

Winter 2021 Issue 1



In This Issue

COVER: Sleeping on a winter's night
by Irina Novikova

Christmas by Anna

Cat during morning by Datoyes Tan

Overall Destruction, Detail 2 by
RUNA

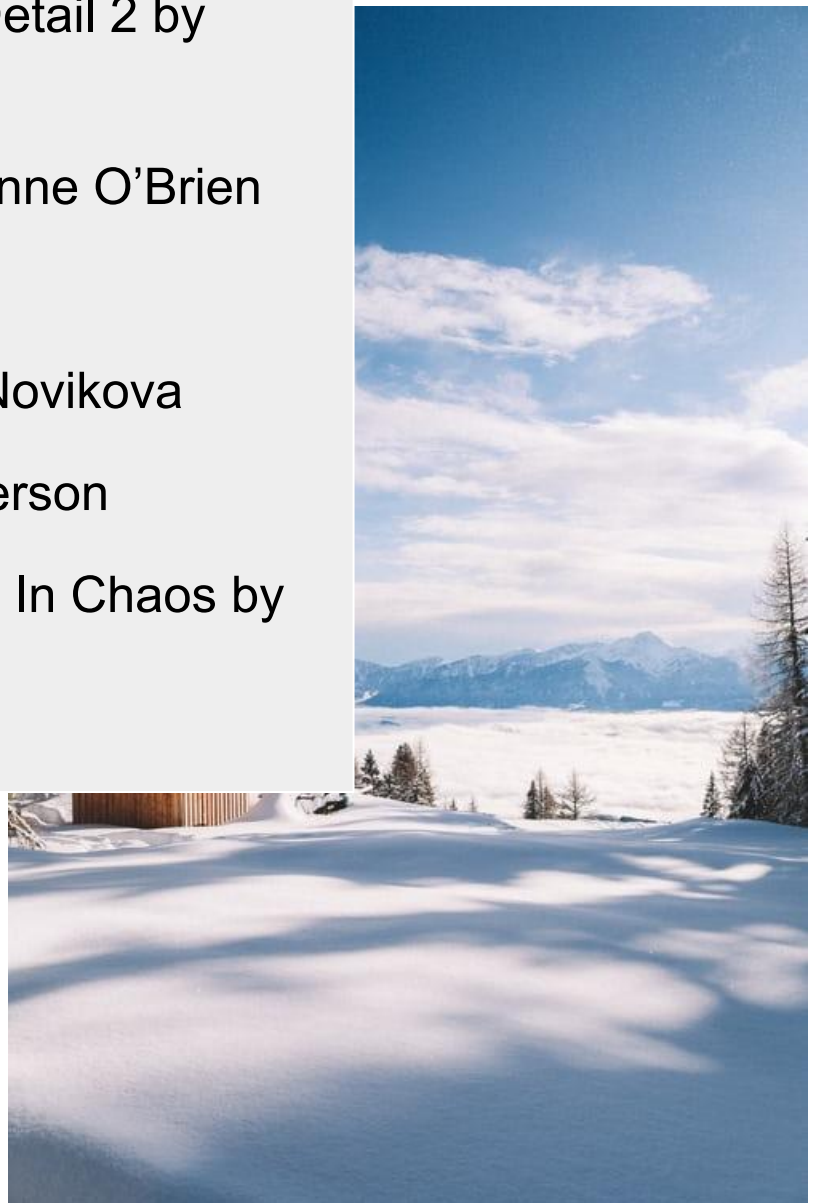
The Guardian by Grainne O'Brien

Cat by Irina Novikova

Sivka-Burka by Irina Novikova

Formsy 2 by Teri Anderson

Article: Finding Peace In Chaos by
George Fisher



Christmas by Anna

Christmas Eve Night 2021

Why is it that everyone longs for Christmas? We wait all year, but as soon as it gets to the holiday season, it is over with a shimmer of the fairy lights, and we go back to our normal mundane lives, no longer feeling that buzz.

It is a shame nothing feels like Christmas anymore, it is all around, in the decorations, the festivities, and the air. Everywhere but in our hearts this year.

Christmas Morning 2021:

I am afraid to get up and out of bed because that will only make it go all the quicker.

The mood is always over too soon. Decorations comes and goes, normality resumes, and nothing is left of the fun we had. Jubilance turns into leftover dinners, presents shoved into dusty cupboards, to be found in years' time. Then, we will wonder where time stole away to.

What will be in the stocking this year, I wonder? A small toy, the kind you only get on Christmas? Some chocolate I will never eat. A piece of fruit, for a chance? I wouldn't know until I open it, although I am loathe to do so. That just speeds time up again.

Christmas, continued

It is after 6, this is the longest I have ever been in bed on Christmas morning. I can't say if I feel good about it. I can hear everyone else moving about without me. I can't say I enjoy thinking about them right now. I guess this is a sign of getting older, maturing. I can't say I like it very much. Where does that time go?

It is almost half past 8, I do not want to leave my room. I don't want to go back to my life. I long to stay in my Christmas bubble, like the angel poised on top of the tree.

My sister gets me out of bed. She makes me happy with her comforting smiles. She manages to make me drag myself out of bed and into real life, but funnily enough, I did not feel too bad about that.

Christmas Night 2021:

End of the night. The last present. The melancholy feeling resurfaces. This will all be over in three hours. I hate to leave this feeling behind.

I would miss the presents and happiness and food. They would stay by the chime of the midnight bells, with the twelfth chime carting away the glitter, and I am left with arguments and sadness, work and my real life. I like it here. Please don't make me leave. Please don't drag me away from this safe bubble. Please don't make me get older.

Cat during morning by Datoyes Tan

His stripes has been replaced by bands of fluorescent sunlight

Looks for the weeping bird under the chair, finds only roads

So looks again, inside the lion's stomach, inside the cartwheeling
jets

Amber eyes are drenched in gasoline tears, set on fire

The sun commits arson, over the rooftop pools, the steaming
coffees, the kaya toasts

Cat tears off his fur with his tongue, dons a cape, then leaps

Into all the liminal spaces, now blazing

—

Overall Destruction, Detail 2 by Runa



The Guardian by Grainne O'Brien

The shop is closed. The final dregs of readers had long since been gently ushered out of the door by exhausted, withered staff. Some had left smiling, knowing they had stayed beyond their welcome. Others, eager to spend one more moment in that space of endless possibilities, were less gracious. From his highest perch he watched, his tail flicking in annoyance on his employees' behalf as they were met with disregard and disrespect. The clock ticked past the time that he was usually left alone and his agitation grew. Soon, coats were pulled on, dinner served, rubs administered and lights turned off.

He had his routine.

He stalked between the bays, finally alone to prowl his kingdom. His paws plodded along the worn, warm, carpeted floors. They say he is not social, that he wants to be alone, but that was not the case. He craves the company of his own kind as much as any being longs to be with one of their own, just not often enough to leave this place of knowledge over which he is keeper and guardian. Besides, he is never alone. A thousand and one lifetimes lie inches from his nose. With one sniff, he can sense them all.

He pauses to contemplate the lives that had been altered by the decisions made by those people, surrounded by heaving shelves and endless pages, knowing the agony of only being able to choose one. He did not know what it felt like to live in a place with less knowledge and potential.

He flicks his ears forward, confirming that he is in fact alone. It wasn't out of the realm of possibility that the staff, distracted in their rush to leave, left a poor wandering soul alone. It has happened before.

The Guardian, continued

He lives for these moments where he's alone and able to observe the silent grandness of this place. Stacks of books lay on the floors and counters, ready to be priced, sorted, and placed on expectant, incomplete shelves. It can't all be done in one day.

He made his way towards the place that houses the books for children, a part he avoids during the day because of the noise and chaos. He hears and smells it at the same time. His eyes were the last to comprehend its presence. A form like his own. Smaller, slighter and younger. Its voice is nothing more than a faint mew, whiskers barely long enough to be seen past its pointed, tiny face.

He had always known they would send another. Once it had been he who had been sent to inform that last guardian it was time. But he'd thought that had been eight lifetimes ago. This place had taught him how to read. Not to count.

How would they react? When they found him gone and another in his place? It didn't matter.

He wasn't ready to leave this place. That didn't matter either. This kitten was here. His time was over. Her time had begun.

Can I have one last moment alone with the books?

He asked, because although he resented it, he was no longer the guardian of this place. And though it would not have been proper to say no, that did not mean she would not.

She mewed and twitched her tail, turning and trotting off into the darkness, leaving him alone, for one last look.

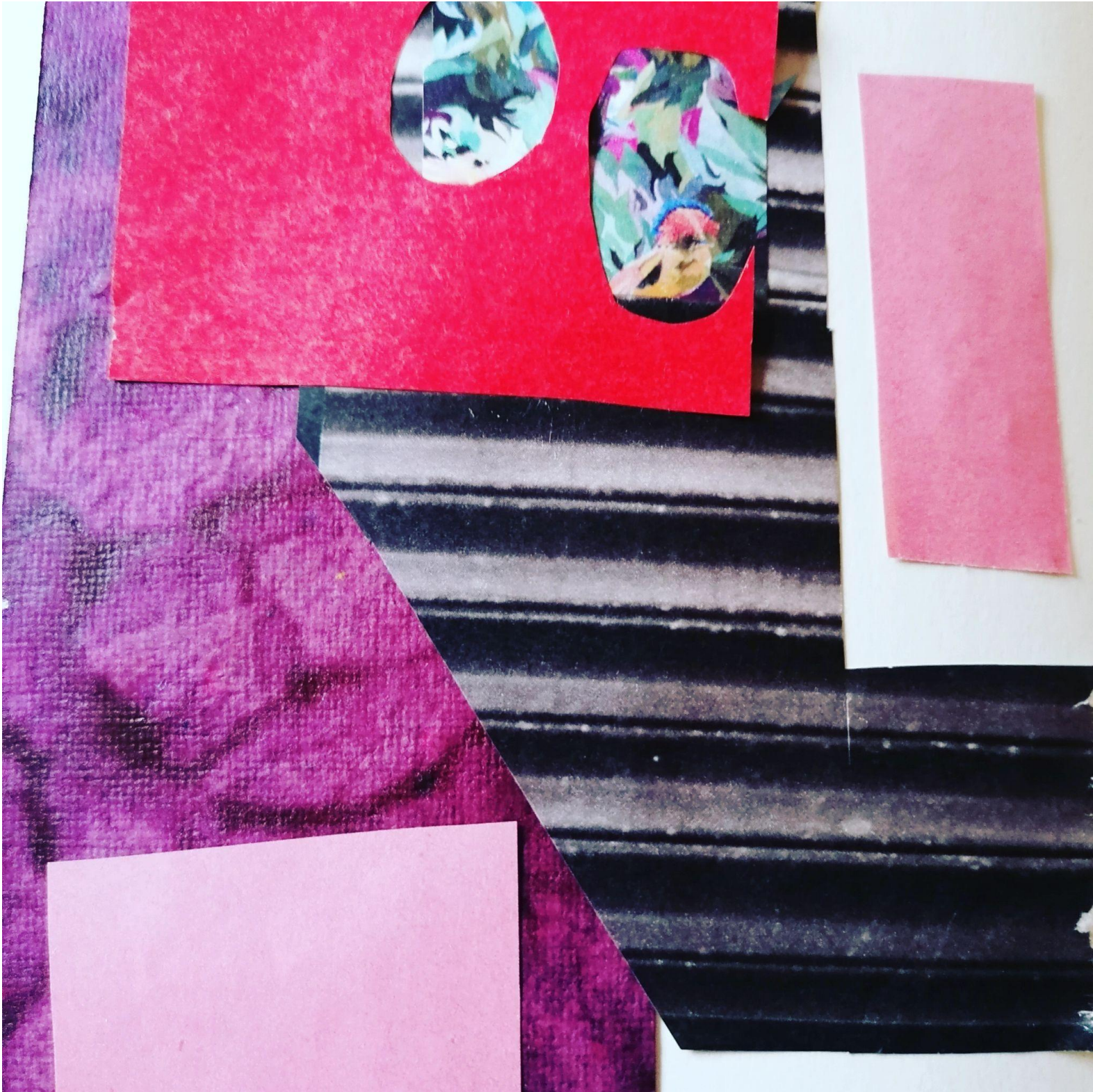
Cat by Irina Novikova



Sivka-Burka by Irina Novikova



Formsy 2 by Teri Anderson



Finding Peace In The Chaos by George Fisher

No matter where you live, the world has become a very loud place. Whether it is the drawl of city life, with vehicles drowning out all other noise until it is impossible to hear the voice in your own head; or the white noise from constant contradictory opinions about current affairs spoken more at you than to you in everyday conversations. Add the pressures of work, studies, and social life on top; or even the basics of life; getting enough sleep, eating well, and being all round 'healthy'; life is a lot.

And as a young adult trying to find his way in the world, struggling emotionally as much as everyone else, I think it is time to start actively prioritising mental health and spiritual health. I believe we need to stop seeing spirituality as joining a religion or a cult; and more about your own moral compass to help you navigate the world and making conscious, everyday decisions.

Of course, we have all heard lots about mindfulness as a new trend. But practising it does not mean having to sit for hours trying to meditate to a voice-over app. Many people experience mindfulness in their hobbies and do not notice because it either has not been pointed out to them, or because it has been called a different name.

Spirituality or mindfulness did not come very easy to me at first but to cut a long story short, it was Muay Thai that opened the door to feeling connected to something bigger than myself.

Finding Peace In The Chaos, continued

Throughout the years of training various martial arts, I never resonated with anything so well than with Thai boxing and I believe it was due to the spiritual side of the sport that I so desperately needed in everyday life. I fell in love with the sport instantly, throwing myself into the hours upon hours of training, fight shows in market halls and nightclubs and pretty much any other place the promoters could put a ring in. And as I began to fight regularly on local and national shows, I truly learnt peace.

During the chaos of a round, with the crowd shouting and screaming, for me or against me, there was a quiet inside myself. Before I understood what this was, the only way to describe it to my family was 'being in the zone'. Now I have experienced this feeling in other aspects of my life, I understand that it is 'being present'. To be completely in the moment as they happen. Of course, in the fight I had to be, there were consequences if I was not present. It took several years to experience 'being present' in another situation, and in that time Thai boxing had become an integral part of my life and identity. It helped shape who I wanted to be by exposing me to different role models and life ethos from a different culture.

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I was lucky enough to be able to move to Sydney in 2018 and had to put Thai boxing on the back burner for a few years. However, this opened a new door to surfing. Another sport where I could only control my actions, how I responded to the situation.

Finding Peace In The Chaos, continued

In this instance, the situation happened to be the ocean, and waves, and whatever they decided they wanted to do on that day. Some days they were wild, heavy, and thick waves trying to swallow me whole just to spit me back towards the beach, daring me to try and catch another; other days they were gentle and rolling, allowing me to try different things and feel like I'm cruising with the most beautiful style in existence. The biggest thing I learnt was to be there, in the moment, as it happened. Be present.

I noticed the similarity between Muay Thai and surfing pretty early on. They both have their individual cultures, influenced by different things, but to me they both teach a moral compass. They both teach (indirectly and directly, depending on aspect of the sport) compassion for people, and for the planet. And they both demand mindfulness. Regardless of whether you want to be the best in the world or just a casual surfer, or if you fight for the love of it, if you aren't there when its happening to respond and act/react, you'll never be good. Or even worse, you'll never understand why you fail.

Mindfulness and spirituality doesn't need to be a cult or religion. It can be about resonating with your reasons why you act the way you do in life. How you impact the world and people around you. Everyone thinks they're a good person, but do you make conscious decisions to follow your moral compass, and not act based on expectations?

Finding Peace In The Chaos, continued

It's about being in the moment, in the zone, being present in as much of life as you can. My advice for a starting point is your favourite hobby. The aspect where you cannot coast, the aspect where you need concentrate to keep improving, or as it was in my case, to stay above water. Start there, recognise that feeling and try to find it in other areas of life. You don't need hours of meditating every day. You just need to find your starting point, as every book ever written on mindfulness says, it's your own journey, you need to find your own starting point. Sometimes peace can be found buried in chaos.

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