

O.D.

You gave yourself a real fright that night, didn't you?
Convulsing on the kitchen floor while the codeine
chewed your guts like rats in a feeding frenzy and
the wine choked your throat like a cheap necklace,
the kids asleep upstairs and you not sure whether to
shit or spew or try to get to the hospital to have
your stomach pumped. Sweating, shaking,
gasping for air; pain, pain, pain.
Somehow you crawled up to bed and scrunched
your eyes like a child after a nightmare
while the cramps kept coming and you clenched your teeth
so hard you felt they'd shatter in your skull.
Conscious thought slipped away
and you knew you might not wake again;
but in the harsh light of morning
with the taste of sickness thick on your tongue
and your whole brain throbbing like
a blister fit to burst,
you lived. You *lived*.

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Ideation

Visualise it.
Picture cold steel on warm skin.
It starts with a small tear,
then a swift slash or a slow slice;
it's your choice, just keep a steady hand.
Forearm flesh splits in a rictus grin
then vomits red and something
starts to seep away,
a straight exchange trading
one kind of pain for another.
You sigh. You shudder.
Exhale. It's over.
The glass expanse of a waveless ocean,
the calm after the storm.

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Dysmorphia

You fat cunt, you sneer,
staring down the enemy
in the full-length mirror,
his naked frame reflected
bloated and swollen
like a corpse dredged from the river,
atrophied flesh mottled fish-white
and contoured with self-made scars.
Your wife says you're wasting away
and the bathroom scales agree –
although what they show
and what you see are two
very different things.
No matter how far the numbers fall
in their endless, futile countdown,
it's never quite enough when filtered
through this sick, distortive lens,
and the bumps and bulges
you strive to starve into submission
on your frenzied quest for perfection
are really just your bones
trying to make a break for it.

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13, The Oval

There are baggies on the table
even at this early hour.
It's noon, and we've got nothing to do
but sit here and shoot the breeze.
We're free and easy;
the coffee's got a kick to pick up
our mood, and soon our thoughts will turn
to the vodka in your room,
or the kitchen cabinet where
your mam and dad keep the medicine.
Last night was good from the bits we recall,
and the grey September that marks the end
of this final summer is still
a long, strange trip away.
Soon, all this will be yesterday.

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Bio: Stu Hennigan is a writer, poet and musician from the north of England. His prose has featured in *Lune Journal*, and in the anthology *The Middle of A Sentence*, published by *The Common Breath*. His poetry has featured in *Visual Verse*, and also previously in *The Common Breath*. He's currently completing the final edits on a narrative non-fiction work about the extreme poverty he encountered whilst delivering food parcels during the pandemic.

Favourite Poem: *Palms to the Moon* by Jim Dodge