

Inkslingers Blended Session

4th March 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“I feel like we’ve met before”

And the Visual



Snowscape USA

Odyssey through Little Dixie

Steve Huenneke

From Kingdom City (2021)

I was riding back to college on the bus
From Metropolis
To Kingdom City
I didn't know but I could see
If school went like the spring of nineteen seventy five
I'd have trouble getting through the fall alive
Complete confusion, all over again
Like Rain Man
I scribbled myself into an old notebook
A young woman a bit older maybe
Was forced to sit in the next seat
Because the bus was too crowded
She looked at me like one of her enemy
On the other side of a great divide eighteen inches wide
More than almost anybody
I understood "leave me alone"
I went back into my notebook
My private world, my rumination
Writing to relieve my tension
Under a familiar hot and hazy August sun
But light not heat coming in through the window
"What's you all writin'?"
Out of nowhere that woman wanted to know
So I gave her a look at my notebook
She studied the pages like each one were the center of a flower
For a whole quarter hour
I wasn't used to mattering that much
She found things that delighted her
She drew out conclusions which were major
I was depressed about going back to college in Kingdom City
I just might someday break the Covenant
But I was a late bloomer
So it was too soon to make me some honey

I didn't know about the Covenant
She knew that deal well – who'd got cut, cut in and cut out
Who'd endure fear or anger every day, who'd end up as a scapegoat
Who'd have to hang on a cross or swing from a tree
That woman would never go to Kingdom City
She was headed back to be with her own kind
Livin' and learnin' in the hills round a hollow
She gave me back my notebook and said hello
As she gathered her things to go
She gave me a real smile
The moment was just a little while
But in my mind, it's been lasting
Me on the inside with the air conditioning blasting
Her back on the outside in the oppressive heat
The glass and the distance between us
The differences in temperature
I couldn't hear
Her goodbye – which I seen as sincere, so rare
She turned round, jumped up and down, I swear
Her hand looked like music waving in the humid air
She'd been a stranger looking ready to sting me
Now I know'd she'd a done that quite naturally
But I was not scared of her, nor interfering, nor mean
And since she read me clearly
It all turned out differently
Oh, she was still tough, but now she was believably friendly
Now I could have thought *I* was cool
I might have felt *myself* as powerful
Like *my* words had *done* something to change *her*
But this weren't that – I weren't some dumb handsome actor
Just me being me coming to know myself as otherwise
Her wave was like this foreign emissary saying something new
“We see you, we think we know you
We think that you know us
Not everyone does
Certainly nobody else on that bus”

Do you know what's really interesting?
Right then I quit writing in the first person singular
About being lost or longing for some homecoming
I returned the favor from her, that one reader
I let myself be summoned into this world
I straight away tried writing literature
About other people, ideas, everything
About what was almost over and what was just beginning .

The Mentally Ill
Matthew Tubridy

The mentally ill,
Can't walk down the street,
Is that a bus or a luas?
Where am I going?
Rush or Lusk?
Is that a sausage in my lunchbox?
Or a carrot?
I give the bus driver a snickers bar
instead of a few coins,
I pat my head as I walk,
My name is Jimmy McGrain,
Walking down Richmond Road.

Snow on the ground

Magda Velloso F. de Tolentino

It was a bright March morning announcing the coming spring, but there was still snow on the ground to remind people of the dreadfully cold winter they had just left behind.

Donald felt like life was beginning again and he should start feeding the animals of the farm, so he set off on his way to the barn carrying a pail full of feed. Halfway to his destination, he raised his eyes to the road and saw someone coming at a fast pace from the direction of the nearest town, so he stopped and waited for the stranger's approaching.

As the creature drew near, he realized it was a woman, although she was dressed in pants and still wore a fur coat over her shoulders and a cap on her head.

'I'm looking for Donald O'Brian's farm', she said as she stopped before him.

'This is it', he answered, 'and I'm Donald. I wonder: should I know you?'

'I don't think you should,' she said, 'but you knew my mother back in the 90s in Gadsden, Alabama. Do you recall being there for a farmers' conference? She was the main secretary for the event, and it seems you two got together quite quickly from the early days of the conference'.

Donald was struck dumb with the memory of those days. Indeed he remembered the girl Barbara Ann. To say the truth, he had remembered her through all the intervening years.

'Well, I feel like we've met before, I think you look very much like she did at that time. What's your name, girl?'

Well, I'm not a girl exactly, for I'm well over thirty. I'm June Ellen. My mother died a few months ago, but before going she asked me to look for you. You, see, I'm your daughter.'

Flabbergasted, Donald let the pail he was holding fall from his hand and stared hard at the woman in front of him.

For the first time in his life words failed him.

Bernadette O'Reilly

Have We Met Before?

When I was a child it was very rare for my da to take me anywhere without my ma, some men seemed to be like that back then. So I've heard.

So I was surprised when my da and his friend Tom took me along on their trip to Greystones. The bus was rickety and rocked alarmingly along the road, this was in the seventies. When we eventually arrived at the house, a tall lady welcomed us in. We had never met before. In her sitting room the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. I had the feeling I had been in this house before. My child's mind was shocked. We had never been to Greystones I knew. Yes we had been to Howth and Cavan but definitely not Greystones. Over the years the woman's features have faded, but not that feeling of being in her house previously. I have wondered through the years if I lived in that house in a past life.

Pat Brogan

Matthew Tubridy

Takes a serve in the Tennis club,
He looks at his wrists,
He says sorry to the other players on the court,
He goes into the dressing room,
And takes out a penknife,
He looks at himself in the mirror,
He remembers his bank manager telling him he only had 30 euro in his account,
After he unsuccessfully invested in crypto currency,
His other tennis players come into the dressing room to figure out what he's doing,
There's blood everywhere,
Pats penknife is sticking into his chest,
The youngsters are playing too,
When they see an Ambulance pull up
And Pat brought out in a stretcher,
It's the first time it's happened in the history of Clontarf Tennis Club,
The next do the cleaner scrubs and scrubs at the blood,
But it won't come out,
The dressing room is cordoned off,
Ever since then Pat Brogan haunts the Clubhouse,
Especially the dressing room,
The locker doors creak and moan,
Is it the wind or is it Pat?
Sometimes as well, when a member of the club goes to take a serve a gust of wind takes the ball when it's not even windy,
Is it the weather or is it Pat?
Also the mirrors in the dressing room sometime has blood running down it,
Pat is buried in a graveyard near the tennis club,
It is said that sometimes Pat rises from his grave for a few games games of tennis,
All the people of Clontarf who have died,

All those born in 1823 or before,
Other a tiny percentage are still here to have a cup of coffee,
We must remember the universe is mostly space,
They go back to space,
The space that is always here.

As if they had met before.

Michael O'Brien

The first time she saw him was at the carnival in Cork, he was working on a dart stand where you had three darts to win a prize, what she immediately loved about him was the way he moved a dart to up the score of a young child so she could win. When the young child and her family left delighted with their winnings she saw the manager of the stand push the young man violently berating him for his generosity, but the young man was not cowed by his much larger boss and his expression suggested it was the right thing to do, and if the same situation arose he would do the same thing again.

That was the day Paul came to the attention of Katie, though he had no idea. She spent the rest of the night dreaming of what an amazing father he would be, how they would have two kids and when they were old enough to understand they would bring them to the carnival and explain that's where their mom and dad met, after she walked around dreaming like this for hours she chided herself on how ridiculous it was, given that she hadn't even spoken to him. She made sure to go back the next night but was saddened to find Paul was not working the Dart stand, she was annoyed with herself for not talking to him when she had the chance, or at least in some way making herself known to him, and was heavy hearted now as she walked around the stands feeling she had missed an important event in her young seventeen-year-old life.

Chairoplanes whizzed above her head with people screaming and laughing as they soared through the air, there was the excited screeches of people in the bumper cars, and the ooh and aahs of others winning or just missing out on prizes, but with all this mirth and happiness around her Katie could not raise her mood, not even the scent of candy floss could raise her spirits, as with a lot of seventeen year olds the feeling that you missed out was a devastating sensation that made you feel your life was crumbling around you.

The moon was full as they kissed, the sensation in her chest brought a runaway kite to her mind's eye, when they spoke nearly everything he said rhymed with the way she felt, which made their meeting

supernatural as far as she was concerned, almost as if they'd met before. He was only two years older than her, but he had seen so much more of the world than she had, he left school two years ago but had read books she either had never heard of or books that she knew of but considered too advanced for her. He was athletic, he was intelligent, he was strong and kind, he was perfect. She had felt she was in love before with pop stars and footballers, but she knew this was it, it was meant to be, the stars were aligned for them to meet when they did, they were perfect for each other. He walked her home that first night and met her next morning and walked her to school. She was in her final year and she wished she could get her exams out of the way so they could be together properly all the time, or maybe she could leave school and drop out early like he had.

He picked her up from school on his motorbike once, her eyes flared when she saw him and it was made all the better because her friends saw the whole scene, making her feel she was in a movie as she jumped on the back and sped off into Hollywood coolness. But that's all it ever was, a scene, a mirage, and now as she waited outside those exact same gates to collect her own daughter she looked back on her younger self, at that beautiful naive idealistic dreamer of a young girl, with her arms wrapped around him as they sped off on that motorbike, she was never happier than at that moment, she smiled at her beautiful younger self, she was a mother now, she wanted to put her arms around that young trusting girl and tell her to be careful, not to trust so deep so fast. It turned out Paul was indeed more advanced than her back then and was actually six years older than her, and Kate was not his only girl, he literally had one in every town the carnival visited, he had fooled her into thinking she was special to him, the pain when she found out was devastating, despite being a promising student she failed all her final exams and had to stay back a year to repeat, but was it worth it she wondered, those few weeks were truly bliss and she had never been happier, but she had also never been so dangerously miserable, was the joy worth the misery?, she didn't know. She was a harder case now, and she knew her husband loved her more than she loved him, though love him she did, it was like that in most of her relationships these days, the only one who had the edge on her was her daughter, and she could live with that.

On the Scrambler Bike

Matthew Tubridy

The jumps and turns,
At a ferocious pace,
The clay of the track,
Spurts behind him,
Your whole world is the ferocious pace of your scrambler bike you drive,
Turn left, turn right,
You feel the wind of another scrambler bike,
You imagine crashing into the other bike,
The wind whistles past your cheeks,
The Ambulance crew are on standby,
They only had to treat 5 crashes that day,
The scrambler fly by,
The paramedics get the ketamine ready,
And the stretcher,
Soon enough comes their first job,
Micko tried a overtake on the inside
and collided.

Elaine Reardon

Condolence

His wife Recently Died
We sat beside each other
at school for four years,
double-dated to the prom
with the sweethearts we married,
but hadn't set eyes on each other
for forty years. He responded to my
condolence, wanted me to call soon.
He brushed aside my sympathy,
said you know, she was Irish and loved
to drink, loved it too much. Oh, your'e Irish
too, aren't you. I thought Ah the past! And
your'e Italian; my dad never let me date those
handsome Italian boys. Something to do with his
experiences in the War. And here we are now, at this
crossroads so many years after WW2, after our high
school graduation, after your wife passed on, and you
raise the spectre of where we grew up, of the dividing lines.
You still live in the house you bought in the 80's when
your second child was born. Your daughter and
grandchild live with you now. The house is grand,
you were successful in work. To explain your
success, you tell me the size of the living
room, the high ceiling, the jacuzzi
in the bedroom. The marriage
you considered leaving,
tried too, twice.
Didn't.
You missed your kids.
You enjoyed the family life.
You took them everywhere in
the country, flew to Florida every
winter. Skied just an hour north of me,
in Vermont, with the whole family. You stayed

together, you said, for the kids. It was easier. You
were on the road a lot. I wondered what life
on the road for a successful salesman
had been like, what your wife felt
when you were away, having
success, a good time.
Life passes for all of us,
filled with choices we make
How many lonely years
did they stay together?
I'll raise a cup, nod,
And wish her some joy.

An Act of Purification

Greg Fields

In his later years, Donal Mannion recalled the wonder of snow. They had not come often, those vast, sweeping snowfalls that coated the city with several inches, but when they did, his world transformed. An even whiteness would cover the grit of city streets, the sounds of the sparse traffic were muted and made gentle. Footsteps on the sidewalks crunched and crackled in sublimated tones, as if all the world and those within it were living on tiptoes.

He had not regarded snowfall in such a way in quite some time. As he grew into the city, snow became an impediment, an obstacle to the free and easy way he sought to live. How to navigate his way to the local when the sidewalks were covered, or, more to the point, how to navigate his way back home on the slick ice of a frozen nightfall after spending the evening with Johnnie Walker or Jim Beam. Problems, all of it.

But now, in the growing quietude of the last chapters of his life, he turned back to the excitements he had felt on the whitened days. It was snowing now, hard, and five inches of the stuff was bound to bring the city to halt for at least a day, and maybe two. He would leave his cab in the garage, and no loss to it. He had food enough, the heat was on, and there was a bottle on the shelf. He would be fine, that he knew, and he would welcome the peace of having even his small obligations negated for a while.

And there, as he looked out a window rattled by a steady wind onto the rapidly falling thick flakes, Donal felt a strange repose. Was it all cyclical, then, this recollection of the feelings such a scene meant to a small boy? How far down the line had he really travelled, or was Donal Mannion the same spirit that came squalling into his mother's life six decades prior, unchanged and unchangeable?

"Donal, make sure you're well bundled when you go out. And take care not to get careless."

"Ah, Ma, away with your worrying. We'll be in the park down the way."

On that day, so many years ago....The lads assembled in the whiteness of the park. Where other boys might build snowmen, these boys built forts. They chose sides and pelted each other with snowballs. Donal learned that if he formed his with a bit of ice at the centre, he could create a finer weapon, and he taught the others on his crew to do the same. Battle, it was, and as with every battle, it was fought to be won.

Johnny Duncan had a sled, and there was enough of an incline to use it. At the park's corner, a slight hill rose, then fell down to New York Avenue. They took turns slinging down the slope, landing with a thud on the still-hard street. At one point, four of them lay prone, one on the other, and the increased weight made for a particularly fast ride, and a brutally hard landing. At the end of it, Johnny Duncan went home with a lip split from such a landing, and not an ounce of regret for the wound.

Boys, then. And now where? Donal knew that Johnny Duncan still drove a city bus. He saw him from time to time, and they would share a drink or two. Evan Moore, he knew, had died years ago, the casualty of a bad heart poorly used. The others had disappeared, swallowed into the maws of adulthood. He himself had made the effort to disappear as well, marrying Annie so many years ago and moving downtown. Where would she be on this day? On this night? Would the snowfall change the view out her window? Would its coating whiteness cover the grit of what Donal had visited upon her, and make it seem pure again?

Donal Mannion opened his window just for a second. A few flakes blew into the small living room, but no matter. He sniffed the air and felt the bite of cold on his cheeks and breathed a puff of whiteness into the outside air.

'An act of purification,' he said to himself, then closed the window again. 'To be a boy in the snowfall once more, that's all. Purify me, and take away the grit and the grime'

Gnashing Teeth

Matthew Tubridy

our just some vocal cords and gnashing teeth,
You're carried around in a pram,
You sit in the Dail,
Discussing this and that,
You went to university,
And switch from speaking with your bashing teeth to holding and
writing with a pen,
You write and write all the assignments your teachers give you,
They pass your assignments,
You go to a restaurant on Dawson Street,
You are vocal cords and those gnashing teeth,
You chat to your friend,
Did you know you have a gullet too?
You drink beer,
You don't have any legs or feet,
You're on the bus,
Just vocal cords and gnashing teeth,
You put those teeth to use by eating a banana,
Because you're a small size you only take up one fifth of a seat,
You only really exist when you're talking to someone because of your
body restrictions,
If you're talking to your friend on the bus,
Or listening to a lecture,
I suppose you get by in life because you have the ability to write as well,
You can't go to UCD sports centre,
Just sit in a cafe taking to another vocal cord plus gnashing teeth,
Between taking you cease to exist,
You only exist if you're using your vocal cords beside someone else's
vocal cords.

Start Anywhere

Catriona Murphy

'Start anywhere,' Beth thought, staring at the snow-capped mountains of Wild Nephin Park.

The Lough lapped gently beneath her feet and the wide open space unfurled away, like a tumbling landscape, flattening to give so much space, so much space...

In her heart centre burned a longing, a secret wish she hesitated to share with anyone. She hadn't meant to make that wish, but making it next to a fairy ring had been risky business in the first place.

Say the words, then speak them aloud, her mind said, say it in your head first, that makes it easier to say it out.

It had been the worst week in work. Her promotion fell through, her co-worker, Shauna, had been sleeping with her boyfriend, but even then the cracks of the relationship had begun to fissure before that. The seams unravelling until Beth had no thread left, no threads to spin to patch it all up.

She hadn't told anyone, but she knew it was true.

She was done.

Done with pushing squares into circles, and then running around them expecting it all to work, and hamster wheels and rollercoasters and things just not working.

Before the logical part of her could protest, she drove out of Dublin; out of Leinster. Escape was pushing on the brain and a dream, a manifestation hung in the air. It was glimmering in front of her windshield the whole drive over; a guiding north star.

Her body knew where it was going, and an instinct more ancient than the hills surrounding her car pulled her to the wilderness.

The air was frigid but delicate on her skin, and the freshness opened the windows in her mind and clarity entered.

She knew this place.

She'd pulled up at the fairy ring, gotten out and stared at the panoramic mountains, with the evergreen trees blanketed on one side, and the barren, thin earth on the other.

She felt a stretch, an expansion of her own consciousness as she forgot herself in the wildscape.

Then the wish came again.

It whispered around the daffodils that were spotted with red. She recalled some folklore legend about them representing blood drops when seen on the west coast of Ireland in early spring. She pushed the dark thought aside.

Beth saw a low mist had begun to rise out on the water.

Coalescing and moving closer, she saw a silhouette, a shape emerge and a man with dark hair and green eyes stepped out onto the shale beach.

Beth stood frozen, unsure if this was happening.

He gave her a peculiar look.

'I feel like we've met before...'

The fairy ring began to glow.

A quiet meadow

Gerard Byrne

My bare feet going quickly numb in the two foot of snow that i find myself walking through,
Hugging my naked body as i try to keep the last of the heat in,
It feels like we've been walking for hours, but my watch says different.

My captor finally yields, throwing a rusty shovel to the ground and demanding me to dig,
I refuse, as would most people,
A bullet to my knee brings me back down to earth.

I spend the next few hours watching my captor, dig a four foot deep hole,
Big enough for me, my wife and three kids,
No idea where any of them are now,
Probably still locked up in the garage.

Time to beg for life,
Just not my own,
The captor lowers the scarf from his mouth,
My eyes catch hold of a few familiar features,
"I've met you before", I blurt out through bloody teeth,
"Alas that's true", replies my captor as he throws the shovel out of the hole, "but we'll never meet again?"
And with those final few words, he puts the gun to my sweaty temple and pulls the trigger.

I Feel Like We've Met Before

Angelina Kelly

I don't believe in ghosts – though I possibly should, given my leanings towards alternative medicine, thinking and practices! However the other night, during a particularly restless sleep, I was awoken with a sense that I was not alone in my room and that I was being watched. I lay in bed with my eyes closed telling myself that it was an irrational thought and attempted to breathe myself back into sleep. Unfortunately, the feeling grew stronger so I opened my eyes and saw a faint glow at the end of my bed.

Sitting up and wiping the sleep from my eyes I became aware of a shimmering form standing in the room watching me. There was no aura of malice or bad intent surrounding the form, if anything, there was a sense of sadness. Looking at the apparition, I asked "Who are you? How are we connected, and why have you come to me?" Gently, the ghost took on a more solid form, and I saw a robust man with shoulder length greying hair, dressed in a dark, ankle-length travelling cloak, and soft leather boots. His tanned face was etched with deep lines of age and wisdom, his striking blue eyes held me in a strong stare.

"You look tired." I said. "Sit a while, you look like a storyteller, so tell me your tale." Inwardly I marvelled at my use of formal language, normally I don't speak like that.

Sitting on the end of the bed he replied, "I am Paedur, a Druid of the old school! A long time ago we were... friends. Well, rather teacher and student." He shrugged. "You were young back then but have grown since, and, if I am correct, are of middle years, and older than I was when I was taken from you. Do you remember me?"

Surprised at his sudden appearance, I nodded. "Yes! I remember!" I whispered. "You took me from my poor life - the only life I had known – trained me and tried to teach me things I did not want to know. I believe I was a reluctant student and made you angry many times."

His sadness deepened. "Indeed you were, and there were times I questioned my... need for you. Our time together was short and did not

end well. I suspect you have your own tale to tell, about what happened afterwards.”

I nodded. “Yes! But, in spite of my reluctance to learn, you did teach me what I needed to know. My own time did not end well either and I do not wish to visit it’s memory.”

Paedur nodded silently.

“So, why have you appeared to me tonight?” I asked.

“I heard tell that you are ailing and I sought to reassure myself about your well-being.”

“There are some health issues at the moment, I admit. But nothing that the modern doctors cannot handle, and I will be recovered soon and back on my feet.”

“Then I will not detain you any longer. I shall take my leave and wish you a long and healthy life.”

He stood up, turned his full attention on to me for a moment, and then faded into the night.

His sudden appearance unnerved me, but not wanting to revisit those memories I shook myself, took a few sips of water from the bottle on my bedside stand, and snuggled back down under my duvet, and sank into a peaceful sleep.

The following week, while travelling on the LUAS, I sat at a window seat and watched the scenery as we passed the various locations on the way into town. Paying no attention to my fellow passengers I watched the green spaces disappear as the high rise buildings took over the landscape.

The seat facing me was unoccupied so I stretched my legs out in front of me. The tram car came to a stop and a few people embarked. A gentleman made his way to the seat opposite me and pointed to it. I moved my feet giving him free access to the seat. He settled himself, nodded to me, and looked out the window. The LUAS continued on its journey, and we sat in silence.

A few minutes later, I felt my fellow passenger looking at me, so I glanced sideways in his direction. He nodded and said, "Good Morning! I feel like we've met before!"

Observing this man, with a deeply lined face, striking blue eyes and shoulder length greying hair, I replied, " No! I don't think so. I don't remember you!"

"Oh, but we have! I came to you in a dream recently. You remembered me then!"

I nodded, remembering my dream, and looked more closely at him. His voice had a rich, deep timber to it. He had an air of serenity about him. "Ah yes! I remember you now. Paedur, the druid. But you were a ghost to me then."

He nodded, "Yes! I was. I know you are unwell, and I am concerned for your health, and so I have returned, momentarily, so that I can be with you again."

Spooked now, by his presence, and not wanting to engage with this strange man, I was glad that we had just reached my stop. Hastily, I stumbled to my feet, disembarked, and blended into the crowd, hoping he wasn't following me. I was so unnerved by meeting him again, this time in person, that I didn't look back.

Thankfully, my transactions and a little bit of shopping, had engaged my mind enough to have forgotten about the creepy man but, as I made my way back to my tram stop, I wondered if he would still be there, waiting for me, and if I would have to actually engage with him. I hoped not because I really did not want to revisit those memories of so long ago. I had left them behind and wanted them to stay in the past, where they belonged.

For the entire journey home I watched every passenger but I didn't see him. As I walked back to my house I felt that he would make another appearance and wondered when my next encounter with him would be.

The Following Morning

Matthew Tubridy

Suddenly I realise the following morning
10 grand is missing from my bank account... 'what did I do?
I know I was drunk but...
Where did I go?
How many bottles of champagne did I drink?
In the Radisson Blu hotel?
The staff kept just giving it to me and charging it to my tab,
My friend Biffy was there too,
He was drinking my champagne!
Then we got a taxi, more money,
to the Dalkey Duck,
But 10 grand?
What did I do in the depths of drunkenness?
Maybe a cruise around Dublin Bay?
In a private yacht.
Maybe dropping in on Bonos house?
But Bono charged for it,
Miserable fecker,
Then I needed a suit,
A woman! I spent it on a woman!
She had a dress adorned with diamonds,
I met her in the Fitzwilliam hotel,
What do you give a woman adorned with diamonds?
'I went through medical school' she says
So we walked down Grafton Street to the jewellery shop
Boodles,
I got her more diamonds,
We went to a restaurant on Dawson street,
Got prime steak,
Her name was Stephanie,
But 10 grand?
I chatted to the Provost of Trinity College,
We downed red wine in his house by Grafton Street,
Anyway it all involves alcohol, that's expensive!

But there was the expensive taxi too,
A Mercedes Benz,
Driving down O'Connell street,
Shouting out the window 'You fools You fools!'
But I'm the fool spending 10 grand in one night!
Then there was the trip to Brown Thomas,
I got trousers, a jacket, and a shirt,
I got into the Shelbourne Hotel looking like a million dollars!
'More wine' I shout!
Ms Diamond adorned woman comes back,
We get a room for the night,
Order crackers and cheese,
I look about the window at Tommo,
At least he has money in the bank.

I Feel Like We've Met Before

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr

Darlene reflected on her first thoughts upon gazing into the eyes of the mysterious farm hand she'd been forced to hire. Since the death of her parents, she'd been tasked with running the daily operations and a forty-acre parcel of land was simply beyond the power and energy of one thin woman. The livestock alone were quite a handful.

Lately she'd taken to watching him as he piled bale after bale of hay. Steam rose from his naked back and chest in the cold Wisconsin morning. In terms of work ethic, this man had been a Godsend, but his looks were a distraction. She'd kept to herself both socially and romantically since her husband had run off with some girl in town, never to be heard from again.

"I feel like we've met before.", Had been the cheesy and uncontrolled utterance that had run out of her mouth when William had showed up at her front door, looking for work. A clean-shaven man of tall stature, too young to be widowed and too healthy and well-kept to be some wandering vagabond. It didn't take long for her to decide to take him on and he had worked as though his life depended on it every day. Rising at 4:30 am and putting down in his small room behind the barn after having taken care of all the animals, tended the fields, and done any number of jobs that she felt needed his attention. All without hesitation or complaint.

She offered to have him sit with her and the other farm hands at the table, but he'd always requested to eat alone in his room. He avoided her gaze most of the time but whenever their eyes met there was something there. Something inexplicable, beyond words, but as real as the white snow that surrounded them. It grew every single day and Darlene was painfully aware that this man was no mere helper. His was a quiet strength that was supplemented by his physical prowess. He tossed bales of hay that weighed some 500 pounds as though they were loaves of bread. Once or twice while in a deep state of sleep she saw his face. They walked together on a beach on some distant world. An odd scene, but one that nonetheless seemed as real as any sober and fully awake experience. William was starting to grow on her...

Board of Education Matthew Tubridy

Mother is asked.
We give them pills for ADHD,
When they think they're teacher is a walrus,
We give them Risperdal,
None of your bones and herbs,
When they don't do well in school,
Mother would like to put them in the spirit boat,
Chanting,
But the Board of Education have different ideas,
They think there's a chemical imbalance in the troublesome child's
brain,
He's called Freddy,
He sits in the hall,
With 10 members of the board of Education,
Sit looking at Freddy,
Now Freddy, you painted the school windows red,
We know Mother wants to feed you bones,
But we prefer pills, either olanzapines, Risperdal, Seroquel,
Is it psychosis or a mood disorder?
Well he thinks his teacher is a walrus!
He painted the window red,
He screamed at the younger children,
Like the New Zealand Rugby players doing the Haka,
He tossed a young child's tub of yogurt onto the ground,
He wants to shave his teachers hair off,
They take Freddy away in a squad car,
But Mother finds out and shouts
'It's the bones he needs! And herbs!'
She runs after the squad car,
Freddy sits in front of the psychiatrist,
And takes the pills.

Snowscape USA

Clíodhna Joyce-Daly

It was blanketed across the uniform landscape, creating a brightness that was piercing to glance at. The frost hung from the sunken rooftops of old Georgian white houses, that although familiar in name, meant something completely different in central Illinois. The blizzard collected at the tops of trees and her wrath engulfed the entire street all to the top of campus. The poorly kept college houses that once were grand in their glory days stood grim and glacial as appearing cracks collected in its wooden plywood would gradually let the cold bursts seep through the insulation of the house.

The foot paths were covered in the hardened snow that many college students were too lazy, indifferent or hungover to pave, and salting the roads were completely out of the question. The frozen landscape created an ice rink effect that made those who dared wander through its tundra to grip lampposts, slip or slide to get to their classrooms.

The snow created a summer effect that brought on the idea of whether the weather would warm up at all in the space in the short journey to the classroom. Although it was well past a normal hour for working individuals to get to work, the 10am start for a college student seemed bleak, early and disruption of sleeping time.

As Sinead walked grappling with the idea of ringing her mother, to which she realised she would have been up for hours by now, she dreaded the lecture that lasted well over two hours.

Despite being heavily suited up for the gloomily winter, frost began to encompass her body and she felt a chill as she continued along the icy path.

It was a true cold that she had never experienced before. The last winter she participated in was in the west of Ireland where although rain consumed the days, it was never freezing.

As her trudging pushed snow into her boots, making her toes a prisoner to the winter's displeasure, she wondered why she decided to go to university miles away from family and an ocean between anything she knew as being familiar.

She dreaded the words of professors who spent their days lecturing students and bragging about their trials in the “real world” which many students would fail to aspire to. Sinead preferred to spend time outside the classroom, daydreaming or even sleeping. While the thought of sitting in a classroom at this ungodly hour of 10am, it was still better than struggling through this Snowscape USA.

Custard,
Matthew Tubridy

Declan, a bit of a problem he has,
Custard,
I have my custard every evening,
Then one day he didn't get his custard,
Drat!
The Dail stands up in indignation,
Declan has not got his custard!
They send a courier to Declan's house,
Now you have custard! They say!

Snow, bloody snow

Ciaran O'Melia

Snow, bloody snow, the worst of it. I mean the very worst of it, Agh! the children get to laugh and play in it, but ask them to give you an opinion on snow after a few days of it, and watch out for it the young who are angels turn into anarchist, when the joy goes out of it.

I remember 1988 or was it 87, we had a belly full of it. I was down the country working and this morning I came out, looked at the sky, could see the darkness and feel the massive flakes of snow falling gently onto my face. Oh it was a sight to behold, lovely even I would agree.

But I was 160 miles away from home, so what did I do, I went out of me way and heading to another job, just to check on it. By the time I got there, it, the snow was falling down plentiful, in fact already it fell 3". The lads on the job were gone, and I was advised to cut my losses and head home, I did.

And many the turn I had getting home, but I nearly made it, I was about 10 miles away, when this gobshite made a manoeuvre over to the other side of the road, I hit a snow bank. That was the end of it, I could not get the car out of the bank.

There was only one thing to do, wrap up and walk. Now did you even walk in three feet of snow? It is not easy. To my right shoulder I saw a shape of a man, we fell in together and before you could blink an eye we both walked, it cut the distance in half, I reached home but before I did I turned to him , he was gone, I looked but could not find him. It was as if he kept me company.

So I walk into the home, that warm home with the fire blazing in the grate.

Herself said "I wondered where you were, did jimmy get you?"

"Jimmy,"

"His twin brother died."

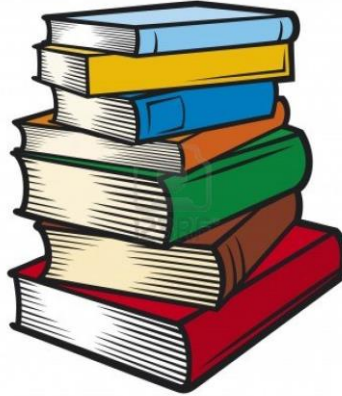
"Jimmy's brother died, I wondered who he was, I feel like we met before."

Tim and Tom
Matthew Tubridy

The men in their trench coats pass on O'Connell street,
Tim and Tom,
Tim and Tom,
Yup! Tom says,
Yip! Tim says,
Would. You like an ice cream? Tim asks.
Would you like a deck of cards? Is asked,
Can I direct you to a coffee shop?
Out of the cold?
Can I give you a contract to build a motorway?
Tim asks Tom,
Can I give you a large house in Foxrock?
Tim and Tom become great friends,
In their trench coats,
They sit on O'Connell Street just giving people things,
Eventually the politicians hear about them,
Leo Varadkar comes and they give him a lollipop,
Tom and Tim,
There's should be a Tom and Tim in every city of Ireland,
Like Galway City,
Tom and Tim have been cloned,
They give people lollipops,
They even have clones in New York,
In Times Square,
Giving out lollipops,
Their clones are in Malaysia, Singapore,
Beijing,
They make statues of Tim and Tom in Beijing,
Out of wood,
But it's actually a vending machine where
you can get lollipops,

The Complete Stultification Reader

Stephen Brady



It was the big grey book that first gave her the idea.

Maura had been working part-time in Paragraphs Bookstore for just over a month. She was deep into first year Drama Studies, and she adored the place. The long sentinel stacks of volumes, the heady musk of the Second Hand section, the afternoon sunlight that filtered weakly through the dust-shrouded windows, the eccentrics who came in every day to wander among the displays. She loved it all.

After two weeks, Maura had been put on the Orders desk. There she had been shown the ropes by Donal. Donal was a balding, heavysset man who wore a permanent air of existential disappointment. Everything he said, even the announcement he was going on his break, was laden with doom. He wore T shirts that bore humorous slogans, but to Maura the fact that Donal was wearing them extracted any humour that might have been inherent in the words.

One afternoon she was going through the new orders when she spotted something odd.

"Donal...?"

He sighed. "Yeah?"

"There's a typo here."

"A typo?"

"Yes, look. Right here."

"Where?"

"It says this customer's name is Stanley Stanley."

He eyed her wearily. "That's his name."

"We have a customer called Stanley Stanley?"

"Yeah. He's a regular." Donal glanced around, and indicated a book on the table behind her. "That's for him. Check it, if you want."

Maura was curious to know what kind of book a customer named Stanley Stanley might have ordered. She leaned over to inspect it.

It was a whopper, one of the biggest books she'd ever seen. The cover was a plain dull grey, like the hull of a submarine. Its title:

"A Comprehensive History Of The... File Index Card?"

Maura was nonplussed, for three reasons. First, that the book should exist. Second, that it was so enormous. And thirdly, that anyone, even someone called Stanley Stanley, should have ordered it. And according to the docket, it hadn't been cheap.

"Excuse me...?"

A customer was standing at the desk. A squat young man with bad skin and sort of pudding-bowl haircut. He was wearing a beige sweater stained with what looked like egg yolk.

She was visited by a flash of intuition.

"Are you Mr Stanley?"

"Yuh! I believe yous have a book for me?"

"Yes. Just a moment..."

Maura struggled to lift the immense tome. By God, it weighed a ton! She passed it across and he took it with both hands. He gazed at the grey cover, face aglow.

"Tenth edition! Complete glossary and footnotes. Can't wait to get stuck into this baby!" And with that, Stanley Stanley turned and shuffled away, the giant book clasped lovingly to his bosom.

Maura watched him go, chewing her lip. Something was happening here that she could not quite grasp. And she was determined to get to the bottom of it.

That afternoon, she went back through the recent orders list to see what other titles the singular Mr Stanley had requested. The results of her search only served to deepen the mystery.

Apart from the grimoire on the file index card, Stan Stanley had also ordered:

The Double-Plate Telescope Lens: In Theory and Practice

Paint Classifications: The Definitive Guide

1,001 Carpet Samples

The Evolution of the Bevel-Edged Chisel (Incorporating the Belgian Short-Handle Controversy)

Reading this list engendered in Maura a feeling for which she had no name. To imagine those volumes, what they must have looked like, felt like in the hand, and above all, what the experience of reading them must have been like, made her feel subtly oppressed. A crushing, breathless sensation, such as she had felt once in a stalled elevator in Chicago, began to take hold of her. She wasn't especially claustrophobic, but imagining a bookshelf somewhere groaning under the weight of such works, and others of their ilk, awoke in her the symptoms a low-grade panic attack.

When Donal returned, she said: "Hey. You know that guy..."

"What guy?"

"Stanley Stanley."

"Oh yeah."

"Has he been getting books here long?"

Donal pondered. "Few years, anyway."

"How often does he come in?"

"Every week. Clockwork."

"Well, it's just..."

"What...?"

"I've been looking at the back orders. And I just can't believe anybody reads books like that."

"Well, he does. Simon, who used to do the orders? He told me that one time Stan Stanley was looking for something on the history of the shoelace. He said he wanted it 'as detailed as possible.'" He nodded sagely. "Make of that what you will."

"But..!" She was becoming agitated. Like in rehearsals when she didn't have the lines. "Why does he read that stuff?"

"Beats me." Donal sat and drew out his phone. "Who cares?"

"I do!"

"Well why don't you ask him?"

"Maybe I will..."

The following Monday, Stan Stanley's next order was emailed in. Donal printed it off and handed it to Maura.

"Early Non-Patterned Ceramics of the Upper Volga: The Complete Catalogue of the Pottery Department at the University of Vorbinsk. Non-Illustrated Edition."

"There now," he announced. "He's consistent, I'll give him that."

"Let me get it," said Maura. "I'll give it to him. And I'll get to the bottom of this."

"Whatever."

She found the book, at a specialist academic press in Poland. It was eye-wateringly expensive. And when it arrived, she was no longer surprised at its size or heft. She carefully wrote the customer's name on the sticker, and kept the giant volume close at hand. All week she worked diligently, buzzing through the store, mop of curls held back by a man's

silk tie. She even skipped lectures, to ensure she didn't miss him. And her eyes kept returning to the plain, shrink-wrapped doorstop on the desk, which held the key to the mystery.

When Friday came, her anticipation had reached fever pitch. She swapped shelving duties with Donal, so she could stay on the desk. As the time ticked by she bobbed and boogied, craning for a view of the entrance. And finally, just before lunchtime, he appeared.

Maura moved to the counter, dragging the book into position. Stanley Stanley trundled over, and favoured her with a crooked grin.

"Eh, hello. I ordered-

"Yes, Mr Stanley. I have it here." She pushed the massive tome across the counter.

"Great!" His eyes shone. "I been lookin forward to this one, so I have. Can't wait ta dive in!" He put his stubby fingers on the book, but Maura held it firm.

"Mr Stanley. I wondered if I could ask you something?"

"Eh... whut?"

"Well, I've been doing the orders for a while now, and I've noticed that all the books you order are of a certain... type?"

"Yuh?"

"And I wondered if I could ask you..."

"Whut?"

"... do you not find all these books a bit... you know..."

"A bit whut?"

"Boring."

He grinned, revealing rows of crooked yellow tombstones. "*Boring?*"

"Yes, boring."

He hooted. "Ooooh, yuh! They're boring, alright! Stul-ti-fy-ing! By Jeez, they're dull!" His grin vanished. "'Cept there was one. A history of the Mid-Napoleonic Shoe Buckle. I hadta stop readin that one. It was *racy*."

As he spoke, he was trying to draw the book towards him. But Maura wasn't letting go. "Then why do you read them?"

"Why...?"

"Yes. I don't mean to be, like, intrusive. But I'd really like to know."

He leaned forward and spoke in a low voice. She had to move closer to hear and endure the twin trials of breath and body odour.

"*Time.*"

"... Did you say 'time'?"

"Yeah." He nodded confidentially. "Time is elastic, so it is. When ye're entertained, time speeds up. When ye're bored, time slows down. Ye know?"

"That's not real, though. That's just, like, perception."

"I know that," he said equably. "But the perception of time is totally elastic. So I spent last week readin' that book about the file index card. An' that week felt like a year, believe me. I read that book all day, every day. An' it was like a year passed, but I didn't age. Y'see? Einstein was wrong, an' HG Wells. It's nothin' to do wi' physics. *Boredom* is time travel!" His voice had risen to a zealous pitch, and people were looking.

"So that's why you read those books?"

"Yuh! I get the biggest, dullest books I can find, an' I read them one after another. All day every day. It's great, so it is. By the time I die, I'll feel like I lived for a thousand years!"

Maura released the book. Her hand left ghostly sweat-marks on the plastic. Stanley Stanley drew the non-illustrated ceramics catalogue to him and folded it in the protective embrace with which she was by now familiar.

"Be back next week," he chirped. "I've me eye on somethin' about drains. In the meantime, try it yerself!"

And off he went.

Maura stood there a while, staring out the window. She felt none the wiser for that exchange. Or perhaps she did, and she simply didn't want to formulate it.

On the street the lunchtime rush had started. People darted ceaselessly back and forth. Almost all were buried in their phones.

She thought about her own phone, nestled in her handbag. No doubt full of angry messages from college. But that wasn't what concerned her. She was thinking about what Stanley Stanley had said. And about all the times she'd glanced up from the screen, to discover that an hour of her life had passed.

"Hey." It was Donal. He'd been lounging at the end of the counter, and had no doubt caught the whole exchange. "Listen. We just got a new one in. Lesser-known garden implements of pre-Revolutionary France." A strange, sad smile creased the hangdog features. "I'll go and get it for you, if you like."

Ghostly Man

Matthew Tubridy

You're on an island in the middle of a lake,
You see a McDonalds on the bank,
It's night time,
A ghostly man in a boat comes closer to you
'I will get you too a chicken burger with fries' he says in a whispery voice,
I get on the back of his boat,
He slowly rows threwh the night,
We get to the bank,
But when we arrive the McDonalds has disappeared,
It was an illusion,
There just the sodden bog,
Me and the ghostly man walk to Leunann,
There's a restaurant there,
I get a burger, but is it as good as the imaginary McDonalds?
The waitress pours me a glass of 7up,