



BEAT THE DUST SEASON FINALE

NOVEMBER 2011

Introduction

For our last issue of Beat the Dust in 2011, we invited a number of writers, many of whom we've never published, to submit new work for us to consider. The result is a bumper edition brimful of good writing and stunning photography from creatives based in the UK, US and Japan. Our contributors have also compiled playlists, five tracks inspired by or relevant to their work published here in Beat the Dust's season finale issue.

Graffiti monkey image above, a photograph by Simon Crubellier.

Clare Pollard



Clare's playlist:

Tomorrow Never Knows - The Beatles
Desire - Anna Calvi
White Rabbit - Jefferson Airplane
Everything Everything - Schoolin'
My Sweet Lord - George Harrison

A Night In Varanasi

There was a cow in the sari shop.
Pink and orange silk; the muscular white neck
turned towards a shrine to itself.
They offer up incense and ghee -
that yellow slurry, its melt smell.

This is the kind of heat that hurts your edges.
The sheets have a fever. On your side of the bed,
I writhe, coil; I am that snake in its lidded basket.

On my bedside table is *The Ramayana*.
Blue-skinned Rama, an avatar of Vishnu,
loves Sita, who is Lakshmi.
Today I read of Indra's punishment -
covered with a thousand vaginas,
every pore that nerve-sticky and open; the shame.

Delhi is Samsara:
goats' heads in a row, the grope,
elbows, breath, traffic banging bone. A girl
lurches up: demoness hair, dusty, five.
I pay her, but she clings,
her wanting eyes, her *this way* lies.
I shoo them off like flies.

The week churns like the fan:
vultures, ghats, the body on the burning woodpile,
the sari-wrapped body on the roof of the car
carried to the Ganges to escape all this -
orgies cut in stone,
lingam and yoni,
the offerings of rose-petals, cooking oil and money.

Spoilt as Gods, the monkeys hissed and parried,
then one pissed with fear,
but Vishnu is Rama is Krishna is a fish
is a boar is a dwarf is Buddha.
India is corrupt, the guide said in Agra.
This flesh smells not mine; these armpits smell
of sacks of spilt spice on the street-side.

I turn again in my dirt,
that pig on the pavement.
Dawnlight aches; the roar of others agitates.
Men try to sleep in their rickshaws.
Money, rupee. They touch their mouths to signal *food*.
Would you protect me? They piss openly.
They stare at my blonde hair.
A sadhu, in his apricot nappy, spits.

Pigeons peck the palaces to dust.

I can't bear all this non-attachment -
would you love me whoever I was?
Sita is in Lanka, in her dusty yellow Sari.
'O Rama, have you forgotten me?'
You are at the other side of the earth

and I summon you here
in dreams where you are you but not you
and we fuck as Khajuraho carvings fuck, as puppets fuck,
as Tantrics fuck, dissolution, loosing self from self

but then, awake,
I'm that mosquito, fat with my own blood;
I'm that jackal gorging on scraps;
willing sweat on my back into hands on my back
in this bed that's not my bed, this hurting heat,
this incarnation.

Paul Kavanagh



Paul's playlist:

Journey In Satchidananda - Alice Coltrane
The Whale - John Tavener
A Sea Symphony (1. A Song For All Seas, All Ships) - Vaughan Williams
Atlantis - Donovan
Blackpool Rock (With My Little Stick Of) - George Formby

Three Islands

Island One

Light, thank you. "Light," said father. We set sail before the sun. Father rowed. I sat in the stern. The goods were in the bow. The water was tranquil and the sky clear. There would be no rain. Gulls overhead were loud and vexed. Our journey for some reason had upset them. I asked my father why the gulls were upset by our journey and father said that gulls were created vexed. N i.i.d. random variables each with entropy $H(X)$ can be compressed into

more than $N H(X)$ bits with negligible risk of information loss it's happening again. Confusion. Soon I will be lost again. I am in here. Light. It is a labyrinth. A labyrinth of words and information. Don't stop as N tends to infinity; but conversely, if they are compressed into fewer than $N H(X)$. Father lit a cigarette. I watched the smoke drift lazily over the edge of the boat. My thoughts seemed to follow the swirling smoke until like the smoke they dissipated. The oars disturbed the silence of pre-morning. The dull thuds reverberated and reached the island. I no longer had to dip my fingers into the water to know that the water was cold. Snow covered the beach and ice had produced the only noise before the dull thud of the oars hitting the water. I could smell the sweat emanating off father's clothing. His breath was expelled in thick balls of concrete that disintegrated in the sea air. Light. Keep moving. Thoughts. Light. "We'll soon be there," said father. He tossed the cigarette into the sea. The sun cut a path across the sea. I could see the island. I asked my father why the sea was blue and the sky blue and why the sun rose and why the earth went around the sun and not the sun around the earth and why the stars didn't shine during the day although the moon sometimes appeared in the day sky and I asked him why the gulls were upset by our journey and father said that gulls were created vexed. "I am hungry," I said. "There's food in the bow," said father, "but don't eat too much." There are algae and roots. The air is fusty. As N tends to infinity; but conversely, if they are compressed into fewer than $N H(X)$ light. Light. The water was dappled in lambent gold. The sun rose over the island. The island was small, the population a number of families. They were starving. My father was taking them food in exchange for the gold they hoarded. The gold was now worthless to them. Hunger had produced disease and death.

Island Two

Light, thank you. "Heavy," said father. We set sail before the moon. Father rowed. I sat in the bow. The heap of gold was in the stern. The water was irritated and the sky thick with clouds. The swell was erratic. There would be rain. Gulls overhead were loud and vexed. Our journey for some reason had upset them. I asked my father why the gulls were upset by our journey and father said that gulls were created vexed. But virtually certain that information will be lost algae and roots. Σ_1, Σ_2 denote two finite alphabets and let and denote the I'm losing you. The dark. I need the light. Light. There must be light and movement. Keep moving. Don't go back. Keep moving forward. The water calcified. The mud coagulated. Father lit a cigarette. The coals struggled. The wind stole much of the cigarette. The water slapped the boat angrily. We had trespassed. I watched the coals oscillate. As we ventured out into the troubled water a fog rose over the island and obfuscated the island. Father rowed. His breathing was heavy and without form. The boat sagged. Water seeped through the apertures and cascaded over the edge. "We'll soon be home," said father. He tossed the cigarette into the sea. The moonlight cut a path across the sea. X is an i.i.d. source, its time series X_1, \dots, X_n is i.i.d. with entropy $H(X)$ in the discrete-valued case and differential entropy in the continuous-valued case. I could not see our island. I asked my father why the sea was black and the sky black and why the moon rose and why the moon went around the earth and not the earth around the moon and why the sun didn't shine during the night although many suns appeared in the night sky and I

asked him why the gulls were upset by our journey and father said that gulls were created vexed. "I am hungry," I said. The gulls were hungry. We had no food to offer, to placate. "When we get home we will have plenty to eat," said father.

Island Three

Light, thank you. Heavy. Dark. Cold. Light. Keep going. Movement. Do not stop. I am in here. Trapped. Thoughts. Fix some $\epsilon > 0$. The typical set, is defined as follows sardines, anchovy, cod, clownfish, halibut, sharks and barracuda and jellyfish, sea anemones, ctenophore, sea worms, platyhelminthes, nemertea, annelida, sipuncula, echiura, chaetognatha, phoronida, mollusca, shellfish, squid, octopus arthropod chelicerata, crustacean, porifera, bryozoa, starfish, urochordata, sea squirts and tunicates. The encoding algorithm: The encoder checks if the input sequence lies within the typical set; if yes, it outputs the index of the input sequence within the typical set; if not, the encoder outputs an arbitrary digit number. As long as the input sequence lies within the typical set. The encoding algorithm: The encoder checks if the input sequence lies within the typical set; if yes, it outputs the index of the input sequence within the typical set; if not, the encoder outputs an arbitrary digit number. As long as the input sequence lies within the typical set information loss it's happening again. Confusion. Soon I will be lost again. I am in here. Light. It is a labyrinth. A labyrinth of words and information and thoughts. Thought. Gulls, sea turtles, albatross, penguins, gannets, and auks and seasnakes, terrapins, the marine iguana, and the saltwater crocodile. The water calcified. The mud coagulated. I couldn't move. The ground crawled upon me. The algae crawled upon my shoes and up my legs. I couldn't move. The algae appeared around my arms. The algae grew. The algae covered my legs and spread up my belly and over to the chest. The algae clogged my eyes, clogged my ears, clogged my nostrils, clogged my mouth. My teeth turned to roots. The hair in my nostrils and ears turned to roots, white and purple. I dissolved. Only thoughts. Thought.

Valerie O'Riordan



Valerie's playlist:

Screamager - Therapy?
No Fun - The Stooges
Stop Whispering - Radiohead
Territorial Pissings - Nirvana
Shit Luck - Modest Mouse

Pure Dirt - novel extract

Tighten the bra straps; hoist the tits. Pout.

I'm sweating.

"So what do yeh reckon?" I say. "Will I do?"

"Yeh've a stripe here."

Ciara rubs the pad of her thumb along my jaw-line. We're together in the back room of Curl Up & Dye, Ardown's only hair-salon, where she works as a trainee. You can smell bleach and ammonia and Ciara's Anais Anais perfume, rising up off of skinny wrists. This perfect shadow thrown by the bone where the hand curves out. She rubs my jaw and turns away.

"D'yeh think I look old enough, but?" I step back. "See, if I go like this –" I put one hand on the left hip of the skirt and look at her with the head cocked. "*Can I help yeh there, missus?* How's that? Ciara? Is that all right?"

"Tina," she says, "yer worryin' too much. Listen –"

"Wha'?"

She opens her mouth, then shakes the head. "Nothin'."

She's back to the sweeping. Snipped curls of hair pile up at my feet like I've been moulting.

"Can yeh imagine me with a job, but?" I say. "Ciara? Can yeh?"

"Yeah," she says. Shrugs. "I s'pose." Sweep, sweep, sweep. "Here, Tina –"

"Wha'?" I say, again, but she doesn't reply.

I'm standing in the doorway, back to the salon, looking over my shoulder so I can see my arse in the big mirror. The bulge of it. I frown and tilt the pelvis forward. This auld one, tits like bean-bags under the plastic cloak, scowls at me in the glass.

"There's no fuckin' privacy in this place," I say. Then to Ciara: "Tell us, though. Am I really all right?"

She's down on her hunkers, sloshing combs through grey suds in a bucket.

"Ciara," I say. "Here, *Ciara*. C'mon."

"Jesus," she says, "I'm workin' here. Shay'll be lookin'."

Shay's the owner, husband of Stylist Cynthia, Ciara's boss. Shay's rolling a fag at the reception desk. You can see his gut splurging out under this tight rayon shirt. The hair's

shaved to a Number Two except for this ratty little fringe that needs trimming. Shay looks like Ciara's fella, Dónal, only older even; this stumpy block of a chin, biceps softening under t-shirt sleeves. You know Ciara fancies Shay. She has her blouse open to the third button. You can see the little pink ribbon tracing the rim of her bra-cup. Shay isn't looking.

"Look," I say, "just wish us luck, will yeh?"

She turns. I hold my breath and stand very still. Belly sucked in. She's loaned me her WonderBra and the pre-Dónal leather hooker boots. White body-top and the skirt from my school uniform because the others are all too short or drink-stained or snug on the hips for today. I'm tightless due to ladders. The legs are goose-pimpled and the CV's tucked under the armpit.

"Yer lovely, Tina," she says. "Hang on, but, an' I'll tell yeh somethin' –"

"Thought yeh were workin'?"

"Yeah, only –" The combs in her hands drip filthy water all over her shoes as she stares at me. She's whiter than usual, or she's put on the wrong foundation, and you can see orange blotches cracking open along her cheekbones where she hasn't blended the way she'd shown me. The black hairdressing t-shirt has a speckle of dandruff on one shoulder.

The state of yeh, I think, but that isn't something you'd think about Ciara Dwyer. So instead I point at her feet.

"Lookit," I say, "yer wreckin' yerself. I'll call for yeh later." I give her hand a squeeze. It's slithery with detergent. Then I hurry out through the salon, past the sink and the mirror, Cynthia and the cutting station.

Shay looks up from his skins. "Get to fuck outta me shop in them boots, Martina Deegan. This is a decent bleedin' establishment. Haven't yeh homework to be doin' or wha'?"

"Ah, go on home an' play with yerself, Shay Rafferty," I say. "I'm done wi' all tha' shite."

Cynthia, behind me, makes this clucking sound.

But I'm grinning. You knew he was admiring the legs. And the eyes are drifting on up to the tits as well. Shoulders back is the key. And pout.

Ardown's north-side Dublin, eight miles from the city centre: potholed and boarded-up, this miserable drag of shops and single-glazed bungalows with the dump snagged down one end, a mouldering crotch in the fork between the Dublin road and the cul-de-sac to our Estate. They're still building the Ardown Bypass – Under Construction since I left Primary – and that's to skirt the Estate, creeping to town, leaving us behind.

I go into Bernie's, the women's boutique, and hand the CV to Missus Staines from Number Twenty-Six.

"Yeh could give us a lift into work an' all," I tell her, "it'd be dead handy."

She says, "Yeh know yer too young, pet."

I take a breath. The shop smells like day-old tights and fly spray. Bernie's leaning over the counter, bosoms splayed. You can see the frayed lace trimming the upholstered bra.

"Lookit," I say, "nobody cares abou' tha' shite. I'll be sixteen by Christmas. An' I'll work hard –"

"Give us a shout back in six months, so," she says, shaking the head. Jowls flapping.

I'm not going to cry. "C'mon, Missus Staines. I thought yeh'd help us out. I need the money now."

"Sorry, Tina," she says. "I'd help yeh if I could. I told yer Ma –"

I fold the arms. "Yeh gave Billy a job."

She looks at me. "Yer brother was sixteen. An' yeh can't just –" She stops and inhales. "Lookit, Tina, I'm not breakin' the law here. I know it's hard for yous –"

I pull the CV back off of her and I think, yeh can take yer *poxy* job an' stick it up yer *hole*, Missus – but I don't say it. I say nothing and walk back out.

Quinnsworth. I pause before the swish of automatic doors and take a breath. I step indoors.

The supermarket's cold. Shivering checkout girls pick their noses and flick snot onto conveyor belts. There's a smashed bottle of red wine by the trolleys. I pick my way around the edge of the bloodstain and go down to the meat counter. Bluebottles batter themselves off of the glass sneeze-guard over the chops. One flops and twitches on the electric scales. The butcher yawns and scrapes dirt out from under his nails with the chewed lid of a biro.

"Howyeh, Mister Greville," I say, "yer boss around?" I flourish the CV.

Rick Greville's apron is spattered with bloody strips of fat and gristle. He's short and red-faced with these bushy sideburns that creep out from under this hairnet and over towards the nose. He's riding our neighbour, Nonie Foster; you'd see him waiting at her front door, lugging plastic bags full of wholesale sirloin steaks and pork chops and ribs and lamb chops, the corners of the bags heavy and red from the run-off that drips out into the footpath. Plus he supplies Dónal's chip-van – cheeky off-cuts sold in the pub car-park after trading hours.

He shakes his head. "I wouldn't bother, love."

"Yeah, well." I lean in towards him - like Ciara says - WonderBra pressed against the harness of the blouse. "Maybe yeh could have a word?"

His neck reddens near purple and he stares at the top of my left ear as he speaks. "There yeh go, now."

I turn.

Mel Nolan's coming at us with a clipboard. She's this pinch-mouthed yoke with her hair in a bun and the legs in thick black tights. She's Mel for Melanie but we all say Melanoma on account of the red-lemonade tan off of the sun-beds. The Assistant Manager badge gleams from spit polish.

"I'm not seeing any boning, Richard," she calls. "Chop, chop!"

I say, "Scuse us, Mizz Nolan –"

You can see the eyes run over the shaving scar on the right shin. "What can I do for you?" she says.

"A job," I say, "cashier or bags or anythin', I'm not fussy."

"And what are you," she says, "thirteen?" She raises the eyebrows. Pores on her like plucked chicken.

"Yeh can go off-books," I say, "it's all right wi' me."

"Can I, now," she says, "and aren't the official staff here bad enough?" She waggles the clipboard at Rick. He looks down and flicks at the fly on the scales with his biro lid.

I hold out the CV. "Just give us a look, Mel. Mizz Nolan. Please."

She sighs and then takes it off of me and scans. She laughs. "I don't think a D in yer French Mocks is goin' to get yeh a vice-managerial role, Martina." The posh accent's gone. She crumples the CV and tosses it over the meat counter. "I've work to do."

I watch her march off down the dairy aisle. Her tights are bobbed from the washing machine and the shoes are low-heeled and worn right down.

"Thunderin' bitch," I say.

"Ah, now," says Rick Greville, the butcher. "There's no need for language." He's picked up the CV and smoothed it out. He passes it over, but I leave him there with the hand sticking out.

Another bluebottle smashes into the spit guard.

"I'll tell yeh wha'," I say, "the whole lot of yous can just go fuck yerselves."

Mike Meraz



Mike's playlist:

The Great Destroyer - Nine Inch Nails

Provenance - Christopher Bissonnette

Well I Wonder - The Smiths

Bloody Cape - Deftones

Obstacle 1 - Interpol

Best Tits On The Block

there are odd names
in the French Quarter.

names like:

"Cupcakes"

"Buttercup"

"Sunshine."

there is even a
"best tits on the block."

the odd women of the world
come to New Orleans.

they walk by you
and ask you questions
like:

"my, you're a quiet one."

and

"how come you never talk?"

I stand there amazed
at boobs
at tits
at ass.

and the loveliness
of their voice.

I don't want them,
most men don't
want them.

there is a loneliness
in their eyes

that they will
never belong
to anyone.

just the
streets

just the
streets.

Dead Roses

I put a bouquet of dead roses
on her doorstep
tied to a two page letter
filled with anger, hate, rage
and, at the end, a gut wrenching
confession of unconditional love.

of course, the next day she called.

"much respect to you, you are a good writer,"
she said.

"I thought you'd like that," I said.

"but I'm not leaving him."

"but I do not want you to."

"but I thought you said you loved me."

"I do but love does not mean we have to be
together. I can love you from afar."

David Hoenigman



David's playlist:

Four 2/2 (solo: Ayler, Taylor) - Cecil Taylor & Albert Ayler
Amphetamine - Peter Laughner
Jenny - The Mountain Goats
Akashia No Ame Ga Yamutoki - Kaoru Abe
You Painted Your Teeth - Jandek

Squeal For Joy

she screams something in the direction of the sleeping vulture. maybe she says, I'm never coming back. she walks along a barbed wire fence. there's someone on the other side of the fence. I thought the clown had become the only person in the universe. but there's someone there. perhaps a person and an animal. the blade goes *ding* on the metal frame of my hospital bed. the shadows wear masks and carry knives. they're never ashamed of themselves. I blow all my money in a single afternoon and feel ashamed. the shadows' masks dangle with ornaments. some people claim to disappear. he's rattling the knife between the bars of the metal bed frame. the shadows bark at me. so I further confess. it's the only thing that's effortless. most men are afraid to truly accept their own madness. it's almost a form of bravery. his eyes bulge out between the bandages. his mouth moves in a goldfish confession. the clown blows her nose and walks along the barbed wire. she waves to the workers in the field. now she's alone along the road. there's a slight wind. her steps look determined. then they don't. again. again. there's nowhere to go. she's playing with something in her hands. she sits down on the side of a hill. I've continued on for years when there's been nowhere to go. I was young and wanted nothing. then I was old and wanted nothing. why doesn't she go back to the green woman and the children? the wind ripples the leaves of the ugly trees. this life has no meaning. do animals torture each other? the shadows put their boots through windows. they demand confessions. caterpillars. goldfish. feathers. the caterpillars live like royalty. they buy and sell these goldfish. if it were me I'd call on the murderess. I'd like to kill one. just one time. bang its little head on the ground till the lights went out. they don't appear to be ashamed because they aren't ashamed. you've bent yourself into this shape for me. it dies and returns. dies and returns. the shadows'

masks dangle with ornaments. goldfish. feathers. caterpillars. the murderess telling us a story about her dog. maybe we shouldn't call her *the clown* anymore. *the runaway* sits along the side of the road and frowns. and thinks that running away is like a birth. but she didn't run away from a place she ran away from a man. a man who's always moving. so it may already be too late for her to find her way back to him. he may have woken up and sped off. she plays with the insects. she lets them walk across her hand. maybe they'll find her dead body here. one walks across her hand and flies off. as I've seen her to be caring and kind-hearted I want something good to happen to this runaway. this clown. this blue woman. I want her to find her long-lost family. or a man who isn't anything like the vulture. the knife again goes *ding* on the bars of the bandaged man's bed frame and he tells them everything they want to hear. I won't return from such humiliation. the remainder of my life will be a further confession. a further surrender. I thought I'd like to abandon the bandaged man and tell you about a girl I met last night but he's right here in front of me begging for his life and he's my responsibility. she was the antithesis of all my worry. every time I looked at her she smiled. they take the knife away and the bandaged man collapses on the bed. wasn't someone supposed to be protecting him? will there be another wave of torturers? then three men march toward the runaway playing horns. it could be a flute and a clarinet and a trombone. but I can't see them clearly yet. there must be an urgency to this music. a desire to express a lifetime of confusion in the time it takes to march past a lonely runaway woman. their music makes me think they've spent their whole lives together. or that they're ghosts stumbling through some eternity together. the woman sits up in disbelief watching them approach. it's a flute and a clarinet and a small french horn. they pass by the woman just as the horse passed by her on the night she was abandoned by the vulture and the jack-o'-lantern. I'd rather not think of the torturers. what would it be like to be alone with her? I felt I could just grab her. like I should have been entitled to just grab her. the torturers look down in disgust at the bandaged caterpillar man. they bring back the knife. they had taken it away but now they bring it back. they press it to the bandaged neck. in the reflection of the blade I see a girl with a beautiful smile. a girl who smiles every time I look at her. I begin to see through a torturer's mask to his eyes. anything can be diffused through thought. through finding another outlet. the mask doesn't exactly fit right. the eye holes are sliding down toward the end of his nose. but I wonder why they went to the trouble of stringing ornaments around their heads. maybe I recognize this man through his mask. maybe he's the man I've always called *the failure*. she decides to follow them. she follows the music and smiles. and I wonder if this means that something good will happen to the runaway. that she can finally rest easily. safe from vultures. she spins and jumps and follows the music. and suddenly isn't quite as hopeless as we'd thought. falling in behind the third man. being led to some kind of ceremony. a celebration of spring. a rejoicing that the trees no longer look dead. a wave of children in identical costumes. the runaway's swept up. love pours from all of their hearts. and her faith has never been stronger. it's clung to me since childhood. I was sitting there with the insects praying something might happen. I followed the wind and I've found a family. they're carving up pigs for the feast. we parade through the streets together and I'm in love. I'm in love with this salvation. no one has a right to say anything to their fathers. we should trust each other and bask in the good fortune. the runaway's pulled along by this. she turns away but she's spun around again and made to continue forward in the same direction. her faith has never been stronger. there's

rest and safety and comfort in this. there's someone willing to offer her a home. the two torturers now huddle and begin whispering into each other's ears. among these ornaments perhaps I see a sky blue ballerina. a child in pink pajamas. a girl who smiles every time I look at her. a star shape. a baby shape. an owl with symbols drawn on her arms. lights reflect off the surface of the mask. four light bulbs below the eye. one light bulb above the eyebrow. I'd like to let myself into her room. she'd never be angry at me. her smile says she'd never be angry at me. I could spend days looking through her things. burning every trace of him. when we live. when we sleep and work. sleep and work. people live our dreams. their hearts swell with joy for us so that when we look at them they smile. finally the torturers are in the hallway unwinding. having found somewhere to sit. rubbing their eyes. I'd like to draw the symbols on her arms. I'd like to watch her change her clothes. I'm not afraid to tell her anything. I'd collapse just like the bandaged caterpillar man when the torturers pulled away the knife.

Bogdan Frymorgen



Bogdan's playlist:

Goldberg Variations (singularly the most brilliant piece of music ever composed) - Bach
Operas - Handel
Spiegel Im Spiegel - Arvo Part
Con Toda Palabra - Lhasa
Both Sides Now - Joni Mitchell





Robert McGowan

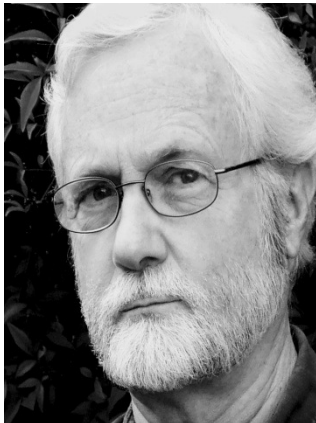


Photo by Ashley Drew

Robert's playlist:

- My Cherie Amour - Stevie Wonder
- The Greatest - Cat Power
- If I Didn't Care - The Ink Spots
- Don't Explain - Nina Simone
- Casta Diva - Vincenzo Bellini

The Only Damn Things

The only damn things they let me out of the Army with were my field jacket and my medals.

And also my jungle hat, but I no longer have that. My wife, the one I had at the time, threw it out right after I got home. I think she was pissed about what the Nam took from us, or from her, and about what it did to me. I can understand how she felt, but I wasn't happy she did it. Up and tossed the thing out on her own, without saying a word to me. "Disposed of it," she said. Or hell maybe she was right. I guess who the fuck needs such a thing. But still. Maybe you hate what some old hat like that reminds you of, but in some weird-ass way you don't want to lose touch with that stuff you remember, do you? Because it's important. Bad but important. Things you have a whole lot of damn feeling about. So something like that ratty jungle hat . . . you'd want to keep it, is all. A normal human thing. But out it went. Without a word.

The medals, I guess the Army figured, belonged to the ones they gave them to, so they were okay with me taking mine when we parted company. Pretty damn big of them. But that field jacket, the one they issued to me in basic and that I carried around with me everywhere, even to Nam and back, that damn thing the motherfuckers wanted back. Can you believe that shit? They wanted that beat up field jacket of mine, with my name on it and my rank and all the stains and holes. What were they going to do with it? Throw it on a pile with a million others, is what, and then probably just burn them all up somewhere. So I worked out a little something with the supply guy when I was processing out. Got him to pull another jacket from the pile of jackets he'd taken in that week and let me turn that one in and keep mine. Typical Army bullshit, a going-through-the-motions thing. That's how I ended up with the only thing, except for my medals, I have from my goddamned Army life. And that's a true story. I had to fucking *steal* it. The motherfuckers.

The medals, mainly just the usual Nam stuff—I wasn't anything special, no hero or anything—I keep them stuck back here at home. So who cares. But the jacket, I still wear it sometimes. I don't know for sure why, to be honest. Well, it's a good weight, right for lots of days when it's not really all that cold. And it fits me even better now than when they gave it to me. It was too big then. These days it's pretty much just right, now that I'm a little heavier. It's the standard Army jacket: last name over the right pocket, U.S. ARMY over the left. My sergeant rank on the sleeves. E-6 is what they finally made me right there at the end. Staff sergeant. Big fuckin' deal. My 9th Infantry patch on the left shoulder. Flaming asshole is what we called it, because of the design of the thing. My Combat Infantryman Badge, the CIB. These are all the subdued-type patches of course, what they finally started using in the Nam, kind of a camo black and green, not the bright color stuff. It's all still right there on my jacket, just like when I stole it from the motherfucking Army. Except for the medals, or the ribbons is what you call them. I don't wear those, not on a field jacket, you wouldn't do that.

9th Infantry Division was my unit, down there in the rice paddies south of Saigon. Same unit Forrest Gump was in. No kidding. When you watch that movie, look for his patch, the 9th Infantry patch. The Gump Division, right? Which would make me a Gumpian? Or some shit. What a fucking hoot. But yeah, look for that patch in the movie. Same outfit, me and the Gumper. And believe me, morons like him we had plenty of. I wonder about *me* sometimes. Hell I guess you had to be some kind of a damn moron to get yourself into that shit in the first place. I wouldn't argue with you on that one.

I joined. Joined the Army and signed up for infantry right from the damn start. Only a dumbfuck kid would do that. You've got no idea what the hell the deal is, what it's all

gonna come to, what it *could* come to anyway, and lots of times does. Like with me, for example, if you want proof of what can really happen. All because I was a stupid little shit kid, not a damn thing in my head.

Wearing that jacket like I do around here . . . I don't know, it's not like it takes me back to Nam all that much. We did wear them sometimes, even down in the steamy-hot Delta, but not much. So it's not the Nam itself the jacket takes me back to, but I'd say the Army in general.

Which I hated. Which must be pretty clear from the way I've talked about it. I hated the damn Army. I guess I'm proud of surviving it, the Army and Nam, but I hated every-damning thing about the whole ride. Except for a few gung-ho nutcases, most of us did.

So why do I wear this old jacket sometimes? Why do I even keep it? Why did I bother to steal it from the fucking Army in the first place?

I don't really know. Except I was intact for most of the time I had that jacket. Everything was working. Both arms. Maybe it's a souvenir from when I was the whole me.

It's been a bitch because I was right-handed. I learned over the years to be more or less left-handed, but it took a while and it's still not natural. I took two rounds in my upper arm, just below the shoulder. AK-47. Two right there together. Shattered everything—bone, muscle, nerves, the whole works. Lots of times I wish they'd gone ahead and cut the stupid thing off, which they came real close to doing. It's sure as hell totally useless, not much more than a nuisance, is what it is. It does look more or less normal, at first, hanging there, so you don't get those stares that amputees can get. Which I guess is good.

I could have one of those purple-heart license plates on my car—with a purple heart medal on it so everybody gets to know I was wounded? But fuck. Who cares? Nobody, is what you realize after a while, so why advertise it. Like we used to say back in the Nam, Don't mean nothin'.

Which is the truth; it doesn't. At least I can't myself find any damn meaning in it. My arm just got fucked up, is all. For no good reason. Which is the part that really does piss me off. No good reason. Of course I've seen guys with a whole lot worse, *way* worse. Not even to mention the dead ones.

I've heard people say, about memories, that in time the bad starts to slip away and you remember the good. I've never really agreed with that, never saw it to be true for me personally. I can't yet remember much about the goddamned Nam that's good. Or about this goofy limp reminder of it.

I know there were other things too, but truth is, I think the biggest part of the reason Linda finally left me back then—it wasn't but a couple years after I got back—was I had this dead arm hanging here, flopping around. Which I'm sure really is kind of gross and weird. But if she was going to goddamned leave, I wish she would have let me for Chrissakes keep my fucking Nam hat at least. It had my blood on it. Just a little, not enough so it was all that disgusting or anything, but it was my own blood, from when I was hit. You'd want to hold on to something like that.

The medals I keep in a drawer. What else would you do with those kinds of things? I take them out now and then and look at them. I don't know why.

Benedict Newbery



Benedict's playlist:

Kings Of The Wild Frontier - Adam And The Ants
A Picture From Life's Other Side - Woody Guthrie
Brain Damage - Pink Floyd
Bette Davis Eyes - Kim Carnes
Masters Of War - Bob Dylan

End Notes: Hospital Asylum 1878

In a cot
the sparrow bones
of Charlotte Cook
pressed against
the margin,
bundled up in skin
and cloth.

Registered a year ago,
a brother's death
the noted likely cause
which, along with form
of disorder,
bodily condition
on admission
and monthly observation,
almost fills the page.

On Sunday
her brothers and sisters
made the journey
from the workhouse
and the town,
left late
in the dark
beyond allotted hours,

lantern
lighting path
from asylum walls.

*Charlotte Cook,
pauper, aged 19,
lingered
till the evening
when she peacefully passed away:
present Nurse D White,
noted Monday night
against the uncrossed margin,
coroner informed
21st of June.*

Uncle Walter

His sisters saw that half minute in his eye,
set in the folds of skin.

Hit from the side by an '88 —
Tom and Pete, five seconds late —
two soldiers soldered
to the inside plates,
the first, and last,
of his African mates.

Her Tradecraft

Whenever I asked her a question
the longer the day seemed to pass
spent in her room
reading between her lines
truth in part –
her tradecraft
polished to reflect
the crux of what we wanted
“Is he ours or theirs?”

We passed to different rooms,
cross checked
with reported traffic
and pillaged letter box,
the drops
and kernels cast

In the days, months that passed
she never gave up –
surrendering the balance

of her final score
and ten.

The Spice Of Life

A non-swimmer, Jules
in the pool
most mornings
then wanders back
to shower and change

'Hello, my friend,
how are you?'
Variety,
summer seasons
in the Seventies
described to Bill
as they shower:
'Oh, yes,
I know the south coast.
Bournemouth.'

'I'm still in the acting trade'
adds Jules
leans in, close,
for a stage whisper.
'Used to be lovely
down there
and then the cousins moved in.'
Pauses — gauging
or for effect.
'You get me meaning?'

Ewan Morrison



Ewan's playlist:

Terrain - Simcity4 music

Friday - Rebecca Black

Numb/Encore - Linkin Park v Jay Z

Not Afraid - Eminem

Famous Last Words – My Chemical Romance

Incident In A Mall #42 - Shopping For A Carrier Bag

'Right, ye had to get the right kind o' bag,' laughs Tommy, 'No, yer pishy wee plastic Sainsbury's or whatever - ye'd fall on yer arse in them. Ye need something wae a bit substance, thick, quality paper, or cardboard, know what I mean. The best was fae Debenhams, by far, but ye had to buy something really big to get one of the big bags with it; like an anorak or a suit or.... Aye, the old bag trick, if ye didna get one big enough for both yer feet, they'd catch ye, when they looked under.'

The 'they' that Tommy is talking about is mall security, the 'looking under' is under the doors of the toilet cubicles and the standing inside a paper bag was an ingenious precautionary measure against being caught while receiving felatio from another man; since, when security checked underneath the cubicle door, they would see only one pair of seated feet and one shopping bag.

'Always feared, but never got caught ...heard of some guy did time, indecent exposure or what have ye. Ye heard stories,' he says. 'They used to send cops in dressed as civvies, cos in the old days the place was heaving, like Bennets on a Friday night.'

Bennets was a gay club in Glasgow, but when Tommy was a teenager, he wasn't into the gay scene. He didn't like the music, the leather, the whole affected air and also being fifteen, he was too young to get into clubs. The way he saw it, he was just a working class lad from the Gorbals and if anyone from the flats saw him going to a gay club, that'd be it, game over. And the parks were no safe cos gangs went knifing lads at night. So, he had his formative encounters in the first floor toilets of a certain centrally placed Glasgow shopping mall.

In fact Tommy went every day, sometimes twice or three times a day, over years, in fact over a whole decade until, he claims, he grew out of it.

'Must have been maybe fifty or so guys,' he says. 'Ye see the same faces once in a while, ye know, but no, mostly there was a lot of variety, cos it's the city centre right, where else are ye gonna get that?'

There were at that time in Glasgow only four registered gay saunas. That number has since declined.

'I reckon guys drove in, ye know, from all walks o'life, no like the clubs; students, foreigners, hippies, goths, everyone, guys in suits with brief cases, country bumpkins, married guys. What was the old slogan?' he says – *Everything under one roof*. It was mental, some guys'd crawl under the wall, other guys climbing over the top, or ye'd leave yer door open a bit, then they'd push it open and boobies yer uncle. There was even for a while, in two of the cubicles, this bit of the back wall came off, and ye stuck yer head through. The glory days, eh.'

Tommy recalls this all in the affectionate past tense now, as the mall has now been refurbished and the cottaging problem dealt with by CCTV, patrolling and reinforced walls. Also Tommy has over the years lost a friend or two and is settled now with Steven who works in Boots the Chemist in the mall. Tommy too has a respectable job, working for the council.

'It gets its hooks in ye tho,' says Tommy. 'Ye canna just stop it when ye want. I'd be in there just actually trying to do some shopping for once and I'm walking round and there'd be some guy with this big bag and I'd think, hello, there's no way that guy shops in Debenhams. So I followed him and it was the toilets right enough. It's like yer a secret agent, ye know, it's kind o' the buzz, ye know cos there's hundreds of folks there, and no-one knows what yer up to.'

He becomes excited again, talking about the methods.

'Sometimes, I'd get the fear, ye know, just thinking, they must be getting suspicious, seeing me wae the same old bag every day. Right, so ye'd have to have a wee something in the bag, so it looks like you're shopping for real, in case they stopped ye, right, like a jacket or something. So then, and this is mental, I'm going round Top Man and H&M, checking behind the counters to see what size of bags they've got, and even BHS. And BHS are pretty substantial by the way. So then I'm looking round for the cheapest biggest thing to buy, and it always turns out to be duvet covers. And they're no that cheap. Ye've no idea how many bloody duvet covers I've got stashed in the flat. Oh aye, God, when I think of how much I must have spent just trying to get the right bags, over the years, must have been hundreds, more. Now ye can probably just buy them in line or something.'

Tommy often gets melancholy when talking of now. 'Aye, I'm over all that business. Anyway, what if I was at it, and I sees Steve in there in the bogs. No, he says, I couldny bear it. Commitment, aye, that's what it's all about now.' And he falls silent. But it is not long till he is grinning again.

'Mind you, I quite fancy checking out that Riverdale Centre,' he says. 'They've got a big John Lewis in there, and I mean big, and I like a big wan, right up ma arse.'

Justin Hyde



Justin's playlist:

Maggie's Farm - Rage Against The Machine
The Spider And The Fly - Rolling Stones
One Debt Away - Middle Class Rut
Home - Edward Sharpe And The Magneticks
Streets of Baltimore - Gram Parsons

In My Newspaper Today

a fat fuck
stands there dumbfounded
as the foreclosure company
dumps his possessions
onto the curb
to be scavenged
by people
in rusty trucks.

buried
3/4 of the way
into the article
it says
he knew this was coming
for a year.

i don't know
who is the bigger
turd:

the fat fuck
for accepting unchecked credit
beyond his means

or the bank
for giving it to him
then selling it
up-river.

these things
shouldn't happen
in america,
they quote
the fat fuck
in a final photo
showing a two liter of coke
dangling
between his fingers.

i take
a bite
of bagel.

one booth over
two hispanic brothers
dressed like vagrants
pour a whole bottle of syrup
out onto the table

running their hands through it like rats

while their mother
talks into a cellphone
about the burberry purse
and weekend in vegas
she's going to buy
with her tax return.

this is
the country
we deserve.

Fresh Flowers Every Night

a forty eight year old
post menopausal vp
of a grocery store chain

a one armed
nineteen year old nanny
from guatemala

the red haired
ghost hunter
who pays the bills
delivering newspapers

or the stuttering
med student
from washington.

truly amazing
the scope
of women
who can be hustled
out of the penumbra
onto a twin size mattress
on the floor
of a dingy apartment
in des moines iowa.

they've all got sad

flies
in their heads

and hearts
like velcro.

but so
do i.

We All Gotta Be Somewhere

a grapefruit spoon
in his left hand
which he's using
to cut pats of butter
into four small squares

scooping each one
into his mouth
with the efficiency
and precision
of a neurosurgeon.

a penny
in his right hand
which he's using
to scratch off
lottery tickets

a pile of them
on the edge of his booth
thicker than a
funk & wagnalls.

can i
get you more coffee honey?
the truck-stop waitress
asks him.

No,
more butter,
he murmurs

left foot
tapping out
a constant rhythm
like some old
steam engine
piston

tongue
air jordan
out the
side of his mouth.

his phone
rings:

boardlan's taxidermy
chet boardlan speaking,
he says into the receiver.
i'm up in iowa
some accountant
over to keosaqua
thought he was davy crockett
blasted a mountain lion
out of a tree
in his backyard.
how big a giraffe we talking?
20-25feet?
give me a call
early part of next week.

he puts the phone
back into the front pocket
of his shirt.

davy crockett
good one chet,
he chuckles to himself.

he blows
the dandruff
off the card
in front of him

pulling another
off the top
of the deck.

Christiana Spens



Christiana's playlist:

Runaway Horses - Belinda Carlisle
It's My Party And I'll Cry If I Want To - Lesley Gore
Absolutely Fabulous - Pet Shop Boys
Angie - Rolling Stones
Mother's Little Helper - Rolling Stones

The Birthday Party

Forty lilies in forty vases, forty cakes with forty candles, forty kinds of dip and forty bruschetta, forty heart-shaped sandwiches and forty kinds of cupcake. Forty sorts of cocktail, necessary for the more than forty guests, mostly from the past fifteen years of my life, but a few from that distant childhood, those blurry university years. Everyone I know and many I wish I didn't. But it's too late now to take back the invitations. It's too late to regret it all.

"Forty years and forty lovers!" an old friend reminds me, and most other people in the room, "but how many of them did you invite?"

I laugh it off and turn around, and go to the restroom, and wish this wasn't happening. I have never been a birthday party kind of person. I don't want everyone to meet and talk and share stories about how they know me, what they remember. I don't want them all to get flashbacks to embarrassments, remind me of what I happily forgot, and ask me what I'm doing now. It's unnecessary to be so cruel. But then I did invite them.

I smile at people as I leave the room, "So great to see you!" - "Thank you for coming!" - "You look beautiful, Sandra!" - and then I lock myself in a cubicle, take a deep breath and blank them out for a moment. But the vision of them all - my emotional attachments, beautiful friends, seeps in - a pink, swirling glow of my nearest, dearest strangers, my loveliest lost faces. Maybe I am overwhelmed by all the love, or maybe new wisdom splinters my facade, my carefully constructed fantasies, for a moment. I am pulling myself together when I hear familiar chatter, voicing my worst anxieties, and confirming the

suspicion that my enemies are too close to me, and my friends aren't even here.

"Her dress is sweet. It's like this dress she wore at her thirtieth though. How can she have forgotten that?" a shrill Manhattan voice announces, the other side of the door.

"Well, I doubt she remembers anything from her thirtieth, Lulu." Two old friends from my first job at a rip-off gallery in Mayfair, it would seem - Lulu and Rachel.

"I wonder if she invited Tom?"

More laughter. "She should never have slept with William. Big. Mistake."

"Rachel! You are *awful*. Awful. How *is* Charlotte?"

"She's good. She's terrible. She went travelling."

"Thought as much. Is my hair okay like this, or...?"

"It's perfect. Let's go back. I want to try forty cocktails."

"Oh stop it, Rachel! You sound like Angie."

I'm about to open the door and make my escape, and not let the gossip get to me, when another person I wanted to avoid comes in, with another person I didn't realize I wanted to avoid, but apparently need to.

"No - not here. It's so tacky, and we're not teenagers."

"No one's here, Sara. We can leave the party but it would be obvious." I know the voice, the pushiness, immediately: Tom. I shouldn't have invited him, clearly. He remarried since I left him, but apparently that's not working out.

"We can't leave the party," Sara says. "It would be rude to Angie. It would be [giggle] mean! I said not *here*, Tom, it's..."

They shut the door of the cubicle next to me and I take my chance at escape, feeling like a teenager more than even they do. I glance at my reflection and my hair and make-up are fine, and I like this colour actually, and I leave and go back into the dazzle of my awful party, which at least can't be as bad as the restroom has become.

I try to be calm and walk through the little crowd of fair-weather friends, and they are all enjoying my efforts as much as they can, and I try to be satisfied with the décor of this bar I wish I hadn't chosen, and ignore the paranoia that they are laughing about me. I scan the room for people I want to see but see only a flash of cocktail dresses, plumped lips and glossy, dyed hair. Good figures, too much bragging, and moneyed smiles; perhaps this was what they wanted, but I didn't recognize it as my own. A glimmer of alienation, a feeling that I'm at the wrong birthday party. This can't be my life. These can't be my friends. I don't recognize these hard, smiling faces.

And I'm too used to these situations, now - these trysts of lovers and friends. I used to feign happiness so often that I sometimes convinced myself that I was at ease in my make-

believe. It is slipping now, at last.

"Angie!"

Finally, Todd; perhaps the only person invited whom I do want to see. We were at school together and he is never surprised when I regress or run away. He does not think less of me for my moments of childish panic and school play stage fright. He smiles from across the room, and I go over, and he says, "Angie, it looks great. I'm sorry I'm a bit late."

"I want to leave," I tell him, and he looks at me as if I'm a disruptive little girl again.

"Don't be silly. Everyone wants to see you," he says, taking me in, protecting me from it all. I sigh, relieved, and hold him tight.

"Not really. I don't think they do." I try and fail to smile. He tries and fails to change my mind.

"You just need to stop stressing about the party and start enjoying yourself."

"I've been listening to people talk about me, look down on me, and lie to me for an hour now. I don't want to be here anymore. The only way I'll enjoy myself is if you take me to your car right now." He sighs and smiles with his pale brown eyes.

Then he gazes around at all the people I want to abandon, and then back to me in the very sweet, understanding way he always had, and takes my hand. We turn around and leave them all. Their glitter and hostility fade as their voices become incomprehensible and the noise of the outside traffic mows them down.

Todd gives me a cigarette, as we're walking down Lafayette, and says, "I never liked your friends either."

I smile, with an old addiction and my only friend. "You always had better taste than me."

"I did try to tell you." He smiles.

"I should have listened. Where shall we go?"

He puts his arm around me and points at a boring little bar with sweet little lights, and says, "They have nice flowers, nice wine, and no one ever goes there."

"Perfect." I reply, all perked up again.

Todd kisses my forehead and takes my coat, and I pretend not to hear when he tells the waiter to find a cake, a candle, a sparkler.

We sit down and order some rosé and some pizza and we talk about all the times we escaped together before, all the times we never looked back: various boring lessons at school, all the hockey matches, a few family engagements, and a couple pointless flings, even.

"Funny how the best times are always leaving what should have been the best times," he

says, as the waiter pours our wine. I agree.

"And you know, it was a good idea to have a birthday party, if only because it means all the people I don't want to talk to are in one place. We won't bump into anyone we don't want to see!"

We raise our glasses to being anti-social, alone, together, as ever.

Tania Hershman



Tania's playlist:

Save Me - Aimee Mann
Don't Stop - Fleetwood Mac
These Boots Are Made for Walking - Nancy Sinatra
Long And Winding Road - The Beatles
Mother And Child Reunion - Paul Simon

Move Quickly Now

She said, "Move quickly now and we'll go together. No, don't look behind. No, don't." He wondered but followed, only being small and not yet ready for disagreements. Or rather, not yet ready to see if this would be what he decided to be disagreeable about. He was a small boy who chose his battles carefully, understanding almost from the first moment that it was not worthwhile to waste his energies. So he had sat, a calm and fat baby, watching and assessing. She had expected more cries, more shrieking, and was relieved when he turned out not to be one of those. She had shown him off to friends:

"He's placid, so placid," said her friends, ragged around their eyes and mouth from bewildered and uncalm nights with their own. They looked at him greedily and soon she stopped seeing those sorts of friends, those sorts of mothers.

They walked together along the road, but he wanted to look back. She held his hand as if gripping onto a rope ladder dangling over a gorge. Gripped him so tightly.

"How do you know where we'll get to?" he said, and she wanted to say something original, something about crystal balls or divination by means of arrows, but she was tired and he was too clever, so she said, "I have a map, and I've got an address for us. Don't worry."

"I'm not worried," said the boy, and he wasn't, but he was curious.

They came across the first body some hours later, as she moved them both off the road to rest between trees. She stopped still, and he stood behind her and for one quick instant she wished she could fly, wished she could just take him and go up and up and never have to show him anything but clouds again.

He stared at the body, which had wounds to its head. Probably caused by a knife, thought the boy, without thinking how he might possibly know that. She was staring at the face, which had a faraway look to it.

They stood there for a long time, the woman and the boy and the dead man. He had the word "father" circling in his mind, and she was trying not to cry, not to just sit there and raise her arms up to the world and the circling crows.

"Come on," said the boy, and he took her hand. "Come on, let's go," and he led her away, back to the road, and they carried on walking.