

Nanette coughed with such ferocity that her ribs clawed against her skin desperate to be released. Phlegm emerged and she leaned over the side of the mattress to spit it out. A vile mix of colours spread before her. The concrete floor stank of urine, the smell penetrating her nose. Kerosene, engine oil and other poisons hung in the air like a cloak long forgotten in the rain. A workbench stood beside the mattress: screwdrivers, wrenches, and a hammer adorned its space. A lone motorbike, covered in its shroud, stood abandoned in the corner. Once it had graced the streets of places far away. Lately, it was condemned to the back streets near Ballymun.

Through a narrow window faint sunlight crept in and brought little warmth. Nanette attempted to lift her head. The pounding drums that played a steady beat in her mind reached their crescendo. She coughed again, spat out blood. *Shit*, she thought, *not good*. Her fingers tingled; her legs sighed from exhaustion. She sought the floor beside her. A weak arm with vibrant veins encased in translucent skin slowly walked its fingers in search of its prey. They found the cigarette packet, the fingers brushing its edge before the arm collapsed. She felt a hunger from inside as the fingers grasped at the packet again. They couldn't reach.

"Useless. Both of us," she muttered. A sudden urge to urinate arose even though the bed was already wet. "He's pissed himself again," she whispered. She spoke louder, "you pissed yourself again." She lay back, the haze that stretched before her disappearing as she closed her eyes. Ragged breaths punctured the room. Wrinkles formed on her forehead as she stilled herself. There was only her breath. No other breath. No other mumbles. No other movement.

Her mind raced but her body slowed as she tried to reach towards Eamon. Nanette's hand brushed his back. Through his saturated shirt she could feel the cold. She wanted to make him warm and knew there was a blanket in the small suitcase that held their few possessions. Unfurling her legs their stiffness protested for her not to move. She had forgotten about the toilet. She needed to get to the blanket. She knew she needed to move, to help.

Wrapped him up, stroked his hair, kissed his cheek. The chill of his skin the antithesis to her warmth. She began a song, one that his Ma had sung to him when he was young. A light lament, it had always called him away from the war that had raged outside. That his Ma, each night, had sung the song, prayed to God to keep him safe and waited until he fell asleep.

Nanette remembered the words to the song; even though she didn't remember how they ended up in the garage. She remembered the melody; even though she didn't remember how they had gotten home last night. But she couldn't remember how to cry. She couldn't remember how to feel sad. She couldn't remember how to wake him up. To make him talk. To say hello. Eamon McCarthy was dead.