

# Inkslingers Blended Session

6<sup>th</sup> May 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“I Failed Math So Many Times at School I Can’t Even Count”

And the Visual



*What Do You Have To Do  
To Get Your Face On A Wall  
Around Here???*

## A Father's Spirit

Greg Fields

Cooney's mind faded into the undefined levels bridging consciousness and the spirit. While there the images of the ago years came to him in snippets and spasms. As the blood ran out, the memories flowed in, a neap tide of thought and feelings for things gone by and forever vanished. The lot of time was there only for the regarding, for the evaluation of gain and loss, and nothing more.

Memories in their vague, wispy forms, unsorted and random, flitted before him and around him. Cooney had no sense now of physical space. He did not know where he was, not really. A bed of some sort, and there was strangeness enough in that alone. He had known too few beds in his day. His slumped body had grown accustomed to the benches and grasses of the square, to the unforgiving cots of the shelters, and, when his resources allowed, to the bug-infested beds of cheap hotels. Here, though, he lay in some comfort. He could not recall with any precision how he had come to this place, nor did he know who the shifting forms were who gathered around him to poke, prod and study what was left of him.

Thick as flies on a summer's night the memories came to him. He saw himself once again as a boy, chattering through his days, bearing the bruises, both visible and invisible, of being Mack Cooney's only son. He saw his mother, gone these many years, sleeping on a ragged couch, and heard the fall of her bottle as it hit the floor and spilled the remainder of its contents onto the tatty rug.

He saw Johnny Duncan pull at his arm, dragging him reluctantly to school, sixth graders then and rawer than most of their mates. "Come along, Matt. Let's get along with it. We've got to go, and you know you'll end up there anyway."

And he saw again the inside of the classroom where the torments of learning left him numb. Cooney felt the urge to fight what he could not grasp, to shake it and pound on it until whatever it was gave up and left him alone. So it was with the lads on the street, and so it was in this classroom with most of the things his teachers put in front of him. He

recalled a math lesson where, called to the board to add a string of numbers, he froze and looked confusedly at the figures before him. They may as well have been Egyptian hieroglyphics or Icelandic runes, and the vision of his friends' laughter came clear. In his wrist he felt again the throb where the teacher's ruler had whacked his unmoving hand.

He had learned to fight. He had learned to steal, to thieve, to hoard what he had and give out none of it, neither the material goods that comprised his store, nor the emotions of the young man who had stolen it. Matthew Cooney learned to walk alone, to stare into a night sky and see only a single star, ignoring the rest of the firmament. One light was enough.

Now, at the end of it all, these things came back to him. He had no control of the matter. There was no order to it. The jumbled, chaotic and severely broken mosaic that was Matthew Cooney wafted into and out of his memory in its broken, faded pieces, each piece with its own sharpened edges.

Time, now, to pass it by. A heartbroken years ago grew weaker and wearier by the minute, and the spirit that fed it packed its things to go.

Matthew Cooney opened his eyes once more and looked around him as best he could. Strange it was. All this was very strange.

In the doorway he saw a familiar figure move toward him. As Matthew Cooney closed his eyes, he drew a long and tired breath. Before him his father's face, behind him all that was, ahead of him the vast darkness and uncounted balances of a life at once too short, and yet far too long.

"I am thy father's spirit, Doomed for a certain term to walk the night. . "

## Most men

Matthew Tubridy

Most men  
Don't care about anyone,  
Except his wife,  
Baby boomer,  
Fred goes to party to find his baby boomer,  
His enlarged tummy,  
His big breasts,  
The curves,  
He's looking for Sinead,  
Sinead is looking for a tall man,  
Who sells fruit and vegetables,  
Somewhat imposing,  
With big eyebrows,  
Called Fred,  
Has an imposing jeep,  
Cliff hanger Fred,  
Sinead looks at a line of men,  
She pities the small men,  
They all wear suits,  
Roger is the small man,  
But he has a gun!  
He shines the gun with his handkerchief,  
He says to Sinéad,  
I could kill all of these men if I wanted,  
I'd the impulse took me,  
Sinead eyes him up,  
Roger you say?  
Roger takes out an apple tart  
from his rucksack,  
Roger is type of Tom Cruise character,  
He flies war planes,  
In the sky above Kinsale,  
He offers Sinead his hand, as he sits in his warplane

## **A place of honour?**

### **Adrian Gallagher**

Durak's transport made its way along the crowded street. Though that wasn't the name he was given at birth, it was what everybody now called him. He didn't like it. He felt demeaned by it but over the years he had grown accustomed to it. What could he do? He couldn't fight the whole world all the time because of it. But today he felt he was about to escape from under this yoke. He had been entrusted with carrying out a very important task.

He had just turned fifteen when he had become involved for the first time the group. He had come to the attention of the leadership because, though Durak hadn't been seen as very bright in school, he had developed great patience and perseverance, while he was also physically skilful and could be relied on to carry out fiddly tasks. They could see that he had the potential to be useful to them given the right direction, and they would surely give him that!

They set about moulding him in their vision. He began training, which included being brought to training camps and here he met others that were being given the same treatment. Any equipment they required was made available to them, as were any bodily needs. It was a continuous cycle of trial and error interspersed with inspirational discourse. Though a tough regime, he didn't care because for the first time in his life he felt truly wanted and valued.

Initially he had started with small tasks but as developed his knowledge and became more skilful, the potency of his competencies increased.

While he was developing, he also began to dream, of being truly essential to the group and its cause, of being famous! These dreams drove him on. He was following in the footsteps of the many greats who were now revered. He would show them, those people who had belittled him. He would rise from being seen as the dunce of the class to a place of honour.

Now after honing his skills and developing his knowledge for the task ahead, he was ready. He would follow his great leader's instructions to the letter. He would blow away the opposition.

As he came in sight of the stadium, he wondered how his efforts this day would be remembered. Would he find himself being simply washed back into the gutter? Or would his picture and that of his team be plastered all over walls? It would all depend on success or failure.

## **An Idol After All**

**Steve Huenneke**

To become an image  
An icon  
Imagine that  
You, too  
Supposedly  
You and I can be alive  
After we're dead  
In a photo  
You know  
Everyone has seen  
Like an app  
On a computer screen  
A face in the history  
Of a sports team  
A ghost in the outfield  
I wish I could have been a Cardinal  
In that golden year  
Or been a writer  
Like this Shakespeare  
Of a man  
In the picture  
He'd been a house painter  
A part time soldier  
He'd been a prisoner of war  
The story of his life, that ended  
In that same golden year of yore  
In nineteen sixty four  
He was as famous as a Beatle  
After dying in Meath Hospital  
This man had a funeral  
The biggest since Charles Stewart Parnell  
Now he is famous still  
But not quite as  
Because that's never forever

Life is not, nor the legend  
Life is before the legend  
It's in the man  
Not in an idol after all  
Not in a fossil on this wall  
It's in the man  
Coming out of Borstal  
Before he was on any wall  
He'd been behind one in prison  
He was a person  
Before his downfall  
There was this future  
His was no way of knowing then  
Before his downfall  
He was off the wall  
Still kicking  
Carousing  
With his wit  
Thinking  
He was in the thick of everything  
He was in the thick of everything  
Every evening  
In some pub  
Seeing double in Dublin.



## **Along the Banks**

**Nieve Nichol**

I am standing on the Banks of the Seine in the city of Paris. That is what the photograph shows. I am wearing a brightly coloured warm coat to offset the cold winter. In the photo Simon is behind me. I'd say he was about twenty years old then. He was thin and arty looking. I was a year younger.

Years seemed to stretch before us at that stage of life like the great river Seine before us, long and meandering. At the same time we seemed to live in the present, catching as much of life as we could like whale hunters exploring the ocean to catch more.

We were drawn together by something I don't know why really but there we were the two of us hanging around together in the 70's and staring at the Seine.

He was part of a group of UK trainee chefs and I was part of a group of au pairs looking after children. At weekends, we visited every chateau around Paris.

Au pairs appeared in different ways. There was talk among us of some au pairs being isolated in big chateaus outside Paris while the owners were away. Another au pair used to play the guitar in the metro.

At that time I lived in a Gendarmerie in the Latin Quarter. Every morning I could hear the horses being prepared for their duties. I looked out and saw beautifully uniformed soldiers on horseback getting ready for their morning exercise.

I wonder now what Simon and I talked about. He told me he was raised by his grandmother. He seemed unhappy. He was struggling.

At that time, I was trying to find direction and jumped at the chance of going to Paris.

The last time I saw Simon, he handed me a pile of stamped envelopes and said he couldn't post them and would I please do it for him. He said one of the letters was to give up his training as a chef in the UK. No trouble to me. I quickly found a post box and put them all in.

Where are you now Simon? What was in those other letters?

## **Gwi Jones**

**Matthew Tubridy**

Gwi Jones, lives in Cardiff,  
His family were coal miners,  
The Jones,  
But Gwi wanted to move to the city,  
Gwi gets a job in a bank,  
He gives people their money,  
Gwi's Grandad was called Rhys,  
He had coal dust on him all day every day,  
He mines 'Mine 27'  
He comes home for lunch,'  
but coal dust on his sandwich,  
It was pickle and ham,  
Rhys wife is called Efa,  
She gives him milk,  
Rhys eats his lunch and heads back down mine 27,  
It pays good money,  
He can buy his daughter a hobby horse,  
But the only thing is it gets coal dust on it,  
Down the mine, the workers sing songs,  
As they whack at the coal down there,  
This will power the UKs trains!  
Rhys daughter is called Bronwen,  
She goes to school,  
She wants to work in a bank in Cardiff,  
Barclays,  
At 18 she moves to Cardiff,  
She has a baby called Gwi!  
Gwi plays golf,  
He studies well in school,  
He studies math very well,  
He wants to work in the bank like his mother,  
But it's all electronic now,  
He sits up in the manager's office thinking what to offer his customers,  
There is nothing more to offer,  
He thinks,  
Despite emergency planning,

## Mimosa Medicine

Karla Freeman

(From the novel *To Heal a Broken Heart*)

Why had Cissy said yes without thinking? She was dressed and ready when Antonio picked her up at eight a.m. on the dot. His truck was old, and her seat was lumpy. Her moods shifted with the clouds as they left the city. She shivered, remembering the stormy outburst right before her escape. Her armpits were hot and sweaty as they passed through cityscapes, entering fields with mountains in the distance. Arid landscapes held her attention, melding cactus after cactus. When Cissy stole a glance at Antonio, she felt comforted, like sipping chamomile tea. Grumpiness began to disappear as the landscape opened to vast vistas. Antonio sang a Mexican song she couldn't name. She found herself humming along. Was he always so positive? Annoyance returned. She'd better be careful or she would pick a fight.

"This road is pretty winding. Do you ever get car sick?" His concern touched something that broke through as if light shone under a closed door.

"No, I think I'll be ok."

"It will take about an hour to Mitla."

Cissy took her water bottle out of her backpack, tightened her seat belt. Ready or not, they ploughed onward. When they turned on a poorly paved road, Cissy gripped her water bottle, swallowing in gulps. But nothing helped the rising tide. Snaking back and forth did indeed make her sick.

"Are you ok?"

"Sure." She hoped the lie would tell her stomach to obey. "How much farther?"

"Another thirty minutes."

"Is the road like this the rest of the way?"

Cissy tried to think about other things. She didn't want him to have to pull over. She didn't want to be a bother.

“Will we see a lot of mimosa trees?” Cissy hoped to stem the rising bile.

“Yes, and the abuela who makes the tinctures has many other herbs.”

“I think we need to pull over, Antonio.”

After the episode was over, Cissy felt enormous relief. Antonio was actually laughing and when she joined in, she wondered why no shame. Why did throwing up feel so funny?

“I didn’t want to scare you,” he said. “That’s why I didn’t tell you how bad the road was. You are now initiated into the world of Milta. They say if you don’t throw up on the ride, you will not receive the medicine you need.”

“So, throwing up was a good thing.”

She just hoped that more throwing up wasn’t going to be part of the day.

When they arrived, Cissy climbed out of the truck and was embraced immediately by a round woman wearing the traditional embroidered blouse.

“Bienvenidos a mi casa.”

Cissy laughed. Her happy mood confused her. This place felt like home. Befuddled, Cissy laughed again. Had she met this medicine woman before? Maybe she had, but didn’t remember. It was all so new, yet it wasn’t.

They entered a small dirt-floored room where pots boiled on an old stove. She wanted to hold her nose; it smelled so bad, like dirty underwear. Again, Cissy wanted to throw up. Margarita talked in Spanish while Antonio translated.

“Cissy, Margarita has been a medicine woman since birth. She comes from a line of healers. She already knew things about you. She made potions even before you came today.”

How could she? Cissy wondered.

“This is a potion that has been used since the Aztecs were here. Over many years, the tinctures have changed. I am adding some very potent

herbs to heal your heart.” As he translated, Antonio’s voice had a strange effect creating a dream state. In a haze, Cissy watched bottles open. She couldn’t say how or why, but the room clouded. Unnameable aromas entered her nostrils, surrounding her like a hug. Another bottle was opened. Flower buds and tangled branches were laid on the table as Margarita worked. She placed a few seeds, twigs, and flowers in the pots. Cissy wanted to ask why the cooking herbs smelled so bad. She was trying not to inhale, but it wasn’t working. Then she tried to breathe through her mouth. She coughed. Coughing was making her dizzy. Was this part of the experience?

Maybe she was supposed to throw up again. She was afraid to ask.

“The senorita is making a special blend just for you. You will have to drink it.”

“Here? Now?” She was getting close to panic. If the smell was so awful, what would swallowing taste like? Couldn’t she just take it home and drink it later?

The abuela stopped her mixing the brew and put her hand on Cissy’s arm.

“Would you like to see my mimosa trees?”

“Yes,” Cissy said, gratefully. Outside, Cissy took huge gulps of air. Thankfully, her stomach settled. They walked over to a group of trees she recognized as mimosas. Even just looking at them made her heart calm and her lips curve upward.

“We are lucky to be with this healer,” Antonio said. “She knows more than anyone else I have met about what to mix for exactly what each person needs. You will have to drink it here. Then it can help you.”

Margarita picked off a small branch with pink blossoms. Cissy inhaled the subtle sweetness. Maybe she won’t have to drink. She was happy enough just smelling the flowers. When she walked back toward the house, Cissy was ready to run. But where could she go? She was trapped in a place she didn’t know, with people who were giving her terrible-smelling stuff to drink.

“I need to sit down.” She thought maybe she could fake fainting. Like they read her thoughts, they both put their arms around her.

“You will be ok.”

The ride home was uneventful. The drink hadn't made her sick. She couldn't remember much that happened after she forced down the drink, except that she fell into some kind of haze. When she awoke, she was in the car.

“No need to think about what happened. Just rest. You might fall asleep. In a few days, we can talk.”

## **Dingle Journey**

**Matthew Tubridy**

In Dingle, we drive through,  
But the light gets darker,  
We see a shed,  
But in it, I spot heifers dangling from Tempe rafters,  
We pass a field,  
There's a farmer holding a pitchfork,  
My Dad stops the car to ask directions,  
Farmer shouts, 'Get away! Get Away!  
I'll set my Bull on you!  
This is Moriarty's laneway!  
Farmers sheepdog goes to the car window,  
My Dad puts his hand out to pet the dog,  
But the dog put my Dads hand in his mouth,  
The farmer makes a strange whistling sound,  
The dog starts sucking my Dads fingers,  
My Mum throws the dog some Jaffa cakes,  
Dog doesn't know where to look,  
Obey his master or get Jaffa Cakes?  
But farmer picks up Jaffa Cakes and feeds  
them to the dog,  
Farmer tells us where Dingle is,  
5 miles up that way,  
We continue on our way,  
In a Dingle we go into a pub,  
My Dad says to a local about our stoppage  
on Moriarty's lane,  
Ah Moriarty! Between His Bull and his shotgun and his sheepdog,  
You got away lightly!  
There was 2 American tourists asked Moriarty for directions,  
Moriarty got out his pitchfork, and punctured the tyres of their jeep,  
But then they realize they're long lost cousins,  
Moriarty invites them in to his farmhouse for tea,  
The Americans end up spending their whole vacation with Moriarty,  
Suckling the lambs,



A far cry from New York!  
Being chased by the Bull,  
Collecting the eggs from the hatchery,  
One day Moriarty drives them into town,  
The 2 Americans at the back of his Jeep,  
And his Bull in the trailer behind that,  
They get to the cattle mart,  
But instead of bringing the Bull to the middle of the mart  
Moriarty brings his 2 Americans,  
Anyone related to these 2? He shouts  
Gillian puts them up in her B&B,  
THE 2 Americans offer to pay  
But Gillian has been looking at her family tree,  
Your grand she says!  
Americans walk down the Main Street of Dingle,  
Hi I'm Bob! And this is Rob!  
They go in for an Irish Coffee in Brady's,  
They skip down Main Street,  
I'm your cousin, and you're my cousin! They sing!  
They go into a mechanic to get their Jeep fixed,  
The mechanic's name is Old Joe,  
He drives to Moriarty's farm,  
Fixes the punctured wheels and drives it back to a Gilliam's B&B,  
Thank you cousin!  
But Old Joe isn't related to them and charges them through the roof,  
The 2 Americans get fed up of dancing down Main Street and drive back  
up to Dublin,  
They drop the Jeep back to the car rental,  
And get on their flight back to New York.

## Harvey's Pyjamas

Miguel Angel Rivera

It was sentencing day for the accused predator. Armed Corrections Officers led him into the courtroom shackled hand and foot. He was wearing the brightest of orange jumpsuits. One which fit snug as a snake's skin and rode into every dark crevice of the large man's frame.

In the audience, media personnel, observers, victims, and other persons lucky enough to get a seat in this most prestigious of hearings, paid close attention. All except Mable. She was only here as a fill-in for her sister, now too busy with her new You-tube channel. This particular segment to which Mable had been assigned, supposedly dealt with the subject of Powerful men and abuse of power.

Although a published writer, this was definitely *not* Mable's forte'. On her way in, she'd observed a mural of Harvey as a monster on the side of a building in Little Italy. It had caught her attention though and so she'd agreed to come here in her sister's stead. As the judge read the pre-sentencing report, her mind began to wander. Pondering the fame, now infamy of this man, and she thought, "*What do you do to get your face on a wall around here?*"

She began doodling with nervousness on her notepad, constructing what came to mind. Her brain in concert with this environment delivered a sad, silly poem of sorts.

### *Harvey's Pyjamas*

*How has it come to this? A Director in chains!  
Reporters like vultures consuming remains,  
Lawyers like leeches satiated with blood,  
For the billable hours of rolling in mud.  
Are you a victim Harvey, now stripped of all power?  
Headed for a hellish place and a crowded prison shower.*

*In that mountain of emotions, in that ocean of proof,  
The teary-eyed faces of victims scream truth.  
Now older and wiser, these women ask why,  
Their fortune and fame had a price-tag too high.  
Oh, you did it Harvey. You enjoyed their abuse.  
Their desperate lives amid morals too loose.  
Now you're going to that place of torment and hell,  
in orange pajamas that fit 'not-so-well'.  
Oh, You're famous now Harvey, your face is on a wall.*

## **I Failed Math So Many Times At School, I Can't Even Count**

**Angelina Kelly**

I hated school – with a vengeance. Every minute I spent in that building was torture. I longed for the ‘going home’ bell and that walk down the driveway to the gate... to freedom.

The only time I was happy in school was in English class – that was heaven – all of it. I learned the grammar, punctuation, comprehension, verbs and even the poetry which I struggled a little with. My favourite moments in school, however, the essay prompt, especially when it was an unfinished sentence. Going home on those occasions I rubbed my hands together with glee, locked myself into my room and composed – my imagination running wild – and it did.

But, as we all know, there is balance and that came in the form of math. I hated math. I could never get my sums to add up correctly – no matter how hard I tried, or what way I did them. As for multiplication and division – especially long-division – they were beyond my comprehension. I barely got beyond  $2 + 2 = 4$  and to this day I can't remember the Tables, other than 5 and 10.

I dreaded exams, they struck cold terror in my heart and my brain went blank. Except for English – of course – but the exam I hated the most was – yes, you guessed it – math. I failed math so many times at school, I can't even count.

Thankfully nowadays we have calculators, both physical hand-held devices and on our smart phones – thank God our phones are smart - because I certainly am not. I no longer need to scramble my brain because the machines do it all for me. Afterall, that's what they are for, right?

Whoever invented the calculator was a genius and I tip my hat and bow in reverence to them every time I have to do math. Bless their inventiveness and bless them most of all.

## **Scientist**

**Matthew Tubridy**

So he's a scientist in Trinity College Dublin,  
He finds out what old bus tyres can be used for,  
He goes out onto Nassau Street,  
And gets under a bus,  
He says to the bus driver  
'You should reuse these tyres!'  
He gets out his spanner and takes the wheels off,  
Bus driver says 'Here, I'm supposed to be going to Tallaght!'  
The police put bricks under the wheels of the bus,  
It stays on Pearse Street,  
The Trinity students come out and view the bus.

## **Maths Failures.**

**Laura Alves**

I failed math so many times at school I can't even count - and that was only in one specific year.

I thought there had to be something wrong either with the school, with the teacher or with me, as I never had any problem with maths before or after that year.

So I did a thorough checking of my work as it came marked 0 all the time. The teacher never complained with me, never came over to explain where I was going wrong or where I could improve my work. The school didn't seem concerned about it either.

I checked and checked and didn't see where I could be going wrong, but I was getting annoyed.

I thought the way it was going, I was going to fail the year altogether and have to repeat that year because of maths.

So I went to the teacher and asked her where I was getting it wrong that I had zero every exercise, homework and test I did that year.

"Oh!", she said, "That's not a zero! That's a letter O for "outstanding"!"

## Joan

**Matthew Tubridy**

Joan walks down O' Connell Street,  
Visibly pregnant,  
I'm pregnant! She says to a passersby,  
He just shrugs his shoulders,  
She goes to Moore Street,  
Buys a few bananas and peaches,  
Eats them there and then,  
It's for the baby she says to a passersby,  
He shrugs his shoulders,  
Joan goes home and has a big bath,  
She rubs her big belly,  
What will I call the baby?  
If it's a boy I'll call him Tom, after the man  
Who she has the rendezvous with in the toilet of the night-club.

## **I Failed Maths**

**Bernadette O' Reilly**

In primary school I struggled to learn maths

I just about managed to learn subtraction

And adding

Division and percentages were beyond me, still are without the aid of a calculator

Equations sent me into an unknown world in which I lost my way

My hands suffered along with a brain that refused to cooperate when the ruler hit my knuckles or my palm

My ears reddened from many a clatter as I stood at the blackboard in utter confusion as numbers danced before me

Phone calculators are now my best friend.



## **You can change the uniform but you can't tame the booty**

**Rebecca N West**

It was a perfectly normal day at the police station. Aside from the average reports of petty burglary and auto-mobile trouble, Gus had spent 40 minutes reassuring the local looney that the government did not, in fact, have cameras installed in the neighbourhood's pigeons. She'd swore they'd been tampering with traffic lights and watching her shower. After weeks of failed attempts to capture one for inspection, she'd finally given up, trucking over to the station with a deceased specimen recently squashed by a car.

"Ma'am, I am not going to perform an autopsy on this bird." For the tenth time, Gus rebuked the woman. She'd brought a hammer and a scalpel for his convenience, quite certain he'd open the skull to reveal the wiring within. She couldn't do it herself, of course, because she had diabetes.

"Fine, I'll take it to the library." Before he could stop her she'd scooped the thing and its entrails back into her Gucci handbag and stomped out the door in her flip-flops and bathrobe, leaving a bloody, slimy mess behind.

He'd barely finished cleaning the counter-top before a jovial middle-aged man with a comb-over flounced in and claimed it, leaning heavily on one elbow. He smiled at Gus and winked. Oh hell no Gus thought to himself, sorely regretting his decision to quit his last gig dancing at the local gay club. It was good fun, but he got sick to death of the laundry. On a busy night he'd change outfits seven or eight times, each one soaked and stuffed with dirty bills. After a few weeks on the job his whole apartment smelled of ass. He spent too much time at the laundromat, the owner mistakenly thought they were friends. The poor old guy got absolutely blitzed at 11 AM, lamenting an unrequited love for a recently married ex-girlfriend, crying hideously before requesting politely that Gus rub eczema cream between his shoulder-blades and murmur "no more itchy, my sweet Richie," just like Angie used to.

The elderly ladies on that street knew him by name. They'd taken to offering lemonade and home-made baked goods in exchange for small

favours, like unplugging a toilet, changing a lightbulb, or checking a breast for suspicious lumps. In exchange for a tuna casserole he'd stood on a chair in Mrs. McCarthy's sitting room, re-organizing bookshelves and porcelain figurines while the widow sipped tea on the sofa. After obliging her request on a fourth occasion, he developed a suspicion that Mrs. McCarthy did not, in fact, have Alzheimer's, but was exploiting the clutter to appreciate his well-formed backside. So, he quit. Now he washed his police uniform once a week. No one seemed to notice.

His attention snapped back to the man's snapping fingers, gesturing at the photos. "What do you have to do to get your face on a wall around here?"

"Sir, those are homicide suspects."

"Well, I'd kill to get out of my sister's wedding."

"Can I help you with something?"

"Yea, I want to rent a few fellas, this Saturday night." The jovial man winked. Gus stared blankly, the gears in his head churning at 15 miles an hour. As far as he knew, the public wasn't allowed to rent cops, the privilege being reserved for the local governor cum real estate mogul and his extended family. For campaign or legal eviction purposes only, after what happened in 2017.

"Do you require assistance, sir? Would you like to report a crime?"

"Oh no, she's not that ugly." The man winked again. Gus stared him down with all the enthusiasm of a teenage junkie zonked out on xanax and glue. There was one, in fact, passed out in the corner, saturated in his own vomit. "She's not exactly thick, if you know what I mean," the man winked, continued, "she's got a face like a donkey, but the groom's no looker neither."

"Your sister?"

"Yeah, her friends suck so I'm planning the party, fuck me if it's gonna be sad, I promised mom I'll make it a hit. Sure the company isn't all that, some old birds from the church choir, those lassies at that dumb hardware store she works at. I tracked down her yoga instructor, that chic's a hottie if I've ever seen one, I tell ya. She needed convincing, I

was prepared, I whipped up a sob story, you know what I mean, no one wants to be the bad guy and skip the bachelorette's when the bride's got colon cancer and six months to live...."

"Sir, what's the issue here?"

"Well hot dog!" The man winked, slammed a fist on the desk. "I need a few fellas, younger would be nice, but any ol' stud will do. So long as he'll strut, you know, for the ladies."

It finally clicked. "Sir, this is a police station, we are real police officers."

"Well, you got the uniforms don't you? I need two or three, whoever you got. I'm off to the auto-shop next for a spicy one, a Mexican or something."

Gus ignored that last comment. "Sir, you can't hire a real police officer for your party. I would suggest you look elsewhere." On the outside Gus was a machine, a stone-cold professional in the face of an irate and delirious public. But on the inside, for a split second, something surged within him - his left foot twitched, his right hip jerked, his buttocks clenched, and he was all too-aware that his too-small briefs were clinging to his balls, squeezing ever so gently. The sensation disturbed him, reminiscent as it was to those neon green too-short short-short booty-shorts, the favourite pair that so deliciously accentuated his junk. He briefly revelled in the squeeze, and was suddenly shocked by an overwhelming urge to rip off his shirt, jump on the desk, and thrust his crotch into the stranger's face. Muscle memory, he thought, relieved that the looney bird woman had interrupted his coffee break. He was lethargic enough to resist the impulse to shake his nuts off.

The man gave a quizzical look, fussed with the four strands of hair on his head, and shrugged. Does he know? Has he seen me at the club? Gus fiddled nervously with a pen; he'd lost his cool. The stranger was less strange to him. Gus imagined him in aviator shades and a studded leather cap, matching pants sporting "bite me" in rhinestones down the thigh. Oh no.

"Well, shame, it's a few hours work, this Saturday night. I'm paying \$250." The fellow raised his eyebrows quickly in succession, and jauntily

shifted his weight to the other elbow, licking his lips and drumming his fingers on the desk. He knows. And he knows I can't refuse.

Glancing about, to be sure no one was listening, Gus took in the nearly empty room. Besides the vomit-soaked teenager was his co-worker Maria, who'd been shouting on the phone for the past hour, and a snoring middle-aged delinquent, who'd been brought in three times this month for urinating on merchandise at the local Walmart. He scribbled quickly on a sticky note and thrust it into the expectant fingers, whispering "Here's my number. Take it and get out."

The man winked one last time, blew a kiss, and departed.

## **In the seclusion room**

**Matthew Tubridy**

In the seclusion room in the Assessment unit in  
St Vincent's Hospital Fairview,  
Paul zooms in on it from google maps,  
He sees Paul Scully drinking a cup of tea in the garden,  
Anyway back to seclusion room,  
Mark is in there,  
But they wheel a Telly in,  
Play soaps over and over again,  
To try to calm him down,  
Mark had poured tomato ketchup on his custard,  
Paul looks at the hospital with google maps,  
He sees Nurses whipping patients,  
He sees patients being crucified,  
He sees dogs being killed to fed to patients,  
It's chicken! The nurses say!  
Paul emails the Minister for Health,  
The facility is closed down.

## **What do you have to do to get you face on the wall around here.**

### **Mark L'estrange**

Spin Man had made a good few friends over the last number of months the way he was able to help people. He decided to contact the girl he met at the so called superhero convention to see if she would have any ideas to help this guy who changed into the monster.

"Hi sorry to bother you it's me Paddy the guy you met at the convention, how is your dad after the breaking" "Great thanks nice to hear from you I can't thank you enough for your help and getting all his stuff back for us you were amazing help, and I can't believe the guards arrested you for helping." Paddy said.

"That's all fine now, and it was no problem glad I could help you guys, the reason I am ring is to ask have you ever experienced this. He explained what was happening to the guy he was trying to help, she said. "Funny you should ask me that a friend of mine was given a funny substance before and it made her go a bit crazy hiding on her friends all the time, which I know sounds funny but she wasn't happy."

"What did she do?" "There is a guy I know that she went to and was able to break her spell I will send you his number." "thanks so much for that." "It's the least I can do for you after all your help." He rang the guy his name was Thomas. "Hi I got your number from a friend, she said you might be able to help this guy who was given some strange substance." He said, "I can give it a go when can you come down."

"Is this afternoon alright need something done fast because don't want to him to change again?"

"Sure I will send you my address."

When they got there, there was a huge picture of him on his wall Paddy said. "This is obviously what you have to get your picture up around here." The Sergeant laughed as Paddy brought the guy in.

When he went in there was pictures of this guy all over the walls when he met him he asked, "What is with all the pictures?" "It's how it all works the patient gets to see lots of me and that's all they concentrate

on then I start the process.” “How long does this take and how does he know it’s worked?”

“Ten minutes and trust me it works.”

Paddy sat in the waiting room for a few minutes and next thing he saw the lights flickering and thought something must be happening.

Thomas came out scratching his head saying, Paddy asked. “Is everything ok.” “He has changed back into the monster but he is talking and acting the same it hasn’t changed his action.”

To be continued.

**Jimmy**  
**Matthew Tubridy**

Jimmy walks past,  
I'm late! I'm late! for a very important date!  
Jimmy wears a black suit,  
He's going to a interview with RTÉ,  
He wants to be a news presenter on the 6.1 news,  
He saw Conor Kane and thought I could do much better than him!  
Jimmy practices in front of his mirror,  
Wearing his suit,  
'Well Hello!' Welcome to the 6.1 news!  
And now the headlands!  
He kicks David McCullagh out the door into the RTÉ carpark,  
He rings up his sister to offer her a job co presenting the 6.1 news,  
They give Catriona Perry the boot too!  
Jimmy makes tea for Dee Forbes, Director General of RTÉ.



## **No one can be happy forever, you know that don't you?**

**Heloisa Prieto**

(The Storytellers (excerpt))

Perched on the large tree branch just above my head, Toca carefully opened the Inga bean and smiled down at me. I reached out to the branch by my side, to try and pick up a bean for myself and almost fell down. Toca cracked up laughing. I knew she was being a bully, laughing at my city girl clumsiness, but I could never be mad at her. For one thing: I loved her grin, the way her eyes could smile as openly as her mouth. I had noticed, early in life, that mouths can be made to smile, but eyes never lie.

Toca handed me the fruit and went on:

“If I could choose between being a happy child or a happy adult, I would rather be happy now. You see, I am happy here. On this farm. But I know it won't last. Bad things will find their way into my life, that's for sure. So, in the future, when I will be in trouble, whenever I feel like crying, I will still hold onto the memories of my happy moments with you.”

I smiled. I was moved by Toca's words. I knew she meant them. I leaned my back against the trunk enjoying the breeze and the birds chirping. I liked eating Inga beans for their softness, but they always left a spicy flavor in my mouth. I only ate them around Toca, at the Saint Caroline farm in Minas Gerais. Back home, in São Paulo, Inga beans were nowhere to be found.

“How about you, Dada? Tell me!”

I knew Toca could be relentless, so I told her:

“I am very happy here too, with you. But my life in the city can make me sad sometimes. I am not sure I agree with you. Sadness and happiness are everywhere. I don't think we have much of a choice... Things come and go on their own.”

Toca slid down and sat on the branch next to me. She stared at me and kept quiet. She turned her face towards the horizon. Sunset. I knew she would tell me to go back to my mother soon to get ready for dinner

time. My grandparents were very strict about dinner. I had to take a bath and sit properly at the table. Food would be delicious, but I had to display good manners and eat the whole dish. There would be no small talk, nor laughter and my mother would avoid eating dessert. She would constantly leave the table before me under the disapproving eyes of Nona, my granny.

So I wanted to stay longer feeling like a bird on my tree nest, but I wouldn't dare say it. I just looked at Toca's lovely profile and enjoyed the emotional comfort her friendship could provide.

"I think you are right, after all!" I told her, finally breaking the silence. "If you suffer as a child, memories will haunt you forever..."

She jumped down to the floor, gesturing to me to do the same.

"I saw your mother crying the other day..." she said in a matter of fact way.

I felt angry. I hated my mother's tears. I knew that there was nothing I could do to wipe them away.

"Where is your real father, anyway?" she asked me bluntly.

"Nardo is working. He couldn't come with us..." I told her.

Toca stood in the middle of the road, crossed her arms and asked me deviously:

"Can't you see the plain truth? He is not your real father. How could your blond, blue eyed mother and this blond, green eyed man give birth to you? You could be my blood sister, you know. We share the same skin tone, the same curly hair, but I know my family's ancestors came all the way from Africa. How about you? I asked my mother about your father the other day. I wanted to know if you were adopted. My aunt Cecilia has just adopted a cute baby and I wondered about you. But Mom told me she had seen your mother's huge, pregnant belly, besides, you have blue eyes just like hers. Why does your mother cry so much? Doesn't she love her husband?"

I ran away from Toca. I hated crying so much, tears slid down my face, but I would not allow myself to sob. When I tried to clean their traces, my dirty hand left marks all over my cheeks. I got home, looking down,

all I wanted was to sink in a hot bath. But instead of waiting for me, towel in hands, hot water running, I saw my mother screaming at Nona. They were speaking very fast, in Italian, and I could not understand what they were saying. I went into my bedroom and just waited. I felt hungry, but I couldn't smell Nona's pasta. I looked out of the window and realized Grandad's car was not in its parking lot.

Toca was right.

Happy, simple moments are underrated.

I immediately missed the cosiness of a regular, family dinner.

But I was right too.

Unhappiness can strike as lightning. Unannounced.

## **Brain, in Scoil Ui Chonnail,**

**Matthew Tubridy**

You should have run around the pitch 10 times!  
No dribbling the ball, pick it up!  
And the he smashed a window of the clubhouse,  
The smell of wet grass and crisps,  
Gerr up there!  
Get up the pitch,  
A boy gets whacked at the side of his head,  
It's Timmy from Kincora Avenue,  
He was hit my Gunter, '  
Timmy's mother rushes over,  
They call the doctor in  
A Helicopter Doctor,  
It flattens the grass as it lands,  
Dr Jezz gets out,  
Alright! All you who have health insurance and so are eligible for  
medical care make a line over here,  
All the Clontarf boys line up,  
Dr Jezz checks them over,  
he peers in their mouths,  
He massages their legs,  
The boys from the inner city are in a bunch,  
One of them has an open fracture of his leg,  
Dr Jezz puts silver crowns on the heads of Clontarf boys,  
He takes Timmy away in his helicopter,  
They fly to St Vincent's Elm Park,  
The Mater is a bit too common for Timmy,  
Timmy gets a visit from his mother.