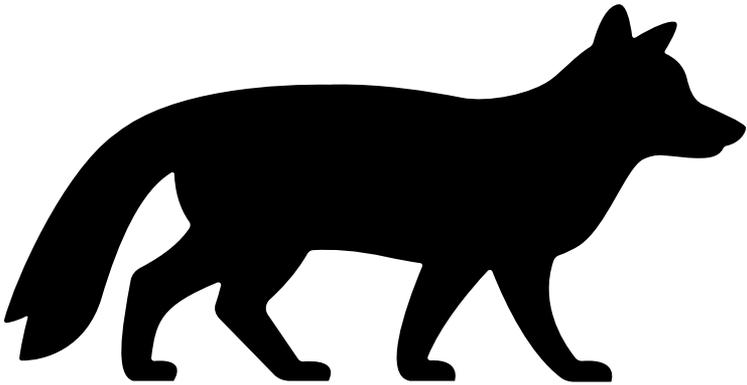


# **GUTTER VOICES**

**ISSUE #3**



# GUTTER VOICES

[TWITTER.COM/GUTTERVOICES](https://twitter.com/GUTTERVOICES)  
[GUTTERVOICES.COM](https://guttervoices.com)

## What's New in the Gutter

Welcome to Issue 3 of Gutter Vices which is actually Issue 4, in a way. We have now released two regularly scheduled issues and a special Black voices issue. If you haven't seen them, check them out on our website.

We have made a lot of strides since Issue 2 and have officially set up a proper website which you can check out at [guttervoices.com](http://guttervoices.com) as well as our Patreon page (see page 14). Our website is also host to a blog with behind the scenes insights into Gutter Voices & the works within it. There's some really exciting stuff planned for it so keep an eye out for that too in the coming weeks. We're aiming to keep it updated with a post every week or two.

We are looking forward to the exciting future of Gutter Voices and continuing to grow. But that is all in the months and years to come. For now, enjoy these fabulous poems and pieces of fiction!

Yours in the gutter,  
Gutter Voices

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- Join our exclusive list of cool cats and never miss out on an issue!

# AGING

BY JESSICA MEHTA

Am I strange that getting old fits  
me like a good suit, goes down  
like a buttery oyster—just two chews  
to perfection? I wear these new lines  
like the sweater that smells of you, comfortable  
in the cloying, fragile in the flailing. My god,  
who would want to do their twenties  
again, the teenage years drunk in angst  
or childhoods where traumas are  
big as whales and our parents acerbic  
gods? Me, I barely survived the first  
time around that macabre carousel, just look

at these battle scars: The first threads  
of silver, the laugh lines running deep,  
and the crow's feet cawing with lungs  
of steel echoing over weathered tombstones.

# ATONE ME LIGHTLY

*BY EMILY GIBSON*

with divinity, unconscious

a sunday morning sat down for coffee

you in the house, me in the backyard

stale images of wantings, for future reference

taped in an ectoplasm, stored in an atrium

there's no path there anymore

take my hand and lead me to my grave

a piling heap of miscommunications

on which i will become one with the soil

i did not say it right, oh dear god

to whom i will atone and to whom will

atone me lightly. full of garbage

i can romanticize anything. with grace,  
with fruit. i am one long boring afternoon  
and into it i become one longer, affectionate  
need and a check on your to-do list  
do not give me cause for alarm and i will not  
lunge forward into the thickness of nuance

# I BREAK THE STRINGS

*BY LINDA CRATE*

i am the moon daughter

solitary i shine

like my mother

oft i have been

misunderstood,

not everyone appreciates

my calm seas;

but everyone notices

my hurricanes—

i am judged for everything i  
erode and everything that remains,  
i am judged when i act and when i  
don't react and it is exhausting;

i am fierce and i am feral  
wild and full of talons and teeth  
i'm not sure what they want  
from me but i know they like to  
make me the villain even  
when i'm not—

they want to control me,  
but i refuse to be their puppet;  
i always break the strings.

# THE BLUE NIGHTMARE

*BY LINDA CRATE*

i remember

the night

i was lost in the

dark blue sky

there were no stars to light the way,

and my moon mother was hiding

somewhere i couldn't find

her;

everything was terrifying

whether it was a hooting owl or the branches

snapping beneath my feet—

the forest, my refuge,

became a prison of nightmares;

and i knew not whisper of wind to listen to  
nor which tree would guide me out of the forest  
came out five miles from home and was found by  
a neighbor and everyone teased me for years at church  
about  
my sense of direction—  
the joke's on them  
i never got lost  
again.

# HOW TO SUPPORT US

We recently started a Patreon page to help support Gutter Voices. We have some really exciting rewards for backing us on Patreon and it starts from as little as €2 per month - that's the cost of a very nice chocolate bar or a very bad cup of coffee.

Our aim is twofold: we want to be able to pay our contributors for their writing but we also want to keep Gutter Voices itself free. All the rewards for supporting us through Patreon are bonuses, you still get Gutter Voices experience whether you back us or not.

As we have now published multiple issues, we will be aiming to backpay first to contributors from previous issues and play catch-up until we're up to date. Hopefully with enough backers and support we will be able to catch up sooner rather than later.

By all means, don't feel pressured to support us through Patreon. If you can, fantastic! If you can't, please continue to read Gutter Voices and share us. Ultimately, our focus here at Gutter Voices is to share new and exciting voices and act as the first stepping stone for new authors in their publication and storytelling journeys.

**CHECK OUR PATREON PAGE HERE:**

[PATREON.COM/GUTTERVOICES](https://patreon.com/guttervoices)

Current Backers: Jean C

# FOXES AND COYOTES

*BY ZACH MURPHY*

The tulips grew apart from each other that Spring. The ground cracked and crumbled in ways that I'd never seen before.

I watched the foxes and the coyotes battle all Summer on Cesar Chavez Boulevard, where the blood would leave permanent stains on the concrete. The reckless packs would flash their teeth, mark their territories, and steal more than just scraps.

Me, I was a squirrel. I was small. But I was agile. I hustled from sun up until sundown at a frenetic pace. I always minded my own business and stuck to my own path. I didn't want to get involved with the vicious nature of pack mentality.

My best friend was a squirrel, too. We grew up around same nest. We used to climb trees, chase tails, and break soggy

bread together. We'd walk the wires between safety and danger. And when we got too deep into the mess, we'd get out just in time. Growing up, I always wondered if we would live long enough to die from old age, or if the environment and its elements would get to us first.

That Fall, my best friend got caught up with the foxes and the coyotes. Now he's gone.

The foxes and the coyotes lied low in the Winter. Me, I trotted across the frozen ground and desperately hoped I'd see my best friend's footprints once again.

# MY BIRD

*BY JEAN CALLENDER*

My bird, he is so beautiful

He dominates my dreams

So high he is above me

How infinite he seems

The sea so far below him

I stretch my arms so high

But I will never catch him

I cannot reach the sky

His feathers are so lovely

I cannot look away

His colours are such fantasy

That I can only say

“Oh Bird I cannot catch you

Why won't you come to me ”

He whirls, lets out a mocking cry

Then flies across the sea

# 20 WORDS CHALLENGE

IN OUR LAST ISSUE WE ISSUED OUR READERS A CHALLENGE TO CRAFT SOME EXTREME FLASH FICTION WITH A 20 WORD LIMIT. IT WAS A FUN CHALLENGE AND HERE ARE OUR FAVOURITES:

I swore that would be the last time. You just smiled and said  
'See you next time. Darling.'

- Dave Clancy

Laying in the dirt, he had only to wait for a few geological  
ages to pass for a proper burial.

- Connor Orrico

After I sent my only child to die for your sins, I stopped  
getting Father's Day presents. You are welcome.

- John Tinney

# NEW BAIT

BY DARRAN BRENNAN

*Approximately forty miles off the west coast of Ireland.*

The rusting implement rested against my thigh, Experience, not necessarily in challenging the primordial, had taught me to have patience. Things slowed on the ocean, thoughts were hazy, lazy, and uncertainties surfaced on waves. Bad or good, it was all luck.

“We’ve had bad luck for ages,” said Hugo, yanking on the handle of the bait box, it refused to budge. “That thing keeps its distance.”

Quinn took a folding blade from the pocket of her camo shorts, wedged it under the lid, and it opened with a loud pop. They recoiled with the stench.

“Get it out there,” I said, watching the charcoal-coloured fin resurface between the foot-high waves.

Quinn reached towards the bait box, wincing with closed eyes. “Jesus, it’s off.”

“Will ye’ just do it,” I said. “Sorry, love.”

Hugo held his nose, dunking an arm into the slimy water, and pulled out a fist of fish guts. He shoved them into his sister's face—Quinn smirked without flinching—and he threw the innards into the ocean.

I saw its shadow pass my view—forty meters out—and change course back the way it came.

“It doesn’t seem interested in the bait,” he said.

She pushed him aside. “I’ll do it.” The motion of the boat sent him into the bait box, and he sat in it, flicking guts at her.

“Loser,” she said, preempting waves shunting the small boat and giving him the middle finger.

“Stop messing you two. Get more of it into the water.”

He got up squeezing bloody water from his shorts as the fin went under the surface.

I took the shaft and put it to the open muzzle, my hands shook.

“Come on, uncle Donnacha,” she said, as she took out a fish-tail and flung it. “Why does it have to smell so bad?”

“Ned Murphy said it has to.” I found the groove and slid the spear into the trigger mechanism until I heard a click. The pin popped up—like Ned had shown me.

“Why ‘uncle’ all of a sudden?” he asked, peppering the water with fish-heads.

“Since we moved in with Cara it just feels right,” she said. “He’s not our real Dad.”

“Shush, love,” I said. My fingers fumbled trying to thread the monofilament through the loops of the speargun. I glanced up to see the fin scything sideways and then diving, and I quickly threaded the line and attached it to the loop on the shaft. “Okay.”

They leaned on the edge of the fishing boat, either side of me, and waited for it to resurface.

“See, this one is smart,” she said. “It knows we’re hunting it.”

“Ned said you two were using the wrong bait,” I whispered. “And you went after it in the mornings. He said

the evening is the best time.” I searched the swells, trying to anticipate where it would show. “It’ll smell the blood and come back.”

After a few minutes of nothing, she sat down with her back to the water.

“What are you doing?” he asked, flinging innards backhandedly as far as he could. “You’re supposed to be spotting.”

“This was a stupid idea,” she said. “We’d do better alone with the new bait. He’s jinxing it.” She glanced at me out of the side of her eyes. “Sorry, uncle Donnacha.”

I knelt down and rested the speargun on top of the side of the boat. “Drop the ‘uncle’.”

“Shut up, he’s not jinxing it.” Hugo folded his arms. “We’ve tried with this one and got nowhere. Donnacha wants a shot, let him have it.”

Time crept on, achingly decelerated, as the boat drifted away from the blood-stained water. My knees and arms got sore from holding the heavy lump of metal. There was no sign of it, and no reward for our patience.

The sun drifted behind ranks and legions of angel-white cumulus clouds that fused and blackened further out—making the Atlantic murky. Seagulls circled overhead and dived for the bait, or they mocked my thoughts, as all flourishes of life seemed to nowadays—Quinn also made me feel older than forty-one.

She played with the ends of her hair; dampening a frizzy clump of curls with seawater. “Did you say that fella is a black albino?” she asked, out of the blue.

Hugo frowned at her. “What fella?”

“Donnacha, I’m talking to you,” she said. “Didn’t you say he was?”

I glanced up. “Were you listening in on my conversation with Cara?”

“Are you going to bring him to Treoir?” she asked, pinching the ends of her hair with her piano-player fingers and squinting one eye.

“He’s going to stay here for a while, yes.” The sun had come out from behind the clouds, and I noticed the boat was drifting in milky water. “Is that pollution?”

“Fucking capitalist,” he said, sticking his chin in the air.

She hummed a flat version of the Lonesome Boatman.

I spotted movement fifty meters out and lifted the speargun. “Quiet, love.”

She continued humming a little more softly.

“Shut up, Quinn,” he said, sipping up his wetsuit.

The sun caught the top of waves, blinding me momentarily. As one rolled on, across its back—silky then distorted by intersecting waves—I saw a v-shaped wake glistening on the top of the water.

“It’s coming right at us,” I said, as the tip of the fin broke through the surface.

Quinn stood up and slipped on fish-guts, sending her backwards. I watched in disbelief as she disappeared into the murkiness. “Hugo,” I said, diving to grab her and missing. “Help your sister.”

I leaned prone against the side of the boat and aimed the speargun at the fin with one hand. A flash of orange passed by my peripheral vision and a life-ring plonked into the ocean with a loud slap. Quinn resurfaced a few feet away

from it, spluttering and screaming, as the boat drifted in the current.

He reached out a hand. “Swim.”

I saw the shark inside an illuminated wave—like it was encased in blue glass. It was the width of two obese men, and its fin was as big as the sail of a training-dingy. “Jesus Christ, this thing is enormous.” Shivers ran up my spine.

Hugo shoved my shoulder. “Fire, ye’ plank,” he said, and edged onto the lip of the boat, stretching his leg over the water. “Grab my leg, Quinn.”

She flapped her arms until she reached his boot and clawed her way along his leg. He held on but began to slip in. “Donnacha,” he whimpered.

My finger hovered over the trigger as the shark kept its course towards the boat, forty meters out. I hesitated—if I missed I wouldn’t have time to reload, if it was closer I’d have a better chance. A splash sounded next to me, and I saw the two of them go into the drink as one and go under.

Thirty meters out, the shark changed course towards them and its long body slowly curved in the water and

submerged menacingly. I held my breath in the silence and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened!

I lunged to the other side of the boat and blindly reached a hand into a swell.

Hugo and Quinn resurfaced a couple of meters out.

“Swim,” I said and aimed at the scattered shape hulking a foot below the surface. I pulled the trigger again and nothing happened.

*“The safety, release the safety,”* said Quinn, frantically front-crawling past her younger brother.

“Stop splashing,” I said, seeing it get closer. “Stay still.” I remembered Ned’s instructions and gently released the safety, it made a faint click.

The moment went quiet, but for their panicked breathing, and I took aim. “Don’t move...stay—very—still.” I closed one eye. “It’s a great white. Let it pass. Stay—still.”

“Jesus,” she said, in a husky, almost inaudible squeal. “Shoot the fucking thing.”

Wind blew directly into my ears, as loud as a gale, drowning out doubts about missing, and I pulled the trigger.

A loud thwack sounded as the mechanism released, and a whooshing noise followed as the line was pulled at high speed through the metal loops. The spear entered the water silently and punctured the shark's rubbery skin. Immediately, it darted away.

"Hurry, get back in the boat," I said, reaching out a hand to Hugo, who swam first.

He lunged out of the water like a Marlin, slipped onto his back and got up in one fluid motion. He leaned over the side to pull his sister in, while I watched the spool get smaller and the shark dive deeper.

He laughed, as he pulled Quinn over the side and the two of them lay on their back, with their legs on the side of the boat. "We almost died," he said, gasping for breath and turning his head to look at her.

"That was mental," she said, blowing away water streaming over her top lip and puffing her cheeks. "What a buzz." She held her hands clasped against her forehead, elbows out wide. "Is it still alive, Donnacha? Tell me it's dead."

“I barely scratched the fucker,” I said, staring at the spool uncoiling. “I don’t think I hit it in a good spot.” I took out my pocket knife and held it under the line.

“What are you doing?” he asked, jolting up into a sitting position. “You have it hooked.” He got on his knees and held my wrist. “Reload the speargun, wait until it comes up, and get it again man.”

“It’s too big, and this boat is too small, it’ll sink us.” I cut the line and slumped down with a disappointed sigh. “Shit.”

He sat on the opposite side of the boat. “We must have tried ten times with that thing.” He sighed. “It gets away every time.”

“Are you sure it’s the same one?” I asked. “You didn’t mention it was so big.”

“We’ve only seen it below the water, and it stayed away. You don’t get many great whites this side of the Atlantic.” He zipped open the chest flap on his wetsuit. “I’m pretty sure it’s the same one. ”

“You had it,” she said.

“Ah, fair play anyway,” he said. “You injured it at least. Good job, Donnacha.”

She groaned. “Don’t give him a big head.”

He waved his hand at her as I sucked air sharply through my teeth. “There wasn’t much kick in that speargun,” I said. “Hopefully it’ll bleed out.”

“Wonder if Ned was a whaler in a past life.” He pushed his sister’s thigh with his foot, wiping blood from a cut on his other ankle. “I’m not getting into that water until it’s dead.”

She sat up, squeezing water from her hair. “I’m convinced now it’s the one that got Wann Murphy,” she said and got into the driver’s seat. “We should get a few boats together and hunt it.”

Quinn turned the boat around and headed into Monte Cristo Bay. The bay was typically calm, and there was a warm evening breeze. Straight ahead, the sky was a deep purple and stars were visible. I turned around on the middle seat, looking at the dipping sun painting unique patterns of cloud and sea into a kaleidoscope of oranges, pinks and baby-

blues, as we passed the small, uninhabited islands. “Maybe it did take Wann. I hadn’t entertained the idea until I saw it up close.”

Hugo peeled off the wetsuit. “So, you don’t think it was the traffickers now?”

“I don’t know now, Ned doesn’t seem to think so any more.” I held the speargun on my lap. “I want another go at it.”

“Aren’t you going to Dublin in the morning to get that lad?” he asked, pressing on the bait-box, using his body-weight to close the lid.

“There are going to be a few issues about that,” said Quinn, “when the islanders find out he’s from Africa and he’s an albino.”

“Jonah’s a Dub, and it’ll be grand,” I said, still unsure if I was doing the right thing.

She looked at me over her shoulder. “I read up on African albinos, there’s lots of superstition surrounding them, and you know what people are like here. It’s going to stir a few pots.”

As we passed the old wreck, with its rusting chimney stack visible above the water, I saw two tiny figures marching knees-to-chin through the swamps, between dunes and Clippers Hook. Red and yellow raincoats and wellies, no more than seven or eight years old. “Who are they?” I asked.

Hugo shrugged. “Never seen them before.”

“Do you know them, Quinn,” I asked.

She pushed the throttle to full and the engine roared.

“Nope.”

The boat shuddered violently as it hit the sandbank and beached, sending me forwards into a hunch, clinging to the side. “Jesus Christ, what did ye’ do that for?”

“Sorry,” she said, looking away.

The two boys stood staring at us and then came towards us.

Quinn jumped off the boat and went to the back. “I felt like the engine was lagging. I need to look at it.”

Hugo was on the beach, hands on hips and gazing at the boys hopping and skipping his way.

I got off, feeling disturbed by Quinn's odd mood change, and joined him. "Are they from O'Dowd's Point?" I asked.

"If I had to guess, I'd say yeah."

I looked back at Quinn and waved at her to come over. She shook her head and ducked down behind the engine.

"How's it going?" said Hugo, as the two little munchkins arrived with screwed up faces and piercing blue eyes.

"Where are you from?"

The smaller boy in red pointed east.

"O'Dowd's Point?" he asked.

They nodded in unison. "We were only catching tadpoles," said the one in red.

The one in yellow kept his eyes on me.

"I'm Donnacha, this is Hugo," I said. "What's your name?"

"I'm not supposed to talk to you," said the red one.

I frowned at Hugo, chuckling to myself. "Me?"

"You're the witch's husband," he said.

I stepped forward and Hugo grabbed my arm. “Leave it Donnacha, they’re only kids.”

“Who told you to say that?” I asked, bending until I could see the freckles on their button noses.

“Witches, witches, witches,” they chanted.

Hugo laughed.

I made a fist. “Tell whoever told you to say that they’re... they’re sick.”

“Jaysus, Donnacha, relax.”

“Hugo, it’s this kind of thing that made Erin sick.”

“Are you drunk, man? They’re kids.”

“I don’t care.” I chased them up the beach and into the woods between the dunes and the town centre.

They ran off—hiding behind trees and looking back at me with impish stares—until their little shadows faded into the twilight.

# FEATURED WRITER:

## DARRAN BRENNAN

Darran's debut novel *Treoir* is coming out October 9th, 2020.

We asked him a few questions about it.

### **What is *Treoir* about?**

*Treoir* is told by Donnacha, a man who offers to help an African person with albinism (PWA), Jonah. Jonah's petty criminal of a father plans to sell him to an African witchdoctor for a small fortune—who use body parts from PWA in ceremonies. Jonah's differences throw Donnacha's conservative Irish island community into chaos, rekindling old superstitions—until Jonah goes missing. Donnacha goes to a dark part of Africa to hunt a witch doctor, hoping to find Jonah.

## **What inspired you to write *Treoir*?**

The book started as a short story—that came in a dream—about a man on an island protecting kids of different colours from the craziness in the world. I don't pay attention to dreams, but it was so visceral I felt a need to explore it. It ended up becoming a novel about how superstition and the old ways clash (here and in Africa). I live in Rathmines and it's a very mixed bag where rich and poor; black and white; and old and modern co-exist. So I think that inspired the dream and ultimately the root of the story.

## **What was the biggest challenge writing *Treoir*?**

Keeping the story liner and making every part relative to the main plot. Alongside the plot there are themes of fear and superstition; mental illness; physical, mental, and sexual norms; science clashing with religion; and quantum physics' relationship with love. Jonah had to have a unique reason to make Donnacha (a stranger to him) want to risk his life to save him. As the two are science nerds, I had an idea Jonah

could have a brilliant scientific theory. That turned out to be harder to make work than I thought. I researched black holes, consciousness, and the Fibonacci Sequence in nature. Eventually, I came up with something that I believe, conceptually, takes other theories in a different direction.

### **What was the most exciting moment writing *Treoir*?**

There are a few exciting moments for me personally (whatever you can dream up, it probably happens in Africa). The book is a ride and builds to an unrelenting 100-page climax. There's a part in the last act where Donnacha has a Sophie's Choice moment. That, and the subsequent scenes afterwards, literally had my heart racing writing them. There is also a big reveal near the end that answers questions readers might have about certain characters and subplots that seemed to go nowhere. They were great fun to write.

## **What's coming next after *Treoir*?**

I've three other completed novels in the editing phase. One is about the youngest judge in Ireland (who's a very naughty boy). Another is about two people—a twisted band manager together with a bored TD's secretary—who try to ruin a man's life for a bet. And the third is about a famous musician looking for meaning and trying to fit into a normal existence after his career tanks. I'm entering that in the Irish Writers Center Novel Fair in September. I'm also a music producer and I've been making an album since 2015, not sure what I'm doing on that front.

**And a sixth, for whimsy - if you discovered dark secrets on a small island, would you pursue it or pretend you didn't notice?**

I'd whisper about it in the pub so someone else could pursue it. I'm not discrete enough. I'd leave that to the Miss Marples of this world. Those types of people can get away

with snooping into peoples business without anyone saying a word. I'd inevitably end up as somebody's dark secret.

# SEND US YOUR SUBMISSION

If you would like to be a part of our next issue, submissions are now open!

Send your submissions to [guttervoices@gmail.com](mailto:guttervoices@gmail.com) with 'Submission' as your subject line.

Submissions can be one or multiple pieces but the total amount must not exceed 3,000 words or 12 pages (taking 250 words to equal 1 page).

We are open to poetry, flash fiction & short stories.

Please make sure to introduce yourself in the body of the email, include your website or preferred social media, and title your documents.

**Submissions Close August 20th.**

# SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

We sincerely hope you've enjoyed Gutter Voices Issue #3 as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

If you have any feedback or suggestions, please send them to [guttervoices@gmail.com](mailto:guttervoices@gmail.com) with 'Feedback' as your subject line.

# JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST

If you want to be first in line for Issue #4 and all future issues, send an email to [guttervoices@gmail.com](mailto:guttervoices@gmail.com) with 'Email List' as your subject line to join and receive it direct to your inbox on September 15th!

This email list will only be used for delivering issues and no other purpose.

**THANK YOU!**

**SEE YOU SEPTEMBER 15TH FOR ISSUE #4**