sat silent, and, in that moment, commanded her full attention, "except for medical, scientific, and mechanical purposes. And that, presents us with an exploitable and controllable moment." To Josephine, her father's mellow Volga German sounds created music in the hidden room.

John had the land, the contacts, the transportation, and the raw nerve, but he hated bribes, pay-offs, subterranean double-dealing. Nevertheless, he sensed a weakness. Other hotel owners were unequipped to pivot - to mold themselves to exploit the state constitution. "Those old hotels can wrestle with speak-easies, cheap moonshine, and Sheriff's departments. We're getting out of the 'shine business. Our approach will be to exploit the medical and scientific clause."

He looked at his daughter, glanced at his desk, "With the private restaurant we'll cater to the oilmen, farmer-ranchers, road workers, and the military from the base north of Berdan." John paused, "And, with the pharmacy, we can cater to all the Southern Baptists and Mennonites who don't drink," he paused for effect, and said, "in front of one another."

Inside the hidden room, Josephine calculated the size of the circular room with its fifteen-foot radius, limestone interior walls, and trap door used by her grandfather as a shelter from Indians. She had done the math; the hidden room provided seven hundred and six sq. ft. of storage space. Then she suggested the Rock House become a staging area for the nightly deliveries from Canada.

Bootlegging out of Canada required not only a manufacturer, staging areas, and retail outlets, but also transportation. With his two Bay Oil stations, John could keep his rolling stock of flathead V-8 1.5-ton Ford trucks in gasoline, tires, and maintenance on the rough country roads twenty-four hours a day. "We'll control the whiskey as it travels from Canada into Berdan."

In the years since John's father settled in Ninnescah county, Ber-

dan had built a bridge across the Ninnescah River that linked with another town, then proceeded to transform from a muddy village with a wooden cavalry fort and open sewage into the county seat with brick streets, a city sewage system, a new military base, a country club, a public health nurse, and three doctors; though the town was without a hospital.

"I talked with the sisters at the school," John said as he reached for another Camel, "and they want a hospital in Berdan, but they'll never have the money to build. We can do a dollar-a-year lease to the sisters; and their hospital can be on the top two floors of the hotel. We'll run guests on the lower six floors." Waited for Josephine's reaction.

She understood immediately, "Right. And the hospital will tie the doctors even more tightly to the drug store in the hotel."

After his second wife died, John hung three photographs and a painting on his bedroom wall. A blurry sepia-tone of his first wife on their wedding day, a second photo of his youngest son in his Army uniform proudly displaying his tech sergeant stripes, the third picture was of Elaine. Then he hung a framed painting of a large yellow circle given to him by Elaine years earlier.

John's sister saw the white chat clouds on the county road trailing the Sheriff's car as it turned onto the hard dirt drive to the Rock House. The sheriff, John's brother-in-law, was still angry with John for derailing his dead sister's vocation as a nun, although he had never set foot inside a convent, a seminary, and rarely a church.

When the Sheriff turned into the drive, he passed four railroad tracks, then a cattle trough next to the windmill on the far side of the barbed wire fence, and a clothesline where two headless chickens hung by their feet while their necks oozed blood.

John stood outside the Rock House, his visitor framed by the endless rolling prairie that bisected the sky a million miles away. The Sheriff handed him a telegram. "Elaine's coming home, John, but she'll be late." He saw John's eyes move from the telegram to the church across the road, then said, "I'm sorry."

John swallowed, made the Sign of the Cross, walked inside the Rock House, and, while the Sheriff stood next to him, called the mor-

tuary to tell them of the delay.

Josephine and John's sister sat at the dining room table. In his soft German accent, the emotion in his voice heavy, he said, "The funeral will be four days from now."

His dinner remained untouched and turned cold. His sister looked at him, patted his side of the table, then said, "Remember when Elaine outgrew her cradle? And you kept it. In fact, you still have it. Called it her manger." Elaine's manger. John engineered a smile and made a decision.

Josephine leaned forward as if what happened had been delayed, and in her matter-of-fact manner reminisced about the time at the Lemon Park swinging bridge when Elaine tried to walk on the thick rope handrails.

John reached for his Camels. With a flick of the wooden match against his thumbnail, he brought the flame to his cigarette. He decided to forgo his usual shot of Four Roses from the half-pint bottle behind the picture of the Last Supper next to the Napoleon clock on the kitchen counter.

He placed his hands on the table, sat, leaned back, then hunched forward, looked at no one, and said, "Her first day at school just next door here."

Stopped, pointed to his left as though no one at the table knew where the school was - even though all his children had attended. "I walked with her. Her in her purple dress." He adjusted his cigarette and continued, "And when I met her after school, she had this bright yellow picture. Just a big yellow circle she painted."

The others at the table heard a viscous sniff, waited for the appearance of his handkerchief. They remained silent as he lowered his head, and, once again, made the Sign of the Cross.

John listened to a few more stories about Elaine, then stood, stuffed the half-pint into his back pocket, and, followed by Josephine, walked from the table to his bedroom, then entered the circular room through a hidden door at the back of his closet.

"He now had another death in the family, another wife to bury, but tonight he and Josephine had work to do"

He now had another death in the family, another wife to bury, but tonight he and Josephine had work to do. He knew he would not sleep easily even with the comforting sound of the windmill's turns and creaks.

John's heavy capped-toed, brass-nailed boots clicked as he walked on the wooden railroad platform toward the wall-mounted telephone. He lifted the receiver, waited for the operator, told her the number, then fed nickels into the machine.

As soon as the voice from the next station answered, John asked, "Has the Montana train arrived?"

While he waited for Elaine's train, he thought of her wedding. Despite being hurriedly planned, it was held in the church. She wore a white dress, and with her arm in his, they followed the ring bearer and flower girl down the aisle. At the reception, the young beauty of the family danced with her father while guests pinned money on her wedding train. At the dais, tradition dictated that she remove her shoes, and push them behind her chair to serve as receptacles for more cash.

Two days after Elaine's hurriedly planned wedding, the reason for the ceremony arrived premature and stillborn.

When Elaine arrived at the train station, she was driven straight to the mortuary to be next to her mother. John followed in his own car. It was then he decided there would be no open casket. He stopped and called the mortuary before Elaine arrived.

John knew the family traditions dictated that relatives recite the rosary at the mortuary for twenty-four hours. When the optimal number of people were present, somewhere around the sixteenth rosary, an aunt would faint. Hours later, the family formed a line, bent over the casket, and kissed the dead. Then the uncles and cousins lifted the dead from mortuary to hearse, from hearse to church, from church to grave.

For the second time in seventeen years, John watched as his wife was lowered into the grave. He waited until the priest finished reading, then hesitated. Part of his soul had ripped. Within an instant, he felt weak, heavy, and old. He turned around, and knelt while Elaine's coffin was lowered, then he stood, leaned forward, and placed the telegram and her baby manger into the grave.

He would be there when the generations shifted. He would be there when they shifted a second time, and a third time. He was in all of them; but now, after the burials, after the dinner, and after the farmers left to do their chores, John sat at his desk inside the hidden room behind his bedroom at the Rock House.

He heard the windmill turn and creak. Tonight, sleep would wait. Tonight, he and Josephine had work to do.

Skull

Cesar Valtierra



Cesar Valtierra has been a graphic designer for 10 plus years. His portfolio and illustrations can be found at www.cesarvaltierra.com and www.orderfromkhaos.com. His comic, *Balazo*, can be viewed on www.tonybalazo.com.

Why we chose it:

Do we need to explain why we chose this? Come on! Cesar's work is friggin' awesome! Does it have anything to do with travel? Um... kinda? I mean, it's a skull so I guess you could say it's symbolic of the journey we're all making toward death and decay... but really we just thought it was pretty cool

Going Rental

Richard Lakin

Richard Lakin is married with two sons and lives in Staffordshire. He writes short stories, but also enjoys travel writing and his work has been published by the Guardian and Daily Telegraph, Oxford University's Oxonian Review, Londonist, Structo, the University of Dundee, University of Chester and others.

Why we chose it:
Oh Richard. If this is a typical holiday for you and your family then we totally feel for you! A hilarious account of the misadventures the Lakin family experienced driving through France.

It's thirty degrees in the shade and my shoes are beginning to melt into this tree-less car park. I'm sticky and I'm tired and my shirt is plastered to my spine with sweat. I've spent the last hour trailing a week's luggage and two irritable boys between tightly parked Mercedes and Audis in a futile attempt to rent anything on four wheels.

If I had to, I would have put money on the flights going wrong. If something was going to go belly up it was surely connecting flights that left us a fifteen minute sprint across Charles de Gaulle Airport in the height of the French holiday season. But the flights were seamless and everything was going great until we collected our luggage. When I grabbed that last stripy case off the carousel I said, "This is actually going alright, isn't it?"

Tracey snapped "Shush!" at me, but it was too late.

A few moments later I cheerily presented my debit card and a French teenager nibbled at her pencil and shook her head. She might have said "*Non*," but the pencil tasted too good.

"Sorry?" I said.

She shook her head again. I felt the first wave of panic. Debit was no good. No, we don't have credit cards. Yes, I know that makes us Victorian but so be it. She wouldn't budge. We offered a cash deposit. A shake of the head followed. We offered my Dad's

AMEX, defying all the odds to secure a conversation between the fourth green back home - where he was putting for a birdie - and this disinterested pencil-loving car rental clerk in Provence. Another shake of the head followed. I bit my knuckles drawing blood.

Seven-year-old Jacob chose that moment to grow tired of jamming objects in the automatic doors and begin to cry. Ten-year-old Joe sat down on our biggest case, head in hands and despondent, looking just like an England fan at any World Cup since '66.

I went outside and stood fuming and trying not to flinch at the incessant honks and toots of queuing Renaults and Citroens while Tracey patiently checked half a dozen other providers. Yes, she said, she'd found one that'd take our card, but no, they had nothing available until the day after tomorrow. I could've cried. I'd put in hours preparing for this French driving adventure and I couldn't even leave the car park. All those months I'd spent replaying the car chases in Ronin and the French Connection and waiting till midnight to shoot the roundabouts anti-clockwise at our local Asda seemed wasted. I'd even researched rude regional hand gestures on Youtube.

"That's it, we're going," I say. "I can't take any more of this."

I spot an airport hotel sign poking through distant foliage and decide a cold beer will put things right. We set out and walk for fifteen minutes but, like an oasis in a desert, the hotel doesn't seem to be getting any closer. We drag our wheeled cases over drainage ditches, up metre-high concrete kerbs and over gnarled tree roots. It's *Jeux Sans Frontières* with the Lakin family of Stafford battling the French suburbs with giant luggage.

Delayed for a day we decide to explore Marseilles and do some sightseeing. The city's drivers don't inspire confidence in a rookie. Cars seemed to be abandoned anywhere and everywhere with smashed lights, dented panels, taped up door handles and dangling wing mirrors. It seems as if the owners have been involved in a giant, city-wide game of dodgems.

The following day we leave the airport at seven and I take my first roundabout at speed with glee. Moments later I've missed the turn for Aix while Tracey performs complex origami with our map of southern France. She's turning the map around saying "You know it's definitely easier looking at it from this side." When anyone turns a map I start to get worried. I reach for the gear stick but open the win-

dow instead. Mercifully there's another sign for Aix-en-Provence and before long I'm belting down the Avenue du Val de Durance wondering where all the traffic went. It's fast and nearly empty for miles - a bit like a more scenic version of the M6 with no Birmingham or Manchester to clog it up with traffic. I don't even begrudge the twelve Euro toll.

"This is us now!" Tracey screams as I swerve for our turnoff. Soon the roads are getting narrower. "The kerb, watch the kerb!" Tracey says, so I hug the white line instead. When a truck roars through the first village we pass through I'm forced so far over I can almost grab a cake from the patisserie window.

"You're doing well," Tracey says. It's the kind of well-meaning yet patronising comment our under-11s football coach used to make when we lost to a rival school by a basketball score. We climb higher into the Alps, passing the names of cyclists painted on the road during *Le Tour*. On one side is a patchwork of fields hundreds of metres below, on the other a rain gutter deep enough for a tank to get stuck in. There are warnings of rock slides, blinking traffic lights that only hover between red and amber and more bends than a plumbing convention. A sign warns: *chaussée déformée* and I swerve for huge humps in the middle of the road.

I am starting to enjoy driving in France. I'm zipping up the climbs, nipping those tight bends and swerving round those bumps. The lack of traffic helps and, if a van stacked with veggies or sloshing pails of milk appears in my rear-view mirror, I tuck in to let them pass and I'm rewarded with a blink of their hazards.

"French roads eh? Don't know what all the fuss is about," I say and Tracey rolls her eyes.

It's inevitable then that the clouds descend and smother us that night as we leave the restaurant down in the valley. Rain lashes the bonnet and gusts of wind tug at the steering wheel as I creep shakily onto the main road. Halfway up the mountain it clears, but soon we're in thick cloud again and I'm down to first gear and crawling, my fingernails biting into the wheel. The engine's almost stalling and I'm using the white paint on the road as Braille. Finally Joe spots our chalet in a break in the mist.

"You've done it," Tracey says. "Well done!"

This time I wisely keep it zipped. We aren't quite there yet.

Richard's Travel Photo

“The Long Walk Up”

Aix-en-Provence, France



Mario

Monica Strina

Monica Strina belongs to two islands: Sardinia and Ireland. She is a freelance editor and a published author. Monica has an undergraduate degree in Foreign Languages and Literature and a master's degree in Creative Writing, awarded from Trinity College Dublin. She loves reading, skating, baking, and, of course, writing.

Why we chose it:

When putting "Places We've Travelled" together, we realized that not all 'journeys' are literal. As Monica's story shows, sometimes the most important journey you'll ever make is from the person you are to the person you want to be.

It's the first time I see him in twenty years, and I'm not sure it's him under the covers. Mario has never been pale, or sick.

"What are you doing here?" Mario twists his lips. "They told you to come, didn't they? There was no need."

"I wanted to," I say.

"You know I don't like children who lie." Mario gets the hiccups. I stretch my arm to hand him the plastic cup that's resting on top of his bedside table, but he pushes away my hand and gets it himself.

"I'm not a child any more."

"I know that."

This accusation follows me home, and to work the next day.

Sitting behind the counter, I look at the window exhibit. When they set me up in this shop, my parents enrolled me in a course where I learnt how to display items so that customers feel compelled to buy something they already own.

Two aspirins splutter in my face as I massage my temples. The jack-hammer that's drilling into the walkway outside has lodged into my skull and goes off intermittently. But when you walked into Mario's store, the air changed, and you could no longer hear the sounds of car engines or alarms, yet the door had woodworm and two panels of glass that boys had cracked

with stones on their way back from school. The smell was that of dust and paint thinner, of old things and of the shadow under an upturned boat. If I stopped my chattering and concentrated on the tasks he gave me, Mario let me pick an object to take home. I chose something small so I could hide it from my parents. They had forbidden me to go to Mario's, and without giving a name to their suspicions they had turned the air murky with fears. But to me those blanks stood for what adults had lost in growing up. Under my bed a shoebox filled with treasures, and sleeping above it I dreamt that they came alive to keep me company.

At lunchtime, I buy a box of meatballs in tomato sauce from the nice restaurant near my shop and drive to the hospital.

"You *bought* these," says Mario, setting down the fork after the first bite. He grabs the tray with the overboiled hospital food, and eats it like it's cardboard, his eyes fixed to the wall. Old age and illness have lengthened his earlobes and face, turning him into a gargoyle.

"Mario, I'm sorry I didn't—"

"What do you make in your shop?" he asks.

At closing time I drive to my parents' house, lie to them about what I'm looking for, and go rustling in my old room, in the wardrobes, in the attic where I finally find it, dusty and infested by spiders and much smaller than I remembered. With the shutters down, in the morning, I open the box of Mario's presents and touch each object - a square of green glass worn by the sea, a ribbed shell, the mummified tail of a grouper. Beads, stickers, a ballerina from a music box. I place them against my lips to feel them as a child would. The memory of them is physical. From under the counter they chatter to me all day while I sell plastic clones. They tell me about how childhood can seem endless; about the terrible clarity of a child's beliefs.

In the hospital, Mario looks at the box and shakes his head. The way his hair has diminished and his skin has come closer to his bones, it seems to be like he's always wet, just out of the sea where he swam every morning, all year, when I was a child.

"What did you bring that for?"

“I thought you might like to have it.”

“You earned those things. They were for you. If you don't want them, throw them away. Isn't that what you all do?”

The morning after, I clear a corner of the shop window and replace the products with Mario's things. The way my hands shake, I have to pick up some of them a few times.

“Why did you put that rubbish in the window?” asks the girl from the shop beside mine when she comes over to buy disposable cups. “Is it a new advertisement technique?”

From the outside I look in and it frightens me that I might be getting another bout of what mum and dad called a 'breakdown'. The window goes back the way it should be and Mario's things return to the box.

“And so Mario looked out of the dusty windows with a hundred pairs of eyes”

“Arrange the sunglasses,” Mario would say, without so much as a nod, when I arrived, and I'd drop my schoolbag on the floor; roll up my sleeves as he had taught me to do so I would not get dirty. “See if you can line them up straight, this time.”

The rows of sunglasses grew, for every morning at dawn Mario walked along the beach and found new pairs with round, square, large, small lenses, and in the penumbra of his store fixed their frames; cleaned them of sand and salt. And so Mario looked out of the dusty windows with a hundred pairs of eyes. Bicycles he had found and fixed dangled from the roof; on the walls hung a series of hard hats on which Mario had painted animals. Yet the store was smaller than my parents' attic.

“I went to beach-combing last night,” I say to Mario, “I didn't find anything worth picking up. How did you do it?”

Mario squints at me. When he moves his hands in that way he has, like an orchestra conductor, the tube of the IV draws in the air squiggles I don't understand.

“What were you thinking about? When you walked on the

beach.”

I look at my foot as I answer.

“Things I could sell?”

Mario snorts.

At half-seven, still groggy from my sleeping pill, I drive to work and place my finds on the counter: wooden sticks, a length of rope, pebbles, seashells, St Lucy's eyes. No one will come in this early so I get to work with some glue and paint, but there is a rush in my fingers; stuff to do in my mind, even though I can't think of what it is. Soon I am obsessing about how I won't get any money from making this. It's a waste of my time. My sculpture crumbles; I squash it with my hands, cut my palm, and cry.

“Time is never wasted when you are doing something properly,” Mario would mutter squinting at me above his spectacles, which he kept misplacing out of spite. But I forgot about the way varnish stuck better if I twirled the brush slowly around the curves of seashells.

Through the day I sell plastic stuff and stick banknotes into the cash register. It starts to look to me as though they are changing into Monopoly money.

He kept everything – Mario – and there was no lost or abandoned object that he would not rescue and transform. So there were mountains of used hairbands decorated with fabric flowers or seagulls' feathers; empty glass bottles covered with layers of paint that flowed from neck to bottom like multicoloured lava; pre-owned dolls with new freckles on their noses; coffee jars with faces, arms and legs; ships made of cuttlefish bone and dreamcatchers strung with fishing line I helped Mario untangle. Never did I see his fingers hurry over a task – everything in his store was just as he had intended it; each detail could take an hour or a day.

When I'm alone in the shop, I line up some shells in the window, those white pebbles that make sparks and release a burnt smell if you hit them against each other, six lucky Saint Lucy's eyes that I arrange in the shape of a flower. The bell on top of the door chimes fewer times this afternoon, but I'm busy studying how to dispose my troves so a ray of sun makes their edges sparkle for the time it takes the Earth to rotate a little bit farther.

I see a man survey the window from the outside. The sun

bounces on the glass, hiding his face, and before I have the time to open the door he is gone. So I, too, go, back to my apartment and my bathroom that are always clean; to my micro kitchen and half-cold bed.

At night, again I walk along the shore and realise it takes training to find things: there are more treasures in my bag, sea gifts I would not have seen yesterday. Back home I sit on my bed to read, and pass out before I can take my sleeping pills.

Mario eats all of the spaghetti with clams I cooked for him. Their smell of garlic and parsley and the sea covers the hospital stench.

“A little bit insipid,” says Mario as he twirls them around his fork. There are bruises today on the inside of his right arm, and holes with pinpricks of blood. He has lost so much weight that his cheeks have caved in and his eyes grown in his face, giving him a surprised expression.

“Cancer in someone like me,” he says, looking like he's about to spit.

Mother has seen the shop window, or else someone's told her. She sighs on the phone.

“I got you an appointment with Dr Minelli next Monday. I'm sure it's just a bit of stress; you're run down.”

My clearest memory of Mario shows his bushy white head bent over his worktop as he glues onto wooden boxes dozens of seashells – the ribbed ones, the white ones with the shiny purple inside, the twirly ones that used to host Devil's Hands.

“Don't disturb me now,” he would growl, “just take some varnish and help.”

Intoxicated by the fumes, I covered the boxes with a coat so sparkling it made me feel like I could perform magic, letting the shells prick my fingers without complaining, for Mario grew impatient with whiny children. Mario's treasure chests always looked to me like blowfish on the defensive, with all their stingers out.

Today I make a dreamcatcher out of cuttlefish bone, a sheep's bell, some ribbon, a couple of shells onto which the sea has dug holes, and used matchsticks. It takes me hours; I have to stop every time a customer comes in, but this one holds. This one I hung on the

window, with the other treasures.

Today the nurse attached an oxygen mask to Mario's face. It looks like he's being attacked by an alien. He can't speak but his eyes know who I am. His hands and feet are swollen, and make me think of cat's tails.

"Mario, I made things."

His eyes tell me I must do better.

*"His eyes tell
me I must do
better"*

By the end of the week, I have fewer disturbances and smaller piles of Monopoly money in my cash register.

Thinking about Mario, I realise that never saw him sell any of his wonders. People went through the piles of Saint Lucy's eyes and worn action figures and odd earrings without ever bringing any of them to the till; and Mario squinted at them from his worktop, shook his head if they picked up something and grumbled to himself until they left. Only sometimes did I see him straighten up and walk towards a customer. It was as though he could see something others couldn't, and, hidden behind a shelf, I struggled to understand what it was; to see it too. Those times, the person would leave with one of Mario's wonders, yet there had been no exchange of money. I never told Mario of how I followed them around - so easy, in such a small town - never asked him if I'd just imagined they were working shorter hours, looking like they had slept longer.

"Mario, why do you give your things away without asking for anything back?"

"Nonsense, child. I give away nothing. Now, go back to your work."

I wish I knew what Mario saw in me. I wish he wasn't the only one who did.

When people whispered about Mario, I imagined their words as sea monsters caught in a net in place of fish. 'Junk seller', 'freak', 'not all there'. Perhaps they hadn't found what they needed in Mario's store; perhaps, Mario had not liked what he had seen in them. Still, I could not understand why they did it, the same way I couldn't figure out why they'd cut a tree to protect a walkway from its roots.

I give up on waiting, aspirin on hand, for my headache and for

the noise of the jack-hammer across the road; instead I set out to fix a tin robot I found this morning as I walked to work. The things I made this week hang in the window, covering all the white space I used to leave uncluttered so that my exhibit would look 'elegant'. The only time the bell above the door chimes, just before I close down for the day, I lift my face sure it's going to be Mario, but this man is tall, wears glasses with resignation, and even though his eyes are haunted doesn't look older than thirty-eight. Still, he moves in that way I recognise.

"May I help you?" I ask him, but before I can pull out some plastic things from the corners where I relegated them I realise he is studying my creations instead, stepping from one to the other with no hurry. And the way he lifts them from the shelves, the touch of his skin as he turns them in his hands change them. I sit back and watch as they come alive for him in a different way than they do for me. When he holds my first one - the dreamcatcher - longer than the other objects, I know what to do. I *see it*.

"Take it."

He places it on the counter, reaches for his back pocket.

"No." I take his hand and place the dreamcatcher on his palm. He smiles, slowly, and now I know Mario was telling the truth: he gave away nothing.

Monica's Travel Photo

The Peak District, Great Britain



At Glacier Point

Laura-Blaise McDowell

Laura-Blaise McDowell is a 23 year old MA student of Creative Writing at UCD. Her work has appeared in a number of publications such as The Bohemyth, Bare Hands, The Runt and Silver Apples.

Why we chose it:

Laura-Blaise, if that's the one thing you'll never tell your mother about then you're laughing! If Mammys Dunne, O'Brien, and Hussey knew about some of the things we got up to as young wans they'd never let us out the door again. But enough about our misspent youth, can we just gush about how much we love Laura-Blaise's prose poem? We felt as though we were right alongside her counting shooting stars and dodging oncoming vehicles.

There is one thing I'll never tell my mother.

It happened the first night of our two day camping trip to Yosemite. That day, we'd driven to Glacier Point. I'll never forget the height of it, the sheer height. A geography we just don't have at home. It was the first time I realised the size of the world. How ridiculous to think we could lay claim to something so vast. How can a shell rule the ocean? We all watched the sun set over the great elephant and drank half cans of beer, on the rocks that no one owned, in this place that made my palms sweat with the freedom of how much we did not matter. Though I was convinced someone would slip and fall off the face of the earth.

I'd seen a handful of shooting stars in my life, but that night I couldn't make wishes fast enough. They sprang out of every violet dip in the universe, and I lay on my back on the stone with everybody else. Owen McCafferty doesn't write novels because he doesn't do 'sky stuff', and maybe he's right. Maybe nothing I say can hope to capture what I saw. When I try to describe it, I capture only its reflection shimmering on the surface of something much deeper.

We were tired coming back down that hill, holding hands, stumbling like we'd fallen

out of the sky. We split up into our separate cars; five of us in ours. Driving down those twisted cliff roads in the dark was hard enough, why did the guys behind us have their fog lights on? We could barely see. "Turn them off!" we yelled, as if they could hear us. But soon, in the back seat, three of us drifted off.

There is one thing I'll never tell my mother.

It is that as three of us drifted off in the back seat, so did our driver. Our car left the road and skidded as it hit the rough gravel. If, in the passenger seat, he hadn't screamed, none of us would have woken up. The driver would never have swerved, slamming the breaks. We would have kept going. Through the wooden barricades and out over the great expanse. How ridiculous to think we could lay claim to something so vast.

The guys behind pulled in, explained our car had been swerving the whole journey, that they'd put their fog lights on to get our attention. We swapped out the drivers and continued back to camp. When we got there, we went to bed, our hearts still hammering, hoping the bears couldn't hear them.

I lay on my back, and thought, either way, I saw heaven that night.

Airport

Simon Murphy

Simon Murphy is from Limerick, and has recently returned to Ireland after years away. He has 2 different short pieces accepted for the Limerick Writer's Centre Anthology "It's a Queer City all the Same" which is to be published this year.

Why we chose it:

A wise person once said, "It's easier to leave than to return." And that wise person was Alex (who genuinely thought that was a proverb but turns out it's a line she's written in her unfinished YA fantasy manuscript). You're welcome for the life advice folks! In Simon's short story "Airport", he illustrates what many of us who have lived abroad for any amount of time feel - will we be accepted 'back home'? Are we now outsiders? Have we changed too much? A relevant tale for our times.

Martin loaded his luggage onto the conveyor belt, at the check-in desk, and smiled at the attendant. She was in the middle of a conversation with her colleague at the next desk so did not return his smile.

He waited for her to finish. Clearly something of importance was under discussion she was too pre-occupied to even acknowledge him. Not understanding the Dutch being spoken at such a breakneck speed he had no idea as to what they might have been talking about.

After a few moments, she reluctantly turned her attention to him, raised a plastic smile and asked to see his passport and boarding card.

"You are travelling to Dublin, yes?" she inquired.

"Yes I am." he replied.

"Well your luggage is 7 kilos over the weight so you must go to desk fourteen and pay for the excess baggage."

"Aw shite," he thought to himself. He had been utterly ruthless over the past week. Only the absolute essentials had been spared. Books, magazines, souvenirs from holidays over the years, had been mercilessly discarded. This was no time for sentimentality. He was moving back to Ireland after fifteen years away and this meant a fresh start. No need for memorabilia from a part of his life that was now ending.

He had been home on holiday two months earlier and on that trip home he had paid for excess luggage to bring all the items that he couldn't discard - photographs of the many years he had spent in the country below sea level, birthday and Christmas cards from the friends from all over the world that he had made in his fifteen years in Amsterdam - some of whom were still resident there, many more long since departed, having returned to their home countries or gone on to new places seeking new adventures in different lands.

He thought he had downsized sufficiently to enable him to go home with a standard twenty kilo suitcase.

Clearly not.

He made his way to desk fourteen. As his bags had already been accepted and on the conveyor belt to the bowels of the airport to be loaded onto his Aer Lingus flight to Dublin, he wondered what was stopping him from simply boarding the airplane without paying the surcharge. A quick glance at the boarding pass indicated that this would be impossible. The check in girl had efficiently ripped off the scan code from the pass meaning that unless he paid the charge then there was no way he was boarding the flight that evening.

The queue at desk fourteen - the excess baggage line - was long and fractious. People clearly didn't appreciate having to pay additional charges for their flights. Understandable on one hand. But in the current time of no frills flying no-one had any excuse to pretend to be shocked. Every few months, some imbecilic budget airline owner would make an absurd claim that toilet usage was going to be a chargeable expense. The fact that this would in fact be illegal was irrelevant. It was faithfully reported in the press, and the readership would huff and puff and threaten never fly again. All nonsense of course. All publicity is good publicity.

The couple at the head of the queue were attempting to appeal to the attendant's better nature and looking for an exemption to the charge. Sadly she seemed to be missing a better nature and she repeated her statement that they either pay her sixty euros or their bags would be offloaded and they would be unable to fly.

She was in a difficult position, he supposed. Even if she had wanted to make an exception, her job would have been on the line, if she were to be caught by her superiors. And of course the rest of the

queue would have expected the same treatment.

She was sticking to her guns. Eventually the couple in their bermuda shorts and mini-skirt decided that it was not worth arguing any further. If the souvenirs they had acquired in whatever sunkissed spot they were transiting through Amsterdam from, on their way home to Ireland, were to be gifted to the intended recipients, then it meant they had to pay up and shut up.

Resentfully the portly man handed over his credit card, the bill was paid, their documents were issued, and they wandered off in the direction of the departure gates, muttering mutinously as they went.

He presented his torn boarding pass to the harassed looking woman behind desk. She scanned it, tapped in a sequence of commands onto her keyboard and printed a docket.

“You are seven kilos over, it’s five euro per kilo for excess, so you need to pay thirty five euro.” she said in a neutral manner. He wasn’t going to argue - there was no way around this. He had neither the time nor the inclination to go through his suitcase, rummaging for non-essential items weighing seven kilos to discard. His friend Jane was in the coffeeshop in the departure hall waiting for him and he was anxious to meet her.

He handed over his credit card which she inserted into the hand held machine; he entered his PIN number, the receipt was issued, and moments later he had a new boarding pass.

The take off was not for another hour and a half. Jane had left work early that day as she wanted to see him off. She had texted him to tell him that she was in The Place coffeeshop in the concourse area of the airport.

He made his way down the escalator, his eyes darting from left to right to see if he could spot the location. The airport terminal was massive and the throngs of people rushing in every direction made navigation difficult.

He saw the flashing neon sign indicating the coffee-shop and hurried over to it.

If he’d had his own way he would be leaving the country without any goodbyes today. He’d had his farewell party in a bar beside the canal close to his house a week earlier. That had been the official event. He’d not even wanted to have that party - his preference would have been to have said private goodbyes to his friends. But that had

not been a popular idea.

"You've been here fifteen years," Jane had lectured him, "the goodbye party might not be your cup of tea but lots of people know you here and we want to have a proper send off for you."

It had been pleasant, if slightly stressful. Being the centre of attention was exhausting. He could not slink into the background and soak up the atmosphere when the party was being held in his honour. He had pretend to be a good host. If people had made the effort to come to say goodbye then the minimum requirement was to endeavour to be a good host.

In the end it had been a good idea, as it had meant that his final few days were not pre-occupied with meeting people. He could start wrapping his head around the improbable idea that in a few days he would be back living in Ireland, a place he had not spent more than a week in, since the very start of the new century.

There was no point in trying to predict what was in store for him? It was not something that he could really control. He had no job lined up. He had no home lined up. He was moving back in with his mother for the time being - back to the bedroom of his teenage years - until he could sort out his situation properly.

"Martin, over here." Jane hollered from the back of the cafe. Jane was a few years younger than Martin's 35 years. He had known her since his earliest days in Amsterdam, when they had shared a flat. That has been more than twelve years earlier. A lot had changed in both their lives since those days. Jane had married and now had both a husband and a five year old son. She was a typical, harried, working mother, with never enough time in the day to fit everything in, yet seemingly able to juggle a house, a job, friendships. And a slight drink problem.

He waved at her and felt a pang of sadness. He was only moving to Dublin. It was an extremely short distance away with several cheap flights daily between the cities. But moving back felt like the end of an era. Strangely enough it felt like an admittance of failure. Moving to Amsterdam, a few months after graduation all those years ago had been such an exciting time. He had dreams of all the things he had planned to achieve. All those great love affairs he was going to have. An amazing career surely awaited him. He was going to be a

success.

Where had it all gone wrong?

He slid in beside Jane and gave her a hug.

"Well, are you all set then?" she asked him.

"I guess so."

"You've got your passport, boarding pass, and wallet?"

"Yes captain."

"I've ordered you a beer."

"Of course you have." he laughed.

He remembered the first time they had met, twelve years earlier. He had been looking for a new flatmate for the apartment sublet he had been living in. Jane had been the first person to reply to the advert he had placed on the expat website. And as a result she had been given the first viewing.

He had no idea who the landlord of the top floor apartment was. He himself had only moved into the place a few months earlier. Having spent the first few weeks of his life in Amsterdam in a hostel, when his work colleague at the call centre he was working at told him he has a spare room on offer, he had practically stalked the colleague until he moved in.

That colleague left Amsterdam a few months later and it was up to Martin to pay the full rent. On his call centre wages this was beyond his budget so he was looking to share the rent they paid each month.

Jane had a neon pink hair colour and a nose ring at the time. She was only twenty one but already a two year veteran of the city, having moved after secondary school with her boyfriend. She was from south London but spoke in a very posh newsreader manner. He had liked her immediately - she had a very sarcastic turn of phrase and sense of humour.

Even though they only shared the flat for a few years they had remained the firmest of friends. She had been his first friend in Amsterdam, so it seemed fitting that she was the friend that would be there to wave him off.

"How are you feeling?" she asked before taking a deep gulp from her pint glass.

"I have no idea, I've been trying not to think about it too much." he answered. He knew that if he started analysing his motives for re-

turning he would convince himself that it was a mistake. That it had been too long since he had lived in Ireland to simply slot back into people's lives again, and to carry on as if he had never left. He knew that the network of friends that he had built up here was going to be impossible to replicate.

But for the last couple of years he had been feeling restless. While all his friends were settling down - getting married, having kids, moving in with their partner, buying houses, he had felt that his own life had remained static. Having been single for several years, he suspected that his prospects in Ireland might be slightly better in that regard.

"Well listen to me now, and listen good," she sounded serious. "I understand that you are keen to make a change and I suppose I even understand why you want to try moving back home, but I am going miss you terribly..."

"Aw, you big..."

"Shut up, let me finish... And I guess you have to give it a proper shot. If you hate it though, you can always come back. It doesn't have to be permanent. There's always a spare bed in our house, so if you need it you are to use it. Do you hear me?"

He gulped. He didn't want to get emotional. Grabbing his pint he took a mouthful.

"I know, and I will take you up on that if I need to. But I've been telling myself the same thing. That I need to give it a minimum of a year. It's not like moving to a new country, but in a way I reckon it is. Maybe this time next year, you'll be picking me up at the airport again to welcome me back."

They chatted idly for a while - nothing heavy was discussed - just the day to day stuff about Jane's life, her plans for that weekend, her mother's impending visit to see her grandson. Just the usual.

"What time is take-off?" she asked.

He glanced at his watch. "Oh shit, they're about to board in a minute."

They hugged each other for a few moments. Disengaging he grabbed his rucksack and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"Go on, I'll pay for the beer."

He left the bar and hurried towards the customs check-in. The queue at customs was long, but moving quickly. He stepped into

the 'EE passports' line and inched forward in time with the queue. The guard sneered at him as he glanced from the passport to Martin. Martin kept his face pleasant and neutral, being slightly paranoid that he wouldn't be allowed to board. His paranoia was baseless - he wasn't carrying any contraband. Airport security was so tight these days, compared to how it had been in the past. It was wiser to suppress any rebellious streak and do exactly as told.

He was waved through.

Gate D23 was his departure gate - this was in the same part of the airport that all Aer Lingus flights to Ireland embarked from. It was about a twenty minute walk from customs check-in. It always impressed him how very vast this airport was, and how smoothly it all seemed to operate.

Putting some pace in his walk he followed the directions for gate D23. He would have liked a coffee. There was a kiosk at the gate - he would buy one there, time permitting.

He passed the shops, selling cigarettes, alcohol, perfume, magazines, books, sweets, camera and porcelain windmills. Last minute holiday gifts for lazy people, blockbuster books for long haul flights or sun holidays. He ignored them all. He was going home and that was where his focus remained.

As he walked he checked his pockets for keys and coins. The X-Ray machine was the last obstacle, right before he would board the plane, and all metals would have to be removed from his person before he went through the metal detector.

Finally reaching his gate, he could see that the queue was already moving. He would have to wait until he was on the plane before he could get a coffee.

He slipped into line while transferring his metals from pocket to bag.

He went through security check without setting off the alarm, gathered his jacket and bag at the other side and made his way to a bright, orange formica seat.

He estimated that boarding would start in a few minutes. He looked at his boarding card - seat 23F - an aisle seat. Good. Some more room for a leg stretch.

He kept his mind occupied with the upcoming flight. He did not think about the move. He did not think about Ireland or

Amsterdam. There would be plenty of time for that in the coming days, weeks and months. He did not think about his mother waiting in her semi-detached house in Castleknock. First he would move home. All the rest would come later.

An announcement came over the tannoy.

“Ladies and gentlemen, Aer Lingus flight EI 661 to Dublin is now boarding. Could passengers in seat rows 15 to 28 please make your way to the boarding gate.”

Simon's Travel Photo

Perth, Australia



Thank you for reading Issue Seven:
“Places We’ve Travelled”

Submissions for Issue Eight:
“Dirty Laundry” will open in
June 2016

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Confessions from the back page:
I really liked George Clooney as Batman