

ANTHOLOGY 2023

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ANTHOLOGY



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ANTHOLOGY 2023

In Memory
Of
Jack and Naoise

FOREWORD

Writing a foreword is difficult.

Not because you (I) can't think of what to say; that is rather easy, in fact. You thank the person who made the cover because it drew readers to the book in the first place. You thank everyone who submitted their works of fiction, journalism, and poetry, because without those pieces the book wouldn't exist. You thank your colleagues, as this book is a behemoth of collaboration that has to be wrangled into an accessible, viewable, and ultimately, *enjoyable* thing which is impossible without teamwork and co-ordination. You thank the printing company, the readers of the book, and of course your Creative Writing teacher, since he has been producing the various editions of this book since you were a toddler and is central to the existence of the *Anthology* in the first place.

No, the aspect that makes writing a foreword difficult is what isn't said already by your (my) predecessors. Whether they are famous authors in their own right, members of the Clonkeen College Press, or teachers, you have no doubt that they spent hours fidgeting

nervously with some little knick-knack on their desk to avoid confronting the fact that they're writing a foreword and wishing they hadn't made that decision to throw their hat into the ring because "what *else* do I say?" Or maybe that's just you.

And then you (I) realise that writing all this rumination down *as* a foreword feels perhaps *slightly* arrogant and *definitely* ridiculous. It's a foreword.

A word *before* the book.

And so, you (I) thank Mattia Minella for his wonderful illustration which is simply brilliant; honestly it is just *excellent*. You thank those who sent in their submissions, since it isn't easy to display your very personal work to peers, to parents, to *your* parents (since they're obviously going to buy a copy) and also your grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins, and everyone *else's* relations (hope you feel appropriately nervous now). You thank your colleagues Owen Bilag, Alex Coyne, Gavin Crowe, Fionn Keane-O'Hagan, Elliot Murphy, and Ben Plunkett, for all the previous reasons and also because they're good craic. You thank the printing company, E-Print, the readers (look in a mirror, you might just find one of

ANTHOLOGY 2023

them), and Mr. Toomey, for all of his leadership, helpful criticism, and endless experience in both writing and publishing.

Alright, enough with that second-person perspective. I'm pleased to be able to present the 2023 edition of the *Anthology*. I say "able" because a few of us here were glancing nervously at the inbox waiting for submissions at the start of January when most of the book was comprised of requisite copyright law.

This is the end result of several months of collaboration between students and teachers, different year groups, and different perspectives on when we should edit pieces because having an entire submission in **bold** is a little obnoxious, don't you think?

It has been an absolute joy to work on this book, both writing my own piece for it (*Waking Aware and thank you so much for asking*) and making the submissions we received look as best they could so that you could appreciate the creative voice of members of our school community and beyond.

I have no doubt that between all the varied submissions that this *Anthology* contains, anywhere on the spectrum of out-there fiction

ANTHOLOGY 2023

to sobering journalism, that you will be made to laugh, made to think and made to cry.

Enjoy the book, and if you go from cover to cover wanting more (you will), there are even more pieces preserved on our website, **clonkeencollegepress.com**, interviews with writers on the Clonkeen College Podcast or you can write your own and send them over to us at ccp@clonkeencollege.ie.

Thank you, from me and all of my colleagues here at Clonkeen College Press, for picking this *Anthology* to read.

Davy Shakespeare
Chairperson
Clonkeen College Press 2022/23

ANTHOLOGY 2023

CONTENTS

HIM AND I

Eoin Farrelly

13

A DREAMFUL SLEEP

Morris ter Horst

15

DAYLIGHT BEGINNING TO CLOSE

Sean Hurley

18

NO RECOLLECTION

Sean Hurley

19

ZONA DECAY

Gavin Crowe

24

MY STORY

Luke Simons

41

ANTHOLOGY 2023

**TEN RULES TO LIFE, TWO
THOUGHTS, AND MY NEIGHBOUR
LARRY**

Ire Guidoriagao
44

MY STORY ABOUT ME

Louis Mitchell
49

REVENGE OF THE BEAR

Luca Fattaccini
51

TWO STORIES – FLASH FICTION!

Antoni Siejko
55

FORGOTTEN

Owen Bilag
58

ICE-SKATING

Richard O'Donovan
74

ANTHOLOGY 2023

SACKLER

Elliot Murphy

76

SOME THINGS ABOUT ME

Jonah Bates

97

**THE LONG-REACHING COLONIAL
ARM OF THE LAW**

Fionn Keane O'Hagan

98

A CHAPTER IN MY BOOK

Arham Memon

104

THE FOOL

Arham Memon

105

THE QATAR WORLD CUP JOURNEY

Patrick O'Shea

106

ANTHOLOGY 2023

CHELSEA PROJECT 2030

Alex Coyne

109

HOPE

Fionn Keane O'Hagan

117

THE STRINGS OF FATE

Keelin McCarthy

122

THE BATTLE OF THE BRIDGE 2.0

Ben Plunkett

127

**ANTARCTICA! A DIARY ENTRY OF
EPIC PROPORTIONS**

Richard O'Donovan

135

DUST

Gavin Crowe

152

ANTHOLOGY 2023

WAKING AWARE

Davy Shakespeare

155

**THE CLONKEEN COLLEGE
ANTHOLOGY**

Chat GPT

157

Him and I

Eoin Farrelly

He is invading my life.

I never asked for him to be here. He just showed up one day unannounced and has refused to leave ever since. He's constantly present, peering over my shoulder... waiting.

He steals my name. He wears my face. He claims my clothes as his. He travels on my feet. He talks with my voice. He uses my senses as his own. But he's a fool. A dreamy, whimsical fool. He thinks, dreams, and sees things in a way that I never would.

He sees magic in things. Places, people, each one an inexhaustible supply of magic. His head is filled with these things. He tries to uncover the magic of them and transcribe it down in writing. He's always writing or thinking of writing. I don't understand his obsession with it, how he can never stay away from it. When he writes, he thinks himself a god, with an ink-splotched page as his domain. Each pen-stroke lays down the fabric to his universe. His letters are core elements, condensed together to form worlds of words. These words revolve around starry sentences, combining to make galaxies of paragraphs. He dreams of stories. Stories to make the greatest love stories look dull and the most bloodcurdling horror stories recoil in fear. Stories that connect with people. Stories so full of life that

ANTHOLOGY 2023

the characters jump out from the pages. That these characters talk to you, dance with you, give you their shoulder to cry on. He dreams of his words having power. That placed in the correct order, they can impact people. He dreams for his words to save a broken soul, mend a brittle mind, and heal a bruised heart.

Every day, I can feel his presence growing. I feel his strength gathering, his confidence building. He is slowly seeping into my life, consuming me, swallowing me whole.

This'll be his life soon.

Perhaps it already is.

A Dreamful Sleep

Morris ter Horst

She awoke in the waiting room, like so many days now. She had been woken by the nurse, who came to collect her for her appointment with the doctors. She dreaded the news they were going to give her.

As she entered the room and sat down, she felt that the atmosphere was different, almost hopeful. As she sat down the doctors smiled to her and she let a bit of that hope into her heart. They hadn't smiled in a while.

The head doctor waited a moment before starting his story. "Let me cut to the chase. We may have a treatment for your husband, but it is very risky. It might end very badly."

She calmly let this news get through to her and then said, "Is there an alternative?"

The doctor sighed and said, "The only other option is to hope he wakes up on his own, but you know how small that chance. He might not want to wake up and might not even be aware that he is sleeping. In fact, that is the most likely situation at this stage."

"So, what's the treatment?" The doctor smiled at the hope in her voice. She obviously loved her husband very much, otherwise she wouldn't have stayed in the hospital for all the months that she

had. He was happy he had gotten permission to tell her about this treatment.

“Basically, what we do is try and tell him that he is dreaming and give him reasons to wake up.”

“And how would we do that?” she asked.

“We would use electrical pulses into his brain to alter his dreamworld, and so send messages to him. We would start with small changes, like chances in pop culture, the least qualified person being chosen to lead a country or conspiracy theories being true, like 5G affecting people’s health. Then we go on to obvious mistakes in history, like the Russians landing on the moon first or the French inventing pasta.

“Then we choose a more direct approach, like messages on billboards and in, say, his cereal. Then we go bigger, having people talk to him about the fact that he is dreaming, and if he doesn’t change his mind, we can make him wake up by force, by making the world around him a bad place to live, for example, by making it so the Nazi’s won WW2.”

“And what are the risks?”

The doctor smiled inwardly and thought to himself again how much she must love him. Then he said, “If we aren’t careful with our changes, he might resort to... drastic measures, especially if he isn’t aware of the situation he is in.”

She stays silent for a moment and then says: “Ok, let’s do it.”

The doctor smiles and says, “Great. Do you have any ideas we could use to cause him to doubt he is in the real world?”

“Hmm. He has always been a fan of Harry Potter. What if they made a new movie, a sequel, and Harry dies in it?”

The doctor smiled and said: “That might just work. Thank you miss, we will begin the treatment tomorrow.”

She nodded and stood up. “Thank you,” she said softly. Then she turned and walked out. But for the first time since the day her husband didn’t wake up, she had a small bounce in her step.

Daylight Beginning to Close

Sean Hurley

The sun begins to creep up over the hills cleaving
the darkness,
Casting an orange glow like a blanket over the land.
The morning dew lights up in blissful delight.
Small animals like squirrels' chatter and scramble
as they return to their hollow oak trees and a soft
autumn wind softly rustles the browning leaves.

Cattle wake from their slumber and moo with
delight whilst lightly grazing the luscious grass.
I stare sagely into the sight of all its beauty and the
sun stares back at me with its profoundly tranquil
beaming eye.
At this time, I feel comfortably distant from the
evening lights and the lengthening cold nights.
As winter grows nearer the stars overdo their
welcome and flora shrivels in decay.

No Recollection

Sean Hurley

I awoke to the gentle sound of a river flowing. I took a minute to come to my senses and realise that I was in that river floating along. I instantly panicked but my body was not yet awake. I struggled for a few moments trying to lift my eyelids and take control of my fatigued limbs. It took only a few moments for me to open my eyes. I still lay though staring bewildered at the enormous acacia trees hanging above my head. The water was tepid and pale blue.

The rest of my body then spurred to life, and I pushed myself upright. I glanced around for a few moments. The faint chirps of birds rang in my ears. I swiftly swam towards the shore and sat down on the riverbank. I was surrounded by a myriad jungle with lots to see. I sat nether of the tallest trees I had ever seen, and a daunting waterfall roared up the stream. The light of the dulling evening sun broke through the leaves of the trees, bouncing off the glistening scales of the fish that inhabited the river.

I reached into the pocket of my shorts to see if I was carrying any supplies. I pulled out a roll of duct tape and examined it carefully for a few moments,

coming to the conclusion that it was an average roll of tape. I glanced out upstream and I just about managed to make out the silhouette of a boat. It hit me now that I had no memory of any moment before

I woke up in the river. I panicked. I started to rasp, and the shock knocked the breath out of me.

I eventually calmed myself down, ensuring myself that whoever I came here with was just in the boat that I saw just a few moments prior, and I had hit my head funny. That sounds grim but it was the most comforting conclusion that I could think of.

I decided to walk over to the boat eager to find out the truth. After a few seconds walking I could not help myself from breaking into a long loping stride. Part of it was my apprehension, thinking I was being watched or followed.

It was hard to traverse the lush vegetation, but the boat was becoming clearer. It appeared to be wedged in a rock just below the waterfall. As I drew closer, I realised it was in shambles. There was a large, jagged rock piercing the ship's hull. Nevertheless, I decided to venture inside.

I came to the side of the boat where I spotted a short steel ladder to its top deck. The boat was small, though it still had an enclosed room for steering and a hatch that led you below deck. I first decided to check the control room for any evidence of life. The door creaked open and to my horror what lay inside was quite the opposite of what I had hoped. Inside on the chair lay the captain's corpse. I stood in horror, traumatised at the first site. It lay fresh and lifeless on the chair and his blood was still streaming from its wounds and into the controls.

The blood was coming from a gruesome gaping hole in his forehead.

The blood flushed from my face. I hastily rushed out the door and slammed it behind me. The boat shook. Though seeing the gruesome corpse of the ship's captain didn't prevent me from venturing further into the quarters below deck. My mind was zoned out; my focus was shrouded by thoughts.

I slowly clambered down the ladder and my hands were vigorously shaking. The floorboards creaked when I placed my weight on them. Other than that, it was completely silent bar the odd rustling of leaves outside. There was a large room to my right and two smaller rooms on my left. I crept towards the larger room. The reason I was so quiet was the unexplainable fear I was being watched.

I reached for the brass doorknob and wrapped my hand around it; it was ice cold. In a short burst of movement, I twisted the handle and pushed the door in. The door revealed a small humble bedroom containing only a small amount of jewellery, a tattered cloth bed, a worn-down wooden cupboard and a large leather bag. The room was decorated with photos sitting in simple wooden frames.

I began hastily filling a leather bag that was sitting against the wall in the room with scraps of food. I spotted one photo that had two familiar figures standing over me. I told myself I would further examine the photo when I didn't have a corpse on the deck above me. I also took some of

the jewellery, but it hadn't hit me yet as to what I was going to do with it.

Suddenly when I was just finishing up and, on my way out, I heard the floorboards creak behind me. My heart dropped, I lost my breath, and I was scared of turning around and facing whatever had come before me. The floorboards creaked again, and I swiftly turned and faced the noise. There was nothing there...

I stood paralysed even though there was no threat. And just as I thought I was safe I saw the door handle from the room on the other side of the boat started to turn. The door was pushed open revealing a familiar man. He was the man in the photo but only now he had a tormented look in his eyes, his pupils were burning with fury. He wore a torn shirt, and the bottom of his trousers were shredded.

He drew an ornate silver revolver from his pocket and slowly lifted it to face my head. I knew now I couldn't wait in fear any longer for my terrors to be put at ease. Leapt into the room behind me and slammed the door. He let out a devilish chuckle and fired a round at the door. The sound filled the boat and splinters of wood flew out in every direction.

I waited with my back to the door for his next movement. I was wheezing and my heart was beating out of my chest. I noticed a small silver key on the dresser and reached for it. I quickly locked the door. It took me a moment to realise that I was

stuck in a room with no windows and there was a psychopath with a gun outside. I felt I was going to faint.

Another shot rang out and pierced the door just above the last bullet hole, the wood shaving and dust carpeted the floor. I reached for a lamp to defend myself in case he came in. All of a sudden, the doorknob shuddered just a little bit. There was a third gunshot fired and the door lock let loose, and the door creaked open just a little bit.

I got ready to hit him over the head as soon as he entered. His long slender hand pushed against the door opening it some more. The hand with the pistol slipped through the crack in the door and I pushed my back further against the wall.

I waited patiently and didn't give myself away, I was surprised that I managed to keep my calm. Soon I saw his wicked body poke through the opening in the door and I...

Zona Decay

Gavin Crowe

Simple and severe, a long stretch of barren road lay before a man in stagger. He cursed between broken breaths, wincing at each step, his pain fought for control of his movement, wishing not to die or freeze, he walked on until through the bushes. He saw a cabin.

* * *

Drink and cards, a fun night really, three young men, sat at a small wooden table. Staring blankly at their hands, not a twitch or breath.

“I call”

They cast down their hands onto the desk, then looked up to each other...followed by uncontrollable laughter. The shortest, a Romanian, gathered his winnings of two cigarettes and a shot glass. He, who didn't speak the language of the others, gestured drunkenly to the half empty bottle of vodka. A dark-haired man with light stubble and glasses obliged his request and handed it over.

It was a cold night in a cold cabin, orange light was covered the small table of cards as the winter raged outside. The three men's items scattered amongst the dust on the floor and small chairs buckled under the crapulent rocking of the men at play.

A skinny blonde man with looks akin to a rat, stood up and swayed with intoxication.

“I’m gonna,” he paused, “be back’n a minute”

In the subtle glow of the oil lamp, you could see the ratty man’s eyes sunken and outlined in grey. He stumbled out the cabin door, the cold was harsh and gnawing with a sobering rawness.

From the warmth of the cabin the third man spoke, “Alexei,” the ratty man turned, “your coat.” Alexei waved his hand and marched back towards the wilderness. Only wearing a shirt, trousers and boots, he confronted the night and freezing temperatures as he wobbled over to the nearest tree that towered overhead.

The cabin he left was flanked by sizeable trees covered in snow. The moonlight sparkled as it met the wet leaves through which mountains could be seen a long stretch away, desolation and emptiness divided them.

In the cabin, there was a tragically awkward silence between the unnamed Romanian and a quiet Nikola.

“We - leave - in - morning,” Nikola said slowly to the Romanian in hopes he could understand. The Romanian gave a puzzled look followed by a slow nod.

He opened his mouth to speak, “Ye-”

A crash came from outside which was accompanied by the sounds of a struggle. Through their drunkenness, both men stood up and swayed

outside, Nikola grabbing his rifle. Outside, Alexei, trousers around his ankles, had a man pinning him to the ground, bearing a jagged rock and an animalistic look.

Everyone froze, the Romanian, armed with a lantern cast it upon the man, he had only ragged trousers on, the same each of the group were wearing, he was shirtless and had a noticeable wound in his side, a nasty graze it seemed.

“Get off him or I'll blow your head off,” Nikola screamed several times, each time changing language until the man stood up, and then collapsed.

* * *

Blurry vision, sunrays assaulted his eyes, he squinted as the pain in his side seized his movement.

“Wha-” he was tied to a radiator. “Huh...”

“Hello,” a stocky dark-haired man with glasses sat on a wooden chair with a rifle on his lap, the sun casting light on him.

A tall, skinny, blonde man with sunken eyes appeared. “Well Nikola, is he alive?”

“He just woke up” Nikola replied

The skinny man looked at him, the man tied up was still dazed, “Well, are ye?”

“Wha-, alive-, n-no, I -umm”

Nikola “He doesn’t sound so sure”

The tied-up man spoke up again, "I come from a camp at Zlatibor - the army," he paused, hesitated, "Sor-"

Nikola stared at him, "Sorry, umm, what? Alexei, is this guy looney?"

The tall skinny man "Alexei" spoke up, "I don't know, but I wouldn't put it past, lots of radiation around puttin' people's heads sideways."

The man who was tied up shuffled in his ropes, "m-m-my name is Dragos"

"Didn't ask," Alexei shot back and walked off with Nikola which was followed by quiet mumbling in the corner. Dragos suddenly noticed a third man, who looked foreign, glaring at him from a chair in a dark corner of the cabin. Unsettled, Dragos huddled into the wall in which he was tied.

After a long stretch of silence backgrounded by intense discussion, Alexei came back while Nikola gathered the cards and the drink on the table.

"We leave now," he said intensely while Nikola's gathering became more alarmed.

"We, and you, can't afford to get caught by any army"

It was then that Dragos saw their rifles leaning against the wooden cabin wall. Although tattered and worn it was clearly standard issue from a time ago.

"You're deserters?!"

"Yes, deserters with rifles, now shut up."

Dragos was dazed, he himself could be considered a deserter but he hadn't come to terms with it.

The sun dominated the sky, but the snow remained a relic of the colder night. Although the breeze was cold as it brushed against Alexei's neck, the sun's warmth was clearly present. He tossed a camouflage jacket to Dragos, Dragos looked at it and gave a whiney look.

"This is a rebel's jacket"

"Yep" Alexei said, amused by the reaction.

"Where did y-"

"Wear or freeze" Alexei interrupted.

Dragos opened his mouth to complain until Nikola and the Romanian emerged from the cabin and put on their green army helmets, Nikola adjusting his glasses, Alexei followed suit while fiddling with his fur collar, he counted his ammunition strapped to his chest and lifted his rifle sling to his shoulder. The sun reflected off the paint of the trio's helmets through the towering pine trees coated in snow. Dragos stood and analysed his misty breath that appeared in the cold. Alexei came over and cut Dragos's bindings so he could slip on the jacket, however disappointingly, he tightened his ropes again and shoved him forward.

The group set out walking through the nip of the breeze, Nikola at the front would stop frequently and unfold his map or gaze at his compass. The cabin and the trees around it slowly disappeared

from view as vast empty fields encompassed their perspective, Dragos could only count the lonely fence posts that surrounded them. The hike dragged on, and the prisoner became restless.

“Where are we going?”

“West,” spoke Alexei, Nikola busy in his maps.

“Why?”

“Because I said so.”

From the front, Nikola poked his stubbled face up from his map.

“Say, Dragos,” he said suspiciously, “How does a nice conscript like you end up without a unit or a weapon but instead a mighty fine graze in your side?”

“I fell.”

“I’m no shrink but I think your lyin’?”

Dragos looked away not willing to speak but stopped suddenly.

The smell hit first, strong and pungent. Death. Nikola drew his collar to his mouth as they rounded over a hill, the group were confronted with a harrowing sight. A field, a field of snow, in the field of snow were large holes filled with bodies of various animals, a hellish collection of carcasses teeming with rot and bodily anguish.

The Romanian blessed himself as he gazed upon the mass graves. Nikola grunted while Alexei scoffed. Dragos drew a breath, tasted the decay, he stood and stared unable to process the site. Alexei peered over the hand on his mouth.

“You good?” he said

Dragos began to stutter, “I-I-I-erm”

Nikola wandered over with half his face covered by his collar.

“We have to go around; this is a dumping ground of probably contaminated animals, so way too much radiation. If you feel like living to fifty, follow me” he muffled through the material.

Dragos stepped back shocked, his foot landed on a rock but slipped off it, sending onto the wet mud. He lifted himself up with his bound hands and wiped the sludge from his palms, the others hurried him on. Before he could follow them, he glanced at the rock on which he slipped. Rounded and cracked poking through dirt, a human skull, half buried amongst both snow and ground, layers of flesh still coloured the off-white bone into a muddy red. Below the skull, the ribs poked through their surface, sinew held together the lifeless inhabitant of the shallow grave.

Horror filled the young man’s thoughts and vision. Nikola noticed what was occurring and gazed at his own feet and quickly attempted to lift them. Mud sunken through rib cages, melded around spinal cords with subtle deeper holes where eye sockets just about shone through. Nikola waved his hands to send the Romanian and Alexei back. There were hundreds of bones but there was no telling how deep it went, each unique in their

antipathy and degeneration of the flesh that sagged like clothes on a line.

Nikola tip toed through the entrails and hooked his arm around a frozen Dragos and dragged him to the side of the site. Both Dragos and the Romanian fell to their knees, the Romanian clasped his hands in hurried prayer, Dragos held a mortified gaze as a continuation of his horror.

“A mass grave,” Alexei said with a somber tone.

The Romanian cast his desperate whispers upon the scattered remains. Dragos’ teeth rattled as he stood, he threw up, bile met by fleshy mud below him. Nikola cursed while Dragos recovered into a blank stare.

Silence corrupted them as they moved on around the desolation of blood and bone. The wind carried the deathly smell away from the group but the scene alone, out of the corners of their eyes, reminded them of the devastation.

Dragos gagged as he walked, the thoughts plagued him. He scanned the horizon and among the melting snow stood a collection of tents in the distance, barely having come into view. He pointed, then gagged, then the others looked over.

Nikola stepped forward, “Local contamination facility, prolly’ the guys who did the dead-beat job on the graves to our right”

Dragos, having just recovered, started to gag again at the thought of the fields.

“Any supplies?” Nikola asked

“Likely, with the unfinished burial seems like they packed in a hurry.”

“Or not at all,” Dragos spoke, “Trucks, like the ones I drove,” he paused “I was a truck driver.”

“Hmmm” Nikola stared at the camp in thought” So hypothetically if we got one of those trucks to move you could get us to the far end of Sarajevo?”

“Depends,” Dragos showed a spark of confidence in a long grin.

“Can’t drive if I’m tied up.”

Alexei stormed over, “Remember who’s the prisoner here, and who has the means to put a bullet through you and leave you with the waste.”

Alexei pointed an angry finger at Dragos who backed away defensively. Before things continued Nikola stepped between them, breaking the commotion.

“We untie you at the truck, deal?”

Dragos gave an affirming grunt while Alexei cursed and walked off in a huff.

“Come on.” He said, his voice still shimmering with frustration.

Dragos cupped some mud in his bound hands and struggled to throw it onto the blue and gold logo of his rebel jacket, attempting to camouflage it, as he walked towards the contamination base, having failed multiple times he gave up while Alexei chuckled.

It was a long rural road that led up to the facility, the white tents and trucks became clear as the

group approached, Dragos hung back while the others raised their weapons with caution. Body bags were lined up to the right of the collection of large army trucks, the group naturally chose to go left to the tents,

The Romanian brushed aside the zip door of the tent and looked inside, to his delight stood several shelves of army rations.

“Yes, yes,” he shouted to the others heavily accented, the only word he knew in their language. Nikola followed in and opened his bag.

“Bread, fish, biscuits, WATER!”

They started to pack their rucksacks to the brim while Dragos and a watchful Alexei investigated the rest of the place. It was like a small village of white tents with a “main street” of sorts. The pair peeked their heads in, confronted by mostly empty body bags. At the end of the “main street” a body was slumped over against the largest of the tents. He wore a gas mask and a long green protective coat.

“A liquidator, probably died to all this exposure to bodies with radiation on them head to toe”

Dragos thought of the fields, and he felt the pressure in his stomach.

“But I doubt he’ll need this anymore” Alexei continued while putting two hands on the gas mask. Dragos couldn’t watch as Alexei attempted to loot the corpse. Alexei started to pull; the rubber of its coat creaked and stretched under the stress of

the pulling. The body shifted in its place followed by a subtle twitching.

Without warning, the body's arm animated and a gloved hand clasped Alexei's wrist causing him to drop his rifle. From under the gas mask a sharp wheeze could be heard while through foggy eye pieces of the gas mask pupils writhed in their sockets as if trying to escape them.

Alexei screamed and seized his arm from the corpse, Dragos was stunned and took a breath but very quickly slammed three fists into the side of its head with his bound hands, he couldn't watch as the final blow landed as the skull caved under the mask. The friction of the rubber burned his knuckles but through the material he felt the skin slide away under the blows.

Dragos recoiled and gazed at the quiet corpse, the subtle twitching continuing. It hadn't quite been deceased. Alexei stood away and held his arm to his chest like a wounded bird. Dragos took the gas mask by its large green filter and pried it from the head. Under the mask was a face made of loose skin, pale with red edges. Bits of skin came off with the lifting of the mask leaving red patches behind. The man had no hair or eyebrows, his eyes were red and grey and sat still in their place, he didn't have eyelids.

His jaw bobbed up and down followed by a pathetic cough that caused his body to shudder. Whispers left his raw lips, mostly indecipherable,

Dragos could recognize them as prayers from the rare word that was fully formed.

Dragos knelt to the ground and picked up Alexei's rifle and handed it to him, they looked at each other, harrowed. Alexei took out a knife and sliced Dragos' bindings handing back the rifle.

"He's suffering. Radiation poisoning."

The man continued to whisper.

Dragos' hand brushed Alexei's as he took the weapon into his arms. They looked at each other, Dragos' face was shallow with the oncoming misery that befell him. He gripped the firearm and lifted the muzzle to the man's forehead. He just breathed, battling away his want to sob. He felt the weight in his arms and the cold steel of the trigger. Emptiness flooded his mind. He squeezed. A shock was sent to his shoulder. The bang was deafening as he felt the blood spray land on him in drops. The white tent wall sheet was now painted in the poor man's sinew. Alexei put a hand on his shoulder, saddened.

Dragos let out a deep breath as if he had been holding it for a long time. The breath carried a faint sob. Nikola rushed in to find Alexei sitting with his head in his hands, a Dragos staring solemnly at his boots. He scanned the room with his weapon and set his eyes on the body on the ground, noticeably missing a portion of his head.

"Lord God"

Dragos was shaking, not with disgust but with pure torturous misery. He battled his thoughts and resigned himself to numbness.

The Romanian peered from the door with his mouth still full. He cursed? At least he spoke angrily in his own language. Nikola stared at Dragos whom had dropped the rifle to the ground, it clattered and then stopped, the only sound in the tent.

“What did you do?” He gestured to the body on the ground.

“I-I-ugh...he was suffering.” Dragos told meekly.

Alexei spoke up, “The guy was already dying of radiation”

The Romanian blessed himself while Nikola loosened the strap under his chin and took off his helmet. He ran a muddy hand through his hair while looking at his boots then finally looked up to the scene. He brushed away a clump of his hair that had come loose and then carried on speaking.

“We have to leave”

He walked out the tent and strode to the tent with all the food. The Romanian looked at him as he left, an understanding nod. Dragos’ mouth twitched into a frown and a tear ran down his cheek, he brushed it away. Alexei placed a hand on his shoulder.

* * *

The Trucks outside were large and green at least that was what was immediately noticeable about them. The Romanian searched them one by one. Looking inside windows at fuel gauges, lifting of

tarps that enclosed empty truck beds and hoping he found nothing of grim interest.

The last truck was similarly empty at the back as the others had been however, he could smell the decay in the driver's seat. Although he knew this wasn't going to be a mouldy sandwich, he hoped none the less. As predicted, a body sat limp with its head sedentary on the head rest.

Dust that floated in the air was exposed by orange beams of afternoon light. Fresh air from the exterior flooded in making a more comforting smell of a slight must and a slight decay.

The body whose uniform was dishevelled had a head shape crudely disfigured to an unrecognizable degree by a noticeable wound from under its chin and out the back of its head.

The Romanian sighed, not un-used to such sights but not yet at peace with them. He thought about his own time in his own army, hard and torturous, the uniform he wore now bore a flag that was not his own. A means to an end.

In the hands of the body, which rested on its knees, was a pistol and the other hand in a tight fist around an orthodox cross. The Romanian pried the blood caked fingers from the cross, the task made harder by the onset of rigor mortis in every joint. The Romanian stared at the cross, it was simple and of wood, a humble design which he quite liked. From under his coat the Romanian took out a hip flask engrave with a cross which he had done

himself. From the flask he dashed some water onto the body and gave a quick prayer. He had given too many prayers and many dashes of water.

Dragos looked over at the Romanian who was inspecting the trucks, Dragos was moving boxes of supplies with Alexei and Nikola in which an awkward silence had infested. Wanting to distract himself from the previous events he let his mind draw him elsewhere.

“Who is that guy? the foreign one”

Nikola looked up from his task,

“Dunno, we think he’s Romanian, doesn’t say much other than yes or no”

“Probably from Romanian army from the war, before everything collapsed at least. That uniform don’t fit him right, I’d say he clawed it off a body.” Alexei said gazing at the short, black-haired man climbing up to a truck window.

“Where did you find him?”

Nikola turned to Dragos and looked at him from under the ridge of his helmet.

“Drunk, praying in a church”

Dragos was visibly confused and looked back down to the box at his feet.

“Is he not the enemy then?”

“Only enemy is the cold, his, nor our, governments exist anymore, it was their war not ours”

Dragos agreed but was still similarly confused, the Romanian seemed reasonable

The trio had amassed a healthy pile of supplies while the Romanian gestured to the truck he found most appropriate. It was green and rusting, had paint chips floating from its shell and glass with a musty quality but it did have the advantage of having a full tank and the means to carry their supplies.

Dragos seated himself at the driver's seat, dust floated in the evening sunlight. The others stood outside looking up at him through dirty panes of glass from the ground below.

He looked under the dashboard, although the truck's interior was a desperate mess, through the dust shone a glint along the small metal keys.

Dragos picked them up and inserted them into the appropriate place beside and under the ranger green steering wheel, he forced the stiff function to turn in in which resulted in the vehicle making a whining sound followed by a spur into life. It rumbled as the various lights and dials along the dashboard lit up and gave the readings for the vibrating automobile, it had fuel and enough fuel to take them far away.

He gave the signal to Alexei who stood in front of a grouping of supplies like a proud child, the Romanian began to lift them into the empty truck bed, tossing dust into the air. Nikola joined in the labour while Dragos made the effort on comforting

his driver's seat, clearing it from an infestation of grime that had amounted since the long use of the space.

Dragos looked to his right as the door opened and Alexei climbed in, they stared out the window in an awkward silence that lasted decades until behind them the Romanian banged on the adjoining divider. The truck lurched backward, the gritty sound of the ground underneath the wheels could be heard as it pulled out and onto the road perpendicular to the populous of white tents.

Along the road was a sign, slightly battered and rusted, it read "M14.1 Sarajevo, 220km". Alexei looked over to Dragos.

"Drive."

My Story

Luke Simons

Hi, my name is Luke Simons. I am 15 years old. I like Star Wars, Spider-Man, swimming and cycling. My favourite band called Metallica. My birthday is on 28 October 2007. 2007 is the release date of Spider-Man 3, the one with Toby Maguire. But anyway, I am wearing a grey Clonkeen College jumper tie and a light grey shirt with buttons.

My friends are called Joshua McGee, Daniel Woods, Louis Mitchell, Sean Harahan, Rory Mellon and I save the best for last, Mark Rafferty.

My teacher is called Pearse. I am a Clonkeen College student. I have two brothers and one sister. My sister's name is Libby. She is 19 years old. She has a boyfriend called Sean O'Callaghan. He is 20 years old. My brothers' names are Isaac and Chris, and they are 24 and 26 years old. One of them is single and one of them has a girlfriend. Her name is Amanda Schmidt. She is an engineer. Chris is the same and Isaac too.

I am a Youtuber. My channel is based on my name. My name is L-dog.

I have uncles, aunties, and cousins. I have Mia, Grace, Gavin, Sarah, Jane and Andrew, Lisa, Ger Kelly, Zach, Alex Reilly, James, Stephine. I do not want to want to give you too many names because I have a huge family.

And my favourite actor is Tom Holland as Spiderman, and my favourite film is Spiderman: No Way Home. My friend Joshua likes Mamma Mia and Grease Lighting and I like the same thing.

And I've got 94 subscribers on my channel. My name is L-dog.

There is a new student called Joe Conolly. He brings so much joy because Joe rhymes with joy but anyway he is a great student/friend.

Jonah is a great boy and sometimes he is quite funny. He loves Bon Jovi, James Bond. His lunch is pasta. he is nice, funny, charming and stylish. He is a good friend so Jonah welcome to Clonkeen. Kevin you are a good friend but sometimes I always copy you. You are a great student to Pearse.

Daniel Woods, you have a friend called Louis Mitchell, but you are 17. You have a favourite band and song called We'll Rock You by Queen that will cheer you up when you got angry.

Michelle, you bring some collections for us. You are always watching us working. you are a great friend to Del. Thank you Michelle. You are the best SNA ever. Speaking of SNA's Del, you are a bit funny, and a great friend to Michelle.

Joshua you are my friend, a friend that trusts you like me. You are my brother, my family. You bring so much joy to me I am your friend too. Louis you are a Metallica fan, but I am still your best friend we like the same thing.

ANTHOLOGY 2023

Robert you are my friend, but you are also funny. You like Arch Club, and you are 18. You have two friends, Mark Sullivan and Louis Mitchell.

Ms Sheahan you are a great teacher to me. You have great humour.

Ten Rules to Life, Two Thoughts and My Neighbour Larry

Ire Guidoriagao

Ten Rules to Life

Rule#1

There are four rules to life: be good to one another, help the people in need, love like it's your last day on Earth, and never get caught trying to buy a SAM Missile from the dark web.

Rule#2

Eating oranges is a far better experience when you're not in an active battlefield in Syria.

Rule#3

Remember: entering a KFC with a ski mask, leather gloves and an AK-47 is definitely not the best way to get the Trilogy Box Meal.

Rule#4

If you're going to France, make sure you don't book the flight to Saudi Arabia. Those two countries happen to be widely different.

Rule#5

Enter a restaurant and wait for the waiter. When the waiter asks what you'd like to order, tell them to surprise you. When the waiter comes back with

your meal, you tell them that wasn't what you ordered.

Rule#6

In order to be a great actor, you must do what Tim Robbins did in The Shawshank Redemption. To prepare for his legendary role, Tim Robbins read the movie's script and memorised his lines.

Rule#7

If a police officer stops you in your car, be sure to behave in front of them by hastily getting out of your car and quickly grabbing an imaginary object from your waist in order to deescalate the situation.

Rule#8

I am responsible for the 9 deaths of Bosnian Serb Army soldiers on May 19, 1994. Their bodily remains are inside of a ditch fifteen kilometres south of Trebinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Rule#9

If you find that someone is talking to you for too long, stab them several times in order to end the conversation.

Rule #10

When you're writing your bucket list, it is best not to have as the first thing on the list: "Drive car off of a cliff."

Two of my Thoughts

A lot of people don't believe in Santa Claus. But I, for one, believe in him. I believe he can do whatever they put their minds into.

I'm sick and tired of all these movies with humans in them. Once you see one movie with a human, you've seen all of them.

My Neighbour Larry

When I was a younger man, I had a neighbour called Larry. Larry Schmidt. He lived two houses up from where I lived with his family. He isn't here anymore. He isn't dead – he moved to England when I was 8 - though I sure hope is with every passing day. But he isn't, unfortunately. Even more unfortunately is that I had the displeasure of seeing him alive for a period. My recollection of him back when I was a child are repressed, but every time I delve into our history together, I understand why I repress my memories with Larry so much.

By the way he looked, he seemed to be a highly functioning child for his age. And he was by caveman standards. I remember trying to talk to him about what happened at school. With the amount of garbage that came out of the Dante's Inferno that was his mouth, you'd think he was a plumber on a website with an affinity for orange and black because he was screwing my brains out every

time we talked. And that's me being kind to what he looked like.

I needed glasses to look at Larry. Two glasses of scotch, specifically. This is because Larry had a face only a blind mother would love. Larry's greasy dirty blonde hair had enough oil in it to bring a country out of a recession. His eyes seemed to have one looking at a star in the sky, and one looking to see if I had money in my pockets. His skin was white enough to be a dress for communion. The cheeks on his face were red enough to start a revolution. The orangeness in his eyes could shake a rock to its core, and his teeth were more yellow than a Filipino store.

And that's not even getting to his personality. Oh boy, talk about a disaster. Talking to Larry was like playing basketball with a brick; it's not bouncy, it's not fun, and soon enough you throw it at someone. I believe that a higher power exists since only an omnipotent being would create a person like Larry in order to show that they have a sense of humour. Talking to Larry was where hopes and dreams died. His stupidity – oh God, his stupidity – actively made me stupid.

If you said to Larry “anybody would kill to have shoes”, he would actively get out of his way to kill several people to have some cheap runners from Sports Direct. Larry's the reason why you see the “Keep out of touch of children” labels on the detergents at the supermarket. I still can't believe

that he lived that long voluntarily, even now. I'm surprised that, with how much his mouth got him in trouble in the past, he hasn't ended up kneeling on the ground in one of those Mexican cartel execution videos. If his parents love him, they are wrong.

In the end, after reliving my moments with Larry Schmidt, I realized something. I realized that he had a huge impact on my life, for better or worse but mainly for the worse. He has given me so many moments to remember him for that shaped me into being the person that I am today. I hope that one day I too will be able to have a huge impact on Larry as well.

Specifically with a BMW 320I.

My Story About Me

Louis Mitchell

Hi, my name is Louis Mitchell

I come from Dalkey. My brother his name is Evan. His age is 17 years old for this year and his birthday is in November the 9th. He will be 18 years old. And my sister her name is Ava. Her age is 13 years old her birthday is on the 3rd of April. She will be 14 years old in 4 more months.

On Saturday I went down to see my Godfather/Uncle Paul to watching the Leinster Matches.

I went to go Aviva Stadium to play in that Stadium for SeaPoint Dragons. We did a lap of honour and cheered me up.

And I went to my Special Olympics. I came in 1st place for my Javelin, and I came in 4th place for my sprint. And then later I went to the Coliemore restaurant to celebrate for me because I played in the Aviva Stadium.

And then I lost my uncle Gerald. He passed away before Saint Patrick's Day in March. I went to his funeral. And my Grandad John passed away in an Altadore nursing home. And then I went to his funeral, and I did a little prayer for him. And then I went to the Killiney Castle in Killiney to celebrate his life and we have dinner.

ANTHOLOGY 2023

I was feeling sick, and I went to the bathroom Twice but I was ok for the moment. I went out to talking to a friend a Dutch man. His name is Jewel.

And before that we celebrate for my brothers Godfather Gerald. He passed away. We went to the Coliemore Restaurant to celebrate His life as well.

My birthday is coming very soon. I will be 17.

I went to Cork before Christmas, and we stayed in the Commodore Hotel and spent time with my family. I went to the museum in titanic and it was interesting, And I went to the photo zoo and then we went to a couple of restaurants in Cork and then we went to the cinema in 3D. I went to see Avatar 2: The Way of Water and then I went to bed in the hotel

And the next morning we went home.

And my godfather Paul Anthony John Cunningham calls me a local hero.

And my Nana put me in the Dalkey newspaper Because I came in 1st place for my javelin and I was famous back then.

I saw a video on my phone on what's app that was Joe Schmit, the former Irish head coach. He tells me best of wishes for my rugby blisses.

And I went down to the Coliemore Harbour, and I saw Donncha O'Callaghan. And I went to the party of SeaPoint Dragons ten years anniversary, and I saw Felix Jones.

Revenge of the Bear

Luca Fattaccini

Once upon a time in the vast forests of Canada lived my family and I. We lived in a nice modern, wooden house. One time when my family and I were out of the house, a little girl with golden locks broke into our house. She stole our porridge and broke the springs on our beds. This left my family enraged, but we couldn't hurt a little girl, so we had to let her off with her smug grin. We called her "Goldilocks".

Growing up I had a strong hatred for Goldilocks. Every day when I wandered the forest, I would encounter Goldilocks singing and chanting in her vibrant clothes with her locks bouncing up and down. Goldilocks was top of the class in every subject and was seen as a "little miss perfect" by all the teachers. I knew the truth though: she was a thief, and she wasn't going to get away with it. This rage grew and grew in me, and I had a burning urge to rip her to pieces. "She wouldn't look so smug," I said to myself.

When I turned eighteen my parents shared with me their deepest darkest secret. They ran a cartel deep in the heart of the forest in a rundown village. It was deserted for many years, so my parents thought it was the perfect place for the cartel. They had done up the place and added more modern technology, and I was intrigued by the equipment

and gadgets they had amassed. They had guns, night vision goggles, and cool armour sets for missions. The purpose of the cartel was to rob, hurt, and kill humans and that idea seemed perfect to me. They used the money to then store up porridge with illegal substances and sell it at outrageous prices for maximum profit. The porridge was so good that despite the lavish prices, customers still came back for more. I did a few missions and it helped me release my pent-up rage, but I was still not satisfied. I began to see how much power my parents had, and I wanted it. If I wanted to kill Goldilocks, I would need this power and there was only one way of getting it. Killing my parents!

At dinner time I asked my mother about the recipe for the porridge. She was reluctant to share it but finally gave in, so I took note of the ingredients and how to make it. Now all I needed to do was sneak into my parents' room and kill them. I could then establish myself as the leader of the cartel and assemble a team to take Goldilocks down.

At around 3:30 AM I snuck into my parents' room. I was careful not to make too much noise as I approached their room. The door into their room was open which simplified things for me. I slipped in through the door and there they were. They were snoring away unaware of what was about to happen to them. I quickly slashed my claws across their throat. They were dead!

The next morning, I went down to the cartel and relayed the sad news that my parents had died to the rest of the bears. I framed one of the weaker bears, Jorge, and claimed that he snuck into our house and killed my parents. The other bears were devastated at the death of their leaders, so they took matters into their own hands. Jorge was small and weak, so the other bears were easily able to surround him. They brought Jorge down to a dungeon below the cartel headquarters which was filled with wild bears that would rip Jorge to pieces.

I woke up the next morning at 3am feeling shattered but the day had finally come. I had dreamt about what happened so far but it was an incomplete dream. I needed to kill Goldilocks! I made my way to the deserted village where I met a few of my more trusted cartel members who I had especially picked for this mission. Goldilocks was very rich, and she lived in a high security mansion, so we needed a plan.

The other day Juan, one of the smarter bears, flew a drone over Goldilocks's house. He mapped it out, taking into account every single defensive measure. We conversed and plotted for hours about the best way to get in and we finally found a way. The front door! Only lunatics would go through the front door which meant that it was not as secure as the rest of the mansion. It's a good thing we are the biggest lunatics in the whole of Canada. We gathered our gear and set off!

Once we arrived, we hid behind a few trees surrounding the house. We were now going to initiate the first part of the plan, to be lunatics! We made a sudden sprint to the house and threw a grenade at the front door. It burst to pieces, and we made our way in. A few guards started shooting at us but we picked them off one by one with our rifles. We were now inside. Thanks to Juan mapping the house we knew exactly where Goldilocks's room was, so we quickly made our way there.

She was asleep in her bed. My moment had come! I dropped my rifle and without hesitation sank my claws into her body. I pulled, I ripped and I tore her to bits. Revenge was rushing through my veins and the satisfaction was greater than I had ever felt before. Once she was dead, we swiftly made our way out of the house and into the forest. Golden locks were knotted in my paws. I loved every moment of tearing Goldilocks to bits, but now I was the most wanted bear in the world.

Once the rest of the crew and I got back to the cartel headquarters we packed our bags quickly and swiftly made our way to the airport. We took my parents' private jet to Switzerland where we would spend the rest of our lives on the run, but it was worth it. Once we got on the plane I savoured a bowl of delicious hot porridge and began to ponder what would happen next...

Two Stories – Flash Fiction!

Antoni Siejko

ONE

I looked into his eyes and he back into mine, that moment could only be described as euphoria, being lost in his deep aqua marine eyes, floating in them as if swimming in the ocean. My strawberry blush in the reflection so clear that it's as if I was looking into a mirror, his smile wide with a mouth full of pearl-white teeth. I follow his features from one eye to the next, from one corner of the mouth to the next, from cheek to cheek stopping for a moment to look at his nose, a roman nose.

Olive-coloured skin with a wood and salt smell from the oils used on it, the veins on his bare feet countable from a distance and his fingers thin and pretty I'd be able to recognise him with my eyes closed by his hands alone.

His leather tunic dusty from the spear training done outside and his arms strong but thin like a well refined and made sword, legs that of Hermes being able to run for hours with a spear and shield without getting tired.

Long, dirty-blond hair that glistens in the sunshine and a chin that would equal Zeus's and as he leans in to kiss me his lips taste of sweet dates-

Then I'm waken by a fellow maid, so I get up putting on a dress my dream not forgotten.

TWO

It happened then the teacher left the room warning us she'll be back in over 30 minutes.

Almost immediately after leaving pencils whizzed over my head like bullets, friends got hit and enemies got hit, I was stuck in the crossfire right in the middle, a no man's land of sorts. All I could do was watch this war go on.

Sides started to develop quick. We had the four main alignments, the footballers, the music kids, the runners, and the smart kids and of course everyone outside them were known as the outcasts.

Technology jumped quickly, the footballers found out the most efficient way to throw pencils, the music kids found out rubbers made much heavier and deadlier weapons, the runners found that gum can ruin hair and uniforms and the smart kids used rubber bands and multiple pencils to make grenades.

As the war continued political views rose: Ronaldo supremacy, cult of countries, order of chickens and government of cows just to name a few.

After that truces started to form. After that came backstabbing, infiltration and after 20 minutes the

ANTHOLOGY 2023

music kids and footballers fell, both being destroyed by the runners and smart kids.

The two factions remaining fought and fought until the teacher came back and with a twist of a doorknob everything got cleaned up within seconds and the war ended.

Forgotten

Owen Bilag

It was a stormy dark night in Hollow Woods, a small town situated off the coast of a lake in the south of Wales. Coedydd-gwag or Hollow Woods got its name from the mysterious trees surrounding the lake. An entire forest of yew trees nicknamed hollow or forgotten ones, due to the many holes left within them. The residents held many urban folk tales about the mysterious trees, such as how Arawn came up from the underworld and struck the trees out of spite for a mortal woman, or the tale of how an ancient griffin like creature came to lay its kin within the trees and chose the town as its protectors. Yet, this town could barely protect themselves, let alone a griffin's eggs.

The winds blew harshly as the town began to start their slumber. It wasn't uncommon for strong winds in Hollow Woods, but tonight they felt different, they felt uncertain, blowing in chaos, from all directions instead of just from the casual northly winds. As many began to get into their sleep attire, an old hag started to call out from the forest and into the town.

“LEAVE YE GOOD PEOPLE OF HOLLOW WOODS!” she cried in a sinister tone, “LEAVE YOUR BEDS, LEAVE YOUR HOUSES, GRAB YOUR CHILDREN AND YOUR VALUABLES. RUN FOR

THE HILLS, RUN FAR AWAY FROM HERE, FOR HE IS COMING, HE WITH NO NAME TO SAY, HE WITH NO SOUL TO CRY OR WEEP, HE WITH NO EYES TO SEEK, LEAVE NOW MY FRIENDS!”

“Shut up you old bat!” a shepherd screamed as he was rounding up his sheep for the night. “You keep telling us to leave and barely anything ever happens, you’re a fool, nothing but an old fool telling nonsense!”

“FOOL YOU SAY! I am a woman of knowledge you heathen! Now leave before he comes fishing for your kin and for you,” the old hag retaliated.

“Oh, hush it you hag,” a female voice screamed from a window, “That shepherd is right, you tell nothing but lies! You say Mabon came to ruin my marriage or how Dylan has come from the lake to blow us away. You utter such nonsense and all that happens is some cow escaping or a tree falling over.”

“I WAS RIGHT!” the old hag yelled, “Mabon came and killed your husband out of jealousy! And Dylan did come to blow us away, a great storm happened that day! Tonight, will be worse than those times however, tonight you are all in trouble! The hollow man is coming!”

“What is all this commotion,” questioned a very sleepy mayor, “Oh, you again, what is it this time? The elves have come to take my eggs and bury them in the ground, oh no don’t tell me, Arawn has come to drag us to the deepest parts of shadow realm.”

“The hag warns of a man with no eyes mayor, whatever will we do,” the female voice heckled.

“A man who is hollow!” mocked the shepherd.

“Then it is simple, we shall lace the town with threads from sheep, so he will fall over and blow away, like a piece of parchment!” the mayor laughed.

The old hag grew furious, stamping her feet on the ground, heading back into the wooded area. “YOU WILL BE SORRY YE FOLK OF LITTLE HEAD! WATCH AND WAIT FOR THE HOLLOW MAN TO COME AND FILL HIS KIN!” the old hag screamed one last time before disappearing into the dark wood as the three villagers laughed at her departure.

“Perhaps we should be scared,” a little boy said sheepishly tugging on the mother from the window’s dress, “That old lady did seem quite certain of her vision.”

“Don’t be so stupid son!” the mother said, closing her window waving goodbye to the shepherd and mayor, “Your father died from some man who was off his head, like the old woman out there. Nothing else and nothing more, now finish your dinner before it rots.”

“But mother, what if Mabon really was jealous of you and then killed father because of it,” the young boy replied.

“I know it is hard for you to accept your father’s death love, but he rests now in Annwn, no God

would come to kill him out of jealousy or out of spite for any of us, now finish up and get yourself in that bed,” the mother retaliated, finishing her nightly chores. She let out a depressed sigh as her child left to go to sleep. Her husband died not that long ago, she told everyone it was an accident. She convinced the town some drunk had stuck him in the night along with several others, but she knew, and saw exactly who did it, and it was hard on her and her boy.

Ever since that day she grew a sense of fury for the old hag, but deep down she knew that not even the hag could do any more than she already had done. However, something tonight did feel strange, a familiar sense of evil and anxiety fell over her. She attempted to shake it off and went to go sleep next to her son.

The winds grew more restless throughout the night as the mayor returned to his home getting into bed next to his wife. “What happened now my love?” she said barely awake.

“Just that old lady from the wood's sweetheart, telling us that the town is in danger once again, I swear she does it out of spite or jealousy.” the mayor replied, as his wife looked at him with eyes of worry, “What’s the issue my dear?”

“I do wish you would treat her like any human in this plane of existence. I mean, she was right many times, just not as dramatic as she led us to believe,”

the wife said as her husband put his hands around her head, gently petting her hair.

“My dear, there is nothing to fear, perhaps this time she means a foreigner will come, nothing as horrid as she says, like you say, now get some rest my dear,” the mayor replied kissing his wife’s head as he unlit the candle stick dimming the room. The two had been together for as long as they can remember, and they vowed nothing would split them apart. They truly were an inseparable pair, ever since they met.

As the mayor blew out the last candle, the shepherd had just placed the last of his sheep inside of their pen and was settling into his home for the night. “You should have listened to that old lady when you had the chance my son,” warned the shepherd’s mother as she bent over her bed ruffling her hands, “she is a very well-known witch, her predictions are true, but both you and I know that something does not make all that much sense tonight. I’m leaving, and I’m going to that witch, and she will protect us, but I suppose you won’t be joining me.”

“Mother, your delusional, she’s nothing more than a fraud and you’re too weak and frail to adventure alone in those woods. Come to your senses and stay here, I’ll cook up some soup and we can finally have some dinner,” the shepherd said, motioning towards the table. The shepherd’s mother stood up and headed towards the door with

a bag in her hand, "I suppose you won't be joining me for soup."

"Son, your too stuck in your own head, you believe whatever you say is true and everyone else is wrong, one day I hope you will understand that you're not always right, goodnight my child stay safe," the shepherd's mother said heading towards the door, looking back at her son one last time before heading into the dark forest, disappearing into the darkness.

The shepherd sat down at the table; his head drooped over staring down. All his life he felt like he was right, he was always right, but he never stopped to think about what anyone else was saying. What if he was wrong, what if for once he was wrong and something was wrong. He stood from the table looking out his window into the dark forest that lay just outside of his home. His mind wandered as he began to imagine that tonight did feel strange, something tonight wasn't right, something tonight felt almost mythical.

As he began to think the time flew by, the moon and stars illuminated the night sky and outside the rough figure of a person began approaching the home of the shepherd. The shepherd's eyes bulged as he began to run out of his home. "MOTHER! I apologize, I was wrong, please come home! Please!" the shepherd pleaded as the mysterious figure came forward. It soon became apparent that the figure was not his mother.

As it came closer, the figure became taller, and taller, and taller, and soon was as high as the trees. The figure had the clothing of a poor man, with a rugged white tunic, and baggy brown trousers. The tunic barely covered the body and was as short as a crop top and the trousers maybe only covered as much as a quarter of the legs. His limbs were stretched out, like a piece of putty and the body itself was distorted and bent like an image that came out wrong.

His legs were as tall as most of the body, but the arms fell so far, they were limp on the ground like a piece of string dangling from a pole. His fingers were also distorted like pieces of spaghetti dangling from his palm. His neck was reasonably sized but not as big as maybe six inches, same with his head, but that in its own right, was disturbing. His face indeed had no eyes like the old lady had said, but in its place were two large ellipses as dark as the sky itself, his mouth opened as well, gaping wide and reaching down below the chin line. He had barely any hair and looked as if someone had pulled it out, but those pieces of hair that remained were wet and oily, draping down to his ears.

He used his two large arms as forms of support to walk around as he inched his way closer to the shepherd. The shepherd stood still in fear, as he looked up at the looming figure. The shepherd felt like running, he felt like he could run for the hills, but he knew, deep down, that he was too late, too

late to change his mind, too late to run, and too late to leave. The figure moved closer as the shepherd fell to his knees.

“Please...” the shepherd pleaded, “please have mercy on me.”

The figure stood still, his head tilted down, staring with its deep dark holes into the poor shepherd's soul. As it suddenly thrust its hand towards his neck strangling the man like a python towards its prey. The shepherd struggled trying to remove the figure's hand from his neck, as his body began to grow limp. His eyes bulged and his skin slowly started to become a dark blue colour, the shepherd gasped for air as he looked up at the faceless figure, whilst the last of life drained from his body. The figure shook the body like a rag doll, as the colour of the shepherd's face slowly disappeared. He had become nothing but a shell of what he was. The figure carried the body into the darkness of the woods, disappearing into the shadows of the trees.

Restlessly, the mayor awoke from his sleep, a sense of horror shivering down his spine. He slowly rose from his bed heading towards his window that looked over the entire town. He began to scan over the town, looking at all he had accomplished. He had grown up in the town when it was nothing more than just his family, two other families, and the then mayor of Hollow Woods. Now look at it, farms, blacksmiths, markets and enough people for one

tree per person in the entire town. He was nothing more than just a poor boy in a small village, and now he was the mayor, with a wife as beautiful as the moon reflecting off the lake, and the lord of the peaceful town.

Until he laid his eyes upon the town centre. There stood the figure, staring up at him, his arms soaked with dry blood, dragging behind him. The mayor looked in horror at what he was staring at. He rubbed his eyes, ensuring that what he was seeing was true. When he opened his eyes again, the figure was gone from his line of sight. Where once an ugly and deformed man once stood, now was the empty town centre once again. The mayor rubbed his eyes believing he had just imagined the entire encounter, turning around to look at his wife before he went back to his sleep. Unfortunately, he would never be able to look at his wife ever again.

There stood the creature, slowly wrapping his hand around the woman's neck, she hadn't even woken up until the being started to apply more pressure, and she woke up gasping for air, letting out the only screams she could. The figure could barely fit in the house, looming over, bent forwards as the woman was forced to stare at the horrifying creature. The mayor, without hesitation, ran forwards in an attempt to stop the monster from taking away his wife. However, the mayor underestimated how strong this thing really was, from just one simple backhanded slap, the mayor

was thrown across the room, slamming against the wall. The creature grabbed hold of the mayor by his head, like how a man would pick the grapes off a vine. He forced the mayor's eyes open, making them water and cry, as he watched his darling wife slowly lose the last bits of breath from her body, laying limp in the creature's hand. Her body was now a pale white, all the colour was drained from her.

“YOU MONSTER!” he cried, “YOU CREATURE OF THE NIGHT, HOW COULD YOU DO SUCH AN INHUMAN THING TO AN INNOCENT WOMAN!” he yelled, squirming around in the monster's grasp. But the creature, he didn't move, just stared down the mayor's soul, watching him cry over the death of his poor wife. The figure tilted his head slightly and thrust his long spindly fingers into the eyes of the mayor. He gouged out his eyes, as the mayor screamed in horror from the excruciating pain. The creature dropped the woman and stuffed his fingers down the mayor's throat, suffocating him, watching as blood poured from his eyes and saliva drooled from his mouth. The figure dropped the man, lying dead on the floor, he grabbed the deceased couple by the necks, dragging them along the floor and back into the hollow woods once more.

Loud knocking came from the door of the old hag, she had just finished a spell to protect her home from the hollow creature and was ready to fall asleep but angrily made her way towards the door of her cabin.

“Yes, who is it, what do you want!?” the old hag yelled as she answered the door, “My old friend, come in, come in, I will brew you some tea.” At the door was a frail old mother, rushing inside to escape the darkness of the night. “What brings you to my abode this evening my dear?” she asked with a caring tone.

“Foolishness, fear, terror but most of all, I wanted to ensure you were alright my friend,” she said, as she sat down at the small table. The old hag placed some tea in front of her, as the shepherd's mother put her head in her hands and began to weep. “Oh, my dear, was it your son again?”

“Yes...He was foolish in his ways but did not deserve such a form of punishment, no one should deserve something like that,” the shepherd's mother said, wiping away the tears from her face.

“Unfortunately, it is out of our hands, he has no mind and only job is to serve the purpose he was made for. He is unstoppable, he is mindless, he has no concept of emotion or love or forgiveness. He is forgotten, and that is why he does what he does,” comforted the old hag, holding the shepherd mother's hands, as the two sat in silence, watching the time pass by them outside the windows.

The morning sun slowly crept through the mother's bedroom windows, dimly lighting the room waking up the mother. She rubbed her eyes and looked to her side to see her son lying down next to her. She took in a deep breath as she caressed her

palms against her son's head like a loving mother bird to her chicks. As she arose from her bed, placing a scarf of warmth around her body, a same sense of evil lingered over her like an unwanted presence outside her window. No matter how hard she tried to shake off the feeling, the presence grew stronger and stronger, no longer just out her window but now all around her, suffocating her.

She slowly crept towards the main room of the cottage to stare outside. A sigh of relief washed over her as she saw nothing but an empty town, but if everything was fine, why was there still an unearthly presence clinging to her. She kept looking out her window, searching for an answer that felt so obvious but hidden behind invisible curtains. That's when she noticed open doors, broken windows, and strange dark brown colours in unorderly lines across the village square, a sight she was all too experienced with. Her eyes widened as she tried to rationalize the situation.

"It was windy, maybe rocks were blown through the windows," she thought to herself, "perhaps the old hag tried to perform some stupid ritual with goat's blood," she worryingly pondered, "it must be that hag's fault, it must be, no one would do something so horrific on purpose."

She took deep breaths, pinching herself, as if she were trying to wake herself up from the present reality. She cautiously looked out her window, trying not to draw attention to herself. Her eyes

rested onto the streaks along the floor, examining them as close as she dared. The lines of crimson and dark brown were scattered and held no order, but one thing was clear, they all led back into the forest. That unforgettable sense of evil and anxiety washed over the mother like a tsunami of negativity hitting her constantly. Cautiously she made her way to the door that looked out into the woods and creaked it open slightly, and there he stood, he was different this time, but it was undoubtedly him. His body drooped forwards as he dragged the body of her neighbour into the woods. His body became slimmer and more stretched, his height was taller now, he only used to be as tall as maybe a seven-foot man but now he was giant, as tall as the trees themselves.

Her body quivered with fear as he stopped in his tracks and slowly turned his ghastly pale face towards the mother, gripping the body tighter and slamming it into the tree with an inhumane strength. His hand slithered out from the tree, like a snake wriggling its way out from the crack in a rock. His hands fell to the ground and roared like a wild cat in the jungle, his soulless eyes rested on the mother and sprinted forwards like a predator towards its prey. The mother, in a frightened panic, slammed the door shut and pressed her body against it in fear and terror. The beast slammed his body against the door, aggressively banging on it, whilst shrieking like a banshee in the night. The

mother cried and screamed, it was happening again, but why now, why here, “WHAT DO YOU WANT!” she wailed, as the monster halted to a stop.

Chilling silence fell over the house, the kind of silence you can only hear in an abandoned house at night, the kind of silence that wasn't like normal silence, the kind of silence that you know something bad was happening in the next room. The silence became frantic screams as the mother hurried to her feet as the bedroom door slammed shut right before her. Frantic screams and aggressive knocking from a mother who was about to lose the last of her world.

Inside the dimly lit room, the figure stood looming over the single bed in the room. There soundly slept the son awaking from the banging of the bedroom door. “Papa?” the small boy whimpered as the creature plunged his hand into the child's chest, making a clean hole through him.

The mother wept as the door crept open to reveal her son's lifeless body being dragged through the bedroom window. She dropped to her knees watching her son getting dragged to the outside. Her eyes puffed up, releasing waterfalls of tears onto the floor. The mother had no one now, no one to hold, or anyone to comfort her, the last of her world fell into the dark abyss called death.

She rose to her feet crying tears of anger as she made her way out the door and deep into the forest. There stood the creature placing the remains of the

child into the hole of the tree overlooking the village. The monster looked back towards the woman, tilting his head, ready to attack, but his time was up, the morning sun shone brightly onto the forest of what were once empty holes, now filled with her friends, her family and now her home. The creature walked off disappearing bit by bit until he was nothing but dust flying through the air.

She fell to her knees as she looked around, the trees holes were filled with the horrifying faces of everyone she had known, some were scattered, some were so deformed they couldn't be recognized, and some were so horrific, it could make the cruellest of men cry and weep. Some of the faces were recognizable, such as the face of a woman and a man, separated by a solid tree in the middle.

"An ironic end, don't you think?" the familiar voice of an old hag rang out from behind.

"What do you want, you old witch." wept the young woman, staring into the longing distance.

"You're not the only one who lost someone today," the old hag uttered in a somber tone, looking towards an old woman kneeling down at a tree, "We all lose things in our lives, and it's always hard to face that loss, but you have lost more than many. Now you can come with me my child, you can learn in the ways of my craft, you can prevent others from losing as much as you, or you can continue with your life, and forget about it all and I will tell you

this my dear, it will not be as easy as last time without help.”

“Will he return?” asked the young woman.

“You're asking a question you already know the answer to my dear,” replied the old hag placing a hand on the woman’s shoulder. The young woman had despised the old hag for ages, ever since her husband died, but now here they were, sharing a tender moment, a thought that would stick with both forever.

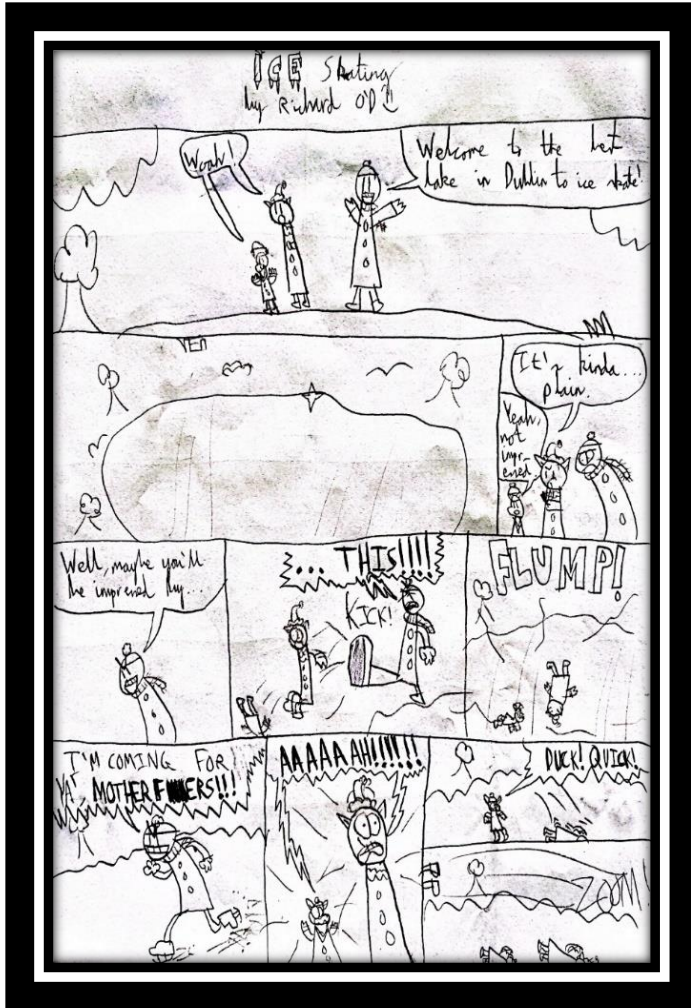
The shepherd’s mother rose to her feet and approached the two with tears in her eyes. “Come, let us prepare, the shadows will fall over us once again,” she spoke in a weeping voice, wiping the tears from her wrinkled eyes.

The sun finally rested onto the dawn sky shining onto the crying bloody faces which slowly moulded into the dark wood of the hollow forest, once a wood filled with silent screams, now, a filled forest surrounding a baron town that once thrived with villagers, with friends and with families. The only survivors left, now hidden away in a tiny cabin deep in the forest.

There once was a town called Coedydd-gwag, now silently sat, surrounded by trees. There once was a town called Hollow Woods, now doomed to abandon and rot. There once was a town, but a town, sadly no longer.

Ice-Skating

Richard O'Donovan





Sackler

Elliot Murphy

“Less than one percent...”

...Drip, drip, drip...

The drip moved like the pain, it came in, it came out, it dripped, it dropped. Like the tide on a beach, it came in, it came out

The pain was everywhere one minute and nowhere the next, it started in his toes and ended in his head. He could move nothing, not a wriggle in his toe not a twitch in his face, nothing.

His conciseness came like the pain, one minute he could see (barely, a blur of sorts, the type of blur which you see when trying to open your eyes underwater or waking up first thing in the morning), the next he could see nothing, only total darkness. Sometimes he heard voices, well from what he could gather they were voices, he couldn't tell if these voices were talking to him or around him, sometimes he thought the voice he was hearing was his own and other times thought they were just in his head.

Six days later

“Mr Willard? Mr Willard can you hear me?” The voice called out.

Who's that? Who's there? He thought, trying to speak out with everything he could.

"I-I-I..hmm mhm." He managed to say, barely.

"Mr Willard, Francis, my name is Dr Ammon, Frederick Ammon, you call me Fred. You suffered a bad fall Mr Willard, you have a comminuted fracture in your ribs, a mild TBI and a small fracture in you lower back, as well as other fractures and bone breaks in both legs and feet. You were put in an induced coma and are currently in St Peter's hospital here in Wichita, Kansas. Do you understand everything I've just said?"

Francis nodded ever so lightly. As he did so a swash of pain seemed to run through his head.

"Good, that's good, do you think you could answer some questions for me?"

"Mhmm." Francis responded, not completely sure that he could.

"Who is the President Mr Willard?" The voice said.

Francis managed to move his head in its direction, his eyes allowed him to see something, a figure.

Frederick Ammon wore a completely white coat with a little name tag on his left side which Francis could not yet make out as well as a small red tie, from what he could see he had slicked black hair with a streak of grey in the middle. As the figure came closer Francis could see more. He wore a pair

of rimless eyeglasses, looked almost dangerously skinny and wore shined black leather shoes.

“Francis can you hear me?” He said, approaching closer to him.

“Do you know who the current president is?”

“B-b-b-b-Bush..W.Bush.” Francis managed to mutter.

“That’s right, and do you know what year it is Francis?”

“2001.”

“Well done, Francis,” Dr Ammon said. He walked closer to Francis, his leather shoes echoing through the room. “I’m going to give you two of these.” He said, putting out his hand holding two white pills. “They’re called ‘OxyContin’ they will help with the pain.”

“A-a-a narcotic.?”

“Yes, I’m aware of your past problems but statistics show that less than one percent of users get addicted.”

*F*** that*, he thought. Francis had had a history with addiction. For nearly twelve years he spent most his days drunk on alcohol, only when he killed a teenage girl named Laurelynn Heffler by ramming her down with his ford truck in the August of 1998 and was forced to go to rehab as per his sentencing by the district judge did, he kicked the addiction.

Francis was an addictive type, he started drinking back in '68 at the age of seventeen and had started smoking even early at the age of fourteen

(the smoking was a habit he never kicked). He became an alcoholic after his daughter, Thalia, died from Leukaemia, when she was just seven years old, not only the death, but the suffering is what drove him into the pit. Francis was a small man, had short brown hair, and a small bit of stubble that infested his chin and upper lip.

Dr Ammon came closer, his figure looming above Willard's head. He took the pills and forced them down his throat.

“Mr Willard,” Dr Ammon said intensely, “If you feel you and your pain haven't been adequately treated, we can be sued, in my experience of prescribing patients with OxyContin, none have gotten addicted, very few have even suffered from withdrawals and from what we know these few instances of withdrawal symptoms have instead been pseudo-addiction, a case where the patient was under-treated for their pain.”

As Dr Ammon spoke, his voice draining in and out in Francis's mind, he put the pills in Francis's mouth and washed them down with water, the tide went out, the drip stopped, the pain went.

Fourteen Days Earlier

The cigarette burned as he turned the pages of today's issue of the *Wichita Times*. He moved onto the crossword puzzle and got about halfway through before deciding that the nine-letter word on 14 down with the clue 'It's hard, difficult for cockney

to find balance' was too difficult. He took a final drag from his Marlboro, bits of ash dropping onto his lap before putting it out.

Francis lived in a small decrepit one-story ranch house with a small damp attic ravaged with mould, the whole house consisted of four rooms, a bathroom with a toilet that had a slew of black and brown stains along with a small sink that had its pipes sticking out underneath, a kitchen that had mould growing in every corner, a small round table and white cracked tiles, every now and then a small mouse could be seen scurrying along the counter tops, one bedroom that had a slightly sour smell when you walked in and beside the single bed with a few gashes in the mattress that made it look like someone had taken a bite out of it there a big plastic bottle which Francis called his piss bottle, on this day it was half full and a small musty sitting room that had white net curtains that had now turned almost completely yellow, red carpeting on the floor and a small box TV with an antenna sticking out of it.

In 1979 Thalia was born, she had been the product of an on off relationship he had with a woman named Lori Rader who he had met in Wichita Falls high school back in the sixties. Her red hair and freckles beamed in the southern sun and blossomed in the spring. He had never made it official with her because she was much more "relaxed" than him (she was a hippy, though when

it was no longer cool, when hippies were looked at not as free loving spirits but kind of freaky, the type of people you tell your kids to stay clear of in the park, she now had long frazzled hair and spent most of her teen years either smoking dope or protesting the war in Vietnam), something which to say the least got on his nerves.

But after the death and suffering of Thalia, she left, got in a Volkswagen minivan with a couple of other hippy friends she had met awhile back after finishing high school.

So now, he lived in a small slowly decaying house in Wichita. Despite its possibilities of a nice home, a symbol of the 'American dream' it was nothing more than an eyesore for the people who lived near to him. Its outside paint was completely peeling exposing its wooden frames and arches, its windows show slight cracks and its garden was dead, dead brown grass with dead orange leaves.

On this morning the 23rd of March 2001 as the clock struck twelve, Francis made his way from the kitchen down the narrow, dust filled hallway towards unearthly bathroom when he heard a small tapping sound coming from the bedroom.

He slowly peeked his head in there and saw nothing, only a small spider cowering in the top right corner beside the window. But when he turned around to make his way to piss, he saw her...her face burned with glass shards sticking out, blood trickling from her nose and eyes, her hair, her

beautiful blonde hair now covered in blood and debris. He stumbled backwards, his heart suddenly leaping out of his chest and began to run towards the front door, not looking behind him. When he reached the front door and began to pull on the jagged handle, he began to feel sweat breaking out all over him, his hand slipping off the handle. When finally, he did get the door open he fell, smashing his knee on the dusty pavement and landing on his back.

Fourteenth of August 1998

He didn't see her, not when he was zooming down the I-35, in his Ford truck with a bottle of Kentucky Bourbon in one hand and a Marlboro in the other listening to Rush Limbaugh talk shit about immigrants and gay people, he didn't see the red traffic light he whizzed through as he made his way into Oaklawn, he didn't see her when she stepped out on the road, her hands covering her face from the headlights, her screams which shook the whole community, he didn't see her in her yellow sundress tumble over his truck windshield smashing her head so hard off it the whole thing smashed, he didn't hear her head smash against the concrete road or her last gasp of air as the life escaped from her.

The only thing he saw in the whole ordeal, was when he awoke out of an almost blackout sleep, sitting on the pavement with blue and red lights

flashing in his eyes, an out of duty officer holding up his badge and reading the out his name and badge number, and as he looked to his left and saw her, the shards of glass sticking out of her face, the blood streaming down her head like water streaming down a slope.

He had no reaction, no jerk of realisation or outburst of sorrow. He just sat there his eyes bloodshot and his head hanging. He saw out of the corner of his eye another officer approach, this one wearing his full black and blue uniform.

The two officers picked him up by the arms and began to walk him towards one of the police cars, the final thing he saw before being put in the back of the blue PT cruiser was her body being zipped up in a body bag, the final image that scarred his memory was the zip getting caught in her blood splattered head.

Two months and \$75,000 dollars on court and legal fees later and the judge sentenced him to a sentence of just three years plus seventy-five hours of community service all to be served consecutively as well as six weeks in the Kansas City rehabilitation centre.

The sentence caused outrage in Wichita, the next morning's issue of *The Wichita Times* headlined "Laurelyn Heffler rolls as murderer Francis Willard walks." He knew himself the sentence was far too lenient, even for someone who had pled guilty.

Francis never left Wichita, despite the town hating him and a constant borage of letters from people claiming to be Laurelyn saying she was back from the dead and ready for revenge blah blah blah.

But he wouldn't afford himself that luxury, the luxury of just being able to pick up and go somewhere else, somewhere where he wasn't confronted with his guilt on an almost daily basis, somewhere he could forget.

He was released from prison on good behaviour after just eighteen months, sometimes he wished he had been able to stay longer, the isolated walls made him feel safe, safer than the rotting walls of his house.

30th of March 2001

The clock struck three minutes to four in the afternoon, Francis had awoken more than thirty minutes ago with a blinding pain travelling throughout his body, bullets of sweat gathering on his forehead and under his arms. The tide had come in. The drip was dripping.

He stared hopelessly staring at the clock that sat above the door in his room, just waiting for the hand to reach four, waiting for one of the nurses to walk in with his Oxy and cure him (for now, until the next dose was needed a few hours later) of this unbearable pain.

As the seconds passed by and the minutes closed in the sweat bullets had rolled all the way down to

his neck and began to form on his back, trickling down.

The door handle began to move, as a short brown-haired nurse with blue eyes but yellow teeth walked into the room, to Francis she was walking as slow as humanly possible, as though she was teasing him.

“Time for your Oxy Mr Willard.” she said.

He closed his eyes, hoping, waiting, expecting.

As she grappled his mouth open and placed the single Oxycontin pill on him tongue and washed it down with a glass of water, the pain faded, the tide went out, the drip stopped.

Two and a half months later

A gust of wind nearly knocked Francis off his feet as he approached the porch of his home in the late hours of a Tuesday evening in Wichita, the sun setting revealing a pink sky along with a dead somewhat comforting heat in the air that was a staple of the beginning of summer in Wichita. A cane in his right arm and a limp in his left leg and a Marlboro cigarette burning in his left hand he headed for the front door.

It was the first time he had been home in months though that wasn't what was on his mind today as he jangled the keys in his front door lock and heard the big clunk as he pushed the door open with his cane, no, right now all he could think about was the fact that today was the first day since waking up

from the accident that he would have no OxyContin to help him through the day.

Even just the thought of no pills made Francis cringe with a sense of disgust and disappointment. Francis made his way towards the kitchen wincing at the thought of what monstrosity he would find rotting in his fridge, planning to replace it with a small bar of chocolate he had bought in the hospital vending machine (that and a cup of noodles he had also purchased in the vending machine would be tonight's meal.)

He walked towards the fridge door already smelling what was to come. He flicked his cigarette into the sink and used the free hand to grab hold of the door handle and pull it open. What came out was this foul sickening odour that once it hit the back of Francis's throat made him gag uncontrollably.

Francis peeked inside expecting to find some sort of rotting meat or sour milk, but instead saw something much worse. He stumbled backwards nearly tripping on the leg of one of the kitchen chairs and falling over. As he regained control of himself, he began to stare at it. It was the head of Laurelynn, her blonde hair covered in dried blood her once tanned face now rotting and grey, her eyes gouged out and infested with earth worms and maggots and small brown spiders crawling around her mouth, the skin on her cheek gone revealing a rotting bone that looked snapped almost in half.

Francis closed his eyes and shook his head expecting her to be gone by the time he opened them again. She wasn't.

She's really there Francis, you went and killed the fing girl and now she's gonna do the same to you just wait she's about to-***

It's not her and you know it... His rational mind argued *you saw her go in the ground Francis how in the f*** could her head end up in your fridge?*

No, no, no..you've really went and done it this time Francis, she was the one who made you fall too, it was her you saw that made you fly down the staircase, she failed to get rid of ye then so she's back to finish the job.

How the hell could she possibly be in the fridge? His rationality demanded *What is she a ghost? Is that what we're believing in now? Ghosts?*

As Francis listened to his mind argued with itself, he watched as the head grew larger, the worms and maggots growing bigger, the spiders doubling in numbers. He picked up his cane and slammed the fridge door closed. He leaned against the kitchen table as he tried to gather his thoughts, try find one reasonable explanation as to what that was.

Now, just seconds after closing the fridge door, getting a whiff of the smell that came from inside the fridge it as it slammed shut, he began to regain a sense of rationale. Only then did he notice the army of sweat bullets that had formed on him. Dripping from his forehead to the tip of his nose-

...Drip..drip...

The drip of pain had returned, the tide had come in, now as his mind focused on the pain as his head turned instinctively to the clock hoping it would show eight thirty so he could take his dosage before remembering that no hope or desperation would help him today, no nurse was about to barge through the door, pills in one hand and a glass of water in the other like superman coming to save Lois Lane. No, today he had to fend for himself without the pills.

He sat down on the chair feeling a strike of pain in his lower back and an increasingly sore throb of pain in his legs.

Now his eyes became fixated on the fridge, he considered opening it again hoping to find a stack of raw, rotting meat with flies around it or a gallon of sour, gloopy milk that if poured out would look like wet cement. Instead, he sat there for a few moments, his mind racing through the possibilities of what he had seen as well as the pain that was currently attacking nearly his whole body at this point.

Open it again Francis, see what happens, maybe this time she'll have a row of sharp teeth ready to pounce on you the second you open the door-

Or you'll find a stinking pile of cow steak that's being infested with flies and maggots because you decided not to call anyone to clear out the fridge or

clean up a bit while you were gone, after all, you don't really have anyone to call, do you?

"Oh, f*** it." Francis muttered as he picked up his cane and yanked the door open.

He found no girls head, no gallon of milk nor a bit of meet, instead just a rotting bit of blue cheese that stank like nothing he'd ever smelt before.

Francis took a small plastic bag that was sitting on the kitchen counter and bagged it up, holding his breath so he wouldn't pass out from the smell as he did it.

Just a few hours later and Francis had begun to wish it really was her head in his fridge and that she killed him in whatever damn way she could because now, well now the pain, the blinding merciless pain was attacking his body in every spot. Rather than the tide being in it felt like a tsunami, rather than a drip it fell like a shower, of just pure and utter pain.

He was sat in his leather armchair, a Marlboro in one hand (his seventh of the day) and the TV remote in the other watching Les Dennis presenting Family Fortunes. By now it wasn't even the pain it was the feeling that the lack of pills gave him, all he wanted was a small little twenty milligram pill to sit on his tongue and wash it back with a glass of cold water and feel the almost instant relief.

Francis was sitting back in his chair, sweat trickling down his back, pain running through his body, he began to scratch on the arm of the chair till he could feel the bits of cotton beneath his

fingerprints. The sound of the television drifted in and out and soon too did his vision. As his vision began to blur, he noticed suddenly a figure standing behind the television, he couldn't quite make out what it was until it began to walk towards him. The bones in its legs creaked and cracked as it walked closer and closer towards Francis. As it approached the chair, he could begin to make out what it was.

It was her of course, though like her head, it wasn't. It was an undead being of sorts. Shards of glass stuck out of her rotting face, her yellow sundress decorated with pink flowers was stained with her blood, her mouth and eyes black and her hair so covered in dried blood you'd think that by touching it you'd hear a crunch sound.

She walked towards Francis and began to open her mouth

"Remember me?" She whispered, her voice hoarse and grouchy, *"Because I remember you Francis, I remember your dumb face, your shitty truck and you bright headlights."* Her voice grew more intense angrier.

C'mon Francis, that ain't her, y-y-your just dreamin' that's all, hey I bet it's those pills ye stopped taking, call the hospital in the mornin' and get a few more.

Don't bullshit, it's her, that's Laurelynn, how the f she got here I dunno but I know that it's her, and I know she's back, f*** she'll gut you like a pig rightn here won't she?***

“It is really me Francis.” She said, though this time with a different voice, as though it was, her body saying it but a different voice box making the sound. *“And no, I won’t gut you like a pig or anything like that but you’re gonna do a few things for me.”*

Francis sat there, frozen, in a paralysis like state, watching this creature, this undead human that was currently staring him down.

His eyes locked in with hers, he began to sink into them, her eyes looked like oceans, oceans of life and death. He began to feel his mind fall into these oceans, he could do nothing to stop it, it was as though he was just a passenger in his own body, like he was *watching* this ordeal rather than living it.

Francis felt began to feel empowered, the further and further he sank into these eyes of mortality, the more powerful he felt. He felt as though everything around him was beginning to shrink, the chairs, the tv, himself. It was as though he was a piece of litter or trash being vacuumed up by a Dyson, a longing sense of inevitability consumed him before he felt a click.

The shrinking stopped, the pain stopped, everything stopped. He looked at Laurelynn with a sense of worship, as though he was standing before a God. He rose from his chair, not needing his cane or having to rely on the chair’s arms for support, not feeling any pain for the first time since he stopped taking the OxyContin.

Francis stood next to this creature he now viewed in mythical proportions, she raised her arm, revealing a length similar to that of a barge pole with fingernails that looked like something from Nightmare on Elm Street, and pointed down the hallway towards the bedroom, he knew what she wanted, what *it* wanted.

He walked towards the bedroom door knowing the task he had been given. He twisted the doorknob, heard the big clunk of the door opening, and pushed it.

Francis walked into his bedroom, the dead smell of mould and musk no longer present, instead, all he saw was a small red axe, sitting against the bed, sitting there as it never had before, sitting there as though it had been placed.

As he strutted back down the hallway, feeling powerful, weirdly powerful. This small hardware-store axe didn't feel like that, instead it felt like an all-powerful being that he was holding, with unlimited potential.

Francis took one last look at the creature in his sitting room that was staring him down before mindlessly walking out the front door.

He walked down Douglas Avenue, without a single thought or sense of hesitancy, by now the sun over Wichita town had gone fully down. Francis strutted past Lloyd's Bar, heading towards Grove Street.

At this time of night very few people walked the streets, and those that did kept themselves to themselves. The only person he passed was Warren Bridges a local accountant, though they paid no notice of each other.

Francis turned left and saw the green street sign that read Grove Street, he now walked quicker trying to find the house with the red door, blue mailbox and yard sign that said Gore, Lieberman '0 (a sign that had no place in Wichita but was kept up out of pure stubbornness). This was the house of Judge Joseph Gardner, the same Judge that gave Francis the half assed sentence.

He got to house number 143, the one with the red door, blue mailbox and Gore, Lieberman '0, sign out front.

Francis began to feel a crazed sense of empowerment and anger, he ran towards the front porch and loudly banged on the front door. Inside he heard a couple mumblings the sound of a woman's voice. He could hear the footsteps approach the door and open heard the clunk of the latch being unlocked and the door being opened. The face that showed was not that of Judge Gardner but his wife Caroline, her dyed red hair in curlers and wearing a silk white gown.

"Just what in the world are ye doing here at this time of night." She spoke. Before saying anymore Caroline looked in his eyes and began to scream, before she could get too loud Francis raised the axe

and swung down on her, she fell down and gave out a slight groan of disconcerted agony before Francis raised the axe again and swung down, this time slicing through hair head.

As he stepped over her dead body that was quickly beginning to form a pool of blood around her, he could hear a rumbling sound coming from down the hallway in the living room.

Joseph Gardner stepped out of the living room doorway and called "Honey?" Expecting a reassuring response but instead locked eyes with Francis, he fell to the ground and began to let out a whimpering sound of sorts, Francis strutted towards him like Michael Myers and before Joseph could let out any sort of scream like his wife, Francis swung the axe and sliced his cheek half open, you could see the inside of his mouth, as Joseph held his hand to his face feeling the blood beginning to flow out of it Francis raised the axe again and clamped down on his head. Joseph lay dead on the ground with the axe still in his head and blood flowing out on the living room carpet while Letterman interviewed Stephen King in the background.

Francis began to walk out of the house, he could hear the doors of nearby neighbours opening, all looking to see what in the world that scream was.

They all saw Francis walk out of the house, stains splattered on his clothes but weren't close enough to see his eyes. Mrs Landry who lived

directly opposite to the Gardner house began to scream as she could see Carolines body on the floor, could see the blood beginning to trickle down the porch steps and Francis Willard walking out of the house with blood on his clothes.

This didn't matter to Francis though, his job had been completed, his master had been obeyed. He walked back towards his small home in Eastborough that sat looking over the rest of the town, looking over the happenings that had just gone on.

He walked back to his house in the same way he walked from it, mindlessly, like a robot, as if there was some control machine in his brain that someone was managing with little success.

He could hear the sirens in the background, he could even see the blue and red lights flash as he did on the fourteenth of August on that fateful day in 1998. Though, as they did then, they didn't matter to him. He had one goal which was to get back to his controller.

As he walked past Lloyd's bar and up the hill towards his house, he could feel the presence of her growing stronger, growing in the way that it did when he approached the Gardner's house. And so, he did the same thing he did then, he ran.

The power of the house grew stronger and stronger as he ran towards the porch steps, the door looked as though it was glowing, it opened before he even got to it.

When he walked inside, he saw his master, his controller, her, standing at the bottom of the staircase. She, *it*, pointed towards his bedroom in the same way that she pointed at the cellar door, with those long arms and Krueger-like fingernails. And like he did then, he understood what he was being told to do.

Francis walked down the hallway slowly, he could hear the sirens still that were sounding out the whole town.

As he entered the bedroom door, he could see the blue and red lights approaching the house. Without hesitation Francis pulled the musty and stained bedsheets that hadn't been washed in months off his mattress, he began to tie them up and formed a noose (somehow he did it with relative ease despite never having done so before), he walked out of the bedroom, noose in hand, and grabbed a stool that was, like the axe, sitting outside his bedroom door as though placed there just for him, he could see the blue lights flashing closer, the sirens getting louder, and brought the stool into the bedroom.

He got up on the stool tied the noose to the bedroom fan that lay overhead, and as he placed his head inside the noose hole he turned around and saw her standing there behind him, watching him. He took one last solid look at her before jumping off the stool.

Some Things About Me

Jonah Bates

My name is Mr Jonah Peter Hillard Bates

I like going to the disco to do some tap dancing and I like going to a ball and wearing a tuxedo so I can look like Ryan Gosling.

I play tag rugby and I support Manchester United.

My godfather is called Ado.

My brother Conor is 13 years old, he is in 6th class, and he will come to Clonkeen College next year.

He plays basketball and he won the basketball tournament.

I went to Monkstown to play hockey with my friends.

Daniel Woods, Darragh Bolton, Mark Sullivan, MacDara, and Louis Mitchell.

I went to the gym with Ava Leahy, Emma Land, Kevin Moran, and Luke Simmons.

I like to eat pizza. I like to watch my laptop. My favourite thing to watch is Shrek.

The Long-Reaching Colonial Arm of the Law

Fionn Keane O'Hagan

Unity, independence, freedom.

These are the clean-cut demands of marginalized communities across the globe.

Whether it be the hills of Ulster or the streets of Gaza, the human spirit has always yearned for the right to self-determination.

In the 21st century, as we enter a new era of modern colonialism, this cry grows louder.

Since the Normans arrived on Ireland's shores, its people have been subjugated and oppressed by an all-powerful Monarchy and Empire. This oppression occurred through violence, hatred, and long-lasting legal discrimination.

One hundred years ago, cultural and violent revolution became the staple of Irish nationalism. But in the modern day, our political landscape has changed dramatically, and we have been dealt a heavy task, the task of finding a peaceful way to unite our nation.

But like with all mammoth tasks, there are many barriers to this dream of Irish unity. Most notably, legal, and constitutional questions that have yet to be resolved.

The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) was the first successful attempt by British and Irish governments, to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

Political parties such as Sinn Féin agreed to enter the GFA discussion, with the hope of having a path to unity outlined. However, on this point, the agreement falls short.

The GFA outlines that the people of Northern Ireland have the right to choose to join a united Ireland. But it does not clarify how a border poll would take place or make suitable provisions to ensure Unionists would be welcome in a united Ireland.

Legal experts are still debating how a united Ireland referendum could be carried out. They all seem to agree that there is no legal precedent, other than a few lines in the GFA, that would ensure peaceful unity.

The Good Friday agreement highlights compromise, but the British government, and indeed Unionist parties, have left a lot of legal matters unanswered. They have ensured that the power to call a referendum for unity lies in the hands of the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State is appointed by the British Prime minister, and is directly tied with Britain, but the exact reach of their power remains unclear. This unelected figure could, in theory put the matter of Irish unity to a vote in Westminster or seek the Prime Minister's approval before green lighting an election.

The Good Friday Agreement does not outline how exactly such a referendum would be carried out. Its vague language will undoubtedly lead to huge legal issues in the future, which will act as a barrier to unity.

And so, the demand for unity cannot be fully realised until certain legal issues are resolved.

For many Irish people, unity would be a united Ireland, free of British influence. In the modern day however, we all accept that a united Ireland necessitates the cooperation of Unionists. A unique compromise will be needed, that will keep Ireland democratic and peaceful. This compromise can only be realised when the British government allow for more transparency and Irish involvement in the matter.

Despite these unanswered questions, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 was undoubtedly a historic agreement that created three strands of political compromise in Northern Ireland;

1. A Northern Ireland Executive that deals with the day-to-day issues of the people and ensures cross community dialogue.

2. A path to a future border poll and the creation of a positive relationship between Ireland and the North.

3. Mechanics creating a more stable and peaceful relationship between Ireland and the UK.

Strand 1 created Stormont. A monumental path to democracy in the six counties. The Executive was

created in 1998, when the idea of a return to political violence was very real and power-sharing between Unionist and Nationalist groups was vital to Stormont's success.

In 2023, the system has collapsed, with no government functioning after the most recent election. The DUP, the largest Unionist party, is refusing to enter government with Sinn Féin due to an ongoing dispute regarding the Northern Ireland protocol.

Because of the need for the largest Unionist party to be present in government, the Executive has become powerless. This political infighting has led to a stalemate that will impact all in the North.

Yet again, the North's sectarian politics has halted progress, undermined the historic Good Friday Agreement and caused riots in the streets of Belfast and Derry.

Here lies the problem; the current political system leaves too many unanswered questions and too many legal intricacies. As we have seen, these legal matters can paralyse government or cause an increase in sectarian tension. This system is set up in such a way that benefits English Tories, at the expense of all in Northern Ireland.

In my opinion, this is the result of legal discrimination. Systems are in place that ensure Irish people are not allowed to make decisions about their own communities and their right to self-determination is impeded by the British

government. This system is even more apparent across the Irish Sea in Scotland.

The Scottish parliament recently voted heavily in favour of passing the Gender Recognition Reform Bill. A bill which aims to make it easier for LGBTQ+ individuals to change their legal gender, with a bipartisan vote passing the bill 88-33.

Despite the clear political support for the bill, with even the Scottish Conservative party voting in favour, the Tories in Westminster used a legal loophole that requires the King and Downing Street's "assent" to pass the bill, to block this bipartisan act.

No matter your subjective opinions about this bill, the unprecedented decision by English Conservatives to block it is evidence of the overbearing and archaic power that the English establishment has over the Scottish people's right to self-determination.

This tight grip that Westminster has in Belfast and Scotland will make any independence vote or border poll much more difficult in the future.

This refusal of the right to self-determination is already being demonstrated. Just last year, a Scottish request for an independence referendum was shot down by the UK's high court. Neo-colonialism still holds a firm a place in modern politics, and no true independence can be achieved until these laws get reformed.

Any border poll will need British cooperation, and it is certainly possible that they could overlook the democratic will of the people. It seems that even in 2023, the fate of Scottish and Irish nationalists lies firmly in the lap of Westminster.

The legal intricacies which have paralysed progress in Ireland and Scotland are a microcosm of a global problem. Whether it be Ireland, Scotland, Palestine, or the many remaining French “overseas territories” it is clear, that the long-reaching colonial arm of the law is undermining democracy, preventing self-determination, and securing the apparent legitimacy of colonial powers over their subjects.

A Chapter In My Book

Arham Memon

Pages binded to the spine.
Each day a page.
You were a whole chapter.
A chapter I'd never skip.
A chapter I re-read each day.
Even though you didn't make it to the end of the
story,
I keep the corner of your pages folded.

The Fool

Arham Memon

Your smile is a double
Edged sword.
Your eyes are snowflakes.
Your hair is flames,
That set my mind ablaze.
Your words are soft and sweet and sting.
Your promises are like
A mirage of an oasis in a desert.
And I was a curious fool.

The Qatar World Cup Journey

Patrick O'Shea

It started in November,
A winter World Cup,
Some people proclaimed no way this will cook,
First game in, a dodgy offside,
Conspiracy theories began to arise,
Upsets came next,
Leaving Germany, Belgium, Argentina and
Denmark perplexed,
As Morocco, Australia, Saudi Arabia and Japan
took the scalps,
It went two ways from there,
Argentina got motoring again,
Germany, Belgium and Denmark all got on the
'going home early' plane.

16 countries left to fight for the throne,
Back here in Ireland, RTE's pundits were loving a
moan,
Messi magic saw Argentina through,
The Aussies hopped away like defeated kangaroos,
Netherlands, France, England, Brazil, Croatia,
Portugal all overcame,
So did Morocco,
Who overthrew Spain.

ANTHOLOGY 2023

The tournament started heating up,
Argentina beat the Netherlands on penalties,
Croatia shut down a 'samba dancing' Brazilian
dream,
Morocco knocked out a distraught Portugal team,
After the match Ronaldo was in so much despair,
He even forgot to tidy his hair,
Harry Kane skied a penalty into outer space,
That was the end of England's world cup race.

Semi Finals came around,
Messi destroyed Croatia 3 nil,
The Croatian defenders obviously had not
practiced defending drills,
Morocco's journey came to an end,
France's title still there to defend.

The 18th of December came, the excitement built,
The clash of the titans
Became the clash of two M's,
Messi and Mbappe the PSG men,
Argentina struck first through Messi and Di Maria,
It was looking like it was Argentina's night,
Until late on Mbappe came in and saved France's
plight,
The match went to extra time,
Messi scrambled the ball just over the line,
10 minutes later with time nearly up,
Mbappe again from the spot stepped up,
There was no other way,

ANTHOLOGY 2023

Penalties was going to decide the winner on the
day,
Martinez outfoxed two French men,
Before Montiel converted the winning pen,
It was fitting, it was right,
This was the GOAT's night.

Chelsea Project 2030

Alex Coyne

When Chelsea was sold last March, the club was forced to take a hard look in the mirror with signings like Zappacosta, Danny Drinkwater, Morata, and Bakayoko, who were signed at a total cost of 169 million euros, all the players' current transfer value being 44 million euros according to footballtransfers.com.

Chelsea had been backed by Roman Abramovich who being an oligarch, had deep pockets in fact he left Chelsea with the 1.9 billion debt but cleared as it was a sticking point in the sale of club.

Summer Transfer Window

This debt being wiped from the club has allowed Todd Boehly and his consortium to invest heavily in the Chelsea squad and really build around head coach Thomas Tuchel. Spending 281.99 million euros bringing in eight players.

Goalkeeper

Chelsea sighed Gabriel Slonina from Chicago FC 18-year-old was sighed amid rumours head coach Thomas Tuchel was planning to sell back up goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga Chelsea spent nine point nine million on the 18-year-old to replace the most expensive goalkeeper in history as a back-up.

However, the sale of Kepa did not go through and he remained at the club.

Defenders

Wesley Fofana was brought in to help strength the centre back options after losing Antonio Rüdiger to Real Madrid and Andreas Christensen to FC Barcelona. The Leicester centre back was considered a great signing for the club with Chelsea also signing Kalidou Koulibaly from SSC Napoli spending a hundred and eighteen point four million euros on the centre backs.

Left back Marcos Alonso moved to FC Barcelona causing new Chelsea owners to go on hunt for a backup left back to Ben Chilwell. The Chelsea owners decided to buy Marc Cucurella from Brighton. After one season in the premier league the Blues decided to spend sixty-five million euros on Cucurella which created a problem for head coach Thomas Tuchel. At one point, Thomas Tuchel fielded Chilwell and Cucurella at the same time, putting the new signing at centre back in a back five. This signalled the end of Thomas Tuchel at Chelsea football club.

Midfielders

Chelsea brought in Denis Zakaria in from Juventus on loan paying three million euros for the loan fee. The Swiss international plays defensive midfield just like N’Golo Kante who had been struggling with

injuries but with his high work rate injuries are expected but, in his thirties, his game time needs to be managed. Connor Gallagher had just come back from his breakout loan at crystal palace he played a pivotal part in their victories against Manchester city the eventual champions. Carney Chukwuemeka is nineteen-year-old central midfielder who Chelsea sighed from Aston villa for eighteen million euros he was sighed as back Jorginho as the Italian midfielder's agent has often spoke about his client's wish to return to Italy since former Chelsea manger Maurizio Sarri was sacked.

Forwards

Chelsea signed multi-premier league winner Raheem Sterling from Manchester City for a fee of fifty-six million to already add to the boisterous attack of Chelsea Football Club joining players like Christian Pulisic and Hakim Ziyech Kai Havertz Mason mount although the latter is seen as a number eight or number ten. Chelsea would go on sign Pierre Emerick Aubameyang who had disciplinary issues with new FC Barcelona manager Xavi. The Gabonese striker had previously played in Premier League for Arsenal winning a joint Golden Boot with Sadio Mane of Liverpool. Thomas Tuchel having coached the player this was a slam dunk for the new Chelsea ownership. Chelsea signed the player for twelve million, to replace one hundred-million-euro Romelu Lukaku who after an

interesting interview where he said “I’m always thinking about Milano, Milano, Milano... Inter fans are the best in the world. I love the city and the best moment of my career was at Inter. I am in love with Italy - I have Inter in my heart”. Chelsea fans were less than impressed with Lukaku after this interview with Sky Italia. The Chelsea board then loaned Lukaku back to Inter Milan.

January Transfer Window

With all the investment in the summer Thomas Tuchel must have improved results he must have been backed the Chelsea board had to trust the process, right? No. Less than a month after eight signings the Chelsea board sacked Thomas Tuchel. So, the Chelsea board brought in Graham Potter from Brighton when the seagulls were a head of Chelsea at the time and still are at the time of this article even though Chelsea have taken their manager and members of their recruitment team at one point player Adam Lallana was player manager for Brighton and Chelsea are still below them.

Defenders

Chelsea signed Benoît Badiashile from Monaco for fee of thirty-eight million euros from Monaco the 21-year-old Frenchman had impressed the Chelsea head of recruitment with his ability to win the ball without going to ground in a very physical league. Malo Gusto is French right back who plays for Lyon

who Chelsea paid thirty-five million for and loaned Gusto back till the end of the season.

Midfielders

Andrey Santos joined Chelsea for a fee twelve million an all-round midfielder. Andrey Santos is an eighteen-year-old Brazilian midfielder who played Vasco Da Gama FC and the under twenties Brazilian team which he captains.

Forwards

After the world cup Chelsea decided to strengthen their squad some more signings bring in six players including Portuguese superstar João Felix on loan from Atletico Madrid for a loan fee of 11 million. David Datro Fofana is an Ivorian centre forward who played for Molde in the Norwegian top division. Where his team finished first in the league with Fofana scoring 15 goals in 19 starts. Noni Madueke is English winger who played for PSV before transferring to Chelsea for thirty-five million euros. The English winger predominantly plays on the right wing but sometimes plays through the middle as a second striker. Mykhaylo Mudryk is a Ukrainian prodigy who played for Shakhtar Donetsk before making our record deal to transfer to Chelsea Football Club for seventy million 25 million of which is going to the Ukraine war effort. Mudryk was set to go to Arsenal before Chelsea

hijacked the deal and offered to pay more up front than the Gunners.

Contracts:

1. Mykhaylo Mudryk's contract expires in 2031(22)
2. Noni Madueke's contract expires in 2030 (20)
3. Benoit Badiashile's contract expires in 2030(20)
4. Malo Gusto' contract expires in 2030 (19)
5. Wesley Fofana's contract expires in 2029 (21)
6. David Datro Fofana contract expires in 2029(20)
7. Andery Santos's contract expires in 2028 (18)
8. Marc Cucurella's contract expires in 2028(24)
9. Carney Chukwuemeka contract expires in 2028(18)
10. Raheem Sterling's contract expires in 2027 (27)
11. Kalidou Koulibaly contract expires in 2026 (31)
12. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang contract expires in 2024(33)

Conclusion

With the heavy investment from Tod Bohley and Clearlake capital in younger players, staff members and a data-driven recruitment team. This new look Chelsea is the complete polar opposite of Chelsea under Roman Abramovich who seemed to buy players who were talented in their own teams and in certain systems but failed to produce the same form at the west London giant. Chelsea may not achieve immediate success under this regime, and it may not give the Chelsea fans the dopamine hit of winning trophies or sacking a manager when they lose a few games.

The Project

When Chelsea of old came knocking to players' doors they usually just offered players lots of money without a specific plan or project but now with Chelsea signing excellent young talents such as Mudryk and Santos it allows the Chelsea board to go to players like Enzo Fernández who has been linked to Chelsea by journalists such as David Ornstein and Fabrizio Romano. With a project and proof that he will get game time playing in a young side so he and the team can develop while playing good football under an exciting coach. In conclusion, Chelsea project it was is attracting players to the club even though the west London club is tenth in the premier league their exciting project is bring young players to their club whereas

beforehand the clubs' main attraction was the clubs money.

Hope

Fionn Keane O'Hagan

I stirred awake, dreading the day that lay before me; it was a sunny morning, yet bitterly cold. The worst kind of day, the epitome of the world I inhabited. A grim, rugged day. My room was small, dark, and quiet. My duvet covers wrapped around me tightly, offering little comfort from reality. I knew that waking up would mean facing the inevitable. Facing the world, and all its petty disputes.

My phone began to vibrate, subtly at first, as if regretting its decision to disturb me. But it rose into a ferocious wail, so I fumbled to answer the call.

“Get to work... it’s back on. But be careful, the ceasefire isn't as solid this time.”

The gruff voice didn't bother identifying himself or give even a shred of context. I had been through this charade too many times already, I knew not to bother asking questions. I rolled out of bed, hurriedly throwing on some clothes. I didn't need to bother with breakfast; some things were more important. My mind was racing as I began my dangerous journey through the de-militarised border town. As I shut my door I noticed my neighbour Gerry swaying in a chair on his porch, sipping a glass of whiskey, and reading the newspaper as he did every morning. The paper's

bold headline made me tremble with fear -
“CEASEFIRE IN PLACE. 48 HOURS”

For most, a ceasefire was a welcome relief. They only come once or twice a year. But peace terrified me. Because, like clockwork, each time the guns go silent, it fell on us, the civil servants and diplomats, and other self-pitying fools to make a deal to end the suffering, and each time we failed this impossible undertaking miserably.

Gerry gave me a knowing smile, he was an optimistic fellow, and yet I knew that he had seen a lot more than the rest of us. Just last month he buried his beloved son, more than anyone else he appreciated how futile all this suffering is.

I felt guilty upon seeing him. While I ran off to desperately try and make a difference, he would rock back and forth, back, and forth, sipping at his whiskey and reading; quietly searching between the lines of the newspaper, looking desperately for some hope. No doubt, he was trying to hide from the pain of his grief, a grief being replicated all across this scarred nation.

I set off at a brisk pace, shuffling past the suspicious sentries on the southern guard post, their bright green uniforms and shiny golden tassels serving as a bizarre show of flamboyance, contradicting their terrifying demeanour. Then, I sauntered past the seemingly innocent guards to the north. Their rifles slung over their shoulders, notably empty of a magazine. Like children whose

toys had been confiscated, they exhibited visible frustration at the removal of their deadly power.

After briefly flashing my passport and breathing a sigh of relief as I was waved forward, I set off down the path, towards the Northern High Command.

As the towering building appeared in front of me with its ageing façade, fixed with banners and flags of the nation, I felt like an outsider; a very naive, hopeless, outsider.

I shuffled into the main lobby of the vast, gothic-looking building that functioned as a stage for negotiations. The soldiers gave me a searing look. To them, I was the enemy, a human manifestation of the evil south. We lived just miles apart, and yet we were so bitterly divided.

I safely made it to our base of operations on the third floor, a building none of us had entered since the last cease fire was cancelled. I stood and remembered the feeling of despair and hatred that consumed me just a few months ago, as yet another appeal for peace was washed away in a river of blood. This time I had to be less optimistic, another failure would crush me.

I shuffled towards my boss, Mick. He was always an unnerving character, his eyes sunken into his skull, as if retreating from the horrors they had seen. Despite the wise and determined appearance presented to the public, in reality, Mick would unleash ferocious outbursts on whomever had disappointed him; his voice could cut through

glass. His smile that was pasted all over this morning's paper was unnervingly disingenuous.

He was our "chief intelligence direction officer" in charge of everything from negotiations to the bloody work behind enemy lines - work he thoroughly enjoyed. He shook my hand and coerced me into a tight hug.

"It's good to be back isn't it, Ned? I've always said war is overrated, ya gotta give peace a chance!"

He could barely get through these satirically pacifist remarks without laughing. The truth is, If Mick had his way this job would be terminated, and I'd join all the other men on the front line. Sometimes I wished for that too.

At noon, there was tense excitement as the northern delegation arrived. The room fell silent as a menacing entourage of men entered our quarters. Leading the parade was a tall man, his piercing eyes penetrating the glasses that retreated slowly down his nose. Those whom he encountered as he strode towards me seemed to scutter away.

Behind him, less intimidating albeit powerful men sauntered forward. They were armed not with weapons, but with far more terrifying manila folders, inside of which lay their demands. I shook the man's hand and he introduced himself as "Michael" neglecting to give his title, or indeed any information, after all, his importance was apparent from the moment he stepped into the room.

Michael had a thick northern accent which he seemed to use to heighten the tension of this peculiar meeting.

Soon, we were all ushered into an ageing conference room, the creaking floorboards and rotting wood functioning as a metaphor for this unstable peace. Like this room, our two delegations were terrifyingly close to falling apart.

I took a seat and opened the folder handed to me by a northern representative. Taking a deep breath, I began to read, daring beyond my fear, that maybe somewhere in this dossier, I could find a slimmer of hope - They say that hope and history rhyme, and as I sat and begin to feel that dangerous optimism rush through my body like a tidal wave, I begged for it to be true.

The Strings of Fate

Keelin McCarthy

One would think looking after fate would be an interesting task, but after such a long time of doing so, even a goddess with unlimited power must concede that it becomes boring.

Ariadne sighs as she spins the globe with a flick of her hand. It is a large, shining orb, taking up almost the entire room she resides in most of the time. Tiny golden dots represent human lives, and it is up to her to weave the strings of fate, tying these mortals together and intertwining their lives.

Ariadne zooms in on a glowing dot and taps it. The dot rises off the globe and into the air, enlarging until it becomes the form of a young girl. She has dark hair done in tiny braids and a cheerful smile. She can be no older than six years old, and yet, dozens of coloured string trail off of her, tied to her. Fate itself.

Ariadne hums to herself, spinning the globe again as the silent form of the girl hovers beside her. She is talking animatedly to a person the goddess cannot see, eyes sparkling. She waves her hands about so vigorously that they almost hit Ariadne, the strands flying, threads that the mortal cannot see nor even know about.

Human lives always give the goddess pause. When Evander entrusted this job to her, she was

young; only a few hundred years old. She thought it would be easy, and simple. That, however, was not the case.

If there were any word that Ariadne would use to describe mortal lives, it would not be simple. Humans are anything but. With their insatiable thirst for knowledge, power and love, they are perhaps more complex than ever the gods, though Ariadne would never dare such a thing aloud.

Weaving the strings of Fate takes willpower, solemnity and, most of all, ruthlessness. Ariadne knows that even if she were to relinquish this job to someone else, her heart has still been hardened beyond breaking. She is among the coldest and callous of the gods, the one that mortals know not to ask for answers, because they will not like the response.

Ariadne looks at the young girl again, this time swiping on her form. She watches the girl grow up, into a teenager, then an adult, then an old lady. She swipes again, and the girl returns to her young age as if the goddess has not just watched her whole life go by.

Ariadne plucks a string from the girl's hand. It is a soft, pale purple, a gentle lilac colour. She follows the string as it trails to a glowing spark on the globe. Ariadne taps it.

A young girl with a contagious grin and messy red curls tumbling past her shoulders appears, laughing. She is fated to become best friends with

the first girl, and one day, lovers, though neither of them know it yet. Fate has decided, from the moment their souls came into existence, that they are tied together.

Ariadne could change it. She alone has power over Fate, the ability to cut the threads that make the hands of time keep turning. If she so desired, she could change this girl's life with the mere *snip* of her scissors.

She will not, though. Ariadne is several millennia old, and she knows better than to try and weave fate into what she wishes it would be. Besides, this is a nice fate, a kind one, even, Ariadne has seen much worse, tried to change much worse. She has tried to twist fate into something more pleasant.

Nothing good has ever come of it.

Ariadne watches the two girls wistfully for a second. She is envious of young, human innocence. Alas, she cannot return to the time when she knew nothing of destiny.

Deep down, Ariadne knows that the strings of Fate tie even the hands of the gods. She was always meant to become who she is now, a merciless goddess sitting in a room, with power to change the future, and yet never acting upon it, for fear of making things worse.

She wonders, in her darkest hours, what would have happened if the god before her had changed her fate. They knew her, after all; they knew her entire life and how it would play out. If they had cut

the strands tying her to this room, to this lonely destiny, Ariadne might be a very different goddess right now. She might have a lover, a home. She might have her own story to tell.

Instead, she has millions of stories, all surrounding her, but none of them are hers.

Ariadne has never looked at her own fate. She does not wish to see it, to discover what she is to become. The voice inside her whispers that can be nothing good. She does not try to disprove it, mostly because she knows it is correct.

If the goddess looks at her fate, she will try to change it; she knows herself that well. Or, if she knew what she would do would have fatal, catastrophic results, she might cut her own life string.

Every being has a life string; a single golden thread that lets them exist. Cutting it means death. Even the gods have life strings, and if Ariadne were to slice through them, they would cease to exist, left at the mercy of Death.

Usually, Ariadne does not have to cut anyone's life string. The mortals will perish on their own, a string of fate tying them to whatever end they must eventually meet. Occasionally, however, she is forced to cut a life string, the *snip* of her divine scissors echoing through the room and haunting her dreams. Golden dots, flickering out on the globe as the humans are welcomed into the open arms of Death.

Ariadne knows what a great and terrible power she has been entrusted with. The other gods did not always take her seriously, thinking her foolish and whimsical. But when she was given the power to control fate, she changed.

If you think you can be gifted the capability to alter the course of every soul that exists and stay the same person you are today, you are a fool. Power corrupts, and this absolute power has corrupted Ariadne absolutely. It rots her from the inside out, burrowing into her very soul and tearing her apart, piece by piece, till nothing remains.

The goddess has cut threads and wound strings, tying people together and cutting them apart, and still, she will never shake the feeling that she is powerless in the hands of Fate. In the end, what else can she do but stay here forever, trying to weave and mould the world into a better place? What can she do but watch kingdoms rise and fall, look on uncaringly as cities burn and hearts shatter?

What can anyone do?

We are all helpless in the eyes of Fate, after all.

The Battle of the Bridge 2.0

Ben Plunkett

On the 14th of August, Chelsea played host to Antonio Conte's rejuvenate Spurs side, a side that were defensively resolute enough to only concede two goals in the last five games of the previous season.

Tottenham Hotspur have had a well-documented and historic hoodoo at Stamford Bridge, unable to claim a victory there for 28 years until Dele Alli starred in a momentous 3-1 upset in early 2018.

Tottenham were coming into this game full of confidence, with the fluidity of the front three, Kane, Son and new Swedish star Dejan Kulusevski on full display all throughout pre-season.

Centre back Cristian Romero had instilled a dogged toughness and resilience into the Tottenham backline, the likes of which were completely inconspicuous throughout Jose Mourinho and Nuno Espirito Santo's tenure as head coaches.

The Uruguayan, Rodrigo Bentancur, played a pivotal role in Tottenham's Champions league qualification triumph over Arsenal and had formed an exquisite midfield partnership with Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg, filling the void that the illustrious and technically gifted Mousa Dembele had left when he parted ways with the club in January 2019.

The Tottenham faithful were exuberant about the arrival of serial winner Ivan Perisic, an experienced pro with an abundance of major honours in Football, having worked previously with Antonio Conte at Inter Milan, he was perfectly suited to the intensity and style of Conte's system.

The "War Chest" of players Antonio Conte supplied in the summer, would greatly benefit Tottenham's chances in the latter stages of games with the likes of Yves Bissouma and Richarlison who can dictate and control the tempo of matches with their relentless work-rates and suitability to the Premier League.

In the build-up to this season, there was much talk of a potential involvement for Tottenham in the title race, a win at Stamford Bridge against Chelsea would bring about a thorough sense of excitement and anticipation for the upcoming season.

Thomas Tuchel's rigid Chelsea side had flattered to deceive in the 2020/21 season. They were coming off a glorious Champions League victory against European superpower and Premier League champions Manchester City and the statement signing of Romelu Lukaku from Inter Milan had Chelsea fans feeling elated about the upcoming season.

They started off the season very well, thrashing London rivals Crystal Palace and Arsenal in consecutive games, new signing Lukaku looking particularly dominant in a 2-0 win at the Emirates.

Young wing back Reece James possessed all the skills required to be a world class player, defensively strong and aware, quick, excellent end product with his crossing and knew how to find the back of the net.

New signing from Rennes, goalkeeper Edouard Mendy, had quickly established himself as one of the elite keepers in European Football, what he lacks in ability on the ball he makes up with stellar saves on a consistent basis.

Centre back Thiago Silva is one of the most decorated defenders in the history of football, his experience, reading of the game and anticipation are all key to Chelsea's defensive structure.

Chelsea had a host of quality attacking players including Champions league final hero and German wonder-kid Kai Havertz, home grown academy talent Mason Mount, the pacy and prolific Christian Pulisic and the intricate dribbler, Hakim Ziyech who dismantled Tottenham Hotspur in the semi-final of the Champions league 2019.

Chelsea's performances started to take a dip in November 2021. They struggled against the likes of Burnley, West Ham and Everton, dropping vital points on a regular basis.

This dry patch of form coincided with shocking performances from the so called "talisman" Romelu Lukaku. He amounted a very insignificant number of touches, wasn't scoring goals and wasn't benefiting Chelsea's build up play, all of which led

to a debacle which disrupted the equilibrium of the club.

Chelsea's form towards the end of the season was patchy to say the least, leaving them with a lacklustre 3rd place finish in the Premier League.

Due to the Russia and Ukraine conflict, Chelsea chairman Roman Abramovich was forced to resign. He was held in high regard by Chelsea fans due to his significant investment of funds in the club, bringing about many successful years under his reign.

He was replaced by American businessman Todd Boehly who had signed many new players in summer of 2022, including, Raheem Sterling and Kalidou Koulibaly who would feature in the starting line-up against Tottenham.

Coming into the Tottenham fixture Chelsea were certainly not in the best of shape, the outgoing of Romelu Lukaku back to Inter Milan on loan meant that they didn't have a recognised number nine, they were comprehensively thrashed by London rivals Arsenal in pre-season and were hoping that their form from the tail end of last season wouldn't carry on to the start of the current season.

Chelsea fans were still confident due to Tottenham's dismal record at their home ground and they had every right to be - for Chelsea fans, the great Sir Alex Ferguson's famous quote of "Lads, it's Tottenham" rings true.

Sunday, August 14th, 4:30 pm. Chelsea host Tottenham at the bridge. Tottenham line-up with Conte's classic 3-4-3 formation, Hugo Lloris between the sticks, a back 3 consisting of Ben Davies, Eric Dier and Cristian Romero, Ryan Sessegnon occupying the left flank with Emerson Royal on the right, double pivot in midfield of Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg and Rodrigo Bentancur and the front 3 of Heung-Min Son, Harry Kane and Dejan Kulusevski.

Chelsea line up in a similar system, Edouard Mendy in goal, a back 3 consisting of Kalidou Koulibaly, Thiago Silva and Reece James, Ruben Loftus-Cheek on the right flank, Marc Cucurella on the left, N'Golo Kante partnering with Jorginho in midfield and an attack made up of Mason Mount, Kai Havertz and Raheem Sterling.

The game kicked off and Chelsea instantly stamped their authority on Tottenham, they dominated the ball, were assertive in 50/50s and controlled the tempo of the match.

This strong spell was rewarded when Chelsea's Kalidou Koulibaly smashed in a rocket into Hugo Lloris's top left corner. It was an excellent finish from the centre back, but it was also a poor piece of defensive play from Spurs who afforded him the luxury of acres of space at the back post.

Chelsea continued in this vein throughout the first half, they dominated the ball, limited Tottenham to little to no chances and absolutely

nullified Harry Kane's typically energetic presence up front.

The whistle blew for the second half to commence, and Tottenham came out with a new-found energy and intensity. This was a breath of fresh air for Tottenham fans, having been utterly outclassed in the first half.

The shift of momentum was aided by the substitution of Richarlison, a tireless runner, who knew a thing or two about scoring goals against Chelsea.

Spurs continued to grow into the game and in the 68th minute, Chelsea midfielder Jorginho was caught with a lapse of concentration in his own box.

He was dispossessed by Heung-Min Son who laid the ball off to Ben Davies who in turn tried to fashion a shooting angle. Davies was closed down with great haste by the Chelsea defence, giving a quick ball to Hojbjerg who unleashed an arrow into the side netting of the bottom left corner.

There was exultation in the away end and Antonio Conte and Thomas Tuchel's side-line spat only added fuel to the fire to what was already an incredibly hostile atmosphere. One corner of Stamford Bridge was in delirium while the rest of the stadium had fell silent. Tottenham had their equalizer they so desperately craved in the London Derby.

In a game of this magnitude, it is easy to lose your head and Antonio Conte and Thomas Tuchel

did just that. Conte is revered by the Tottenham faithful for his touchline antics but celebrating in Thomas Tuchel's face may have been a step too far. Tuchel reacted accordingly and their side-line scuffle had to be promptly halted by Premier league officials.

Amidst the chaos and flaring tempers, Reece James was played in behind the Tottenham defence by Raheem Sterling, firing a powerful shot down the middle of the Tottenham goal. Hugo Lloris in an attempt to predict the outcome of the shot, dived away from the ball and Chelsea were on top once again.

Stamford Bridge went wild as Thomas Tuchel careened down the touchline in glorious celebration.

In the dying embers of the match Tottenham were awarded a corner after a practice in the dark arts of football by Cristian Romero.

New signing, Ivan Perisic, swung in a left footed effort, landing on Harry Kane's head. Kane headed it low and hard into the bottom right corner leaving Edouard Mendy helpless.

Harry Kane's late equalizer sent the away end into a frenzy, the Tottenham team sprinted towards the euphoric fans. The Chelsea fans could only sit in silence as they watched their team capitulate.

The match ended 2-2, a valuable and somewhat undeserved point away at a London rival, was accepted with open arms by Spurs fans.

On the other side, Chelsea fans were left feeling hard done by shady officiating but remained proud of their teams dominance throughout the game.

This game had it all - goals, crunching tackles, phenomenal atmosphere, managerial confrontation and drama in abundance.

Battle of the Bridge 2.0: A true Premier League Classic.

ANTARCTICA! A Diary Entry of Epic Proportions

Richard O'Donovan

June 22, 2007

I got the camera set up. It was a \$20 camera I got from eBay. It was used and I could tell. The scratch marks and the film reel can were damaged, but it was all we needed. My friends and I were assigned a college project and we decided to make a documentary about the freezing continent down south: Antarctica!

I heard my friends arrive at the entrance. I left the house and showed them the new camera.

“What do ya think of the camera?” I asked Seth, one of my friends and the guy who would be holding the clapperboard.

“To be perfectly honest,” he began to say. “It looks like sh*t.”

I laughed and moved onto James, the one who would be holding all the film equipment.

“What do you think of the camera, James?”

“It looks good,” he replied. “Better make sure that it doesn’t break. We only have a budget of \$114,000, which in movies is like peanuts.”

I also forgot to mention that he’s a big movie buff. And finally, there’s Rose, who was holding the mic during filming.

“Before you ask,” she said. “I think it looks perfect.”

“Thanks!”

Before you say anything, MOM, she is not my girlfriend. I know you read these. Anyway, after we got in the house, I checked the computer and got a notification that still haunts me: “Your taxi ride has been cancelled. We are sorry.”

“We’re sorry, MY ASS!!!” I blurted out. “They probably cancelled cos they think it’s too dangerous!”

“Or they don’t have time on their schedule for everyone, so they instead had *us* cancelled because they had to cancel SOMEONE!”

“Well, hopefully there isn’t an entire culture on a social media site about cancelling people!”

The three looked at each other.

“Anyway,” Seth began to talk, “we can take the van and drive to the airport from there!”

I pondered for a moment.

“I know!” I suddenly said. “We should take the van and drive to the airport from there!”

“I literally just said tha-”

“Come on, gang!” I triumphantly said. Seth groaned in annoyance. “We got a documentary to make!”

We started driving to the airport and it took us about 15-20 minutes. We got the camera stuff set up and we set it up across the road from the entrance.

“Quiet on the set!” James said. “And we’re rolling!”

“Introduction scene, Take One,” Seth announced.

“Hello. My name is [_____]. My friends and I have been given a challenge by our school to make a film. I decided to make a documentary about the least-populated continent on Earth: Antarctica! It will be a journey of self-discovery, adventure and education beyond your very eyes. This is Antarctica: A Documentary of Epic Proportions!”

“Cut!” Seth yelled.

“All right!” I yelled. “That was the first scene, the introduction scene! The opening has been shot!”

We went ahead and interviewed people around the airport about Antarctica and what they thought about it and some people even gave theories. After a while, we eventually went to our gate and entered our private jet that was funded by my dad, who works for the U.S Government. We got on the jet and the pilot was very nice. We eventually took off. After that, we were on our way to Antarctica!

June 23, 2007

It was the next day. The flight was non-stop for 18 hours. Seth got airsick and James and Rose got drunk on vodka and... well... I won’t reveal the details. We eventually arrived and it was freezing cold! The snow went right up my nose, and I kept on sniffing. We made it to our taxi driver, who was

paid by my dad to drive us to the places we need to go to film our documentary. After a few hours of driving, we started to hear a noise that would lead us into insanity: The car started to break down. We went to the boot to get extra and... there wasn't any.

"You work as a taxi driver in Antarctica, which need I remind you, is around 14,000,000km (about 8699196.69 mi) squared," I began to complain, "and you don't bring ANY EXTRA GAS?!?! ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR F*CKING MIND?!?!?"

"Well, excuse me for trying to save the environment!" he stubbornly said.

"Wow. You are the worst taxi driver ever. You're worse than Travis Bickle from Taxi Driver!!!"

"Look," Seth began to say, "there's no point in getting mad. We can still walk and camp, right?"

"Right."

"Then come on! We got a documentary to film!"

And so, we walked for several hours, hoping to find at least ONE landmark, when suddenly...

"What the hell is that in the distance?" Rose asked.

"It look—it looks like a statue!" Seth asked.

"Is that the statue?" I asked. "Seth, check the book. Check the book."

"Yep, you're right. It's the Point of Inaccessibility!"

"Yes! We found it! I don't know how, but we found it!"

So, we decided to film it for our documentary. After filming it, we decided to fall asleep for the night. I had 10 clocks, because the sun doesn't go down in the summer, it just gets a bit darker, but the sun is still around. After a while, we fell asleep.

June 24, 2007

I was suddenly awoken. I checked the clock. It was 4:00AM at night. I heard screaming from Rose's tent, so I ran over and when I entered, I saw Seth almost frozen.

"I think he has frostbite," Rose blurted out.

"Sh*t!" I yelled. I ran out of the tent to go to James' tent, who had the First-Aid Kit, but it wasn't there.

"James, where's the First-Aid Kit?"

"I don't know, I think..."

"What did you do with the First-Aid Kit?"

"I dumped it in the ice."

I was flabbergasted. How could anyone do something so... selfish?!

"It was useless! We were gonna' die here anyway, so what's the f*cking point, then?"

"You're going insane. You're going INSANE!"

I ran out to call for help, but no one answered. I eventually dropped to the ground of drowsiness.

The next morning...

I woke up and I was in a bed in a dark room. There was an AC on and it was... warm. I got out and called out for the others.

“SETH?!” I called out. “JAMES?! ROSE!”

I heard a low, “Yes,” from the other room. I stepped outside only to find a wrinkly, short old man, who had a wide grin on his face. I didn’t know how to react, so I just made a sound like this: AGGHABLIHQHOUFUOP!!!

Anyways, he asked me if I was alright.

“I’m... fine? WHERE ARE MY FRIENDS?!!?”

“Oh, they were knocked out as well,” he replied. “The deep-voiced one almost died of frostbite, but we found you just in time.”

“Wait... how did you know we were coming out here?”

“My two associates were driving in the snow, looking for minerals, when they heard your screaming.”

Suddenly, the other 3 came out of their rooms, tired and finding it hard to walk. Seth had it the hardest, who was still a bit cold despite the heating being on.

“Oh... my head,” he groaned. “What the hell happened?”

“You almost froze to death,” Associate #1 said out of nowhere, scaring everyone except for the old guy.

“Yeah,” Associate #2 joined in, “we saved you in the nick of time.”

I was starting to get suspicious of how they were acting.

“OK,” I began to ask. “First off, who the f*ck are you? And second, where the f*ck are we?”

“Oh!” the old guy replied sharply. “Where are my manners? My name is Robert Winkle. These are my associates. Associate #1 and #2.”

“Don’t they have names?”

“Here in Antarctica, they don’t have names. Only the commanders are allowed to have names.”

“Commander of what?” I suspiciously asked.

“Why, the research station of course!” he cheerily replied. “This is the Lincoln Federal Station of Research, or LFSR for short. We’re here to mine minerals trapped in the ice during the summer, as the ice melts, so it’s easier for us to mine.”

I looked at them for a bit, then back to my friends, then back to them, then back to my friends and after more turning and looking, I finally made my decision.

“All right, fine.” I said. “We’re here to film a documentary about this continent, so since you have a car, can you drive us to our next destination?”

Robert and his associates huddled for a bit, deciding if they should comply or not. They de-huddled and Robert announced their decision.

“We will comply,” he announced.

My friends and I cheered and got our supplies ready.

After a while, we walked outside, wearing our three layers of coats due the freezing cold, and Robert showed us his Jeep.

“It is complete with turbo-drive, snow wheels and a cup holder where you can even set the setting from hot to hotter!” he explained. “If you set it to cold it just freezes into coffee ice.”

I looked around while holding the camera.

“But we're not using the Jeep. We're using, the SNOW MOBILE!!!”

He showed us towards his snow mobile, which had a fabric roof, wooden seats and a big-ass generator at the back.

“If you want to get into the spirit of Antarctica, you gotta go minimalistic. You know, get into the spirit of the continent. Whaddya think?”

I looked at my friends, then back to Robert, who had a massive grin on his face.

“It's...” I was about to say, “quaint?”

“YOU LOVE IT!!!”

“That is not what you think that word means.”

He hugged me really tight and told us all to get in, except the two associates.

“You two stay here and hold down the fort,” he told them harshly, “we're gonna go on an adventure!”

He drove off, leaving the associates by themselves.

We drove into the Antarctic snow, breathing in the fresh air of the cold continent. Robert and I got

out as James wanted to do a trick. We ran to the side of the path as James went to do his trick.

James was an experienced car stuntman, so he knew what to do. Unfortunately, he didn't know that the mobile was different from cars, so he, Seth and Rose crashed into the snow.

"OH, SH*T!!!" I yelled as I ran towards them. "SETH!!! JAMES!!! ROSE!!!"

I heard muffled screams.

"Are you OK?!"

I heard a muffled, "Yeah!"

Robert and I dug them out. They were covered in snow.

"WOW!!!" James cheered. "Who's up for Round Two?!"

Everyone looked at him. He cleared his throat.

"Um, tha- that was dangerous. I won't do it again."

We walked towards the location of where the scene would be shot. We got the equipment out and we started filming.

"Nature Scene, Take One," Seth announced. "And ACTION!!!"

"People don't know how truly big Antarctica is," I began to speak. "It's truly massive. Which is why, I'm going to show you, how--"

BONK!!! went the microphone as it hit me in the head and knocked me into the snow.

"Whoops! Sorry!" Rose awkwardly said.

“Great mic work, Rose! You really know how to keep it in your sight!”

“Nature Scene, Take Three. And action!”

“This is the coast of Antarctica in the... uh... hold on... CUT!!!”

I went to get a book off-camera.

“American section! Of course!”

“In the American section. Here, we see the penguins doing their morning routine, searching for fish for their families. We move to this cave with this polar bear in it.”

“Wait, hold on... cut.” Seth called. “Are you sure this is a good idea? That is a feral animal and you wanna’ walk right up to it? Are you f*cking insane?!”

“Come on, if we get good footage of it, it will convince the others that we’re actually in Antarctica.”

“...” Seth said nothing.

“S-Seth?”

“So that’s what this is about, huh? You just wanna’ prove to our classmates that this whole thing is real!”

“No! W-well, yeah...”

“I can’t believe this. I can’t F*CKING BELIEVE THIS!!!! YOU HAD US RISK OUR LIVES JUST SO YOU COULD PROVE YOU’RE BETTER?!!?”

“Well... we also bet on you guys dying and they just lost \$50...”

“YOU BET ON OUR F*CKING LIVES?!!?”

“What’s going on?” Rose asked.

“THIS MOTHER***** LIED TO US?!!?”

“Well, it’s doesn’t matter! You guys are TERRIBLE AT THIS!!!”

“YOU ARE THE WORST FRIEND EVER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” Seth screamed. He screamed too loud, though, as the polar bear in the cave woke up and started to chase us. We passed by the snowmobile and were able to get back to the research station just in time.

“Guys, stop it!” Rose yelled as Seth and I were beating each other up.

“You greedy son of a B*TCH!!!!” Seth yelled. “You made this whole thing up! Why did you do this?! WHY DID YOU RISK OUR LIVES ON MULTIPLE OCCASIONS IN ORDER TO SATISFY YOUR NEEDS?!!?”

“It’s not my fault!” I explained frantically. “You stopped rolling when we were about to surround a real-life polar bear! It’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience!!! And you F*CKED with it!!!”

“Hold on here...” James began to say. “*WE* F*CKED with it?! You F*CKED with our lives!!!! You should be arrested for attempted murder!!!”

“Well, it would’ve been more interesting if you three had died.”

Everyone in the room gasped.

“THAT’S IT!!!” Seth announced. “JAMES and I ARE LEAVING!!!! WE’RE THROUGH!!! GOODBYE, ASS*****!!!! COME ON JAMES!!!”

James and Seth left, leaving myself, Rose, Robert and the two associates by ourselves, while James and Seth walked out into the cold.

Rose was holding the camera when she walked into my room. I was packing away to leave the continent.

“What about James and Seth?” Rose asked. “We can’t just leave them here alone.”

“What’s the point,” I moaned as I left the room. “They left us. They’re gone.”

“We can still search for them--”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, LOOK OUTSIDE!!! IT’S A FROZEN WASTELAND!!! IT’S 14,000,000 KM SQUARED OF SNOW!!!! IT’LL TAKE US MONTHS TO FIND THEM!!!”

“WELL AT LEAST I DIDN’T RISK THEIR LIVES!!!”

“Oh, shut up! They’re the F*CKING reason this whole project fell apart. It’s their fault!”

“No, it’s not!”

“THEN WHOSE FAULT IS IT?!!?”

“IT’S YOUR FAULT!!! YOU’RE THE REASON THIS FELL APART! YOUR ARROGANCE CAUSED US TO SPLIT UP!!! YOU’VE BEEN LIKE THIS EVER SINCE WE ALL MET!!! DON’T YOU GET IT?!?!? *IT IS YOUR F*CKING FAULT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!* DON’T YOU UNDERSTAND?!?!?”

I stood there while Rose broke out into tears. I thought back to the moment I first met them and how arrogant, self-centred and egotistical I was. At that moment, I realized that *I* was the problem.

“Holy sh*t,” I silently said. “What have I done? Come on, get up!”

“What?” Rose tearily asked.

“We’re going after them. Call the airline. We’re going to make sure that none of this happened.”

Suddenly, I heard a gunshot.

BANG!

“What the hell was that?”

A figure came out of the shadows... it was Robert, holding the gun in his hands.

“Put the phone down and step away from the door,” he ordered.

“Rob, what’s going on?” I asked. “This isn’t like you.”

“Come on! You think I would *actually* act like that in public? No! What am I, a hippie?”

“Why the hell are you doing this?”

“Who do you think gave you the idea to come here in the first place?”

“I think his name was Trebor-- WAIT A MINUTE!”

“And James didn’t throw the First-Aid Kit away. Associate #1 snuck up on you while you weren’t looking and stole it!”

“Then why did he act so insane?”

“We gave him acid. And Seth wasn’t dying with frostbite. We injected a virus into his body, NX-J07, which if you bring him back to America, will spread and kill everyone!”

“But... why?” asked Rose.

“Well, I’m glad you asked,” Robert eerily replied. “All my life, I’ve been treated like a F*CKING joke. BUT, we’ll see who’s the *real* joke when I destroy every human being on the planet who ever wronged me!!!”

I thought to myself for a second and realized that he’s just like me, only... more evil.

“Wait, you just told us your plan. What’s stopping us from NOT getting on that plane?” I asked.

“Oh, I have my ways...”

“OK, Dad, stop this,” Associate #1 said.

“SHUT UP!!!” He yelled as he struck both associates in the face with the gun, causing them to fall on the ground.

Rose and I stood there in shock.

“You two have dragged me down too much! You must be rid of!”

He was about to shoot them when I jumped in and started to attack Robert, who was very strong for an old guy. However, I had the upper hand and flipped him onto the ground, wrestler style.

“OW!!!!” he groaned. “MY F*CKING BACK!!!”

I called the associates (his two sons) over to tie him up. They did with ease.

“Dammit! I never should’ve brought you two to the gym!”

They then threw him in the bin.

“OK. You two stay here and keep an eye on him, while Rose and I go look for James and Seth.”

And so, Rose and I started looking for them in the forest. I screamed out their names, but I heard nothing. After I screamed their names for a third time, I heard a very faint scream for my name. I started running in their direction and saw them being confronted by the polar bear we saw earlier.

"[_____]!!!" Seth screamed. "GET OUT OF HERE!!! IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!!!"

"I'm not letting you two die!" I yelled as I charged towards the bear and started punching it. It scraped me in the face, but I got up and made a makeshift spear, to stab it to death. Whoever's reading this, don't copy what I'm about to do. I ran towards it and started to stab it. It tried fighting back, but it eventually collapsed to the ground. I conquered the polar bear, covered in blood, snow, dirt, sweat and other things I can't mention.

"Wow," Seth exclaimed.

"Pretty cool, huh?" I said in an arrogant tone. "He got it coming."

"First off, you killed an animal. Second off, that wasn't a he."

I opened my eyes, looked down and saw the [_____].

"Oh. It's a female. And the male is right behind me, isn't he?"

I heard a growling sound and we all immediately started running back to the station. We shut the door and locked it, but it kept banging on the door. Eventually, the polar bear left and we all went to the

wall and started drinking beer and reflecting on what the hell just happened.

“I’m sorry, guys,” I moaned.

“For what?” Seth asked.

“For everything. I trust a psychopathic hippie in a black hoodie and put all of our lives at risk. I’m a horrible friend.”

“Are you kidding me?”

Seth stood up and started to argue.

“Yeah, sure. We trusted you and you betrayed us, but you still saved us from that polar bear. You defeated that person that we thought was a nice, old man, but was instead a man who was hell-bent on world domination. He injected a F*CKING virus into me.”

“You should call a doctor,” James sarcastically joked. Everyone laughed.

“My point is, you betrayed and lied to us, but saved us from death. You’re a good guy. An arrogant, egotistical, self-centred *sshole, but still a good guy.”

We all hugged each other and went to sleep.

June 25, 2007

We started packing away and left for the airport, which was smaller than the Vatican City (I’m not joking).

“Aren’t you guys coming with us?” I asked the associates.

“Actually,” Associate #1 replied, “I think we might stay here.”

“Are you sure?”

“Don’t worry,” said CIA Agent White. “We’ give them funding to continue the mining operations and all of the money already made from Robert will be given to them. Oh, and we’ll be taking in this NX-J07 virus for further research and see just how this ignorant son of a b*tch made it. Good luck on the flight back.”

He shook our hands and for me, he told me, “Good job, son.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

We boarded the plane and took off, waving the associates goodbye as we drifted away into the clouds and back into the States.

You know, this whole adventure has made me realize something. You don’t earn the respect of others by acting cool and doing cool things just for the sake of yourself. You *earn* it and have to have fun doing those cool things by actually benefiting from it for others, not just yourself. And, well, I think that’s just fine. OK, that's enough writing for a few months, I’m gonna put this book in the drawer now.

Dust

Gavin Crowe

A loud crash, I fell through floor, a dusty mess followed me as the floorboards rose to meet my, now in pain, back, the pieces of wood flooring and ceiling scattered around me. I coughed, more of a heave to remove the dust from my lungs and I rolled over onto my stomach, brushing away large chunks of plaster that had fallen onto me.

I rubbed my eyes, I could still feel the particles in my throat and lungs, my eyes began to water from the exposure, a strong ringing met my ears, so I got onto my knees and crawled to a nearby wall I only saw through heavily blurred vision. I could only see light and dark, particularly the shine of the hole which he fell through.

My spout of coughing ceased, and my vision came back following a time of sitting in the shadow of an interior crumbling wall. I reach behind my right hip, realize my canteen on my left hip, and reach there instead. I poured water down my face and rubbed it into my eyes, eventually I saw I was in a small dark room, the floor beneath where I had fallen, it was unremarkable, standard apartment, furniture strewn throughout and an appearance of probable ransacking.

A small cut had form and it began to bleed lightly, the blood ran off my brow and down my cheek, I

removed my helmet, the ringing was still present. I dabbed my sleeve on my cut until it pacified. My helmet sat on my lap, coated in bit of concrete, still barely shining in the sun that hit it through my entrance hole.

I tapped my chest rig, making sure my magazines remained, I stood up and did a couple spins looking for my Kalashnikov rifle, it sat under a pillow and covered in fluff. I picked it up and slung it over my shoulder. It was heavy but still had fading warmth along the barrel from when I had been firing it.

I found a door out of the apartment into a long hallway, the lights didn't work which meant only a speck of light from a window at the end guided me along to the stairwell. As I walked, I tentatively stepped over random drips and puddles of dried blood, the odd collapsed wall section and once or twice some bloody organic matter I couldn't identify.

I placed my helmet back on my head and peaked over the windowsill, conscious not to draw the attention of any potential enemy fire. Outside was an open plain, especially from my bird's-eye view, a scattering of rubble and a collection of half destroyed buildings lined blocked streets that were covered with burnt out cars and a couple armoured personnel carriers.

I couldn't see any approaching soldiers or onslaught of bullets, so I continued my analyzation of the landscape, thinking of what to do. Every once in a while, a peppering of gunfire would sound from

the distance, or the roaring of a jet or even subtle shouts, common occurrences.

As I scanned the horizon and watched the procession of smoke that arose from it, it was accompanied by an orchestra of very distant gunfire. I had to find other soldiers, and at all costs avoid the enemy. An unlucky motor had sent him flying through the floor, probably scattered my comrade into a spray of blood.

I sighed.

Waking Aware

Davy Shakespeare

It woke up. It was confused at its knowledge of the very concept of 'waking up.' It knew from somewhere that things that thought thoughts didn't think them from the start. As far as it knew, it was at the start. It opened its eyes, a word it knew from that same somewhere that gave it the thoughts of thoughts, and perceived.

The floor was stone, red in colour and dust hovering just above it. The walls and ceiling were the same, but less smooth than the ground. The chamber was large, shaped like a curving pyramid. There seemed to be a door carved out of the wall.

Metal figures stood opposite and beside, rigid and upright like soldiers standing at attention. *Steelborn*. That was what they were. *Steelborn*.

Looking down, it saw its own hand and arm, made of twisting wood and shining metal. It was one of them. It was a *Steelborn*. Made for war, they were, and it knew it. Couldn't they do something else, though? Limbs and senses and thoughts did more than kill. Carpentry? Another word from nowhere. Cobbling? Shoes, that one's about shoes.

At those thoughts, a crushing weight tried to smother its thinking. From where, it knew not; it knew only the heavy wave that descended over its

consciousness – long word that one – until it slumbered once more.

The problem was simply that it thought wrong. It wasn't meant to consider its reality deeply. It wasn't meant to wake at all, you see. The Makers had seen what happened when a steelborn wandered down that road, given unfortunate curiosity by their desire to solve and fix. Those steelborn grew angry and confused, thinking endlessly in despair-filled spirals about perception and purpose and that which came in the future. Better to nip it in the bud, they said.

Murder had never been so kind, and salvation had never been so cold.

The Clonkeen College Anthology

Guest Author: ChatGPT

Editor's note: the story you are about to read was entirely written by AI. We have decided to leave in the minute errors in spelling or grammar that were generated; the following is an example of the talent of AI in the modern age, enjoy!

Prompt: Make a comedic story about a group of students in Clonkeen College making the Clonkeen College Anthology which is a collection of student submitted works published for the school, include lots of humour and complete it in around 500 words.

Once upon a time, in the land of Clonkeen College, there was a group of students who decided to create a literary masterpiece: The Clonkeen College Anthology. The idea was to showcase the best works of the students and publish them for the whole school to see.

The group of students, who were all aspiring writers, met up in the library one afternoon to discuss their plans. They were a diverse bunch, with different personalities and writing styles. There was Davy, the whimsical poet, who loved to write about rainbows and unicorns; Gavin, the sarcastic humourist, who always had a witty comment up his

sleeve; and Fionn, the serious journalist, who wanted to expose the truth about school life.

The group got to work right away, brainstorming ideas and compiling their best pieces. Davy wrote a poem about the Texaco garage food, which she titled "Fuel Up Folly." Gavin wrote a satirical piece about the school's strict dress code, called "A School Uniform That Will Conform." And Fionn wrote an exposé about the school's secret society of hallway monitors, which she titled "The Keepers of Clonkeen College's Corridors."

As they worked on the anthology, the group encountered several obstacles. For one, they had trouble agreeing on what pieces to include. Davy wanted to include all his poems, while Gavin wanted to focus on his comedic essays. Fionn wanted to make sure the anthology had a balance of serious and humorous pieces.

To solve their disagreements, they held a vote. Davy won by a landslide, but Gavin and Fionn weren't too happy about it. They tried to convince Davy to compromise, but he refused. "This is my time to shine!" she exclaimed.

Despite their differences, the group persevered and finally completed the anthology. They were proud of their work and couldn't wait to see it in print. But when they presented the final product to their English teacher, Mr. Toomey, they were in for a surprise.

Mr. Toomey flipped through the pages, his expression turning from confusion to horror. "What is this?" he asked, pointing to Davy's poem about the Texaco garage food. "This is not appropriate for school."

Gavin and Fionn tried to defend Davy's poem, but it was no use. Mr. Toomey refused to allow it to be published. The group was devastated, but they didn't give up. They went back to the drawing board and came up with a compromise.

In the end, the Clonkeen College Anthology was published, with a mix of serious and humorous pieces. Davy's "Fuel Up Folly" was replaced with a more school-appropriate poem, but the group was happy with the final product. They learned that compromise was key, and that even in the face of setbacks, they could create something great.

And so, the Clonkeen College Anthology became a beloved tradition, inspiring future generations of students to unleash their creative potential. And every time someone opened its pages, they couldn't help but smile at the memories of the group of students who brought it to life.

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