

Small

By Damien Duggan

I fold my clothes as neat as I can into a drawer, pants on pants, jumper on jumper, neat piles, everything in order. A cold draft brushes my neck from the slightly ajar bedroom door just behind me, the peeling paint dances quietly on the architrave, as the softy unseen breath of air passes through the doorway. I continue unpacking my clothes and what little personal items I have managed to keep by my side these last few years. One item in particular, a small faded picture of my mother smiling with a beer bottle in her hand, as a large stage looms behind her, and the sun shines atop her blond hair. She is truly beautiful and my heart beats a little faster every time I pick up this photo.

Through all this I have always gone back to the simple ideology I have created of my mother, and what I can remember of her. In old German the word god translates to mean higher good, I see my mother in this light, a pedestaled image created between the mesh of confusion and badness that has greeted me piece by piece almost daily over these last four years. On the day my mother died, I still see as the catalyst of how all this began. I stood waiting at the school gate, I knew something was wrong as my mother was always early and as yet hadn't arrived, I was the last pupil standing as the rain drops landed on front of me and splattered my new shoes, I remember feeling annoyed by this at the time as I had only been given these shoes by my mother a couple of days before. I never could have predicted what was ahead of me in that moment. Then I felt the hand of the kindly Mr Kindles the principle of the school on my shoulder, this woke me from my annoyances. His eyes looked on me with sorrow and he asked me to come to his office. I did as he asked at the time, as any student would have without question. As I stepped inside his office an officious looking man with a name tag sat at the desk which I found odd at the time, I didn't know back then that that would be a precursor to my life, revolving around these adults with nametags bringing me to different homes and families, and always with the line. "It will be ok" which I believe looking back now

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they never believed themselves. I suppress a surprising anger that comes with these memories, that catches me off guard.

I file the photograph of my mother under the pile of pants with my other items, a simple compass left behind at one of the homes I was in by one of the other boys, has also been my unloving companion these last few years, and a small watch given to me by my mother a few years before her death. Ironic maybe that the things I hold dearest are a watch which expresses to me the time, and a compass which rests in the palm of the hand of a life that is deficient in direction. A noise behind me somewhere outside the bedroom makes me jump, and all sorts of images and fears travel the train tracks of my nine year old mind, silence then returns just as quickly as it came. The knees of my jeans have become dirtied as the pressure of my body has rested upon the worn floorboards of the small room. A small room that in the films I've seen on the telly of the kind the kids never reside in, but then maybe that is all just a fantasy created to entice people to watch, just a dream maybe. The wall paper is an unstimulating light green, nothing like the type of green jacket which my mother wears in the photo which is much more pleasing to the eye. A small locker sits beside the single and as yet undressed bed. The only item on the locker is a simple glass of water which I was given a half hour earlier when I entered this strange unknown abode, where my control over my own destiny is limited to the moods and ideas of others, or maybe I am just being overly pessimistic. A noise comes from behind me again and my heart begins to pound, a sensation that isn't alien to me in my ninth year." Just a voice" I tell myself and try to slow down my panic, and halt it before it gets too much. I stand and look around my windowless dwellings. There are a couple of hand worn books that lie in the corner against the dusty floor boards. I walk to the books and pick them up, all the time wanting to snatch them up and lose my mind in them to escape as I have done in the past, I'm not choosy about what I read, anything with words, characters, places and stories that don't resemble my life will do. I hear footsteps on the stairs, and again the onslaught of anxiety erupts inside my upper stomach area. I look at my clothes which have been packed away in a neat orderly fashion, my glass of water with the small sip taken from it by the slim boy who

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rarely holds much of an appetite for anything these days. A voice teams with the footsteps outside to increase foreboding future predictions. As an instinct more than anything else I feel I pick up both of the books, holding the worn binder in my bony hands and face the title page towards me. One is a book with a creamy brown at the bottom and a light latte type colour at the top. The Quran, a book many homes are without but many possess. I put it on the dusty floorboard and it releases an exhalation of dust which makes me cough a couple of times, in response to the cough seems to be the voice outside again getting closer now and coming across the landing area outside the bedroom. My eyes are wide now with the repercussions that may come, I scan the room again and in my own madness I suppose I look for reasons by which I may be punished, I search the room for perfection so I may please my carer, everything looks in order, clothes packed away, my hair is combed and the room is as clean as I could have it in such a short time. I think I am going too far with this and maybe being stupid as the boys in the home often call me. It will be different this time, the man that told me go to the room with the water seemed nice, he smiled when he showed me in and said "it is nice to have you here, you may make it your home". They don't often say this. Yes it will be ok, I look at the undressed bed, the worn floorboards and the deeply depressing wallpaper. I turn over the second book and read the cover "A persons a person no matter how small" Explanations by Dr Seuss. As I read the last word an unoiled door creaks behind me, I look around and see the man that led me in standing there, blocking the doorway, standing centre, looking as a carer should look, and someone you may trust to care for your life but for a few physicality's that unsettle me. The smile, the posture of the body and the whitened knuckles straining around the leather belt in the hands.

The End

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Damien Duggan bio: My name is Damien. I am a 31 year old hobby writer I suppose I should call myself living in Limerick in Ireland. I work full time at front office in a busy hotel and I am the father of two incredible young boys. I write mostly for enjoyment and to appease the soul. I have had one story accepted for publication recently which will be published in Silver Apples magazine around mid-May.