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Roscommon County Council Arts Office

Autumn Leaves

A broadsheet of poetry,
flash fiction and prose

Editor: Louise G. Cole



Prelude

In Roscommon's fields, autumn starts to weave its spell,
The whispers of wind through the once verdant forests swell,
Leaves of amber and crimson, gently float and fall,
A symphony of colour, a prelude to winter's squall.

The lakes reflect the sky in hues of grey and molten gold,
Their surface calm and still for now, a mirror to behold,
Upon the shores, the reeds sway soft and slow,
In tune with nature's breath, a tranquil ebb and flow.

Stone walls, timeworn and ancient, line the winding roads,
Boundaries of old stories, of joys and ancient loads.
Cosy homes with chimneys puffing plumes of smoke,
Stand beside the steadfast sentinels of the mighty oak.

The fields, once green and lively, now wear a russet hue,
The harvest has been gathered in, beneath the sky so blue.
Potatoes, turf, and apples, in baskets across the county,
Testament to summer's toil, the earth's generous bounty.

The rivers murmur softly, their waters clear and cold,
They sing the song of a changing season, a tale both new and old.
Through woods where creatures wander, their breath a ghostly mist,
The world takes on a deeper magic, in autumn's gentle kiss.

The crisp, dark forests come alive, as dusk begins to fall,
The stars above in splendour, a sparkling, silent call.
The murmur of family echoes, as hearth fires crackle bright,
Against the velvet backdrop of the encroaching night.

Anne Marie Brogan



Echo of the Woodland

Little by little I hear
sap bubbling, dripping
within the rivers of the oak,
the blood in my veins.
Cuckoo calling –
‘Cuck-oo’
it’s time to rise.
A spine tingling cry
from an amorous fox
searching for a sweetheart.
Mistle thrush – handsomely preened
shows off his melodious pitch
then feasts on sticky red berries.
A hungry hedgehog snuffling
in the undergrowth of autumn leaves.
On arthritic branches owls yawn
waiting for bed on a sun kissed morn.

Carol Beirne

Nature’s Beauty

Dappled sunlight
Freckling country lanes,
Hints of blue sky
Through tall, leafy trees.
A symphony of bird song,
The soft buzzing of bees.
Freshly cut grass
Staging jewel coloured borders,
Young, tender plants
Stretch out to the sun
Bathing in warmth,
Uncurling their beauty
For all to enjoy.
Children’s laughter
As they run and skip
Or play ‘hide and seek’
Amongst the majestic oaks.
A water fountain sparkles
Bringing relief to small birds
As they splash and sip
In a flurry of feathers.
The soft, warm breeze of evening
Rustles the leaves.
The western sun sinks lower
Showing off with colours
Of orange and pink.
The day is closing it’s curtains
At rest
Until dawn . . .

Mary McCormack

Elemental Prayer

Teach me to breathe
with sustained and uniform intent,
but gently so, as if ushering seeds
to further fields, or as if I was the seed
or indeed the earth and all lay
poised on a single breath,
and to inhale pure and clear
at the quick of the storm.

I have felt rain that falls
baptismally bright, and battled
rising floods – yet the lonely vigil
for the sun to dawn
demands my steadfast faith.

And when it is mine
to know again the ebb and flow
of time and tide, the changing
and the stopping of the hour,
the ripple, the splash, the sway
and ash, garland, wax and bell,
let it be said then
that they knew me and I
knew them and we both
found a common ground.

Tadgh Carey



Think Happy Thoughts

How can I be normal
and not frighten you away?
How can I write something happy?
What are the words that I could say?
I try and try to lighten up
but those feelings never stay.
There's something stuck inside me
and I have to write this way.
Because my mind is full of horror
and it overpowers the light.
Because I'm longing for new ideas,
a different topic I could right.
Like puppies, rainbows, unicorns.
Something happy, something bright.
But my mind won't let me say it
because I'm darkened by the night.

David Ryan



The Last Gift

So what
if her fight
fails, and she never does walk
along the sea, or swim, or cook a curry
for hours longer than necessary,
and this is it -

we laugh,
she constructs spidery words
on paper, points, pulls faces, makes us
understand her,
we've already adapted
to a life of charades

but if even that fails,
through some new
cruel
catastrophe,
and it's back to the start
or straight to the end

isn't this time that we're sharing
the point? This effort
our proof
that what matters
is just as Larkin says:
what will survive of us is love.

Jessamine O'Connor

A Skylark Sings No More

Smoke filled shadows throw
sparks from charcoal embers.
Eyes water, acid teardrops fall
onto a funeral pyre.

We did not hear snails scream,
frightened frogs webbed feet
melting in fiery flames.
Skylark's serenade silenced.
Marsh fritillary, dragonflies,
eyed hawk moths meet their demise.

Where moments earlier golden furze
blossoms burst into a blaze of glory.
White tipped bog cotton swayed
singular strands against a spring breeze.
Spiders scurry for safety, no place to hide.
Snipe, hen-harriers nest no more
silenced by ignorance.

A cuckoo calls in the distance sensing
the destruction of nature's habitat.

Joseph Black

Peach Around the Edges

I cycle into the village to do my shopping. I buy too much which leaves the bike a little unbalanced for the ride home. No matter. I get off and walk. I admire the gardens and rockeries. There is something very neat about all of them. I pass the house that sells the eggs, and has an honesty box. Hens are chuck, chucking. There's a soundless robot cutting the grass. I bend down to pick up some white petals which have fallen from a rhododendron. Beside it, there is another pale-yellow rhododendron with an abundance of blooms. Each flower has a peachy tinge round the edges of the outer petals. I thought of a day back home, some years earlier, when my mood was low and I had gone for a drive. I came across a wedding in a tiny country church – as I drove past, I noticed the bridesmaids walking along the footpath. They wore mid-length peach coloured dresses with matching shoes and it cheered me up to see them. Had it been a funeral, well that might have prolonged my mood. I place some petals from each bush carefully in my jacket pocket. I must remember to put them into my scrapbook when I get home.

Rosaleen Glennon



Take the Time to Remember

Remember to take the time to savour that first sip
of morning coffee.
Take the time to listen to that favourite song in its entirety.
Remember to take the time to admire the intricacies of a spider's web.
Take the time to stop and watch the new lambs
dancing in the fields.
Remember to take the time to actually read the newspaper
and turn the pages slowly.
Take the time to listen to others and the things that they
remember.
Take the time to really listen before offering your own opinion.
Remember to take the time to stop and watch the waves.
Take the time to close your eyes and remember your Gran's soda bread.
Remember, to take the time, and remember.

T.M. Ryan

Joy in The Little Things

Walking through town
The wind-flung wrappings
Brimming with movement
In every corner.
There is a story
Not in the thing itself
But in finding joy
In the little things.

Bernadette Murphy

On Father's Day

I recall the landscape of that December when we buried you in that snow-covered ground. Staccato sounds of feet pounding the ground in an effort to keep warm. This was not your scene.

If you had a choice, you would be a garden full of vegetables in summer time. The sun beating down, handkerchief on your head, clothes dancing in the breeze while jets flew overhead. "Faster than sound," you said.

If you were a piece of furniture, you would be an old battered armchair stuffed with cushions of various hues. A haven where comfort and support would be provided to those in need of a cuddle or a kind word. Where prayers would be taught and fairy tales read.

Your scent is hard to define but I picture you as cement, mixed with pipe smoke and tobacco. Your black wavy hair slicked back with Brylcreem. A comforting scent which meant home.

You would be multi-coloured due to your colour blindness. A rainbow man. I picture you painting the kitchen, clashing colours, strong scent and happy children.

As an entertainer, you would be one of the old greats like Sinatra or Bing rendering tunes for our amusement as you taught us to dance around the kitchen floor. "Mind the press and around the table," you instructed.

If choosing weather, you would be the calm before the storm. A peacemaker between three squabbling siblings. On rare occasions reaching storm force gales.

As a flower, you would be a lily. Very patriotic, you wore it with pride at Easter time.

As a bird, you would be a cockerel beaming with pride at family achievements.

A mixture of metaphors attempting to do justice to a man who was cherished beyond words.

Margaret Mugan



White Horse

A handsome white horse ranges
along the fenced narrow pasture
where he is penned in, alone.
He pauses to watch passers-by,
birds and rabbits of the field.

Does he envy their freedom?
Is he living his life vicariously,
watching them fly, run, escape
in ways he cannot?

Does a single, living white horse
in a field - not a symbolic one
carved into the land in antiquity,
eye-catching hillside petroglyph -
but a living, breathing creature
with no companions, pacing from
one end of boredom to the other -
does he know he's a symbol of purity,
heroism, spiritual enlightenment,
the triumph of good over evil?

Does he care the first horseman
of the Apocalypse rode a white horse?
He might not ponder these things,
though he'll have a sense of being
a herd animal, and will tell you,
given the chance,
solitude
is
overrated.

Louise G Cole



Stepping Out

We crossed the road
to the wild Iris
she called *Flaggers*.
Flaggers it was then.
The power of a god
making colour she said,
filling our words
and our eyes with yellow,
rapturous light
like mid-summer butter,
as pagan as we were
out past the wildwood.

Tom Noone

Carrowntogher at Dusk

Walking on a country road
in the distance a lawnmower
three donkeys in a field
stripped of its summer yield
cows minding their young
a young one sticks out his tongue
swallows fly with great speed
searching for feed
not for them any old weed
singing in the sky
the musical notes from the wren
sunburnt grass by the road
swaying as the breeze blows
crows sitting on a telephone wire
basking in the twilight.

A black cat crosses the lane
tonight, not for her the hearth
a pilgrim on an ancient cow path
sun sinking in the sky
another day will die

I say goodbye
with a tearful eye

Lucy Guerin



The Gift of Dreaming

here inside my heart... Antonio Machado

In the darkest hours
a team of workers
does the night-shift
here inside my heart.

Unnoticed, they arrive
like elves in a fairy tale
to sift through
the messiness of yesterday

and to place things back
on their shelves again,
so that by morning
a weight has lifted

and everything feels lighter
here inside my heart.

Bernadette McCarrick

Picking Apples

Within the forest the world disappears. Thick green needles pierce the light so that it falls in broken pieces around you, tiny shards of colour sliding off the trees, dappling the dawn-wet leaves of the undergrowth.

There is such stillness that you stop your breath.

Close your eyes.

You feel the mist, a feather touch against your skin, the soft spring of generations beneath your slippers feet.

The pressure in your chest hurts. You hold on for as long as you can . . .

There is a cottage, a garden with apple trees; a rough-made bench outside the door. You see her there, a basket at her feet. Her lips move, and you follow her gaze.

A boy climbs for apples, leaves drifting like snow onto the potato ridges. You hear the heart-beat thumps; see the glossy blushes among the fading grass.

She finds you, beside the broken cottage. When she takes your hand, you see the cuts and scratches, the tiny rosary buds of blood.

“Time to go home, Dad,” she whispers.

You shake your head, confused by her words, the gnarled wildness of the apple trees, the tumbled heaps of stone.

“We’ll make something of these apples,” she says, taking the basket from you. She smiles, holds out a hand.

You walk together among the trees, plucking blackberries from the brambled ditches. You know these paths, the feel of your mother’s hand in yours. The forest moves with you, thicker now, darker, strangling the autumn sun . . . you squeeze her hand tighter, hoping you’ll be home soon . . .

Behind you the apple trees bend towards the earth, curl around their stunted blooms, rot their still-born husks into the forest floor.

You smell the strident puff of ripe-cut flesh, the spiced sweetness as she dresses the bitter fruit . . .

Tomorrow you’ll pick some more.

Party Animal

A hush fell over the boisterous partygoers when, as if by magic, you appeared uninvited that first time. All eyes were on you. Young, beautiful and very curious. Shy, but in no hurry to leave. Loud music and the sweet smoky aroma of the BBQ are probably what enticed you.

Next day, peace and quiet returned to our neck of the woods, so did you. Visiting us daily. Usually around dinner time.

Blending into our peaceful existence causing no ripples, sitting quietly keeping us company as we sat reading or listening to music. Following us with quiet curiosity as we pottered about, a soothing tranquil presence.

Like us, you seemed to love the periodical break to all that quiet. Loved it when we had company. You always turned up. A party animal . . .

The trees stepped closer to the house and autumn was getting impatient. We reluctantly returned to our different life. Sadly bidding you farewell.

The following year you seemed as happy to see us as we were to see you. Taking up where we left off. Once again, we were eating out of your hand, and literally, you were eating out of our hand.

It's the third year you are keeping us company. We had something to celebrate. A wedding anniversary. No party because of Covid, just some tea and cake in the garden. You obviously sensed it was our special day. Spending all afternoon with us. Hardly letting us out of your sight. So sweet. We discovered you had decided to celebrate without us. The cake was gone. "You little vixen." Was it guilt and not love had you staying so close?

Beautiful Rua with your gilded ginger tail tipped with silver, we may not invite you to our next party. But you'll probably come anyway.

Eileen Barsema-Molloy

The Flaypit

“Don’t tell me you’re walking over to that kip to watch a child’s film a second night?”

My Mother asked that as she stood frying the-teenager-me my tea of chips from left-over boiled spuds with an egg. She was shocked I was going back a second night to watch the re-released Star Wars because of the picture-house screening it. The Odeon was what you’d call a fleapit, but where I grew up a flea was forever called a flay, so I had her christened the Flaypit.

“Not if I was ped to watch the film would I sit in it,” was said with an affected shiver. I put forward how it would be far worse were I off gallivanting with drink or drugs for myself and how she’d surely have cause for cribbing then. Mam answered with a conceding smile and I felt I had the winning reply from our gentle back and forth arguing.

Looking about the Flaypit, I imagined what it must have been like to sit watching the movies that played on this silver - albeit somewhat yellow-tinted - screen. To hear the whirling sound of the projection projecting a twenty five foot shark terrorising a New England tourist town. To watch Travis Bickle cruise in his taxi, witness John Hurt give birth to a phallic-like beast or see soldiers of God battle demonic forces for the soul of a young girl.

That autumn when the leaves fell, the Flaypit closed and was later demolished. Now there stands a multi-screen, salubrious delight. Mam has a particular fondness for the reclining chairs on offer anytime I go along with her to a film that piques her interest. I do wait until she’s comfortable in one of them to tell her how much I miss the Flaypit.

And I do surely.

Wayne Denniston



Readiness

No stir in the air
I watch an oak tree let go leaves.

Each landfall
unique abandon:

some waver on their way
to the lawn's edge.

A shower of sun glistens
on the verge of others.

Still more make for land
with a show of haste.

All arrive with grace
pace doesn't matter.

The earth gentles their landing
to an even gentler rest.

Time waits for nature's readiness
in every tree and person

to wake to another day.

Mary Lee

Mirabelles

This period of furious passion,
the role of a lover
is not how I had pictured my life,
from a simple meeting,
the working of the mind
to the subtle way thought
becomes flesh,
sometimes stabbing
jagged through my veins.
It hurts.
Oh . . . how it does hurt.

Such colourful moments.

Love untamed
like bountiful bunches
of red and yellow Mirabelles
hang swollen, wild
across the next field.

Amy Abdullah Barry

How Can I Marry Such a Pretty Girl as You?

They met at a work party and knew they were right for each other. Instinctively they understood it was why neither had found anybody before, and had almost given up searching. Too old, they thought, to bother with marriage, though she might have paused had he asked. Instead, they styled the country cottage her aunt had willed her with the shade of each other's company.

He bought her gifts she could use and was grateful for – cookbooks, a crockpot, gardening paraphernalia.

She noticed he rarely smiled and sensed he was embarrassed by a row of teeth knocked crooked, he said, in his sporting days. She paid for orthodontics. His hair, thinning towards a comb-over, bothered him, he confessed. She found a cosmetic clinic and felt loved the morning she glimpsed him at the bathroom mirror trailing fingers through new growth.

She took ill soon after – a worrying illness, but curable – and they took a Caribbean cruise she insisted on paying for to celebrate her remission.

When they returned, with his shining teeth, carefully dyed thatch and a tan clearly not from a sunbed, he caught the eye of a new girl in the office, who mistook him for a man just young enough and rich enough to deserve her.

He quit the country cottage to shack up in an apartment. Everything was rosy until the new girl twigged his pockets emptied and his vigour drained faster than anticipated.

He was sent packing back to the cottage with his tail between his legs. He was met by a cardboard box with his name on it, warped from weeks lying outside: cookbooks, a crockpot, gardening tools, unused, all layered beneath a note he didn't need to read.

Cows Dreaming Among the Buttercups

This spring the West of Ireland
grew a glut of buttercups -
not high on the desire list of farmers
quick to top a thistle, trick out rattle.

Fully blown they gilded all the land,
catching every kilowatt of sun,
so that on dull days cows seemed foot-lit softly,
as though their world had tilted.

Rowdy bovine songs were mellowed
by the zithering of bees,
and base percussive notes
of every six-legged creature known to cow

until chin deep in yellow they lay down
to dream of butter, and began to wonder
how it might feel to be a pollen beetle,
sun-drunk in this golden light of petal.

Marian Griffin

