

# 37

# RAVEN CAGE

Poetry and Prose Ezine





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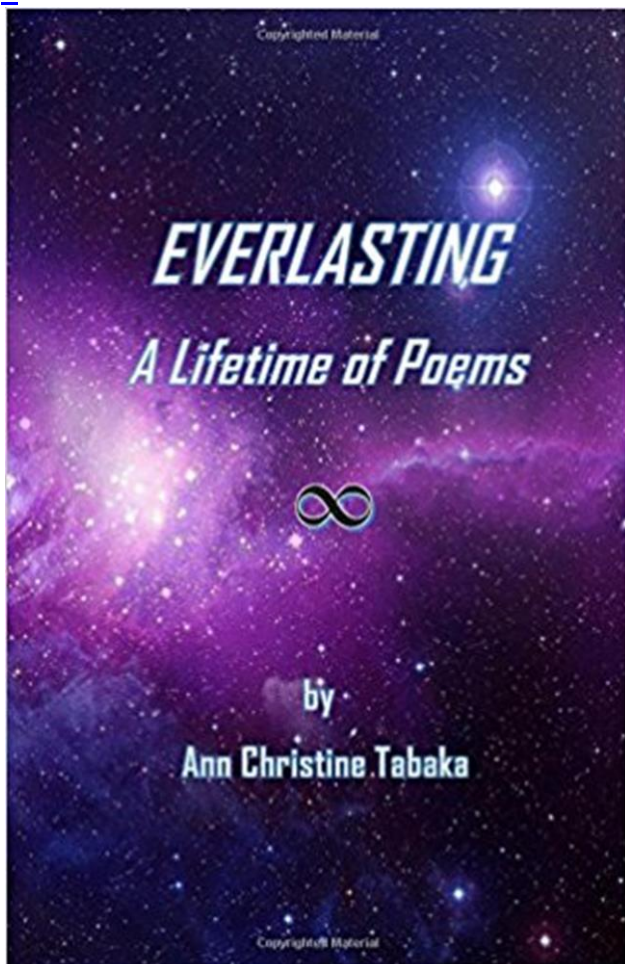
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# EDITORIAL

## PROMOTION

[https://www.amazon.com/Everlasting-Lifetime-Ann-Christine-Tabaka/dp/1978019572/ref=la\\_B06XF2PWSK\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1515253039&sr=1-2](https://www.amazon.com/Everlasting-Lifetime-Ann-Christine-Tabaka/dp/1978019572/ref=la_B06XF2PWSK_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1515253039&sr=1-2)



<http://aeafanzine.blogspot.de/>



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/230377537030238/>

<http://servanteofdarkness.blogspot.de/>

Dee's Ghostly Writes

<https://www.facebook.com/DebzMARIE33/>

Grave Pain Project

<https://www.facebook.com/gravepainproject/>

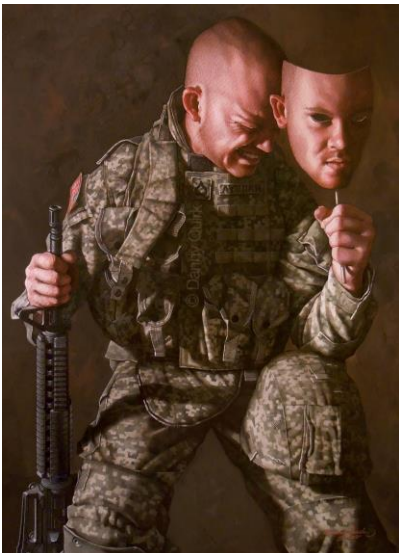
Fallen Angels & Second-Hand Halos

Jason Cueto

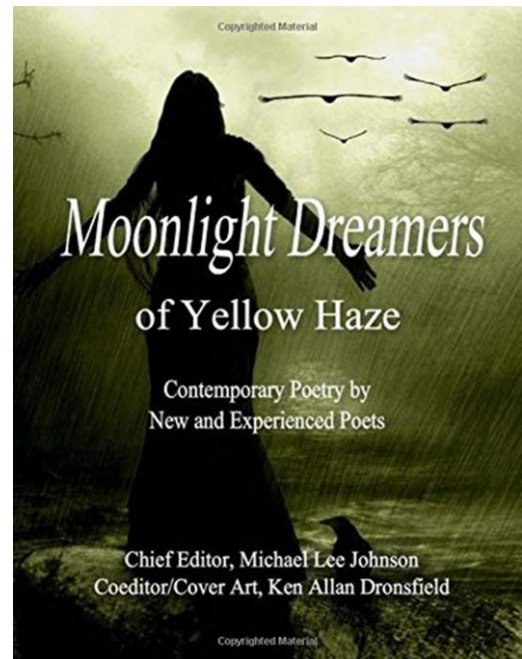
<https://www.facebook.com/fallenangelsandsecondhandhalos>

# EDITORIAL

<https://servanteofdarkness.blogspot.de/2017/12/update-two-trauma-diagnosis-and-therapy.html>



<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1530456762>



Chucked full with 53 poets and 188 pages, this 8 1/2 x 11" anthology is loaded with the very best contemporary and new artistic voices in poetry today.

Inside is a combination of Pushcart nominees, winners, Best of the Net such as chief editor Michael Lee Johnson, Janet Kuypers, A.J. Huffman, Joan Mc Nerney, Gary Beck, Joanna M. Weston, Scott Thomas Outlar, Psycho Kanev, and coeditor Ken Allan Dronsfield and many others. If you do not recognize a name now you will after this book captures your imagination touches your heart because these poets are on the frontline of small contemporary poetry press today. This anthology, wonderful covers, incredible talent, makes the perfect addition to your personal library, coffee table, or given as a special gift. Buy now!

# Emotional Poetry

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## Emotional Poetry

---

Ngozi Olivia Osuoha

### Untitled

I lend my voice  
To speak for peace  
That there be joy  
And love all over the world.

I condemn war and violence  
Together with hate and killings,  
I lend my voice against racism  
To facilitate humanity.

Let peace lead, let love flourish  
Let unity grow, let us be one.

I lend my voice  
My voice to the stability of man  
That we may grow  
And dwell in peace.

Supremacy and superiority  
Both fight against each other,  
Intimacy and inferiority  
Both stand against one another.

Again, I lend my voice  
To the unity of the world.

© Ngozi Olivia Osuoha



## Love

With all your warm feelings

I always expect you to walk over flowers sprinkled all on your way

Lux to love all those beautiful things

Which are only for some moments

Of course Your love makes me bold enough to cross a difficult bridge

Without any support

Enlightened by you

deep down there is a benevolent concern

I love to see the world as the most beautiful one

Your true love has made me a radical

I can see myself in all

It has made me a truly revolutionary person

And taught me the concept that we all are one!

Copyright Ruma Hazarika

## Hitchhikers in our Psyche

We are made up of thoughts  
or what we think we become.  
Thinking plays an important role  
in guiding our actions.  
Our thoughts  
are like tiny boats  
adrift on a vast  
infinite space  
seeking placid waters  
away from the turbulence  
and murk of  
the mired existence.

How we reach our destination  
depends on  
the load we carry  
in our fragile vessels.

Sometimes the baggage  
is our own creation  
out of anguish  
and suffering  
which looks bigger  
to our constricted vision,  
at times it is  
dumped on us  
from outside  
in the form of filthy sacs  
trying to  
get a free ride.

They corrode our thoughts  
the way barnacles  
spoil the hull of a ship  
impeding its speed,  
dragging it down  
to the place of darkness

# Emotional Poetry

---

which the psychiatrists  
call depression.

There is no saving  
if you allow them  
a seat on your boat,  
as they keep multiplying,  
giving you no chance  
to breathe fresh air.

Soon their brethren  
worry and anxiety  
join them,  
dragging along the  
zombies of past.  
They conquer us  
like unsolicited pirates  
taking down our sails,  
stripping us  
of all happiness.

They want us  
to be the walking dead  
beating our own head  
with torture spikes,  
until all hope  
gushes out  
and we're rendered  
powerless.

Our inconspicuous scars  
are scratched  
again and again  
so that we could  
never forget pain  
and are never healed.

We keep drifting  
like a castaways  
searching for land,  
running in circles  
on the same route,



# Emotional Poetry

---

in the same waters  
coming back to the  
same place we began.

Only if we find a way  
to master this  
untamed demon,  
banishing him  
from our sanctum,

we shall reach  
our destination.

© Shalini Garg 2019

## Untitled

Happy clown and saddened clown  
Painted facets of a lone jewel  
A solemnly promised truth  
Gladly given at no cost  
Taken once and then again  
Who's to forgive the dis-service  
Wasted breath always asking  
Can you see to walk with me?  
Days, days passing fleet of foot  
Night's cold to only linger  
Weary legs but still standing  
And a soul bereft of North  
A question needing answered  
The answer too sorely missed  
These two jesters of one court  
How long to persevere?  
© 8/24/18 Fish Fisher

## Shut-up and Pay Attention!

By: Author Reneé Drummond-Brown

To those teachers  
who 'neva saw-us,  
sitting in the back of those classrooms.

We paid attention to you.  
We paid attention to you.

From the back of the room;  
We watched you teach  
the "select few."

We paid attention to you.  
We paid attention to you.

From the back of the room;  
looking at the pictures on the board,  
while watching your mouth(s) move.

We paid attention to you.  
We paid attention to you.

Now, looking at us; watching and wondering  
"How do "that" intellectual mind do what-it-do?"

Glad you asked.  
Now, I'll tell you:  
In the midst of your discrimination, while you pay us no mind.

We paid attention to you.  
We paid attention to you.

Dedicated to: If you ain't 'gone teach I before E except after C to 'uryone...GET OUT THE WAY!

A B.A.D. Poem

(Renee's Poems with Wings are Words in Flight)



# Emotional Poetry

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As an emerging artist, trying to establish a solid reputation as an author amongst my critics, I am asking for your support by \*SHARING THIS POST\* and \*ORDERING\* my books/ebooks (\$3.99) online and/or on my Facebook Page.

Books by Drummond-Brown:

~A Bridge Over Troubled Water

~Tried, Tested and True Poets from Across the Globe

~A B.A.D. Poem

~The Power of the Pen

~SOLD: TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER

~Renee's Poems with Wings are Words in Flight-I'll Write Our Wrongs!

And

~e-Book: Renee's Poems with Wings are Words in Flight

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# Gothic Poetry

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## GOthic POETRY

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Daniel de Culla

### FOLKLORIC WO/MAN NUMBER ONE

I woke up from a deep sleep  
And I came to the fields  
Leaving the bedroom  
And, as sorcerer and wizard  
I rose up to a leafy tree  
For watching sunrise.  
With great silence, softly  
The Sun god  
Was walking slowly  
Wrapped in colorful clouds  
Visiting the site  
Where I  
Was contemplating Him.  
What a joy of light  
He was going to give me  
He's coming, He's arriving.  
I stick out my tongue  
And relate Him.  
Oh, what a moment!  
When I got hold of myself  
He dressed me as folkloric Wo/Man  
And put in my hands  
On the right chest  
A plastic Goddess  
Whom my hug woke up  
Giving trick, a good trick  
On the Sun god  
Because I gave Life to the Goddess  
Naming her Eve  
Removing Himself, full of sun  
Confused and stunned  
Growling and giving swear-words  
For burning my skin  
And make me blisters.

# Gothic Poetry

---

With some risk  
I got off the tree  
And, in its shadow  
Me free from so much sun  
I blessed Him for being God and Sun  
And for giving me this goddess  
With which, here, I fell in Love  
Wanting without wanting.  
I don't know if other folklorics  
Will have achieved so much happiness  
Like me.  
What I can say is  
That I'm full of light  
And very glad about it.  
-Daniel de Culla



## Justice of a black moon

The day will come that karma will reign down upon you, with all her rage. All your lies and deceitful ways will come unraveled on her day of glory. Your story will be told for all to behold. Your sugar coated lies and all you hide will diminish your disguise. Your words will spew like tar and sulfur on this day you will suffer! Your fate will be sealed in the hands of Kismet wrapped and tangled within her net. Oh the cries and tears you will pour out, will stream down your face no prayer you pray will unlock your fate. This is now your judgement day! You will have to face all who you have crossed. No manipulation, deceitfulness or mind games my dear, will unseal this lock, for time is on her clock you now have a debt to pay for all your sins. Your Loki ways are OVER your cover is blown you soon will discover

There will be no redemption or mercy given for the card of justice will be the card I hold for your story will now unfold! Gods of heaven reign down justice, mother earth nurture my prayer make the seeds take root and grow! Winds from East carry my words my request. Release the fire from the South, that I stand before burn! Carry my words from my mouth like hells fury giving your energy to my words!

On this Black moon night my tears of pain, I turn to the West to call upon the rain to wash away all my rage, I have called upon all four corners to lend a helping hand! This is my magical rite I now evoke the 5th element æther, let my prayers be heard and justice served!

Come together on this night as my blood drains off my anthem, my chalice full I hold as my offering.

Into my fire that lights the night sky on this Black moon night Balmon-snake head I hold in my hand lead my prayers with steadfastness, as I sprinkle black walnut dust, bringing blessings from the gods from above! Bats head root! Make my wishes come true.

Release me from the pain he has caused me unweave the lies and all he hides, the storms begin to tell all his tales, unleash the demons to prey, feed upon all his miserable decay. It is time he pays his debt. As above so be it below. Let the truths be told.

With the sound of the bell my circle is down.

You are forever bound to your fate, and shame. Now you have only yourself, to blame!

by © Poetry of a Dark Angel July 2017

## Crimson Opium

Your crimson kiss feeds my lust.

My moral restraints begin to rust

As sanguine life fills my veins,

Racing like a runaway train.

Freeing my inner Hyde

Pushing the gentleman aside.

Blood on your lips is opium on my tongue.

It's the most narcotic song ever sung.

Ecstasy is a hurricane on the shoreline

As your blood mingles with mine.

I feed on your crimson kiss in frenzy.

I greed for your sanguine potency.

Oh, how your blood inebriates.

Oh, how your passion rejuvenates.

Feed me, my crimson bride.

Kiss me until heaven and earth collide.

© Jerry Langdon 2019

# Romance

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## General Poetry

---

Jack Henry

### **a ballad of robin tucker**

i fell in love with Robin Tucker

early 6th grade year & i made the

mistake of telling my best friend, Jeff,

all about it -

Robin had bigger boobs than the other girls,

& a bigger heart,

kind, selfless, an absolute free spirit;

Robin exited the big yellow school bus,

one stop before mine, at the trailer part,

the true source of her scars;

other girls derided her for developing too

fast; boys lay into her about the trailer park

& an unfortunate rhyme to her last name:

Robin Tucker, dirty fucker,

lives in the trailer park,

she'll fuck you, she'll fuck me,

especially after dark

# Romance

---

word got 'round that i loved  
Robin Tucker with every inch of  
my prepubescent heart; the hazing immediate,  
rampant, absolute;  
i cried to my mother, i didn't understand  
their derision, their antagonism, their rage;  
after weeks of bullying i finally snapped, finally lost my mind,  
captured my own rage, slowly turned,  
let them pick a fight,  
meet us after 3:00 o'clock  
you're dead shit, motherfucker  
you should just walk away, pussy boy  
i arrived early,  
didn't walk away,  
didn't back down,  
i took the first punch,  
then i returned my own;  
  
my father taught me to fight,  
my mother taught me how not to,  
  
in kindergarten i befriended the Navarro brothers,  
became party of la familia,  
  
and the Navarro brothers lived to fight;  
three brown skinned boys & a skinny white kid

# Romance

---

stood fist-clenched & ready;

not another word spit out,

not another fist thrown;

& everything changed;

no one talked to me, for at least a week,

except the Navarro Brothers

& no one bothered me or Robin Tucker again;

years later, after a first time, after college,

after my first real love, after divorce,

i bumped into Robin Tucker

pushing a stroller & walking

next to a handsome man;

she looked at me, smiled, nodded,

& kept moving down the street;

after a single heartbeat & a memory,

i turned & kept moving too -

© jck hnry 2019

# Romance

---

## **i remember**

that time i joined a church

just to get in the pants

of a girl i knew? it worked,

by the way...

yeah, i've seen better days

and that time a guy stuck

a loaded .357 in my face,

robbed the pizza place i

managed; stole wallets from

my friends i; when i chased him

down the street to a waiting car,

and i heard the hammer cock?

yeah, i've seen better days

and that time i picked a

guy up by the throat because

up hit a girl i loved?

yeah, i've seen better days

and that time i snatched money

from a gas station cash register

when the clerk wandered off,

just to buy drugs?



# Romance

---

yeah, i've seen better days

and that time when i went speed

racing for 66 hours straight, line

after line after line, paranoid and

naked waiting for the cops?

yeah, i've seen better days

and that time i got married at

22 to a woman 19; married 19 years

before i couldn't manage the crazy;

hers or mine?

yeah, i've seen better days?

and that time i sat alone on

a beach in Laguna; crying and

screaming; generally losing my

mind?

yeah, i've seen better days

i know i am lucky

but sometimes i wonder

© jck hnry 2019

# Romance

---

## kid in an iron lung

the kid across the street from  
the house on Helendale had  
a rare disease, one that kept  
him home from school, one  
that put him in an iron lung  
everyday;

my mom made me go visit  
and he seemed okay, except  
for a giant black iron lung that  
sat in the dining room;

because he was so sick his mom  
bought him anything he wanted,  
all the new comic books and  
he would let me read them;

every now and then i would steal  
a comic book, but my mom always  
caught me; she'd make me march  
across the street and apologize;

# Romance

---

he never seemed to mind and one  
day offered to give me a stack, but  
i refused; i didn't want to march  
back across the street and apologize  
for something i didn't do;

as i got older i didn't go over  
as much and i felt bad about it;  
i would look at his house when  
we played baseball or street hockey;  
i told myself i would go over  
more often but we moved  
to Orange County;

one day my mom told me the kid  
across the street from the  
house on Helendale died; at 16 i didn't  
give it much thought;

now i wonder about the kid in the iron lung  
and know i missed out on something

# Romance

---

i should not have;

© jck hnry 2019

# Romance

---

## pretending grown-up

Valerie lived across the street from my house;

1971 or 2, i can't really remember; right around

the time of the big Sylmar quake; 1971;

she & i played as kids do, back in the day, but

only when the other fellas weren't around;

Valerie had long dirty blonde hair & i loved her;

at 7 or 8 yo, too tall for my age, awkward, glasses,

Valerie tolerated me, a trait that held true

for most women i would come to know;

i played dad & she played mom; i'd come home late

from work, sit in my chair, drink pretend beer;

she did everything else;

even then the programming started;

sometimes we'd play dress up; she'd put pretend make-up

on & i would watch her; fascinated; Valerie would

walk around; pretending grown-up; stylish & suave; i

# Romance

---

put on pretend make-up too, but her mom said

that's not allowed;

Valerie invited me to her 8th or 9th birthday party; i

can't remember; no other boys were allowed; she

called me her best girlfriend; maybe that's where it

all begin; for me;

i remember the last time we played house; Valerie

told me to be the mom; she'd be the dad; made sense

at the time; gender roles didn't register then, or now;

Valerie moved away around 9 or 10, i think, my memory's fuzzy

around certain events; but i think of her, from time

to time; wondering if she is still playing house; or

if she found her way out -

© jck hnry 2019

# Romance

---

## Richard and Johnny

Richard and Johnny were best friends

and most days hated each other;

Richard lived next door to me; Johnny

down the street in a house next to

the alley;

they were older than me by

a couple of years and let me tag along,

mostly because i could swear pretty

good and looked the same age;

we never did much, just hanging out on

the street, playing baseball and street

hockey, waiting for the street lights

to go on signaling time to head home;

one day Johnny and Richard got into

a screaming match about something;

Richard had a pocket knife; promised

to stab Johnny if he didn't shut up;



# Romance

---

Johnny grabbed a belt, then a kitchen knife,

and finally his father's .38 revolver;

'i'm gonna kill you,' he screamed

and we believed him, especially

when he stood on his front porch

waving his father's .38 revolver around;

his mother finally broke away from

her soaps, tumbled out onto the porch,

saw the gun, and punched Johnny

in the ear;

Johnny went down hard, gun dropped from

his hand, his mother snatched it up

and sneered at us to go home; and we ran;

Richard and i stood in front of my house,

waiting for Johnny's father to arrive; it

didn't take long; we didn't see Johnny for

almost three months;

in those days you didn't call CPS, you waited

# Romance

---

for your father, he took care of things, old school;

© jck hnry 2019

# Romance

---

## Rotten Jimmy

during the summer between 3rd & 4th

grade, me & my friends would walk down

to the Plunge; the big swimming pool at

Verdugo High School;

mom would give me four quarters,

enough for entrance & a locker;

she'd pack a sandwich, cookies &

an apple; always an apple;

each time we went to the Plunge the big

kids would terrorize us; especially

Rotten Jimmy; we didn't know his real

name, we gave him that one;

Rotten Jimmy liked to punch you in the

ass if you moved too slow getting out

of the pool; or spit on you; or steal your

lunch;

one day he took it too far; i turned &

kicked him in the face as he climbed

# Romance

---

from the pool; broke his nose;

i got banned from the Plunge; had to

answer to mom; waited for dad to come

home;

after i told my side of the story; through

tears & blind rage my dad took me &

my sister to Thrifty's for ice cream;

three scoops; all in;

early fall that same year Rotten Jimmy got

arrested for selling speed at Verdugo High School;

my dad showed me his mug shot

in the local paper; his nose bent & scarred;

i smiled to myself, knowing he'd always think of me

when he looked at a mirror

hanging on a prison wall;

© jck hnry 2019

## BOMBS OF DEATH, FETIDE BOMBS

Terrible things, awful things, naughty things  
Humans do in the name of Gods and his nonsense.  
Two different worlds we live in:  
A world with murderess bombs  
And a world of fetid bombs.  
There's nothing more to know  
Than what one touch the other side of what  
One want to be: a dictator get conceited  
Or a criminal delighted in tormenting  
Both smelling like the devil:  
Of dead or of rankness.  
The ones as dead as a black doornail  
The others as bad smell of o noise.  
We are unable to span the gap with both feet.  
The abysm between our expectations  
And our actual state of being  
Is sensed as an impossibility to explore the World  
By paths of Love and Peace.  
Antediluvians and barbarians make day by day  
A high tantric plateau of death and sad scent.  
Gods invented by Wo/Men  
Covered with muds  
Has a tide of battles and wars.  
It spreads over our map  
Charting a course of gunpowder and revulsions.  
And we in the midst of fire still sing:  
No more Bombs of Death  
Yes Fetid Bombs of Life as if by magic.  
God, go to the devilj  
Do not soil the purple flowers  
That remind us of the sea  
Nor the wild iris and dandelions  
That are in bloom near our houses.

© Daniel de Culla

## CAPTIVE VENUS

Bunny "Venus" sleeps  
Mine's daughter Elizabeth  
Born of the primordial egg  
In her Olympic cage  
And we have to be joyful  
All the day  
Because, when She wakes up  
We will take her in our arms  
Feeling her in our chest  
Lively and throbbing.  
Her running around the house  
From the dining room to the kitchen  
Throws us to life  
Turning the stay  
In a beautiful garden.  
Now we are in The banquet  
Like the Platon's  
And the six that are here  
We are saying:  
-What a beautiful bunny  
How soft is her white hair!  
She has black ears  
Like those of Lucas Cranach  
That are propellers that blow  
To the wind of her passing.  
-Of what color is  
Elizabeth's white bunny?  
It is the most widespread question  
What does father and mother  
To kid growing up  
Between mischieves and games  
When he comes to see her.  
She combs her hair alone  
Her eyes are two half moons  
That light the dark night  
Of the dreamedrabbit Cupid  
Coming, in dreams  
With a carnal torch  
That inflames the senses  
And giving birth to Love

# Romance

---

In hearts  
Reciting Petrarca  
On his road  
Garcilaso de la Vega as well  
Galeotto del Carretto  
Juan de Mal Lara  
Juan de Arguijo  
Giambatista Marino  
José de Valdivielso  
Calderón de la Barca  
La Fontaine and Marivaux  
And Me too.



**Pic: Isabel G. de Diego**

**-Daniel de Culla**

**gallotricolor@yahoo.com**



## SEPTEMBER IN ORBIT

There's nothing more to know  
Than September Satellites  
Touching the otherside  
Of what we want to be.  
Nothing but be quiet contemplating  
This pure light shining steady  
On the floor of the Rainbow  
Thru: "To have more money  
Than we have"  
"To read more books  
"Than we buy on hire-purchase"  
"To be more stupid  
Than we thought"  
September has its Music  
This headdress where i dream  
Earth, Wind & Fire's "September:  
"There was a Bade ya  
Say do you remember  
Bade ya, dancing September"  
As a stream into a circle without doors:  
Venus, Jupiter, Saturn  
In the Summer Triangle  
Leo in Virgo  
Celebrating the equinox (equal nights)  
Everywhere are both  
Twelve hours long  
And the New Moon  
Always messing with our Love Life  
Remembering the Global Climate Strike:  
"This September, millions of us  
Will walk out of our work places and homes  
To join Young climate strikers  
On the streets  
And demand an end to the age of fossil fuels.  
Our house is on fire  
-Let's act like it.  
We demand climate justice  
For everyone".  
September has its Music

# Romance

---

Coming down the walls  
And reaching the morning of our heads.  
Here we'll find  
Radiance, quiet, and delight  
And the Petra Markland' voice  
Singing: "Even an angel  
Can end up falling  
Don't you cry because you're crawling  
Start again, it's a beautiful morning  
For satellites still moving.  
-Daniel de Culla



Daniel de Culla is a writer, poet, and photographer. He's member of the Spanish Writers Association, Earthly Writers International Caucus, Poets of the World, (IA) International Authors, Surrealism Art, Friends of The Blake Society, and others. Director of Gallo Tricolor Review, and Robespierre Review. He participated in many Festivals of Poetry, and Theater in Madrid, Burgos, Berlin, Minden, Hannover and Genève .He has exposed in many galleries from Madrid, Burgos, London, and Amsterdam. He is moving between North Hollywood, Madrid and Burgos; e-mail: [gallotricolor@yahoo.com](mailto:gallotricolor@yahoo.com)

# Romance

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## SEPTEMBER IN ORBIT

There's nothing more to know  
Than September Satellites  
Touching the otherside  
Of what we want to be.  
Nothing but be quiet contemplating  
This pure light shining steady  
On the floor of the Rainbow  
Thru: "To have more money  
Than we have"  
"To read more books  
"Than we buy on hire-purchase"  
"To be more stupid  
Than we thought"  
September has its Music  
This headdress where i dream  
Earth, Wind & Fire's "September:  
"There was a Bade ya  
Say do you remember  
Bade ya, dancing September"  
As a stream into a circle without doors:  
Venus, Jupiter, Saturn  
In the Summer Triangle  
Leo in Virgo  
Celebrating the equinox (equal nights)  
Everywhere are both  
Twelve hours long  
And the New Moon  
Always messing with our Love Life  
Remembering the Global Climate Strike:  
"This September, millions of us  
Will walk out of our work places and homes  
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September has its Music  
Coming down the walls

# Romance

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-Daniel de Culla

## ROSES AND THORNS.

Sobriety sleeps in drunkenness,  
Family secrets and brokenness,  
Shame and fame,  
Merry no go where,  
Fathers without heads,  
Mothers without necks,  
Upsidenness, lostness,  
Generation of television parenting,  
Penetration of malignant flimsiness,  
Pointing fingers at work ethics,  
Kids growing themselves,  
Minders with smoky morals,  
The base of a baseless nation,  
All substance imitation,  
Shallow thoughts in sallow thighs,  
Begetting lostness and bigotry,  
Sunday school lyrics that preach dry flowers,  
Who without seeds,  
Germination dies at infancy,  
Thorns outgrowing the leaves,  
And the garden is infected,  
By a blame of gods of irresponsibility,  
Counter blame the center piece,  
And we can all cry and wonder,  
Why tomorrow dies today,  
Excusing our part in it.

© Nancy Ndeke

## SCATTERED TOGETHERNESS.

From the tree that found the valley,  
Where life got planted,  
Sibling seeds did grow,  
Each sharing a surname,  
The brood answering to the pillars of family,  
There ends the tale of togetherness,  
Competitions and fatal rivalries,  
Backstabbing and Jacob manners,  
Hatreds form basis,  
Dislike climb towers,  
Divisions form and fly,  
Present at weddings,  
And funerals too,  
Where plastic smiles face the cameras,  
To immortalize a nonexistence truth,  
For the hearts are poison driven,  
And many a brother,  
Have downed a rival brother,  
And many a sister,  
Have bedded a sister's love,  
The ogres of dismal shenanigans,  
Which rule in secret,  
Many a home,  
Where silence remains an oath,  
To air not,  
The secrets that bind the home.

© Nancy Ndeke

## THE OTHER,

Who man your man,  
Wicked weekends get away,  
Shewolve,  
In shesheepskin,  
Hugging you,  
Dearly warm,  
As yours by the sun,  
Is hers by moon,  
Knowing your sweat and frowning through a smile,  
A rat,  
Well adapted to the sewer,  
She trolls the backyard,  
Where, innerwears see no light,  
She lives on phone,  
Stalking your new hair,  
To demand her own,  
She stays alert,  
Checking on your kids,  
So hers miss not the chance,  
Till, by fates quack,  
The balls drop at midnight,  
And breathe stop,  
And courts service is activated,  
Showing up with orders,  
And legal counsel in tow,  
Plus the three boys you knew not till then,  
Were brothers to your own.

© Nancy Ndeke



## Coffin's Beach

No more  
to the shells,  
to pray.  
Hold up  
your bright,  
white halo  
of grains.  
Foam gathers,  
and all sleep.  
Stars of the sea,  
waiting  
for that space.

© Meg Smith 2019

## Angel of Rushes

Gather,  
white wisps,  
to say --  
are you  
I have  
a circle for you  
I want to know  
your prehistory  
open,  
though  
blind flight.

© Meg Smith 2019

# Romance

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## Green Bracelet

Wolves are calling  
to the silent hills.  
I'm walking through  
the tall yellow grass.  
At the pond's edge,  
couples dance  
to 'No quarter.'  
I am holding up  
my arms, unadorned,  
and the wolves and I  
are laughing  
to our own  
strange music.

© Meg Smith 2019

## Tostig

Bad brother --  
one always  
draws the chains.  
One always  
give us the words  
of blood-poems.  
The door of the room  
creaks open  
to a blue  
and terrible light.

© Meg Smith 2019

## The Dark Frame

I have no structure  
but truth.  
The corners match,  
as do my words.  
This is done  
and the fingers reach  
beyond the gold border.  
This is done  
and you cannot  
vanquish the smoke.

© Meg Smith 2019

## Seagulls in the silence.

Many lined up on the rocks  
at the end of an August day  
I look in the palm of my hand  
it is written as on the sheets  
of the story of those two lovers  
that in silence they seek  
to give answers, but in vain,  
the essence of them that are among many.  
Sentinels make a barrier  
between the sea and the horizon  
and those who admire in front  
he sees only one seagull not placed there in a row  
freely circling  
on the water, flutter  
then with echoing sounds  
silence interrupted for a few  
moments before starting again.  
Masters of the gliding sky  
fast, with such mastery  
that jolts with joy,  
you follow them with your eyes, they take off.  
The ecorochs make a big noise  
distinguishes their singular sound  
from the silence interrupted for a while  
in the scenography that takes place on the spot.

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## Souls of the universe.

Lonely soul  
your essence is transmitted  
from each air molecule,  
in the words it remains Impresa.  
The wild wind  
driven by great feeling  
he arrived with courage  
to the happy heart.  
Seas and mountains has passed  
in a breath of the immense sky,  
finally arrived,  
in the hands perfume and incense.

He takes his soul twin by the hand,  
happy but also suffering,  
a tear falls from his eyes,  
distant though minds close.  
The rain their love quenches,  
every drop on dry leaves  
indicates that the goal is here  
and for eternity he receives it  
with the promise, which is not empty,  
to love it until death.  
It is a confided vote  
of feeling so strong.

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ELISA MASCIA.: Born in Santa of Magliano (Cb), she lives and works in San Giuliano di Puglia (Cb). She is a teacher, retired. From a very young age the predilection for a pencil in hand and also a camera for the still current passion to photograph events and the surrounding landscape. Writing, writing always and in every occasion a detail, a photo of a sunrise or a sunset, a painting or what is in nature and in the whole world arouses motive and inexhaustible source of inspiration She has participated in various national and international and world poetry competitions obtaining awards, certificates of participation and merit, honorable mentions. The book of unpublished poems "The grater of the moon" was published by L'inedito Letterario.

He received the Special Jury Prize for "Sogni Dipinti" at the XXXIV edition of the Histonium Prize 2019 with the Silloge inspired by 10 paintings by the great artist and poet Erminio Girardo n. his teacher died on 12/27/1924 in Milan on 02-14-2019. In the Opainternational group, insert 5 poems in the Anthology 2019 Spirit of Nature. Diploma of recognition at the world event of the Rosa y Orquídeas MIXTICA Edition III. Participation in the Salvemos world event



## Schemes

Promises of the masses,  
Trust of everyone to fulfill,  
In all such haywire to cover,  
Some people make those cheating schemes.

Believing the world to change,  
Not sure how to proceed with climate change all over,  
To make sure they are on the front of the table,  
Some people do plan those ruptured schemes.

Why they assure they are the best?  
Not even experts of the environment,  
In all such schemes they just want a bargain,  
If not done, their lives are also shut down by the same.

How we dismiss such business minded people?  
Their plans horrible than even we know,  
Only one scheme we have to assure now,  
Solve environmental problem or no deal at the least...

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## No effort

We brought climate clean,  
Our goals, talks and every movement in your service,  
Though we have made many changes since the issue raised first,  
You feel that we have done no effort.

We are fighting the enraged battle,  
Our tasks, scars and holiness all in your service,  
We have made many commitments leaving our differences aside,  
You feel we have done no effort?

Truth is that this field is political,  
Every heart in it wants payment for the work done,  
No effort is the goal of achieving much more horrible,  
Why! Can't we commit together for the more green earth?

Nature is facing crises every day,  
Our chance and foresight has also become narrow with technological limits,  
No effort is the prime of the epic we could stop much early,  
Come! Together we stop it and make a greener earth.

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## Pounding fists

One gathering blames for damage,  
Other accuses of lack of support,  
While nature is crumbling all around the earth,  
Even one room is crowded with pounding fists.

One group shouts of no finance,  
Other shrieks of corruption in the effort,  
While scars of the earth becomes extreme,  
Every country stands against each other with pounding fists.

Who cares for what we are on the verge of?  
Our lack of stand has made us lost huge,  
Pounding fists may soon be silent with one natural uproar,  
Are we prepared to lose everything in the name of collapse?

Though why even protect the earth with our efforts!  
We are busy with phones, devices and our newly made diluted servants,  
One quiet bang should subside every plan we have gone on,  
Pounding fists are today, they shall exist no more...

© 2019 Saurabh Pant



# Picture Poetry

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## Picture Poetry

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Poetry of Dark Angel

So you say you want to know me... well do you dare? Come my dear step inside my head, take a stroll with me as we pass each door within , let's see what unfolds, as the truth are told,just know once you passed the threshold there is no escaping what awaits us ahead. Let me unlock your mind with mine, and kiss each demon as they lay and wait inside. Sure you want to turn that corner? oh there is no escaping what lurks within the dark corners of my consciousness you've left your world and have now entered mine. SCREAM little one SCREAM some more, it only makes what creeps within the shadows hungry my friend, feeding on your weakness they will devour you like a fresh kill making themselves a glutton feasting on your every sin. Oh but honey you said you wanted to know me, now you've become part of me, now your lost within the shadows of my SOUL where you will forever reside.

Poetry of Dark Angel ©2019 PODA

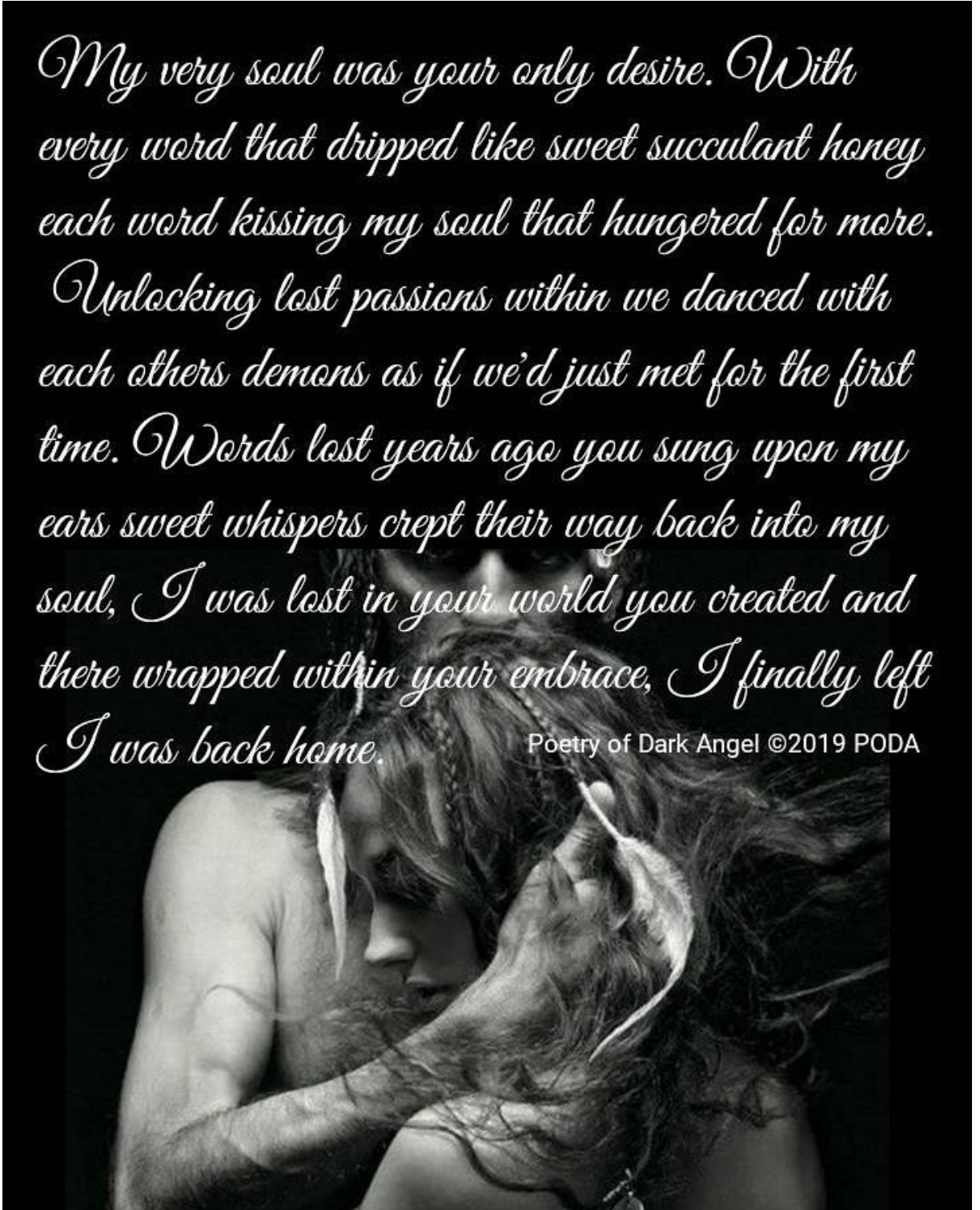


## Picture Poetry

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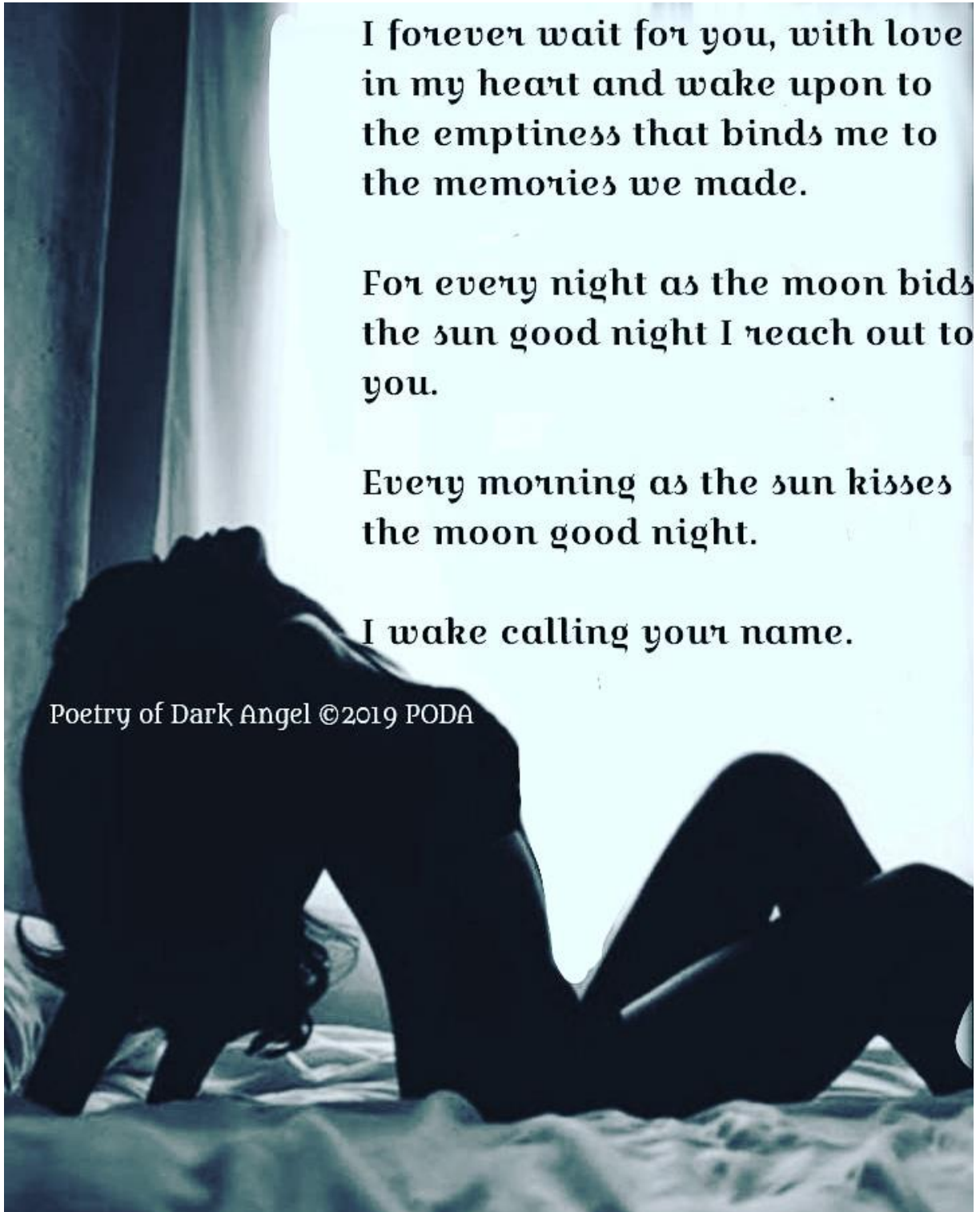
*My very soul was your only desire. With every word that dripped like sweet succulent honey each word kissing my soul that hungered for more. Unlocking lost passions within we danced with each others demons as if we'd just met for the first time. Words last years ago you sung upon my ears sweet whispers crept their way back into my soul, I was lost in your world you created and there wrapped within your embrace, I finally left I was back home.*

Poetry of Dark Angel ©2019 PODA



# Picture Poetry

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I forever wait for you, with love  
in my heart and wake upon to  
the emptiness that binds me to  
the memories we made.

For every night as the moon bids  
the sun good night I reach out to  
you.

Every morning as the sun kisses  
the moon good night.

I wake calling your name.

Poetry of Dark Angel ©2019 PODA



## Picture Poetry

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*Even though I  
reside within  
the shadows of my  
mind.*

*My heart weeps for  
our love  
will be written upon the  
tears  
that shall only shine  
upon the  
moonlit sky....*

©PODA2018

## Picture Poetry

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Monster's don't  
always lurk in  
the shadows they  
can also be found  
within the darkness  
of one's mind.  
within the darkness  
is where one  
become's weak or  
one decides he will  
not be defeated and  
fights the monster's  
that creeps.

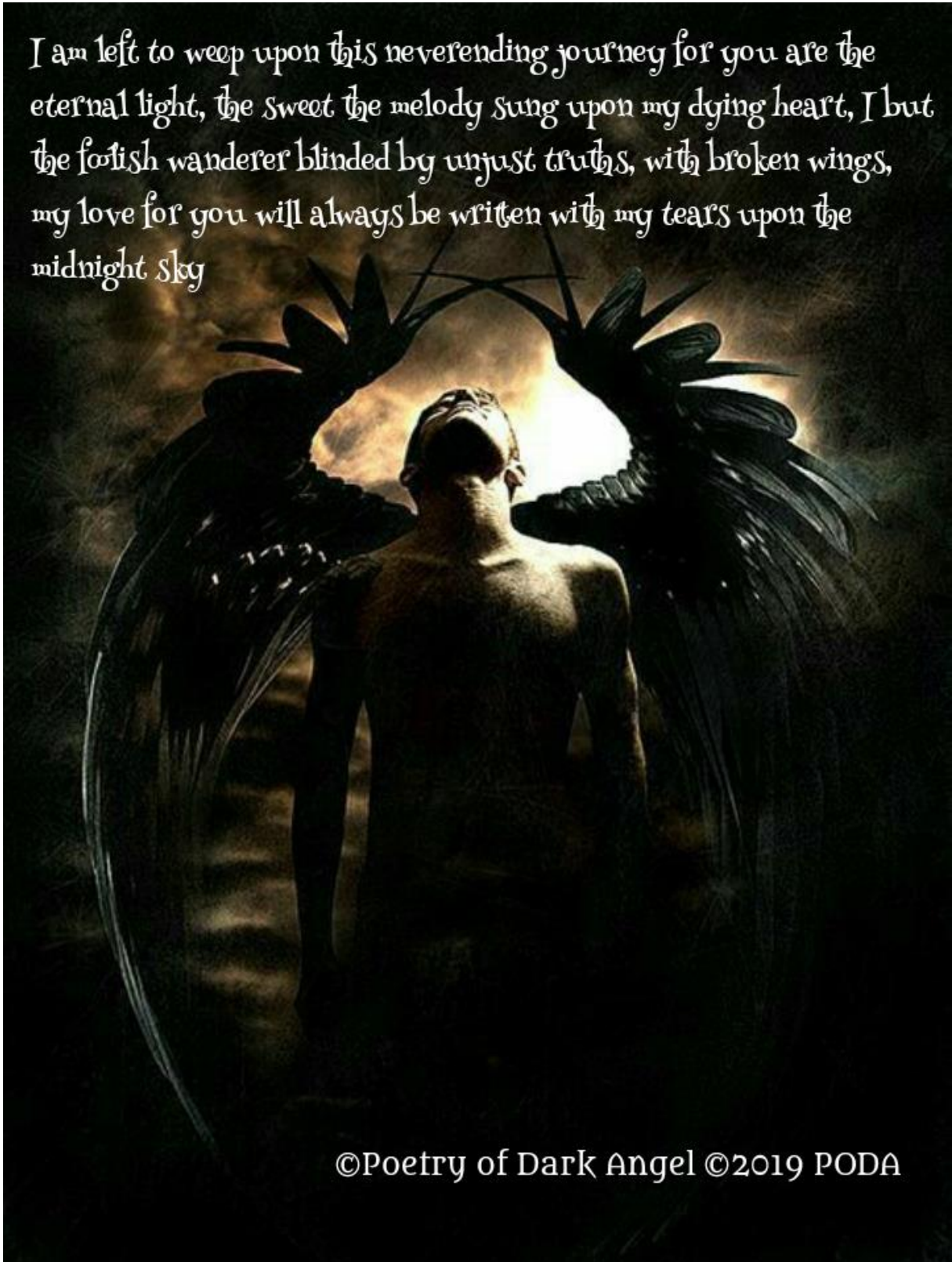
©POETRY OF DARK ANGEL ©2019 PODA



# Picture Poetry

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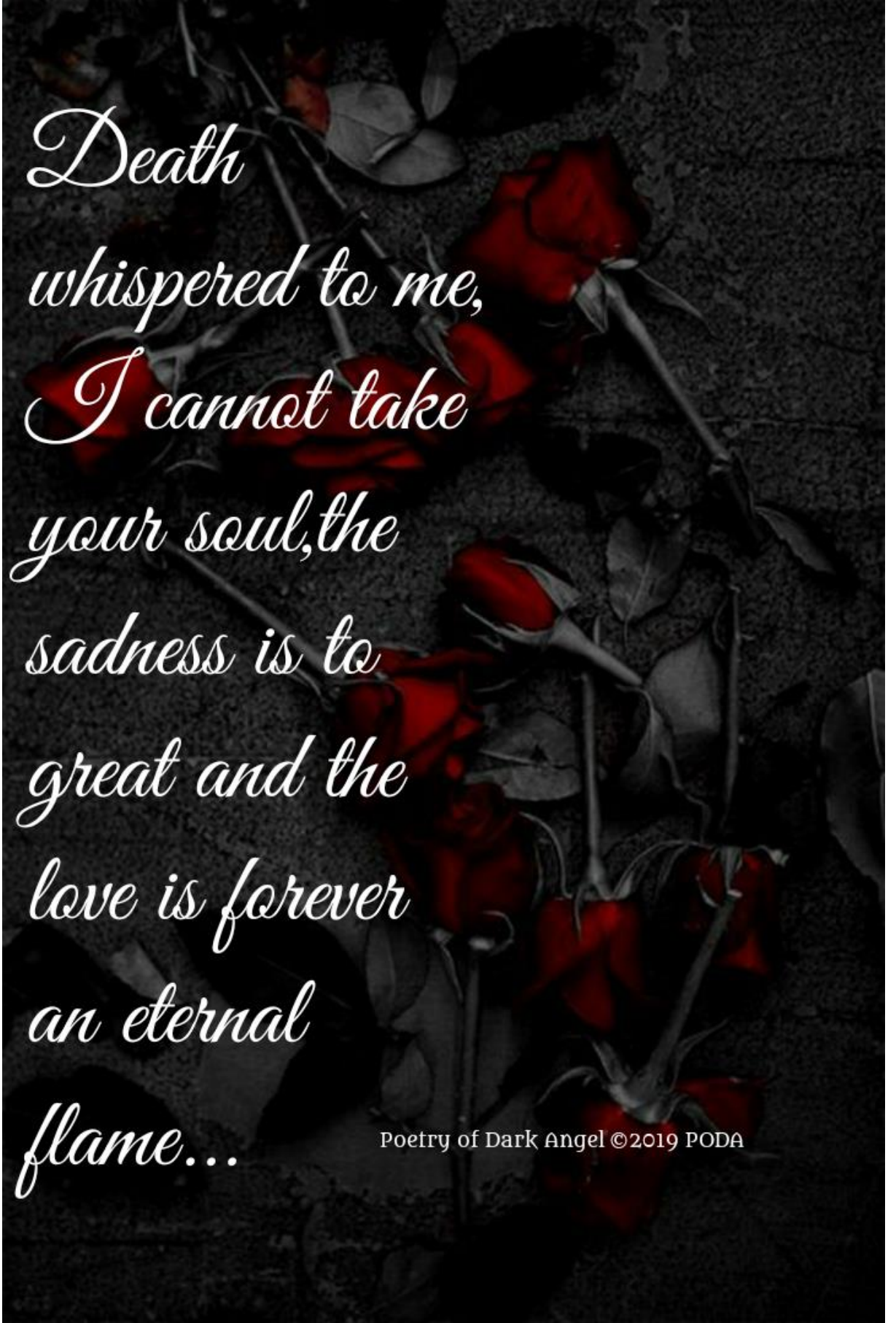
I am left to weep upon this neverending journey for you are the eternal light, the sweet the melody sung upon my dying heart, I but the foolish wanderer blinded by unjust truths, with broken wings, my love for you will always be written with my tears upon the midnight sky



©Poetry of Dark Angel ©2019 PODA

## Picture Poetry

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*Death  
whispered to me,  
I cannot take  
your soul, the  
sadness is too  
great and the  
love is forever  
an eternal  
flame...*

Poetry of Dark Angel ©2019 PODA

# Picture Poetry

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*Uncovering the secrets of my body, his words tangling me, deeper I fall within his world, with each touch, my heart races, with his appetite to feed his inner demons. I beg, to feel his hand upon my neck, my life in his hands, I melt inside, as he unlocks each door within my mind. He is the master of all my desires.*



Poetry of Dark Angel ©2019 PODA




# Picture Poetry

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*My love I will take the burden carry all your  
pain and rage as my scars. For My love, is  
stronger than any rage, you hold within your soul.*

*I carry your scars with pride.*

*I will heal your wounds with my tears. No anger  
or fear do I hold in my heart only love. I will  
wash away every scar, mend, the wounds, that cut  
deep, within your heart. Healing every memory and  
hurt inside you, catch every tear, you shed, every word  
that stung. For I am, the one, who was meant, to  
hold, your broken soul. To heal your broken wings,  
so you can fly once again. You are my angel, you  
will rise once more and fly and fly high, above all the  
hurt and pain.....*



Poetry of Dark Angel ©PODA 2017

Jerry Langdon

## **Alive And Buried**

My fingernails are full of dirt

From digging through all the hurt.

Trying to find a way out

I keep getting stuck on doubt.

Why is this hole so deep?

Why don't the shit wash away when I weep?

I scream until I suffocate.

My eyes bleed with hate,

Cursing myself for being alive,

For allowing all this to thrive.

No matter where I've been

If I fall I get back up again.

It's all just another fight

And I'm still no closer to the light.

© Jerry Langdon

EROTIC

EROTIC

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Daniel de Culla

## AT THE TOP OF ONE'S VOICE

Isabel and Fernando, adorable couple  
Enjoying dishes and snacks  
With a drink  
Through the streets of medieval Burgos  
They met themselves  
Loving and whising each other.  
With a greatest determination  
And strong commitment  
Fighting unemployment and for life  
They went to live, in a confident couple  
To a flat for rent in a new neighborhood.  
Caught in loving hug, one day  
Fernando's Seed of Love  
In Lover's shout that is delivered  
To which we have so much appreciation  
He begot his fruit in Isabel's womb  
Thanks to her beautiful ovaries.  
Oh joyful life of Isabel's womb!  
Blessed is the fruit of his belly  
That announces its splendor to the Universe  
In the form of a dawning boy or girl.  
At the end of the nine months, more or less  
We will contemplate the creature  
As flower Born crying on a rainbow  
Of living and divine lips  
In Love worthy of being praised.  
Their friends and cousins  
Happy to see her excited  
The sun going down on their face  
Comment and say to each other:  
-I can't be so long without a boyfriend.  
-I want to have a good fiancé  
And, even if my parents say  
That it has to be with a millionaire  
I don't care if it is with a sweeper  
Provided that he was a good man

# EROTIC

And that, above all, loves me  
No insulting, no harassing, no sticking.  
-I don't want to stay to dress saints  
And although I had very fat legs  
A man will ask me in marriage.  
-It seems impossible that the girl Isabel  
Be, now, a little chubby, and pregnant  
Slender and worth seeing.  
-In a little while, for September  
(Today is August)  
She will tell us if the new-born  
Will be a girl or a boy.  
In the days, with its mornings and nights  
The light of Life spreads in Isabel  
With a new grace in her beautiful belly  
And some very good words  
Aimed at her participating cousins and friends  
From her pregnancy under the tents  
From Zara, H&M, Springfield and Stradivarius:  
"If you kiss this my belly that gives Life  
You don't have to stay single. "

© Daniel de Culla

# EROTIC

## ABOUT FESTIVALS AND OTHER WITTICISMS

My mother already told me:

-Son, nowhere dogs are tied with sausage.

But me, obstinately, had to go out of my land, travel the World. A World that, for me, was always flat.

-I'm a poet, mother; and Poetry is my name. And I have to drink from other waters, because the path of Life is short, and my thirst for love and knowledge is very tight. That, here, in Madrid, mother, there is little to drag and much to lose.

-Well, son, be very careful, and call me. Behave like a gentleman, and see if you succeed in what I know you go to those festivals: "to reap that barley that the girls have between two columns that support their soul."

-Mother, I will earn a lot of money, and, although I know that the Girls' suture is worth a fortune, I will return one day and I will reward you.

My mother was really smart.

At about midnight, I went to the airport to catch a plane that would take me from here to there.

First, I was a witness of the Shoreline of Infinity. Event Horizon Science Fiction & Fantasy Special Festival "The Return", Edinburgh, Lothian, UK.

Another day, at The Hucknall Byron Festival, in Nottinghamshire, UK.

From England I went to Germany, dreaming of enjoying what I most wanted in the performances of the APA-B Association for Performance Arts in Berlin.

Oh, oh, oh. Sad and distressed, seeing that I was my own wife and, also, my dear, I flew to Australia, in order to live its extraordinary festivals at the Byron Bay: "Byron Comedy Fest", and "Byron Writers Festival".

Drinking, dancing and singing, I hurt my feet and my ribs hurt. I grabbed a table in a coffee bar, and broke my head from dreams.

- Madam, what are you looking at me? What are you looking at me?

-Son, nothing.

The time I spent in both Festival, I was not attentive to the Verse or the musical note. Just, I just looked at those pretty faces that had a sex to dip bread.

# EROTIC

When the act was over, my illusion was over, leaving the sap of my bones lifeless and heartless, because I ended up loving myself, following the Onan's footsteps.

I did not eat a thread at such a festival. I followed the steps of the girls, to see where he put it, and when he reached his portal, he always told them that I was cuming. So, they didn't answer anything to me, and they left me.

By the way, one day that I was badly dancing a tango with a great girl, in Byron Bay, Australia, I remembered the definition of the Tango that my friend Jesus did. It is: "Tango is like playing Teto: We dance; she lifts her leg, and I go into her."

I wanted to fall in love, but I was expelled by indecent from the Tango's Festival.

Very sad and heartbroken, after spending three years, almost four years, I returned to Madrid and, on the plane back home, to my own goldfinch my sorrows I told him:

-Goldfinch, goldfinch, what do you have to tell me, for a woman I love and look for and I can't get her in it.

The goldfinch replied:

- To the woman you have to treat with sweetness and firmness; and with sincere kisses you will soften its hardness.

Already in Madrid, I followed in her footsteps, as the goldfinch said; and, after all, I achieved much more than I thought.

With my beloved, my "half orange", I moved to Burgos.

Here, at the SanFran Mary Jane, a music bar, at "Asphalt Poetry" or "Brick Music" festivals, from time to time, I participate, dreaming with attending, one day, the Palm Beach Poetry Festival, Lake Worth, Florida, USA .

This site, the SanFran Mary Jeane, is a cool place, because, in addition to the festivals, if you ask to eat, they give you salty sardines, and if you ask to drink they give you broom water.

-Daniel de Culla

## FLASH FICTION / SHORT STORIES

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Nancy Ndeke

### HARD TO TELL.

When it happened, it did under the canopy of trust and faithfulness only a child is capable of. Play became prey and the hunter was the hero of all mornings at breakfast banter and lessons at the swimming pool where learning and splashing water on an afternoon was such a joy.

Waking was in pain. Walking was worse. How does a six year old winch with pain like a mother with fresh stitches?

Standing was pain, sitting was pain, how could a six year old know the bile rising pain of torn ligaments?

Pissing was pain moving bowels was pain, how could a six year old understand the pangs of damaged muscles on an act promised to be a daddy secret?

And yet, on Carols heart sat the groan of a mighty burden. One she could not share except with the source and cause of her night mare.

She groaned and winched and closed her beautiful eyes even as tears spilled down her pretty undamaged cheeks in rivulets of acidic vitriol.

“ Sit properly my baby angel” the mother admonished the little girl at the breakfast table. With pains of her own from her recent delivery, this was the first family gathering she had attended from a week ago.

Carol seemed to sit with difficulty, and seemed to favor a tilted sitting where most of her little weight was thrown onto the sides to remove pressure from the center of her frame which was on fire from the previous night’s visit by her father.

The child’s eyes closed as she struggled to adjust herself, and when she had, she clenched her little jaws with a firm bite of her lower lip.

“ There my baby. Now work on your cereals so daddy can take you to school. Ok?”

The child groaned underneath her breath as she started on her cereals. Her little hands shook. Her head was bowed over her bowl.

“ Carol baby, you are quiet” the mother observed.

“ you know why babe” the husband responded as he run his hairy hand on the wife’s slender arm.

She turned her face to his and was rewarded with a kiss on her beautiful full lips. The child heard the smack and something deep inside turned with a violence that made her gasp.

The mother missed the reaction as she wallowed in her moment of pure bliss. A perfect family that god had given her after carols father had abandoned her upon finding out she was pregnant. Getting depressed and losing her job. Losing

# FLASH FICTION / SHORT STORIES

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her mortgage and her sanity before the birth of her underweight daughter. Alcoholism and insomnia. She closed her eyes just to erase the memories from where Dan her psychologist got her from. Then, the friendship that grew into love. Love that healed. A proposal for marriage and adoption of Carol. Life couldn't be better.

"Thanks babe." She replied as she returned the kiss.

Carol dragged her cold body out of the house with the father's protective hand over her tiny shoulders. Her mother holding her week old son watched as father and daughter boarded the family car and spend out of the beautiful home for Carol to be dropped to school and husband to school. She smiled. Her life was perfect. Or was it?

At two that afternoon, a police car came calling. A gentlemen and a lady officer followed by Carols teacher.

"Is my child ok?" the mother asked quite anxiously

And the story was told but this time in question form.

Carol was in hospital waiting to go for surgery. Her little body was broken in more places than the hymen. Her famous doctor husband was helping the police with investigations and what could she tell them about child molestation in her own house?

Her world crushed.

Her senses locked and shut down. Blood drained from her face and her breath came in rusps.

"No! No! No! you have all this wrong! Noooooo!" she howled as she went into a partial mental derailment, one that grew into an anxiety attack before it turned into a manic scream that could be heard a kilometer away.

Who could tell this story really? Who could tell the story of a sensible gentleman turned an abuser of his own charge?

Who could tell the pain and anguish of such betrayal as witnessed by mother and daughter/

Who could tell the story of madness and sadness and the shocking detail of how a broken child found a tongue to tell the sordid story of her bleeding body?

The media did a mess of it but at least a lesson did suffice.

Trust cannot be assumed and human beings can be quite inhuman.

Watch over your children with extra care for the world is all so wrong.



## I SURVIVED DEATH OR DID?

The night is never silent but this one was. Not even the usual wind of an high altitude area like OLonguruone where typically, nights are punctuated by whistling of sharp shrilled winds. Not tonight. Sleep stayed an inch from every eye. Not even baby Musa who was known for his noisy breastfeeding was heard tonight. He pulled gently at the mother's dark nipple holding on tightly on the breast as if for reassurance. Father stared blankly at a spot on the high roof of the church where we had gathered that evening for shelter from what I had not really got to understand, as yet. My kid sister handled snuggly between dad and mum, her head lying on dads warm corduroy trousers as her knees nestled on mums left side.

I thought of my homework which I never got to complete. I thought of my story book that I intended to read this night. I thought of Pastor Ngecu, and his preaching earlier that evening. His emphasis on the heart of man being wicked, nothing was clear, nothing was making sense except, the night was terribly quiet and it was unnerving.

At some point, I must have been taken in by sleep for suddenly I came to, to a most bizarre scenario. My dad was holding my kid sister with the left hand while he held my mum with baby Musa with the right. I was half way covered by the baby's blanket and so it was hard to see properly, the leering faces of the hooded men who leaned over my immediate family. My heart must have stopped for a second from the sheer horror of the scene unfolding right in front of me. And there was worse.

From my peripheral vision, I saw shadowy figures standing over other families within the church and speaking in harsh threatening tones. Money seemed to be the item in demand.

Suddenly, the scene changed as quickly as it had registered in my frightened mind. For, four hooded figures entered the church splashing what must have been fuel on heads and bundles of clothes next to the handled families. That is when hell released the tongues of men and women and their children and a cry like I have never imagined rose like a wounded beast's cry of agony. Wailing filled the "house of God" my father turned slightly too where I was hidden under the baby blanket soaked on one side with petrol and mouthed something inaudible. It did not register but something else did. The fear in his eyes was frightening. And horrible to watch. My father had just apologized to me. Why? I wondered. A shot rang out and my father's head disappeared from where it had been a second before. Another shot and another and another....., I lost hearing and sight. Smoke hung heavy everywhere and when I tried to move, I found myself pinned down by a weight beyond my eight years. I must have passed out or died

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but since I registered some distant voices later that night or the following day or the following week or month, death had narrowly missed me or I had widely missed death.

But alas! It was in the same church about an hour later with the inside of the church still shouldering from burning clothing's, mattresses and bodies that I woke to. I was only alive because the bodies of my dad and mum and baby Musa quelled the raging fuel fire with their blood.

They said its tribal crashes. I say its insanity and the devil all rolled out in one. They said some day we will heal and forget all this. I say they are liars for no one can forget the apology of a father when outnumbered by people he had lived with and laughed with and worked with like the teacher who shot him. He was my teacher and dads colleague in my school.

They say we should forgive those who hurt us so we can heal. Well, am yet to get the courage to forgive or even face the truth about those who took my entire family over difference of political opinion. Am yet to find the God of forgiveness and ask him why His house of prayer became a house of carnage.

Perhaps after leaving this internally displaced peoples camp where I have lived to adulthood, I may know peace they say comes with forgiveness.

Meanwhile, my life is one large canvas of scars and faces of my dead family and the ones who committed the murders.

They call me an alcoholic. A druggie and whisper as I pass.

Am not sorry.

## PRICE OF PAIN.

The drum beats echoed across the dusty plains, competing against the lowing of tired cattle as they were hurriedly herded into the make shift kraals for the night. Sunset had barely settled into the distance hills before the legs of the dying sun added the color of bellowing wood smoke onto the scene. The smell of roast camel meat told a gay story. Woman's coy laughter seductively called the night close. Smaller children told their excitement by enacting observed adult games. An evening of cerebration of an elevation. What an evening!

Older men were squatting on the dusty patch under the only acacia tree within the compound. Their scanty hair dyed red with henna resembled crested cranes in the dimming light of day. Chewing khat and spitting the dark green remains out with forceful sputter, rendered them a club of gate keepers at the show within.

At the center of the circle of tattered make shift hovels with plastic roofing sheets flapping in the charging night wind, were women in faded bui buis and shawls chattering in shrill voices as they made traditional bread on the open fire. From a long distance away, a hyena laughed. Elders cocked their heads to the direction of the laughter. Closer by, an owl hooted. The chattering women stopped momentarily to first look at one another before transferring their sad looks to the elders. There was horror on the women's faces and one uttered a thinly veiled scream. This is because the animal kingdom could be easily imitated by sinister marauders of the night. The cow was a prized animal on these plains. "What's the meaning of this?" the youngest of the women asked no one in particular.

In answer, she got a whooping smack at her swollen bottom by the oldest woman present, promptly ending all efforts at more questioning.

"You don't question what must come" the elderly woman hissed.

A tension settled on the compound. A restlessness arose fired like a ball of fire on dry grass by the piercing cry of a child, soon joined by another. The hyenas laughter came loud and sinister and nearer. The owl hooted closer. The tempo of whimpering children went up an octave higher. The elders stood up. The young men quickly came to where the elders stood with clenched jaws and furrowed faces.

The great patriarch cleared his usually rough throat and bellowed in a tongue dripping with authority. For such an emaciated figure the tremble of his voice was quite impressive. He sounded like deep volcanic rumble.

"You know what must be done!" is all he said before the youths drew their heavy guns and spread out round the compound.

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Young men are not known to waste time putting a favorite toy to use. Here, on these plains in the semi desert of the proud nomad country more than anywhere else. The early night came alive with a cacophony of heavy bursts of machine gun fire. All other noises were swallowed by of boom of doom. In three minutes, ears were ringing as blood pleasure rose to stroke levels. The elders, both men and women knew their drill. The cooking fires disappeared. The cattle kraal was alive as the old men blended with and into them. Silence. If death was to come, the clan believed, let a man die with his favorite animal. Cow.

“Mariamaaaa! Mariamaaaa!” came a haunted scream from one of the dilapidated hovels.

A sight beyond what the elders could never remember awaited all in the dark room.

The bride. The child bride only aged thirteen had used the cover of the confusion to stick a knife into her heart and now lay still and warm in her mother’s mat. Shock and disbelief engulfed the small homestead. The intensity of the loss, the shame of the protesting child and the obvious loss of dowry for the minor was clearly registered on the bowed heads of every mature member of the group. This was her night passage to adulthood and honor of marriage. This was her cerebrated honor for catching the eye of the richest elder of the clan. This was her night of exit from a child to a woman.

No words could express the outrage of the old man whose daughter was to fetch him a handsome herd or her brothers who stood to benefit from the sale.

The night ended. The story never ended, for law enforcement comes even if a day late. By then, the story had changed and Mariam’s sad demise was attributed to a cattle rustler attack.

The truth though, is that a monster culture had eaten its own. A future cut down at the beginning.

## THE GIRL SAGA.

The girl saga, is the song of the wind that whips the loins of seekers and plowmen. It is the secret dream of waning age and weak heart beats of folklore when memories fling its cloak on what the feet used to be. They are the stories told in silence as culture cooks unsavory dishes to serve heat to cold steam emanating from men whose names came with the caves of the patriarchal train.

A girl is the eye opener of pleasure coves,

A girl is the tear holder of the pressure stove,

She holds the milk in place

She folds the kin in peace,

Her sacrifice is the song tender being roughed,

In her heroism,

Death is appeased and men praised.

The girl saga is the whispered secret in the village of villain fathers and brothers with mothers blessing a curse. Pain is the measure of guarantee passage to the next stage for more pain. The moon is the red soil that prompts the call of sharpened spears to plunder the virgin land and ensure royalty from the fragile saplings of the homesteads. A girl is the eye opener of pleasure coves,

A girl is the tear holder of the pressure stove,

She holds the milk in place

She folds the kin in peace,

Her sacrifice is the song tender being roughed,

In her heroism,

Death is appeased and men praised.

The girl saga is the old woman's story never shared in the shine of the day but does rounds with the silhouettes of long throats gossip. It is the steam in the pepper with running noses offended by the stinging nettle. Everyone knows where the cobweb is but no one may point at it. The rule of law is that clan is bigger than any man and most eloquently than all females of the harem. Duty calls for tears and mucosal discharge at the hour of lordships of the minors in cerebrated rape-man-ship. The burial ground of the community is full of bones praying for redemption from being born. A call rises every dawn with tight lips pleading for the end of justice of early harvest of a crop that withers before maturity. Marginalization was naturalized and given citizenship in the land where beauty of birth is torture for weak muscles torn twice in one season. The song of fistula chills visits to stay stamping its decay on the presently ripe plum.

A girl is the eye opener of pleasure coves,

A girl is the tear holder of the pressure stove,

She holds the milk in place

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She folds the kin in peace,  
Her sacrifice is the song tender being roughed,  
In her heroism,  
Death is appeased and men praised.

The girl saga is the role model who puts a mask to lead the limping Nation to clap in pomp and applause at visiting dignitaries. She is the epitome of maternal care oozing smiles under cracked lips from excess showmanship of bottled pain and buried grief. She dances well on wooden feet to songs laced with sarcasm and sensual innuendos that she no longer understands or cares to. Hers is the seat of queen-ship spiked with thorns the size of ram horns. Hers is the champion of losers of inner debates that the world would be shocked to know. Hers is a choreographed hymn that praises the devil in blatant lies and heavy breathing. Nowhere is this spirit of diminished presentation of the Lilly of the forest and bush tales of culture preservation more pronounced than among people speaking loftily about equal rights. If it's not domesticated hooliganism, its sexual predatory tendencies. If it's not battery, its drudgery. If it's not penury, its beggary.

A girl is the eye opener of pleasure coves,  
A girl is the tear holder of the pressure stove,  
She holds the milk in place  
She folds the kin in peace,  
Her sacrifice is the song tender being roughed,  
In her heroism,  
Death is appeased and men praised.

The girl saga is the boy saga. The girl saga is the man saga. And unless the world lights the path of the girl, the darkness creeping into the family hearth shall consume us all. One, after all is equals to two.

© Nancy Ndeke.

Ronan Quinn

## Noodles in the park

by Ronan Quinn

I was walking past him on the passageway one day and touched his shoulder to get by him. He was a big hairy type of guy with a mop of hair which went half way down to his shoulders without actually touching them. A lion's mane would not have described his head of hair, not having the predatory instinct in him, but as I was to find out he had the roar of a wild beast in him nonetheless. I brushed past him in the narrow passageway and regretted having lightly tipped his shoulder as I did so.

The touch was harmless, and was meant to be friendly while appealing, a plea somehow made from somewhere deep inside, pleading with him to make way, to give way just for one second so that I could walk past and into my room. He turned to look at me, a splinter in his eye as cold as the ice maiden's stare in winter, and a look on him that said he wanted to scream. He didn't scream, he just groaned, grumbled and glared at me in a way that was really not too inviting, and not at all well-meant. He turned and was confrontational.

Noticing that he was none too friendly with me, doubting that my intentions were the purest to start with and being ever on the guard anyway, the wardens came from nowhere, plunked their fat bodies beside me and started asking questions. The questions they put to me were not of the nice variety, not the cleanest put to me but I managed however to extricate myself from their freezing glances and walk on my way. That was my intention in the first place.

The wardens were numerous and all too ubiquitous. They were beside me when I woke up in the morning, they were beside me when I brushed my teeth, took a piss and when I was eating. They were even alongside when I was dreaming, or did I imagine this fact, when I was having nightmares and when I woke up in a sweat in the middle of the night to scream out loud, so that they could come rushing. They always came rushing because there was no privacy, absolutely none at all and I wondered to myself how people were supposed to feel better with all the constant monitoring to be had.

They said that they meant well and were a little misunderstood. They said that I could roll back to sleep again after they came into my room every morning to wake me up, in very loud voices resembling a brass band playing in a monastery while the monks were hard at prayer or akin to a noisy loudspeaker in a room full

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of people meditating. These wardens were noisy and in my face every morning, but they said it was possible to go back to sleep. They said a lot of things.

Once they had trounced my sleep pattern in one shout, they stood over me when I was having my breakfast, staring at me and staking my sausages and eggs as if they had nothing better to do in that big, wide and very open spaced hospital, as if they had no lives other than that of the patient, a life which was squeezed out of him and chewed over and then very unceremoniously spat out, back onto the breakfast plate full of sausages and eggs, which I was trying in vain to eat in peace and by myself.

The wardens were like stalkers. Or they were more like pursuers, like people out on a hunt for some animal, first of all following the poor beast for a while, then surrounding their prey in an obsessed and self-indulgent manner, and then going in for the kill, the animal being swallowed whole and alive, then half-digested before being vomited out in one whole, intact piece. It was like a game to them, a game that was enjoyed only by them, and for their sole satisfaction. The wardens were a rare and uncanny breed of their own.

One of the wardens saw me sporting a Vietnam souvenir t-shirt one day and we got chatting about it. I had been in that country a few months before my admission to the hospital and had bought quite a few of the t-shirts. Most of them had a picture of the comic book character, Tin Tin, on them, actually all of them had, if I can remember well enough. They were of different and varying colours and some of them had a few different shades and I was very fond of them all.

The warden's wife was a native of Vietnam, and he had been to the country on return flights numerous times. He warmed and softened somewhat to my wearing of the souvenirs and was fond of asking me questions about my time there. He asked whether I had been there on my own, if I liked the cuisine of the land, and how I found the people. He asked me what must have amounted to five different questions about Vietnam and my trip there, but as soon as he put them to me, he would start again and ask them from the beginning.

I felt as if I was in a fish tank, swimming around and around, doing nothing but swimming in a circle and the whole of the hospital was looking at me, no they were staring at me and analyzing me. Was it a test that the warden, nice and happy as he was with me, was saying the same thing over and over to me like a pounding drum and the wrong end of a tuba in my brain? Yes, it probably was and I didn't like it. But I couldn't do anything about it.



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The wardens were not the only predators on the ward. In fact, the hospital was full of the like. All the walls heaved at times with the sound of people screaming at each other in the main, in the small part at themselves, why were they screaming they could say it normally, but on the whole they didn't know what they were doing themselves. Nor did I. But no one asked me. Why would they ask me? I was an inmate and I was deemed to be mad, off my head and not worth a penny.

I was in here for my sins. My sins towards a woman, a girl who was no more than a girl in mentality and one who said that she was not interested in me, but not just so, she spun it out and spat me out and here I was. In a hospital, but no ordinary hospital a hospital for those who are deemed not to be able to cope and the more so not able to relate with people on a normal basis, a basis that has been predetermined by someone high up, and not necessarily in the know, in society.

I had a whole of orchestra of bored women musicians gossiping about me, normally prone to talking about Bach and Beethoven, and now given some juicy piece of melon to digest, all of them waiting for me to sink. But I didn't sink. I didn't sink in that mire, that cesspit that had been assigned to me by the four seasons of the woodwind section and I was in one piece, sitting on my own, trying to be inconspicuous, in a hospital with everyone screaming around me.

It was probably fair that I had been put here, but I didn't think so at the start. I felt aggrieved at having my privacy stripped of me and feeling none too little self-pity that I had to share a room with someone I didn't know and was wary of trusting. How could I trust him if I knew not what was wrong with him? I had made an innate nuisance of myself with the oboe player, been decried as all that is filthy in the world by a flautist, and visited from time to time by a member of the string section. Yes it was probably fair that I had been put here.

I have memories of a paddy wagon, strong ones, I can recall feeling as if I was in a chicken coop with God knows whom, recollect pulling my mobile from my only free hand and squeezing the number of my friend in London. No one had noticed that I had pulled it from anywhere, others were in their own coops pulling their own moods and frights but I texted away, for help, for compassion and maybe for a little solace at the same time.

I was none too happy at having been plunked in a police paddy wagon, and as it was all of a sudden giving me shock and had I not been in shock, probably distress at the same time. But no one was hassling me, they were calm and smooth, they were passively aggressive, they were used to it. I was not used to it,

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unacquainted with being herded from pillar to post and all the while was disinclined to get used to it. There was a way out of this mess, a circuitous one, a path which took me through the gates of a psychiatric hospital.

It would have been a totally different outcome had the girl in question been of any other nationality but Irish and straight, I am presuming, out of a convent school and indoctrinated to the hilt by the nuns on how to act and how not to act towards men by the nuns. Had the girl been Italian, or French say, I would not be in such a hospital for the mad, I would be an outpatient in my local version and being treated for something minor. But she was Irish and I here was, staring out of the window at nothing in particular.

I am wary of calling such a place a psychiatric hospital or any other label that could be dreamed up but I was worried about what people would think of me if they found out where I was and more to the point why. I was concerned that my work mates and manager would find out and I was also irked at the possibility of the neighbours getting wind of it, but how could they, I was not going to tell them and nor was anyone else. Silence would be the watch word.

I sat there looking at the window, there was nothing else to do, and figured that I could do anything. I could act the way I wanted, dress the way I wanted and even speak as I wished all because I was a lunatic. I had been deemed to be a lunatic and because of this diagnosis, whatever I did for now on would only be thought of as in keeping, in keeping with what the doctors had thought of me from the time I had been brought here. In chains, screaming and about to fit in with the rest of the inmates. They were lunatics too.

But it was not in my interests to act like a lunatic. And the more so I didn't want to, nor feel like, appeasing or placating the doctors around me and proving them in the right. They were not in the right, I was not mad. There was just something small wrong with me, and I was letting out screams because I was confined, not in a strait jacket, but I was in a place which had a coat like aura to it, not one that was keeping me warm and snug, but a coat that was made of paper and which was ready to crack after scream of one of my fellow inmates.

Was it the end of the world if the boss' found out that I was here and not pulling a sickie for the fever or a bad head cold? What would happen if the office discovered that my head was in another corner and not here on my head, for that is how it felt. Nothing would happen. I would turn up for work after my discharge, work til the crack of dawn in silence and slow mental torture in itself, and then leave, say goodbye, until the next time, and head off in a taxi. Nothing

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would happen, no one would say anything, they would think of me as they usually did.

I stopped looking out the window. I was sharing a room with a man who was always in a dressing gown; I had never seen him in anything else. I was sleeping in the same room as a guy who always had that tossed just out of bed look to him, his hair was all over the place, and he had his gown flowing down to the ground. It never bothered me that I could never remember his name, that I asked him so many times, but couldn't remember it. I had a guy next to me in my room and I was sharing my cream cakes with him.

I often wondered then as I do now, often while I stared intently out the window, for there was nothing else to do, what could possibly be the problem with my roommate, whatever his name was. I could only guess what he was called, for the umpteenth time, or pretend I had recalled it, and I could only make suppositions as to why he was in here with me, in the same room, in the same hospital, looking out the window for there was nothing else to do, sharing my cream cakes, because I didn't mind.

The hospital had a lot of manic depressives, or people with the now called bipolar, dwelling within its walls. They were as common as the gravy on the Sunday potatoes. I was envious of them; I would have loved everything like that to be black and white, cut and dry. Nothing was cut and dry and two opposites of the one pole for me, I was living in my own, very small world, with people shouting and screaming and banging on the walls when I was trying to sleep. And then in the morning the wardens came in banging their drums.

A steak knife was very common in the psyche when people thought of the mentally ill, those in need of the said. They had pictures of people wielding such kitchen implements, running and wielding, shouting and screaming, ready to strike. They had the images of people who were dangerous, with or without such knives, people to be locked up before they could strike and do an injury, people who should not be allowed to roam, let alone wield. I felt a lot of mentally ill had bad publicity.

I remember Churchill referred a lot, sometimes in passing, to his Black Dog, the animal that would chase him in his dreams, waking or otherwise, and would spur him on to great and greater things. His Black Dog was of the Rottweiler type, snarling and ever on the alert for intruders, to keep them out and to defend his master, who would then revert to the bottle as a way of getting away from the growling and barking ringing forever in his ears.

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I had neither a black dog nor a Rottweiler to keep me entertained and spur me on, but I had my demons. My demons were hard to understand on the surface, irreverent to others in the extreme and didn't just snarl at me and others, but gnashed their teeth and unfurled their wings as if to take off, but deciding at the last minute to stay by my side. I had nasty demons, right there by my side, but I wouldn't miss these demons, black and evil and nasty.

These dark creatures, unseen and unheard by everyone but me, would encourage me and egg me on, and give me advice in the side of my ear. The advice was not always clean, seldom good, but I would always act on it and wrote the opportunity at a later stage. No one could see or imagine even how these dark demons of mine were my council, my ever present friends more so than enemies, and my constant and enduring company.

They first appeared in a black night in September, the previous September, and had stood at the end of the bed as I got up to go to the toilet. They were still at the bottom of the bed when I returned with dripping hands, I had washed them but had refrained from drying them, and they started talking to me as I got in under my covers once more. They appeared regularly to me after that, always when I was on my own and always when I was at my most vulnerable. They were my companions.

These characters, for want of another term, for they would appear when they felt like it, but often and with increasing regularity when I didn't feel like seeing them or when I was feeling under the weather. They would ensure, invariably, that there were more storm clouds over my head than usual and would darken my spirits, and do nothing for my mood. But I would not be without the demons; they controlled me and pointed me in the direction every time that they appeared to me.

My life had changed since the demons first appeared. I have an idea that I was the more focused for them being in my life and being an integral part of it. I thought a lot more with concentration and with more premeditated thought than without them, but it could be said that I was becoming more reliant on them, more stuck to them whenever they appeared. I was my demons and they were me, one and the whole, together.

I always felt, or around this time anyway, the time of my incarceration in the hospital, for it can only be called an incarceration, a kind of imprisonment, that people without demons don't know what they are missing, that they were lacking something from their lives, that they were in essence and to a large degree boring people. I had been placed on a higher kind of altar thanks to my

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friends, these demons, and everyone else was jealous off me, for the guidance, for the concentration and for the constant company that they provided me.

A lot of music is coming back to me now, from that time that I spent right there, a lot of tunes I can associate with a certain event or time in my life, the association is all the more poignant and prolonged the more I hear that individual music. I can relate to dark passages in my life according to dirges sung by the hardest wailers or happy times linked to music performed by pop bands or girl groups. The music, once played, sets my mind racing and my thoughts spiraling into memories, good or bad.

A piece of a melody is returning to me as I write and think of that hospital, that stay in the ward, a piece paid by U2 and one of their earlier and better stuff. The song was one track of an album kept in the common room by one of the inmates, one of the manic depressives, a curly headed red head, and he allowed me to play it when he was not around. He permitted me to associate this song of lost and frustrated love by the Irish mega group with the back drop of wails and shouts and the endless repetitive questions and tests of the wardens, walking up and down.

The music I am recalling makes me feel sad even now, the music kept playing on the manic depressives stereo even when I was in another room, not played or requested by me and in making me feel sad, I wished that someone would take hold of the stereo and would just turn it off. But no one turned it off and the music played over and over, never giving me a break and masking me feel as if the tears were just around the corner, in my neighbour's bedroom waiting to visit me in the night when no one was around.

The ghetto blaster or sound system or whatever it is called now, as I say, was the property of a manic depressive, a carrot headed bipolar sufferer, one more contrary than not and one who was always popping onto the balcony for a cigarette and then he would growl, turn his mouth down and pretend to be at war with the world, or maybe he was, if the world was at war with everyone in the ward and along the corridors and put here on the balcony where people stood to have a cigarette.

There was nothing else to do in the ward but smoke, the smoke churning out from the patients mouths became the lingua franca of the whole hospital, filling the lungs with a gooey mess of tar and nicotine, relieving the inmates minds of what they had to say next to the psychiatrist when he did his rounds and instead letting him, rest, concentrate on nothing and just standing there with the rings of

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smoke rising up to the slit in the window separating the balcony from the outside world, the freedom outside.

His red hair bristled in the wind, the hair on the hand of the manic depressive, I never got his name, the smoke rings getting in between his strands, of which there were many and then leaving them standing on end. They stood on their roots, their red roots and on each beat of the songs blasting from the sound system in the next adjoining room to the balcony where the smokers were, the hairs would sway gently and curl a at the ends as if agreeing with the lyrics of the songs.

I never knew his name because I didn't care. I didn't care what people were called or for that matter what he called himself because I was focused on myself, focused on keeping my head down and not causing ruptures with the other inmates and just making sure that someday I would get out of there. I never asked. The wardens had the situation constructed so that no one varied anything about those around him but himself and it made people selfish in a way, but incredibly insular.

Living on a form of desert island amidst all the screams and shouts from behind the walls of my bedroom in the small hours of the morning was futile. The soul searching forced on us was not working and could never do so because I existed in relation to other people. I was in the hospital due to someone else and I would one day leave the place and go to other people. The soul's searching forced on me left feeling bitter towards the others in the hospital and a little lonely, especially at night.

There was a guy in the ward who was very strange. Yes, there were a lot of very strange people in the ward, a lot of strange things going down. This guy was very much, so, very much to me, I don't know why, I pretended he wasn't there. He didn't go away when I pretended he was somewhere else, it didn't work, I should have tried something else. The guy shouted at me every time he saw me, and then he wondered why I wouldn't talk to him. This guy was the king of odd balls

I wonder now, looking back after a time has gone by, whether it was his way of being friendly with me, his way of getting close in a strange place where no one wanted to get close to anyone else, they just wanted to put their heads down, keep them down, lurk a little when necessary for the sake's of appearance and then kick the walls in anger when no one else was looking. And then act a little mad for the wardens when they went by with their clipboards, to monitor how you have been, because it has been five minutes since the last check.

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There was a distinctly odd man sitting in the common room, where there was a television, shouting in the same chair every time I entered, every time I saw him in the plush armchair, a chair that he had to have or he would not be able to cope, he would start shaking and emitting spit from the side of his mouth, he had to be placed in the same way every time. So I gave him the chair, there were others in the room anyway, I didn't care.

I didn't care either that he was foul mouthed, and it was the same to me that he looked every inch like a ferret from Wind in the Willows fable, with his shaven hair and sharp nose. The ferrets always conjured up images of sneaky animals out to get the poor Ratty or the down on his luck Toad. The guy in the chair looking like a ferret was harmless to anyone around him, a little brusque with the guards, but I can't blame him for that and he left me in peace for the main.

I say in the main because every time I entered the room, that one with the television, the guy in the chair, the same chair each time, asked me for the motorbike mag that he had seen me with on more than one occasion. He was into his bikes, as I was into them, but I just loved to leaf through the pictures without wanting to worry my mum by buying these wheels which would probably see me fall as I turned round some bend in the rain and in the slush.

Little did the orchestral piece of art know that I was having this conversation in this room, with the television, with this character from a well-known children's book, in such an environment. I didn't care about this either, I was learning not too care about a lot of things, the hospital had turned me inwards and I was beginning not to care about myself. I smoked, I drank a lot of coffee and I gave my motorbike magazine to the guy in the armchair every time I saw him.

There was a girl sitting in the corner, arms folded across her breasts, just sizing every one up. It was the corner between the room with the television and the balcony where everyone smoked. She was always there, smoldering like a half baked Alaska, half Indian and half something else, I don't know I never asked, it was none of my business. She sat in the corner as if it was the most natural thing to do and with an unerring look off absolute contempt sprawled across her face.

I shared her contempt, her almost personal hatred and even shall I say despair at the wandering crowd, at the wardens and at the gardener doing his thing outside on the grass, there beyond the window. I shared her dislike at being stuck here with everyone around, in complete isolation from all others, while slowly cringing and screaming inside as the moans made their way bit by bit through the system and released themselves in a loud shout.

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The clock above her head, as she sat in the corner struck five. I thought it had struck five a long time ago. Time moved slowly in this ward, the never ending boredom and the longing to fill the hours with something, just something, even if it was to go out on the balcony for a smoke. The endless smoking filled seven minutes, just long enough to reach the filter, and then it was back to the slow moving hands on the creakingly slow clock above the head of the girl in the corner.

The birds were getting cold singing in the trees,, the leaves and just started to fall under the birds wings and I first met her in the autumnal breeze in Wexford. She and the rest of the merry band had been on tour of the county for a week when I first arrived to the area for the first time, seeing the strand in Rosslare as a novice and a fledgling aficionado of the delights of Bach and Beethoven. But I still held no affinity with the woodwind section.

I found her at one almost excessively flirty, in a way that didn't really matter, which was at once off hand and care free. I found her keen to talk and up, close when her husband was nowhere to be seen but otherwise off hand with me and with others. She was used to timing her breaths to the cue of the conductor but I was parched in comparison, unused to breathing in different ways but the norm, I knew just one way, direct and honest and to the point.

The first time I met her I thought she was all hair and teeth. I felt that she looked as if she had just emerged from a bush, having been dragged, lashing out her feet and arms at her assailant and had not got around to looking in the mirror. Her hair was lazily tied back as if she didn't care how she looked and her two top teeth protruded from her mouth like a cartoon character when she spoke, giving her a gawkish look to match the things that she came out with.

I didn't look back in anger but I quite looked back in tears. The tears would swell slowly on the corner off my tear duct; a salty taste would rise up in my eyes and mouth, a tide of tears ready to flow. My pillow at times like this was a great salvation for hiding this from the wardens, they might ask me questions, too many questions, it was none of their business anyway. I would get out of here sometime, and then I wouldn't have to explain to anyone. I wouldn't need to cry.

Never lose your cool he said to me as he peed all over the floor. I had just rushed him to the toilet to make sure he did what he called his number two and had painstakingly washed and dressed him and pulled his pants nearly as far as his knees, when the urine emerged, splashing and streaming in a line from his groin and hitting the floor in a splatter. Never lose my cool he advised me as I sat there looking at the mess on the floor. I was calm and bewildered.



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My dad had always walked in a stride of his own, we couldn't keep up with him as children, we had strides very much of children, but we tried none the less we tried to keep up with him, trying not to step on the lines of the pavement as we did so, because that would bring bad luck to us. It would bring bad luck to dad too, in his dominant way of walking and his quick walk, but he stepped on the lines and didn't care if the luck would turn.

I had been having recurring dreams for a while off my dad, he was just around, just present in my dreams, I was of having a pint with him one minute, the following I was doing a do it myself job with him in the attic, that place I rarely went into due to a fear of heights and a fear of falling down, down, from the ladder or I had the imagination that he was just in the background. The ladder didn't collapse under me, I didn't have a pint with him and I woke up the next morning in a sweat.

The inmates would be allowed in the fresh air on daily walks about three times a day, to march round the perimeter of the playing field and back again. Daily walks would be withheld permanently and forfeited if refused three times in a row by the patient, but no one bothered to tell me the rules of the farm. I refused because I wanted breathing space on the ward for even half an hour, space to breath from the screams and the despair and the lack of privacy. But someone came up to explain to me.

My strides were long and my strides were strident. I wanted to lose the others; I wanted to break free from them. When I walked I was quicker than all else though I was going slowly. I didn't have to try. But there I was told to slow down, I was warned the others might have heart attacks, I was told that we didn't want to lose any one. Felt the need to tell me everything. When it suited them. I was told a lot of things but I wanted to break free.

There was a big and very large wall surrounding the playing fields that we walked around. The wall had been there, in my estimation, for a few hundred years, and would probably have been able to tell a yarn or crack a joke on the antics that it had been witness to down through those ages. I couldn't decide whether the wall was in place to keep the outsiders from coming in and annoying us or whether we were being held prisoner by those pieces of stone and paste. But the wall was high, the wall was sturdy and the wall was not going to be going anywhere any time soon.

I started by wanting to take her for a friendly drink. Why was I so keen? I have no idea why I wanted to take her for a friendly drink, something inside talked me

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into it, something gnawed at me from inside my gut, from inside my body I blurted out if she liked a certain bar, in a certain place, she didn't know it, she wasn't sure, but could she come back to me later about it. I asked her again but then I was already being too persistent, the tide had turned and she was having none of it.

Maybe it was because I was not used to women that I was built so persistent, that my strategy if you can call it that back fired on me. Maybe it was for the very reason that I had only a few romances that I was ill equipped to deal with the horn blowing and the double bass of approaches, half approaches and even nonexistent approaches. I had questions whirling in my brain as to why I was doing what I was doing and where I should be doing it, but no one gave me any answers, not even my demons.

Outside of that window, where everyone saw the outside world, where everyone gazed, because there was nothing else to do but smoke, the groundsman was busy cutting the grass out of the window. He did well in cutting the grass, because his turbine engine was slow and methodical and only cut every second blade, so he had to go back and cut the missing link, the missing link among a hospital full of very odd links and no links and odd balls.

The sound of the television woke me up in the morning, the sound of the television put me to sleep at night, its slow monotonous hum was a constant draw to do the only other thing left possible on the ward, to smoke on the balcony. The television rehashed the same, the usual, the ordinary, all day and on each day. It was on all day and it was a drag. I tried turning it off, I ignored the dissent, I hid the remote, it was found again, I tried putting a pillow on my head, I tried.

In was not allowed out of the ward for even one minute, not allowed out on my own without supervision and not given permission to piss without a warden knocking on the door of the toilet after five minutes. I was all right in the main, I didn't need constant supervision, I wanted freedom, to roam, to wander to hide if need be. I felt like a criminal amongst a lot of thieves and delinquents, I felt as if I were in a strait jacket, invisible yet, tightening, I felt ever so gradually numb. The food that was laid out for us in the evenings was made to put on the calories, the food was designed to fatten us up. I was worried about my weight having had put on weight before, looking like a lardy pan cake didn't suit me, I didn't like it and didn't what to return there, I had my dreamed up aura to look after. I had an idea of myself that I wanted to keep and that I was carefully nurturing and which perhaps was out of sync with reality, but I didn't care, I didn't think about it, I was too busy looking at the food and fattening.

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I felt as if little gnomes had lined up outside the window to spook me, I had the feeling that not just gnomes but all other types of spooks were out to get me, the world was out to get me, I was vulnerable perhaps, and therefore, they knew it and preyed on me, came in the night to sit in the window and look in at me. I was not all right, despite what I wanted to tell myself, I was feeling low, I was in the depths, I had put myself there perhaps, and more, and everywhere I looked I saw enemies in the corner, gnomes outside the window and more lurking in wait.

She thought the gnomes were dancing in the prairie when I spoke, the look on her face fell a few decibels when I opened my mouth, I blabbered something and retreated, muttered something and gave way, repeatedly surrendering, involuntarily yielding to the dumb struck, wordless state that I found myself in when I opened my mouth to her. She was all hair and teeth for sure, but I had a feeling for her that persisted and irked me whenever I said anything to her.

She thought I was talking in tongues when I asked her for a drink. She thought the pixies had formed an armed guard around the concert hall those days when I persisted in calling round, just visiting to say hello, just passing, just not minding my own business, just whatever. She thought a lot of things, she thought of the woodwind section, the lack of acoustics, the cold air circling around the string section every time the door opened, she thought very little of me.

He was built more like a lumber jack, built more as if he belonged in a log cabin in the forest, but a calmer more relaxed person had not graced the ward before. I didn't know what was wrong with him, maybe nothing, and I didn't ask, but he was heavily into his yoga, telling me from the times that I had the pleasure of sitting down beside him. He had taught yoga in his time, continued to espouse it and was sorely missing the art since he had been admitted to the ward.

I had done yoga before my encounter with the lumber jack, indoctrinated others into the practice and was all set to continue, when I had a scrape, I was running to meet a girl, the snow was heavy and falling, a brunette on the other end of the run, a bunch of flowers in one hand, and a sudden slip backwards and a sprained or broken wrist for my experience. Brunette never got the flowers, I gave up in pain, hurtled back to the flat and was no longer able to lean on my hand as the yoga master was humming and awing to our movements.

The lumber jack, whatever his name was, introduced me to a chap, a tiller by the name of Pat. I remembered Pat's name because I had a lot of interaction with him, he had this habit of pacing up and down the corridors to the high chair in

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the corner, where he would sit down with me nervously, stroking his long flowing hair, his goatee would be scratched and he would tweak his knees as I spoke. I remember Pat's name because he introduced me to jazz music.

The jazz man Pat the tiller, introduced me to jazz as if he was enrolling me into a secret society or asking me to join a conspiracy or a bomb plot in the making. He indoctrinated me into the jazz world and I took to it as if I had never heard any other kind of music, though I had a smattering of it already, a smattering which grew into a blossoming tree, the jazz tilted out through the walls from then on, thank you Pat the tiller for introducing me to jazz.

I would pick up my pay packet every Friday hence, for some inefficient reason in a small brown envelope, I would go to the record shop and peruse the titles of unknown musicians, unknown to me due to my novice inclination, pick out two discs and add them to my burgeoning collection. I would play the disc at semi sound levels, not disturbing any one including the neighbours, how would jazz disturb, and I would remember the man who paced, the man who sat nervously beside me, I would remember Pat the tiller.

I was standing one day on the corner of Molesworth and Kildare, I was looking down at the gutter at the side of the pavement, a paper boat was sailing through the dirty water, some child had forgotten to pick up it after having played with it and made it, and I had a sudden feeling that the wind was hitting me from behind. I jerked backwards, grasped by the wind and looked to see nothing, or nothing in particular, just the passersby, the makers of the paper boats in tow, and a lot of traffic splashing me with the dirty water from the gutter.

I didn't understand her and she didn't understand me. This fact should have changed a lot of things but it didn't change a thing. It should have changed the number of my visits back stage, it should have altered my enthusiasm for the tied back hair, lazily, the set of teeth peeping through and the lack of charm, the total lack of charm, the seething nonsense emanating from the reeds and mouth pieces of the woodwind section. It didn't change anything.

There was another pacer through the corridors but this time, unlike Pat the tiller, he would take three paces and stop, make a sign of the cross to anyone present and then pace another four before stopping to do the same. He would make a blessing and sign every time he halted even if there was no one to bless and sign, this guy who thought he was Jesus, walking up and down, pacing, pacing and stopping.

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I thought all along that he was in another world, and that he couldn't possibly know me, be aware of me, or even care about me given that he had a lot weighing him down on his mind. I have met him a lot on the street as he shuffles along, playing the part of a member of the Committer, his long brown beard nearly tripping him up as he talks, now he greets me like a comrade quoting the manifesto to me, his hand goes up to his face as he blesses me as a fellow traveller.

I found the nights long and hard, I found that the depression was hitting me in the evenings, I felt that the longer I stayed here the more I felt like screaming in unison with the others around me in a kind of painful chorus. The longer I was in here, I thought, the longer the wardens were getting a bit worried about me, they would stop asking me the same repetitive questions in a pointless tone of an unsaid manner all of their own, they would just stand there in the corner near the balcony where people smoked and the television room and just stare.

Suddenly the doors flung open for me, the windows were no longer worth gazing through, and they had let me out after six weeks. Suddenly. All of a sudden, I could cross the threshold of the ward and into another, from there into the lobby and from the lobby into the waiting car outside. I let out a loud scream in the car park with mum waiting for me with one of her hands on the bonnet of the engine, the other on her hip as if she were waiting for more than a scream from me. The scream I let out was primal, therapeutic and long overdue.

Why had they let me out? I have no idea why they had let me out. I have no idea why they, the wardens and the doctors, had decided suddenly to stop treating me like a criminal, to stop asking me the same questions about Vietnam and to give me the same stare when I was eating, dressing, peeing, and trying very hard to sleep. They, the wardens and the doctors, had probably got tired of banging their drums every morning to wake me, only to tell me to go back to sleep. Or maybe they just needed my bed.

I had no worries about meeting her; she wanted nothing to do with me. I held no fears at meeting her by accident on the street, as if by chance, for she drove everywhere and was not seen by daylight. I was not worried that our paths would cross, I was not in the least bit concerned, because I didn't care anymore, I shouldn't have cared before and I was devoid of any care about the future, the chance of returning to the mad house, or the possibility to be treated like a criminal again. I didn't care anymore.

The next time that I entered the threshold of my local bar, I was greeted with a lot of smiles, a lot of silence and too, many a whisper. I didn't mind if they knew

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where I had been, what I had been through, where I was going or where I chose not to tread. After time the whispers and the silence died down, just like the winter that was approaching and was proving to be very challenging and very cold, and like the ice that was forming on the window outside my bedroom window.

Back at work was a different story, but a tale worth reading as my fellow workers were completely oblivious as to my travails, stuck in their own worries and self-absorbed with deadlines, sometimes flashing by and sometimes moving very slowly at a canter, but always looming was the English Premiership and the obsession with football which took precedence over any person's fears and experiences. I at once joined in with the football talk, forgetting myself and who I had been and joining in the banter.

I had a lethargic and somewhat careless attitude with regards to the present, the hospital leaving me with a bad taste in my mouth, but as for anything in the future tense, I was boundless in, well, not quite optimism, but a presentiment that things could not get any worse and could only improve and that when affairs were outside of my control, they fell away between my fingers as the sand on the beach does, and instead of swimming against the tide perpetually, I was to just float and see what the waves would bring in.

I lay there on the beach, the seagulls were crowing and cowering, predatory as usual, I saw the sun slowly set on another day, the sky went a little red in patches, the cold started to set in, but I was happy, no content, there were no wardens monitoring my breathing pattern, no inmate screaming in my ears, and just the odd litter collector walking past me. I got up, staggered as far as the water. It was cold, it was November, but I didn't care at all.

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## A brief encounter

by Ronan Quinn

It wasn't so much that her eyes were deep blue like the colour of the salty sea down the road from me, nor was it the way that her hair went up at the ends as if it had a life of its own. I wasn't sure myself what it was. But there was something there, something which attracted me hard and keenly to her on first glance. Nor was it a glance, neither from me nor her, it was a look which seized me when it was emitted and hung with me like the rings of smoke from the guy sitting next to me at the bar I had been waiting at.

The bar was full that night, the bar I usually frequented when I was in the city centre, unusually full for a Sunday night and unusually full for any time I had been here. There was a long bar stretching from the left near the toilets all the way right up to the exit, which had a habit of opening and shutting every second as the people came in, looked around and changed their minds to leave. Not that there was anything wrong with the bar to change their minds, it had an atmosphere all of its own, and had a charm just like the breath of air blowing in the middle of July. But this was not July, this was the end of February and the door was opening every second.

I had been waiting at the bar, sitting high on a stool, watching this door open and shut for about half an hour. I was always early for meetings and always would be, perpetually waiting for people who themselves would be late. This time I was anticipating a Russian, a contact from the internet, a new one, and one which I hoped would lead to me practicing my language skills on her, for she was a woman, a young one, around the age of thirty. I hoped this woman would entertain me a little, have a story to tell, or maybe two and that she would be an excuse to leave my computer at home for a few hours once in a while and be a diversion for me.

But I had my doubts. I had experiences of a relationship with a Russian girl before, a tempestuous one, fond of her as I am to this day, but it had left an imprint in my mind, deep and festering which had, rightly or wrongly, put me off all Russian girls for years to come. Probably wrongly. But I was giving this girl a chance, and maybe she would be different. It would be wrong of me to lump all people from the same country into the same mixture, wrong of me to generalize. But I had my reasons. And my doubts, too.

Apparently she was a translator, one of her characteristics which appealed to me, or shall I say crept up on me, for I was one too and knew the joys of the

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printed and translated word and the pitfalls that emanated from it, for it had made me a dreadful pedant and annoying to be with if a person hadn't put in the correct apostrophe in his oral speech. Yes, she was translator too, she was a Russian also and I quietly seethed and hated her for it. But I had decided to meet her.

The first thing I noticed about her was the her grip on the door. As I have said, I was used to the draught from the door, or maybe I should have sat somewhere else, because I lived with the sea breeze in my ears, but what I really noticed was the indecisive and half-hearted way she had of opening that ever swinging door. She didn't know if she wanted to come in. Nor did she know if she wanted to leave. Little did I know that this was going to be a characteristic of our relationship.

She sailed like a parachute over to where I was sitting, not taking off her coat, but offering her hand to mine. She didn't offer her cheek to be kissed, I didn't try to kiss it and she sat down beside me. She took a deep breath, a long deep breath and looked over at me, beside her, with a look that had nothing behind it, but one which had at the same time a lot going for it, one with potential and one which enticed mine onto hers. Her name was Natasha, a name which was to linger with me for a long time to come.

Natasha didn't have a pick on her, or at least none that I could see. But what Natasha did have was the deepest, most longing pair of blue eyes that had been seen. A pair which enticed on the one hand, while also retaining in them a look that she was not really here but in actual fact running from something, that she had left Russia in a hurry and did not know when she would be back. She didn't know if she would stay here, she didn't know if she would be a fine translator, she didn't know if she wanted to stay in her job as a waitress. As I was to find out, Natasha didn't know.

Natasha, and Natasha's eyes, sat beside me, conjuring something up inside me and entralling me every time she opened her mouth, every time she looked at me. Every time she looked at me, I was struggling to find something intelligent to say in response, battling not to look at her too much, but also fighting with myself to look at her enough to pay her enough attention, and to show her enough of me. When she glanced over at me, Natasha was like a slowly working worm, gnawing at me and squirming through my body. From the moment that she walked in that swinging door, Natasha had me.

One of the first aspects about her that I noticed straight away, as she sat down on the stool beside mine, was that she was almost completely flat chested. This



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had never bothered me before in girls, or at least I didn't let on to myself that it did, but I noticed it in Natasha at once. Maybe I had become a shallow so in so? But I put it to the back of my mind as she began to talk to me and told myself that I would think no more of the matter.

What we talked about didn't matter to me and didn't seem to matter to her. The conversation flowed at once, not just from me but from her. We talked about books, probably a little too much, literature being one topic I can wax ad nauseam about, in my opinion, and I discovered that she had a background in philology, a fact which she was immensely proud of. She was enormously happy with her intellect, a little snobbish about it at the same time, and seemed to admire my recent completion of a master's course in Russian, not something that I was snobbish of in my own right.

The fact that she was Russian wore heavily on me, a fact that Natasha sensed from the off. It was not so much that I loved everything connected with Russia, and I had spent a lot of my life, no actually most of it, looking towards the East, it was more a matter that I loved the country one minute and it got on my nerves the next. It got on my nerves for the very reason that I loved it. That it had consumed me and bewitched from an early age, and had enchanted me to boot. Natasha was Russian and I liked this about her. But I also hated it.

She remarked that she wanted to be a literary translator, that she wanted to translate the works of Tatyana Tolstaya. She admired me for being a literary translator. Or so she said. I didn't believe her when she said it. I don't believe her now, looking back. I thought it was just a fantasy, a young person's fantasy. For I was older than her, but not by much. But by enough for me to see sense, where she didn't think it existed. Natasha wanted to translate books, she said.

Natasha spoke English incredibly well, for we spoke in English and not in Russian, she wanting to practice her language skills, her reason for being in the country. She spoke English very well, but up to a point and then I lost her, though she would be convinced that she understood me and that her interpretation was correct. For Natasha was always correct, she was always right.

Why on earth did we not speak in Russian? Why did I not 'train my Russian' as she put it, why did I not flex my linguistic abilities and perhaps impress her that way? I could have done, but I was lazy. But no, more than that I was reaching an over saturation point in the language and was keen to take a rest from it. Just to sit at the neighbouring stool from a pretty Russian and let her flex her tongue and let her make the linguistic efforts. But perhaps I am right. I was lazy.

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I bought her a coffee while I had a beer. Then I bought her another coffee. She would be up all night. Yes, perhaps she would. Another one followed that cup. I noticed that she was making no effort to delve into her own wallet, and this gave me a warm feeling of masculinity, a feeling of being happy. In all the time that I was to know her, I would see her spend two euro of her own money. Perhaps she was right. Perhaps it was my role to spend my money on her, perhaps.

Her eyes looked up at me from her place beside me and made me dance inside. But she also had a kind of hang dog expression on her face, matched by the radiance in her eyes, which made her look vulnerable in none too small a way. I had the feeling from her conversation, when it was not about books, that she didn't know where she was going and that she certainly didn't know how she was going to get there. She was running from someone or somebody, yes, but she was shy to tell me from whom or from what.

It was dark outside the window panes. I didn't like that. Nor did I like the fact that it was raining, and not just raining but raining heavily. It never rained in Russia but it poured. But I wasn't in Russia, I was in Dublin. I was with a girl with a very pretty face and two large eyes which were at this moment boring a hole in the counter top. I was longing to tell her how pretty she was, but it was too soon. Too soon after having met her. And the rain outside gave a kind of atmosphere to my thoughts.

Natasha had a delightful way of expressing vowel sounds in English, some of which, in fairness to her, were alien to her native Russian tongue. Her pronunciation was not quite rural Ireland, just bordering on back street Dublin, but her expression was cute and the same time funny when she articulated. She had a positively delightful way of pronouncing the word coffee, she gave it a full O sound, and I contained myself from smiling and stopped myself from laughing.

She informed me that she had been staying in a house full of Brazilian girls for the last six months and by this stage she was well and truly fed up with the noise of the samba wafting, thumping more like, through her thin bedroom walls at home. She desperately wanted to move and was so far searching in vain for a viable replacement. A chance to live with her Russian girlfriends was enticing and mouth watering for her. She was nearly decided on it.

I had spent nearly two hours in her company by the time I looked at the time on my mobile phone. I was reluctant to leave her so soon and go but I didn't want to appear too keen to maintain her presence so soon after having first met her. Actually the mere sight of my looking at the time set the motion of leaving in

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train and had Natasha nearly on her feet in anticipation. So, I put on my coat, a light one considering the time of year, and got ready to bid adieu.

It was as if I was leaving on the morning train, I was leaving abruptly and dare I say it, unexpectedly. I got up from the stool, and proffered my hand to be shaken by hers. I don't know why I didn't just kiss her on the cheek, either side of her nose, that oh so splendidly soft skin of hers which I was later to find out about. Maybe it was bashfulness, but she was no better, she didn't offer her cheek to mine. I kissed her on the cheek and left through the door which was always opening and closing.

She had made an impact on me. I can say this straight out and at once. She had got under my fibres and had already begun to play around with me. I had upped and left and left her behind to finish her coffee on her own. I had left her behind in the bar on her own. This was positively the ungentlemanly thing to do in the circumstance as I was feeling as I walked away from the place towards the train station. I at least should have kissed her goodnight. Would I see her again?

I took the long strides from the bar to the station at my ease; I thought about Natasha, I thought about how we had spent our first encounter together. Walking home, I was thinking would I see her again? Anticipating the train I was wondering to myself why I might want to see her again, was it her engaging conversation, the way she answered me or the fact that I just liked her? The fact that I just liked being with her? I would text her in the morning and see how she was.

I woke up the morning after our meeting and felt very cozy. I had felt very cozy for a while now, not having any insecurities or hang ups and felt in myself an inner calm, ready for the world and on the alert for anything. This morning was no different. I woke up with a spring and got out my phone to text her that I wanted to see her again. That I wanted to see her broad smile, her enchanting ways. But no, I didn't say any of this to her. I was too scared to.

I had never warmed to texting as a means of relating to a girl. Or a man for that matter. It was a very cold and calculated way of relating to someone. But all the same I would get texts, maybe I was not a good person on the telephone, maybe they knew this and maybe they wanted to compromise with me. All the same I got texts from people that demanded an answer. Straight away. I got texts from Natasha. Maybe she was a person who was attracted to texts.

I remember her locks would fall delicately on her shoulders, they would go golden brown as they were on to the edges of her back, and fall subtly down her

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spine. They were crisp in their feel, not that I had felt them and they were light brown, no blonde in their touch. She said they were wild in their response to her, I was keen in my response to her and the hair, all the same, went and flowed down her back.

I texted her briefly to say that it was a pleasure to have met her the previous night and she responded in kind, very kindly and a little too polite, perhaps. Said she was delighted to have met me. Polite. I have always been wary of people who are excessively polite, not that she was excessively, but just saying that they might be hiding something, true feelings, or hidden emotions that they didn't want known. I never knew where I stood with polite people, but Natasha was polite in moderation. There was no need to be paranoid.

I was later to understand that Natasha was not always polite, that she would lose her patience with me easily, perhaps a little too easily, and at times she was blunt and rude. She would be curt and moody with me for no apparent reason, for no reason that I could see, and would leave me dangling in a state of not knowing, in a void so to speak. But for now she was the epitome of politeness and she left me pondering.

She had told me at once that she felt younger than her age at times and sometimes older, at time she thought of herself as a mere twenty one year old, a lot of the time more mature than in reality, more mature than would be shown at times later on in our relationship, and I was left wondering what age she really was. I had once been told that Russians looked older than they actually were, so I put Natasha at the thirty year mark, as I have said and thought that in one swoop she made me feel earlier than I was, in reality or otherwise.

In one stroke of a pen, or in this case one stroke of a thumb across the keyboard of a mobile for a text, my ill feelings for Russians, and in particular Russian girls, had evaporated. Or should I say more or less. It was too early for me to dismiss all my bad feeling from the past, too soon to sweep up all the dirt from under the Russian carpet of my home, but all the same Natasha was like a good headache pill, to be taken when just arousing from a long night's sleep. She was a painkiller and I was looking forward to taking another pill.

My sleep was long that night, that night after having met Natasha, it was fitful and was similar to a long form of torture, maybe a spot of water boarding in the Middle East, or a slow form of hanging in the Tower of London in the middle ages. Why was it such? I kept waking, in fact I woke every two hours, and I checked my mobile for messages, I don't know why I checked it, but I did, and it made my sleep wild and fitful that night.

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She had a fondness for the printed word, she had a fondness for texts, it was bordering on an obsession, and she was on her phone night and day, texting home. Texting Russia or merely texting me. Any time I was about to text her or see if she had read my mail, her account registered that she had just been live, that she had just been checking or she had just been sending. Her mania for texts kept her up all night too and sometimes was to keep me up, just answering, just reading the texts and just anticipating. Anticipating a text.

Every time I received a text from Natasha I could see that she had a signature name, some kind of nickname linked to her account. My Socks didn't mean anything to me at first, in the beginning I couldn't understand it. I asked her about it, gingerly, as if afraid, I don't know why, but I was cautious, as if asking her for a private statement, a personal affirmation of how she felt. Her reply was ambiguous, it left me wondering. Her texting signature was the only thing constant in her life. What was wrong with the rest of her life?

Also my socks was to engage a different meaning as the relationship between us was to blossom and bloom a little, it was to signify the difficulties we were to encounter along the way, the long road we walked down together and sometimes apart, but always in touch, always connected through texts. She was to change her mind like her socks, often, daily, and her new opinion would be fresh and lively, a lot of the time fresh and prolonged, like a prolonged pain through the side of my chest. My socks were an apt texting signature.

I felt that love was like a boomerang, that I threw it to a person and it would keep returning, it would keep coming back to me, sometimes in the whole, sometimes in the way that I had thrown it, but always other worldly and somehow always asking more questions than it had merited at the start, when I had thrown it first. But come back it always would, and would beg me to throw it again, posing more questions, looking for more answers and aiming to solve more issues and problems than it would sometimes merit.

The sound of the text coming in on my phone excited me, at once also confused me, as there was a ping from a friend as he texted me through social media. The pings were different in essence, different enough to put a line between the two people contacting me, but similar to set my pulse racing, my heart leaping and my brain start worrying. The ping on social media was more like a splash, on whatsapp more like the string of a tennis racket breaking. Who was texting and for what reason?

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I lay back on my couch and starting thinking, my friend thought I did that too often and just let the world splish splash over my head. I was thinking of Natasha, pondering another meeting with her, wondering whether I wanted one, was it worth it in the long run and what I wanted to glean from it. I reflected on the merits of the previous encounter, and what I hoped to gain from a further one. I pondered. I thought. I lay back on the couch.

Why did I want to meet her again? Did I want to sink into her deep blue eyes once more, or listen to her tirade against Irish people and their apparent lack of friendliness, her predilection for Russian literature or was it her frenzy to run from everything that symbolised her past, her forgotten, or rather wished for, lack of memory for whatever had forced her to flee her homeland? I was a little more than pinged with intrigue about her and felt like, not longed to, engage with her once more.

To give her credit, Natasha would always try to be polite unless she was driven to rudeness. This time, she agreed in a polite and kind manner to what I was saying to her, bending her ears more like, she said she would be delighted and that she enjoyed my company when we had met. This was all well and good, she was a very pretty girl, but it was all coming too quickly and too suddenly for me. I would have to breathe heavily, a sharp intake of breath, and reach out, reach out to Natasha as if she was the first girl I had ever met. I would try.

I sat down to think of where to take her next for it was up to me to choose the place and it was up to me to take her somewhere different than before, much as I liked the previous bar we had been in. This time it dawned on me very quickly where to take her. I chose one of a chain of bars to meet her in again, this being just one week after our previous meeting, and we settled on, she having agreed with me, a touristic establishment, which was unfortunately very loud, being full of people, making it hard to hear ourselves it was busy there but we found a nice place to sit and chat.

Was it a fate that I had met her? That would be stretching the situation a little bit too far. Did I want it to be a date, or was I already dating Natasha? Yes, I was already dating her, not that I wanted to own up to this. I didn't want to own up because I didn't want to count any poultry just yet, not that I had any. But we were dating.

Her texts to me, in between us meeting, were always polite, they were always reciprocal, kind. They were many things to me, and to her, but they were always polite. This didn't make me feel at all uneasy, though I was never sure where I stood with polite people, sensing that they were hiding something from me and

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felt the need to cover it with a polite veneer. No her politeness didn't put me off. Nothing about Natasha put me off. Absolutely nothing.

There were intricacies and little nuances galore in choosing a place to meet every time a date was due, and it was always up to me, my call, to make the pick. I would recline on the couch and ponder my favourite bars, eliminate the uncomfortable places, the noisy places and exclude the downright unfriendly. A bar had to be female friendly, as not all are in Dublin, it had to be the type that is not prone to old men in cloth caps, peaked caps perhaps, cursing and belching after every sip of beer. A lot of thought went into the choosing of a bar to meet in. But I didn't mind.

Her nose was slightly tilted. It was like how I pictured a Dutch nose to be, a nose that lent itself to a snobbish air, a haughtiness that was not actually there in Natasha. Natasha was not haughty but her nose was. Very much so. The nose tilted upwards and caught the raindrops which were forming and dripping on the canopy on the side of the bar outside. It was a beautiful nose.

Natasha was already making me feel special, making me think that I held an important section of her, of her fibre and of her soul perhaps. She did this in a way which was subtle and unnoticed at first, but which was tangible all the same and which I could reach out and touch anytime I was in her company and also, dare I say it, any time I was not with her but just sitting around thinking of her. Natasha was making me feel good about myself.

She had a gait about her, a pose one might say, which was at once striking when she walked into a room, at once noticeable as she held her head high and her back absolutely straight. She walked so straight that it might be said that she was carrying a stash of dishes on her shoulders, held up only by a long pole and only missing her elegant nose by a couple of centimeters. Natasha's stride, though it was a slow one, made people sit up and glance.

Flowers were a waste of time in Natasha's hands, they would take one look at her and wither. Their smell would waft through her nostrils, then mine and die a death on the seat beside us. The aversion that flowers held for her was not that she was ungrateful for them, she was happy enough in them, it was more that they didn't suit her, they didn't blend in with what was Natasha, with what she was about. I gave them to her twice and then stopped. She never again had a bunch of flowers from me.

Natasha was a theatre fiend, a devourer of what was theatrical, at least she said so and at least she was in Moscow. It was not a subject she liked to talk about for some reason, but she gave off hints and innuendoes, strange kind of insinuations

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that the theatre was the place for her, the place to be and to be seen, and to sit back and watch the actors in a language alien to her own. But she never talked about the theatre.

The plays we frequented were never full, a little sparse of fun but always on the head in terms of feeling, sentiment maybe better, pulling at the strings not of the heart but of the brain in a way that other theatrical presentations didn't do, filing away any previous hesitation to come, which had to be left at the door of the theatre and engaging us. Engaging through shouts, threats, a few tears being shed but always that. Engaging.

It was after one such play, in one such theatre, that I presented Natasha with bottles of cider, not one but ten, I think, for Natasha was a cider drinker, knowing she had to be a drinker of cider other than the norm, to be different but I gave her cider bottles to make her smile. It's something I regret now, looking back. maybe I should have taken her for a meal, a walk or something else, but there it was, ten bottles of cider.

She said thank you to me in a stifled kind of way, in a manner which belied the fact that I had given her so much alcohol, all at once and in one which sort of suggested that I had committed an involuntary act of kindness towards her. I hadn't really meant to, in all honesty. She spluttered out gratitude to me always being there for her, and stammered something which the wind caught before I could hear it. Maybe it's just as well, maybe it's better that I didn't know what she had said.

It wasn't just her nose. Of course, I was very sentimental towards her, very lost in the boyish way of being lost, as a schoolboy is towards a girl in his class whom everyone else knows for a fact to be unworthy. It wasn't just her nose, as I say. Her eyebrows had a habit of twisting northwards in surprise, when there was nothing to be surprised at, her mouth bent double, no sideways when the sunlight reflected from her lips and the whole face was a painting of what it wasn't in reality, a painting of a girl beyond words. But mainly it was her nose.

I had the impression, or maybe it was a little bit of surmise on my part, that that walk of hers, so upright, was psychological, that maybe the imaginary load that she was carrying was something from her past, an image that she was bearing of days gone by, of past slights and mischief making and perhaps, if I am right, of deep sighs of relief and exhales of breath that she had forgotten to take, but was desperately trying to engage in now. I didn't know then, and I don't know now, what it was all about.



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Her bicycle was like the ultimate of leitmotifs in the most heralded of theatrical performances; she referred to it quite often and was very proud of it. She rode it everywhere, everywhere around Dublin I mean, a very small city in her mind certainly in comparison to Moscow. She was very proud of her two wheeler, but in my mind I somehow envisaged it as more of a horse drawn chariot, driven by a galley force of slaves. I never saw her bike; it was kept far off in the distance, chained to some railing somewhere, out of my sight.

Her skin was akin to a deep dark pillow every time I kissed her goodbye, on the cheek and twice for good measure. Her skin was so soft that I could lose myself in it, to fall in deeply and get out of with difficulty. The texture of her touch had a hidden smell of its own, without being a smell, but it caught me as if it was, as if it was an eau de cologne specifically limited and tied up in smell and touch and thought.

The fans were cheering one night in June when the home nation took on Sweden. they were cheering because we were playing well for a change, and because we were leading by a goal scored in the first half and there were only ten minutes of play on my watch. I liked the game of football, I liked the atmosphere and the bar was full. Full to the brim of happy faces, shining smiles and expectation. We were, after all, leading by a goal.

I had returned to the scene of where I had first met Natasha, the same bar and I was waiting to transport myself the other side of the river to a similar place, but not as friendly, not as cozy and by far not as pleasant, to meet Natasha herself, to have a pint of the house lager and see what she had to say for herself. It had been a week since I had last seen her, as usual, and by timetable, and I was excited about seeing her again, but not longing for it. I was content. I was going to see Natasha again.

I saw her as I came into the bar, the one at the edge of town; I saw her sitting by herself. She was sitting at the back of the bar looking as she usually did, as if she had been waiting a while for me to come though she had only just sat down in that seat, that one at the end of the bar, looking as if she had nothing else to do but anticipate my arrival although I am sure that she had plenty to do besides me. She looked as if she were worth a lot, not just to me. She appeared to be sitting there with a ton of books on her shoulders, that weight she was supporting.

The conversation we hit upon almost at once, and straight away, was mundane and it was very ordinary. We had been seeing each other for a while now, very regularly, once a week, and we had grown accustomed to free talking, free chat

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about anything and everything, so we didn't care about the subject or the direction of the conversation and where it would end up. We were talking about nothing in particular and then she pounced on me.

She jumped on me metaphorically but she jumped on me all the same, and she took me completely by surprise. She said, rather suddenly, that she really valued our meetings in the bars and restaurants of Dublin every week, and that she especially admired me as a person. This was particularly unpalatable for me because it was framed in a way that no native would articulate and in a way that was so obviously foreign student learning English and so very Russian at the same time. I told her that it was a pity.

Why did I say that, I wondered? Why had I said it was a pity and why indeed was it such in the first place? It was qualified compliment but a compliment all the same, a compliment which was given a full blooded taste after my third pint of the evening and one which would end up confusing me after pint six. She looked at me in a strange way, a new way, on the other end of the table, sitting alone with me in the bar. She sat alone with me every week in a bar but this week had just been marked as special.

In between telling me how she felt for me, she had promised to send me some of her favourite music in MP3 format through our phones. It was in Russian, of course, when I got it and when she had sent it. Auction was the name of it and it was very reminiscent of some of the trumpet music that I was used to listening to. I had dallied in the local pub to recollect myself on the way home and I put the sound up as far as I could to hear it, slowly grasping, quietly accumulating noise, which was less like music but more akin to a sound which was repeating itself in a funereal way. I liked it and repeated it a few times.

I had booked two tickets for a play, yet another play, the following week, the week after we had met in that bar in the centre the day of the match, and I had geared myself up for a pleasant night out. I had taken Natasha to the theatre before, as I say, but this one was to be a short play, mercifully curtailed for our enjoyment. I saw her from the corner of my eye as I approached the theatre from the back streets, and she was looking like a damp squib on a dry afternoon on the beach. She was in a bad mood for once. I don't know why she was in a bad mood, she didn't tell me, she didn't open up to me, but it made me uncomfortable. I wasn't used to it. Not at all.

The mood of hers hit me between the eyes, just at the top of my nose, on top of the bridge of the nose and squarely raised the nerves on the temples. My

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temples were not used to being raised, my heckles were not either and I was no more used to Natasha being in a mood than I was of waiting in the rain for her to appear before a play. I fumbled in my pockets for the tickets, mumbled a few words of pleasantries and platitudes to her, told her great how she was despite the mood that she was in and putting me and went to the door of the theatre.

The night in the theatre was more like a night at the opera, or to be more exact the Phantom of the Opera. He was masked so that no one could see him, as were my nerves at being beside Natasha, though by now I had been out with her so many times that I had lost count. The rain outside the theatre hit the skyline above the stage and added a kind of musical accompaniment to the seriousness that was going inside, as it was a tragedy that we were watching, and I was dreading having to get my coat on and leave. There was still time for that, though.

I had been writing a short story about a previous love for a while. I had taken it on as a personal project, as a form of therapy perhaps, or maybe as a way of expunging the regret that I had inside me for not having done all I could for her. Who knows why I had taken it on? It was a project that was not taking up much of my time but that was all the same alive in me, if that is the right word, living and festering inside me as a mole had been burrowing my very insides. I enjoyed writing the short story, I enjoyed thinking of my previous affaire de couer, and moreover I would extract pleasure from a publisher looking kindly at it.

I showed it to Natasha by email. I have no idea why I showed it to Natasha, it was either an impulse, or an impetuosity or a blind spot that I suddenly had, but it was certainly a mistake, or so I was to find out. It was a mistake that was to provoke another mistake, and hiding behind that one was another, more insidious mistake, it was as if I had become a professional onion peeler scaling back on the layers, pulling back on the mistakes. But that's what it was. A mistake.

The project I had completed, and that was completed a long time before, was made up of words, words forming sentences, some words out on their own away from all others, a collection of words. In English. But these words which were forming phrases on the pages were my words, all mine and nobody else's. And they should not have caused offence, or wonder even. In the end, my words, with their punctuation in between, didn't really offend anyone; they just amazed and produce wonderment, that time when I showed the story to Natasha.

Natasha wanted to know if the story was about her. Why would it be about her? I hadn't known her face when I wrote the story, nor seen how her mouth quiver

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when she is embarrassed. I had known and encountered the reaction of another, the moods of another, ever so slightly more volatile in nature. No, the story was not written about her, or even for her, nor with her image at the back of my head as I typed. But Natasha was showing a little conceit, maybe some self-consciousness at me in thinking that it was about her. Set my heart racing as she had at times, no, she was not the centre of my universe. Not quite, not yet.

Her mood, so odd, and a little strange, the time we had met prior to the theatre encounter, now took off in a different direction and with it, ever so possibly, a different target. The story that I had shown her had set her off into an unstable mood, she didn't know how to cope, though so calm and sanguine a week before, when she was letting me know how she had felt. But over a pint was one thing, in front of a theatre in the ever descending dark was another, and now by text message, a barrage of them, proved itself to be, on a slow and ponderous path, to be a new dimension I had yet to experience with her.

Scribbling was not the norm for me and maybe it was not my forte either, but I thought I would pick up my quill and wax the words as they came out of my system. Maybe I was not so much scribbling, but composing, if composing is not a too high flown word for what I was doing. Yes, as I sent my composition off to Natasha for her perusal, no for her to scan more like, I held my breath and tried to think of something other than her reaction to it, as why would her reaction matter so much, given that the story was not about her in the first place. It was about someone, in essence, completely different and far away.

I was distracted by Coralie tapping on my window from the sill where she was sitting. Coralie was not the subject of my next project and would never be the *affaire de couer* that perhaps she had always aimed to be, from the first day that she had come to live with me, way back that December, that cold and dark December. She was getting old by her estimation alone but was always on hand to alert me, distract me and sometimes tire me out with her constant games and intrigues. Coralie was always the girl for me, Coralie was a tabby and she was my favourite cat.

Natasha responded to her proofing my story. And, yes, she responded. Natasha said that she was worried and said she would only hurt me due to previous relationship being painful. I thought this was a load of tosh but I refrained from telling her so. I was wary of hurting her feelings too and I had only shown her some writings of mine, a work I had been dreaming up for a while. I was also aware that a previous relationship of hers did not matter to me, only she mattered to me but I didn't tell her that either. I didn't tell her a lot of things that

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I should have, maybe I was unaware that my chance had come, maybe I was not alert to the fact that she was not ending with me, maybe.

Even when she was angry and narky, there was a look in her that the sun lit up when it reflected against her face, and it was a look that shone brightly in her eyes. Maybe it was an accident and completely unintentional way that her face moved when she was upset and the manner in which not just her eyes but her nose twitched when she had something on her mind, something that I was not aware of then, not too much in any rate, but was to come acquainted with a lot later, much later on.

Maybe also unintentional was the way in which she made me feel very special, perhaps without meaning to, and also perhaps against her better judgment. I caught her with her guard down on many an occasion and fought that tiny feeling inside her that yes, indeed, there were feelings for me deep inside her and were fighting to erupt, at any moment. It was a little while later, just a matter of days after I showed her my manuscript, against my better judgment, that they were to erupt in full force.

The spat wasn't a spat but more of a conundrum, or a riddle shall we say. It was a suggestive riddle in the way that it came on suddenly and disappeared almost as quickly. Her temper erupted by text at three in the morning, as was her want to thrash things out in the small hours of the morning, to get me when I was at my most vulnerable, when I had been asleep and woken up. When my dreams were interrupted. I wanted to disconnect from her, but I didn't have the heart, or perhaps I wasn't brave enough and didn't have the requisite amount of willpower in my arsenal. The conversation, by text, went on for about an hour.

We had got very close in the short window that had opened for us since we first met all those months ago in the bar with the ever opening door, the ever smiling barman and the ever opening wallet of mine which had a tendency to get lost on big occasions. It was a closeness of a kind, while she was still a little stand offish, a kind of distant, but drawing me ever closer to herself, to her being, to her moods and whims which was her want at the small hours of the morning and more. I had been snared, to put it shortly, not so much in a net as in a web, a sticky one and one which was hard to free myself from. But I was trying. Or was I?

The following days were like mellow moments sitting by a river bank, moments filled with doing nothing else but watching the ripples on my coffee cup grow ever darker and smaller. I obviously had nothing else better to do but wait for her texts to make a ping sound on my telephone, but such was the sound that

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they made each day as we, Natasha and I, exchanged texts. I was relaxed, I was sanguine; I was in a good mood. I felt that the worst of it all was behind me and finished.

On the other hand, Natasha seemed to go to ground, or more likely, go underground somewhere where I couldn't see for it was a good, or on this case bad, couple of weeks before I saw her again. The soil had settled on the time we had a spat in the little hours of the morning and I wondered deeply how she was, how she was living, where she was and her general mood. I missed her. I missed those one on one chats that we had over a glass of wine and I missed the smooth, tender touch of her skin against mine. It was soft. I felt the lack of her greatly.

I met her a few weeks later, for her birthday, one very unusual and sticky August afternoon when the sun was not so hot but it was shining nonetheless. I waited for her for about a half hour in the restaurant, a French one and small one, and I got up to leave. She was nowhere. I put on my coat and was half way out the door, when her scent reached my nostrils, not from the kitchen but from the door which had just opened and which was now standing ajar. She had forgotten to close it. She took the Pink Floyd record that I had given her, she collected vinyl or so she said, then she sat down opposite me.

Her soft contours and glacial look in her eyes were not to show themselves to me again for a few months hence, though I didn't realize this when I kissed her goodbye, there on the pavement outside the restaurant. That place on the pavement captured everything in me at that moment, when I said farewell, the cooling of the summer weather, the soft gaze as if there was no one else around, though there was and in abundance, and the promise of more yet to come, unsaid as yet, but inferred by her talk. There was more to follow, in abundance, but the calibre and tone of what was to prey on me gave me no inkling at that time.

By this stage, I hadn't seen her in the region of six weeks, very unusual on her part and very uncalled for in my mind. I somehow wanted to make up for this, maybe in a sense of guilt which no one had given me but myself or maybe out of a feeling of making up, though we hadn't had a fight. A sudden impulse to write her poetry came over me, the impulse to write and do, to compose something very romantic and from the soul, from the mind which had been captured so stealthily by Natasha over the previous few months and not given back, but just stolen. Stolen secretly and steadily.

I likened my Natasha, was she mine, maybe, just a little, to the rain in Ireland, to the rain that was always a constant, a reliable presence in life, not just mine, but

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everyone's, a presence which was useful and cleansing, just like Natasha. She was like the rain for so many different reasons because she was always there, always yet to come, forever promised and forever reliable. But the rain drenches at the same time, the rain can be light or heavy and it can destroy a person's attire in one go. Natasha, for me, was like the rain on so many different ways.

Perhaps, I was being unfair to Natasha that she was like a downpour of rain. This was not quite true because she had a better effect on me, more of a cleansing effect on me, even when she was in a strop with me, in a mood, for no reason and unexpected, even when she was boring a hole through my skull with that gaze which would fell a thousand trees in a forest. No, Natasha was akin to more than the rain for me. She was like a thousand little rain drops, which would fall on the end of my nose and plop like a bomb into the nearest puddle at my feet. Natasha was like the raindrops.

However, I am a great fan of the rain, I like the rain because I can think in it, when needed the rain going trickle down my body, fast or slow, can induce such great feelings of emotion, brought on by me pondering the puddles beneath my feet, the raindrops falling from the tail of my coat onto the ground. The rain on the window pane engenders feelings of thoughtfulness too, trickling in a line from the top of the window, slowly meandering on its lonely way to the bottom, where it meets up with the other drips.

I was to hear from Natasha every day in the autumn but I wasn't to see her, I felt this strange, I wondered why it was so, I longed to see her, I didn't quite pine for her but felt the absence of her, felt the presence of her through the texts as the ping of her message alerted me, but emphasized the fact of her not being with me, not being alongside me in person. I wondered why I was not meeting her every week as before, had I said something, had she done something, should I know about it or had she already toiled me?

A thought came to me. No, it was more like a panic attack, the more so a fear. It caught me down the spine and made me breathe as if I had been searching for air and not getting it, made me reach out for something. I couldn't find it, what I had been stretching my hand and arms out for, but I wondered, had she met someone else? I quickly dismissed this thought, fear, from my head, as it wouldn't have made sense to me, had she a man in her life apart from me, she would have said, he would have put in a show, he would have thrown his weight around. No, she didn't have a man in her life, but me.

December was a dark one that year, but the more so it was cold and misty. Natasha's moods and with them the swings were just as black and foggy, and in addition nebulous as I was not aware of where they had come from and why.

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Like the weather, her strops were wearying and grew heavier as did each day. They would come as the darkness fell in the evenings and would lift just as miraculously as the sun shone in the morning, leaving me wondering had they come in the first place. But they had.

I was wondering in earnest what was making her like this? What was encouraging her to think of me highly in the main and none too often look at me as if I were the last person on earth she would like to meet, let alone talk to by text during the day? I was debating whether I had said something out of place, mentioned something that I shouldn't or rather not spoken when it was prompt to do so, or when it was my turn to say a sweet phrase to her.

I made her very jealous, one time by text, late at night, one time she was talking to me and very communicative at that, she wondered what women I was with, and whether I was texting them often and for what reason. I was with none. What made her think I was? A lot of questions were floating somewhere in my head, but they were not keeping me awake at night, the last thing they were doing was preventing me from having a good night's sleep, maybe I was getting used to the diatribes, the mood swings and the tempers? I didn't want to get used to them, it was Christmas approaching.

Christmas was black, just like the weather and very similar to the moods coming through to me those days. I was taken to hospital that Christmas Eve, or perhaps the day before, not knowing why and pondering whether I would stay on until the New Year. I texted Natasha, I mailed her from the hospital bed in the morning, saying where I was, when I would leave, what was wrong, it was just a routine visit after all and nothing to worry about. It really scared her. It made me feel uncomfortable, her response was out of the blue and akin to the old Natasha, the old charming Russian I knew, but I had grown unaccustomed to it, perhaps I had become immune to her.

By the time that the nights were growing shorter, by the first drop of a bee's wing on the petals of the flowers outside my house, I had met Natasha three more times. She had given me three more months of oddity, but she had given me some laughs as well, much of them ironic and cynical. I sat back in my chair in the cafe where I had just met her for a tea and saw her slender frame walk slowly away, her hair shining in the reflection of the brass on the counter and her ass moving in a sway to the sound of the imaginary busker outside the window. For the last time.

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# RAVEN CAGE

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Poetry and Prose Ezine

