

THE ANTHOLOGY

2012

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Foreword

This collection of writing from Clonkeen College students demonstrates as eclectic a mix of styles, voices and subject matter that would be natural to expect from nineteen individuals. Nineteen boys, finding their feet as men. For the purposes of incorporating them into a single volume, we have grouped the stories under broad themes and headings – LOVE, WAR, SPORT, URBAN LIVES, TALES FROM OTHER CITIES, SUSPENSE, GRIEF, as well as including a POETRY section. Some fit more comfortably than others into their designated category, of course, but the themes provide the collection with some uniformity.

In editing, we have tried to interfere as little as possible with the writing of the students. The process of

writing for publication required editorial discussions with the respective authors, drafting and redrafting of work, and helping the authors to discover their own, coherent way of delivering onto the page what they had dreamt up in their minds. This, after all, is the essence of what it is to write creatively – finding ways to put what you know in your heart and mind onto a blank page.

The content of the authors' work went virtually untouched. More often than not it was the nuts and bolts of writing – punctuation, spelling, choosing the right word rather than the cleverest word – that required revisiting.

We have also been pleased and hugely impressed by the submissions we have received from other students in the school, who wrote pieces for us simply because they love writing. We hope that in subsequent years this collection, *The Anthology, 2012*, will encourage even more students from across the student body, 1st to 6th Years, to participate in the Clonkeen College Press project.

John Toomey

LOVE

Blossoming In Winter

Adrian Matthews

My Senior Year was ravaged by a battle so potent it was comparable to that of the Riders of Rohan riding to the world's ending to relieve a besieged Minas Tirith from the black forces of Mordor.

Then again, I'd be lying if I said that the Leaving was the only thing that occurred in my Senior Year. Ha...Oh, yes...Something even more important than the greatest memory test known to man happened in my final year of High School.

On a day bearing great similarity to a Serbian prison camp, I realised something...something that, even

to this day, confounds me in even trying to explain and hurts to comprehend.

The day was ice cold. So cold, it bordered on the point of absolute zero. My school, however, appeared to be shattering all the laws of thermodynamics. The memory of the mucus freezing as it dribbled down from my nose in class that day, still rings in my memory like the events of that fateful afternoon.

After watching the clock slowly tick by from my classroom seat, I leaned forward to engage in a hushed conversation with my friend, Kin.

'Christ-sake...What's with this school?...Brr...Ten more minutes of this, Kin, and I swear I will reopen that indoor bonfire idea.'

'That would be unwise, Aya,' Kin murmured, his sleeves pulled up in their usual position around his elbows. How he survived in that ice-box, god only knows. Most likely it was the antifreeze-infused nanities coursing through his blood, or something.

'Why, I have matches!'

'Fine...Fine...Go ahead and burn the school down, but I'm not paying your bail.'

'Why not...I'm your best friend. If I say lick my feet, you drop on all fours and start licking.'

Kin sighed, facing forward as our teacher's eyes started wandering over to our hushed conversation. I,

who had as much desire to listen to that old hag as drinking my own bile, nodded off against the window pane.

Once the witch had signed off, and Kin had kicked me awake, we started packing our frostbitten things. Kin ignored me, making a great deal of fixing up his bag, so I vented my anger at my jacket zip, which seemed to have frozen in place, midway up my navel. Our eyes met and the non-verbal message of, 'Wanna walk home together?' reached into our minds simultaneously. We both nodded in agreement and took to the hormone-infused hallway, walking onwards to the student exit.

Well, I jogged, to keep up with Kin's giant-sized footsteps. Unlike my five-foot, two-inch self, who was sparsely built for athletic purposes, Kin towered over me. His close-cut hair and the abundance of muscle from his neck down, cast a significant shadow over the grey-sweatered First Years.

The Irish Dragon and the Pocket Lioness. These were our nicknames. 'If only Kin could encase me in a wall of flame so I wouldn't experience cryopreservation every time I step into this place,' I thought, drawing my arms over my chest as the sudden chill outside hit me.

'How's judo?' I asked conversationally, trying to tear my mind away from just how cold I was.

'Fine.'

'Ok...How's the family?'

'Fine.'

'I'll just keep talking then, till it bugs the hell out of you.'

He looked at me through his black, beetle eyes.

'Fine by me.'

'AHH...Ha...Hmmp...You're no fun...Ahh, look at the courtyard. The council **sure** has been busy!'

We were out into the frosty courtyard. It sparkled and glimmered with the Student Council's noble but failed effort at Christmas decoration, the electronics having died the night before. But the tinsel and baubles, hanging from the sleeping cherry blossoms, glittered with a thin covering of silver ice that radiated a sort of eerie beauty.

'Mistletoe!' Kin grunted, nodding over towards a courtyard lamppost that was endowed with a floating bundle of the dreaded shrub and a murder of girls flocking beneath it.

'Man, I swear, if any guy ventures inside that orgy in the making, he ain't coming out.'

'Hmm...'

'Don't you even dare think about it,' I snap, kicking his tree-trunk-like leg. Pain instantly formed, causing me to start hopping about, gritting my teeth.

'I wasn't thinking about that.'

'Oh, **come on**...All boys think like that. It's a man's nature to be perverted.' I pulled at his red school blazer, trying and failing to uproot him. 'Man...Come **on**...I'm **hungry**. That's...more important than your sexual desires.'

He pivoted on his heels, almost like one of those androids out of Doctor Who...or my art teacher on a bad day. 'You've never had a problem with me eyeing-up girls before.'

'It's a new year's resolution and I'm starting early.

MOVE.'

Sighing, he let me drag him along, his eyes wandering back now and again as we bisected the gap between the girls' football match and the hockey team's practice.

We crossed out of the cold prison freezer and, following a road lined with blue LED lights, we headed up Main Street. It was Christmas and I could already feel the sense of joy and uttermost wonder of the pagan festival erasing the negative vibes that school had been radiating on me.

'I should really start to study,' I thought, out loud, trying to evoke a response from my typically pseudo-alien friend. 'I'm **screwed** for the mocks. Screwed with a capital **SC**...'

'I see an A1 in English flying your way.'

'It's not my damned fault I'm in pass. This insane language and its nonsensical spelling and grammar is just **SO** infuriating....**Grr...I Hate** it.'

'Yeah..,' Kin stopped outside a café as I continued to lament my misfortunes. He turned when I'd hit the line.

'And don't get me started on Maths...WHY...**WHY!**...did they need to replace numbers with letters? Wasn't ten enough? God damn you, Newton.'

'If I buy you dinner would you keep quiet?'

I clench up mid-vowel, '..inner?'

'Yes, as in the noun...a meal that is usually taken in the latter part of the day.'

'I know what dinner is, idiot! But why? You've never offered it before.'

'Heh,' he reached out and rubbed the crown of my head, ruffling my long blonde hair. 'It's my new year's resolution,' and he forced open the heavy glass door with his iron-like foot.

The café's toasty aroma hit my nostrils like fireworks. I sucked in massive heap-fulls of smooth, coffee-filled air as we were directed towards a seat by the window and had menus placed in front of us. Kin

ordered for us, mainly because I was taking forever to decide between a curry and a fish deal.

'I was about to order,' I pouted, pursing my lips and throwing my eyes skyward.

I glared around as Kin shrugged and adopted his usual cool, quiet stance, hands behind his head. The Café hummed with chatter. I recognised a few Juniors in a corner having the time of their lives, tucking into a platefuls of cheesy tacos. 'How simplistic of them.' Little did they know of the sheer torrent of work waiting for them just around the bend. 'Well, I'm one to talk; never do anything in class but sleep and draw cartoons.'

I couldn't say that I'd been an enemy of school my whole life, though. Back in my home town, I had a blast in Middle School but... My move for the Leaving Cert was, well, looking like Italy during the war. Idiotic and ill-informed.

Kin, thankfully, had been there since I first stepped into that deep freezer in Fourth Year. Just by chance, Seth had placed Kin sitting in front of me, back on that wondrous first day and...well, you know...we clicked. <Heh!>

Funny...if it hadn't been for Kin and his quiet yet resolute support, I don't think I would've withstood that blizzard they call the Leaving...and for that I am grateful.

The waitress swooped back, seeming more like a blonde-haired, dumb fashion-model than anything. She gracefully placed Kin's coffee before him, while giving him a face full of her cleavage. She threw my coke in front of me, letting some of the black mixture spill over the lip of the glass, and pranced away looking very pleased with herself.

Snarling, I picked up my knife and aimed for the back of her head, but Kin quickly disarmed me and forced me back in my seat.

He slumped back and resumed his relaxed position with his hands behind his head again. 'You're definitely an interesting friend...willing to defend me from all chances of perversion. You'd think you were in love with me.'

'Ha!'

'... or you see me as a God. The latter would be preferable.'

That comment should have been enough for me to spear him with my fork. But as the thought dwelled in my head, something else came to mind, something contrastive to causing him sheer bodily harm.

Our curvy waitress arrived with our food while I was still in contemplation of my inaction. Kin nodded at her in dismissal, and watched her slump away, deprived of her the chance to commence flirting.

He picked up his spoon. 'There. Eat.'

'...'

'Aya...'

'Hmm...'

'I'm paying but you're going to have to have feed yourself.'

The low buzzing of the restaurant took over as we eye-balled each other in a tense stand-off.

'Aya! Eat!,' his deep gravelly voice broke out like a shotgun. For some reason, I blushed. Only slightly, mind, but still. My cold, brazen mask had slipped for just one accursed moment. 'Aya, are you blushing?'

'No...'

'You **are** sure?'

'Drink your coffee.'

Thirty minutes passed in which I ranted on about meaningless things. Kin inclined his head at the right intervals while maintaining a strained, interested demeanour. Kin, the tall muscular guy I called my friend. I wondered if it could ever work. I'd dated in the past and never liked it that much, always having guys hanging over the phone, saying you're everything and promising the world when all they cared about was their carrot in my shopping basket, to put it delicately.

'Does he love me or have I already warmed to him in such a way that he sees me like a sister and that

dating would just be too weird?' I wondered. <Sigh> 'God knows.' I was a hard person to love, I knew that. Boys tended to treat me like a lioness, a beauty to date but a vengeful goddess to piss-off.

'Oh... ' Kin grunts.

'What's wrong?' I jumped, a ruby-red glow beginning to dance around my ears

'Hmm...oh. It's snowing.'

He was right. Even in that backwards coastal town it was snowing. It was falling in great spiralling sheets. I watched the people outside being mystified by this unknown force.

'They're saying 2011 is going to be a bad year,' Kin grumbled.

'Oh...Do you hate snow then?'

'No.' He chuckled as he grinned at me. 'But you do.'

When does a friend become a friend? To be honest with you, I can't remember the first time I met Kin, the first time we spoke, the first time I complained about the heating in the school. It's strange how things suddenly just appear in your life, like snow on a brisk Irish day. It seems so insignificant and fragile, snow, but given time it builds until it transforms a country into a crystallised wonderland.

Maybe some things take time. Maybe life doesn't have fixed points of definite change, but rather moments when you look at yourself and say, 'Holy crap...how did that happen?'

The walk home was, yes, cold. I shivered as the night gathered darkness. I chanced a glance at Kin who seemed to be oblivious to the snow building on his hatless head, his figure composed and relaxed as it always was and always would be. 'I could say it now,' I thought, but I could feel the call of cliché floating in the wind, and I let the moment pass.

Kin once said that only at the apex do we change; but how can we change when we can't perceive the point of transfiguration? I have no idea when these feelings for Kin flowered or why they grew at all. All I know is that my love blossomed that winter. That's when it finally emerged from the earth. But could it have been that it was there all along, hidden under the cold, cold snow?

Long Fall

Daniel Robinson

David Dunne has always been a generous man. He has constantly given people the things they wanted, within

reason. When he was young it could have been the use of a marble or a Pog. As he grew up it might have been a few crisps or some of his drink. He was happy to give. However, some people started to take advantage of his kind-hearted nature and he ended up doing things he was never really happy doing, like copying out people's homework for them or helping them cheat on class tests.

At the moment in time where we will be joining David, for nearly the first time in his life, he will be doing something not because someone else asked him to but because he felt they needed him to.

David is, at that moment, in a grey-speckled room and the blue plastic chairs attached to the wall, in a single line, aren't very comfortable but are the only things he can sit on. The room is a box, and when I say box, I mean it in the literal sense. If you were to measure it you would see that the floor, walls and ceiling would all be the exact same area.

David is a short guy, which never really bothered him, and was also not the strongest, which he didn't care about either. He has longish, brown hair that just dips over his eyes and what he lacks in muscle he makes up for in how intelligent he is. He has never really had time to show it because he is also very shy and quiet; he only ever got to show-off around his group of friends.

Dave is sitting in this grey-speckled box typing away on his laptop. Across the room sits Dave's best friend, slowly nodding his head to the music from his iPod and tapping his foot on the floor. He looks up and, nearly shouting, says, 'Good luck tryin' to get an internet connection round here, Bro.' Peter Marcella's strong deep voice echoes through the box, 'Just wait for Sammy Boy to get here. He'll figure something out.' There is a pause as he sighs. 'I hope,' he chuckles to himself and manages to get a smile off Dave.

As Dave goes back to typing on his laptop, he begins pounding the keys, as if typing louder will cause the connection to be stronger. So, for a while, the only sound is the tapping of the keyboard and the slight sound of Peter's shoes beating off the floor to the rhythm of his music.

A sound from the other room makes Dave look up from what he is doing and makes Pete take his headphones off. The two double doors, that only a few minutes ago they had walked in through, open and in comes Beth Murray. She smiles with her perfect teeth, green eyes and dark brown hair, taking all light shone at her and reflecting it back.

'Did you guys really have to pick a place so far out of the way to do this? Couldn't you have picked a place that's closer to, well, I dunno, *civilisation*?' Dave

sighs and puts his head back down to his laptop. 'Well, I can tell you're happy to see me,' Beth announces sarcastically.

'Calm down, would you. He was hoping for old Sammy Boy.' A smile rushes over Beth's face.

'Well, he's outside parkin' the car, so don't get your panties in a twist.'

Dave looks up from his laptop and is about to speak when Pete interrupts him by shouting, 'Oh babe, I love you so freckin much it's unbelievable.' He jumps up and runs over to her, giving her such a massive kiss that Dave thinks he is trying to eat her face instead.

Yet Dave can't help but smile. Pete and Beth have been among his best friends for the longest time and as he sits, unworried about the fact he has to set up the internet because Sammy is on his way, he begins to remember all the way back to when he first met Pete, Beth and Sammy, and how life had come to be the way it is now. So he begins to use the giggling and laughing to bring him back and soon he is there.

Dave's mother had always been the outgoing type and when she had Dave, she decided that he wasn't going to slowdown her life and always went over to her friends. Little Dave was dragged along with her. Dave always enjoyed going to his mum's friends; they were kind and

always looked at him like he was the most amazing thing in the world. However, one day things changed, as they do, and Dave wasn't the greatest thing in the world any more. When they went to his mother's oldest friend's house he found out that this woman had one little amazing thing of her own, and Dave felt he wasn't so special after all. This other little and amazing thing was Pete. Now when two little and amazing things collide there is friction. Dave and Pete were only four or five but they still understood that they were both intruding on each other's way of life. They would always sit in the playroom and watch Thomas the Tank Engine, or any show that was on day after day.

This was all well and good until one day Pete turned, in the middle of the adverts, and spoke to Dave.

'Why do you come over here?'

The words shocked Dave; he wasn't expecting the day to be any different than normal. 'I don't know. I just go with my mummy and end up here.' He spoke the words softly, so as not to be heard if he gave the wrong answer.

'OK then, do you want to play with some Lego?'

Dave lifted his head up from staring at his feet, just dangling of the edge of the couch trying to touch the floor but never being able to reach.

'That sounds fun,' he said, so quietly that it was almost a whisper.

Pete hopped down from the couch and walked to a box on the floor and knocked it over, causing an avalanche of blocks, all shapes and sizes, to topple onto the floor. Dave laughed and got down to go play with the blocks.

From then onwards they became the closest of friends. As these two friends grew older, so did their interests, from Lego, to Marbles, to Pokémon, to Yu-Gi-Oh, to books, and finally arriving at the subject that would interest them for the rest of their lives - girls.

So I'll skip all the parts between Lego and girls and bring you up to the age of thirteen. Dave and Pete are starting secondary school in Brownfield's College.

'Brownfield College is well known by parents and teachers for producing well rounded, intelligent and high achieving students,' read Pete, from a pamphlet that his mother had given to him. 'Give me a pen for a sec. I need to add a little something in.'

Dave reached into the side pocket of his bag and produced a black pen.

Pete began to mumble to himself as he jotted down his thoughts. 'And there,' he said with the sound

of pride in his voice, handing the new and improved pamphlet to Pete.

'Brownfield College is well known by parents and teachers for producing well rounded, intelligent and high achieving students,' began Dave, 'and its *lonely amount of babies?*' He sounded out the words slowly, reading what he could make out of the writing.

'And it's *lovely* amount of *babes*,' said Pete, stretching out the words Dave had said wrong.

'Well, it's not my fault you have the writing of a six year old!'

Pete shot him a glance and they laughed it off. 'The school's around the corner, let's go.'

They headed around the corner and stared at the place where they would be spending the next six years of their lives. The school was a two-storey high grey block that, to Pete, Dave and the rest of the kids in the school, looked just like a prison. The ground was concrete and cold and there was barely a sign of grass, other than a small patch which was being occupied by a large group of Sixth Years.

'OK, from what I can tell we are going to be living in that little old block over there,' said Pete, pointing to what looked like a small house that somebody never quite finished. It had only one floor and the roof was never completed and was missing a gutter.

Some of the roof had been tiled with a different colour tile to the rest of it.

'First of all we have to go to the school hall and be put into classes and given timetables and the rest of the things that they do in school, which is also strangely familiar to what they do in a prison,' said Pete to Dave, with a very enthusiastic voice.

'Well, at least we get to leave, unlike in prison, where you just sit in your cell with your roommate who keeps dropping the soap.' They both laughed and headed to the hall.

They entered into the hall and were met with the chattering of nearly a hundred people, all of whom were either talking to their old friends from primary school or awkwardly looking around to try and find new friends. Girls were hugging, talking and telling each other about holidays and discussing the new school year, while lads were laughing and high-fiving. Pete and Dave looked around and couldn't believe the amount of people who were there. They walked over to a small group of people who they felt they could introduce themselves to. This was the basic idea that Pete had taught Dave - all you had to do was go up, say a few words, and wait to see what they talked about. Once the subject got to something that you knew about, you injected yourself into the conversation and said anything funny, witty or

smart about the topic, depending on the type of people you thought they were from the conversation they had been having.

So Pete walked up and began his *fool proof* plan.

'Hey, I'm Dave and he's Pete and...'

'Actually, I'm Dave, you fool,' interrupted Dave, with a cheeky smile on his face. The small group laughed and Pete's face reddened.

'That would make you Pete,' said a small, pretty girl with her hand outstretched. Dave looked up with a smile on his face. 'I'm Beth Murray'

He grabbed her hand and shook. 'Pete Marcella'

He looked at all her features. She was small but she was *perfectly* curved. She had amazing eyes, the blue just a vague dot in her white eyes. Her hair was long and black, as if it belonged in a shampoo commercial. Pete noticed all this and more. He was in a trance and nearly forgot to stop shaking her hand until Dave elbowed him in the ribs. Pete was snapped out of it and began to talk to the heavenly image that was Beth Murray.

Dave was also making a new friend, another person in the group they had walked up to. This was Sam Kennedy, otherwise known as Sammy Boy.

'Yeah, so I'd say the thing I'm best at is probably computer stuff like hacking, mods and editing. Stuff like that,' said Sammy.

'That's perfect, you could really help me out. Here, take a look at my new camera.'

As Sammy began examining the camera and talking about its pros and cons, Dave was looking past him, past his words and past everything around him. He was, in fact, staring at someone across the room. He stared and stared and stared until eventually she looked at him. She smiled with an awkward look. Dave, realising that he was staring, smiled and waved at her. She looked away shyly and then smiled and waved back. Dave didn't know her but he knew in the back of his mind that they'd eventually meet and eventually they'd be friends.

As Dave opens his eyes and notices how those two children standing in a hall and meeting for the first time had grown into this incredible and amazing thing that was now a major part of his life, he begins to think of the other major things in his life. Just as he starts to drift off again, the door slams open and Sammy Boy strolls in and announces, 'I am here so do not worry. This event will make it to its destination!' This, of course, makes no sense, but Sammy Boy hardly ever does.

'Yea, and if you don't shut up and sit down, my foot will reach its destination of your arse,' proclaims Beth.

The sound of laughing fills the room as Sammy walks over, takes the laptop from Dave and begins typing. After a few minutes of typing and clicking, he looks up and explains the situation to everyone.

'Alright, so the problem is that we need internet and this old dump, amazingly, has some but they have it locked. So what I'm gonna have to do is hack through the code. But even then the signal would not be strong enough. So I'll have to add a Wi-Fi booster, but I won't be able to do that, 'cause I have to connect it to their Wi-Fi box, and I doubt I'm going to be able to creep in and hook it up without getting seen. I know I'm stealthy, but I'm not some kind of ninja.'

'That's all well and good,' said Pete, 'but would you still be able to broadcast live from the middle of a field, well enough so that people would not be going...,' Pete raised his hands in the air and shook them around like he was trying to swat a fly, '...'OMG y r thre so mush lag me do not like rawr rawr'...?'

'Hopefully, but you never know with streaming.'

Pete and Sammy Boy begin to talk about all the ways in which they could fix the situation. As all this is going on, Beth stands up and walks out of the room.

'Give me that,' she says, on her return, snapping the WI-FI booster up from beside Sammy.

'What do you think you're doing?' demands Sammy

'Well, while you two morons were babbling about nothing, I went and asked if I could connect a WI-FI booster to the box and they said, 'Sure.' So that's what I'm going to do.'

Pete and Sammy look dumfounded and say nothing, and she walks out of the room with her head held high.

'That's some girl you have there,' chuckles Sammy.

'You're telling me,' mumbles Pete.

Dave sits there smiling away. He looks up and sees the clock. 8:15. The jump is to take place in fifteen minutes. Dave stands up and walks out of the room, into the toilet. Sammy and Pete have learned over time that you don't have to worry about Dave if he just goes out of a room, plus they can see he is heading to the toilet.

Dave walks out of the stall. He stumbles towards the sink. He is feeling light-headed and nearly vomits. He honestly can't believe that he is about to do this. He washes his face and stares in the mirror. He isn't sure what is water and what are tears. He knows it in his mind and then he says it. It is only a whisper but he needs to

say it. 'I'm scared,' he says, down into the plain white sink. The words pour out slowly, like gravy. It feels good for him to say these words. He needed to get them off his chest and he couldn't tell any of the lads. He knows that they would understand that, like most people, he is scared but what they really wouldn't understand is why he would still do something like this even though he is so afraid. His eyes open after seconds of breathing and he turns on the tap again. The water rushes around in a circular motion, slowly filling the sink until, finally, he pulls the plug and every last drop of water and all his tears are washed away into the unknown.

Dave gulps up a mouthful of air and heads back to the waiting room. He enters, rubbing his eyes. He is tired and it is 8:20 in the morning, and it is also Saturday.

He senses it as soon as he enters the room. The room feels hotter, his chest and voice feel tighter and there is an unusual silence in the room. He slowly takes his hands away from his face because he almost doesn't want to. He looks, and there sitting on the table talking to the rest of his friends is the girl he saw across the room some four years before. Dave doesn't even know how to feel. He is happy, surprised, angry, and just overall confused. Confused for two simple reasons.

Firstly, he knew that she would come down to be here but he is still confused on how she knew what time

and where, because he never told her. And secondly, he isn't sure if he has just become deaf because he is pretty sure he can see their lips moving but he can't hear a word.

These are both answered by Pete coughing loudly and near shouting, 'So it's great that you decided to come down.'

Everybody turns and looks at Dave. Then they all look away, all except the girl who has just walked in, all except Ailish O'Connor. She stares at Dave as he stares back. He coughs, trying to clear his throat. He can't unblock the fear that has built up and is near choking him.

The instructor comes in and breaks the silence that, to everybody, seems to have gone on for hours.

'Right, David is it? Come with me and we'll get your gear on. Then you'll be ready to go.'

Dave nods at the instructor and follows him out. The plane is waiting for him outside. He hops on and looks back at the building.

Dave sits silently in the aeroplane and the instructor explains to him how to fix his belt, which cord to pull, and the back-up cord, but he isn't listening to any of it. He has gone over it a million times before in his own head, and a two minute lecture just before he is going to jump isn't what he wants to focus on. He

wonders, while flying to over twelve thousand feet, about her, again, and how she knew to be there and then he remembers the last time he spoke to her, the day he finally got to know her.

It was a freezing November's day and Dave was sprinting down the street. 'Of course,' he mumbled under his breath, 'it snows like the Arctic and my alarm doesn't go off, so now I have to get somewhere fifteen minutes away in only five minutes.' He bolted past the local shops and darted across the road. He knew that the only chance of arriving to school on time was pure luck.

He turned around the corner and then he faced it, the only thing between him and the school, a now frozen lake. Dave knelt down and tucked his trousers into his socks. There was a tree next to him. He pulled a branch down and broke it in half. He stabbed the ice with his makeshift spikes. No cracks, it looked safe enough to cross. Dave began walking as quickly as he could without being too quick. Stab, stab, walk. Stab, stab, walk.

This was repeated and gradually Dave made his way across, until - stab, stab, crack! He turned his head over his shoulder, and tried to see where the sound came from. Another crack was heard; he began sprinting

across the rest of the ice. The ground fell from under him, just seconds after he began running – ‘No, no, no...’ Dave stood in less than a few inches of water. ‘Oh, terrific!’

Dave arrived into class just seconds before the bell rang. He looked up at the teacher and his class. ‘Mr Dunne, you’ve made it in by a hair.’ Dave smiled to himself. “However, you may want to put your shoes on the radiator. You can’t go around the class room with wet shoes on.” Dave took his shoes off to dry and looked to where he seat normally was, it wasn’t there. ‘Oh, yes. Another class needed a chair, so yours was taken. Just sit next to Ailish.’ The teacher pointed to the chair. Dave picked up his bag and sat down. ‘Alright then, what year did the French Revolution begin?’

Time dragged on through the day and soon it was the last class, English. Dave loved English class because not only was the teacher really nice but also because it gave him time to write about his day so far, so he wouldn’t forget anything that he needed to video. He decided that he would start with a clip from out of his window, at the snow, and then the clock, running late, and then the lake.

‘Alright then, David?’ said the English teacher. Dave looked up from his copy and stared at him.

‘Sorry sir, what did you say?’

The teacher waved his hand over the class. 'I told everybody to find out the most exciting thing about the person beside you.'

Dave took a sly look over at Ailish, who was writing in her copy.

'So get cracking,' said the teacher and walked away.

Dave sat up, closed his notebook and turned in his chair to face Ailish. He wondered why it would have to be the one girl in his class that he had a crush on that he would have to talk to.

'Alright then, my name's David, I'm sixteen and I guess my most interesting thing is that eh...I'm good at maths?' he said nervously.

'No, it's not,' replied Ailish, strongly.

'Sorry? What?' Dave asked, shocked. The idea that this girl thought she knew more about him than he did himself, interested him.

'Well, it's the fact that you make videos on the internet.' Dave's face began to turn red and he didn't know what to say. 'I've been watching your videos for a while and you're kinda funny and cute. Also, what you said in a few of your videos, that I'm beautiful, well that's not true.' Now it was her face that went red. Dave was still very confused and didn't know what to say. 'You even said you would jump out of a plane for me.'

Dave finally spoke. 'Well, that was only cause I hate heights.'

'Yeah, I know but...'. She paused as if scared about what she was going to say. 'Would you?'

'Why?' asked Dave, his voice smaller than expected. 'I was only joking really.'

'Well, your fans would like pay to see that and you'd get loads of money from your fans.'

Dave cut her off. 'No, I don't like where this is going.'

She sighed and leaned into him, 'In a few months,' she whispered, 'I'm not going to have any kidneys.'

That was the last time he had seen her - that day, that class, that sentence, those words. He hadn't seen her after that. He made the plans with Pete, Beth and Sammy but nobody else. He had said in his videos, many a time, the date and time he would be doing the jump, so people knew when to watch. But never the place, so she couldn't have possibly known.

As the instructor's face appears in front of his, he joins his thumb and index finger together to make the OK sign. He stands up and the door opens. The camera is attached to his head and he knows it is streaming to the computer down below, so he gives them the OK sign

too. He leans out of the door and with the wind rushing past his face he lets go of the handles, and he falls.

Pete, Sammy, Beth and Ailsih are all waiting in the middle of the field, next to the target, where Dave is set to land. Sammy and Pete are carrying a table and computer equipment to begin setting up the live stream.

'Thanks for telling me where this was happening, Pete,' says Ailish, as they walk.

'No problem. I felt you needed to be here.'

Beth hit him in the back of the head and whispered into his ear. 'Did you really do that? Dave isn't going to be the happiest person when he lands.'

'I don't care, 'cause he doesn't know what he needs to be happy.' He placed the table down and pointed at Ailish. 'She is what will make him happy.'

'Thank you, Pete.'

They both looked at her. They were silent, they didn't know that she could hear them.

'Everybody, the image is coming through,' shouted Sammy Boy.

They all walked over and looked at the computer screen. He was sitting and the instructor was talking to him.

'Alright, we're gone live.' A webpage opened up and thousands of comments flowed in from random users of the site.

TheKingBigfoot: You da man David

MyNameMeansMe: Hope you dnt hurt youself

JGreen77: You're great for doing this for a friend.

Many, many more flowed in, some near impossible to read at the speed they went by.

The screen went to Dave's fingers making the OK sign, and then he was gone out of the plane. They all watched, nobody said a word. They just watched as he fell and fell and fell, and they jolted back up as his shoot was filled with air. Then they saw him, looking around at the fields and at the skies. Then he looked and saw the target. He kicked, and started to get his aim to hit the middle of the target. He slowly came down, and then he looked up again at the car park as a car arrived, and then he looked back down.

They all walked over to the target, but Sammy Boy waited by the computer. Dave had landed in the middle ring and ran along trying to stop his momentum. Sammy flashed an animation on the screen that said, '100 Points!' He then changed from the head-cam to a standing one, over next to the target, and with everybody in it.

Dave was standing but his legs were shaking like jelly and everybody could tell. He fell backwards and lay on his back, breathing in and out heavily, and laughing. Pete, Beth and Ailish sat down next to him and Sammy

connected to his handheld camera. Beth and Pete exploded party poppers all over him, and they began laughing too.

'Anything to say to all the people watching you, Dave?' said Sammy Boy, as if interviewing him.

Dave sat up and looked at Ailish. 'I would never do that again.' He took a breath. 'Unless one of you need a kidney too?'

Everybody laughed but nobody noticed the two people who were marching over to them.

'Ailish O'Connor, how dare you even think that you could leave without my permission,' shouted one of the people, a woman, coming towards them.

'Shit,' said Ailish. She leaned over Dave and whispered into his ear, 'I love you, come see me in hospital. You aren't allowed in for three months, but I want you to see me then.' Two hands pulled her off Dave, by her shoulders.

'I know that hospitals are boring but you can't just leave them,' the woman said.

'Yeah, yeah, I know. It doesn't matter anymore, let's go.' She turned and winked at Dave. 'I'll see you all later, guys,' and they walked away.

'Well, you've got to be kiddin' me! Get it? Kiddin' me? Kidney?' Laughed Pete, and Beth hit him in the back of the head again.

WAR

A Glimpse of Hope

Martin Killeen

'Nothing is ever easy enough, we can never expect anything to fall into place. We must create the future.'

I stepped into the plane, all geared up, trying to convince myself I was ready, while blocking my mind from the truth. After the brief, I was feeling even more fearful. We were above Berlin now and all I could hear were the sounds of war. This was going to be my first time on the battlefield, and I had to start off jumping from an aircraft.

'OK! When this light goes green, YOU JUMP! Don't think! Just go for it!' Our private screamed at us over the noise. 'STAND UP!' he shouted, and we all made our way to our feet as the plane frantically shook. The light went green. 'GO! GO! GO!'

One by one I saw the other soldiers disappear into the air. I moved up, I was not ready. I was the only one left to jump. I leaned out the door and froze.

'GO!!' The private pushed me out and I was immediately swallowed by the wind. Everything was a blur, noise all around me, intense pressure. I couldn't breathe. I was falling at an incredible pace. I soon remembered what I had to do. I pulled my parachute and felt a strong tug upwards. As my falling came to a halt, I then began slowly drifting downwards towards the ground, recovering from the fright, but losing concentration. I had jumped too late. I was falling straight into enemy territory. I glanced around, panicking, searching for a green flare, or a light...or anything...

After regaining consciousness, I stood up and began to think again. I had landed in a narrow, dark alley. I was hurt, but it didn't stop me as I searched for safety. Now the noise of German soldiers was more distant. As far as I knew, I was in their territory, but I had passed them out, I had skipped the battlefield. It was like

a false feeling of safety, but I was lost. I didn't know which way to go, and I was far away from the rest of my division. I scrambled in the darkness, trying to find my rifle, hoping it had landed near me.... But it hadn't. I had no weapon. Now all hope seemed further away. I searched myself for anything I could use. A knife, a hand grenade, and a smoke grenade. Not too bad. I began to wander around the quiet, dead streets.

After only about twenty minutes of walking I began to hear voices. They weren't speaking English. I glanced around the corner and saw them, two German guards. They were closer than I had expected. One spotted me. The look on his face was frightening. He pointed at me, shouting. I turned and ran, as fast as I could, without looking back. The sound of gunfire pierced my ears, bullets whizzed past my head and buried themselves in the walls and buildings ahead of me. I took a sharp left down a long narrow alley. Not the best decision, but I had to get out of their line of fire.

Soon enough I was in their sight again as another spray of bullets whizzed past. I kept sprinting as fast as I could to get to the end of the alley. I heard shouting once again, and another spray of bullets. I dived out into the street and out of their sight. I had been hit. I hit the ground and was out into the street. I quickly felt a sharp piercing pain in the back of my leg. I

couldn't get to my feet, they were nearing the end of the alley.

I searched myself, grabbed the hand grenade, pulled the pin, and threw it sideways, deflecting it off the wall and into the alley. The clattering sound of the grenade against the cobblestones brought my enemies to a halt - BANG!!!

All I could hear was ringing, apart from the distant sounding roars from my enemies. Smoke erupted quickly into the street. I dragged myself over and looked down into the alley when there was silence. They were certainly dead. I treated my leg the best I could, and after a few minutes of recuperation, I decided to start moving again.

But after what seemed like hours of wandering, I was only more lost, crossing a field on the outskirts of the city. Now I wasn't even sure what way I was going, I had lost my compass. I wasn't anywhere near the battle at all. My energy levels low, hurting, starving, freezing in the rain, I didn't feel the will anymore. I couldn't walk another step. I let myself fall down into the long grass to die...

My Struggle

Steven Byrne

January 2nd 1945

Today I moved into my neighbour's house along with my parents. We knew that we could not stay in our own house after the constant discrimination of the Jewish race. This discrimination started with the appointment of a Mr Adolf Hitler. The first of the discrimination started

with us having to wear the Star of David everywhere we went, but the discrimination became more and more immoral. Many of our kind fled Germany but we stayed. My parents told me that it is not safe to go out until the Nazi army are defeated so now we have to keep in this underground basement, with no electricity and very little sunlight, in our neighbour's home.

January 3rd 1945

It is the second day in this underground dwelling and I am already becoming sick of it. We have only one mattress for me and my two parents, and we can't leave in case we are seen by the Nazis. The dark loneliness of the room has already started to drive me crazy, so hopefully the war will finish soon.

January 24th 1945

Yesterday there was an explosion that shook the ground itself. We are all hoping that the allies are gaining a foothold in the war. The explosion was monstrous and nearly knocked me right off my feet.

February 17th 1945

It's like I'm trapped in a box down here. There was a very nervous moment last week when the door of the house was kicked in by the Nazis as they rummaged the house

in search of any Jews being kept illegitimately. Luckily enough they did not find the secret door to our underground dwelling. Five days later though we were not as lucky, as the Nazi army stormed through the secret door, beating me and my parents half to death before throwing us in throwing us into the back of their van. The last thing that I saw that day was our neighbours being beaten and then brought around the corner. The last noise that I heard was that of a gunshot.

February 27th 1945

We have been taken to a concentration camp in Auschwitz. Life in the concentration camp is hard. We were stripped of all of our possessions and were given blue and white jumpsuits to wear at all times. We work countless hours every day with little to no food and sleep. Yesterday a group of people were rounded-up and taken away to a little room. Hours later a horrible aroma filled everybody's nostrils. We haven't seen them since and hoped they had been let free, and we hoped we would be too.

But today, after a tedious day's work, I could not find my parents. I looked everywhere but they could not be found. Another prisoner of the concentration camp, Shmuel, said that he saw them being rounded-up right

before the horrible fumes, so hopefully when I get out of here they will be waiting for me on the other side.

March 16th 1945

Even more people were admitted to our camp today. It's becoming very overcrowded and there is little room left where we sleep. The more people that seem to be admitted to the camp the more horrible fumes seem to be omitted from that secret room. Many people are becoming weak in the camp. A few people have collapsed but there is no sympathy shown by the Nazis who beat anyone too weak to struggle through the pain of this constant work.

The work in this place is unbearable and everybody is slowly becoming weaker and weaker. Many people are becoming senseless within the metal cage which is our home. Countless weeks have passed since I was imprisoned and I do not know if I can last much longer. My legs are beginning to feel like jelly and my hands have begun to shake unbearably. Hopefully my parents did get free from this hell and are now living back in our home. It has become clear that I am not the only person who is going insane inside this camp. A prisoner who had probably went insane from the gruelling physical labour tried to climb the electric fence yesterday. Nobody knew if he actually thought that he

might get over the fence or if he was just committing suicide.

March 18th 1945 – the rebellion

Today there was a rebellion within the camp. A group of about one hundred prisoners came together to try and fight their way to freedom. The rebellion did not last long though and every Jew who played any part in the rebellion was shot on the spot, along with another one hundred, to try and stop any further rebellion from us.

March 21st 1945 - few days after the attempted rebellion

A man came to the camp. He is obviously high up in the German army because he was treated with great respect and was surrounded by soldiers at all times. They called him the Fuhrer.

I was sent to a banquet room for the Nazi army in the camp to do the cleaning. There was a big turkey breast in the bin. I quickly glanced down the hall. There was nobody in sight. I ran over to the bin and picked up the turkey. It was still warm. I began devouring the meat as if I had never eaten before in my life. Suddenly, I heard a noise. My heart began pounding. You could nearly see it beating through my clothes. I turned

around slowly and saw a Nazi soldier glaring at me as if I had done something terrible. I dropped the turkey back in the bin.

The soldier began to approach me and I stumbled backwards. The next thing I knew I was walking out of the banquet room with a black eye and a broken arm. It was nearly worth it though, as it gave me the energy to keep on working, at least for a couple more days.

April 2nd 1945

A few days have passed since the incident in the banquet room. My eye has begun to heal but my arm was put in a sling by another one of the prisoners who used to work as a doctor. This has made work even more difficult, as if it wasn't bad enough already.

I can hear gunshots outside the camp!

Hours later

The Nazis quickly ran outside to the aid of their comrades when they heard the gunshots. There was suddenly no work being done in the camp, for probably the first time ever. Everybody had found shelter from the gunshots outside. There was mayhem outside the camp. Bullets were flying everywhere. A couple of prisoners

within the camp decided to try and make a break for the gate. They did not get far though. A few Nazi soldiers guarding it shot them down instantly.

The battle outside continued but it looked like the more numerous allied army was gaining a foothold in the war. Finally, the Nazi army surrendered right before our eyes. The camp was over the moon but many people wondered what was going to be done with us.

The allies entered the camp and released everyone right away, as well as opening every room for all to see. As I was looking through the camp I remembered that mysterious room from where people never seemed to return, including my parents. I quickly began walking to that mysterious room that had exuded those horrible fumes. My walk began to turn into a run as my anticipation grew. I finally reached the room. The door was closed. I took a breath and opened the door.

Inside was a room with the clothes we had to wear and another door. I opened the other door to find a soldier inside. I asked him about the room and he began to explain the gas chamber to me. I was distraught.

The camp will be closed along with all other camps of its kind. The Nazi army are defeated and I have

to try and struggle on with life, constantly remembering the unbearable time I spent in the camp and the gruesome suffering my parents would have went through.

SPORT

An Opportunity

Ben McEntee

Meet Jason Jonson, a 14 year old from Drumcondra, North Co. Dublin. Jason lives with his single-parent mother in a rundown two-bedroom apartment. Although Jason and his mother don't get to spend a lot of time together, they are very close.

Jason has some anger issues and they have cost him an education. He was kicked out of his first school for consistently losing his head with teachers during class, and for picking fights with anyone who annoyed him in the slightest! Now out of school, Jason often finds himself getting into more trouble than the average teenager, not because of drinking or smoking, the kind of things that are usually associated with teens, but for breaking anything in sight with a football. You see, Jason has a talent, a footballing talent; he has deadly accuracy, a tight touch and a passion for the game which eluded many other talented footballers.

Nowadays Jason spends his time walking around with a football at his feet, setting little challenges for himself as he sees them. As the days went by he got better and better. Day after day Jason often got himself in trouble because he was forever breaking *auld ones'* belongings.

One morning Jason got up and got himself some breakfast. Once he had finished he headed out to the

local park, where he spotted a group of lads having a kick-about. Jason sat on the bench beside the self-made pitch and watched. A friend of Jason spotted him sitting on the bench and asked him would he like to even up the teams. Without even thinking about it, Jason said, 'Yes,' and hopped up off the bench. Even though Jason was half the size of these lads, he ran the show. Many of them were taken by surprise by how skilful he was.

There were a few onlookers but nothing unusual. One man took particular interest in Jason and wanted to make it his business to go and speak with him at the end of the game. Due to other commitments the man had to leave. Was this an opportunity that had eluded Jason without him even knowing?

This man had connections to Glasgow Celtic F.C, a team that Jason supported, being a Catholic and all that! In fact, this man went by the name of Packie Bonner.

Packie felt he'd missed an opportunity in not talking to this young man. But his luck was in. On route back to his car he spotted the boy crossing the road about fifty metres down the street. Suddenly, he yelled out, 'Hey, kid!' and moved quickly towards him, for a

man of his age, anyway. Jason was a bit amused by the sight of a fifty year-old man jogging towards him.

Packie reached Jason and said, 'I saw you playin' in the park a few minutes ago. You're handy enough.'

'Thanks,' replied Jason, still a bit confused that someone would come up and say that out of the blue.

'You play?' questioned Packie.

'No. Just in the park and about the place, not for a club.'

'Why's that?'

'Money. No money for me to use on registration fees and boots and the rest of it.'

'Is that so?'

'Yeah! I don't mind though, I don't need to play for a club. I like playing round in the park.'

'I see. Where are you going now?'

'Dunno, just around here, I suppose.'

'Would you like to get something to eat? I'd like to talk to you about something.'

'About what?'

'Just something, come on!'

Packie and Jason arrived at a local café. Packie bought Jason some lunch and they started chatting, about everything, really, like why he wasn't in school and what he did every day, and his family background and other stuff.

Funnily enough, although they were talking for nearly an hour, Jason had no idea who Packie was.

'Not being rude or anything, but who are you?' Jason asked.

'Good questioned,' replied Packie, and so he told him.

After he told Jason about his 642 appearances for Celtic, 80 appearances for Ireland, and all the honours he ever won, Jason was simply in awe and had a bunch of questions to ask him. But the question that most interested Jason was, 'Do you think I'd have a chance of making it?'

'Honestly, I think you have every chance of making it. In fact, that's what I really wanted to talk to

you about. You see, I was very impressed with you in the park and I'm currently on a scouting call over here.'

My Personal Triumph

Jeff Richardson

I'm Jeff Richardson and I am a goalkeeper. I currently play for Ballybrack F.C. It is a good football club, or soccer club as the GAA heads would call it. I play with the 18s and 17s so it is good experience when I play a year ahead of myself with the 18s. Then when I play with the 17s it is a very high standard of football so I am only gaining good game time whatever age group. I have been playing football since I was knee high. Football is the only ever sport I ever felt passionate about. Of course I've played other sports within the schools I've been in, such as Gaelic and athletics. I was never really slow but never the fastest either, so the athletics never panned out too good.

The All-Ireland Cup is a competition for all schoolboy football age groups. There is a competition per age group from U11s to U19s. The competition is a knockout from the start since there are so many football clubs in Ireland.

It was the first year I joined the club; we had been having a great All-Ireland Cup run. We had almost been the surprise package of the tournament. This is because the season before more than half the team had left at the end of the season, some for England, for clubs

such as Derby and Manchester United. About six from last year's squad joined Bray Wanderers Elite squad for the U19s Elite League. The team that I was on had only two players left from the last season. That meant that the team had a new face to it and this meant we could now adapt a new form of football. That pre-season we all worked our arses off. We got to know how everybody on the team thought and played the game.

We started our All-Ireland Cup run very well, winning 4-0 against a lower league team called Knocklyon. We went on to beat another lower league team, Cabinteely, 6-2.

When the draw came out for the last thirty-two, there was mixed opinions on the draw. Away to Salthill Devon from Galway. A couple of my other mates had got other decent draws that maybe we would have liked.

Dan and Ste were friends of Ben and I. Dan was with Joey's and Ste was with Stella Maris. Ste had drawn Cherry Orchard, at home, and Dan Home Farm, away.

The day came when we had to travel to Galway. When we got there we were delighted to see a lovely pitch with an unreal playing surface. When the match got under way, right from the start I could sense it would be a good day. I made a few good decisions and early saves. My kicking was good and we were all over them in the first twenty minutes. Then they got a break

through. A counter attack from one of our corners at their end led to four of their players against two of our defenders, and me in nets. The striker ran his way past Ben and squared it across to the winger running up in support, who slotted it into the open net, leaving me helpless. At half-time we got a bollocking and it certainly worked because we went out and got an early second half goal. We weren't going to let this opportunity pass us and we did something about it. After we got our first goal, we had the confidence and finished the game 3-1. A hard won victory which we fully deserved, given the amount of effort put into the second half.

When we got home we found out that Cherry Orchard had beaten Ste's Stella Maris 2-1, which sounded like a tight game. This meant that we would have Cherry Orchard in the next round at home. I would treat this like my final. At the training sessions during the week before the match everybody was putting 110% into it. I was working as hard as I could, just to make sure I maintained my starting position for the upcoming Sunday. Maybe I was going too hard and needed to relax a little bit. I felt a small niggle in my left knee that had been giving me jip in the past. I stupidly kept going and didn't tell my manager.

As soon as I got home I told my Dad. He called me a Muppet for not stopping. He got an ice-bag

together and wrapped it around my knee with cling-film. I took it easy and my knee began to feel better. With a spring in my step I was ready for Sunday.

The Sunday of the game came and I was more than ready, I was pumped. My Dad told me not to get too wound-up. He loosened me up and told me to relax and be myself, play my usual game. When I arrived to the club the manager told me to go into dressing room number three, where all the lads were already. The smell of Deep Heat greeted me as I walked in. 'The smell of football!' my Dad said. Black tape was brought specially for the occasion, and was doing its rounds around the dressing room, going on the lads' socks. The team was called out and it was probably the most relieved I've ever been because I had maintained my starting position in the team. My Dad warmed me up before the game and told me to play like it was the last game I would ever play. This was my time to shine he told me.

We went into the dressing room after a good warm up. Every one of us just wanted to go out and get the game started. I prepared my brand new Adidas Finger Save gloves and my trusty Umbro Speciali. I dampened my gloves a tad and the grip felt good on them. I couldn't wait to start plucking balls out of the air from crosses and was more than ever wanting to get out on the pitch and play!

I threw my jersey over my shoulders and tucked the front of it into my shorts to make it look like it was tucked in. I never liked playing with my jersey tucked in and my sleeves down. It felt like they were in the way. So I tucked my jersey in at the front, rolled my sleeves up, taped my wrists and my fingers, and walked out with the rest of the team onto the pitch. Soon after Cherry Orchard walked out onto the pitch and we gave them the stares to try make it as uncomfortable as possible. It didn't seem to faze them in the slightest, they just gave them back to us.

Finally, the game got underway and we both got at each other straight away. It promised to be a fiery encounter. They passed the ball around very well and in the early stages of the game you could see the difference in the level of football they played. I remember our pacey right-winger dribbling, running rings around the Cherry Orchard defence, and shooting. The keeper appeared to have saved it and held onto the ball, but our striker was aware he'd blundered and he pounced on the opportunity of a dropped ball from the keeper and struck it into the roof of the net. It took a couple of seconds for it to sink in that we had scored and were leading one-nil against Cherry Orchard. We couldn't afford to keep our mind on that single goal, so

our captain ordered for us to keep the momentum and not let the work slip.

It seemed that no one had listened and The Orchard jumped at the opportunity of us getting sloppy. Their striker - a big, tall, well-built lad - was storming through our midfield and eventually our defence into the penalty box. Ben had no option but to slide and hope for the best. What Ben had hoped for didn't work out. The Orchard striker was too quick and skipped passed the challenge and fell to ground just like Cristiano Ronaldo. I would have given the dive 8.5. I knew the second he went down the referee would whistle for a penalty, which he did.

Their well-built striker stood up to take the opportunity to level the match right before half-time. I did all I could to delay the spot-kick and distract the striker. As he began his run up I decided I was going to dive to my right because it looked like he was going to kick it across his body. I was right, and for that split second I thought I had it covered, but as the ball fired towards my right hand I only then realised how powerful the shot was. I could only manage to deflect it onto the inside the post and in. I was gutted, but I had to get on with it.

The half-time whistle blew and I jogged towards the halfway line where the squad was circled around our

manager. He gave us encouragement and told us we had nothing to lose and to go out and give it our all.

The ref blew his whistle to signal the end of half-time, our manager gave us a few last words, and we all burst out, all fired-up, to get a second goal. Obviously we were so fired-up about getting a second goal that we completely forgot about defending, because they attacked us with a counterattack, four of their players against one of my defenders and me in the goal. It was inevitable that one of the strikers, the one with the ball, would pull wide and then just square the ball in. Well, at least I thought it was. But then the Cherry Orchard player with the ball took an early powerful shot which surprised me and I had to parry, only to parry wide to the tricky winger off the Orchard and he slotted home leaving me with no hope. This goal deflated us and gave Cherry Orchard even more hope of getting a couple more passed us.

The game ended up 3-1 to The Orchard and overall I was very pleased to get to that stage of the All-Ireland Cup. My Dad said he was very proud of me. When I got home, I was welcomed by my uncle Damien and my goalkeeper coach to congratulate me on how far I had gone. My coach said he would get more out of me in the coming years.

A Day I Never Shall Forget

Kyle Braine

It was the 29th of August, the day before the big day, our final! I play for Cuala GAA and we were in the championship Final against Kilmacud Crokes. It was being held in Parnell Park. I was very nervous but mainly excited and ready for war. Cuala and Crokes are rivals and have been for many years. Any match we play against each other, no matter what age, it is always an intense and very physical battle. These two teams playing against each other is like Manchester United playing Manchester City at Old Trafford.

On the day of the final I felt very nervous. The match was at three o'clock in Parnell Park. My team and I were meeting at one o'clock in Thomastown so we could all travel in together and look professional. We all had matching tracksuits and we looked the part.

We arrived at Parnell Park at 13:45 and the crowd was very small. We went into the dressing room,

changed into our gear and went out onto the pitch to do our warm-up. The atmosphere was rising. There was no sign of Crokes. We began walking back into the dressing room when Crokes busted out and ran onto the pitch. We looked at each other, we knew we were in for a battle on the field that day.

Kilmacud had six dangerous players we really needed to look out for but we had fifteen they needed to look out for, so we were going to let them chase us. We would be the leaders on the field so they would have to counteract what we did.

It was ten minutes until throw in. Our whole team were in the dressing room pumping each other up and promising to each other that we would give it our all until the very end, so we could come out as winners.

Both teams were in the tunnel and were ready to go out onto the field. The tension was rising. Both teams ran out and the crowds were going wild, people cheering on both teams. We faced the Irish flag and sang the national anthem. We got into our positions and everyone on both teams was pumped.

The sliotar was thrown in and the hurls clashed. I managed to get the sliotar in my hand and I gave a low ball into our speedy corner forward, 'Bolt,' as we call

him. He got it into his hand and put it straight over the bar. Our nerves were now settling and we could go out and hammer Crokes! Well, that's what we thought.

Their keeper pucked out the ball and it was collected by their midfielder. He then stuck it between the posts. We now knew we had a game on our hands. It was like a game of ping-pong for ten minutes of the first half, as no team could score. The tackles were flying in and every player on the pitch was putting their body on the line.

Five minutes before half-time and we managed to get a sneaky goal, all because Kilmacud's full-back slipped and Andy was through on goal. He made no mistake and put it in the top right-hand corner. We were relieved but kept fighting till half-time so we could stay ahead. The score at half-time was 1-1 to 0-2, to us.

We got a hard and heavy talk by our managers at half-time. I think that was what we needed to lift us up and finish Crokes in the second half. We both came out ready to drive into each other in a physical, but legal, way.

We were two points ahead and wanted to gain a bigger lead so they couldn't catch us. Their best player, Joey, was now playing full-forward for them and their

task was clearly to get the sliotar into him so they could get goals. Our full-back, Bomber, was a big man, but so was the man he was marking. They were taking lumps out of each other, but fairly, on the ball.

There were five minutes gone in the second half and we managed to gain our lead to four points. Our manager kept encouraging us and driving us on. The crowds were chanting and singing away as if they were in Croke Park on All-Ireland Final day.

Out of nowhere it started pouring rain and most people were slipping and sliding all over the pitch when they tried to get the ball. The speed went out of the game because players were trying to get the ball up, but it was too slippery and it was becoming harder to strike.

Then with ten minutes left and we were up by three points. Crokes were closing the gap towards the end of the game and both teams were getting tired. We just had to hang on to the end. Anytime we scored, they scored. I asked the referee how long was left and he said, quietly, 'One minute.'

I looked at Treacy and said, 'One more minute, mate.' He drove the rest of the players on and everyone realised we could actually be champions.

The sliotar went wide and our keeper pucked it long. The sliotar was in mid-air and the referee blew the whistle. We all jumped around and started hugging each other. I then fell to my knees with joy and couldn't believe what we had achieved as a team.

The speech was made and we gave three cheers to Crokes - they couldn't believe they lost but we couldn't believe we had won.

We went back into the dressing room and celebrated. By the time we were finished the dressing room was a mess. We left Parnell Park and went back to Cuala to celebrate. When we finally arrived at Cuala and entered the clubhouse, everyone was clapping and cheering us on. The whole club had come out, waiting for our arrival. We were delighted with what we had achieved for the club and we then knew we had made ourselves and the club proud. Celebrations continued on through the night and everyone went home safe and sound. The next day, everyone I saw said congratulations to me. It was the best two days of my life. We officially knew we were the best team in Dublin.

A Day I will Never Forget

Conor Byrne-McMahon

It was seven o'clock in the morning and it was the day of the All-Ireland Under 16's football final. I'm the goalkeeper for my team, Cabinteely Football Club, and we were in the final and we were playing against St Joseph's Boys FC. I was already starting to feel the pressure. I was really nervous as I hoped to play well that day and didn't know if I would, with all of the pressure that was on me and my teammates to win the biggest competition in Ireland at our age.

I got up out of bed and tried to get my head focused on the game so that I would be ready to do my very best to bring back the trophy to our club. I got my gear bag ready by putting my goalkeeper gloves, boots and shin guards in it, and went downstairs. My family were all downstairs supporting me and wishing me the best of luck. I felt more confident about the match now because of all the support I had and I wanted to do my family and club proud.

I had to leave my house and go to the clubhouse as we were getting a talk from our managers about the final before we went to the Aviva Stadium. Our managers said how proud they were of us and that we deserved to bring back the trophy because we'd done so well that season. We had a team breakfast in the clubhouse of pasta, fruit and juice to keep our energy levels up for the match. Before we left the clubhouse we had to sign forms and give our date of birth and our Birth Certificates, just to clarify that we were the right age to be playing in this final. It took a while to do but when we were all finished we started to get on to the club bus which was driving us to the Aviva Stadium.

We were on the bus on the way to the Aviva Stadium. We were singing away and our manager told us that we were going to be escorted by the police for the rest of the journey to the Aviva, so we would have enough time to get ready and get a warm-up in. I felt very important at this moment in time and I'd say the rest of the team did too, as we were being guided by the police; you can't just get a police escort for no apparent reason. Then, in my mind, I started to think about the game again and my nerves rose. I tried my best not to think about it.

It took us twenty minutes to get there with the police escort. It would have taken us forty-five minutes without it. When we arrived at the Aviva Stadium's back entrance, I was fascinated. I'd never been in that part of the stadium and I felt like a professional football player. We walked into the changing room. They were very big and had really nice bathroom and shower facilities.

But enough about the facilities of the place, it was time to get focused and get my head properly in the game. We all got changed and then the managers had another talk with us, just to boost our morale.

When everyone was ready we headed out onto the pitch for the first time. It was amazing. The grass was perfect, the pitch was very well levelled; it was just the most amazing place to play an All-Ireland football final. We had to do a slow jog up and down the width of the pitch, just to get us moving, when all of a sudden our best striker landed badly on his ankle and fell straight to the ground. My manager ran over as quick as possible and asked him if he was OK. He was screaming, as he was in a lot of pain. Our manager tried everything he could, he even got the physiotherapist in to have a look at him and it wasn't looking good for us.

Our manager had to get, John, our best striker, to the medical room for further inspection and we had

to continue our warm up. We lined up together and started stretching so we wouldn't pull anything beforehand.

Back in the dressing rooms everybody was looking very nervous as this was a big moment in our lives. We got our jerseys on, everyone's was white with bits of green and mine was yellow, as goalkeepers have to stand out from the rest of the team so there aren't any complications during the game. The managers gave us another boring speech about pride, but after hearing the same thing twice already we got the point and just wanted to get out onto the pitch and play as best we could.

Many things were rushing through my mind, like family and friends, managers, and coaches I'd trained with before. I owed it all to them for getting me that far in football, which is such a big part of my life. I walked out onto the pitch with my team and the other team were opposite us. It was like a professional football match when they walked out of the tunnel and ran out. There was a big crowd full of former Cabinteely players and present players who came to support us in our big game, and there were also a lot of St Joseph's supporters as well.

The Referee called both the captains over for the coin toss to see who would be taking tip off first. Sean, our captain, picked tails and he won the coin toss; as the phrase goes - tails never fails! We got to tip-off first.

The referee blew his whistle and the game began. We had possession of the ball and passed it around and our forward ran up the wing and crossed it in, but the opposing goalkeeper came running out and leaped towards the ball and punched it away from his net. I thought to myself, 'I hope I'm up to that standard of goalkeeping today because I don't want to embarrass myself in front of the hundreds of people who are here.'

The ball was in the centre of the pitch and two players ran in for it but the Joey's player won the challenge and ran the pitch. He ran through every defender we had and was now one-on-one with me. I ran out towards him to make the net smaller for him to score and he took a shot and it went straight into the top corner of my net. I was furious at my defenders for their terrible marking of players. The Joey's fans went crazy, they were cheering as their striker had just put their team one-nil up in the final.

Thirty-five minutes had gone and heads were starting to drop already, so I screamed to the team and said, 'We can do this! We're only one goal down,' and

heads started to rise and we looked more determined. We then won every ball from throw-ins, goal kicks, corners and even free-kicks. We now looked the better side and we had a few shots on target before the referee blew the whistle for half-time.

When I walked into the changing room I saw a few angry faces. I told everyone to keep a cool head as we were only one-nil down and there was still plenty of time to come back and win. 'We're playing well and we deserve to win, so we need to go out and play our very best.'

I got a bottle of water as I was dehydrated. The referee came into the changing saying that we had to come out as the second half was about to begin and our mangers just shouted to us, 'Give it your all, boys!' And we ran out onto the pitch with determination to win the game. We got into our positions and we were ready to come back and win the game.

The referee blew his whistle and the second half began. My team had the ball and our forward ran up the pitch got past many of the defenders and was one-on-one with the goalkeeper. He was about to take the shot when one of the defenders came towards him with a

two-footed challenge for the ball. He fell to the ground and we got a penalty-kick. We were delighted because if we scored it would be one-all.

Our midfielder, Jazz, was set to take the penalty. There was sweat dripping down his face. The pressure that was on Jazz at this moment was immense. He looked around and saw all of the fans, everyone that was watching the match looking straight at him. He walked to the spot where the ball was and looked the goalkeeper in the eyes. The ref blew the whistle and Jazz kicked the ball but the keeper saved it. The crowd went wild and the heads of some of our players went down. We were starting to lose hope.

Twenty minutes went by and we hadn't got much possession at all but in the last ten minutes we put all our effort in and had many chances to score. But they were either saved by the keeper, hit against the post, or kicked wide of the net. We hadn't got much time left to try and score an equaliser when St Joseph's got a corner kick. Most of their players pushed up for a chance to score. All my teammates were marking players tightly so we could try clearing it as easy as possible. The corner was taken and Robbo, our right-back, called it and went to head it away, but he knocked it right into the corner of the net and scored and own-goal. I went mad as I

thought we had a few minutes left to come back and score, and now we had just conceded an own goal.

The referee blew the final whistle and the opposite team were celebrating, running around and screaming their heads off. We, on the other hand, were silent and nearly in tears as this was our first loss of the year.

We had to wait to be given our silver medals as we came second in the final. We walked up to collect them and to my surprise I noticed that we were going to be receiving the medals from Shay Given - my idol! I thought he was the best goalkeeper in Ireland and it was going to be an honour to receive a medal from him.

So we got our medals and headed to the changing room as St Joseph's Boys were receiving the cup. We got all of our stuff and the manager said, 'Just go out, lads, and drink away your sorrows.' We all laughed, and that night we all went out to celebrate coming second in the cup. Even though we came second and we didn't win I was still happy that I had the chance to be in a final and play in front of many people, and, who knows, we may win it next year.

URBAN LIVES

PM Ink

David Qin

I've wanted to do this since I was young, when I saw a tattoo program. I wanted to be a tattoo artist and to show people my ability and all my ideas about tattoos.

My name is Shane and I'm from Liverpool but I'm living in London. I was working in this company that designs T-shirts; this was not what I liked to do, but I got a good wage and hoped to go round the world to study all the different skills of tattooing, if I saved enough money.

A few years ago I was in art college. I studied graphic design and developed my drawing skills, because that was the only subject that I felt interested in. I have to say that I didn't have a good time in the college, there were a few teachers who didn't really like me because I missed many classes. They thought I was

being cheeky for the whole time, but that's just me and I can't do anything to change myself.

The college thing wasn't my idea at all, but I had to go. If I didn't go to college then I wouldn't have had the drawing skills, and tattoo shops don't employ a person without any drawing ability and therefore no one would have employed me.

After I studied in the college I was told by my school that there was a company looking for art college students with art ability, so I went to the company and had my first job interview. The manager of this company really trusted me so I got this job, which was just to walk around the company building for a few days, to get used to the place. Then they put me into a team and I started doing some tough work.

I had been working for this company for two months and I could remember all the names of the staff in the company. There were three people in my team, used to be five, but Frank and Charlie decided to design their own cartoon program and they left. It was more difficult, then, for three people, and I wanted to leave after few weeks. I thought there would be many shops in town that would be looking for a tattooist, and I hoped I could get a new job as soon as possible.

It was a Friday, a very important day for me, and I was looking forward to another job interview. The shop was called PM Ink, because this shop never closed until twelve PM, even when there were no customers. I hoped they would take me as a part of the team. They called me just after seven, and I grabbed my hoodie on the chair and sprinted into my white BMW.

I arrived and walked into the shop. I saw Tim talking to Lucas and then they realised it was me. We talked about our experience of tattoos and how we found out tattooing was interesting, for an hour. I was a bit nervous at first but after the conversation I found out that they are very friendly and they thought I had the talent for this job. So Tim hired me for two months, just to see if I could learn the basic skills. I had to work from Monday to Friday, from seven pm to eleven pm. I was so excited that night, my friends and I got drunk.

In the shop there were five tattooists. The shop owner had sixteen years of experience working with tattoos and he was my new teacher. People called him Timmy. The other four staff were Joe, Brian, Lucas and Moka. Each person had their own favourite types of tattoos: Joe was good at black and grey tattoos; and Brian was brilliant at old school tattoos; Moka was a Japanese girl and she was good at Japanese tattoos and also portrait tattoos. All of them had worked in this shop

for over five years, and Lucas had been working in another shop but just came there three months before. He was also really skilful.

Four months later and I was having a great time. I had studied a lot of new skills and Tim thought I was ready to do a tattoo all by myself. I thought, 'I'm ready to do this.' I woke up in the morning and had some breakfast, then drove to the shop. The girl was there waiting for me, she wanted an angel on her right arm. So I set up everything and was ready to start. Twenty minutes later I had completed it. She thought it was perfect, and I was glad that she was happy.

I got better and better after doing different types of tattoos, and one day there was a girl that wanted wings on her back. It took me a long time to complete it, but I still finished it.

Time is running fast and three years have now passed. Tim left the shop and went to travel around the world to study tattoos. Because I loved this job and I was so talented at it, I bought the shop from Tim and I am working with the staff to keep the business going. But I'm still learning new stuff. Maybe in a few years I can be even better than my teacher.

Donal's Story

Jeff Vavasour

My name is Donal. I have been living in Ireland since the day I was born. I work as a project manager. It is difficult to get to work most days. I struggle with getting public transport. I can't drive either. I went to school like a normal person, normal class, normal teacher and normal friends. However it was never the same. People admire me for doing what I did, going to school, and what I do now, working and earning money. The last thing I want is people to pity me. I got this far and I don't want to feel like I'm not independent, to be treated like a child. Sorry, I think I forgot to mention, I lost both my arms in a bus accident when I was four.

I started writing as I like people to get to know me and get an opinion of me before they see me and automatically feel sorry for me. This way I can express my feelings also and show my knowledge before people judge me. Of course at some time I must mention my disability, but it is easier this way.

You may be wondering how I do certain things. That is always everyone's first question. I start the day off by waking up and getting breakfast. I am fed through a tube, which sounds much worse than it actually is. I walk to the train station where I get a free pass every day. I head down to my office in town where I work various hours on different days. I love my job as a project manager. I lead people and instruct them on how to get jobs done. This way people do not look down on me, and have respect for me also. My quick thinking and good communications partly make up for my disability.

You may also be wondering why I don't use prosthetic arms. I think everybody should take what their given and not complain. Get up and get on with things, is my motto. I don't feel like I need plastic arms. If the world was this way, why wouldn't everybody just get fake strong arms and be fake strong.

I experience many *looks* through the day. I wake up in the morning to a *look* of pity, yet struggling to

smile to make me feel better. I go out in the day and receive a *look* of, 'What's that guy doing outside?' I come home at night where I get a *look* of concern. I have grown up with these my whole life and I have learned to brush them off. Most people feel like they have to express their feelings to someone else and have to talk about it. I like to keep it to myself, I don't like talking to people about it. In a way I like to just try to ignore everything. I hate when people approach me and say, 'Are you ok? Are you feeling alright?'

I have written about many feelings and thoughts throughout my life and these are just some of the few I have chosen to write about today. Tomorrow I will feel differently and write about those. I just like to carry on with life and live it to the full. I have a happy life and earn more than most.

I hope this has taught people to not take anything for granted and to respect what they have. Everyone should live life with what they have and enjoy it without any regrets.

TALES FROM OTHER CITIES

The Change

Mark Richardson

It was eight o'clock in New York and the momentum of the morning rush was gathering pace. The early risers were making their way to work. As the clock struck nine, or *morning rush hour*, as some may call it, the traffic became hectic and figures in grey and black suits flooded the sidewalks, all in a great state of panic. The sky was its usual colour of grey, giving the impression

that rain was about to come crashing down from the monstrous clouds.

On the outskirts of the city, quiet beggars and the homeless awoke on the side of streets. In Harlem Street, New York, ten apartment blocks lay huddled together. They were tall, grey, dull buildings with low rent and small apartments inside. Odd windows were smashed and graffiti covered the side of one of the buildings. Inside there was a person sleeping on the stairs with a bottle of vodka in his hand. As you walked up the stairs you would discover syringes on the ground, dirty and smashed.

The door at number 156, on the 10th floor, was old and rundown. You could just make out the apartment number from the wood that had faded in this area. The door knob was loose but still managed to keep the door shut. Inside, the room was small. The apartment consisted of one large room and one small. The large one was a bedroom, sitting room and kitchen all in one, and the smaller one was a bathroom. There were clothes piled in one of the corners. The floorboards were dirty and rundown and there were empty food tins all over the place. The sad excuse for a kitchen was piled with dirty plates and pots. There was a small desk in the corner of the room. It was covered in paper. Some

crumpled up into balls and some in piles on the desk. The rubbish bin was overflowing with paper and the owner had resorted to just throwing the paper around the bin.

The bathroom door was locked. If you listened carefully you could hear a sort of whimpering, as if a small dog was inside crying to get attention. Inside the rundown bathroom, the window was open and there lay a dark hooded figure, standing on the window ledge, crying. The tall slim figure was shaking from the cold and the nerves. A drop of sweat ran through his long, thick brown hair, past his bright blue eyes and ran off his chin. He grabbed hold of the sides of the window and leaned his body forward. He shut his eyes as tight as he possibly could, clenched his whole face and let out a scream. His whole body jolted back through the window into the bathroom, leaving him lying on the floor. He breathed heavily as he lay there, silently.

There was a ringing noise from the room inside. It was his house phone. He got up, walked inside, and picked up a large grey phone. 'Smith residence.'

'Hello, Terry? This is Marina from the New York Press. Yes, we're sorry but we're once again not going to publish your new book, *Hope*. If you have any questions please contact the editor.'

'What? This is the fourth book this year, man! How do you expect me to survive in this city with no income?'

'Look, Mr Smith, you want my advice? Quit the writing, move back home, spend time with your family and choose a new career. Because it seems to me that this one is taking you nowhere.'

Terry's eyes began to water. He opened his mouth to speak again but she had hung up. He collapsed on the floor and began to cry.

There was a firm, hard knock on the door. Terry lifted his head. There was another knock, but this time harder. 'I know you're in there, Terry. I can hear you crying like a little...'

There was a long pause. Terry had his hand over his mouth trying to silence his breathing. Suddenly there was a large thump on the door, slightly unhinging it. The man outside was in the process of slamming his whole body into the door, trying to break it in. 'I'm gonna give you five seconds and if you don't come to the door I'm gonna burst it open.' Terry let out a small shriek. 'Five, four, three, two...'

Terry jumped up and ran to the door. He scuffled his hair and opened the door, slowly, trying to give the impression that he had just woken up and perhaps had not heard the man knocking. 'Eeerrmm, hello, ' he said, not making eye contact with his pursuer.

The man immediately burst through the door, grabbing Terry by the scruff of the neck and forcing him up against a wall. 'Remember me, mate?' Terry was shaking frantically. 'You got my money, punk?'

Terry considered the question for a moment. 'You see, business isn't going so well at the moment and...'

The man cut him off mid-sentence and pressed his face against Terry's as he shouted at him. 'That's the same excuse every time and this time I ain't falling for it! I'm going to give you an hour, Terry. And at the end of the hour, if you haven't got my money, I'm gonna bring my little friend who's stowed away in my drawer, and we're both going to knock some sense into you!' The man's face retreated and his clench on Terry got tighter. He flung Terry on the floor and stormed out the door in a rage.

Terry lifted his head from the floor and looked at the old, cracked clock on one of the walls. He read out

the time, '13:10,' and let out a large groan as he buried his head in his hands. He sat there wasting ten minutes of his hour just thinking about how he could get the money to pay off his debt. Then suddenly it hit him, what the woman from the New York Press had said on the phone; he had nothing, nothing to lose, he might as well have a fresh start and move back home.

He stood up, feeling a lot better than he had a few moments ago. He walked over to the counter and picked up a set of keys. Then he looked around and considered the rest of the items in the room. He picked up three or four items and threw them in a plastic bin-liner he had found lying on the floor. He walked to the front door and had another look around the apartment, smiling before shutting the half-broken door.

He sprinted down the narrow staircase, taking two steps on at a time. Finally he reached the end, bursting through the main door, struggling to keep his footing. He ran across the road to a murky green car, rummaging in his pocket for his keys. As he went to put the key in the car door, he looked up and realised the door was gone and his dashboard had been smashed up. He put the keys in the ignition but the car wouldn't start. Terry cursed under his breath, lifting his head. Suddenly he caught the eye of a person walking into the

apartments on the other side of the road. It was the man who had threatened him not more than forty-five minutes ago.

Terry jumped with surprise and found himself lost for words. His pursuer drew closer and Terry stood there, mouth wide open, startled.

'Hey, man, you're early. I haven't had any time!' he shouted at him. The man drew closer, ignoring what Terry said. He was now about ten feet away. Terry began to walk backwards in sync with his pursuer's steps. 'Please, just give me one more hour. I promise I'll have your money.'

Once again the man ignored him and with that Terry turned around and ran. A smile grew on his face. He knew he could outrun this man and he knew that's all he needed to do. He began to think of the opportunity that could arise and the new life he could lead back home. Who would have known you could feel so good when under so much threat and pressure, fearing for your life one minute, then loving it the next?

Terry began to laugh to himself. But then a smile arose on the face of the man as he reached to his belt. He pulled out a small handgun and aimed it at Terry, who was halfway down the road at this stage: BANG!

The sound of the shot lingered in the air for a couple of seconds, followed by a large groan from Terry. His pursuer watched as he fell heavily on the ground. He walked over to Terry's half-dead body on the road and smiled again.

'You messed with the wrong person this time, my friend.' He raised the gun again and shot Terry once more. The shot, this time, was a little louder than the last.

The man watched Terry's body on the ground, wiped his gun with a cloth and threw it beside Terry's body. The man walked away down the street and disappeared behind a corner shop, leaving Terry's dead body to be found by a citizen of the Big Apple.

The Escape

Conor Hayes

Carlos was a small man. Short legged but with a lot of raw power behind them. He wasn't that well-built though, it looked as if you sat on him you would hurt

him. He was a well-respected man. Many people said it was not respect, though, it was fear. He was the leader of a drugs gang and was always packing heat. But he found it hard to blend in as he had a big scar over his left eye and had long black hair. He fitted right in in San Francisco.

The night was young and Carlos and his gang were heading out to the local club for the night. They always went to the same nightclub, just on the edge of town, called Avids. The club owner knew the gang well and began to grow tired of them coming there every week, bringing drugs and guns to his club. The owner was too scared to do anything as he knew that Carlos carried a 9mm in his jacket. The final straw was when Carlos sold a young girl coke and she ended up in hospital. The club owner then tipped off the police on Carlos's whereabouts and the police hunted him down and arrested him for the sale of Class A drugs and the possession of a firearm.

Carlos was sentenced to five years in jail. He had regular contact with the outside world and with his gang mates. He contacted one of them a lot more than the others. The warden didn't think anything of this and this was his first mistake. Carlos told his mate to get clean off the drugs, settle down with a girl and get a job. Carlos

then told him he would contact him after he got the job and tell him his next move.

It was some three months later when Carlos made his next phone call to his gang mate. By this stage he had found a girlfriend and a job in the government office for Law and Defence. The plan Carlos had carefully put together was finally coming together. Now all he needed was to convince the other jail mates to help him out. To do this Carlos made some promises he might not be able to keep. This was a big risk as Carlos was not a big guy. Sure, he could outrun most men but you know the old saying, 'You can run, but you can't hide.' He also stood out like a sore thumb and wouldn't be hard to find. His plan all came down to whether or not the cellmates trusted him. At this stage it seemed they did. This was a perfect chance for Carlos to get out of that hellhole. Carlos convinced his cellmates to cause a distraction while he took the guards keys and made a break for it. The cellmates agreed, thinking that he would follow through with his promises.

The cellmates began a fight in the yard at exercise time. The guards got involved and tried to break it up but in all the confusion Carlos swiped the keys for his cell and the main doors from the guard's belt. He then left the fight and went off to the basketball

courts to get away from the fight so as not to raise any suspicion. The guards broke up the fight and the inmates were taken back to their cells and were punished with no dinner.

Carlos returned back to his cell after the yard time and thanked the cellmates and gave them his dinner as thanks. Later that night Carlos began to plan his escape. It began with getting out of his cell. After lights-out he got out of his cell and attacked a guard. He took the guard's uniform and walked out past security. As he was exiting the main gates of the prison, the alarms began to ring and the dogs were let out. Carlos was fast on his feet and made it far enough away before the dogs even got to the gate. Carlos was nearly a free man.

Carlos went to live with his friend who helped him out of the prison. The house he had was quite nice. It was a government issued house. He had a nice car, a hot girlfriend and he had it all. He gave Carlos some new clothes and new ID. He went from being Carlos Alvarez of Mexican birth to Tom Rodgers, born in Minnesota. Carlos found it hard to change his name but he knew it had to be done if he ever wanted to see his family in Mexico again. Carlos began going to local bars with his friend. John and Carlos had always been so close. They

had known each other from the time they could talk and walk.

They had been through a lot and now John had helped him out of jail they were closer than ever. John's plan was to find Tom (A.K.A. Carlos) a girlfriend. She would act as perfect cover while he tried to get a job in the government. Carlos knew that the government did background checks, so he got John to create a fake file and plant it in the system for the interview day. The Spyware would find the fake file, he knew, so John set it to delete when the background check was done.

This process took around two months and John's girlfriend began to grow tired of Carlos staying with them. She felt he got more attention than she did. John explained to her that Carlos needed his help and he wasn't going to leave him. She understood and began to be nicer to Carlos. This made it easier to work as there was no tension in the house anymore.

Carlos would go out and see his girlfriend every Monday and Thursday. Carlos worked every other night and she worked during the days. She acted as great cover for Carlos. He and John had told her about Carlos' past and she believed them. So whenever anyone asked who he was, she would tell the story and Carlos became known locally as Tom.

Five years after escaping from prison, Carlos had a family and a job in the government. He had a kid who was five years old and loved sports and was much like his father, only a much stronger lad.

As another two years passed, Carlos began planning to flee to Mexico, to be with his family. He took his car and left for Mexican Border without letting anyone know. He made it across the border with ease and met up with his family. They were overjoyed to see him. He moved in with them and continued with his life.

His wife and kid in San Francisco were scared, fearing he had been kidnapped, and they reported it to the police. The police took his computers and searched his house for any signs of him. They found nothing, initially, but on closer inspection found files on his past and details of where he was headed.

There was nothing the American government could do as he was in Mexico at this stage. All they could do was put out a *Most Wanted* poster with a reward of two million - *Dead or Alive!*

His family and son were devastated and his son took all the information on the computer and began to plan. He went to school and studied very hard. But his plan took many years to perfect. He went to the gym

every second day and became a big guy. The search through the information had revealed where Carlos went to live and who he was with.

One weekend the son took the bus to the Mexican border and passed through with no bother, as he was sixteen. He then went to the local market and bought a knife and made his way to his father's home. He waited outside till Carlos came home from work and then asked him could he come in and use his toilet and phone. He used the toilet and then used the phone to call the police to Carlos' house.

He then attacked Carlos. Carlos didn't stand a chance. He tried to fight back but with no success. During the fight his son took out his knife and drove it into Carlos' leg. This immobilised him. The police came shortly after to find him standing over Carlos. He was still alive.

The police brought Carlos to the hospital, and his son to the police station for questioning. After a few hours of questioning he was let go and received the reward for catching the FBI's most wanted man. His mother and him lived happily after that, and they visited Carlos once a year in his High Security prison. Shortly after Carlos's capture, his friend who had helped him was arrested too. They are both serving life without parole.

The Struggle
Karl Twomey

In the rat-infested and disease-riddled slums of Mumbai, lived Amir. A young Islamic boy living life rough on the brutal streets of Mumbai. Amir was a tall, feeble and fairly handsome fifteen year old boy, who spent the majority of his days begging and conning naïve tourists out of their petty change.

Amir had a shockingly horrific past; he came from a large family in the western Bengal region, where war and poverty raged. Amir had struggled to live in a tiny two-bedroom shack with his family of eight. Life there was just as jarring as it was living on the streets. Though there was one difference, he had a family who would stand by him no matter what. Well, that's what he thought at the time.

After the division of India and Pakistan, life for Amir changed dramatically - for the worse. Amir always had a vision, a vision in which all of India, regardless of their ethnic background, could stand hand-in-hand together in peace. But that wasn't the case. Hindus, morally outraged by the fact that they were handing over their land, began indiscriminately killing Muslims out of pure hatred.

Thousands of Muslims across India were brutally slaughtered due to their belief and religion. Chaos brewed across India, mass protests led to violence,

violence led to what the Hindus considered ethnic cleansing. And stuck in the middle of this genocide were Amir and his family, fearing for their lives.

Amir still remembers the sound of gun shells as they struck the ground. A society of Muslim hating fanatics had stormed through the front door of their small crowded shack. The flickering beam of light against the machete still haunts him. He was forced to watch as every single one of his family were beheaded before his very eyes. Amir was severely beaten and left for dead, floating in a pool of blood. Amir had woken up close to a week later in a hospital in a refugee camp set up during the massacres.

As soon as Amir had recovered he returned to his old home. The remains of his decapitated family members and the blood smeared all over the floor and walls still haunted him. Amir had packed a bag and left behind his whole life, and began on the road to redemption. He began the long and excruciating journey to the Maharashtra region, where he hoped he'd live with his aunt and uncle in Mumbai. It was exceedingly painful for Amir to walk on the jagged rough roads in his thin layered sandals, and by the end of the day his feet were in excruciating pain.

He spent the night on the side of the road where he went to sleep on an empty stomach and had that uncomfortably unsafe feeling. Thousands of children just like Amir all over India are abducted each year and placed in the sex trade or used as drug mules. Kids were forced to carry large quantities of contraband into northern hemisphere countries. Once these young children arrived in these countries they were either shot or sold to eastern European sex traffickers. The thought of this made Amir very paranoid.

The sun rose, and Amir was back on the road again, still weeping with hunger. Ahead of him was a small tourist based village, where he ate scraps left over from restaurants. An American woman, who saw Amir eating food out of the bin, strolled over to him and asked him various questions. Amir's English wasn't very strong but he told the woman how his family were brutally slaughtered and how he was forced to walk for hundreds of miles to live with his aunt in Mumbai. The woman was deeply affected by Amir's breath-taking story. The woman told Amir how people in the northern hemisphere countries show no sympathy towards the third world countries, even though hundreds of thousands of people are dying. 'The media goes crazy over two people dead in New York but ignores a hundred dead in Pakistan,' she said. The woman handed

Amir fifty American dollars and went on her way. Amir was tremendously grateful.

It was beginning to become dark so Amir needed to find a place to rest his head. Amir found an old urine soaked mattress outside the back of an abandoned hotel. He wasn't the only person at the back of the hotel. A group of homeless children were using the hotel as their home. Amir tried to stay hidden. The young boys began to take hits of glue with the intention of forgetting gruesome memories. Amir had hidden the money in his sock, where he felt it would be safe for the night.

He slowly dozed off, only to be woken by the uncomfortable feeling of someone breathing down his neck. Amir quickly jumped off the mattress and into a fighting stance. He was confronted by three boys not much older than himself. The oldest of the boys was holding forty-one calibre Derringer handgun. Amir, frightened for his life, fell to his knees and placed his hands on his head in a state of shock. It most definitely wasn't the first time Amir had stumbled upon someone with a gun. If Amir had learnt anything from his previous ordeals it was, 'Never be the hero.'

He remained quiet and did everything the boys asked. The boys stripped him of everything he had,

including the precious fifty dollars that he had been given by the American woman and a medallion his mother had given him when he was small. He was left with only the underwear he was wearing and was severely beaten. They left him gargling to death on his own blood. Amir was suffering from internal and external bleeding after one of the boys stamped on his head with such force that it caved in. Amir was barely clinging onto life.

Nuns from a local convent rushed Amir to the hospital where he underwent surgery for the whole night. Amir's injuries were life threatening and he had a punctured lung and was struggling to breathe. The hospital fell silent and Amir was later pronounced dead as his injuries were too severe.

Not In-abnormal

Ken Fleming

'Independence is vital in this sorrowed dystopia. With all senses of pleasure controlled by strict curfews and mind-altering drugs, we begin to lose hope. My immunity is as invaluable to me as my willingness to thrive in my duty to discover who I am. I need to be the best that I can be. To save this enslaved city, I have to become the one thing that this city needs - a hero.'

I woke with no sense of reality. My mind felt like its contents were as neutralised as a matador's bull after battle, my dusty eyes blurred from the awakening. Gradually my perception gathered but I saw nothing with which I was familiar.

Surrounding me was a field of clouded smoke but its thinness made its transparency vulnerable. Underneath the flustered sea of fog lay a thick rocken crater, as though an annihilating outer-space asteroid had plummeted into the earth's bracken surface to leave behind a behemothic dent. But, instead of a beached

comet lying in the wake of dust, there was only me, nakedly alone.

It was as though I had been the culprit (or the victim) of this decimation of the Earth's thick, outer crust. I appeared to be the meteoroid that somehow crashed through the thick atmosphere.

People started gathering around, wearing strange clothes and confused expressions. Strong voices emitted from the growing crowd, some in howls of fear, and some in clusters of excitement. I was a foreigner, an alien, lost without reason.

Without thinking I leapt up off the ground and ran. Within second the crowds were behind me. But when I glanced over my shoulder, they were only a dot on the horizon, kilometres away. On either side of me, were tens of hundred-foot towers covered in glass, revealing thousands more people staring at me. They didn't know what was going on and either did I. It was clear in my mind that I was not at home.

I didn't know who I was. I wanted to remember but I couldn't.

The glowing city, bursting with bustling life, is exactly what this prisoned empire controlled by strict

census and oblique fascism, is not. For three years the mayor has completely destroyed the city's connection with the outside world and announced it a separate nation. He introduced a mandatory super-drug controlling how we feel and how we see the world. Those who opposed were executed, live on air. Opinions were destroyed and people lived in constant fear.

Then I came and the people were gifted hope...

SUSPENSE

Wooded Creek

Sean McDonagh

It was a cold, wet, windy day. Not much different to the weather we get in Abernack. You might say it was a normal day for everyone. People were doing their usual routine, going to work and getting kids to school. For me, it was the worst day I could ever imagine.

It was Monday morning, if I remember correctly. I could hear a faint noise. Someone calling my name. The noise was getting louder as I awoke. I could hear the noise clearly. It was my mother calling me to get up for school. I still had my eyes shut but I could feel her standing there looking at me. I could also smell her perfume - the one she always wore for work. It was a very strong scented-perfume. It always dominated any other smell in the room when she wore it. I didn't really like the smell of it. It was heavy in the air and sometimes you could taste it. It was a smell I knew so well from the many years of my mother wearing it. Apart from the strong scent of my mother's perfume and the feeling of her staring at me, I knew it was cold. I could feel the cold air nipping at my toes. I opened my eyes and groaned in

pain as the sunlight flooded into them. It felt like someone was shining a torch in my eyes. I turned to my mother, as she was still standing there

'You can go now, Ma, I'm up,' I said, almost in a grunt. I hated being woken up even for school. It always put me in a terrible mood. She looked at me as if she was going to slap me.

'Don't speak to me like that! Or are you looking for a slap?'

'Sorry, Ma. I'm just tired. You know I hate being woken up.'

I wasn't in the mood for an argument. I sat up and dragged my legs to the side until I was sitting up on the edge of the bed. I was right when I said it was cold - it was freezing when I sat up. I grabbed the blanket and wrapped it around me like a long coat.

'Don't forget the money for your school trip today, Timmy. It's the last day you have to bring it in,' she nagged.

'I know, Ma, you said it like fifty times now,' I moaned, still a bit annoyed at being woken up.

'Ma, can you get out now? So I can dressed?' I asked.

'You better not get back into bed, Tim,' she replied.

Alone with my thoughts again, I couldn't help but die a little when it hit me - another whole week of school. 'Well, I might as well get on with it,' I thought to myself. I could still smell the scent of my mother's perfume but it was slowly dispersing in the air. I could also smell breakfast. 'Mmm,' I sighed to myself. 'Smells like bacon.' I love bacon.

I put on my clothes as fast as I could, almost toppling over myself getting my socks on. I didn't want to stand in the cold. It must have been about twenty-below in my room. Well, it felt like it anyway.

I noticed my alarm clock - only half six in the morning! It was way too early! And my mother wondered why I was always grumpy in the mornings. I was so tired it felt like I couldn't even move my fingers, like I wasn't strong enough to grasp anything. I didn't like that feeling.

I got downstairs just as the mailman put all the letters into the letterbox. I picked them up, flicked through them all. Nothing for me, only bills and work letters for my parents. I left them on the kitchen table for my mother to read later.

I took one of the bowls from the press and poured in some cereal and milk. My kitchen was fairly vague. It was a cream-coloured room with a table that fit five people. It wasn't any bigger than your standard

kitchen. It was as big as it needed to be for my family to live and still have breathing space. Our back garden, on the other hand, was huge. It was three acres in size, complete with a lake off to the left. My dad bought the house and its property about nine years before. It was actually very cheap for so much land.

I looked out the kitchen window which faced the garden. To my surprise there was a small red fox sitting there only about ten meters from the house. I was a little shocked. There weren't usually foxes this close. I was used to seeing foxes in the garden, as it is so big and full of places for them to hide, but his one was definitely not shy at all. I looked at the fox and it stared at me for minute or two.

All round me seemed peaceful. It was completely silent. I could only hear my own breath. I was entranced by the fox. He was small with a large bushy tail. He was a beautiful orange-red colour all over but with a snowy-white colour on his underside. I could see his breath in the cold winter air. We were breathing together; when I breathed in, he breathed in, when I breathed out, he breathed out. I felt so connected to this strange fox I had never seen before. I felt as if I had seen him every day. I stood there for another two or three minutes while he stared straight into my eyes with his crimson orange eyes. He got up and turned around and walked off into a

wooded area of the garden. I snapped back into reality. I was cold again, cold and alone.

Crunch *Crunch* sounded the dead leaves crumbling under my feet as I ran home that afternoon. I always took the forest way home. I had learned the way through the woods to my street. The wood was called Creek Land Woods. It was named after the small river that runs down from the hills and through the woods. The wood takes up about half of the town and runs from the school all the way to where I live.

I walked down to the stream. It was a damp, cold winter's day as usual. I sat down on my coat to stop my trousers getting wet. I liked coming here, away from everyone, just relaxing by myself. In complete silence from the sounds of everyday life. It was interesting to sit and watch the water flow by. The stream reminded me of a swamp of sorts. With the dark wet green grass, the trees covered in a thick green slime of moss, and the broken branches which had cracked due to the years of the damp and wet conditions of the woods and the years of being eaten by woodlice. I loved it there.

That day it was strangely warm and humid by the waterside, so I took off my shoes and socks and dipped my feet into the cool water. I had never really ventured through the forest, only really found the shortest path to

my house from the school. We had a half day that day due to some teacher meetings. I love getting half days. I never liked school I always got picked on and bullied because of the way I looked. Just because I was a little bigger than most kids. I'm not, like, really that big, just a little bigger than them. School could be really hard to cope with sometimes but I got by anyway.

I decided to go and explore the woods a bit. I'd never crossed the river before and chose that to be the area I would explore. I walked up and down the riverbank searching for a spot to get across. I found a fallen tree that worked like a small bridge to walk over the river.

It felt weird being on the other side of the creek. It was cool. I loved exploring new areas and finding new things. I noticed it was little swampier on that side of the river but probably because of the fact that no one ever walked on that side. I decided to head away from the river at a ninety degree angle. Then, if I wanted to get back, I could just turn around and head straight towards the stream. The ground got harder the further I got from the river. Soon I didn't need to be as careful, as there wasn't a big threat of falling into a deep pool of dirty, swampy water.

I was only five minutes into my little expedition when I noticed something strange in the distance. There

was a large opening in the treeline and what appeared to be a small house. I couldn't make out if it was actually a house or not through the fog that was lingering in the air.

I went in for a closer look. I jogged up the clearing but I stayed in the cover of the trees, just in case there was someone around. The house looked like it had been abandoned many years ago. The paint on the outside of the house was flaky and falling off. A few of the windows were smashed in and the front door was open. I stepped out into the clearing after making sure no one was around.

From the minute my foot touched the grass, I got shivers the whole length of my body. My mother always said that when you get shivers down your back, a ghost has just walked through you. I was very scared but I wanted to push on and explore the house.

A bird flew from the bushes near the house and scared me half to death. That's when I heard it - the quiet sound of a little girl crying. It was coming from the house. What was a little girl doing here, by herself?' I wondered. I ran up to the door and pushed it open. The crying stopped as soon my hand touched the wooden door. I walked into the hall and before I could let my eyes react to the dimly lit hallway, the door slammed behind me and all I heard was a loud hysterical laugh.

And then darkness!

GRIEF

Broken Branches

Tiarnán Doyle

I saw James drown and there was nothing I could do about it. I had killed my best friend. It was the first week of summer, it was about thirty degrees outside. James and I decided to go to our favourite place to swim. We found a place where no one else knew about except for James and I. It was quite a dangerous place to swim, it had very strong currents. But James and I were both excellent swimmers. On this day the water was more dangerous than I had ever seen it. The waves were at least six feet tall and there was mini whirlpools forming. I was nervous about getting into the water and I had a bad feeling about it. James was excited about getting in and jumped in the water straight away. He was fine and he

got out and said it was grand. Then I jumped in and I panicked a bit because the currents were stronger than they were usually. I got out and I was fine, my worries were gone.

Then James and I moved up to the rock that we used to dive off into quite deep water. We loved doing this, it was great fun. This time I went first. I was quite a confident diver and I loved doing it. The dive off the rock was about twenty feet high but neither of us were afraid of heights and we had dived off it loads of times.

I dived into the water off the rock. When I hit the water my heart was pounding with adrenaline. The water was ice cold but we were used to it. Every time I get into the water, I still lost my breath.

It was James' turn to jump in then. He was always one for show-boating and he decided to do a backflip off the rock. He was great at doing backflips, I could never do them. We had both jumped into the water off the rock and everything was normal. We got back out of the water and decided to do the biggest jump there was.

The biggest jump wasn't a rock, it was actually a big old tree that had branches coming out of it all the way up, kind of like a ladder. This jump was a least fifty

feet high and I had always been terrified of it. I had only done it a couple of times. I don't know why I decided to do it that day into the strong currents, but I did. James and I raced to it through the woods in our bare feet. There were thorns and braches cutting into our feet. James had got to the tree first; he was a great climber and was at the top of the tree, ready to jump off into the water. James was waiting for me at the top of the tree and I was nearly up. There were a few more branches I had to climb up on to be where James was. I grabbed the branch that James was standing on, to pull myself up, and out of nowhere the branch snapped from underneath James' feet. I grabbed onto a branch to keep myself safe but I saw James falling down the tree like it was in slow motion. As he was falling down he hit his head off a branch of the tree and he was knocked out. He fell straight into the water and I dived in after him but it was too late. He was gone, he was dead.

James and I had always been best friends and so had our mothers. We had been through a lot together and this was the reason we had such a close bond. We were like brothers. When James and I were seven, both our fathers were killed in a plane accident. We lived in quite a rural place, there were a few small shops in the town that sold the basics we needed for survival. The only way out of the town to one of the main towns was

by plane. My father had his own plane, it was an old two-seater plane. James' father and my father flew six times a week and there had never been any problems until the day the plane crashed. No one really knows what happened but people who witnessed the plane going down said that the engine cut out and was in free-fall all the way down to the earth. Both our fathers had been killed. Neither of us knew what was going on but we knew that our fathers were dead. Our families had become even closer. We got on with life without our fathers, it was very hard.

I just finished school last year. I got a job and I had been doing well for myself and had been able to look after myself and my mother, because she doesn't work at the moment. My mother has been quite depressed for the last year. She has always been quite a happy person and even when my father died, although she was very upset, she never got depressed. The reason why she has been very depressed the last year is because she and James' mother had a huge fight and they haven't seen each other since.

They had been very close since a young age they were like sisters. After they had the fight last year, James and I were not allowed to see each other ever again, but we still did. James and I had to lie about seeing each other, so whenever we went out together we could not

tell anybody. If James' mother ever found out that we had been hanging out with each other, even though we weren't allowed, she would have killed both of us and so would my mother. With James dead, I couldn't tell anybody and no one knew he had been out with me.

Two days passed and I hadn't heard anything about James until the news at twelve o'clock, when I heard that there was a missing teenager that hadn't been seen for several days. There was a search party out looking for him. When I heard this I got a horrible feeling in my stomach like I never had before. I was very worried that I would be caught and thrown in prison for murder. It was my fault he died, and no one knew how he died, and they weren't treating it as suspicious; but my mother had always told me that the truth will always come out.

By then James must have been down in open sea somewhere because the river he had drowned in led to the open sea. There was an on-going investigation because James's mother wanted to know what happened. I heard on the radio that detectives had found towels and James' bag and they had also found my bag, which had my wallet and ID in it. I was a wanted man.

A day later James' body had washed up on the beach, three miles away from the river. I decided to hand

myself in. I got questioned for twelve hours and I told my full story. I was going to be charged with murder, I was told, but first I had to go to court. My court date was in a week.

I had to hire a lawyer. I had told him my full story and he told me some bad news, even though that it was a freak accident I would still probably get the full time in prison for murder, but if I pleaded guilty I would probably get two or three years off a ten year sentence. I was devastated.

My court date came. I wore a suit. It was my first ever suit and I had gone out and bought it with my mother, just for court. I felt strange going into court. I actually felt sick and it seemed surreal. In the court there was a strange atmosphere. There was a jury of twenty-one people and they seemed to be all looking at me. I was very intimidated. I shouldn't have been in a court facing murder, but I was a killer. James' mother and his family still hadn't entered the courtroom and neither had the judge. My lawyer advised me to plead guilty and tell my full story, that it was a freak accident and to tell no lies.

James' mother and family entered the courtroom and she looked straight at me. In the eyes. I could see she had very teary eyes and they were bloodshot. She looked me and smiled. I was very surprised, it was like

she knew I didn't kill James on purpose. It was like she understood how close friends we were and how sorry I was.

The judge then entered the courtroom. He was a very tall man with broad shoulders and he had a white curly wig on which went all the way down his back. He had a big book of evidence underneath his arm. He started the trial.

My lawyer explained everything. Then James lawyer stood up. He said that James' mother understood everything, and she knew how close we had been as friends and that she would like the judge to give me the minimum sentence possible. She knew that I had done wrong and that I had to be punished for it.

The judge was astonished. He said he had nothing to say and that it was the jury's decision to make, based on the evidence they had and what they had heard in the court that day.

The jury came back with a decision. They said I was a free man. I was so surprised - I did not have to go to prison! I was delighted. I went home and all my worries were gone. I would never forget the ordeal and never forget the day I accidentally killed my friend James.

Paradise

Cian Hughes

I awoke slowly. I was lying in an old bed made of thin, rusty metal, with a bare mattress. There were no sheets. The bed took up almost half the space of the small, dull grey room. In one of the corners of the room was an old wooden bedside locker, sporting a broken lamp. I lay in

bed for a while, my eyelids were heavy and I was extremely tired. Finally, I got up. I was filthy. I was wearing a damp, stained jacket and was covered in cold, dried sweat. The room wasn't much better. I pulled back the thin curtains and looked onto the street outside. It was just getting bright. It must have been early, maybe around eight.

It was one of the most crime-filled streets I'd ever been on. It was where my apartment was, although it was more like a jail cell, cramped and depressing. Still, it beats being back in Vietnam. Those were the worst days of my life. Sick thoughts and images have constantly crowded my mind since the day I got back. I'd got my ticket out of that hell hole when my friend died. We'd been friends since the day we were born. I lost my mind when he died. I became unstable and a danger to my own men and had to be sent home. Every night since I have recalled what happened that day, every night I wake up crying, and that's if I can get to sleep in the first place.

I shut the blinds. The room went dark. I sat down against the wall. I felt weak. I hadn't eaten in two days. I was lightheaded and my body felt as if it was an unmanageable weight. For hours I sat against the wall, completely blanked out, feeling sorry for myself. My

heart was pumping very heavily. I felt each beat as it pulsed through my body. My nails were bitten to shreds, my hair was thick and greasy and my eyes were bloodshot and thin. There was a heavy amount of messy stubble on my thin face. I sat there thinking. Thinking about my life, about my friends and family, about how I don't have any, how I deserted them. They don't want anything to do with me. But who would? I'm going nowhere. I'm just a low-life drug addict.

I finally got up. I buttoned up my trench-coat and stumbled over to the door. My scrawny, shaky fingers fumbled around the doorknob for a while before I managed to open the door. The door led out onto concrete steps which spiralled their way up the building. I scrambled my way down the stairs and out onto the street. It was a dull grey day. My apartment was a bit out of the way of things. The exit led out into an alleyway. I patted my jacket clumsily, feeling around for some smokes but I didn't have any. I started walking, limping with every step. I was heading towards the other side of the neighbourhood. I had to get something there.

Walking there seemed to take forever. I was trying to stick mainly to the alleyways and small roads, but after a while I had to take to the main streets. The people on the street constantly gave me looks, looks of

disgust and looks of pity. I heard sirens in the distance, although they were rapidly getting nearer. I hobbled as fast as I could to the nearest alleyway. I hid behind a bin and waited for the car to pass. I hadn't even been doing anything bad but I'd been stopped by the police before, just for looking the way I do.

I was tapped on the shoulder. I turned around to see two men standing right behind me. One was tall and lean, the other was an average height man and very skinny. The skinny man held a baseball bat. The leaner of the two grabbed me by the neck and slammed me into the wall. My head cracked off the wall and my vision blurred. I was hit in the ribs. I felt them crack. My legs were snapped from underneath me by the bat. I hit the ground like a ton of bricks and lay there dazed while the men beat me relentlessly. The men searched me. They took off my jacket. They kicked me in the stomach and stamped on my head, and ran.

They left me lying there, half-dead. I could feel my heartbeat in my temple, pounding in my skull. Blood trickled across my face from the side of my head. My breath was hard to catch. My head felt crushed and my ribs shattered. The rest of my body was battered and bruised as well but it was nothing in comparison. It was one of those moments that you wish you were dead.

I tried to stand. I leaned against the wall for support. I released my grip from the wall and fell to the ground. It was like learning to walk again. Again, I tried and failed. On my third try I managed to stand. My limp had significantly worsened. Every few steps my legs would give way and I'd fall. I forgot what I was doing. I was more confused than anything. I walked into a nearby playground and sat against the railings, and took no notice of the strange looks I was getting.

The playground cleared of children fairly quickly. Only a few remained. One woman asked me if I was alright but I ignored her completely. My mind cleared a bit after a while and I left. Only when I got up did I realise how bad a state I was in. I was dying. I was panicking, yet at the same time, I was at ease with it.

The place I was going was around the corner. I finally reached it. It was a big park with a walkway at the edge of a beautiful lake. Every ten metres or so stood a big tree. Behind one of these trees, he stood. He was a shady character, always in dark, unrevealing clothes. This was his place of business. I approached him cautiously. We exchanged a few words, mumbled under our breath. I handed him the money and he gave me the stuff. It was heroin, my addiction. He walked away.

For a minute or two I stood there staring at the view. I went to find a secluded place where I could be alone. I sat against a tree. One more look at the view of the lake before I was going to die. I took the heroin and prepared to slip away to paradise, before leaving this world and slipping into hell.

A Martyr for Happiness

Ben Naughton

I often wonder, what if I died tonight, and left the warm comfort of my bed to see what came after death?

My chest hurts: could my mind develop that into an illness? I always wondered if my mind had that power. Only one way to find out. Mum always said suicide was a selfish act. Looking at it now, it seems selfless. To get rid of my poor existence so as to let someone else have all the opportunities that I don't want. Surely that would be for the good of people.

A slow painful death, that must be selfless. What kind of selfish person would put themselves through all that? None. All that suffering, no chance of joy. It must surely be selfless. It wouldn't be too hard, and think of all that happiness...

I have always understood that death brought families closer. At the death of a loved one, everyone joins together to form a support system. The little daily problems of day-to-day life are put into context when something as serious as death comes knocking. When uncle Ken died, everyone came together to support one another. There were no fights about whose turn it was to empty the dishwasher or about whether Chris would ever clean his room. All of that just didn't seem to matter.

Everyone came together to support Chris at the death of his godfather; friends sat and played games, eating vast amounts of food, because they just needed Chris to be himself, his normal carefree self.

A martyr for happiness, that's what I'll be. Dying for the greater good, for happiness, for the good of everyone else. Glorious!

If I were to suffer, and feel every day drag me one step closer to death, then everyone would be happy. Family bonds would strengthen as everyone gathered round. There to celebrate my short little life, but so proud of my strength to carry on. The longer it lasts, the closer everyone would be, so I need it to be serious enough that they'll worry and slow enough that it sinks in.

It's perfect. I could make Chris play me piano songs and with my last breath ask him to keep it up. He'd have to. Who could deny the dying wishes of their terminally ill sister? Not even Chris. I could inspire a growth within him. I could be a symbol, a sign that even in the weakest darkest hours, the good in people could shine through. I would be looked up to and people would strive to achieve, looking at my life and how it was cut painfully short.

In death I would be a hero.

That's the last scan, no doubt now, I've only a few months to live. Any operation to try and remove it would only hamper the rest of my short life, so there's no point trying.

In my last weeks I could be a real figure of beauty, my hair thinning, but still getting myself out of that hospital bed that seems too much like home. I could bungee jump and ski, and do all of those marvellous things everyone wishes they could do but are always too cautious to.

I'm now carefree. What's a little more pain? Worth it, if one person looks to me and marvels.

It's starting to scare me now. All that strength and courage seems miles away and now I lie frail in this bed, left alone but ready to do this.

I watched a film earlier in which a woman spends all her money thinking she has only a few days to live, but the final twist is that her medical records have been mixed up. I think I'm past that stage now.

I told myself that this is what I wanted, but I think that only came after that first scan, when the doctors were sure that I stood no chance. They smiled at me, but I knew there was no joy in their faces. I could see the sadness behind their eyes, sadness that they hadn't seen it earlier.

The glory I promised myself has come and gone. People smiled and hugged me, in assurance of my safety. That confidence was short-lived. I've seen those smiles change to pursed lips, with people hiding their reactions to my depleting body, lying to me, and themselves, that this is a first step on my road to recovery.

The happiness I had envisioned is gone. As I deteriorate into nothing, I see the life escape from my mother's eyes, and the enthusiasm dies in Chris' movements, as he becomes more aware of my frail body all the time, too scared to hug me in case I snap in his fingers.

I am a frail doll now. I hate what I am doing to my family and friends, who watch me from a distance, too scared to approach such a fragile being.

This night could be it. But I said the same yesterday. I find myself wishing for it all to be done.

Done.

POETRY

Conor McLoughlin

8

I am just a lost soul
Relying on suspicion
Trapped by the night
Confused but not dazed

Dazzled by the light
Staring down a tunnel
That's slowly closing -
Always closing.
No time to stop and think
If only I may.
Your pain does not hurt me
As it is all I have ever felt
Yet do not feel pity for me;
Stating my crooked turn
Does not mean we all must endure
My lingering state, my lingering state
Does not appeal to me
Neither the portrayal of the future I see.
This tirade if unleashed is fond of
Running rings around the eight,
I feel I have made a stigma that most
Will hate.