



I will not
flower

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Sarah Long
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The best way to describe a firm is
to say simply that the boundary is
where they will be found
sometimes drawing the line,
sometimes crossing it, sometimes
erasing or moving it, but always
there, the god of the threshold in
all its forms.

OK, I think we should turn on all the lights because I've been having the weirdest fucking dreams. I don't usually have dreams. Well, if I do, I usually forget them unless I have someone to tell, like right away, within the first couple of minutes of waking, when my eyes are still swimming in woolly pools of colours and my throat feels thick and a little dry. It is in these scanty moments before the day slaps me across the face in all its cocksure splendour that I can recall my dreams. My future self, ageing peculiarly with hair that grows darker with each coming year, never turning grey; a wolf in my childhood bedroom; being forced to return to work in places I despise. I know of course that the only person who is supposed to care about your dreams is your lover. It's the best part of being in love if you ask me. You roll over and begin to direct your ramblings to the heat on the other side of the bed, your husky tone adding a welcome eldritch air to the visions. I know you usually only tell your dreams to lovers but... won't you? Love me?

I had a dream—William Martin Murphy whispered in my ear I was a good girl. He followed me around all day long. When I was in the post office collecting my Jobseekers', when I was standing in front of the painting of the pretty woman off the old banknotes at the Crawford Art Gallery, even when I was scrolling through The Journal.ie comments sauntering around Paul Street. He followed me until I had had enough of him and I goes, 'look, you'd want to fuck off now, ok?.' I didn't say it in a nasty way. I kind of laughed, exasperated, like he was being a bit of a rogue and I was all for fun-and-games but I had to get on with my day at some point and surely-be-to-God he could see that. 'I'm going to have to do a food shop in a minute and I can't have you fecking hanging off me like a bleddy gombeen.' He started growling then, real low and menacing like. I was starting to get pretty pissy by now so I said 'G'wan away now you, ya fecking tosser. Would ya g'way ya string a piss' and then he bit me. It was fucking insane. He bit me. His two front teeth sank into my upper arm. And I had to shake him off cas he had clamped down on me. And then he said the strangest thing. He said we don't die and the greatest trick we've ever managed to pull is to convince people that we do. And it was fucking depressing the way he said it but then I thought it was kind of glorious too. And he whispered in my ear, 'Now forget all about me like a good girl. Forget I'm here at all and go on away about your day. Go on away about your life. There's a good girl'.

Some other strange things happened in the dream too of course. Like the bins were overflowing on all the streets because the lads were on strike and James Connolly was singing a queer tune. Jimmy Hoffa was there too, only he wasn't really Jimmy Hoffa, he was Al Pacino speaking in an Irish accent saying, '...just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.' He was asking people to sign up to a union but when I got closer I saw it was just a form for a Tesco Clubcard. Anyway, I end up running and running, cas I'm terrified now you see, I'm sweating and for some reason the gardaí are chasing me at this stage and I turn the corner and I'm somehow on O'Connell Street and I see the big Jim Larkin statue in the middle of the street and I see his hands high above his head and realise he is no longer preaching or proclaiming but yelling and screaming to God to pull him out and to save him from this shitshow.

We don't die and the greatest trick we've ever managed to pull is to convince people that we do.

I woke up around this point but I couldn't get these words out of my head.

We don't die and the greatest trick we've ever managed to pull is to convince people that we do.

I had always thought that being dead meant that you would be bloody or rotting in some way so I was terrified when my family gathered in the funeral home to say goodbye to my Granny. My mother said I didn't have to look in the coffin if I didn't want to but my dad, offended that I wouldn't look at the woman he adored, lifted me up and there I saw her lying; small, perfect and dressed in blue. I'm here now and she's gone. But she's not gone because I'm here now and I still remember how she told me it wasn't nice to purposefully rile my sister and how she thought a farm should be run. I can even picture all the bottles of club soda that lined her fridge.

I guess the same thing goes for our pal Willy Martin. Someone absent-mindedly popped him in their pocket and he festered away in there until he was driving them by the seat of their pants. Or he caught a hold of a light wind and swung himself into the badly lit part of a pub and in time you could begin to hear some strange mutterings spilling into pints. Or worse still he became the warm air in a stuffy little office and his voice would ring out in a screech every time a chair was pulled back with a scrape at the end of a business meeting. In fact I think if he were to just wait out there in the fields some fecking sap would come along to lick him off the rocks and end up saying something silly like 'isn't it grand holidays the teachers get' or 'nobody wants to work these days' with a straight face.

Anyway to tell you the truth, the reason I'm telling you all this is, well the really mad thing is my arm has been kind of sore ever since. I know it sounds mad. I just said it was mad. Look, you can laugh all you want but all I know is the top of my arm is a bit achy, right where he bit me and I swear I'm starting to think it wasn't a dream at all, at all.

I know, what a cliché—I am tréa
pastiche, I am terribly fucking
cringe altogether. You can't just
write about your dreams, Mary
(holy mary, mother of god) **you
NEED TO SUBVERT TROPES—YOU
DUMB BITCH! ** I am a parody. My
silly little words are my silly little
effacement. I am a rendering of.
What you need to understand is—I
am ribbon on a tree. I am Mary
(mary, mary quite contrary) I am
the dream theauring — I am
the dream and the
-nightmare...

I will not flower presents an installation of painting, writing, sound and moving image that reflects on the potential allegorical qualities of the fern plant through a feminist lens. The fern's ability to reproduce asexually and sexually through the production of spores, alongside its primeval origins, has generated a rich mythology, in particular that of the imaginary 'fern flower'.

The painting installation *Looking for the Fern Flower* considers the fern plant in relation to the Mother Ireland archetype (the patriarchal personification of the Irish landscape as female constructed in literature and through visual representations for a myriad of cultural and political agendas). In these paintings, Long eschews depicting the female body and instead positions the 'bodily' in the framework of the landscape to contest the historical male gaze. Within this framework, she engages with feminine methods of both figuration (employing plants as allegorical motifs) and abstraction (indexing of the body through gesture). Thinking through the interchangeability of 'mother' and 'woman' in the Irish constitution, this body of work seeks to relate the female to the Jungian archetype of the trickster or the shapeshifter over the traditional mother role.

The sound piece *Tread softly because you tread on my dreams* performs a fluid girlhood and invites one into the confidence of the autofictional character, Mary. She shares her strange visions in an effort to decipher their meanings. The work plays with the notion of the aisling, an Irish poetic genre where the nation appears to the poet in a dream in the form of a woman. Mary's dreams offer a critique of inherited language and storytelling systems, while highlighting themes and motifs that reverberate throughout Irish culture such as the impact of colonialism, Celtic mythology and an affinity with the land. Mary first appeared in Long's novella *W/w* (published by Bloomers, 2024) and is a contemporary embodiment of the Mother Ireland figure.

Sarah Long is an artist based in Cork. Her work focuses on suppressed female archetypes, the politics of representation, nationhood, and myth through the lens of feminism. Recent and upcoming solo exhibitions include SO Fine Art Editions, Dublin (2025) and St. Luke's Crypt Cork City (2023).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Long". The letters are cursive and fluid, with the first name "Sarah" on the top line and the last name "Long" on the bottom line.