

Inkslingers Blended Session

29th July 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Never Trust Atoms, They Make Up Everything”

And the Visual



Tutankhamun

Atoms, Explained

Julianna Wilmoth

The stealth of atoms
Joyous in their creation
Silent at the end.

My Golden Glow

Fiona Deaton

I have been shining for years giving out my golden glow. I have a secret gifted to me from my creator. My physic is not actually gold, but another metal. I have looked down on many tourist who has captured my essence in photographs. Today, in 2030 there is a shortage of the minerals they use to make the microchip, that seems to power everything from the dated Mobile phone, the new holograms that have replaced Alexia, YouTube videos on how to do just about anything and AI.

I am made up of a mineral my atoms when split can make up anything. So I have a choice, do I reveal this fact to the scientific community and become a catalyst to save the current devices above or give birth to new technological wizardry. I cast my mind back, simply drowning in sweat doing nothing. After all I was intended to be an ornament so why should I bother and unleash the scientific community on my very core, my atoms.

This mineral I possess could improve the world, but my mind (I am not just a pretty face) recalls the last time man messed with atoms, it lead to a nuclear bomb that killed thousands. Can I trust mankind with my nervous systems of minerals/atoms that pump around my statute, my body?

I have a decision to make, but I am so used to sitting around doing sweet FA why bother. I will leave that thought for tomorrow. However, yesterday that choice is soon to be taken away from my. 'Mc fly' has been at my feet for two years and has toiled endlessly in the blistering heat examining me. He has taken a sample of my mineral, in the form of a small notch from my toenail. Let me state at this juncture, I am used to being gently massaged by professional polishers, not having a toe nail being pulled from my foot. 'ah the pain,' I shout. Perhaps, as 'My Fly' closes in on my secret, that choice will be taken from me.

Unknown to me, 'My fly' had released a paper to the scientific community yesterday. This was picked up by 'The Sun' newspaper out of

London. I am suddenly in danger as other scientists are now at my feet with chisels and scalpels.

So, what can I do? I can't stop progress, i.e., my atoms being split, and precious minerals being dissected, I have decided to take legal action against the said paper, I may not be in charge of my fate but I have rights. Quite frankly I am sick of the current interest in me 'the statue' and the fact that 'The Sun' newspaper is exaggerating and to the point of making up everything.

A Big Band

Matthew Tubridy

A big band on College Green,
'We will, we will entertain you!'
The lead singer throws plums at the crowd,
There's drugs in them,
Happy drugs,
The crowd go out of their heads,
Sing a long,
The police get wind of it and bring a water hose,
The crowd gets soaked with the water hose,
Police put the uneaten plums in plastic bags to use as evidence,
So now there's a pile of high drunk people on College Green,
The staff of Merchants Quay Ireland arrive on scene,
They start counselling the pile of revealers,
They say 'Turn your back on drugs!
Turn to Jesus!'
Party bags are given out,
One of the revealers says he turns to Jesus,
He's escorted off, given a bed,
Given dry clothes,
Given a hit meal,
His friends are still in the pile of bodies,
They all set up their own country called Christiania, just north of
Ballymun,
They get the plums delivered from the Netherlands,
The police know nothing about them,
They think it's just a big building site,
But it's full of revealers knocking back drugged up plums!
Eventually one of the revealers go to Ballymun library,
Jurrrrr he slurs,
I want to get a library card!
Ok write down your address he is told,
He writes down
The building site,

The librarian, on her way home looked in a chink of the gate to the building site,
There's thatch cottages,
People dancing around,
And a campfire,
She decides to keep it secret,
Librarian goes home,
As she chews her steak she thinks about the building site,
Who should she tell?
The social workers?
The guards?
She decides to donate them some clothes,
Because their clothes were raggy,
Next day she goes to the building site and rattled the gate,
Suddenly she is faced with a line of machine guns,
So she runs away as quickly as possible.

Michael's Mummy

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

It was the one chamber that countless grave robbers over the centuries had failed to find, the one with the hidden sarcophagus. Yet now Michael stood in the small, triangle shaped room along with all the other students that had followed the very famous, Professor Mendel. Not a word could be spoken, and no one moved a muscle, having made their way to this inner sanctum, they were awestruck by the sight of a floating Pharos' coffin along with the fact that all the blocks in this room glowed.

Michael felt a wet spot in the bottom of his pants and briefly pondered how he'd been roped into this trip to Egypt when he was a Criminal Justice Major and had zero to do with archaeology or any of its branches.

"Oh yes, now I remember." He thought. It had been the romantic pursuit of Mandy Mendel, the simultaneously super-smart and super-hot Daughter of Professor Arthur Mendel, who was following in her father's footsteps.

"A date is simply out of the question if you don't share my passions for discovery!", had been the line that Mandy had dropped on Michael in response to his asking her out. It was the very reason why he'd travelled thousands of miles to Egypt and why he now found himself in this mysterious chamber with a floating sarcophagus among several of his fellow students, jointly experiencing the paralysis of shock and fear.

The lid to the coffin sprung open and out poured a blinding light. As this happened, he could hear the very audible sounds of terrified breathing supplemented by several persons losing the battle to contain flatulence due to nervousness. Streams of sweat ran down Michaels back and then a collective gasp escaped every student along with the Professor when a mummified form sat up out of the floating sarcophagus. It swung its arms toward the ceiling, stretched as if waking up from a five-thousand-year nap, and then rotated its neck giving off a crackling noise reminiscent of a thousand crackers being broken at once. It then removed the bandages from its head and face.

It wore a strange crown-like adornment on its head and its face was that of an olive-skinned man something on the order of 19 years old. He stared intently at Michael for a few awkwardly terrifying moments and then spoke in clear, lucid English. "Never trust atoms, they make up everything".

That rectangular, glowing room began spinning and the next moment Michael was under a canopy with Mandy kissing him and stroking his hair.

"Oh Michael, I just knew you were the one.", She said.

They Make Up Everything

Laura Alves

With mother and father scientists, there is something I learned very early in life: in reference to atoms, it's not about trust. It's about just accepting the facts: atoms are in everything, so live with it or die trying not to! The only thing we can and must avoid is facing the bomb! This is the one that can dissipate any kind of life in the World! So beware!

They are in all animals, vegetables, minerals, and inanimate objects too! Everything there is around you at the moment is made of atoms. Something that looks rock hard with just a bit of heating will melt and turn liquid and the atoms will still be there. So if you're about to get into a heated argument with someone who seems terribly angry and hard to get through to, just soften him up with a bit of a warmly nice word and you will see him melting down without a word against your ideas. You will soon be hugging and smiling out of the room, ready to go for a pint!

Bus Controller

Matthew Tubridy

Matthew controls where all the buses in Dublin go,
From his phone near Bantry,
The number 27 is going up the Malahide road...
He knows when the bus drivers get to the depot for a cup of tea and a
biscuit,
He decides how big salaries they get,
From his phone near Bantry.

The End of Exile

Greg Fields

(An excerpt from *Through the Waters and the Wild*)

From Liam Finnegan's letter to his grandson Conor:

I came to this city nearly eighty years ago, an exile, hiding my fears behind a conviction that I would do whatever needed doing to survive, and once surviving, to carve my own place in my own way. I saw myself as brave and full of dreams. In truth, I was a child, running manically in flight from what I saw as suffocation. I see it now for what it was: More cowardice than bravery. More self-indulgence than courage.

I fled, and I left what I loved behind me in flames. I lost a father and blinded a brother. My father sold his farm at great loss and died a pauper. My brother, younger and stronger than I was, turned to the streets of Dungarvan and lived through the kindness of a town that had no quarrel with the Finnegan name, giving him odd jobs suitable for those with few skills and no sight. He died before he reached the age of forty, no doubt tired of a life that had no lustre and no purpose. I never saw either again.

Ireland faded into the discomfort of unquiet memory, and, if I could, I would have erased all traces of the soil that gave me birth. I strained to

speak without my native lilt and to dress like every other American lad. I learned to love baseball and followed national politics. I adapted my profanities to my new land and learned to swear in creative Americanized jargon. I sought to emulate the swagger and boldness of this immense, dirty city, and of this new and wondrous country. I wanted to scrub the Irish off my skin.

But I could not do so, not entirely. An Irish pulse still beat beneath this well-scrubbed skin. I would still find myself wandering in the evenings, restless, searching for what I could never find, could never even define. Through the streets, or to a pub for a quick, unsatisfying draft, or to the lake to sit and stare at water that would never touch my homeland.

Restless. Afraid to be still. Irish.

Yet I should be thankful for this restlessness. It was an evening during one of the early years that my disquieted spirit led me to the lake and led me to Molly. All at once, the vapours were quieted.

She saved my life. Without her, the sharp edges would never have softened, and I would have spent the rest of my days without faith. For who can believe that we truly have no purpose, no reason for drawing breath, when each day begins in harmony with the one who cherishes

the unvarnished soul? How could I not come to believe that I drew special air into my lungs and that rare blood pulsed through my veins? I was loved without reason by the perfect woman.

She gave me three sons, and we raised them, regarding each as an almost holy emanation of a spiritual union. But they were neither spirits nor symbols: they were boys, and they ran the streets of Chicago, skipping school when they could, sneaking into ballparks and testing the limits of their curiosity for mischief. The streets did not corrupt them. To my limited knowledge, they committed no crimes. No petty thefts, no dealings in the bad things, only a few minor scraps. In the evenings, they would find their way back to a home they knew would welcome them always, despite the ends of whatever mischief their day might have conjured. There is something in that. Perhaps that is all that one needs to raise good sons—the security of a warm bed where they might always lay their head, no matter what.

But then the cancer came. It began with a slow ache in Molly's stomach that moved to her back like an invading army. She could not get rid of it, nor could she find anything that would lend her comfort. For a week, she did not eat. The doctor ran the normal tests and came back with the

abnormal results. Six months later, I placed flowers on her newly covered gravesite.

These walls hold the energy of their past, and I will complete my days amidst their comforts, amidst their reassurances that what I once had in richness still resonates here. I touch the walls where my boys hung their posters and sit in the chair where Molly once rested. I eat at the same table where crumbs that touched her lips once fell and where my boys spilled their milk. I open the door to a hallway that once echoed their footsteps, and in the far corners of my dwindling consciousness I can hear their laughter, their excited cries, their disappointed shouts, and sense the timber of their scattered lives.

What I have done with my life, how I have lived, is my province alone, and I take responsibility for its glories, for its failures and brutality, and now for the peace that comes to me at the end of it.

I have felt the waters on my face and heard the wild cries of anguish, pain, and sorrow. In flight, I came to a quiet place, and there I stay until all sorrow has passed and breath itself is drawn down to nothingness.

I am exiled no longer.

Never trust atoms

Clíodhna Joyce-Daly

Mike sat frustrated looking at the bubbling, over-flowing breaker perched on top of the deteriorated worktop and sighed to himself. It had been the fourth day in a row, the much anticipated research was flailing. He leaned back in the rickety wooden lab chair, that he reckoned had not been replaced since the lab was built in the 1930s. They were relying on this work to fund the much needed renovation the lab so greatly deserved.

Piles of dusty beakers sat on top of poorly built shelves that were fastened on crooked. The laminated tabletops desperately needed to be replaced with stainless steel ones as the failing experiments were projecting the counters into further disrepair. The lights always tended to flicker on and off when you needed them most. Mike came to the conclusion that either the place was haunted or the donors genuinely did not care for the Chemistry department. He felt defeated.

The space itself was dark with only one light reflecting off the bubbling contraption, he had been struggling to control all week. Mike preferred working in the dark. It was strange and the explanation he gave people was even stranger – “I just like it.” Although, he had a sneaking suspicion that the real reason in recent months was to avoid looking at the filth of the actual lab. They do not care enough to even clean the room, he thought.

As the bubbling subsided, the green liquid began to seep staining the scrap paper left under its glass bottom. The beaker had cracked on each side, which meant that another beaker and another €20 was being thrown into the bin. He would have to sheepishly explain to his colleagues as they heard the clinking of glass being taken out, that the experiment once again did not cooperate.

In desperate need of inspiration, Mike scanned through the dated lab books left from generations ago to see if there was any information that could actually make the experiment stick. One in particular caught his eye. It was dark yellow, bound by beautiful green thread holding its pages of knowledge and intrigue together. He was immediately

captivated by its beauty and pulled it off the shelf. With the book, came dust, half eaten pens, cling film and to Mike's horror glass. This confirmed his suspicion, the room had not been cleaned probably since 1930.

The book had no title or author on its cover. This was unusual, normally all books in the chemistry lab had to be applicable to some sort of science – otherwise what was its purpose there. The cover had tones of yellow, brown and beige blended to create a stunning hardback for this unknown book. He was fascinated to see what lay in its pages.

As he peeled back the first page, the author's name was illuminated in a gold font, *H Herman*. Hmm, Mike thought, never heard of him. As he scanned his brain for any recollection or familiarity of the name, another sentence came to light '*never trust atoms*'. Mike was not sure what that meant exactly, but he was sure excited to find out.

Tomies Wood

Matthew Tubridy

Man in Tomies wood near Killarney,
He has dried food to keep him going,
He gets water from Lough Leane,
He's a botanist so he records all the tree and plant species,
He was sent by Trinity College Dublin,
Sometimes the professor use a drone to spy on the man,
Eventually he becomes psychotic,
So the drone delivers anti psychotic,
Man talks to his mother and she says
'What are you doing there?'
Man said 'Ah Ma, it's ok, I'll get a PhD for doing this!
I'll get to have tea with the Provost of Trinity!'
Then there's Gill,
She's out on a island of the west coast,
Put there by Professor Luke O'Neill,
Gill is in daily communication with her Professor,
Gill is a marine biologist,
She collects edible sea weed
The fishermen go past her on her island,
She has a big poster saying
'Property of Trinity College Dublin'
Professor says to Gill
'If you survive your island stay,
I'll give you a PhD!'

Itaim Paulista

Heloisa Prieto

(From The Storyteller)

Akin and I spent a couple of days busy with paperwork. We had to speak to our lawyers not only about our inherited state, but also for some financial counselling related to the cultural centre. Akin's and Ifakemi's family sent donations that quickly put a start to the remodelling of the old garage and repair shop into a dance studio and art centre. I went to the centre alone, this time, because Akin was busy making preparations for Ifakemi's arrival. Giulia, on the other hand, decided to spend some quality time with her mother. She wasn't on speaking terms with Nardo.

Driving my car on the way to Itaim Paulista all by myself that day, I must confess I felt a bit jealous. I was just beginning to enjoy having a brother and now I would have to share him with his girlfriend. I also felt guilty over my feelings of possessiveness, especially because I really enjoyed my online meetings with Ifakemi.

There was another layer of jealousy, though.

I would not dare say it to Akin, but I guess I felt Giulia was right when she mentioned our emotional scars. Having a relationship has always been a challenge to me. I had such a hard time trusting someone to love me back. I would rather have impossible, distant crushes, or else a tendency to break up right after a beautiful moment as if I wanted to spare myself some inevitable pain.

I wish I had been born out of a long lasting love, such as Akin. I wish I had a mother who took good care of me and did not expect me to look after her all the time. I wish I had been raised around my siblings and biological father. Maybe, had I connected to my Nigerian roots earlier in life I would be happier, wiser and more grounded, more affectionate.

I felt at that moment, on the way to the centre, a bit like some emotionally handicapped person, and I could tell I would feel excluded, rejected when around a happy couple such as Akin and Ifakemi.

All these feelings evaporated when I walked into the Cultural Centre. Walls had been freshly painted, the large windows had been cleaned

spotless, so that sunlight spread all over the space. Some kids were practicing dance steps and laughing, whereas others were painting the walls with amazing images. Kadu walked towards me surrounded by the twin, wolf dogs. As he sat by my side I felt comforted and at home.

“Hi Dada! How do you like it here?” he asked me.

Dogs were so lovely, I had to pet them a bit, so I didn’t answer him immediately. As I opened my mouth, a dark haired, small, smiling boy sat by my side. He seemed so happy and comfortable when he asked me:

“Are you a real storyteller?” I smiled back at him and said:

“Who told you so?”

He sat cross legged on the floor, right in front of me and said, not without a bit of pride:

“Kadu. I can tell stories too!” I sat right next to him, amused:

“I have been telling stories for three years now. I learned them from my mother... How about you?”

“Can I tell you a story?” he asked me bluntly.

I nodded and he immediately started:

“Once upon a time there was a haunted bridge. It so happened that there was a shop nearby. Its owner was a very frightened man, who was really scared of ever seeing a ghost. Anyway, one day he takes too long with his customers and only leaves the shop at sunset. The witching hour. He crossed the bridge by himself, and tried not to look around, really scared. But then, he heard steps. He looked over his shoulder and saw the shadow of a tiny body with this huge head. He ran really fast, his heart pounding until he left the road and saw an empty house. The man knew he was followed by the ghost of the bridge so he thought he could get into the house and lock himself in. But it so happens the house’s door was heavy and he had to use all his strength to shut it. His moves were so slow the tiny body and huge head shadow got into the house before he shut the door. He fainted.

When he woke up he saw a boy with a candle. His body was so tiny, but he had a basket on his head. The boy said:

'Are you all right? I was so happy when I saw a grown up crossing the bridge. I ran as fast as I could to be by your side. I knew you could protect me from any ghosts at all!' Kadu cracked up at the end of the story and his dogs barked, happily wagging their tails.

"Wow!" he said.

The boy smiled largely, looked down, quite proud of his success. Girls had stopped dancing to listen to him, so they clapped their hands. I asked: "You are so young! How can you be such an amazing storyteller?" He stared at me for a second and said:

"Grandma tells me stories every single night after she feeds me and tucks me in..." I stroke his curls and say:

"Why don't you bring your granny here? I would love to meet her!" To my surprise, he raised and left running, without even saying goodbye... I asked Kadu:

"Did I say something wrong?" He took a deep breath and told me:

"The boy lost his granny a couple of months ago. He has been living with his aunt now, because his mother has left him and he never met his father. I told him this tale some time ago. It is a Chinese story. He keeps on telling this story to himself ever since..."

The Castle

Matthew Tubridy

There's a castle only workers can go to,
They chat each other up,
The teachers are mostly female so they chat up the builders who are
mostly men,
The teachers say to their pupils
'Would you like to go to the castle?'
Champagne is served there,
And pigs are roasted on a spit,
Ms Prizeman is there,
It's like the bar of a hospital.

Saving The Sinners

Gerard Byrne

Detective Christian slid back the locking mechanism that secured the barn and opened the door wide. Inside was complete darkness. There was the growls of dogs to be heard over the sound of the howling wind, but there was no sign of them. This wasn't a good ending to their investigation, he could sense that already.

Detective Murphy was standing ten feet away at the gate to the property. Her job was to keep an eye on the farmhouse in the distance. Last thing they needed right now was for the owner to spot them. This was an illegal search with no probable cause and both of them knew that. A tip off from a well known sex offender and ex priest had led them to this location. Even the most psychotic and sadistic people need to look for forgiveness for their sins from time to time.

Suddenly an upstairs light flashed on.

"We've got movement", Murphy pulled out a miniature pair of binoculars that she liked to carry around with her while on duty. Some of her coworkers called her the peeking Tom, but she could easily ignore that shite.

Christian hid inside the door of the barn in fear he'd be spotted. He poked his head around the corner, "has he spotted us?"

Murphy was still gazing through her binoculars at the old farmhouse, "don't think so. Looks like he's taking a piss", the light went off again, "think we're in the clear"

"Think or we are?", Christian hadn't the head for this shite tonight. He'd ran out of coke three days ago and was struggling to score some more. Most people think it should be easy for a detective to get drugs. That may be, but finding someone to supply you, who won't blab it all over Drogheda is another thing. He had a reputation to keep up.

Murphy studied the upstairs windows of the house for another few seconds before replying, "we're clear"

Christian sighed with relief and turned on his torch to see the inside of the barn better. And unfortunately that's all it was. Just a barn with

stacks of round bales and large metal fenced pens for holding cattle during the winter months. He wasn't going to be put off that easily so made his way down the middle aisle of the structure in the hope of finding some evidence to back up their case.

Suddenly all the lights came on above him. Christian looked up to see all this bright fluorescent bulbs in the ceiling. There was way too much light for your average barn. He swivelled around to see Murphy standing beside a row of switches that were mounted on the cement wall.

Murphy shrugged her shoulders, "sorry about that. Just thought we'd need a bit of light in here. But those lights aren't fucking normal. Who in there right minds puts them in a barn"

It was then that Christian spotted the chains on the ground. They were mostly covered with hay and dried cow shit but they weren't that old looking. They were in one of the pens. Strangely enough this was the only pen that had a wooden floor. Christian kneeled down and examined them. There was five in total. Four of them seemed to be used for shackling limbs while the fifth one had a bigger clamp on the end of it. Christian reckoned it was to secure someone's neck. There was dried blood caked around the sharp edges. Someone had been held captive here.

"What did you find?", asked Murphy as she shut the door of the barn behind her.

"Looks like someone was held here", replied Christian, "there's blood here. Not fresh but recent"

As Murphy entered the pen, she noticed a lever hidden among some old rusty tools that had been leaned against the wall, "wonder what this does?", she pulled it without waiting for an answer.

"Don't...", Christian's words fell on deaf ears.

Suddenly the whole floor of the pen began to lower into the ground. All that the two detectives could do was wait for the ride to stop. The platform went down about ten feet before finally coming to a stop in front of a large metal door.

“What the fuck is going on?”, Christian got to his feet, “this is some next level James Bond bad guy lair shit. How the fuck did he keep this quiet?”

“No way did he have builders in to do all this”, Murphy tested the handle on the metal door. It opened freely and swung inwards to reveal another large room filled objects that couldn’t be properly made out in the dark. Murphy searched around the wall inside the door and found a couple of switches which she turned on without hesitation.

The fluorescent lights came on. This time they weren’t as high up as the ones in the barn above so the brightness hurt both of their eyes. But soon that was the least of their worries as the room quickly came into view. On either side of a long walkway in the middle was rows of female mannequins. Each one wearing a different schoolgirl outfit. Upon further inspection, Christian realised that each uniform was from a school where a student had gone missing from in the last seven months. Saint Joseph’s, Saint Ita’s, Saint Mary. Twenty two in total. The uniforms weren’t dirty or ripped. All in perfect condition.

“What the fuck is this shit?”, Murphy was checking one of the uniforms in particular, “why keep these things?”

“Trophies I guess”, Christian had moved onto a large chart on the far end of the room, that was filled with photos, a map of Ireland and handwritten notes, “call it in”

Murphy did as she was told. Pulling out her phone and making the call to headquarters. It was then that she noticed one uniform in particular. She remembered it from a photo she’d seen way back at the start of the case. It had belonged to Vicki Curley. A young tear away who people had thought had run away from home. But here was her uniform. All the way down to the patches her mother had sewn onto each elbow of the jumper. In the photo there had been a rip in the skirt, but someone had repaired it since then. She felt the patch between her fingers, “someone had repaired this recently. Definitely wasn’t her mother”

“Whose mother?”, asked Christian as he studied the wall.

“Vicki Curley”, replied a teary Murphy, “this was her uniform”

“Please don’t speak in the past tense”, a shudder went down Christian’s spine, “we don’t know if they’re alive or not yet. Let’s still have a bit of hope”

“I’ll try”, Murphy didn’t mean it but she wasn’t gonna get into it right now.

“Come over here”, Christian turned on a lamp that sat beside the chart, “think I’ve figured out what this sick fuck is up to. You see the map. That marks all the locations that he has taken a schoolgirl from and it also shows the area where he plans to take one next. As we know they’re all from schools that have religious names. Now we can fully see what he was trying to achieve”

Murphy noticed that the markers on the map made out the shape of a crucifix, “sick fuck. So he’s trying to make some religious statement by kidnapping all these girls. But why?”

Christian pointed to the photos that lined the wall as well. They all featured different schoolgirls. Some of them the detectives were investigating and a good few were new to them. But what all the photos had in common was the fact that each girl was taking part in some kind of activity that they most definitely shouldn’t have been at their age. Drink, drugs, violence and sex. There was a pattern forming?

“This fucker is punishing them for their lifestyles. He thinks religious schools should only have religious students”, Christian had been aware of the dodgy background and lifestyle of some of the girls, but now these photos showed him that it was each and every single one of them. The pattern was fully clear now.

Murphy was still counting all the markers in the board, “going by this, he was planning on kidnapping at least twenty more schoolgirls. There still might be a chance that they’re still alive”

Christian noticed another door in the corner of the room, “only one way to find out”

A dreadful odour hit their nostrils and straight away they both knew they were about to enter a room filled with death. Christian flicked the lights on to reveal a cold room that was fully tiled with hooks hanging

from the ceiling. Attached to the hooks were all manners of body parts. All from young teenage schoolgirls.

“Jesus fucking Christ”, Murphy vomited on the floor, which had a layer of dried blood covering it.

Christian pulled his gun as he was pretty sure there was someone in the next room, “focus Murphy. Think we’re about to have a visitor”, he opened the next door leading on to reveal a large cage containing three big viscous dogs. They were surrounded with bones and shit. But upon further inspection, the bones turned out to be human.

“Now we know why we never found any bodies”, this was one outcome that Christian hadn’t expected.

“I’m gonna kill that fucker when we get out of here”, Murphy was covering her mouth in a poor attempt to block out the smell.

“Focus”, Christian still had his gun drawn. He was pretty sure that he could hear a girl crying in the next room, “think we may have a live one”, he pushed the next door open to reveal a large dark room with an altar at the far end. It was covered in lit candles. Behind it on the wall was a large crucifix. Nailed to said crucifix was a young schoolgirl. Tears ran down her face and blood from her hands and feet.

“Help me”, she cried.

Christian and Murphy ran over to try and assist the young woman. Unfortunately the nails were forced deep into the timbers of the cross and they couldn’t free her by hand. Murphy was on the phone again looking for paramedics and the fire brigade. She wasn’t sure who they needed right at that moment. Christian on the other hand noticed a large wooden block in the middle of the floor, in front of the altar. It had an oval shape indented into the top of it, giving it the look of one of those old chopping blocks from executions in the old days.

“You’ve got to get me out of here. He’s gonna come back and kill me”, cried the schoolgirl as she pulled at her hands and feet causing them to bleed even further, “he chopped her head off”, she nodded towards the wooden block, “right there. Made me watch him. You need to get me out of here”

Suddenly the door opened and in walked a tall muscular man. He was only wearing a pair of dirty white underpants, a large wooden cross around his neck and an executioner's hood over his head. In his hands was a massive broadsword.

"Don't fucking move asshole", Christian pointed his gun at the executioner, "drop the sword and get down on your knees"

"I'm doing the lord's work and nothing will get in my way", replied the executioner, "not even you", and with that he ran at the two detectives, sword swinging high over his head.

Christian got off two shots that got the executioner in the arm. Murphy wasn't so lucky and was knocked off her feet by the swinging sword and crashed into the wall behind her.

The schoolgirl had pulled so hard to try and get away from her attacker that her right hand came free and she started to pull at her left.

Christian tried to put some distance between him and the attacker so jumped the altar and turned to fire. Unfortunately the executioner was already on top of him and knocked his gun away with the sword, taking part of Christian's right hand in the process. Christian fell to his knees as he stared at the bloody mess that was once his hand. The executioner dragged Christian over to the wooden block and placed his head over the top.

Murphy tried to ignore the gaping cut in her arm and crawled towards her gun that had landed on the floor nearby. She could see the executioner was about to decapitate her partner and her body had to react faster than it was.

Suddenly five shots rang out and the executioner stood silently in the centre of the room. His chest covered in newly created bleeding wounds. He fell to his knees and the sword clattered to the ground.

Christian fell to the floor and watched on as his attacker took his final breaths before falling to the floor. The nightmare was over. He then glanced around the room looking for Murphy. She was still on the floor as well. It was only then that he noticed the young schoolgirl standing over him. Smoking gun in hand and mouth open in shock at what she

had just done. The young woman would need even more psychological therapy after pulling the trigger.

Tutankhamun

Ciaran O'Melia

"He died right there," Jake said to his companion.

"When?" Padder asked.

"I think last Christmas, or was it the Christmas before that."

"Jesus, that long ago."

"Ah, he was part of the furniture, loved his pint and a chaser at the night's end."

"Jesus, what's holding him up."

"He's mummified with all the stout inside him," Jake said.

"Does he go to the toilet?"

"No, no, didn't you listen? I said he died."

"And they leave him here, most unusual."

"What."

"To be left there sitting with a dregs of a pint in his hand."

"Never mind that now; he paid for that."

"Jesus Christ, is this what you dragged me in here for."

"No, I wanted to ask you, do you trust atoms?"

"Atoms, wait a minute, you want to ask me if I trusted Atoms," Padder said.

He looked at the other patron in the bar who could be there a year or two.

"Why not ask your man?" He suggested to Jake to indicate the man with the dregs. "He's dead, so is his pint, and that reminds me, it is custom to buy your man a pint; you've only just met him."

Padder looked around to ensure he was not on Candid Camera. But he said, "I've heard of buying pints for a wake, but this a first for me."

He turned to the mummified man and said sleeplessly. "A pint, is it."

The mummified man creaked and groaned but said, "And a ball of malt."

Matty Hennessy

Matthew Tubridy

Matty Hennessy,
Goes down to his Hardware Shop,
After lunch in Montulla, Murgasty Road,
A lunch of Bacon and Cabbage,
Prepared by his wife, Maureen,
My mother had dinner there too,
And custard for dessert,
He goes into his Hardware shop and a customer comes me,
He sells them a box of nails,
He has a cup of tea,
He gets a delivery of planks of wood,
He puts them in the storage room,
Then Mick comes in,
Says he's building a shed,
So Mick gets some planks of wood,
Then it's time for Marty to go home at 5,
He walks up with his umbrella,
He gets home and lifts my mother up in his arms,
Now Matty is resting in Tipperary Cemetery,
He lives on in our memories

Gender Confusion

Michael O'Brien

There was a man who looked like a boy who lived with a woman who looked like a girl, they were both wise beyond their years which was very wise indeed as they shared one hundred and sixty years equally between them. They had the feel, knew the scent, saw the sights, and heard the sound. They laughed often, seldom prayed but seemed serene. Their frugal pension was a king's ransom, they lacked nothing and wanted less. Each morning before dawn they sat on a cliff overlooking the ocean, they could feel the vibration of the sun rising. They sat like two teenagers in a cinema watching the opening credits of a blockbuster movie, they didn't need a man to bang a bong, nor a lion to roar in a circle, no digital screen could replicate this scene.

They smiled at passers-by, spoke to those who stopped, and soothed those who were shocked at the cruelty of this world. It was rare to see them leave or arrive, though they must have done both. One morning a woman stood before them with a young child of about eight years of age, it was hard to tell if the child was male or female as its head was totally bald. As the sun began to rise their silhouette made it impossible to make out their facial features or the colour of their clothes as they stood totally still facing the old couple. Sunlight began to shine on them and between them like heavenly rays, which of course is exactly what they were, giving their shadows an extra-terrestrial air. Not a word was spoken, so no promises were broken. Relax, all is and will be well, were the words carved into that bench they sat on.

This couple lived in a small town called Lordello, fifty miles inland, but they regularly had business on the coast with an ambitious young lawyer, and the drive on the excellent highway was no problem to Vanessa and Albert, taking a little over an hour. After they finished with their young lawyer they would help out in a local hospice by the sea. It was strange to witness the transition on their drives from Lordello which was a dry dusty town on the edge of a desert, to the verdant green landscape of this coastal hamlet they regularly visited.