



Celebrating What Truly Matters

Virgin Slate

Issue 9

May 2012

Contents

| | | |
|--|-----|---|
| Contents & Editor's note | Ed. | 2 |
| <u>Celebrating What Truly Matters</u> | | |
| Celebrating What Truly Matters | MB | 3 |
| Celebrating What Truly Matters | MG | 4 |
| Celebrating What Truly Matters | LH | 5 |
| Celebrating What Truly Matters | DS | 6 |
| The Same People | AC | 7 |
| About VirginSlate | | 8 |

Editor's Note

Dear Readers and Writers,

Again, there has been a bit of a delay between publications. Normally, we would not bother with explanations, but we have a good reason, so it's worth telling.

Before this issue, we were all competition-virgins.

Our theme this time around was 'Celebrating What Truly Matters' for our first competition. We all wrote something to submit to the *Irish Times Powers Whiskey Short Story Competition 2012*. The submission date was April 30th. The VirginSlate members submitted six entries between 400 and 450 words on the theme of 'Celebrating What Truly Matters', five of which are included here. Unfortunately none of us won the €10,000 prize but one entry made the long list (of several hundred). The organisers are planning to publish the best 50 in a few months time, so entry #6 will have to stay off the web until then.

Happy Reading and Happy Writing,
Ed.
May 2012

Theme: Celebrating What Truly Matters

MB

Diana stood there transfixed, motionless expressionless, akin to her goddess namesake. No salty tears streamed down her chiseled ashen face, nothing dampened her perfectly groomed blonde curls, hanging like drapes, around her heart shaped face, she could have been a Bernini sculptor, adorning Piazza Navona.

Suddenly, one last resilient force struggled within: HE would NOT be the victor! After all she had given him, and all he had taken, he would not take her last remaining strength – hope. She was so emotionally bruised and battered, that it took all her inner reserve, to prevent her dark, self-destructive, thoughts, taking over her very existence.

With very mixed feelings and one last attempt at positivity, Diana headed along the narrow winding pathway, leading to the mountains. If they could speak, what would their constructive advice be to her she thought? Would they argue the futility of stress, anxiety, regret, past failures, missed opportunities, or else?

Now the “Mountain God” spoke slowly and clearly. “Step closer” he said “touch me, feel me; I am of this earth, as you are. Live, live, live! Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy! We are all part of this vast universe, each with its own part to play; I know mine, have done, for nigh on 10,000 years now. You have only to look at the flora and fauna, encompassed within my loving embrace. You, too, are part of us, yet with unique human and divine qualities, having a personal, significant role in this life.

If you, as a richly endowed, special, and unique human, renege on your divine responsibilities, the whole of creation is much the poorer. Just as no two blades of grass are identical, no two snowflakes, so it is with you. There never was, or never will be, an individual, predestined to be, or do, what you are. Go now with a heightened awareness live, love, enjoy”

Diana moved slowly, solemnly, from darkness into light. A clear enlightened inner voice aroused her consciousness. “We are, each and all, important, unique, special spirits of immense intrinsic value, let us go forward to live, give, enjoy, savour and enthusiastically celebrate what truly matters”. She reflected, she argued, she questioned, she struggled within her whole tortured being.

Diana tried, without success to lift her right hand to her head, now slowly painfully, she moved her left hand. As she lifted it to her half opened eyes, the sight of fresh red blood dripping from her finger tips, caused her to relapse back into unconsciousness! As she slowly drifted, the Spirit of the Mountain moaned softly around her “enjoy, enjoy, enjoy, live, live, live, celebrate, celebrate, celebrate”.

It was 6:37 am and she stood in the living room window of her first floor apartment, watching behind the curtains as the apartment block came to life. Already people were drifting off in their cars to their place of purpose - a flame of outrageous jealousy leapt in her gut. She had worked for this company for 15 years, they had owned her body and soul and she had been a happy slave, then they left without warning to set up in a much cheaper slave camp somewhere in India. She had been so bereft that she had slept walked through the last days and rage had not set in until she was alone. This made her rage impotent, like all of her specialised knowledge no longer needed – how she longed to shout at her past self for spending all that time on the now useless internal training programmes. That is what they had done to her, they had programmed her and now she had been superseded by someone in India who would spend many hours on internal training...

It seemed like a lifetime later she was sitting in the Doctor's surgery. She had lost her precious apartment to the banks and found herself back in her childhood bedroom depending on her parents again. This childhood sanctuary had lost its lustre and felt more like a prison these days. She had not slept since the move and was wondering if the Doctor might be able to help – this felt like a failure, but she felt a failure anyway and could not find the energy to care any more. She found it almost impossible to stutter out her situation to a Doctor who seemed only half her age. The Doctor had a way of listening and of making little grunts of empathy at just the right moment so that Emily began to feel human in her company and to feel her right to rage at what had happened. Amazingly without any drugs changing hands, she felt lighter and said so, something twitched at the corners of her mouth and she realised she was smiling and the feeling was so foreign that it made her laugh.

She joined a community group where she met a number of people who had been 'corporate cogs' and the group leader encouraged them to celebrate their liberation. Through this group she became an artist (not a very good one), a gardener and an accomplished fairy cake maker. She met with an Elder Group who encouraged her in the old tradition of 'having the craic'. How fabulous, that she had learned to celebrate what truly matters when she had thought that she had lost everything.

Theme: Celebrating What Truly Matters

LH

George let himself in at home and walked through to the kitchen. He slammed the keys down on the kitchen table.

His wife Katy dared to ask him how he got on. 6 weeks he announced and then paused and choked out the remaining words to hand back possession.

Katy's eyes took in her surroundings; her turn-key home; her now broken dreams.

The car parked outside – that was going too.

Pictures on the wall of islands hopped, of holidays taken.

What did any of this matter?

What was more frightening for her was her husband's despair.

She didn't ask him where they would go. She knew already. They would move in with his 85 year old mother. His mother had already told him she would have them all: himself, his wife and his children. Willingly. No blame. No accusation. Nothing to say except that they would all be welcome.

George though was still having a hard time dealing with this. At 50 years of age he couldn't recall a singular incidence before this when he had asked for help.

A successful businessman; he was an entrepreneur; always had been. Personal Guarantees, that's where he went wrong, he thought ruefully.

Banks twisted the screw and his employees turned on him. He thought bitterly of the banks' heavy handedness and the solicitor's letters from his employees. Loyalty was an illusion for when things were going well.

Katy could feel his bitterness. She wondered, not for the first time this year would this anger and bitterness become him forever. It had been part of him long enough now for her to seriously wonder. One thing she knew she would not let it envelop her and the children as a permanent thing. Either it would go or she would.

And so in a fatalist fashion she said with no embellishment. Brian and Marion were over while you were at the bank; they left an envelope on the table. €20,000. It's a gift. They don't want it back. It will be enough for school fees for the year.

George looked at her and sank his face in his hands.

Katy looked at him until he raised his face again. Such kindness he said. He realised that he had looked for loyalty in all the wrong places. He thought of Brian and Marion and their incredible gesture of friendship, his elderly mother and her unconditional love and his beautiful wife and children. He wondered why it took a crisis to mend his heart, restore his faith and bare his love.

Katy said simply and knowingly yes.

She walked over to him, placed her hands on his shoulders and gave him a heartfelt kiss.

Theme: Celebrating What Truly Matters

DS

Her hair was still dripping after the shower as she sat painting her nails a shiny black. Her two brothers had tired of waiting for her ages ago. They were probably already in the local doing rounds of Guinness. She could picture them eagerly waiting for the third pint, so they could start drinking the whiskey chaser; 'typical men', she thought.

She blew on her nails, then grabbed the hair dryer. It made her hair very fluffy, but that was the point. Next she gently pulled on her new stockings, careful not to rip them. The matching black underwear came after that. She grinned as she posed in front of the mirror, she knew she looked good. Then she glided into her new LBD, tight in all the right places.

She hated hairspray and the damage it did to her hair, but she suffered on. No blusher but she allowed herself the heavy dark eyeliner, smudging it a bit under her eyes. She painted on the dark lipstick, grinned to herself and grabbed her black stilettos and tiny black clutch.

She danced down the hallway for her mother's seal of approval. Her mother tutted and fussed over her, then brought out her dangly hematite earrings to complete her daughter's outfit. It was Brid's second date with the boy from work tonight, and he was taking her to the new drive in cinema to see The Rocky Horror Picture Show. It was going to be amazing.

He arrived at the door and blushed nervously as he paid compliments to her mum. She had butterflies in her stomach as she stepped into his car. He held the door for her – such a gentleman! – and her palms were sweaty. They made small talk in the car. She was so nervous she couldn't concentrate on what he was saying and hopped she wasn't making an idiot of herself. They pulled up to the cinema and tuned the radio into the movie.

The movie was well into the first half when she realised he was asking her something. Feeling dizzy she made her excuses and struggled out of the car to find the ladies room. Before she could make it there, she realised the butterflies in her stomach were jumping erratically. She heaved up into her clutch. Tears streaming down her face, she found the ladies and heaved up again, all over the cubicle and her new dress.

Not knowing what else to do, she called her mum. Within thirty minutes she was there at her side with a jumper and baby wipes. The boy didn't ask her out again, but she didn't care, she knows what really matters. Thank you Mum, I love you.

A Compromised Position

It is an early morning Tai Chi class and today it is just the four of us, the teacher, and his three students. We begin with Chi Kung a sequence of stationary positions, each held for a knee trembling minute; stillness sought but rarely found. Occasionally the teacher adjusts our stance: leaning, it seems, is a compromised position. We begin a new exercise called Pushing Hands.

We stood in pairs facing each other, legs apart, weight low with the aim of moving the other without moving yourself. I began opposite the teacher. "You have to invest in loss" he said as I leaned into the great bulk of him. And then he was away from me, but he had not moved. Only up close were you aware of his solid muscular presence. Yet each time I leaned into him he was somehow not there. He spoke of intention, of empty and of full, of investing in loss, of awareness.

We changed partners; the great bulk of him replaced by the lightness of a woman. And the dance began again, feet planted and apart, leaning into each other, back and forth, seeking to feel her intention, to deflect if she pushed, readying my own push.

Afterwards I think of you. And I remember leaning into you in the days when you welcomed it. Only up close did we work. We weren't much good at a distance. Intention was everything. Feet planted and apart, leaning into each other, back and forth, back and forth. And now we have to invest in loss, whatever that means. Back and forth, leaning into each other, intention was everything.

We change again. He shows me more. The trick, it seems, is not to lean into him, not to tense and push. My tension works against me. I must be aware of him, aware of myself, totally present. And if I want to move him I simply focus my intention beyond him and lean into my intention.

The day came when you leaned into me and I was not there. Back and forth, you danced alone, empty and full, empty and full. How did I not know? You must have known. Once you have lost yourself, then it is easy to lose your way. Intention is everything.

From across the floor I lean into the plant by the wall and finally I move him. Intention is everything.

From across the city, on another night alone, I lean into you, empty and full, empty and full.

Leaning, it seems, is a compromised position.

About VirginSlate

VirginSlate is a group of amateur creative writers based in Cork, Ireland.

Our inaugural session happened in the Slate Bar in Cork on Tuesday, 11th October 2011. We can blame the teacher of our creative writing class for cancelling that night, so we had nothing better to do than go to the pub and get creative.

Each of our fortnightly issues will begin with a theme (a word or a phrase). We then have two weeks to submit a piece of writing on that theme. The writing can use any form and take the theme in any direction the author wishes.

Every two weeks the group meets (in a pub) to discuss the various submissions and decides upon a theme for the following fortnight. The authors then have a chance to make any edits they like before the submissions are published online.

New members are welcome to either join us in the pub or to submit entries by email or post.

Email us at: virginslate@gmail.com

Or follow us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/VirginSlate>