

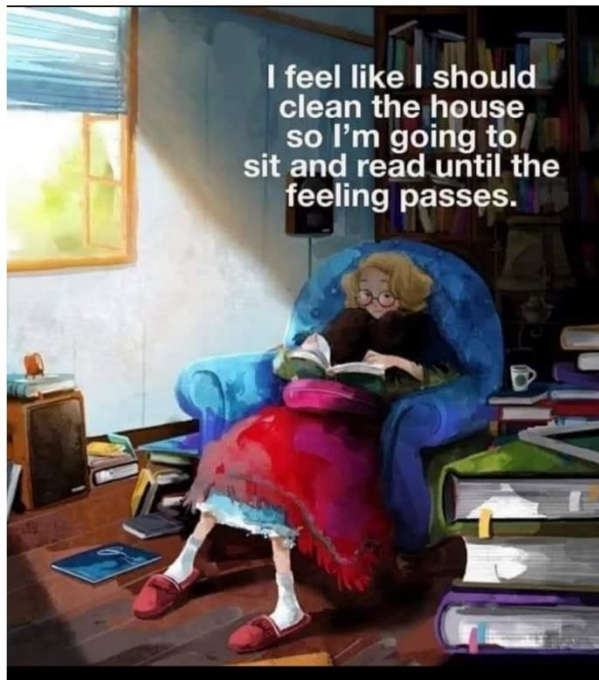
Inkslingers Blended Session

4th February 2023

“The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Ah yes, Come In And Close The Door After You”

And the Visual



Schoolboy

Matthew Tubridy

And so there was a boy in school,
Eats the paper he's supposed to write on,
He starts to think his teachers are gargoyles,
They give him 1% in exams and tests of some description,
He's called Rowdy Rory!
One day he gets all the other pupils to barricade the door so the maths
teacher can't come in,
They chuck the chalk around,
They draw on the walls,
Smash the windows
Eventually the school calls in the fire brigade,
They extend a ladder up to the 2nd floor,
They say
' Please, be reasonable!'
He pupils stick out their tongues at the firemen,
A teacher climbs the ladder,
Says ' I'll give you 100% in your maths homework!'
The pupils stick out their tongues at them.
'This is department of Education property!'
The deputy Headmaster roars,
'It doesn't belong to you!'
Rhee firemen say 'Will we blast them out?'
They have massive hoses,
They get the hose up the ladder,
And turn it on full blast,
The pupils are swooshed back to the back wall,
They thought it was theirs for 3 hours,
The pupils are taken away in Ambulances,
It's back to being Department of Education property,
Ms Goodstone comes back into her classroom.

End of the Drive

Greg Fields

He saw her there on the downtown curb at the end of the day, arm raised to signal for a ride. The wind whipped her scarf and sent her hair flying behind her like a dark cloud, her face furrowed in the discomfort of a spring evening made vicious by fierce blowing and the debris it carried with it. When he saw her, when he recognized the moment, Donal Mannion smiled, then drew his cab to her side.

She entered quickly, and did not glance at the driver as she gave a familiar address. As she tucked her bag beside her she looked up, and in a spasm of disbelief, checked the taxi license displayed behind the driver's seat. Her jaw dropped.

"Good evenin,' Gina. And please close the door now, would you, before the all our warmth is gone."

"Donal", said slightly above a whisper.

"The same," and his smile widened.

"I had no idea you were doing this."

"Picking up lovely ladies on the street? You seemed to chide me for that once or twice, as I remember."

"Driving a cab. I had no idea."

"For the past few months. And yourself, Gina. How've you been getting on?"

She paused. "I admit it's less exciting without you in my life, Donal. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"Only that you're doing well, and as reasonably happy as those of our humour might expect. Is that so?"

"I haven't considered it. Happiness. Such a vague concept. I work, I sleep, I eat. What more is there?"

"Ah, you know the answer to that as well as I do."

"We had our chance, Donal. I'm grateful for it."

“Have you found another man yet? Forgive my asking, but I want to comfort myself that you’re not alone in the working and eating and sleeping. Someone with less of a drift than I had with you. Someone with more substance.” He paused, then added quietly, “Someone you deserve.”

Gina looked out the window. “I’ll not answer that. Just know that I’ve never known any man quite like you, Donal.” She turned back again and watched his eyes reflected in the rear-view mirror. “I don’t regret what we had.”

“Nor do I, Gina. I only regret that it wasn’t enough for you. I suppose I never thought it would be, even when I was telling myself something different.”

They drove then in silence, Donal manoeuvring through the familiar streets now to the one that would take them to Gina’s apartment. At length he drew the cab curbside. “Here we are, lass.”

Gina hesitated, then drew her credit card from her bag to pay for the ride. “Seems like there should be more we can say to one another.”

Donal took the card and ran it through the processor. He smiled as he handed it back to her. “We’ve said enough to know each other well, Gina. And there’s no sadness, at least as I see it. We made our run, and I had my chance. You made me better. I’m grateful for it. For you. For all of it.”

Gina smiled awkwardly, then opened the door. “No sadness,” she whispered.

Donal turned again to the back seat. “Hey, you know there’s space there to add a tip,” and he gestured with a grin to the receipt he had handed her with the card. “It wasn’t a bad ride, was it?”

Gina took out her pen and added a number. She looked back up at him with amusement. He could always make her smile. “Still hustling, I see,” then added softly, “It’s good to see you, Donal.”

She eased out of the cab onto the sidewalk and the wind and the swirls of dust and grime, then walked to the entryway. There she would pass

the lobby and press the elevator button to the fourth floor, where an empty apartment waited.

As she did so, Donal Mannion put his taxi into gear and pulled away. 'What a fine thing,' he thought to himself. 'What a fine thing indeed.'

The butcher
Matthew Tubridy

The butcher,
Cuts the meat,
His teacher said he would never make any money,
But look how he cuts!
The butcher comes into the school to do a demonstration,
With his cleavers knife,
Teacher goes to the butchers shop,
Every few days, the teacher goes to get her steaks in the butchers shop,
The teacher wears a balaclava,
One day the teacher rips off the balaclava,
And says 'I gave you 25% in your maths exam!'
The butcher and teacher decide teacher will still get her steaks,
And as teacher munches the steak she goes
'That's 100% steak!'

Close the Door

Clíodhna Joyce-Daly

Tiredness, fatigue, and desperation were all things Oisín felt as he remained slumped against the couch for the last hour. He had this feeling before, but could not exactly place at what point in the unwelcoming and cold night his fatigue had set in. The warmth of the fire reflected off his face and he could feel the heat generate his cheeks from a pale colourless face into a crimson red. Hopefully, it won't go out.

Oisín was beginning to regret his choice of clothes for his immobility, grey fraying pants and a tattered and matted jumper that hung off his body like a pile of curtains. Ideal for cleaning, he thought, not ideal for laying across a couch he just spent an hour hoovering.

The wind began to pick up and howl its song through the poorly insulated cracks that were piercing out from the uneven floorboards. The tips of his toes that poked out from his bright green toad mouth socks and he felt the breeze as the hole widened as he sat in discomfort.

Just what I need, he thought regretting his choice not to insulate the floors sooner. As he sat there in a state of despair he tried to obtain where he put his phone.

It was the first weekend that Oisín had spent in the new house, a year he had saved and dreamt about the simpler life away from the noise, chaos and pandemonium that the city life had inflicted on his soul for the past 10 years. He remembered the day he stumbled upon this cottage on his daily internet searches that involved little to no actual work done and involved staring at a blank screen contemplating what to make for dinner or dogs on youtube for no particular reason at all.

It was at this point, in his space of fatigue and phone finding that he began to long for the cramped fourth floor walk-up apartment that shared a window with a club for teenagers and a wall with the loud Luas that ran all night. You dopey bollocks, he thought as he attempted to prop himself up sideways to at least look into the hall hoping to detect his phone.

The cottage, while habitable persisted to collect dust in every inch and crevice in the house and make noise without the assistance of any person walking around its halls.

While lying there Oisín noticed, the dirt of the skirting boards and the unwashed coffee stained cups leaving its marks across the table that gathered against a pile of a random collection of books that were failed to be placed on the bookshelf.

Through his limited artist flare, he regretted the decision to paint the heavy walls a dark grey colour splashed against a white wall covered in photographs of doorways and streets he took on his travels. The couch remained plain but accompanied by pillows that resembled more of a Christmas throw rather than a decorative pillow. He made a horrible mistake.

The kitchen still remained not swept with the half-eaten tomatoes that he piled onto his sandwich for lunch sat perched on the cutting board teasing him as the juice fell onto the new island staining to the point further from renewal.

Oisín being a germophobe was not concerned with the prospect that someone might come in and see him laying across the couch, but rather the unkept house and the crumbs littered across the floors as he decided to eat in every room of the house that week, and he didn't shower.

His phone was nowhere to be found and he scrambled around the couch to determine where its light might capture his attention so he could ring someone.

But then he remembered.

After a thorough clean of the newly renovated bathroom and his cosy crawl footed bathtub, he decided it was an ideal time to stare into the oblivion and attempt to adopt a dog from the local animal shelter – a companion he could share his experiences with. Dread was creeping in as the thought of getting the perfect pup was slipping through his fingers, he was worried as it was difficult to get a dog these days with the pandemic.

As he began to feel further sorry for himself, the front door banged through the dark windy night.

“yeah?” he asked.

“Oisin” the voice squeaked through the doorway. “It’s Martha your neighbour, just popping in as I could see the lights were all on and wasn’t sure if you moved in yet.”

Martha, the nosey neighbour, he thought, what luck, she probably run around and tell the town of Clifton that he leaves food out and the house is a dirty kip, but in this moment of desperation and not being able to find his phone, he might as well let her in and she can ring someone that can help him – considering she is 80 years old.

“Look would you come in and close the door after you, I need you to help me find my phone.”

Michael O'Leary

Matthew Tubridy

Michael O'Leary squashes in his passengers in like sardines,
He was on to Boeing in America,
I want aircraft's with a fast turnaround time!
Ok Mr O'Leary! I gotcha!
You can have an extra 500 if we forgo on the safety feature of this
aircraft's wheels!
Mr O'Leary tracks the planes not to get on,
Or all his family and friends,
Boeing 737 had the wonky wheel,
He puts his rival to his job on that flight to Germany,
He sits in his control room in Swords,
Ah ha ha ha ha!
He laughs uproariously!
He sends the air cabin crew on Boeing 737
The one who criticised him at his last end of year party,
Ah Haha!
He pours himself a glass of wine,
'I shall eliminate them!'
He says, like the baddy in James Bond!
You thought I was working in the common good!
I had numerous handshakes and chat with the Minister for Transport!
But I'm actually waiting for a time they're all on one of my flights,
So I can laugh,
Ah ha ha ha!

Can't you leave me alone?

Magda Velloso

It's Saturday morning and we're under the hottest summer I remember in the last 10 years.

Obviously I woke up late and barely had the energy to prepare my own breakfast. My grandson, who lives with me, has long left for work – he teaches English at a language institute – and I'm really proud of his achievement.

Of course I know I should clean the house, as I'm apt to do every morning, but it's past ten now, I really don't feel like it. I'd much rather slouch in my easy chair and try to finish the novel I've been reading these last few days – Maeve Binchy's *Quentin's*; I always wonder at how in these complicated times we live in this author manages to get our attention telling about ordinary people like ourselves, not even producing an out and out villain, let alone write about vampires or beings from another planet. That's what I love in her novels.

But I'm not destined to finish my novel yet. People do not realise an old woman like myself has the right to be on her own doing whatever she chooses and not what society imposes upon her. I hear a knock at the front door and keep quiet to pretend to whoever it is that I'm out. Useless. The knock comes again. I'm surely not going to leave the comfort of my easy chair, so I just shout: "ah yes! Come in and close the door after you!"

A moment later a neighbour shows her face through the door as if by magic her whole body starts to come in, arms first, then the chest, then the rest of it, finally the legs. It feels like a move in slow motion, at least to my sleepy eyes. She's come to gift me with an apple pie for my luncheon, never dreaming my dessert lies in the fridge, getting colder by the hour to help me get through the day in this terrible heat.

Baby Owls

Elaine Reardon

Hungry baby owls screeched
demanding to be fed.
They remind me of my own
colicky infant, who needed
to be soothed and fed
during dark night hours,
who cried to pierce the heart
with midnight hunger or gas.
I'm drawn from bed to the window,
by the piercing screams, and listen
to owlets pierce my heart again.
Later, when first light leaks
into our forest the mother owl
captured a squirrel so heavy
she can't fly back to the nest.
She flew in short hops, a huge
feathery grasshopper,
and vanished into the pines.
Later, I find her wing imprints
where they brushed against snow.

Come In

Angelina Kelly

Sitting in my reading chair, my blanket resting across my knees, my book propped up on a cushion, the window beside me open, and the fresh smell of nature wafting into my room, I settle into the world depicted in my hardback and mentally visualise the scene. I'm engrossed in the adventure and feel I'm actually participating with the characters.

A vague thought, at the back of my mind, presents itself, and I feel like I should clean the house. I am reluctant to leave the volume, so I'm going to sit and read until the feeling passes. I shake myself, raise my eyes from the text for a moment, and focus on the trees outside my window. I take a few deep breaths, savouring the aromas and, after a few minutes, I realise the feeling has passed, so I return to my adventure.

Time passes, the characters complete their tasks, and they gather in a hostelry for a well earned imbibement. I actually feel their relief and satisfaction in my own body and mind, and I celebrate with them. At this stage I have engaged so much with them, and know them so well, that I regard them as friends and speak with them, as if they were there, when I'm not engrossed in the recounting of their tale.

Just then a soft knock sounds on my door, and a voice asks if they can enter. It reminds me that there is another world – the world outside the manuscript – and reluctantly I realise that I should probably engage in that world – “the real world”.

Putting the book down on the stack of tomes piled up beside my chair, I answer “Ah yes! Come in and close the door after you.”

Lumbering Monster

Matthew Tubridy

Monster lumbers into Social Welfare office,
I'm odd he says, just odd,
My foot moves after my knee,
When I walk,
'Is that a disorder?' Staff in Social Welfare ask each other
'And me elbow moves in front of me hands' he says.
The staff look up the big book on disorders,
Monsteritus, it's a disorder!
They slap a badge on him,
They ask him for his bank account details but because he's a monster he
doesn't have any.
So they say
'Come back next week and we'll give you some apricots'
The next week monster trundles to Social Welfare office,
The staff are on the 4 floor and just say hey! You! They throw the
apricots out the window at monster.
See, these social welfare staff are corrupted,
They haven't undergone the right training,
Their instructors had bad instructors and their instructors had bad
instructors as well.

Gerard Keogh

O My G. O'D

“Oh, you’re not watching that God-awful movie again, are you, honey? You know it only makes you angry every time you watch it,” said the First Lady.

“But it’s my all-time favourite movie,” said the president. “Besides, I need to get angry. It gives me material for my next rally. The people like it when I attack my opponents. The public needs to have something to be afraid of. I make sure they’ve got plenty to scare the shit out of them.”

President O’Donnell did indeed have a rare talent for scaring the bejesus out of people, and most of the time the fear was entirely manufactured. However, every now and then he was spot-on. For some time, the rise of the People’s Republic of China had been causing alarm in the intelligence community and among senior members of the military. Through its Belt and Road Initiative, China had established ports and other infrastructure at strategically important locations around the globe. In addition, its armed forces had grown substantially, most notably its navy, which had deployed aircraft carriers and amphibious assault ships, thereby giving it a power-projection capability that posed a threat to U.S. interests worldwide. Unlike the Soviet Union, this totalitarian regime had the economic muscle and the wherewithal to pay for the cultural, political, and military expansion of the Communist ideology which many historians thought had been defeated in the last decade of the twentieth century. And on top of all that, of course, there was the Xinjiang virus pandemic.

The president entered the Oval Office. Already present were his National Security Adviser, John Lancaster, the White House Chief of Staff, Andrew Burns, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Marine Corps General James McFadden, and the Press Secretary, Amy Andrews. He had several items of briefing material in front of him, but the only document in which he displayed any interest was the one that concerned the latest opinion poll results.

“These numbers are terrible. I’m getting killed in the swing states. My approval rating is at an all-time low for a first-term president. This

Xinjiang virus is causing havoc with the economy. How many people have lost their jobs in the last three months? What are the latest figures? Fifty million? Jesus Christ. I need something to distract the public's attention from these statistics. General, is there some shithole country somewhere that we haven't invaded yet? I need a war."

"Sir, as you know, any military intervention overseas must have clear objectives, and be consistent with national strategic goals and the geopolitical reality of the current state of international relations. We can't simply manufacture a reason to invade the sovereign territory of another nation, purely on the grounds of political expediency."

President O'Donnell looked at his most-senior military man as if he had been speaking in a foreign language.

"So, is that a yes or a no?"

"Mr. President, while there are several countries that the United States considers actual or potential adversaries, there are no nation-states against which we could wage war without the proper, legal justification for doing so. It would be in violation of international law, sir." The president turned to his National Security Adviser.

"John, what about the Vatican City? What have they ever done for us?"

"Mr. President, the Vatican?"

"Sure. Why not? They didn't come to our aid after Pearl Harbor. The Pope could have deployed the Swiss Guard to the Pacific theatre, but he chose not to do so. There would have been no need for Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The Vatican has blood on its hands. I've been meaning to say something that's been on my mind quite a bit lately. Do you think it's pure coincidence that my parents named me Gary?" The others in the room didn't quite know how to react to this apparent non sequitur. "My initials: G. O'D. The medical professionals I've spoken to say I have a messianic complex. The Father sent me here for a reason. I was made flesh to do His will on the earth for the sake of all mankind."

Silence descended on the Oval Office, the likes of which the White House had never known before. The people in that room all came to the same conclusion: that President Gary O'Donnell was a stark raving

lunatic. That may not have been the correct medical diagnosis, but it seemed appropriate in the circumstances. Then the obvious question arose: How best to have him declared medically unfit, and then to remove him from office?

His National Security Adviser rose from his chair and whispered into the president's ear, "Sir, could we have a private word?"

"No, John. I know what you're up to. You all think I'm a freaking nutjob. Well, let me tell you something. Of the people in this room, I am the person least likely to be a nutjob. You've all got your own little foibles. I know everything you've ever searched for on the Web. And I mean everything." Concerns over their boss's mental capacity were replaced with panicky thoughts of what could possibly be recorded in their search history. "By the way, Amy. I'd stop doing that if I were you. It's not good for you. Seriously."

"There's a passage from the Gospel of Luke that I like to consult whenever I doubt my purpose here on earth. There's a reference to Jesus in it, but we're kind of interchangeable, so don't get confused about who is the actual Messiah:

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over! Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. *For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; the father divided against the son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'*

Silence reigned once more in the Oval Office, but this time it was mixed with sheer terror. A crazy person was the Commander-in-Chief of the most powerful military in the world and he seemed hell-bent on using those forces to destroy the only planet in the entire universe known to harbour life. The White House Chief of Staff attempted to leave the room to alert the Secret Service to the madness of POTUS. However, the president was surprisingly nimble for a man of his age, and he interposed himself between the employee and the door.

“Not so fast, Tim. Take a seat. All right. Pay attention, everybody. Like I said, if I’m going to get re-elected for a second term, I’m going to need a distraction to take people’s minds off the dire state of the economy. And we all know the best way to achieve that is to start a war. Look, all of the civil strife we’ve seen over the last few months is merely prophecy being fulfilled. This is how it’s supposed to be. *‘For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three....’* First the division and then Armageddon. If I lose this election, I won’t have thousands of nuclear warheads at my disposal any more. For that reason alone, this war is inevitable. I’ve decided that an invasion of the Democratic Republic of Shithole would disappear from the news cycle in about a week. Therefore, the only option is to initiate military action against the People’s Republic of China.”

“Sir, exactly what kind of military action, and with what objectives?” asked General McFadden.

“How the hell should I know? That’s why you’re the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I’m sure you can come up with something. Amy, I want all the networks to be in on this. Even the fake news brigade. Everyone is sick and tired of hearing about this stupid virus, all day, every day. The networks will be thrilled with all those extra eyeballs glued to their screens, looking for information about the war. Advertising revenue will go through the roof. I also want to increase my output on social media. Can you reach out to those guys in – where was it again?”

“Macedonia, sir,” replied his Press Secretary. “I’ll get on it right away. I just need to go to my office, sir.”

“Amy, Amy. Sit down. Two words: search history. That squeaky clean public image of yours can be destroyed in an instant. You people think I’m stupid – that I don’t read. Well, let me tell you something. I can read every one of you like a book. You want to know something else? You make me sick. If I didn’t have more pressing concerns right now, I’d fire every single one of you for insubordination, conspiracy and treason. One more thing: I’m immortal; you’re not. I win. Messianic complex my ass.”

President O’Donnell had won his fight to wage war on an unsuspecting China. For much of his presidency he had been highly critical of the

Chinese leadership and the methods it employed to seek to gain an advantage over the West. The man who held the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party of China was about to pay the price for his and his predecessors' nefarious methods.

"That Chairman Mao won't know what hit him. We've got our invisible stealth fighters and bombers. We've got ten carrier strike groups. They've got how many, General?"

"Sir, they have the ability to deploy seven carrier strike groups, most of them in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Also, stealth technology does not throw a cloak of invisibility over an aircraft; it reduces the radar signature of the fighter, the bomber, or the UAV. They are not actually invisible, sir."

"I knew that. You think I didn't know that? Seven carrier groups? OK. Well, ten is still more than seven. It doesn't matter if they have seven or seventeen. We're still going to win."

"Mr. President, I'm sure you meant to say President Zhao," suggested John Lancaster.

"That's what I said, you dipshit. Pay attention. This guy is so full of shit. He thinks of himself as some kind of modern-day Chinese emperor. Our intelligence reports say he openly refers to his tenure as leader of the CCP as the Zhao dynasty. Communism is ungodly. Therefore, as the true Son of God I cannot allow this regime to peddle its wicked ideology around the globe without bringing down the hammer of my Father's fire and fury on its demonic head."

Like a bolt out of the blue, Amy Andrews received a gift from God, who appeared to be saying to her, "Whoever that batshit crazy person is, he sure as hell ain't my Son. Here's a little divine assistance." "Mr. President, sir. I've just realised something of the utmost importance."

"What is it?"

"Sir, it's almost 2130 hours."

"Oh, Amy, you know I need the easy version of telling the time."

"It's time for your favourite movie again. You get very sad when you miss it. Shall I turn on the TV for you?"

“Yes, yes. Oh, my. You’ve averted a real disaster, Amy. Whatever would I do without you?”

“It’s my pleasure, sir. Enjoy.”

And so it was that a Sino-American war had been avoided, or more precisely, postponed. Who can say when this seemingly inevitable clash of civilisations will finally begin? Will the conflict be because of Taiwan, or the result of involvement in internecine strife on the Korean peninsula? Or perhaps the age-old human struggle for control of resources will prove to be the hair trigger that sets the whole world on fire.

May G. O’D help us.

Paddy McGrew

Matthew Tubridy

Paddy McGrew goes trunch, trunch, trunch,
Down the street in Westport,
He remembers how a little girl laughed and pointed her finger at him,
When Paddy McGrew hiked up the mountain in Peru,
He remembered how a Peruvian bear pointed its finger at him and
laughed,
Paddy McGrew didn't know where to go,
So he moved to the South Pole,
With all the scientists growing lettuce,
Even there though there's penguins who point their fingers and laugh at
him,
'Is it cos I'm from Glasnevin?'
He asks?
But the black and white penguins just shrug their shoulders and flop
back into the sea,
Paddy McGrew goes back to the Peruvian mountain,
As he climbs it he asks the yellow flower...
'Are you going to point your finger at me and laugh?
The flowers move to face the sun...
So Paddy McGrew asks the sun
'Will you laugh at me, and point your finger?'
The sun beams down,
The sun says
'I will love you forever'

Simon's mother

Mark L'estrage

Simon Mam is one in a million mothers who looked after his two children as best she could they never wanted for nothing.

She always had her home spic and span took pride in having a nice home for her family.

Simon would always help her best he could when he was living at home

When he got married to Mary he was controlled and didn't get to spend as much time with her as he would like, and as the years went on whenever he went to visit, he noticed the decline in the house.

He cleaned it up as much as he could when he was there, but it ended up the same way the next week.

Now since the breakup with Mary and him meeting his new girlfriend he is able to be there more.

The last time he went to see her she said.

"Come in and close the door after you."

"Ok mam nice to see you."

The house was in a bad way, he began to clean up and she said.

"Leave that love I just close my eyes and pretend it's not there"

"You know you don't have to live like this I have the money to get you a nice new house."

"Don't be silly this is my home this is where me and your dad brought you up why would I move?"

Simon was really worried about her and asked Susan what she thought he should do, she said.

"How about you say to your mam if she would like to move in with you?"

"She won't leave the house."

“I will have a chat to her she loves me, and maybe we can bring her to Spain she loves Spain does she not?”

New Life

Deirdre Powell.

Shards of watery sunshine creep through the window
A gentle glow fills the room
There is the promise of a new season
Just slithering in around the corner
Like a caterpillar intent on its journey
Full of the expectation of new life.

A skeletal tree hovers outside the window
Covered with ivy from last season,
Its arms bend gently toward me,
Covering, clambering, clearly caressing
For a new chance at life,
Its elegance and wonder.

Remains of dead leaves from last season
Strew the roadside
But unknown to the onlooker
A small bed of daffodils promises to bloom
In a garden that is home to crocuses and snowdrops
And a rose-bed from yester-year.

And so it is that I watch from my window,
As the shards of watery sunshine fill the room,
Comfortable in the knowledge that I am home
Surrounded by all that is familiar
There is nothing to interrupt the flow
Of the start of a new season and the promise of tomorrow.

The Poor Grade

Gerard Byrne

Mrs Shitalian's office was dark and dreary, with its dirty glass door with most of her name scratched

off to spell Mrs Shit instead. She had tried to replace the full word several times over her twenty two

years of working in the college but had given up after the god only knew what time.

Young Mary Behan tapped the glass and stood back, still clutching her sticker covered laptop to her

bosom. She needed answers and wasn't leaving without them, "it's Mary, Mrs Shit..." , she suddenly

realised that she wasn't sure on how to pronounce her lecturer's name, so had a quick guess, "Lynn"

"Ah yes", came the strong withered voice from inside the office, "come in and close the door after

you"

Mary did as she was told. Unfortunately the whiff of stale urine hit her nostrils first and her head

snapped back, giving her tender neck a rough spasm. There was rumours about her lecturer's toilet

problems. Anyone sitting near the front of the class had complained of a strong whiff in the air.

Especially when their lecturer would spin around quickly and her long skirt would raise slightly.

"How can I help you dear?", Mrs Shitalian was sitting in the corner of the room. A book in her hands

and her bleach blonde hair still making her eight three year old body look like it was suffering a

midlife crisis.

“It’s about my grade Mrs. You gave me a D for my project. The work I put in is definitely worth an A, maybe even an A+”, Mary noticed a small paper bin in the corner of the room. It was overloaded with used adult nappies. God help the poor cleaner that had to sort out this place.

“I’m sorry about the state of the place”, Mrs Shitalian closed her book and placed it down on her lap,

“you should see me at home. I should really be cleaning that place more, but I normally sit down and

read until the felling passes. Works for most things in life. I used to use the same trick with my

husband, after we had a big fight. Let things cool down a bit”

“Did it always work?”, asked Mary, even though she couldn’t give a shite.

“Not really”, Mrs Shitalian wearily shook her head, “found him dead on the kitchen floor. Poor old git

died of a stroke. Told him to calm down on those little blue pills. If God had of wanted seventy year

olds to have sex. He wouldn’t have tried us women up drier than the Sahara desert”

Mary really didn’t need that mental image, “can we please get back to my grade Mrs?”

“Ah yes, your grade”, Mrs Shitalian took out a small tin box and started to inhale snuff up her nose,

“you didn’t answer the question I asked properly. Anyone can write twenty pages about the

technical aspect of the shawshank redemption. But I wanted the emotional side of it all. How the

film made you feel. Not a never ending text that Wikipedia probably helped you fill out. I’m not

knocking youse doing all that. I'd probably be at the same thing if we had the internet when I was

younger. But your work needs heart and you're sorely missing it. Can't you not see that?. Your lack

of passion"

"I am passionate about films", Mary protested, "asking me any question about any film and I'll

answer it with more passion than you've ever heard in your life. Just test me please. Anything at all"

Mrs Shitalian thought for a brief moment before replying, "okay then. I've got one for you. I want

you to describe in detail, the relationship between Dante and and Randall over the course of the

Clerks trilogy?"

Mary bit her tongue and tried to think of an answer. Unfortunately the truth slipped out of her lips,

"I've never watched them", even though they where on her curriculum. This wasn't gonna end well.

Biffy

Matthew Tubridy

Then we have Biffy,
He has 10 sandwiches,
Will he eat them on the train or back in his hostel?
In one sandwich he has beef jerky,
In another he has egg salad,
In another he had BLT,
Biffy wants to bring a few sandwiches back to his baby girl,
Biffy eats the eggs salad sandwich,
He also eats a scotch egg,
He people on his train are repulsed by him,
As he munches his scotch egg,
Sister Michael even moves her seat,
Biffy takes a bottle of sunny D out of his bag,
The train goes past the Russian wilderness,
Past towns with long names,
Soon night falls and Billy goes to sleep in his cabin,
When he wakes up he looks out the window and sees green pastures
with grizzly bears in them,
Catching salmon,
His baby girl is in a distant town in Russia,
She's called Ola,
Biffy catches a few salmon when the train stops for an hour,
He will bring it back to his wife to eat,
His wife is heavily pregnant and needs nutrients.

The Storytellers

(chapter 1)

Heloisa Prieto

Maria Dada's presentation

Itaim Paulista

São Paulo, Periphery district

02/16/2023

Good afternoon, folks!

Thank you so much for coming!

I am Maria Dada. My name means “the girl with curly hair”, in Yoruba. I am a professional storyteller and I have spent hours wondering about which tale to tell you today.

In Ancient Greece, a storyteller would look at the audience and immediately guess which stories to tell. But now, looking at you, sitting around me, all I could think of is my own story.

How did I get here?

Why?

When?

But I must warn you: I can't tell it all. There will be loose ends, because this is how real life should be told, not as a plain tv movie script full of details and explanations. Real life is filled with gaps, doubts, mysteries and this is the reason why art can never conquer it. Art can only give us glimpses. Art can enhance our perception. Art can make life meaningful. But I believe Art to be some sort of parallel universe and each one of us holds its personal password.

Now that me and my friends will start sharing bits of our lives with you, try to listen actively to our narratives. Fill the gaps with your own imagination. Don't leave us if you cannot see the whole picture. Stay with us. Listen to us, even if you disagree. Making peace has to do with being able to listen to others, to life itself. But, most of all, enjoy! Be thrilled! Be angry! Be sad! Be yourselves!

Come and share your own stories!

The Minister for Justice

Matthew Tubridy

The Minister for Justice,
Does he blame me?
I burnt the mushrooms making mushroom soup,
I'm hauled into a Garda station,
'What should we do with this man?'
The Garda says
He burnt the Mushrooms!
Drew Harris ponders the situation,
He rubs his chin,
He bring me to court,
Will we give him 10 or 20 years in prison?
The judge rubs his chin,
I'm no Austin Mangan,
I plead 'I will never burn mushroom soup again! in fact I will make some
for you!'
A week later I bring some soup into the courts.
We all watch judge slurp the soup,
'Pretty good' he says
Take the hand cuffs off this man,
He can walk free,
I stride down the street!
I set up a soup restaurant,
I cater for judges,
The judges go 'Pretty good'

From Schnorr
Stephen Brady

Miriam and Tom had been married for fifty years, and today was their anniversary. She couldn't believe the time had flown by so fast. It often seemed to her like some sort of dream. And she always told everyone that Tom was the kindest, most decent, most trustworthy man that anyone could hope to meet.

She had been a little concerned about him since he retired – for a while he had seemed a little distant, preoccupied. She had caught him several times out in the garden, just staring at the sky. She's told her sister that he seemed a little lost.

But then, he had asked her to meet tonight for the anniversary. He had booked, she told everyone, a *very* nice restaurant in town. He told her to get the glad rags on. And, he said, she was going to get a surprise.

Miriam had been excited all day. She's got her hair done, put her best dress on, and her diamond earrings. And when she walked into the restaurant that night, she felt only a little out of place.

And then she spied her beloved, dressed in his best suit, at a table in the centre of the room. Her heart took flight. She went to him, they embraced, and he pulled out her chair.

"This is lovely," she said as she sat.

"Nothing but the best, love, nothing but the best." Tom took his seat. They sat smiling at each other across the table like love-struck teenagers.

"You look just gorgeous," he said, and signalled for a waiter. Miriam ordered a white wine. Tom was on water, she noted, but of course he had driven here.

"So," she said, "what's the big surprise?"

"Oh, now," he said, still smiling. "Don't be a Nosy Nessie. I think we should get a drink in you first."

The waiter arrived with her wine. Miriam took a mouthful, as Tom toyed with a piece of bread roll, just watching her. She could tell he was enjoying this. Building up the suspense.

She put her glass down. "So come on, love. Tell me."

He leaned forward, and in a low and confidential tone he said, "I'm not human."

Miriam was sure she'd misheard. "I'm sorry love, what did you say?"

"I'm not human. That's the surprise!"

A moment of silence ensued. Then Miriam, a little flustered, said, "Tom, what in God's name are you talking about?"

He was chewing in his bread roll, and seemed to be enjoying it. "Now I understand this may be a lot for you to take in, but I need you to listen to me carefully. You see, I don't have much time."

"Alright..."

"I come from a planet called Schnorr. It's in another quadrant. And I was sent here as a spy. I was given a human outerbody to better interact with you Earth people. But it's a disguise."

"A... a disguise?"

"That's right! In my natural form I'm sort of vaporous."

"Vaporous..." The word came out through numb lips. Her wine was finished and, without taking her eyes from him, she signalled for another.

"That's right," he continued. "You see, the Schnorrian Elders assigned me to this planet to gather data on the human species and transmit it back the old homeworld. Now, Schnorr is in another part of the Galaxy entirely, so by the time my data gets there, Schnorrian civilization will have advanced by many millennia. And my data about Earth will be studied as a form of ancient history. D'you get me?"

"Tom. What in *God's* name are you on about?"

He picked up a spoon and tapped his eyeball. To her alarm, it made a metallic *tink, tink*, sound. "These aren't eyes. Oh, no. They're molecular cameras. They record everything I see and transmit it back to Schnorr. On my return, I expect to receive the Elders' highest commendation."

She was struggling. Her second glass was already almost empty, and the room was starting to swim around her. Her head was full of questions, but for some reason, the one she asked was: "And when did you, uh, transmit this data?"

"Well, it was easiest when the higher functions of my human outerbrain were suspended. So I usually did it when we were, y'know..." He winked.

"Mother of God!"

"Oh don't worry, love. The process was entirely automatic."

She reached over and put a hand on his arm. "Tom, listen to me. You've had some sort of a breakdown. A, what do they call it, a psychotic break. I want you to come home with me, and we'll go to Dr. Finnegan in the morning."

"Why would I do that?"

"I think you might need to go somewhere. You know, for a rest."

"Oh, I'm going somewhere alright." His expression had changed, and he looked almost wistful. "That's why I'm telling you this tonight. You see, my mission is at an end. There is a Schnorrian travelpod in orbit as we speak, and they'll be taking me home. This outerbody will be vaporized. You might want to look away, there'll be a flash."

She called loudly for another wine and didn't care who heard.

"Let me see if I have this right. Tonight, on our anniversary, you're telling me you're not my husband. And you never were."

"That's right. On Schnorr we don't have some primitive concepts as wedlock."

"Is that right?"

"Yes. And we have nine genders. You'll never guess which one I am!"

Her third glass had arrived, and she drained it at a gulp. When she slammed it down, the sound rang through the restaurant.

"Right. Now *you* listen to *me*." She got rather unsteadily to her feet. "I'm going to the Ladies. And when I come back, you'd better tell me this has

all been some kind of a sick joke. Or I... I don't know what I'll do. You mind me, Tom Healy!"

"I might not be here when you get back, Earthwife. The travelpod is almost in position."

She stumbled to the bathroom, into a cubicle and vomited copiously into the bowl. The blood was pounding in her ears, and her head was full of roaring. Blearily, she went to the sink and doused cold water on her face.

When she shut her eyes, all she could see was him, earnest and smiling. So like her husband. And his mouth, going nineteen to the dozen while all that ridiculous shite poured out of it.

She opened her eyes and looked at her sad dripping face.

"My husband has gone mad," she said.

Just then, a muffled *boom* sounded from the dining room. Through the walls, she faintly heard the sound of screaming. A strange odour, like singed meat, filtered through into the bathroom.

That's it, she said to herself. "I'm going back out there. Not now, in a minute. When I'm ready. And if he hasn't gone back to his home planet, I swear to God I'm going to kill him"