

# Inkslingers Blended Session

## 15th April 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“My Wife Told Me To Stop Impersonating A Flamingo. I Had To Put My Foot Down”

And the Visual



*Along The Banks..*

## Snakes

**Matthew Tubridy**

Snakes slithering around my head,  
Pops out of the wall,  
Hi I'm Bob! it says,  
Snake gets his friends,  
They slither around the floor,  
I just wanted some frankfurters,  
From the fridge!  
Bob the snakes friend is called Margaret,  
A big snake,  
Margaret pretends to be a frankfurter,  
When I bite her I spew!  
I'm walking around the floor of my flat with snakes slithering around  
Eventually the snakes all go back into the holes in the wall,  
As I go to sleep,  
Professor Claffey wants me to do an assignment,  
Someone comes to the door,  
Margaret comes to the door,  
Ahhhh screams the person at the door!  
Margaret goes to her highest position,  
This is the house of snake! She says,  
There is no Matthew here!  
Matthew is wrapped up in a snake, Margaret's friend,  
The police are called,  
They infiltrate the flat,  
They see snakes everywhere,  
The snakes try to go back into the hole in the wall,  
The police free Matthew,  
Matthew puts on his suit again.  
Snakes come out of the hole in the wall,  
Named Fred,  
Rises up to highest position,  
Fred sits in front of my TV,  
Watches nature programs about snakes,  
Snake hisses his name,

Snake hisses 'BBC! Turn to BBC!'  
He gets turned on by snake mating rituals,  
You give snake a bowl of milk,  
He laps it up with his forked tongue,  
Snake hisses That he likes living with me,  
As he curls up in the sofa,  
We must remember snake is a metaphor for negativity,  
Snake and his friends slither around the floor,  
Nooo! I say,  
They get into the Weetabix box,  
The bottle of milk,  
I am so sick of snake!  
I push him back into his hole in the wall!  
The rest of the snakes follow him,  
Finally I have my flat to myself again,  
I sit down to watch TV,  
But it's all about snakes,  
Fred the snake pokes his head out the holes in the wall,  
But I whack him with a brush!  
Then someone knocks on my door,  
It's a giant snake!  
He hisses...'Have you got your TV license?'  
You look onto the street,  
It's full of snakes risen up to a height,  
You go to Henry Street,  
It's full of snakes,  
The Dail is full of snakes.  
Hissing at each other.

## **The Junkies Grotto**

**Gerard Byrne**

The junkies grotto, as so many local people liked to call it, was a place that no self respecting person would be seen dead in. Around the stone bench every morning would lie used syringes, crumpled up pieces of tin foil, empty alcohol containers and enough cigarette butts to fill an old pub ashtray to breaking point.

Jenny sat down and began to pull out her shooting up kit. She wasn't discreet as always. Scattering her equipment out across the bench and starting to set up her little cooking set. Soon her heroin was brewing away like an overly strained cup of tea. She used the end of a match to mix away the last of the powder.

"See the kitchen is already open for business", remarked Dermot, a long grey haired sixty something, as he sat on the grass a few feet in front of Jenny.

"Fuck off Dermot with your shite jokes", replied Jenny without looking up from the task in hand.

"I've got a joke for you Jenny", Dermot flicked open a can of cheap cider and knocked it off the head with glee.

"Don't wanna hear any more of your stupid jokes", Jenny stuck the needle from the grubby syringe into the brown liquid and began to suck it up into the chamber.

"You'll love this one", protested Dermot.

"No I won't", replied a frustrated Jenny.

"We'll I'm gonna tell it anyway"

"Your fucking funeral", Jenny muttered under her breath.

"Right then", Dermot threw the empty can into the canal and opened up another one, "my wife told me to stop impersonating a flamingo. So I had to put my foot down", he laughed loudly to himself upon completion.

Jenny looked up from her now full syringe, "but you're not married"

The smile fell from Dermot's face, "I know I'm not married Jenny. It's a joke. You just have to go with the narrative and ignore the imperfections in the short tale"

"Would it not be easier to just say girlfriend or partner?", Jenny opened her belt and pulled it through the loops of her blue jeans, "would make more sense then."

"It's not important who the characters are in the joke Jenny", Dermot lit up a homemade joint and began to pull on it until the air around them was filled with smoke, "it's the punchline at the end that is important"

Jenny shook her head with annoyance, "I haven't got time for your bullshit today Dermot. Either shut your mouth or fuck off to the next bench before I shoot up"

Dermot held his hands up in mock surrender, "won't open my mouth again dear"

Jenny nodded her approval as she wrapped the belt around her arm and tapped the top of the needle to make sure no air bubbles got trapped in the solution, "good man. Silence is golden", and with that, she plunged the needle into her arm and pushed the plunger, sending a wave of ecstasy through her body.

It was at that moment that Dermot noticed the change to the graffiti along the front of the bench. Before it used to read, "JUNKIES GROTTO", but now it read, "JENNY THE JOYLESS JUNKIES GROTTO"

Dermot was a tad concerned about mentioning it to Jenny, especially since it was a nickname that she absolutely hated. She was out of her head for now, but upon come down, she might see it for herself. So Dermot made the safest decision in his opinion and packed up his stuff before struggling to his feet again.

"Where, where you going?", protested a drugged up Jenny.

"Just going to the shops", lied Dermot, "back in a few minutes", and with that he hurried off in the direction of the next safe spot to do drugs. Leaving Jenny drooling to her hearts content on the cold stone bench.

## **Joe Biden**

### **Matthew Tubridy**

Joe Biden goes into a pub in Ballina,  
The publican says to Joe,  
'Your not the President of the United States!  
You have to fly back to the United States with Aer Lingus!'  
The publican touches Joe on his forehead,  
Because that publican is the most important person in Ireland,  
Joe leaves his pub,  
Just as Joe Soap,  
He wanders down the street,  
Someone says to him  
'Do you know the President of the United States in coming here today?  
He's called Liam O'Rourke,  
He's going to make a speech in 20 minutes outside the cathedral,  
He got a priest accompany him in Knock Shrine.

## **In Case Of Emergency**

**Clíodhna Joyce-Daly**

After Margaret shut the door behind her, Jean sighed in enthusiasm for the relaxing evening ahead of her. She plopped herself down and reclined back awaiting the premium sky package the family so gleefully purchases.

Jean had babysat before, but the chance of sitting in the O'Reilly's mansion was a uniquely new opportunity that she hoped she would get again. She obtained the gig through a family friend who knew Margaret was in a desperate need of someone to watch their five year old son. They were city goers, an exotic species that seemed to attract copious amount of attention in the village. Neighbours, friends, family all seemed to know what car the O'Reilly's drove, what they bought for their dinner and who they surrounded themselves with or didn't. Jean found the family fascinating in this respect. They were warm yet kept the town at arm's length. It became impossible to unravel them, but now Jean had the front row seat to determine what type of people the O'Reilly's really are.

Jean laid back in the vintage cream Bobois couch that had not a speck of dirt on its covering. The contrasting woven pillow sit perched against the blank canvas of the couch highlighting it's grand features. The walls were painted with a dark green with a white undertone that shone the art work that was collected from years of travel. She was impressed to say the least.

The warmth of the fire created a snug atmosphere and blazed the cold out of Jean's face.

She imagined what it might be like one day living in a place like this. If she became successful opening up her own studio – art was always her favourite subject and she dreamed of one day going to NCAD. As the cosiness projected her into imagination – a very loud musical note from the film blaring in the background bolted her into reality. She saw film credits.

Hadn't the movie just started, thought Jean, attempting to recount what the film was actually about. In a state of panic, Jean reached for her

phone. The light caused her to wince while looking for the time displayed on her mobile. 10 pm – it read. She had been asleep for two hours. Shit. Luckily Margaret and Paul would not be home until 11:00pm. However, throughout the entire time she was there, she never once checked on their son James .

To her knowledge, James had been asleep the entire time - yet she had a terrible feeling in the pit of her stomach about his wellbeing.

James' room was on the first floor the second door to the landing. The door stood slightly ajar and opened into a colourfully painted room. As the light shined against the wall, photos of cars, football stars and retro furniture became illuminated as his night light came into focus. As the light came closer to the top of James' bed, the normal bump of a child's head was not there, the bed was empty.

Fear, anxiety and dread all began to consume Jean's body. How did he get out of the bed, Jean thought, what if he left the house? Did he go look for his parents?

In case of emergency ask Paul to drive us home, were the words illuminating through her head. How embarrassing, just when she thought she could pierce the O'Reilly veil she went and ruined it by her own stupidity.

Losing their child had to be at the top of the list for all the terrible things a babysitter could do. Worse than that time Anne threw a party at the Daly's house, worse than when Padraic burnt the kitchen down at the Cunninghams. All those prospects were still better than losing the child.

Sweat was pouring down from Jean's face, which was dripping down her burning neck. She attempted to wipe her face with her clammy hands. Racing from room to room was the most exercise she had done in months and it was starting to creep up through her heavy breathing and her heart thumping faster. Every surface had been checked, every room unended, every small space examined – she was starting to get desperate and was about to make that intimidating phone call to James' parents.

Just when she thought her dreams of becoming a successful advisor for the O'Reillys were extinct, she hear a loud snort coming from a shut



door behind the landing. It was a door she forgot to search. As she pulled the door back, it revealed a sleepy James curled up on top of shelves of towels, and folded clothes sprawled across him like a blanket. The relief showered over her.

After all this, if she could clean the house in time, maybe she could pierce the veil of the O'Reilly's.

## **Great Expectations**

**Matthew Tubridy**

You were supposed to make the meringue for me and our 10 children!  
With raspberries, and cream,  
Drive to SuperValu in Clifton,  
Also get me a cream bun!  
And Toffee crisps,  
I'm sick of it!  
I wanted Marshmallows too!  
I wanted food for our dog,  
I wanted a foot spa,  
I wanted copy books for our 10 child  
Little Mickey wants to be a doctor!

## **The Slab Of Rock That Changed My Life**

**Fiona Deaton**

I am now in a better place, with a shorter life expectancy as I sit on the concrete slab by the banks of the Royal Canal. The slab of concrete has the words Junkies Grotto' embossed by paint on it '. What you may ask has led me to this moment?

Sunday 1st May 1997 I was running, in fact my whole life then was a race track. I don't know why I always took that stroll on the banks of the Royal Canal but I did then and do now. On the run was my vocation, part of my occupation and was my reality then. I am a minor celebrity star in the townland of Dublin. Wherever I went, whatever I did I was chased by everyone looking for my autograph, a few kind words or their opinion of whatever the 'Paparazzi' has published about me in the Evening Press/Herald. But being a nature lover, I crave the sights and smells of that riverbank.

That day however, it was not the journalists, or the common folk I am running from, it was a flock of swans. I used some vegan, herbal with various nutritional minerals shampoo whilst washing my hair in luke warm water. It unlike an eco cycle of a washing machine failed to rid the majority of the shampoo. A swan rose high above the canal and hungrily picked at my scalp due to the sent and nutritional benefits of the said shampoo. Then several swans started hammering my head with their beaks. So I was running away from them. My feet pulverised many Kms of the riverbank as I was trying to get away from them. Then out of breath, oxygen and plain old energy I collapsed on the said slab/bench with the inscription 'Junkies Grotto' and unlike the paparazzi they all left me and my eco friendly washed hair alone.

Why the sudden departure of the swans? Unknown to me then, the swans had consumed many of the junkies needles and paraphernalia and subsequently all but two swans died of aids. That had been two years prior to that day and the current flock of swans were 5th and 6th cousins of the two remaining swans.

Whilst breathing a sigh of relief on the said slab, an actual Junkie approached me with a needle. He was not looking for my autograph or

opinion on any topic, he wanted my wallet. I had left it at home. In frustration the Junkie stabbed me with the used needle. A journalist walking by the riverbank snapped the shot with his camera.

Six months later I can now walk anywhere in a body consumed by aids, on sight people 'exit stage left' to avoid me (so to speak). I have stopped running there is no longer any need and although I will lead a short simple life I can now appreciate the view of the canal on that said slab of concrete at peace soon to be forever.

## Zoo

**Matthew Tubridy**

If I was in a zoo,  
I would eat a giraffe,  
I would drink all the coffee from the coffee machine,  
I would ask the meerkats where were the pigs so I could eat them too,  
I would get a stunner gadget from a zoo keeper,  
I would stun what I wanted to eat,  
Orangutangs, all the little mice,  
Fry them up on a BBQ,

## **Grotto Scene**

**Ciaran O'Melia**

I have been to the Dublin Zoo and watched the Flamingos, they do spend a lot of time on one foot, but --.

Yes but, unless you have a wooden leg, you will never know what it's like to be a Flamingo.

You see the reason why they stand on one leg is to dry the other one, it makes sense if you do not know anything about flamingos.

Sense, ye say, will a ban the bomb and love inscribed on the Junkies Grotto make sense, I for one don't think so.

Let me tell you something about, Ye see, when did you know a junkie? And the turmoil they create. Go talk to Philly Mc Mahon, and see if you can make sense of him.

You ask me, who is Philly, ah, shite if you do not know his name. He is an adviser to the President's Council.

What good will that do, you ask? A power of good, he will show you love and ban the bomb, and you will get so wrapped up in both you cannot think about drugs. In fact, it is all time-consuming. It is very much like drugs.

Ah Jesus, you don't know your arse from your elbow. In one case, you slide into the unruly world of a man who minds themselves; in the other, you mind the world.

## Hot Dog Man

Matthew Tubridy

Chris has his trolley he pushes around Henry Street and O'Connell street,  
He is selling hot dogs,  
3 euro each!  
He gets the attention of the guards,  
They walk up to him,  
Chris gives them both a hot dog,  
So they won't annoy him,  
Chris gets good business  
because it's Christmas Eve,  
And there's lots of shoppers out in the cold winter air,  
Chris's hot dog are steaming on his trolley,  
Almost irresistible to passers by,  
Only 3 euro he yells!  
Gillian walks by,  
She smells the hot dogs,  
She was on her way into Arnotts,  
To get her son some shoes,  
But the aroma of hot dog was just too strong.

## **Along The Banks**

### **Bernadette O'Reilly**

It had been a long time since I had entered the environs of a bank. Along the bank's walls stood machines replacing the cashier counters. Panic set in.

How to reach up to the screen and how to use these machines to withdraw money.

Searching around the bank, at the very end of the large room, tucked into a corner, was a lone cashier counter just like an oasis in a desert.

I approached and explained my predicament.

The cashier said to complete my business the use of one of the machines was needed.

As it was not a busy time, the woman left her post and helped me complete my transaction.

On leaving the bank the thought struck. Angels can be found hidden in the most unlikely of places.



**A message to Joe Biden,**

**Matthew Tubridy**

You may be the most important man in the world,  
But that's because of your ability to kill people quickly,  
You may have loads of people following you,  
But if I was in the crowd watching you,  
All the light would have to go from you to me,  
For I am the processor of your trip to Ireland,  
Joe Biden should come to my flat to shake my hands.

## **A Very Bad Rabbit**

### **Miguel Angel Rivera**

As was the monthly custom, their eclectic lot sat in a circle for a rousing round of “group therapy”.

All of the characters and Icons associated with holidays who came to air out their stresses, grievances, and just to bullshit a little. Present were: The Tooth Fairy, Father time, Uncle Sam, The Saint Patrick’s day Leprechaun, The Halloween Pumpkin, A pilgrim, The Easter Bunny and of Course their usual host, Santa Claus. The endless litany of nonsense and complaints about not being appreciated or well-financed through current social media and internet sources was accompanied by often unwelcome and somewhat unsolicited revelations of bedroom activity, domestic battles, and binge drinking.

The Pilgrim was sharing. “My wife told me I had to stop impersonating a flamingo, I had to put my foot down.” were the words that escaped The Thanksgiving Pilgrim’s mouth.

That, was one comment too many for The Rabbit and he rolled his eyes while squirming in his chair, followed by an involuntary and rather generous fart that signified his loss of patience with this mandatory, “touchy-feely”, monthly gathering.

“Now Mr. Rabbit, you know the rules with regard to crosstalk, please contain yourself”, Santa warned. The Pilgrim finished sharing and the Rabbit breathed a sigh of relief. He felt tortured by that pathetic pouring-out of weak-minded dribble and desperately wished he could shove the Pilgrim in front of the nearest speeding bus. Now it was the Rabbit’s turn. He smiled and looked at the entire, encircled lot. His buck-toothed grin and furry white face twisted into an evil mask.

“We do this thing, this stupid thing, every month. And to what end? Just look at yourselves, world-famous, iconic, and loaded with endorsements. You make me sick. Especially you Mr. Kringle!”, He said, now turning his gaze sharply toward Santa.

“How is it that you, having the best holiday of all, have the balls to be hosting this meeting? You routinely engage in animal abuse while riding

around in your red spandex outfit and giving out shitty toys made with elf-child slave labour. Tell me, does Mrs. Santa ever get tired of your fat ass? Surely she has an elf lover, or two behind your very round back!”

Then, without another word, he hopped out of his chair, leaving only a coloured egg behind. As he exited the non-descript building in mid-town Manhattan, there was an explosion. Bits of pumpkin, leprechaun, and pilgrim mixed with the remnants of a tight red jogging suit now decorated the street amid the shattered windows and debris from the building. Alarms blared from cars all over the street and sirens could be heard approaching. The rabbit smiled as he hopped to the bus stop. It was a moment of intense satisfaction. “Merry Christmas, you bastards”.

## **Island On A Lake**

**Matthew Tubridy**

On a lake in a Island in Co Mayo,  
But you look behind you and spot a McDonalds,  
With milkshakes,  
A donkey gives you a ride,  
When you get to McDonalds,  
You sit down and have a burger and milkshake,  
You ring your mother,  
I'm ok! I say,  
It was just Justin left me off in the island,  
So I could become enlightened,  
Catch a few fish,  
But Justin didn't see the McDonalds,  
But he finds out, baaa! he says.

## When Stinson Creek Was A River

Steve Huenneke



I took this photo six years ago back when I still lived in Missouri. I lived in a small town called Fulton. In Fulton, there is a place I used to walk frequently. It is known in town as the Stinson Creek Trail. Stinson Creek is often dry. But one night that year, in May, a heavy rain storm occurred. Stinson Creek swelled with water and became like a roaring river, just for a few days.

It was as if nature was creating something to resemble another form of itself, like a grotto resembles a cave. Something both beautiful and destructive. At that moment, I passed by this tree, about midway through my walk.

As I passed by, I stopped and thought of the art of Andy Goldsworthy. I saw it featured in the film *Rivers and Tides*. The art Goldsworthy creates comes from natural objects like stones or pieces of wood. The thought behind his art is deep. The art objects themselves are assembled into a form by the artist. Because the forms are exposed to the elements of nature, they do not last longer than a few hours or days. A river or a tide typically carries the object away or breaks it apart. Goldsworthy said: "The very thing that brings the work to life is the thing that will cause its death."

So it was with this tree, in its environment with the stream, a stream which nature had suddenly reassembled as a river. As if to tell a story. What was the story? What we choose to see I suppose.

To see the tree as only living was too limited, I thought. To see the tree as eventually dying was also too limited, I also thought. I saw the tree as a symbol of someone or something right now bravely leaning into the overdose of water. Why not? Water was what normally made it alive, after all. So it still leaned in, no matter what.

## **A Stone On My Way**

**Magda Veloso**

Along the road there was a stone  
The stone boasted some inscription  
I could not understand.  
I left it to my imagination  
Grotto? Junkies?  
Could make head nor tails of it.  
It looked more like a tomb  
For people long, long gone  
Graffiti on the wall  
Couldn't understand it at all.  
So I came back to my life  
Remembering words from my wife  
To stop impersonating a flamingo.  
Did I? so I thought "Bingo"  
And put my foot down  
Or else I'd feel myself drown  
In the pond nearby.  
It was nearly dawn  
When back home I got  
And told my wife to stop  
Or else I'd start to roam  
Far, far away from home.

## **Along The Banks**

**Angelina Kelly**

Walking along the banks of the canal recently I stopped to observe a stone slab which was emblazoned with graffiti reading "The Junkies Grotto". Thankfully there was no one about so I was able to look at it in peace. The script was rough and the font erratic but there was a strange kind of beauty about it nonetheless. In its own way it was a form of art and the same time and effort went into creating it as one of the so called masters put into their great masterpieces.

I turned to my companion and extolled the virtues of the "work of art" but she was completely unimpressed and saw nothing good about it. I became so engrossed in trying to impress her with my knowledge, that I didn't realise my posture had changed. It was only when my wife told me to stop impersonating a flamingo that I observed myself and realised I was standing on one foot and put my foot down.

Apparently it was more important to her that I didn't make a show of myself than it was to admire the hard work of a potential budding artist.



## The Banks

### Mark L'estrange

Spin Man Paddy got back home after the night out with the Guard and Julie was waiting up for him, she asked "How you get on, what did he ask you?" "He wants me to join the force, what do you think?" "It's your choice, would you like to be a Guard?" "Well, if I can't help people without being one I think I should because that's why I have been given these powers for to help people."

"I will sleep on it, and I will let them know tomorrow."

He woke the next morning to his phone ringing; it was the sergeant he met last night.

"Paddy, have you thought about what we spoke about last night?"

"Yes, can I meet you today to talk about it more please"

"Ok but don't come down to the station I will meet you along the banks of the canal, In case anyone knows you I want you to be under cover for us I will explain when I meet you."

"Ok I will meet you in an hour is that ok?"

"Perfect I will see you then thank you"

When Paddy got there, he couldn't see the guard, then his phone rang it was him he said.

"I am in the ford focus in a disguise I have a beard and a funny looking hat don't laugh at me."

He couldn't help but laugh when he saw how he looked, he said joking.

"You don't stand out at all."

They both laughed which broke the ice because Paddy was feeling nervous.

"Paddy, are you ok to work for us?"

"I will be happy to help you what do I have to do."

“You just need to act as normal go about your day-to-day business, I will give you this phone and when we need your help, we will call you.”

“Will I be getting paid or do I need any training”

“Yes, as you know we send all our new staff to Templemore for training but in your case because you will be working covertly, we are going to get one of our trainers to contact you if anyone asks say your taking Karate classes when you’re getting training.”

“And give me your bank details as we will wire your wages across.”

“Ok, thanks so much for this opportunity.”

“No, Thanks for agreeing I am looking forward to working with you.”

He headed for home and as he did, he had a funny feeling he was being followed. He went into a big shopping centre to see if the car would follow him, but they just kept going, so he headed for home.

He couldn’t wait to tell Julie his news about him becoming Garda Spinman.

## **Stuck Out On A Lake**

**Matthew Tubridy**

Stuck out on a lake,  
Your canoe has broken in 2,  
What will I do?  
Ring someone?  
I ring my mother, she drives to the bank of the lake,  
She jumps in, she was a mermaid in her past life,  
The water is cold and brown,  
She does the front crawl to me,  
When she gets to me and my broken canoe she asks  
'What type of a shit canoe do you have?  
Next thing I know I'm slurping tea beside the stove in my Mums cottage,  
The only thing is I've grown webbed feet,  
I must be taking after my mother!

## Paradise in the Grotto

Greg Fields

The fog of early morning lifted more quickly than the fog of the preceding night. That fog, the one that came through a needle and flushed the veins with liquid heat, the night fog. . . that would take longer to dissipate. Andrew Gentry regarded the wonder of a gray and misty morning within the context of his own grey and misty body. His bones had turned to gelatine, and for the first time since his last fix, the edge had left him. He relaxed into the corner of the small tent he had set up in the far reaches of Farragut Square, beyond the places where anyone would take notice.

The night before a man he knew only as Jake had set him up a nickel bag. Jake had no more substance than the morning fog. He wisped into and out of the streets with a sly transparency, visible only to those who needed him. He seemed to have a hidden sense of when to appear and what to offer, a unique talent that Andrew found most welcome. Last night Jake had appeared, agitated at the mouth of an alleyway near the square, almost miraculous in his emergence when Gentry had the money, and he had the need.

When he started on the streets, Gentry had no notion of what he would have to endure to get by. Naïve, barely seventeen, armed more with brashness than with wits, he saw freedom off the grid. He would take all he needed, and most of what he wanted, and in the hubris of youth believed he would never be caught. That he would never fall short. An awakening was when he realized that brashness was not enough, would never be enough, to provide the things his previous life at home could not offer. He sought security and comfort. What he found was a scramble for life's basics, and a desperation that built a quiet despair, and, in his weaker moments, panic.

It was in the throes of that panic – “Where to sleep, and eat, and laugh. How will I do this? What comes next?” – that Jake first appeared with a soothing whisper that promised at least a bit of pleasure, a numbness, and an insulation from despair. It had not taken much. Gentry had tried the softer drugs, found some peace in weed and the occasional

pill. Here was a chance to do something different. He was not afraid of it.

Now, several months on, he sought out Jake on those nights when his body quivered and trembled, when his mind raced to the plateaus of panic, and when it seemed that all that could ever matter was ending the pain for a bit, finding a place to float, so that when he came down he could make it a while longer.

That corner of the square, the place where Gentry pitched his small tent, was where they all came, those who needed Jake. On this foggy morning Gentry stretched out and watched the wafting, shapeless forms of the misted sky. As he lay there, an older man, one Gentry knew on sight and who often shared this space, stumbled down next to him.

“Hell of a morning, isn’t it, lad?”

Gentry grunted in reply, unable to think of a cogent response.

“All the mornings are like this after the right hit. Don’t you think?”

Gentry looked up at him. His eyes blinked in the morning light, and he noticed a thin coating of dew lining his forehead. “Just another day,” he mumbled.

The older man cackled a broken laugh. “Right, lad. Quite right. Just another day in Paradise. Here, in the Junkies’ Grotto.” He cackled again, then got up to wander to another part of the square.

Gentry rose at last, then folded his tent as his head cleared into a dull throb. This was why he did what he did, he reasoned. This was why he stole, thieved, and bullied. For these days. For the paradise of this forlorn and lonely grotto.

## **Shelter**

**Matthew Tubridy**

Up a mountain, man has a shelter,  
But only puts it over himself first,  
And then his woman,  
Woman was wandering around,  
Trying to look attractive,  
Do you want me to go under your shelter?  
I'm not smelly!  
Eventually woman produces offspring,  
He lets them stay in the shelter,  
In fact gets a bigger one,  
Eventually offspring get too big for the shelter,  
They leave and get another shelter.

## **Conspiracy**

### **Catriona Murphy**

It was a conspiracy, but the story of the century.

Thomas had been waiting for the tip-off for a while.

But then, it appeared.

The flamingo silhouette lit up the night sky like the bat signal.

He'd frozen, upon first sighting it, then grabbed his camera, notepad and pen and dashed to the rooftop.

This would be the interview that would make his career!

After this, the BBC would be begging him to interview all the high-profilers – Elon Musk, Jennifer Lawrence and those people from Love Island.

The rooftop was empty, but he saw a trail of bird footprints, in yellow paint, illuminating in the darkness, like the yellow brick road.

It led him along the banks of the Grand canal and under a bridge where he saw a crack, a crevice, just high enough for an adult to squeeze through, in the wall.

A draft wafted out and tickled his hair.

Darkness stared back at him.

Did he dare? How far was he willing to go for the promotion?

He shoved himself into the gap.

Yellow paint streaked the dank walls, as he grunted and groaned his way through what was clearly too small of a wedge, for a man of his size.

The stench of unwashed bodies and other human filth filled his nostrils.

Eventually, a light shone at the end, and his hope and courage flared up enough to bring him to the end of his gruelling journey.

He almost fell out, and dropped his camera. It smashed, but his attention had been pulled towards the ensemble in front.

Gathered round a gigantic effigy of a flamingo were homeless, addicts, and other members of society, that lived on the fringes of it all.

Torches ran in a semi-circle, and at the head of the dark gathering was a man in pink robes wearing a large hat shaped into a beak.

'Followers of the unholy flamingo, I look upon you all this day and I am glad. Glad for our sacrifice. Those of us blessed with the vision of the pink divine, shall know glory in this life.'

Thomas stared in bemusement at the yellow-painted bird footprints, now leading straight up to the dais.

'And now,' his hand gestured in Thomas's direction. 'Is our day of reckoning. Now, we have our sacrifice.'

Thomas, for the first time, realised, that not only could he report the news, he could also be in it too.



## **Family**

**Matthew Tubridy**

In this family we share the food,  
Would you like a chop?  
Hand buster a chop,  
Mint sauce anyone?  
Jelly and ice cream for desert,  
Thank you Harry, or do we thank God?  
With a prayer,