

## Two and a half minutes.

### *TWO AND A HALF MINUTES*

barks a voice to your right  
in that alpha tone;  
it's a cross of  
dog bark and spite,  
echoing through the mint green brick and  
plexiglass barrier between  
them and us.  
But you don't make a fuss  
and calmly proceed,  
as the sound of jangled keys  
recedes down the corridor,  
you clock  
the doleful eyes of the  
guys around you dart  
from ceiling to floor  
now they've undone,  
unshed, the tight  
war skins they once wore,  
wondering how they've gone  
from wishing for less time  
to now wanting more.

You hear  
orange plastic creak  
as you lean forward  
to retrieve a box of heroes from under your seat.  
You pass the holy purple tin  
around the circle, watch  
tracksuit and tattoo clad limbs  
slowly, delicately, drop hands in.  
See chewed up, blood stained fingers,  
open mouths, eyes closed, delight,  
a divine ritual lit by  
bright white strip light  
and eclipsed  
by the foresight of that  
same shoebox sized ceiling  
they'll be staring up at  
when day turns to night.

You remember your first day  
ID badge checked  
bag scanned on a tray,  
taken to pastoral wing 2A,  
advised to wait and pray  
someone would give it the time of day.  
*Won't have any of them lads dain any of that arty shite i'll tell ye that for free.*  
And then they arrive  
one by one  
a single file of figures  
already infinitely more alive  
than the headlines and textbooks  
from where preconceptions derive.  
The one sat next to you asks  
*you gonna forget about us when you're gone miss?*  
Eyes faithfully marked with the dark circles  
of his past.  
You smile, chew the inside of your gum,  
trying to find words to sum  
up the magnitude of how far  
you watched him come.  
How once the edges of his body  
skimmed the parameters of this space,  
chin up eyes down  
barely able to meet your face,  
his skin prickled with  
an adrenaline cold sweat  
induced by the shrieks of  
unspoken things he couldn't forget.  
But over the week you watched

something shift,  
a creative spark begin to lift  
his spirits, to exist  
in the present, feeling seen in the  
floating state between  
the care free realm of an improvised scene,  
or an acrostic poem,  
releasing part of his uninhibited brain  
once unknown.  
You think of the prisons  
of the mind we all exist inside when we  
don't have the right words to call our own.  
You saw a man find  
in the undergrowth of his regret  
the strength to express  
something you'll never forget.

*ONE MINUTE*

One minute to spare,  
of just you and a group of people breathing the same air.  
Bodies and clothes and teeth and hair.  
Fathers and sons, brothers and friends,  
once fractured, separated  
from the mainland  
of roundabouts and dead ends,  
dividing lines and over time,  
stop signs and penalty fines.  
Cast away from wide eyed  
curtain twitchers who'd sooner see  
them lose their spark.  
Switch channels on the TV  
Before the redemption arc.  
Set the timer running  
inside an eternal glitch of black and white.  
But these men see the grey area  
after paying the price  
and here with you  
in amongst the mess: vape smoke, coffee stains,  
discarded hero wrappers  
sits  
the stillness  
of everything  
existing at once  
in this 2 and a half minutes before you lost them  
and they went off for lunch.