

englist

ISSUE XXI



May 2022



The English Students' Newspaper

ENgLIST: The English Students' Newspaper, Issue XXI, May 2022

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Nika Gradišek

PROOFREADER-IN-CHIEF: Petra Ramšak

EDITORS: Alex Centa, Miona Dinić, Nika Gradišek, Monika Kastelic, Sal Lavrenčič,
Dominik Lenarčič, Petra Ramšak

ENgLIST LOGOTYPE: Ines Ana Jarc

DESIGN: Ariela Herček, Petra Ramšak

COVER ART: Ariela Herček

the.english@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/ENgLIST

https://www.instagram.com/the_english/
english.splet.arnes.si

FUNDERS: ŠOFF & ŠSFF

PRINTED BY Fotokopirnica Kaktus, Matjaž Klarič s.p., Ljubljana, 50 copies, Ljubljana,
May 2022

Price: free

ISSN (tiskana izd.): 2670-4889

ISSN (spletna izd.): 2670-4897

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EDITORIAL

Dear reader!

T. S. Elliot stated in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that a poet should be but a medium of their *Zeitgeist*. What a terrible and heavy expectation to place on a writer's shoulders! To know and understand almost everything that has been and then produce something new, but just expected enough to fit into the canon. To be fair to him, T. S. Elliot was one of the most educated individuals of his age, so he definitely did not stop at preaching. And yet, I beg to differ – his formula might explain how to *succeed* as a writer, but as to why it should automatically make one a *good* writer, I have no clue. Neither the function nor the quality of a written piece is as one-dimensional as to be measured in its reach, popularity, or relatability. Some are meant to stay in a desktop drawer as a therapeutic exercise. Others can go out into the world, can be so intensely felt by the writer, but then fail to produce the same effect on the reader – and yet they're precious in their way of capturing the moment. The third kind of literature manages to resonate with people, and tickles awake their insides.

I sincerely believe and hope you will find examples of the latter in this year's edition. It is the product of so many marvellous people. Thank you to the creators that sent us their poems, short stories, academic articles, and opinion essays. Thank you to our lovely editorial team, who did their job masterfully. A big thank you to Karin, Ariela, and Petra, who helped me sail more or less smoothly through the previously unknown waters of the editor-in-chief's responsibilities. You all rock! ♥

The one thing I believe you, dear reader, should take with you on this journey is the awareness of what simple creatures we authors really are - ultimately, we just want to say things. We want to be heard desperately, and sometimes we even want to be understood. Usually, if not always, we run out of words. We find them lacking. We are forced to recognise that we'll never truly produce an idea, just bits and pieces of it, hidden in the spaces between wonky metaphors, shaky rhythm, and the aftertaste that syllables leave on our tongue. Once we accept that truth, writing gains the potential to become much more of an entertaining game than a survivalist fight to produce something meaningful.

Thus, my request for you is this: allow yourself to listen, to be educated, entertained and inspired, to be tickled awake.

Dear reader, I wish you a happy listening. ♥

Nika Gradišek

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ACADEMIC WRITING

Ribbony Carnation

Ana Krstačić

British composer Joseph Mazzinghi wrote a song entitled “Ye Shepherds Tell Me”, and later on, artist John Singer Sargent created the painting *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* based on that composition. A part of the song goes like this:

A wreath around her head,
Around her head she wore,
Carnation, lily, lily, rose,
And in her hand a crook she bore,
And sweets her breath compose.



(Mazzinghi 1892)

It is a beautiful, dreamy, peaceful and gentle composition that brings all sorts of images and retrospective thoughts of her, my grandmother. And she was all of that; gentle, giving, peaceful, tender-hearted, elegant and strong. The carnation was her favourite flower. Truthfully, I am not entirely sure why. Was it because of the colours or because of the symbol of the flower? I even consider that it was because it was my grandfather's favourite flower, and it was always in her garden, which she carefully took care of. But she was taken from my family and me forcefully. She died of breast cancer. I have never seen anything so evil, so cruel, occur so naturally and with no warning. It took me a few years to be ready to listen and read other stories and experiences of the same cause my gran died. It is a subject of great importance that is not spoken about enough. I fully understand that I cannot talk about it in the first person, but I can, at least to some degree, talk about the three-year experience my gran had fighting this malice of a disease. Or maybe I want to be a little bit selfish and write about it for my own sake. Not to forget her, but to have a collection of thoughts and one day look back to see my past mindset.

I intentionally picked up Audre Lorde's book *The Cancer Journals*. I can't think of a better description for her than this one: “A self-described ‘black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,’ Audre Lorde dedicated both her life and her creative talent to confronting and addressing injustices of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.” (Poetry Foundation 2003) I believe her “hot takes” on certain topics would be much more accepted in this day and age than in her period of life which was in the 60s. She was an open-minded woman with a voice and attitude which were not welcomed at that time (let's be honest, not even now, even though the situation is far better). She was first diagnosed with breast cancer, but later on, it had metastasised in her liver, and from that, she passed away. Since it was my first time reading her work, I didn't know what to expect. I've never read something that powerful, dynamic and meaningful. It is such a hard subject to talk about, but while I was reading, it seemed to me it just flowed from her. Not a single sentence was there to fill up the text nor to convince the reader to like her. It was just her thoughts, experiences and pure emotions. I could sense her anger and pain but, at the same time, a will to push other women to fight for their voices, minds and bodies. She wrote that book to inspire other women to speak and to act out their experiences with cancer and with other threats of death because silence did not and will not bring anything in life. Lorde explains how she does not have any intention to shame other women

for staying silent. Every woman has her way of dealing with pain, and every woman has her path, another way of courage. A different form of escape.

Lorde started with the fact that she could not accept turning her life around—to sleep differently, move differently and eat differently. That immediately brought the thought of my gran. She had to sleep on one side because of the operation that she had on her breast, and I clearly remember how annoyed she was because she had to lay on the opposite side of the telly. She could only eat puddings that are available at the chemist. I couldn't wrap my head around how she was able to consume that every day, but it wasn't a question of whether she would like to but an order she had to obey. She was a classic grandmother who would make a five-kilo salami sandwich for her grandchildren. I was never a fan of that but would eat it anyway and would rather seemingly get those exact kilos after spending a whole summer at her house.

I wasn't even able to properly hug her anymore because of the pain, and I felt despair in my heart, knowing she would not be with us much longer. Sometimes I would just forget about her condition and would go for a tight hug as I would always do, but it was different. Maybe I was forgetting about the condition because she would never show sadness. Laughter was a vital part of her life. My friend had a joke that when she would turn to obituaries in the newspaper, she would say, "Let's see who will not be watching telly today," – an overall sick and twisted joke but my gran would borderline shed tears from laughter.

I don't know if she was sad or angry. Maybe she just accepted everything, but I can most certainly say she fought and did not give up at any stage. That's the pure power of a woman. Women have their own way of handling problems, but voicing it or not, women will confront problems. I wish she shared her pain with me, her emotions and her thoughts. She was the type of person who never wanted to bother anyone with her needs because she thought they were not important or relevant in any way and that everybody has their worries and difficulties. She was a subtle warrior. A rather nasty thing to say, but it was almost annoying at times, but also understandable. "The outsider, both strength and weakness. Yet without community there is certainly no liberation, no future, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between me and my oppression." (Lorde 2020) The feeling of powerlessness was quite frustrating. I couldn't help her. I could only be with her, but in my mind, that was not enough. I am sure she was thankful that my family and I were with her at all times, trying to make her life as easier and happier as we could, but we couldn't make cancer disappear. We were helpless, and bless her; it was all on her. She was fully aware of everything, mainly the rapid change in her health. It would be tiring and degrading convincing her that everything will be fine and back to normal. She was furiously fighting for about three years, but that terrorising thing beat her. I hope she accepted those last years of her life as a gradual life process and was later relieved of all the agony that she went through.

Something that stayed fully engraved in my memory during that period was seeing my dad crying for the first time. Kind of a childish thing to say, but it was surreal. An unbreakable individual, in my eyes, was crying. It is hard to explain because it sounds like that was a proper situation, especially for a son, to cry because of his mother. We went through so many sorrowful events before where a person was required to shed a tear, but not him. And to be honest, I don't think it was because he knew she would very soon pass away, but he could not see her in pain and did not want me to see her in pain. "As women we were raised to fear. If I cannot banish fear completely, I can learn to count with it less. For then fear becomes not a tyrant against which I waste my energy fighting, but a companion, not particularly desirable, yet one whose knowledge can be useful." (Lorde 2020) I want to live in belief she was not afraid. I hope she knows how immensely proud of her I am and how she proved to me and everyone who knew her how strong and capable she was. She did not close her eyes to the enormity of the tasks she had to conquer and, even though being in pain, took the opportunity to find joy and growth in her life. Women are also portrayed as "essentially decorative machines of consumer function" (Lorde 2020), which is

depersonalising to listen even in this time and age. This constant pressure that is expected of women to iron wrinkles, colour grey hair and whiten teeth is absurd. But even worse, the peer pressure on a woman post- mastectomy to feel good about her body - immense and unimaginable. There was never a stigma of cancer where she would be presented as different from her peers. Not a single moment of discomfort was made because of cancer. She was still her. A woman with a mind, soul and emotions.

Everyone deals with grief and loss differently, and it can be one's greatest challenge. There is hardly any other experience that consumes and alters life in the same way, and it is hard to get back to how it was. But there is no room for shame while grieving. At the same time, one should not live in eternal sorrow, and my favourite carnation would not like for me to live that way. And for that reason, I sometimes look at the obituaries and check who will not be watching the telly that day.

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Geordie Vocabulary and Pronunciation

Petra Ramšak

1. Introduction

"[It's] basically incomprehensible. It's just noise really."

This is how a housemate of a Geordie native described the Tyneside dialect in an article by the news site The Tab (2015). This paper will look at why so many speakers find Geordie so hard to understand and show that it is not "just noise" but a distinct way of speaking with its own established system.

Geordie is one of the Anglo-Saxon Northumbrian dialects specific to the North-eastern region of England. The exact geographical area of the dialect is disputed. People who are not from North East England would classify it as the area stretching from the Scottish border to the River Tees and from the Pennine watershed to the North Sea (areas of Tyneside, Wear-side, and Teesside). This classification is countered by the opinion of the residents, who say that Geordie can only be applied to people living in Newcastle upon Tyne (Pearce 2015). For the purposes of this paper, the latter definition will be used.

Geordie, also called Tyneside English, is said to be one of the oldest English dialects. Traces of Old English are still most visible in its vocabulary. Geordie greatly differs from Standard English (SE) in more than just its lexis and phraseology – it also varies in its grammar and pronunciation. The aim of this paper is to determine how Geordie distinguishes itself from the standard.

1.1. Vocabulary

As mentioned before, the influence of Angles and their language is still exceedingly present in the Geordie dialect. The Scandinavian influence is clearly illustrated in the Geordie word for *child* – *bairn*. It is very similar to its Danish, Swedish and Norwegian translation – *barn*.

The British Library (n.d.) compiled a list of some commonly used expressions, all taken from various BBC interviews:

Standard English	Geordie
pretty	bonny
spit	hockle
very	muckle
along	alang
one	a-one
anything	aught
old	auld/aad
adult man	gadgie
yes	aye
go	gan
great, excellent	grand
honey (a form of address)	hinney
boy	laddie
girl	lass
maybe	mebbies
a foolish person	a divvy

Some other common phrases and sentences include:

- **Howay!** This expression has a variety of meanings, all in line with “come on”. If it is followed by the word *man* (e.g. *Howay, let’s gan noo man*), it expresses irritation.
- **Hadaway** means “away with you” and has a multitude of uses. It can have a dismissive but friendly tone (e.g. *Oh, hadaway*) or a more offensive and vulgar tone (e.g. *Hadaway and shite*) (Hargis 2014).
- **He was gan propa radge** – he was really angry
- **A right neby bugga** – a nosey person
- **He’s geet canny as oot** – he is a nice person
- **Areet bonny lad** – a polite greeting
- **Shooting and bawling** – arguing
- **Giz a snout mate** – asking for a cigarette
- **Divvent get is wrant pet** – do not get me wrong (Finnigan 2017)

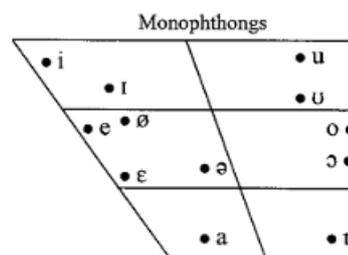
3. Pronunciation

As with grammatical features, not every characteristic can be applied to every speaker of Tyneside English. When it comes to pronunciation, people can articulate words differently with regard to their gender, social class, and age. The following chapter describes the most general and broadest characteristics of the Geordie dialect. With regard to intonation, Geordie speakers tend to produce declarative sentences with rising intonation patterns.

3.1. VOWELS

Monophthongs

The vowel chart of Geordie monophthongs as seen in Watt and Allen (2003) :

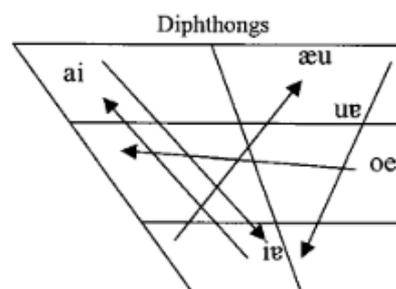


- a) **FOOT vowel /ʊ/** is not subject to the FOOT-STRUT split. This lack of differentiation is typical for the North of England. This means that the two vowels, /ʊ/ and /ʌ/, are represented by a single phoneme (Strycharczuk et al. 2019). Examples: *cup* /kʊp/, *brother* /brʊðə/.
- b) In the cases preceding a final voiced consonant/consonant cluster, the long vowel /a:/ can appear where the **TRAP vowel /æ/** and **BATH vowel /ɑ:/** would be in Standard English. Example: *band* /ba:nd/. Similarly, a short vowel /a/ would appear preceding a final voiceless consonant/consonant cluster, e.g., *laugh* /laf/. This distinction is more prevalent in traditional-dialect forms. [a:] and [a] are also found in complementary distribution, meaning that they are conditioned variants of the same phoneme (Wells 1982, 375). The TRAP vowel and the BATH vowel have merged into [a].
- c) **FLEECE vowel /i:/** has a strong diphthongal variant in final position – *knee* /nei/ (Wells 1982, 375). It is also noted that Geordie speakers may use /i:/ in final unstressed syllables, where Standard English speakers would opt for /i/ – *city* /siti:/ (Watt 1998, 194).
- d) **GOOSE vowel /u:/** is closer to the cardinal vowel 8 – [u] (Watt and Allen 2003). Wells (1982, 375) also notes that Geordie [u] and [əʊ] are allophones.
- e) **LOT vowel /ɒ/** also appears in a different variant as a more open mid-front rounded [œ(:)] – *lot* [lœ:t] (Watt 1998, 145). Its pronunciation sounds similar to the General American CLOTH phoneme.
- f) In Geordie, the **DRESS vowel /e/** appears in positions where Standard English speakers would use the diphthongs /eə/ and /ɪə/ (Watt 1998).
- g) Words that contain the **NURSE vowel /ɜ:/** in Standard English, have the **THOUGHT vowel /ɔ:/** in its place in Geordie. This makes it so that the words *first* and *forced* become homonyms /fɔ:st/ (Hughes et.al. 2005, 123). Wells (1982) claims that the vowel is more like a rounded centralized-front [ø:] and that only the broadest accent merges with the **THOUGHT vowel** (really only in words *first*, *work*, and *shirt*). Trudgill hypothesises that this is most likely the result of the “Northumbrian burr”, a voiced uvular fricative /ʁ/, which influenced the preceding vowels – pushed their formation further back in the mouth. The Northumbrian burr characteristic has since died out, but its effects on the pronunciation of the vowels can still be observed (Trudgill 1999, 70).
- h) Watt and Allen (2003) note that the **schwa** in Geordie is highly variable and is normally very open. It is frequently pronounced as the near-open central vowel [ɐ]. Schwa can also be longer in duration than the vowel of the preceding stressed syllable. Middle-class Geordie women also have the tendency to pronounce the **STRUT vowel** as a schwa in words such as *cup*, *brother*, *double*, *blood*, *does* (Robinson 2019).

- i) **KIT vowel** /ɪ/ is often replaced by schwa in words like *voices*, *ended*. Some Geordie speakers replace schwa with /ɪ/ in words *seven*, *almond* and *impression* /-ʃɪn/ (Wells 1982, 376).
- j) Many words containing the **THOUGHT vowel** /ɔ:/ in Standard English are pronounced with the vowel [a:] in Geordie. Examples: *all*, *talk*, *walk*, *war*, *know*, *cold* (Wells 1982, 375). Hughes et al. (2005) offer a more detailed analysis of how /ɔ:/ is realised in Geordie. They divide words with /ɔ:/ into two groups:
- Words with the *-al-* in the spelling have /a:/, e.g., *talking*, *called*, *all*
 - Words without *-al-* in the spelling retain /ɔ:/, e.g., *morning*

Diphthongs

The vowel chart of Geordie diphthongs as seen in Watt and Allen (2003):



- a) **FACE vowel** /eɪ/ is realised either by a monophthong [e(:)] or diphthongs [eə ~ ɪə] (Wells 1982, 375). Hughes and Trudgill say that /eɪ/ is realised by monophthongal variant [e:] and diphthongal [ɪə]. They also claim that the monophthongal variant would be considered a more prestigious form. According to O'Connor, the FACE vowel is a monophthongal vowel somewhere in-between the cardinal vowels /e/ and /ɛ/ (Watt 1998, 183-195).
- b) **PRICE vowel** /aɪ/ has variation between an /eɪ/ type and an /aɪ/ type. There is no consensus on what the rules of when to use which are. Some would argue that they are in free variation, others that /aɪ/ would be used after the uvular fricative /ʁ/ or that /eɪ/ is used everywhere (Wells 1982, 376).
- c) **GOAT vowel** /əʊ/: as with the FACE vowel, there are two possible realisations of this vowel. According to Hughes and Trudgill, they are represented by the central rounded monophthong [ə] or diphthong [uo]. Wells also defines it in terms of two variants – [o(:) ~ e(:)] or [uə ~ əə]. He also suggests that the diphthongal variant can appear to be slightly old-fashioned (Watt 1998, 195-197).
- d) According to Wells (1982, 375-376), the **MOUTH vowel** /aʊ/ can be of two types: /aʊ/ or /ɛʊ/. In traditional dialect, /u(:)/ and /əʊ/ can also be observed – *down* [dun ~ dəʊn ~ dəʊn].
- e) **SQUARE vowel** /eə/ and the **NEAR vowel** /ɪə/ are often realised by the monophthong /e/ (Watt 1998).

3.2. CONSONANTS

Geordie consonants are mostly identical to the ones used by Standard English speakers. There is some deviation, which is discussed below.

The phonemes /p, t, k/ are aspirated in word-initial position except for when they are preceded by /s/ in the same syllable, e.g., in *sky*, *spy*. Aspiration also occurs in the onsets of word-internal stressed syllables, e.g., in *appear*, *attend*, *occur* (Watt and Allen 2003). According to Wells (1982, 374), a special type of glottalisation of /p, t, k/ occurs both in syllable-final position as well as, at times, in a syllable-initial position before a weak vowel. He gives the examples: *paper* ['peəpʔə], *couple* ['kʊpʔəl], *auntie* ['antʔi].

In contrast to many other regional varieties of English, the use of a glottal stop [ʔ] in place of /t/ in words such as *carter* or *kite* is rarely observed in Geordie. Consonants /b, d, g/ are usually not voiced, except when they occur between two voiced sounds (Watt and Allen 2003). Geordie also has phonemic /h/ and no h-dropping. H is usually dropped only with the /hw/ cluster as in *when* /wɛn/ (Wells 1982, 374) and in unstressed function words. Another rather uncommon feature of a non-standard dialect is that Geordie has no TH-fronting. In words like *thirsty* or *either*, /θ/ and /ð/ are not substituted for /f/ or /v/, respectively. The liquid /l/ is clear in all positions (e.g. in *later* or *solve* where [ɫ] would be used in SE). Geordie is a non-rhotic accent, which means that /r/ is not pronounced in post-vocalic positions unless it is followed by a vowel (*cart* vs. *very*). Intrusive [ɹ] is not used and is sometimes replaced by a glottal stop [ʔ] (Watt and Allen 2003). A tap is also a common realisation of /r/ in Geordie (Cruttenden 2008, 222).

A now obsolete feature of Geordie was also the Northumbrian burr /ɹ/, a voiced uvular fricative realisation of < r >. It was present in the areas of Northumberland and Tyneside, but can only be found in older speakers in rural areas (Wells 1982, 368.). Even though it is not in use anymore, its influence can be observed in Geordie vowel pronunciation, where Standard English /ɜ:/ is pronounced as /ɔ:/.

4. CONCLUSION

Geordie is a dialect with rich and complex variation, especially when contrasted with Standard English. The name has no confirmed origin, but most likely came from a diminutive of George, a common miner's name – Newcastle was historically a mining city. The dialect is heavily influenced by the language of the Angles, who settled in the area in the 6th century. Many vocabulary items used in Geordie can be directly connected to their Old English roots. The vocabulary is heavily influenced by its Anglo-Saxon past, and it, just like grammatical forms and pronunciation, differs from speaker to speaker depending on their sex, age, and social class.

Geordie vowels are significantly different from Standard English vowels. The most notable changes are: no FOOT-STRUT split, TRAP and BATH vowels often pronounced as /a/, LOT vowel shifted to [œ(:)], DRESS vowel appears instead of diphthongs /eə/ and /ɪə/, NURSE vowel is often pronounced as the THOUGHT vowel, etc. Diphthongs were subject to change as well, most notably the FACE and the GOAT vowels which both have a monophthongal and a diphthongal variant.

Consonants are not as different from Standard English as vowels are. The main characteristics are: Geordie is non-rhotic, /p, t, k/ undergo glottalisation in certain positions, there is no TH-fronting and no h-dropping. /l/ is clear in all positions.

What makes Geordie unique is a combination of all of the above-mentioned characteristics, especially Anglo-Saxon derived vocabulary and differences in vowels.

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Representation of Children's Literature in Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Last Wish*

Jure Kompara

1. Introduction

Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* is a collection of fantasy novels, later adapted into a video game format by CD Projekt Red. The stories in both the novels and the video games revolve around Geralt who belongs to the order of witchers – magically enhanced human beings, raised and trained to hunt down and kill monsters. The world and its characters are heavily inspired by mostly European, but also Middle Eastern, folk tales, with the majority of the elements being taken from pre-Christian Slavic mythology and folklore. The social circumstances in the world of *The Witcher* are similar to those of the high Middle Ages with one important difference being the existence of magic and subsequently monsters – most of which have their origins in European and Middle Eastern folklore. Both the novels and the games incorporate classic European children's fairy tales into their structure by adding mature twists to them. Numerous classic works of children's literature, like that of *Snow White* or *The Beauty and the Beast*, are present in the world of *The Witcher* and many of them are explained as events that happened in this fantasy world but were gradually adapted into fairy tale form. The novel *The Last Wish* is an especially good example of how taking several classic stories and adapting them to a new fantasy setting can result in a unique story that has a truly authentic feeling to it. The purpose of this paper is to explore where the works of children's folklore appear in the novel *The Last Wish*, in what form they appear and whether these original fairy tales could be regarded as children's literature at all. I intend to analyse how Sapkowski adapts such stories, and in what way his stories differ from the original ones. Finally, I want to analyse recurring patterns that Sapkowski uses when rewriting these tales.

2. Do Fairy Tales Which Serve as Basis for Sapkowski's Work Constitute Children's Literature?

It is certainly hard to define what constitutes children's literature and whether all fairy tales fall into this category. Fairy tales, while being closely associated with children nowadays, were originally directed mostly at adults, and children mainly listened to the stories out of their curiosity. However, fairy tales were often changed, shortened, and adapted into a form which was suitable for children. In the early days of written fairy tales, there was a question whether the content of fairy tales is truly appropriate for children. Namely, parents hailing from educated backgrounds doubted the moral value of such tales. Nevertheless, the attitude towards fairy tales slowly improved, mainly because educators found that the their format proved especially useful for spreading moral and social ideas. (Zipes 2007, 3; 16 – 20).

The source of Sapkowski's writing is not only the classic European fairy tale literature but also the literature of other narratives. Sapkowski incorporates elements of Arabic literature, referencing the Middle Eastern collection of fairy tales *One Thousand and One Nights*, and his native literature from Poland. Although these literary narratives differ to a certain extent, they all retain the basic fairy tale structure – can they, therefore, be regarded as children's literature? The answer is certainly. Grimms'

Fairy Tales are nowadays considered to be almost exclusively children's literature, stories from *One Thousand and One Nights* such as *Aladdin* and *Sindbad the Sailor* have been regularly featured in cartoons and children's books and Polish folk stories are fairly similar to Grimms' *Fairy Tales* in terms of structure and substance. All the tales that served as an inspiration for Sapkowski's short stories can therefore be regarded as children's literature and in fact, it is highly possible that this is also the way Sapkowski himself perceived them. In one of the short stories, Geralt, the main protagonist of the novel, remarks that some parts of fairy tales are not as fictional and childish as people believe, implying that most people might regard fairy tales as children's literature (Sapkowski 2007, 69).

3. Comparison of Children's Fairy Tales and Sapkowski's Rewritings

Classical European children's literature is probably most prominently featured in Sapkowski's second book in the series *The Last Wish* (first according to the chronology of the fictional world), which describes the adventures of a witcher named Geralt. The witchers are an order of highly skilled monster slayers, magically enhanced for the sole purpose of travelling the land and helping nearby settlements by killing dangerous monsters. The book consists of a frame story which follows Geralt through his retelling of six adventures related to his profession, and all of these adventures are either complete rewritings of children's fairy tales or at least reference such works to some degree.

3.1. The Witcher and Roman Zmorski's *Strzyga*

Sapkowski's first short story tells the tale of how Geralt is hired by the local king to save his daughter from a terrifying curse. Geralt agrees to save the princess from being a striga in exchange for a payment, investigates the circumstances of the curse and in the end confronts the creature. Geralt spends a night with the monster and eventually shuts himself in the striga's sarcophagus, forcing the cursed princess to stay outside until the rooster's third crowing, which lifts the curse. Geralt, although badly wounded, survives the night and is rewarded for his work in gold.

This story is undoubtedly an adaptation of the Polish folk tale *Strzyga* by Roman Zmorski and a summary by Dorota Michułka excellently illustrates this:

“In Zmorski's text, the *Strzyga* from the title – the daughter of King Goździk – was born from incest between the king and his sister. The child transforms into a monster that attacks people at full moon. However, the king's love for his monster child is so great that he promises half of his kingdom and his daughter as wife if someone lifts the curse. The deed is achieved by a handsome but poor orphan named Martin, who is given his reward (Michułka 2015, 95).”

Both stories feature incestuous relationships among royalty, as well as a cursed daughter and a hero who comes to their rescue. Yet, the main difference is precisely in the hero. In Sapkowski's story Geralt agrees to save the princess but unlike Martin –the protagonist in Zmorski's fairy tale– Geralt remarks that if he finds the healing of the princess impossible to accomplish, he will end her suffering by killing her instead. At the same time, Geralt finds out that the child was cursed by someone close to the king. Contrary to that, the original Polish fairy tale does not mention anyone casting a curse upon the child. Martin from Zmorski's story is described as a virtuous orphan and ends up marrying the princess. While Geralt is also an orphan, his character is much more mature. Geralt needs money to survive and his motivation is not just sheer compassion, although he is at times also very virtuous.

A key difference between the stories is the final fate of the daughters. In Roman Zmorski's tale, Martin and the princess marry and live a prosperous life. On the other hand, princess Adda does not recover from her curse completely and is described as mentally impaired.

The Witcher also possesses several recurring symbolical numbers such as the number of years before Adda reappears – seven, or the number of rooster's crows – three. Rooster's crows could also be seen as a biblical reference to Peter's Denial of Jesus (Sapkowski 2007, 2 – 38; Michułka 2015, 95 – 96).

The Witcher is thus clearly a rewriting of the *Strzyga*. It incorporates numerous elements of the original work into its structure, but also adds its own unique ideas. Contrary to other fairy tales that serve as an inspiration for Sapkowski's work, *Strzyga* already features fairly mature themes and Sapkowski's rewriting does not differ significantly. Both stories conclude with similar messages: forbidden relationships end in tragedies and heroic deeds ought to be generously rewarded.

3.2. A Grain of Truth and The Beauty and the Beast

The premise for the second adventure titled *A Grain of Truth* takes inspiration from Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's *The Beauty and the Beast*. In Sapkowski's story, Geralt finds a magical castle, encounters a cursed beast, is given food and ultimately leaves unharmed. However, Sapkowski's tale differs in the tone: the beast is cursed after violating a priestess at some temple, he pays passing merchants gold in exchange for spending time with their daughters and the story concludes with the beast's lover dying and covering the beast in her blood, turning him back into a human.

The tale's structure mirrors that of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's fairy tale *The Beauty and the Beast* – which is a more popular and abridged version of Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *The Beauty and the Beast* – and Sapkowski seems to have stayed incredibly authentic to the original story's construction. Both stories feature many same elements including an abandoned enchanted castle in the middle of the forest, roses growing in the courtyard, a beast, merchants giving away their daughters and, what is probably the most important, a curse that can only be broken by an act of true love. The similarities can also be seen in the beast's reclusive nature and generosity, as in both stories the beast offers food and shelter to their guest. There are, however, some important differences. The first one is the vampiress, which replaces the original heroine and could almost be regarded as the antagonist of the story since she kills people travelling on the road. Her role mirrors that of Beauty, however, as she is the one who lifts the Beast's curse. The second striking difference is the inclusion of mature themes: the beast violates a priestess, and his lover dies a gory death (Beaumont 2018; Sapkowski 2007, 39 – 69).

Sapkowski took the rough shape of the play and adapted it into a form that suited his fictitious world. Yet while Villeneuve's story was originally written for children, Sapkowski's is much more serious, as it incorporates graphic elements that would probably be considered inappropriate for children. Sapkowski also does not shy away from keeping the general aesthetic of the story. Although the tale does not explicitly describe the appearance of the beast, Sapkowski seems to have stayed true to the probably most widespread representation of the beast, as he namely describes it as follows:

“...above it loomed a gigantic, hairy, bear-like head with enormous ears, a pair of wild eyes and terrifying jaws full of crooked fangs in which a red tongue flickered like flame...”

This depiction bears a striking similarity to recent popular representations of the beast – for example the animated Disney film *The Beauty and the Beast* features a bear-like beast (1991).

Sapkowski does change the tone of the story but at the same time acknowledges the brilliance of the fairy tale structure. Geralt's final line regarding love is very true to the original spirit of folklore. It serves as a final moral of the story – that certain things cannot be changed by an individual's force of will.

3.3. The Lesser Evil and Snow White

Sapkowski's third story *The Lesser Evil* recounts the events that occurred during Geralt's stay in a town called Blaviken, where he gets entangled in a strife between a wizard and a rogue princess Renfri. The princess in the short story represents a more tragic and ruthless *Snow White* from Grimms' fairy tales. In the short story, the wizard offers Geralt a reward if he kills Renfri, who is supposedly cursed. Geralt is

ultimately forced to kill the princess and her thugs, which results in a massacre. The story ends with a moral message – Geralt concludes that while both sides prompted him to choose the lesser evil, there is no such thing. No matter what the witcher’s choice was, the outcome would eventually be bad.

The focal point of the story is the cutthroat princess Renfri who bears an uncanny resemblance to Snow White. Both girls are described as being born into royalty, both have an evil bloodthirsty stepmother, both seek refuge with dwarves or gnomes and both are at some point rescued by a prince. Sapkowski again takes the original story’s construction and adapts it for a more mature audience. Renfri is, like Snow White, led into the forest by a man, but unlike Snow White, Renfri is violated and robbed by the hunter and the princess resorts to killing him with a pin of a brooch. The seven gnomes are portrayed as a gang of cutthroat thugs and Renfri is ultimately the one who kills her stepmother. She is at some point trapped and put into slumber –much like Snow White– by being turned into a crystal but is saved by a prince – again like Snow White. Contrary to the original tale, the prince’s family does not support the relationship, which ends badly for them, as they are all poisoned and die (Grimm and Grimm 2017, 494 – 501; Sapkowski 2007, 75 – 113).

Sapkowski’s portrayal of a classic children’s story, while grim and shocking, does not feel out of place. The world of the witcher is a fantasy depiction of the Middle Ages and is equally characterised by violence and cruelty. It does not seem inconceivable that such events could occur in the real world. Sapkowski explores the sexual aspects of the story, which are missing from the original tale, or rather are omitted for the story to be appropriate for children. The Renfri’s story in *The Lesser Evil* is thus in its essence a realistic and tragic retelling of the story of Snow White.

3. 4. A Question of Price and Hans the Hedgehog

The fourth adventure titled *A Question of Price* retells the story of Geralt getting caught up in the middle of a court conflict. A queen hosts a celebration for her daughter’s fifteenth birthday, inviting numerous eligible suitors. Geralt is hired by the queen to kill Duny, a former prince who was cursed into half hedgehog half-human form by day and human form by night. Duny appears at the party and explains that he saved the former king’s life in exchange for the first thing the king would encounter at home without knowing or expecting it, which turns out to be his new-born daughter. After a clash between those who support Duny’s claim for the princess and those who oppose it, the queen finally surrenders that a royal promise must be fulfilled.

This story is somewhat similar to the folk tale *Hans the Hedgehog*, one of the less-known stories collected by the Grimm brothers. The short story is not entirely faithful to the original fairy tale, which in this case serves as a thematic basis rather than as a full template for an adaptation. There are also some important differences between the two stories. The half boy half hedgehog in the Grimm’s fairy tale is born cursed, while Duny is cursed by a magician. At the same time, Duny is of royal heritage, while Hans is a son of a peasant. Furthermore, in his story, Hans saves two kings, while Duny only saves one. Another major difference is also the fact that princess Pavetta falls in love with Duny despite his half-animal form, whereas the princess in *Hans the Hedgehog* hesitates to marry Hans and wavers to go in bed with him (Grimm and Grimm 2016, 721 – 725; Sapkowski 2007, 118 – 156).

Both stories, however, feature a cursed boy saving the life of a king and asking the first thing they find at home as payment. This custom called *The Law of Surprise* is a practice that can frequently be observed in Sapkowski’s work. Most witchers are in fact children who were taken as a reward for *the Law of Surprise*. The tradition seems to have an almost religious undertone to it, as it is taken as something that must, by all means, be honoured even by the royalty. One of the characters exclaims

... (the king) knew the power of the Law of Surprise and the gravity of the oath he took. And he took it because he knew law and custom have a power which protects such oaths, ensuring they are only fulfilled when the force of destiny confirms them (Sapkowski 2007, 143).

The two stories are primarily similar in their final message. The moral of the story in both *A Question of Price* and *Hans the Hedgehog* is that an oath must be honoured, no matter the social status of the individual. At the same time, in both stories, it is the princesses who decide whether they accept to be taken by the half hedgehog man. Volition, therefore, seems to be another important aspect of these tales. When the first princess in “Hans the Hedgehog” falsely pretends that she wants to go with Hans she is punished and shamed for it by him.

A Question of Price and *Hans the Hedgehog* thus conclude with two very similar messages. Firstly, oaths are sacred and have to be honoured, no matter the social status. Secondly, both stories emphasise the importance of volition when it comes to oaths (Sapkowski 2007, 64 – 82).

3.5. The Edge of the World and the folk perception of the Devil

The fifth adventure follows Geralt and his friend on a quest to help a group of villagers with a so-called devil. In the story Geralt, quickly deduces that this is an example of common folk’s misunderstanding of the world. Geralt finds the creature but is eventually kidnapped along with his friend. The two are almost killed by a group of sylvans – goat-like humanoid beings – who want to take revenge on the humans for intruding upon their homeland. Right before they are executed by the leader of the sylvans, a magical fairy-like queen saves the pair by imploring the leader to act mercifully.

This adventure is not a direct rewriting like the fairy tales mentioned before and is instead a mixture of several different stories connected to a so-called “devil”. The story of *The Seven Swabians* for example includes a scene where a group of Swabian men stumble upon a creature in the field and come to a conclusion that it must be “the devil,” even though it is just an ordinary hare. In the story of *The King’s Son Who Feared Nothing* the king’s son is tormented by “the devils” who are described as little malevolent beings. Finally, in the story of *The Peasant and the Devil*, the devil seems to be almost human, wanting to eat grain and conversing with the peasant. This version of the devil could have served as an inspiration for Sapkowski’s story, as both stories feature peasants, the stealing of crops and a creature with human-like characteristics (Grimm and Grimm 2016, 761 – 771, 979 – 980; Sapkowski 2007, 164 – 206). Geralt also remarks that peasants must have seen something and mistook it for a devil after his friend Dandilion exclaims that devils do not exist:

True ... But Dandilion, I could never resist the temptation of having a look at something that doesn't exist (Sapkowski 2007, 173).

Henry Carsch gives explicit mention to the various descriptions of the devil in Grimm’s fairy tales, most of which do not really describe the devil and argues that this pattern of mistaking animals and people for a devil is very prominent in fairy tales (Carsch 1968, 475).

The Edge of the World is therefore not a rewriting of a specific fairy tale, but it does address the reappearing pattern of falsely regarding creatures and people as the devil.

3.6. The Last Wish and The Fisherman and the Jinni

The sixth and last story titled *The Last Wish* retells the story of how Dandilion and Geralt fish and catch an amphora. Dandilion opens the amphora, releases a Jinni, and proceeds to dictate his three wishes, but the Jinni harms Dandilion instead. Geralt finds help for his injured friend from a sorceress, who later gets

Geralt arrested. The sorceress eventually lures the Jinni into the town and tries to gain control of it which backfires. Geralt manages to save her by dictating a wish to the Jinni.

The last and arguably the most important adventure seems to take inspiration from the world-renowned classic *The Fisherman and the Jinni* from *One Thousand and One Nights*. Both stories mention that there is a seal on the jar. The jar in *The Fisherman and the Jinni* bears the seal of Solomon, while the jar in *The Last Wish* bears a signet of a magician on it. The seal of Solomon is also usually associated with a sort of enchanting magic, giving its possessor the power to tame spirits (Jinni). In the same way, the signet is used as a sort of enchantment in *The Last Wish* trapping the Jinni inside the jar. The signet also represents a nine-pointed star, similar to the seal of Solomon, which represents a six-pointed star (Adler and Singer 1907, 448). Another similarity is that the spirit in both tales is vengeful, malicious, and uncontrollable. The Jinni in *The Last Wish* tries to murder Dandilion and Geralt later remarks that Jinni are bound to take revenge on their captors (Burton et al. 2016, 36 – 78; Sapkowski 2007, 214 – 270).

The story of *The Fisherman and the Genie* while not a part of the European folklore can still be classified into the same genre of children's fairy tales. It deals with the supernatural, is short in length and includes a moral. It is, therefore, safe to assume that similar stories from *One Thousand and One Nights* can be easily compared to various children's fairy tales of Europe in terms of both structure and content. Sapkowski seems to have preserved this aspect of the story when he incorporated it into *The Last Wish*. Both stories ultimately emphasise the danger of careless usage of things that are beyond human comprehension and the significance of wisdom under pressure

4. Recurring patterns in Sapkowski's adaptations

The adaptations in Sapkowski's *The Last Wish* feature some recurring elements. Firstly, these adaptations can be sorted into two categories. The first category encompasses the short stories, which are complete rewritings of children's fairy tales – *The Witcher*, *A Grain of Truth* and *The Lesser Evil*. The second category includes those short stories, which only partially adapt children's fairy tales – *A Question of Price*, *The Edge of the World* and *The Last Wish*.

The complete rewritings closely follow the original structure of the tale and are adapted for Sapkowski's fantasy work. The original fairy tale, which was initially intended as a moral story for children is reappropriated for a more mature narrative, retaining the moral part, but adding the cruel aspects of adulthood. The story *The Lesser Evil*, for example, mentions that Renfri was violated by the hunter. Yet Sapkowski's short stories, while certainly harsher, are not entirely pessimistic and are instead at certain points highly romantic. They accentuate the importance of striving for moral ideals and the existence of emotions such as love. *A Grain of Truth* is probably the most explicit example of this, as Geralt points out that *love* has an unexplainable power. The more mature and graphic moments in the story are not there for mere shock value; they serve as means to explore ideas that would otherwise be left unexplored by the restrictions of the children's literature.

The partial adaptations of children's fairy tales only incorporate select parts of the original story. These adapted elements usually serve as a device that drives the plot forward, the best example being the magical jar in *The Last Wish*. At the same time, these elements can also serve as a mode of establishing the atmosphere of the story, as is the case with the short story *The Edge of the World* where the idea of peasants mislabelling certain creatures as the devil – an idea prominent in children's fairy tales – is used to establish a rural illiterate setting.

The second recurring element is Sapkowski's use of literary devices typical of children's fairy tales. The short stories frequently feature curses – symbolising punishment for misbehaviour –, namely the cursed daughter in *The Witcher*, the beast's curse in *A Grain of Truth*, the so-called fabricated *curse of the black*

sun in *The Lesser Evil*, and Duny's curse in *A Question of Price*. The stories also often incorporate characteristic fairy tale numbers such as roster crowing three times, princess Adda emerging from the tomb after seven years, Duny turning into a hedgehog at midnight, Jinni's three wishes, seven gnomes as Renfri's companions etc. Finally, all Sapkowski's stories end with a moral message, which is another prominent characteristic of fairy tales. Again, in the story *A Grain of Truth* Geralt concludes that there is no stronger force than true love seems to be the best example of this, probably due to it being highly faithful to the original story.

Sapkowski's short stories thus follow a certain pattern. They either stay completely true to the source material or use the source material as an inspiration, which serves as a story device. At the same time, numerous structural and thematic fairy tale characteristics are incorporated into these stories. Sapkowski's short stories in *The Last Wish* could be regarded as a modernised version of the classic fairy tale format aimed at an older audience.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Last Wish* is almost in its entirety based on children's fairy tales from various cultural spheres. Be it European or Arabic in origin, these fairy tales are almost certainly perceived by Sapkowski as intended for children. In the short stories that are a part of *The Last Wish* Sapkowski uses the rough structure of the fairy tales and changes it into a form that is suitable for his fantasy setting. These stories can either be full rewritings or adaptations of the original stories or the fairy tales can only serve to give a thematic outline for Sapkowski's content. The stories of *Snow White*, *The Beauty and the Beast*, and *Strzyga* are therefore fully adapted into new stories in Sapkowski's fictional world, while the stories like *Hans the Hedgehog*, *The Seven Swabians* and *The Fisherman and the Jinni* only provide content for shorter segments of the stories. Sapkowski does not shy away from introducing mature themes into the stories and by doing so explores ideas, which could not be explored in children's literature. These ideas could either include violence and gore, the best example being the death of the beast's lover in *A Grain of Truth*, or sexuality, shown in *The Lesser Evil*. Sapkowski also retains numerous literary devices that are a part of fairy tale literature. The most prominent among these are the moral messages at the end of each short story, the characteristic fairy tale numbers, and fairy tale symbols such as roses or magical seals. *The Last Wish* is a testimony of how much Sapkowski appreciates and respects fairy tales. It is an homage to the ingenuity of the oral tradition from various parts of the world.

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From France, With Love

Ajša Podgornik

Wes Anderson's film *The French Dispatch* effectively pays tribute to the most important aspects of French culture: its art, cuisine, and cinema. The film is presented in three vignettes, the first of which tells the story of a prisoner turned painter and salutes the French artistic tradition. The country is well known as a birthplace of many important art movements, such as neoclassicism, realism, and impressionism. This rich history is enhanced by the fact that the story is told by an art historian giving a lecture. French culinary legacy is nodded to in the third story, in which a chef saves a young boy from being killed by a group of criminals. It highlights how food can bring people together in the most unusual ways. Lastly, the film pays tribute to France's iconic filmmakers throughout its entire runtime. Anderson alludes to the French New Wave by using several filmmaking techniques common in that era, such as switching the colour and aspect ratio often, abruptly starting and ending the musical score, and making the audience aware that they are watching a film at all times – something a film was not supposed to do, while still maintaining his own signature.

PROSE FICTION

Corpse (a haibun)

Breda Hribernik

I had no memory of how I got there. Come to think of it, I had no memory of anything. Birth, growing up, life, my death. All I knew was that I was dead. Motionless. Lying in a pit in the snowy forest. No memories. No pain. No cold. I was simply locked within my body, with the ability to see and hear. No one prepares you for what your first year as a corpse would feel like.

the coming of spring
as bushes and birds bloom
I feel nothing still

The sun would blind my eyes almost every day; therefore, I would mostly listen to the familiar sounds of the forest. Bird chirps. Wind moving the branches. The occasional animal making its first steps. One day, a new sound appeared. A child's voice. I opened my eyes. She was picking flowers nearby. She sounded joyous until she saw me. Then she screamed and ran to her mother. Have I ever had a mother to run to?

the first summer taste
sun warming everything here
I am feeling cold

The long days gave me much time to think. Despite having no memories, I remembered I was once happy. Most days I wondered if I would ever feel happy again. I sometimes saw birds. Are they happy? I saw a group of boys run past me, yelling and laughing. Were they happy? Happiness sounds more like an impossible standard than something humans are meant to experience.

a yellow leaf falls
it dances to its own drum
a silent forest

The colours formed a blanket over my motionless body. Hardly anyone came around to the forest during that time, even though I noticed some mushrooms growing. I had no idea if they were poisonous. Perhaps they were, perhaps they were not. I probably did many things in my life, having no idea if they were good or bad. A family of field mice has made a nest in my hair. They occupy my thoughts now.

oh please end it now
I feel and desire nothing
this is not a life

Lotus-Eaters

Pino Pograjc

Suddenly, he appears on my screen. His face is close to the laptop camera, and he must be positioned somewhere on his bed, probably facing the door, since I see a bit of his window frame. I have been in his room often enough to know its content and dimensions, but sometimes I still have no idea where he is when he calls me.

“I’ve been looking forward to this all day,” I say.

He smiles and repositions his camera, “Do you have it with you?”

I hold up a small piece of fruit. It looks like a pitted date, covered with a white sugar glaze. It glistens against my computer’s brightness.

“Thank the gods,” he exhales. “This is the reason I stayed sane for all these months.”

I get a tingling sense of déjà vu and let it pass through me. He stands up from the bed to get his own piece of fruit from the cupboard, and, while I wait, I feel that the light from the window will soon cover his room with sunset hues.

A minute passes before he lies on the bed again. I can almost imagine the clutter he had to rummage through in order to find the delicacy we must eat together.

“Took you a while,” I smirk.

“Yeah, it’s been a minute since I tidied up. I think it’s the weather,” he says and flashes a knowing smile.

I snort and reply, “There’s no such thing as bad weather here. Do I really need to come over and clean every month? What’s next – holding your hand when crossing the street?”

He rolls his eyes and changes the subject: “So, are you ready?”

I nod and straighten my back. I put the fruit between my upper and lower front teeth and wait for him to do the same. Despite the bickering, I feel excited.

“I’ll count to three,” I try to say clearly with the glazed date in between my teeth.

He winks and tries to do the same, “Build me up, buttercup.”

We stare into each other’s eyes.

“One, two, three.”

We bite into the gooey flesh of our fruits and try our best not to have the food stick to our palates. The overwhelming mixture of tastes brings tears to our eyes. Our taste buds are confused by the notes of cinnamon, lemon and figs, but we keep on chewing until we get to the pit, which is similar to a walnut in taste and texture.

Soon we are done with our dessert, and having not taken our eyes away from each other, we start to blink again.

I see his arms slowly detach from his torso as if he were an action doll. With each blink, another piece of his body falls off onto the bed. I sit completely still, yet I feel my arms reach out across the screen and

cradle his legs, his arms and his limp head in my lap. They are dripping with honey, and I start to put them together again like a muscular jigsaw puzzle.

Once he becomes whole again, I feel his hands touching my face and playing with its features. His finger touches my eye and slides it across my cheeks. Then he takes my lips and puts them on my forehead. He puts my nose on my chin.

After the game is over and he puts my face in order again, we start sinking into the bed. The sheet feels like quicksand, and the hole beneath us engulfs us whole. Falling into the mouth of a giant bear, we float in its pulsating stomach, and every movement causes tiny sparks in the air as if we were made of match strike paper. I hug his body and he hugs me back.

Suddenly, he feels strange. He grows cactus spikes all over his skin and a few of them prick me. The little drops of blood float next to us and turn into tiny stork-like red birds. They fly above our heads and let out screams of out-of-tune accordions.

The spikes recede, and I cannot recognize his face, causing me to stare at him. In his eyes, I see the same confusion.

“What’s your name?” he asks.

I try my best to remember, but the letters do not appear in my mind, “I don’t know.”

Still in an embrace, I ask the same, “What’s *your* name?”

He drops his head and takes a few seconds to answer, “I don’t know either.”

Our free fall ends with us dropping on my bed. From there, I see my double sitting on the chair in front of my computer, completely still and smiling. The screen shows the double of my lover looking at mine, smiling as well.

I turn my eyes back to the person next to me, a clone of the man on screen, “Where are you from?”

His voice becomes mellow like static, and a short answer escapes his soft lips, “Does it matter?”

I get a feeling of dread in my stomach. I feel like I have obligations and promises to keep today, but I cannot remember a single one.

I turn towards him and ask, “I should be doing something right now.”

He kisses my neck and smiles, “It can wait, my dear.”

I feel a heaviness weighing on me. It grows stronger and makes my body feel completely exhausted. I start falling asleep in the arms of my lover, a stranger. His closeness makes me feel warm.

-

I wake up in front of my computer screen. The moment I wake, I see him lift his head. We look at each other and smile. I see through my window that the sun will set soon. I look back at him.

“I’ve been looking forward to this all day,” I say.

Dream Watch

Nina Poljanšek



I stared forward, and all the mirror offered was another me staring right back. My hands gripped the cold sink, frozen in fear of letting it go.

Maybe... Maybe I can ask for a raise. Or to get next month's paycheque early?

One of my hands unfroze and slipped down, hanging by my side weakly.

"And get fired like Ji-Woo..."

I reached into the drawer and brought out the make-up kit.

The messages from the last Dream session were shooting through my mind like on speakers:

"She so skinny",

"So fucking pale dude!!!",

"Now that's a corpse I'd put my dick in".

Corpse.

I touched my skin gently; the bags under my eyes were black, my cheeks hollowing in, my skin tone greening from the veins underneath.

A corpse.

What I was. What I was becoming.

I applied a thick layer of powder and drowned my thin lips in soft pink gloss. Then, I looked in the mirror again.

A doll.

They wanted a doll.

I put the make-up down. I washed my hands. I checked my teeth. I combed my hair with my fingers.

Washed my hands again.

There was nothing left to do than to...

I looked at the door. My eyes started watering.

"No." I threw my head back; I couldn't afford the make-up to go to waste. I forced my tears back inside me.

My mind was still running. Maybe I could ask the landlord. I could take triple shifts. I could sell... something...

Nothing.

No matter how I scrambled around, there was no neon-green exit sign to light the way out.

I silenced the weeping in my head. I exited the bathroom.

I stood stiffly in the middle of my bedroom, not sure whether to be grateful or resentful of past me who had already prepared my setup: my laptop with a webcam, The Chord hanging limply from the input port, and the table turned so my back was against the empty white wall. If I hadn't set it up before, I wouldn't be able to myself to do it now.

I sank into my computer chair, staring blankly at the laptop. I didn't turn on any lights, all illumination provided only by screen. Against the darkness of the room, it was blinding. The intense white light washed out any colour, any life, that dared to be around me.

Right in the middle of the background stood an icon – a cute simplistic logo of two people holding hands, one of them wearing a sleeping mask. So cute. So inviting. So innocent.

I held my breath and clicked it. Sweet lullaby notes played from my speakers as the program launched. Everything in my body told me to shut the screen down. Hearing the tune, I felt like a caged animal, hearing a chef in the next room, sharpening their knives against one another. As always, sleepy voice greeted me: “Welcome to Dream Watch.” The voice yawned between the sentences: “We hope you have sweet dreams tonight.”

My profile opened immediately, with my highly filtered profile picture front and centre. I was hoping it would lag, give me a few more seconds of rest. I double checked that everything was running, looking for any last-minute excuse to keep delaying it. My eyes caught the Viewer button on the bottom of the screen. It’s been so long since I’ve been on the other side. Once you’ve been on the receiving end... I didn’t know any Dreamer who still watched other Dreamers...

Just a quick look, I thought. I wouldn’t join any chatrooms. It would be like I’m window shopping, but not stepping in. I clicked the viewer button.

I was bombarded with recommendations, dozens of people’s profiles stacked one after another. I clicked back and forth, a little impressed with how smoothly everything was running, even with so many people online. I didn’t recognize any of the Dreamers; none of the ones I used to watch still worked on the platform. Most profiles clearly showed what their theme was: a guy watching 80s horror movies, a woman listening to slime ASMR, another watching sleep-hypnosis, someone listening to black boxes of crashed planes... I quickly sped by the sex-themed Dreamers. I did not want to know how that genre was doing. Then a familiar face fell into view: Ji-Woo. They were wearing their traditional Hanbok, the one they told me they were dying in during their mom’s second wedding in the summer. I hovered on their profile with my mouse: “Dreams of Korea – come watch Korean movies, K-dramas, photography and K-pop with me, then at night see how it all chaotically blends together.” There was another paragraph written in Hangeul; I imagined it was the same as above just in Korean. I smiled. I know I shouldn’t have. I knew they were here for the same reason as me (not because they wanted to be), but in a way I was glad they found a theme they were passionate about and that didn’t include putting themselves in discomfort or harm.

Then my eyes moved to the profile next to theirs. It was a white guy wearing one of those cheap plastic Chinese hats, squinting and grinning idiotically. His current Dream session was titled: “What you REALLY need to know about Asia!!!” He had three times as many followers as Ji-Woo.

“Of course...” I clicked away.

My eyes glanced to the clock on my laptop: 23:36. Fuck.

I needed to start. I didn’t want to. I was terrified to. But if I didn’t start now... I clenched my teeth together and pressed ‘start video’.

I now only saw myself; the pretty, pale version at least. The chat was empty. I looked at my footage. Plain white shirt, plain white wall. All other Dreamers had colourful setups, backgrounds and attires that fit their theme. I didn’t. I didn’t have a theme. I knew more people would click on me if I did, but I didn’t want one. I couldn’t bring myself to do it. If I did, I was, in a way, admitting I was doing this seriously. Like really doing it...

The first people started flowing in. My last minute of peace was over.

“Good evening, guys. Thanks so much for coming. Hi! Hi. How are you doing? Long day? Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.”

I recognized some of my regulars. XXfishlast sent: “Our anorexic queen is back ♥” I just smiled and waved.

It took a couple of minutes for the viewer number to steady; some were leaving, some still joining, but the number hung around 130.

“So, as you know... You can send me suggestions of what to look up or watch, we’ll watch it together and I’ll give you the code for your headset at the end.”

In the chat, an icon appeared. No picture, no avatar. Just the colour red. And with a name I couldn’t even read, written in that font that looked demonic and melted.

They asked: “Will you watch anything I send you? Anything?”

A chill slid down my spine. It could just be a newcomer asking whether all types of links and files can be sent... But my gut didn't believe that.

I just smiled innocently: “I'll try to see as many suggestions as possible, but I'm only choosing 2 or 3. We only have so much time.”

The links started pouring in. I talked to the viewers while checking the links on my phone – muted. I was good at closing the disturbing ones quickly now: police evidence of hate crimes, sick videos of animal abuse, videos of them masturbating while moaning my username... I had to keep smiling, I had to pretend everything was okay, that I just happened not to see them. I had to keep my voice from quivering or breaking.

But in between the mess, I did find some acceptable ones. “*Get home safe*. I've wanted to watch the trailer for that! Great rec ‘HomeAlone3IsBetterThanDorig’.” I chose another YouTube creepy pasta animation; pretty sure the person who sent it in was the creator themselves, trying to get a shout out, and I didn't mind at all.

The red icon appeared in chat again, spamming one and the same link over and over again.

I stared at it. It could be nothing. I had to pay rent...

No. No, I couldn't.

I ignored it, pretending I was too busy answering the questions from before. The spamming stopped. But before I could even feel the relief, they sent a message to chat.

“I know you saw my link.”

My throat shrivelled dry.

They kept going.

“You want to tease me, huh?” “You little whore.”

I gripped tight on my phone. I needed to keep talking. I could feel my voice quivering. I was terrified to look back at the chat. But I had to. I had to keep talking to the others. I breathed in deep, hoping it wasn't obvious, and looked back.

The red icon was still there.

“I can wait” “I'll see you when you sleep.”

Then he logged out.

Something in me broke. I couldn't pretend to smile anymore. I couldn't keep talking. I couldn't keep reading the chat rushing by. I sat there for a solid 5 minutes in complete silence.

My throat finally opened up and allowed me to speak in a broken voice: “So... That's all the time we have for tonight, guys... R... Remember the code is now in the description.”

The chat was booming with questions: what just happened, that was so creepy, is it a bit... I didn't answer anything, just watched it go by.

And in that sea of theories of my silence, a cute pastel Pikachu icon popped up, asking:

“How do I become a full-time Dreamer like you?”

“... Again, thank you for coming on the chat and... and I'll see you in Dream Watch. Bye.”

And I ended the video.

I sat in silence again. I stayed, only realizing for how long when my laptop screen turned off to preserve energy. I stared at my screen reflection in the dark.

My eyes were heavy. Sunken. Dark.

A corpse.

My phone buzzed. It was just a software update, but it forced me to look at the time: 5 minutes till midnight.

I sighed. I didn't have time to have a breakdown. I got up and went to the bathroom to clean off my make-up and grab a sleeping pill. When back, I sat down on the edge of the bed, looking at the clock. The minutes changed from 57 to 58.

I stared at The Chord. The ribbed lifeless snake was no different from any regular charger but for the three light blue tendrils at its unplugged end. Something so meagre, so ordinary. Yet so painful. Just

looking at it brought back all the pain from previous Dreams – my knees stiff, my back all in knots. My arms were still weak from the last time. It felt wrong that there were no bruises. I mean, of course there weren't, but it still felt wrong. Like someone was stealing away proof of my pain.

A memory visited me. From before all this started, back when no one even knew about Dream Watch. I remembered the first meme I saw about it. It was a screenshot of some movie; some guy's head exploding like a watermelon. Over it, the text read: "bro when the rest of us bois go into his head with Dream Watch to find out who his crush is".

It's funny remembering that now. Both the fact that there was a time when Dream Watch didn't exist and wasn't a worldwide sensation and how ironic it is that people entering your mind hurts right about everywhere else on your body but the head.

I guess it's appropriate. It's like people are sitting on your torso, on your limbs, only staring, not touching your head.

I took one last deep breath before I sunk, allowing myself one tear, and swallowed the sleeping pill dry. I took the loose end of The Chord, bringing it to my throat. When close enough, its tendrils stood up. They elongated and wrapped tightly around my neck, so close they felt like they dug underneath the skin. They slithered to the back of my neck and fell still when they reached their spot.

The pressure started growing, my head heavier. I lay down on the cold pillow.

My phone dinged sadly somewhere next to me. It was exactly midnight. Time.

For the next 6 hours of sleep, I was no longer a person. I was their content.

My Little Thing

Katarina Dimitrijević

I am keeping you so close to me, my little thing. I absorbed you from an early age, and I somehow convinced myself that you are a part of me.

Why are you always doing that? Just to make me mad again?

My little thing, you have become so hidden and completely absorbed in my body that I am in no position to recognise you anymore. Because of that, you always come up in places and people I grow to love. Yes, you do; how can you? Was the pain that I felt with my mother and father not enough for you, to reach to them, and stop with them? Do you feel that I owe you something, still? How can I? I was just a child.

You make me laugh. Every time I see that you think you have finally found it, I show up, I find my way in your lake of emotions, I rise above that thing you thought you loved, and I make a mess. Yes, I am that fear and restlessness you see in your dreams whenever you touch that dark blue water that shines during the night. Yes, I am the one appearing at the end of the tunnel when you fail to make a connection with your so-called loved ones. Yes, I am that success and fame you seek so desperately in others because I remind you that "you are simply not worth it".

How can you be so cruel, my little thing? I ought to get better, and you just wish me misery. Can't you leave my body, my mind, my precious lake, and the core of who I am alone? Can't you go away and be a parasite to somebody else? I cannot stand you any longer. I want you out. I want to love myself completely, my little thing. Allow me that, I beg you, I want to feel it in this lifetime, at least once. Allow me to be the whole I so desperately want to become, to be one with myself without needing to have anybody by my side.

You are so wicked and cruel, you trick me into loving something, and then it is not love for them, but simply you, hiding behind them and laughing at me like I am the biggest fool. But I brought you out on my own, my little thing. I had to hurt myself, break my heart consciously just to see your face on the surface of my lake. I saw you that night; you were so angry when I touched you; you were making my happy shiny lake burst in anger. I brought you out and faced you in the real world.

I had to point at you, my little thing, I had to use my logic where I am not used to, I ruined it, maybe, all of my emotional experiences with that logic, but I got you out. My little thing, you are not little at all; you have caused me a great deal of trouble. Was it worth it?

The Hag of Beara

Maruška Slavec

After a month of settling myself into my new routine –

wake up, drink loads of instant coffee, go to school, teach Irish children some basic Italian, go home and wait for Friday evenings when I can treat myself to a Guinness

– it was time to embark on the mountain.

What the Irish here called ‘the mountain’ was a quarter of the height of the tallest peak back home, but I still felt all warm inside when they would point to the peaks around the Ring of Gullion and proudly tell me about the volcanic formations that protected this area in South Armagh and call them mountains.

The chosen day for *hribolazenje*¹ was the morning after St Patrick’s Day. I was off from school on an extended weekend while many were still working (or were recovering from a hangover), so the parking lot at the base of the mountain was empty but for a few people with children. “Go past the children’s trail, keep left, get to the road and then turn right at the top parking lot; you’ll see stepping stones that lead to the cairn and the lake,” were the instructions of my landlady’s boyfriend, who was kind enough to drive a carless me around that day. “And have you got your SPF?”

I nodded (getting a sunburn in Northern Ireland in March would spell lifelong embarrassment back home), then nodded some more, thanked him and set off in the direction of the arch that read “Giant’s Lair”.

Following the path as instructed, I soon made it to the road where far-reaching views of the countryside opened themselves to me, inviting me to bask in them. I followed the road, which led uphill in the desired direction and worked up such a sweat that the cold winds soon chilled my enthusiasm. The only other living beings I encountered were rams grazing on the mountain slopes, so unbothered that not even my clicking tongue could distract them from the windswept grasses.

Despite the shortening breath and the sweat pooling under my armpits and chest, I kept my feet going one in front of the other and admired the flora. There were small plantations of pine trees peeking from a multitude of yellow-blooming gorse bushes (no, not gorse, whin, the locals instructed me to call them) and purple heaths. They also told me that bluebells would come into bloom soon and that the pastures and woods will be covered in a sea of azure flowers. “God’s country,” the landlady once muttered, and I couldn’t disagree.

Minutes that felt like ages later, I bolted off past the top parking lot and straight for the stepping stones posing as a staircase that led to the very top where I would lay my eyes on the cairn and the lake. There weren’t any people around, just the heathers and stones for company. I began to feel strange; although my phone was working (after paying a hefty price for a package with data, it better work), I felt uneasy being on the mountain alone.

These feelings dissipated with the winds after I was greeted by a huge pile of rocks with an opening in the middle, where a makeshift cavernous entrance marked the doorway to the South Cairn. “Uau,” I whispered to myself.

¹ Slovenian for *hiking, mountaineering*.

“It’s nice, isn’t it,” croaked a voice beside me. I almost tripped on the rocks, but caught myself in time before my foot would get lodged between the rocks and I would fall and cut my hands again. After regaining balance, I looked at the person who spooked me.

The old woman stood upright, with her head cocked to the left. She had skin like granite, and her hair resembled scutched flax which fell upon her shoulders in a waterfall, covering her chest and back. A faint smile danced on her thin lips, and goodwill shone in her small, dark eyes, hidden under wrinkles like precious stones below the soil.

“It is, yeah,” I answered and observed her from the corner of my eye. Her hair and woven linen cloak with cross embroidery made me feel like an intruder on this mountain, with my windbreaker and neon green headphones that I removed from my ears and tucked into my pocket. “Do you come here often?” I asked, trying my hand at small talk.

“Oh yes, I live here,” she pointed to the opening of the cairn. “Not always, of course. I like to move around when it becomes too crowded, but I felt there weren’t many people here today, so I came,” her tone was so conversational that people could mistake us for an auntie and her niece.

“I’m sorry, you live ... here? On the mountain?” I looked at her, then to the cairn, then her again. “Isn’t this the witch’s house?”

She grinned widely, showing me her pointy yellow teeth. “So you’ve heard the stories, my dear! I’m the witch. Or hag. Witch sounds nicer. And this is my house, the Cailleach Beara’s house.” She spoke so fast — and I still wasn’t completely accustomed to the accent people spoke with here — that I felt my wheels rolling in the distant reaches of my brain folds. “You’re ... You’re ... Kajlah bera?”

The face she made was familiar; it was the same face I made when people here would inadvertently mispronounce my harsh-sounding name of Russian origin. “Oh, dear. Let’s try that again. Cailleach. Beara.”

“Cailleach. Beara.”

“That’s much better! And may I hear your name?”

I told her, and she blinked a couple of times, then smiled. “And here I am slagging you off for having a hard time with mine. Sounds lovely, pet, and I’ll make sure to learn it right. Listen now, would you like to come in for a cup of tea?”

A cup of tea with the witch — who knew what that would entail? Would she turn me into a frog or cook me in her oven for breakfast? She must have seen my expression, a furrowed brow and more wheels turning, and chuckled. “You’ve heard the stories about me, alright. No, no, I won’t ask you to jump into the lake, my dear. You’re not from here, are you?”

I nodded my head a no. “Right, well, I could feel it as you were walking up to my mountain ... And I’m terribly intrigued. Don’t often get such foreign visitors. And you came here on your own accord! It would not bode well for the people of this island if we didn’t show our hospitality.”

Maybe I had been home for too long—I had never been far from home for more than a week—and maybe it was that she reminded me of my grandmother, and it was that longing for a semblance of home that led me to bow under the archway that led into the Hag’s House. In the middle of the rounded space, where

the walls were rocks stacked on top of each other, she conjured a fireplace and a kettle. “Now, my dear,” she said and put leaves into the boiling kettle. “Tell me where you’re from.”

“Well, so,” I started the same speech I would start with when someone would ask me that question, but after reciting it as I had to everyone else, she grimaced. “No, no, geography doesn’t mean anything to me. Tell me stories from your homeland, and then I’ll know where you’re from.”

“Stories?”

“Yes, pet. You do tell stories in your home?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Well then,” she passed me a clay mug filled with brown tea. “Tell me anything. Stories about gods, kings, heroes,” she sat on a rock across from me and huddled into her cloak like a child awaiting a bedtime story.

“Ah,” I clutched the mug and let its warmth travel to my fingers. “We don’t have much of those. Gods and kings, I mean. Some heroes. But lots of stories were just written in the 19th century, by writers who realized we don’t have many folk stories, so they collected fragments and then tried to work them into a cohesive plot, or they made up their own,” I looked at her for reassurance, but she just stared at me with those two shiny water beetles for eyes.

“Amm, but the town where I’m from has a story, a legend about how it got its crest. So years and years ago, pirates from Genoa, that is, from Italy, were attacking. The people flocked to the church and prayed for safety. Someone, something heard them, and a thick fog enveloped the island so that the pirates got lost in the mist. The priest from the church then released a white dove, a symbol of peace, and it flew past the ships of the pirates. For them, the bird meant that they were close to shore, because birds like that don’t fly over the sea, so they followed it out of the mist. But it led them to the open sea, and while they were there, they decided to go home, and so the town was saved. The dove returned to the church with an olive branch in its beak, which became the coat of arms for my town.”

I couldn’t have asked for a better listener; the crone drank words like peat absorbs water. She slowly nodded as her eyes centred on me again. “That was good. Now I know a little bit more. Go on, pet.”

The next story from my shallow arsenal was that of the strongman, Martin Krpan; how he would smuggle salt with his loyal mare, how he was summoned to the emperor’s court to best a giant and how he cut down the empress’ favourite linden tree to fashion himself a club. “Sounds like Cuchulainn,” she murmured. “Our stories have something in common then, despite being a sea and some land away.”

I smiled and sipped more tea from the cup that seemed to never empty. Martin Krpan was followed by Kekec, Peter Klepec and then *Zlatorog*, or Goldenhorn, which I embellished with some details, but her unchanging expression of a bemused and entertained person never flickered with doubt. I had to borrow words from our national poet, so I told her about the Waterman, about Rozamunda from Turjak Castle and finally, about the baptism at the Savica.

She nodded knowingly. “Your folk fought against that too. I see, I see now exactly which part of the world you’re from. The image is becoming clearer. I see the thorny bushes that leave whip marks on your legs. I see your bare feet as you run through them, digging your toes into the dry ground. I see the olive trees waving in a sunlit breeze. I smell the faint scent of the turquoise sea as it rolls over the hills.”

As she spoke, I saw the places before my eyes and felt a pang of homesickness in my stomach.

“Do you have any more?”

One more. “It’s not so much a story as a legend or parts of it,” I said. “But we do have a myth about a king who sleeps under the mountain.” She perked up at those words and blinked a couple of times. “There is a stone table in a cave inside the mountain,” I continued, “and behind it sleeps king Matjaž, Matthias, well, Matjaž,” If I had persisted with original names for so long, why bother adapting them now. “Matjaž sleeps under the mountain, and when his beard wraps around the stone table seven times, he will wake up.”

Her clear eyes sparkled. “Is that so? Well then, another thing we share in common,” she smiled widely and showed me her teeth, like shards of flint. “Do you know that we have a story like that, about our king of the Fianna?”

“Fionn MacCumhail?” I asked.

“The one, good girl! He sleeps under a mountain too and will awaken when his people will need him most,” she leaned back against the wall, the ragged edges of the stones must have poked her back, but she didn’t even flinch. “If you ask me, I can count the occasions on which he could’ve woken up on both hands,” her face grew dark, and she pursed her lips in extreme dissatisfaction. “These kings. What could they do even if they did awaken?”

I nodded in a sort of agreement. “Well, you know, I think that somebody must be going up the mountain and cutting Matjaž’s beard so he’d keep sleeping,” I giggled at my own joke, and she regaled me with a sweet, grandmotherly smile. “But I guess you’re right. It would be best if he never woke up, to save him from the shock of everything.”

After moments of warm and thick silence, she stood up and clasped her wrinkled hands together. “This has been lovely, my dear. Thank you for indulging this, well, hag, in her strange wishes,” she said. “Come again when you have more stories, a chara?”

“I’ll read around just for you,” I promised, and she laughed heartily. We exchanged final pleasantries, I over-thanked her for the tea, and she waved her hand. “Come again, not too soon, but when you do, I’ll be here,” she promised, and I nodded quickly. “It’s high time for me to wander around again, and maybe tides and winds will take me to your corner of the earth,” she winked and escorted me outside.

As I stepped out of the cairn, the sun was in the same position as it had been when I entered. No time had passed. Good thing, I thought to myself. It felt like hours, and I would have no other ride back to my landlady’s house. Would have had to ask the Cailleach Beara to lend me her winds.

Outside of the cairn, a month passed. As duly promised, I researched more on my history: about the pagan gods, folk stories and history. Veronika of Desenice might interest her more, or the Chronicles of Visoko, I thought to myself as I climbed up the mountain again the weekend after the Easter holidays had ended. As I reached the top and the entrance to the cairn, I knocked on the stones and waited.

“Come in, a mhuirín,” I heard her shrill call, followed immediately by cackling laughter. “I have a surprise for you!”

I entered her House and on the stone ground right in front of me lay a seven-meter-long silver beard.

A Ghost Story

Katja Indžić

The sun had just begun to set when William walked into the cemetery for his shift. A depressing job, many believed, but he was glad to do it. He'd always wanted to work with people but in a more intimate and relaxed capacity. Office work seemed too stressful, teaching too impersonal. A cemetery caretaker – just the job for him.

He'll admit, it was grueling work – a mix of physical and psychological exertion – but it was more fulfilling than any other job, in William's opinion. The option to help people in pain, after all, is what he went to school for, what his purpose on earth was. He respected psychologists, of course. They did important work. But he felt people needed him later on much more than they ever would during the course of their life.

Clocking in and wheeling out the cart with supplies, William made his way to the first stretch of graves. These were generally the oldest, there since they'd built the cemetery, so the work was mostly that of polishing and cleaning them. On the third of the month, when his local flower shop hosted a 2 for 1 sale, he'd buy some roses and place them on the graves of the ghosts that were struggling most. The first few stretches of graves were void of ghosts and had been since before William started working there, his predecessor successfully doing his job in helping them cross over. Most of the time, the lack of ghosts was only theoretical, of course, because the ghosts that have known William for a while would swing around and keep him company while he cleaned.

Usually, he let them ramble about whatever befell their minds and was just glad for the company. As expected, most of them were older and seemed to have an infinite reservoir of stories to tell. William was always happy to lend his ear.

Today was no different. William stopped his cart at the left-most grave of the first row and started taking out his cleaning supplies. He'd barely gotten the first rag out when Gregory, the ghost of an older gentleman who had died some weeks prior, sat down on the grass beside the grave.

"Good evening, William."

William smiled warmly at him. "Hello, Gregory. How are you?"

The man gave him a kind look. "Better now, certainly."

"Yes, I'd imagine so. It is terribly lonely, isn't it?"

Gregory often liked to discuss his loneliness. His wife hadn't yet passed away, and he was convinced he wouldn't be able to cross over until then, until they could do it together. William felt for him. To spend your whole life with someone, used to them always being there, and then suddenly having to navigate life, or death rather, by yourself. He knew Gregory would spend the day keeping an eye on his wife. Then, as the sun set and he'd be cemetery-bound, he'd spend the night telling William about it.

"It is. But not for much longer, I believe."

"Is that so?" William had just about finished polishing the first grave, giving it one more wipe before getting up to move on to the next one. "Has Cindy gotten worse?"

Gregory floated with him to the next grave, somehow managing to look both forlorn and elated. "Yes. I believe I overheard a doctor say that it's only a matter of time. Days, she thinks."

"Well, she lived a full life. I believe she'll be happy to return back to you now."

He liked Gregory as much as any of the spirits he helped. William made sure not to get overly attached to any of the ghosts. He had a job to do, but honestly, he was less worried about being unprofessional and more worried about mourning them when they eventually ended up leaving him. For the most part, he had gotten used to connecting with them just enough to help, but not enough to miss them. Sure, there were some he'd liked better than others, those he often looked back on fondly – even taking an extra minute or two at their graves when the mood arose. But he made sure to never, *never*, pass

the line of no return. It wouldn't do either party any good – an attachment between him and a ghost would result in the ghost not being able to pass over for far longer than intended and for William to suffer greatly. It was a tough scale to balance sometimes.

It was also, by far, the most punishable offense for a cemetery caretaker. All throughout his studies and his apprenticeships, it was drilled into him that forming a too-strong a connection with a spirit would result in immediate suspension and, in some severe cases, even rehabilitation.

They were constantly monitored, having to submit daily personal notes of progress with individual spirits as well as weekly psych evaluations. The severity of these precautions was due to the fact that cemetery caretakers were few and far between. Once you accepted a job, you were in it for life. Only the caretakers had the ability to see and speak to spirits, and not just anyone could be granted this responsibility. If you committed to pursuing the education required for this job, you got an injection on the first day out of school and were immediately sent to shadow an older caretaker who showed you the ropes.

“We have a new resident, you know,” Gregory told him.

“Yes,” William said, “I know. It is my job to know, after all.”

Gregory chuckled. “That it is.”

“How does he seem?”

Gregory took a pause, mulling the question over. “Sad, of course, as are all newcomers. But calm, too. I couldn't quite figure him out,” he admitted. “Terribly young,” he added, almost as an afterthought. “At least for this place.”

William nodded. “Twenty-seven, I think.”

“Young,” said Gregory.

“Young,” William agreed.

William being thirty himself, couldn't imagine roaming the cemetery as a ghost three years prior or even now, for that matter. Young ghosts always required an extra careful approach – most were nowhere near ready to move on. On average, it took at least twice as long to help them cross over as their older counterparts.

“Keeping to his grave, for now, I suppose?” William questioned. He'd made his way to the second row now, seeing some of the more social ghosts milling about in the distance, talking amongst themselves. Gregory was more of a solitary soul, preferring to keep William company. When asked, William would always say he had no preference on the matter; the social ones often helped each other out more than he ever could. Souls like Gregory used William's abundance of one-on-one time and experience to help them cross over.

“Yes,” Gregory confirmed. “Wouldn't speak with any of us. Even the younger ones.”

The 'younger ones' were, admittedly, still upwards of a decade older than their currently youngest resident. “Well, that's to be expected.” William wasn't all that worried about it. Though it was always that much more challenging, that much more emotional, to help ghosts as young as this one, William was a firm believer of it being that much more important to help them. A challenge, yes, but one he took in stride.

Two hours passed, and William was finally getting to the row of graves with the newest resident. The other ghosts had taken to talking a distance away, giving privacy for William to do his job and approach the newcomer without the pressure of watchful eyes.

He could already see the man sitting at the top of his gravestone, looking statically at the stretch of ground before him. Abandoning his cleaning supplies, William approached the young man.

“Hi,” he said. “You must be Noah.”

The man gave no indication of having heard him, not moving an inch, but did mumble, “Yeah, that's me.”

William had known, before he even walked up to him, that getting Noah to cross over would be a long, difficult journey. Not only did he die young, but he was killed in a car accident. One minute he

was alive and well; the next, he was gone, taken to haunt a cemetery with only life-lived-to-the-fullest ghosts. Nothing William would say or do in these first few days would take away from the fact that Noah hadn't been even remotely prepared to die.

"I'm William. And I'm here, if and when you ever want to talk."

Noah did look towards him at that. "Oh, you're not a ghost."

William was having trouble reading him. He didn't necessarily seem surprised, more like he was merely stating a fact. Deadpan. He conveyed no emotions. His facial expression revealed little more than his words.

"No," he agreed. "I'm the caretaker."

Noah nodded, looking back over the vast rows of graves. "You're supposed to help me cross over then?" he asked, still sounding bored and uninterested.

"That's what I'm here for, yes."

"I think you'll find I might be here for a while."

William appraised him once more. His lackluster attitude was a defense mechanism, of course, but not one seen often in ghosts. Most either went through the five stages of grief or had already accepted their fate by the time they died, not crossing over because of personal attachments or issues, like Gregory. Death in old age didn't really shock most people, so they came to the cemetery already close to crossing over, maybe to wait for a loved one or resolve a past feud. Few combated the fact they were dead and what it meant for them.

"That's okay," William said. "There's no timeline for this, no schedule. Everyone is here just as long as they need to be."

Noah huffed, standing up from the grave and stepping directly in front of William. He was tall and lanky but held himself confidently. His dark hair lacked any real shape or style, framing his face in messy, unruly curls. Despite his indifference, William could now see a glint in his eyes, one of mischief and curiosity. He found himself hoping it wouldn't go away in death, as it does with many who cross over feeling resigned to their fate. Though one could only cross over when in peace with their life, that often didn't mean they were happy.

"Here just as long as they need to be," Noah threw William's words back at him. "But alive only as long as fate allows."

Days passed. Noah stayed bitter, and William stayed persistent. Every day he got through to him just a bit more. Finally, it was the third of the month. William left for his job half an hour earlier than usual and went to the flower shop across the street from his apartment. Thinking about his array of ghosts, he made quick work of buying two large bouquets of roses and setting off to his job.

He was surprised to be met by Noah at the entrance of the cemetery as he wheeled out his supplies. The roses were sitting at the top of the cart, and Noah instantly made a note of them. "Roses? What for?"

William started pushing the cart, Noah following him. "I buy them once a month for the ghosts that are struggling most."

"Why? They can't... I mean, *we* can't even hold them."

"That's true. But it's still nice to get flowers despite that, don't you think? It certainly can't hurt."

He only saw Noah frown at the ground before he floated away, sitting down at his own grave in the distance. William went on with his work, chatting with other ghosts as he worked, placing flowers on certain graves.

Soon he was at Noah's stretch of graves. Noah offered no words of greeting, so he worked in peace until he came up to Noah's grave, polishing it and then placing a whole bouquet on it. He saw Noah raise a brow in question. "Why so many?"

William shrugged. "There's no more graves I need to place them on. These are all the ones left."

Noah frowned at the roses like they personally offended him. “So not because you think I’m struggling most then?”

“No.”

“Right.”

William sighed. “It’s just a gesture. If it genuinely offends you that you got more of them, then I’ll distribute them to the others.”

“No, you can leave them,” Noah said in a monotone voice, much like the one he spoke on his first day. William wouldn’t say he’d gotten particularly jollier in the past few days, but he wasn’t as emotionless as he had been either. His words baffled William, paired with his obvious disinterest in the matter.

“I—” he tried but didn’t even know what he wanted to say. Trying to form an adequate response proved fruitless, making William sigh and quietly admit, “I can’t read you at all, sometimes.” Turning away, he made a move to leave on to the next stretch of graves.

“What do you mean?” Noah questioned, suddenly appearing in front of him.

William looked into his eyes, which still seemed to convey so much more than his words and his bored expression. But no matter how long he stared into them, they revealed no information, at least none William could understand.

“It’s my job to be good at understanding people. Their motives, their feelings, their aspirations. But with you,” he said, looking away from the intense look in Noah’s eyes, “it seems like every time I take a step forward, you take two back. Every time I think I get a read on you, you turn around and do something completely unexpected. I don’t know what to make of it.”

He returned his gaze to Noah’s, finding a look no less intense reflected back to him. Noah seemed to be thinking deeply about his response, yet another paradox to William. Mostly, Noah seemed to have talked to William with no filter, no care for what he said and how it came off sounding. But now, he was slow to answer, crafting his reply in his head.

“I’d imagine you’d face a lot of the unexpected. Every ghost leads a very different life after all, no?” he asked finally, looking curiously down at William.

“Every ghost is different, of course,” William admitted. “But when I talk to them once, twice, usually I understand them. I generally get to the core of a person quickly. I have to—to help them. My goal is to help them cross over as quickly as possible. I can’t spend weeks figuring them out and then—what—months actually helping them based on that.”

Noah nodded, pausing to answer once more. “And you haven’t been able to figure me out?”

“No,” William said. “I haven’t.”

“I didn’t think I was all that complex of a person, to be honest.”

William chuckled at that, “I find there’s much more to you than meets the eye.”

After that day, it was like a switch had flipped; all of a sudden, Noah talked to him for hours. He went on tangent after tangent and answered all of William’s questions, even those of a more private nature. Naturally, this baffled William even further, but he wasn’t about to look a gift horse in the mouth. Instead, he decided to let it go and see where it led.

Even more surprising than the fact that Noah’s attitude had completely switched up was the fact that they seemed to have a lot in common. Noah, like William, loved working with people, but specifically with kids. William knew that Noah had been a kindergarten teacher, as was listed in his file, but there were many people that didn’t quite enjoy their job. Noah was not one of them. He was passionate when talking about the kids he cared for, telling a million stories about each one. They were more than his job to him, and he cared for them deeply.

They were both lovers of art, though through different mediums; William preferring books to Noah’s love of paintings and sculptures. Both agreed that the theater was widely underrated. They shared their passions in detail, William often forgetting the time and clocking out later than he should have.

Though he always enjoyed his work, William now looked forward to each new day with unprecedented exuberance.

“Hi,” William greeted an already smiling Noah. He took out the blanket he routinely started bringing with him and placed it down on the ground, sitting down beside Noah.

“Hi. How are you?”

“Good. I finished the book you recommended.”

“And?” Noah asked, his eyes shining.

“I loved it. Just like you said I would.”

Noah fist-pumped the air. “Yes! I knew you would.”

“What have you been up to?”

Noah looked a bit sheepish then, his eyes momentarily flicking away from William’s gaze. “I checked out your house. I didn’t go in or anything; I didn’t want to be creepy. Or creepier,” he chuckled. “But you mentioned your reading nook was in your backyard the other day, and I wanted to see it for myself.”

“And what did you think?”

“That I would have loved to sit there beside you while you read.”

William couldn’t be sure, but he was almost certain he saw a light blush along Noah’s cheeks despite his slight translucency. “I would have loved for you to sit there too.”

Their gazes met once more, and an outsider might have easily mistaken their looks for those of lovesick teenagers. So fond, yet so new.

Noah’s eyes flickered down to William’s hand on the blanket between them and gently lowered his own to hover over William’s. There was no touch to be felt, but William could have sworn his hand felt warmer. He felt a stinging deep within him before he pushed the feeling away. He would not bring down the mood, especially not now, when Noah’s bad mood seemed to have never been present at all.

William wondered, not for the first time, what would have happened, in another life, if they had met while Noah was still alive. It was entirely improbable that that would have happened at all. William rarely left his apartment other than for work, and Noah, as he now knew from countless stories, was a man of the world, traveling whenever his work would permit him to do so. William knew of vacation days only in theory. His work was much too important to be left unattended for a longer period of time. Even if they had met, he knew, their friendship would have been no more possible than it was just then.

“Would you mind if I sat there sometimes during the day?” Noah asked.

“Of course not.” William would love it. The knowledge that Noah was there, even if he couldn’t see or talk to him, would be more than he could ever wish. “But wouldn’t you grow bored?”

“No,” Noah said. “I would wait for hours just to spend a few minutes in your presence.”

Before they knew it, weeks had passed. Gregory’s wife came and went, as did many other ghosts, but Noah seemed to be no closer to crossing over. Though William was secretly glad, not that he’d admit that even to himself, he couldn’t help but wonder what was stopping him. He seemed to finally be at peace with his death and, as William found out through many late-night conversations, there was no soulmate – platonic or otherwise – that he was waiting for. What then, William wondered, could possibly still be tethering him to this place?

As much as he didn’t wish to bring the subject up with Noah, he knew it was his job to do so. The third of the month was just around the corner, and William decided to do it then, with a flower in hand.

That day when he came into the flower shop, the bouquets were already waiting for him, as they always were. He paid and turned to leave when he spotted an azalea in the corner of the shop. It was a

wonderful peach shade, one he knew Noah would appreciate. Not giving it a second thought, William bought the flower and went to work.

As became tradition, Noah waited by his grave for William to finish up his job with the others and be able to give his undivided attention to Noah. Noah spotted the flower in his hand immediately. “An azalea? Don’t you always buy roses?”

“Hi, Noah,” William said through a smile, making Noah roll his eyes.

“Yes, hi, William.”

“I do always buy roses, and I did today too, but I saw this one, and it made me think of you.” Saying it aloud, he felt a blush creeping along his cheeks. It was quite strange for him to do this. Certainly not quite the level of professionalism he usually kept. He began to think it was a mistake when he saw Noah’s smile. Not a mistake, then, if it made Noah smile so prettily.

“It made you think of me?” William nodded. “Why?”

“You mentioned liking azaleas a while ago.”

“I did.”

“And I thought you’d like the color.”

“I do.”

“Good,” he cleared his throat. “Good.”

Noah floated closer to him with a shy smile and a coy gaze before questioning the one question William didn’t want to answer. “Why the special treatment?”

The blush crept back in his cheeks, if it ever even left, making him look at the ground. “I don’t know.”

“That’s okay,” Noah said. “I find I quite like it.”

“What’s that?”

“Feeling special.”

“You are special, Noah.” He was gifted another larger-than-life smile for that. He would give anything, do anything, just to keep making Noah smile like that, William thought, then instantly dismissed the thought as crazy. “Speaking of ...” he trailed off, not sure how to bring up the touchy subject.

“What?”

“Well ... don’t take this the wrong way. It’s my job to ask. It’s not me criticizing or judging you or anything like that.”

Noah looked more confused by the second. “Okay?”

“Why haven’t you crossed over yet?” he asked and was instantly met with a frown on Noah’s face. “I just mean, what’s stopping you? Is there someone you’re waiting for? Something you still want to do? Because if the answer is yes, that’s what I’m here for, Noah. To help with that.”

He didn’t answer immediately. In fact, William started to think he wouldn’t answer at all. “I suppose it is *someone* that is still keeping me here. But I hadn’t even given it much thought myself, to be honest.”

“Haven’t given it much thought?” William repeated. “You do know crossing over is the ultimate goal, right?” he joked. “And you haven’t thought about the person keeping you here?”

“No, I’ve definitely thought about them,” he chuckled. “Just not in the context of crossing over. I don’t want to think about them dying. And besides, they’re still young; it’d be decades before they died.”

“Even still, you could try to send out a message or something. I’d be happy to find them and tell them what you want them to know. Maybe that would help. And then you’d meet after they crossed over too.”

“Thank you, but no. I don’t think he even knows how special he is to me.”

“Oh. Well, I can tell him. I’m sure he’d be happy to know,” he said, making Noah chuckle.

“That’s okay. I think he’s better off not knowing.”

“I don’t think that’s true. Wouldn’t you want to know?” William knew the answer for himself. He’d rather know. At least he would be able to help the person, whether that’s his job or not.

“I don’t think so,” Noah said. “What good would it do? The person is dead. If I felt the same, it would only depress me, and if I didn’t feel the same, I’d feel guilty.”

“I suppose.”

“Would you want to know?”

“Yes,” William replied without pause. “Absolutely. I’d want to know. Whether I felt the same way or not.”

Noah looked away at that with a frown on his face. “Then I suppose I’ll tell you,” he said finally.

“Okay. If that’s what you want. But don’t tell me just because of my opinion.”

“Actually, it is because of your opinion,” Noah started, holding up a hand to stop William from protesting. “Your opinion matters because the person I need to say this to is you.”

“What do you mean?” William asked, taken aback, yet with a hint of hope in his eyes.

“I know this is an impossible situation, and surely me telling you only hurts you, but I like you. You know exactly what to say to get me out of my bad moods, and you know how to make me trust you. You’ve made it the easiest thing in the world to fall in love with you. Your name is carved in my heart, and nothing I say or do will change that.” Another soft smile was adorning his face, and William could have sworn it was bathed in otherworldly light.

“But ...”

“But nothing.” And just like that, the light, and with it, his smile was gone. He stepped further away from him, and all William wanted to do was pull him closer. “As I said, the situation is hopeless. I’m dead, William. And you’ve still got a ways to go before you join me on this side. And by then, you’ll have found the person that makes you happier than anyone before, and you’ll make a life. I can’t take that away from you.”

“You’re not taking anything away if I’m willingly giving it.”

“William, don’t be crazy. You’re only thirty.”

“I am,” William said. “And you were only twenty-seven when you died.”

“Yes. But I had no say in the matter.”

“And I do.”

“But your job...”

“Is important,” William agreed. “But it is not more important than this. My life cannot be my job. If I die today, or if I die thirty or forty or fifty years from now, with the way things are going, I’ll have lived all the same.”

Niamh walked to the cemetery for her first day of work, excited yet guarded. The sudden and unexplained vacancy was strange, to say the least. Not that that was public knowledge, of course, but Niamh was lucky enough to know a higher-up in the company. Still, she couldn’t help but wonder why the job had opened up. Last she heard, they were immensely happy with their current employee – after all, he’d gotten the job over her, despite her acquaintance putting in a good word for her.

She clocked in, set her things down, and walked towards the file cabinet. Surely, there was something there to help her figure this out. An unexpected disappearance of a cemetery caretaker should surely alarm her, as his successor, so it was only natural for her to be curious. The cabinet was locked, but if life taught Niamh anything, it was to be resourceful. She jimmied the cabinet open and pulled one of only three red files among the blue. The latter, she knew, were those of the residing ghosts, while the former was of previous employees.

Taking out the one that looked newest, she flipped to the first page. Nothing out of the ordinary. Nor did she find anything in his personal notes or mandatory psychological evaluations. Flicking to the last page in the folder, she found the notes of his last day of work. It read:

I've realized that I can no longer, in good conscience, perform my job, for I would be of no help to any spirit. Though I've given this job my all, and was happy to do so, I have begun to realize that there is one more thing in my life that I, should I continue to do this job, have to part with. It is, therefore, with the utmost gratitude for being given this opportunity, that I must resign, effective immediately. I've found something that I never knew was possible for a man such as myself. The job we do is important, but when it is no longer your priority, it is our duty to step away from it. Lately, my mind has not been on the spirits which I am meant to be helping, or rather, it was too focused on only a singular spirit. Feeling within myself that I've connected to said spirit past the realm of professionalism, I felt obligated to step down. Though I know I've become what management fears, I do hope you still understand and respect my decision. If not for anything else, I hope you would do me one last favor in the eye of the good I've accomplished with this job. I ask you only that you bury my remains next to that of my love, Noah James Davis.

*Sincerely,
William Clifford Jones*

On a Hill There Was a Castle

Veronika Mikuš

One morning I woke up and decided to walk up to the castle. I decided to take the path through the forest. The castle was on a steep hill, and as I was making my way up, my legs started to hurt more and more. The air around me was freezing cold, and my fingers were numb. It wasn't a very pleasant hike, but I could still see the castle through the tree branches as I slowly made my way up the hill. Suddenly, the icy path made a steep and sharp turn. I managed to slip and fall flat on my face. Luckily nobody was around. Instead of getting up, I stayed on the floor, feeling the hard ground beneath me. There was a dull pain pulsing in my hands and knees, and the ice-cold air felt sharp on my face, but still, I stayed there. I decided to rest my head on the ground with no desire to get up. I thought to myself, "What reason do I have for getting up? What's stopping me from just staying here on the icy path, turning into dust and disappearing with the wind, never to return again?"

I did not want to get up. The thought of just letting go of everything that was keeping me here was too tempting. I had no reason to continue walking either. There was no voice yelling at me to pick myself up. Nothing to return to. I was too tired. But then I looked up towards the castle again, knowing that if I stayed on the ground I'd never get to see the view everyone had been gushing about. So I got up. Even though I was in pain, I still managed to reach the top of the hill; though perhaps it took me a while longer than it would have taken somebody else, that did not matter. The sun felt so welcome and comforting, and the view was truly breathtaking. The soft pink, warm yellow and vibrant blue of the morning sky mixed together beautifully, like watercolour on a canvas. I was glad I got up from the ground. I might just be overthinking everything, but I feel like there's a metaphor in there somewhere.

POETRY

Hawthorn

Maruška Slavec

Along with heather, celandine and grouse,
From the emerald isle's peaty earth,
In the shadow of the Hag's House,
The Hawthorn tree subsists.

While its white may flowers
Hide mischievous fairies in its buds
(Who curse folk with their powers),
The Hawthorn tree exists.

Still, it blossoms, tall and thick,
Amongst its siblings that were cut
When the potato crop grew sick,
The Hawthorn tree resists.

Undisturbed by Troubles
That had red spill o'er the bog,
Listening to people's struggles,
The Hawthorn still persists.

the lying sort

Pino Pograjc

the fearless king with many fears
addressed a crowd of many peers,
*"for peaceful life, for wisdom, youth,
i bring you harbingers of truth"*

the first orator to the floor
had cuffs and bled from every pore,
*"be not enraged, i am not bound,
through whips and chains i have been
found"*

the second person came to speak,
her dress was stained, her voice was weak,
*"be not upset, i am not poor,
this land has opened every door"*

the last presenter to the stage
was listless, limp, and void of rage,
*"be not afraid, i am not dead,
the gun did not shoot through my
head"*

the crowd went wild, they sang, they cried,
their loyal hearts were filled with pride,
they chanted prayers for their god –
apologies for being flawed

beyond the strong walls of the fort
the masses charged – *"the lying sort"*

remember

Ariela Herček

Sometimes I get so heartbroken
over the things that have been.
To know they'll never be again is
a certain kind of grief that has a slow and
hollow ache.

What do I do with the memories
of my friends?
I carry them around like quicksilver,
I struggle through the weight of them,
a phantom dullness inside of me.
What do I do with these memories when
the friends are long gone?
What do I do with them when
I'm the only one who still puts the memories
to sleep
every night
and shoulders them the next day like
they were meant to be something heavy,
anyway.
What do I do when I'm the only one who still
remembers?

desharpen

Ariela Herček

some evenings my bones
rattle like firecrackers,
like wind-chilled windows,
and it must sound terrible,
doesn't it?
some days I crack my own
knuckles
and feel the pain echoing in
my spine, a brittle thing,
an ache so tender I could cry,
and it's terrible, isn't it?
I'm seeing parts of myself cracking open
like glass,
all jagged edges and sharpness,
and it must be terrible -
running your hands over all those edges,
smoothing them down like sandpaper,
smoothing them until
they are both soft and delicate,
until I am no longer brittle,
until I become a liquidized thing,
until I gentle into sleep.

Future Nostalgia

Nikola Ninković

Born too late to witness new lands,
born too early to live through new dawns,
seeing my fate, God just yawns

You ask me to cheer and rejoice, and I feel as if I should
yet I can't but feel empty and betrayed, as I knew I would
betrayed by the universe and by the moment of my birth;
what more shall my mind unearth

I wander through the world of old, while looking at the great beyond.
It is constantly whispering the sweet melody of mystery,
not loving me back, only wanting misery

I ask it, what for, and it just stays there, silent and malicious,
waiting upon the descendants of mine
so that it could show them a new dawn shine

It is evil, it is cruel, and I won't stand it
I will use up my last ace, won't try saving face, ripping apart its grace
in the end, I will go out alone without leaving a trace
while venturing to my final resting place.

Loop of Nothing

Nikola Ninković

The stone, under which I lie, can't but glisten in the sun
the very sun that I despised the most
the irony of my final rest pierces me, while awaiting Janus
what can a corpse do but be heinous

The blood has already washed away
and my flesh has gone the rotting way
but my thoughts are yet to leave this world of despair
they don't cease, they stay the same, stubbornly refusing to pass on

Those stubborn fools
not giving an inch, not wanting to flinch
wanting me to stay and witness disgrace
not letting me save face

An eon passes, the years become transparent
as death seems not so inherent
I am in no control, for it won't yield
so I guess I am stuck in this semi mortal field.

27

Danche Apostolova

Trapped inside with nothing to do
up on a chilly night
Loud are these thoughts
calling for a violent fight,

Fire commenced within thyself
burning ghostly cord
Longing to feel, to observe.
Do you see this happening, Lord?

Bonded to you in emotional bliss
Never have I ever felt that midnight kiss.

Two souls twins could be
Of a youth whom I adore
Fate shall be obeyed
Never touch, never see.

Thy long-suffering days
Shall come to fruition.
Thus, I pray,
Remain and wait.

Labyrinth

Danche Apostolova

How do I get out of this cycle of suffering?
This constant repeating loop,
making me bleed within myself.
Holding back fears of the unknown.
Out there, beyond my control.
Unconscious, but still pacing.
How do I get out of this labyrinth?
Language of heart circuitous
I long for cherished levity.
Leaden soul soothed of self pity,
let the looping calm sink inward,
Lightheartedness morphs into luminous
arrangement.
I feel the looming decision breathing near
me,
consuming thyself
Nothing I do seems to make an iota of
difference.
Thus I ask,
How do I get out of this circle of suffering?

Appraise

Sal Lavrenčič

Shrill-shelled shell of a former paragon of
beauty, now
Appraise the mild madwoman mounting
The weight of her purse.
Her star-pearled eyes gaze upon
The void you harbour in your quest
To follow the course of a warm embrace
Into the cold, cold fire
They set upon you.

Ablaze.
Her piercing gaze
Shreds apart the dreams you thought were
infinite.
As dreams, the silver smoke, arise
To burn, her clouds paint flaws
Into the marble-white world, now doom.

Appraise.
Your young face, the hands you held
Through years of guiltlessness.
Now you are crowned with guilt,
A throne of thorns to revel in the sight
Of madwomen mounting the back
Of their thighs, their burned-to-the-ground
havens,
Their empty wallets
As you walk on, if a bit unsure,
Into the past once more reborn.

Every Winter I Forget I Love the Sun

Sal Lavrenčič

Every winter I forget I love the sun.

Freeze-frame, immaculate descent
down the ice, I slide into oblivion.

Every winter I forget I love the sun.

My breath is frost inside my veins.

Every summer I wake up again.

Then I walk, like a hawk
I watch for signs of cold –

but it is gone, the snow.

Every summer I wake up,
and underneath the sky

I sing,
of the sun, the stars, and deceit.

I will forget the sun again,
sing silence to the lone white fields.

It's Not Easy
Dominik Lenarčič

It's not easy having a soul
or having a lifeline strung
between two souls.

It's not easy having a mind
or having spoiled
marmalade
in place of a mind.

It's not easy having a heart,
sharing a heart,
accepting a heart,
understanding a heart.

It's not easy having a body,
somebody,
nobody
to touch your soul,
your mind,
your heart.

It's not easy at all.

This is Not a Poem
Dominik Lenarčič

This is still not a poem.
No.
Nope.
Nuh-uh.
Even if I added a crazy
metaphor,
it would still not be a poem.
My love for you is now as
minuscule
as the faeces of a butterfly.
That was pretty crazy,
but a poem that does not
make.
Of course,
I didn't realise that by riding
this train of thought,
I have, in my mindless
ramblings,
nevertheless, created a
poem.

Bugger.

Lovers
Dominik Lenarčič

The bridge of love
has fallen
into the river Styx.
With it went all the
padlocks
that we stuck on the railings
every time we went out to
breathe.
Rot and rust
that is what they shall do.
Good riddance.
I will not revolt,
I will not even feel sad.
You're dead to me.
All I have to say you is:
"Bon Voyage.

La Casquette Bleue The Blue Cap

Emma Ronsin

Aux souvenirs de la Pointe du Raz,
To the memories of the Point du Raz,
Je dédie ce texte plein de soleil.
I dedicate this text full of sun.
Sur ces rochers, oui, ceux-là que l'on voit,
On these rocks, yes, those that we see,
ton rire et le mien résonnent haut et fort,
your laughter and mine resound high and strong,
ricochent sur l'eau couverture de ce port.
ricochet on the water covering this port.
Et nos casquettes secouées par le vent,
And our caps shaken by the wind,
telles sont les joies d'enfants de cinq ans.
such are the joys of five-year-olds.

Tes beaux yeux marrons qui brillent aussi fort,
Your beautiful brown eyes shining as brightly,
s'émerveille de tout, scintillant autant, que
wonder at everything, glittering as much, as
sur l'étendue azure ces paillettes d'or.
on the azure waves these golden sequins.
Nous deux cassons cette belle douceur,
The two of us break this beautiful sweetness,
arc-en-ciel auxquels on a volé les couleurs,
rainbows from which we stole the colors,

nos vestes orange et mauve se mouvant,
our orange and mauve jackets moving,
telles sont les joies d'enfants de cinq ans.
such are the joys of five-year-olds.

Sur ce pied d'estale de la nature,
On this pedestal of nature,
toi et moi face à cette caméra,
you and me in front of this camera,
pour ce moment qu'il faut que l'on capture,
for this moment that we must capture,
oui, car toutes les deux on grandira.
yes, because we'll both grow.
Devant ce fier phare assise avec toi,
In front of this proud lighthouse sitting with you,
l'écume et le bruit des vagues claquant,
the foam and the sound of the waves lapping,
telles sont les joies d'enfants de cinq ans.
such are the joys of five-year-olds.

Des dents en moins des souvenirs en plus.
Less teeth, more memories.
Photos et vidéos c'est ça l'astuce.
Photos and videos are the trick.
Et grimper, déchirer ses vêtements,
And climbing, tearing clothes,
telles sont les joies d'enfants de cinq ans.
such are the joys of five-year-old.

The Sea of Snow

Miriam Hurtado Monarres

Cold is biting at my skin,
harsh wind grabbing at my feet,
the sea of snow
within me forevermore.

The footsteps in the distance
echoing of time's resistance,
the change of seasons
calls to our persistence.

The echoes slowly fading,
the footsteps gradually ageing
and yet, the sea of snow
within me forever more.

Collector of Memories

Miriam Hurtado Monarres

The photos that I took
were the snippets of a moment,
a moment in a snippet.
A moment where everything was well
and your smile eternal.

The eternal smile that I took
with a single snippet of a moment,
but with it,
I captured eternity.

I captured it and made it mine,
a stolen moment made eternal.
Your smile never fading
from my collection of eternity,
I, the collector of the memories.

Life as we... know it?

Marija Šeruga

My mind expelled,
senses rotting in the
garden is full of noises red.

Why mirror won't ever reflect,
something I want is else,
please! just don't make any sense.

Teardrop just passing through,
through your beauty marks,
you went to Cries, so I wouldn't
- I'm sorry.

Escaping escape,
hand me your brain,
"Madam, what is your pain?"
- Chronic lonely.

Apples

Marko Manasiev

You put another apple
In my basket,
There's space left
For only a couple more
Before it becomes full.

I am looking at these apples
Placed carefully over each
other,
Examining their ripe
redness;
I emptied my basket of
everything else,
Only to fit as many of them
As you are willing to give
me.

Tasting these enchanting
fruits
Made me crave their
sweetness,
I have never received
More joyful things
Than these apples I am
given.

I am a withered daisy
Unworthy of such a
blossomed tree,
I want you to keep giving
These apples to me,
I promise to return the
seeds.

Second Round

Marko Manasiev

How do you fly with a
broken wing
And still find the hope in
you to sing,
To put aside everything in
your way?

How do you manage to
have fun
With all the rabble pointing
their guns
In an attempt to keep your
mask on?

And yet you let yourself
take it off,
Unafraid of the bullets they
shot,
Took the pain and moved
on.

I'm terrified of their second
round.

DESPERATE

Urša Ložar

Desperate.
Such a derogatory thing,
just hearing it makes my
heart sting.

I wouldn't say I'm
desperate,
obviously not.
I'm just...

So hopelessly in love
with the idea of who you
might be,
with the stupid little things
like how you like your tea.

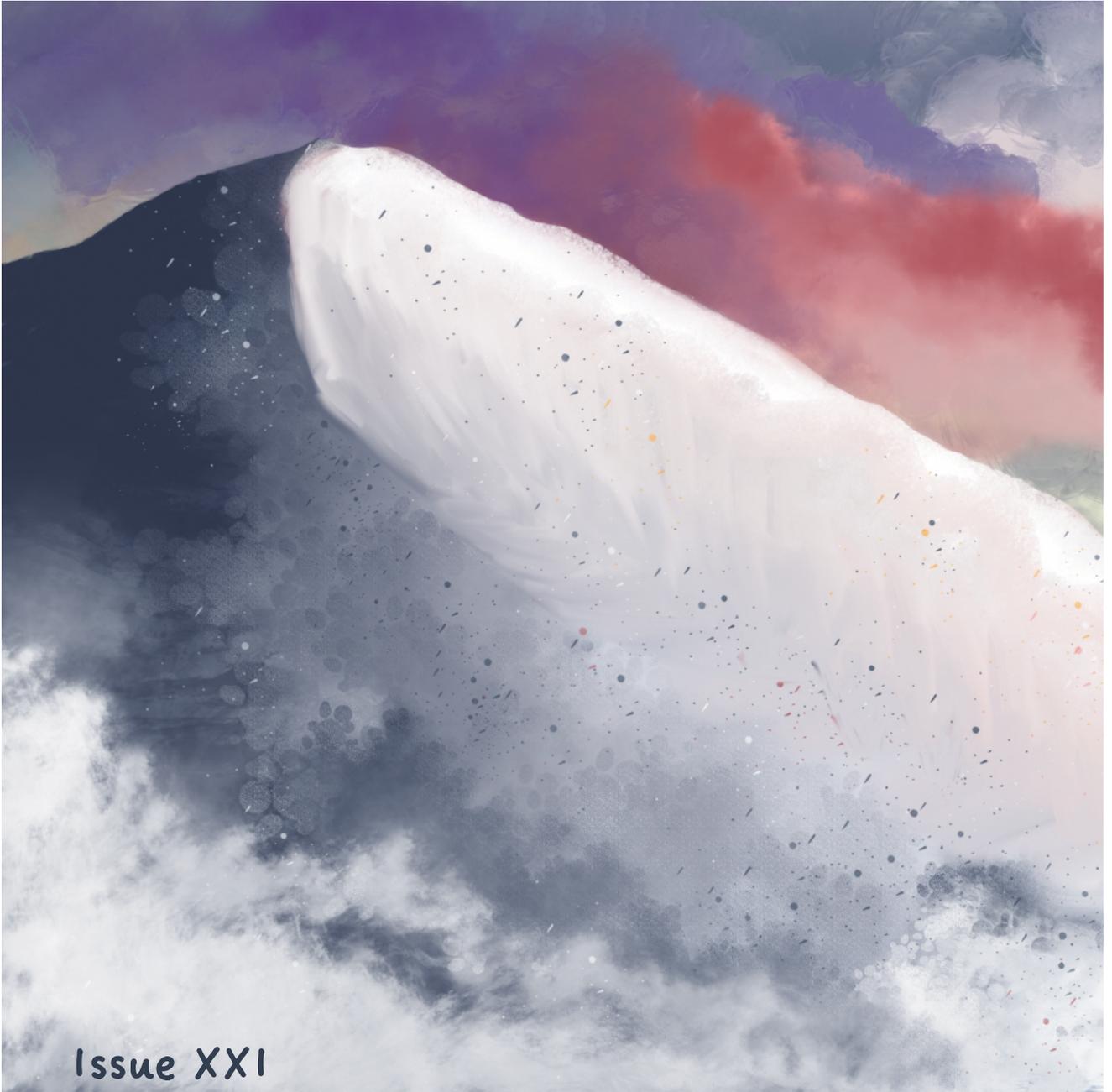
With the great big things
of what you might believe
and the entirely unrelated
way
you'd pull on my sleeve,

to hold my hand firmly,
as we walk down the empty
street,
just a little too late,
maybe too early

morning light shining
through the window,
your hand in mine, legs
intertwined,
the stars seemed to have
aligned,

for you and I,
what I wouldn't give to call
you mine.
And that just might be big,
bold, underlined

DESPERATE.



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