

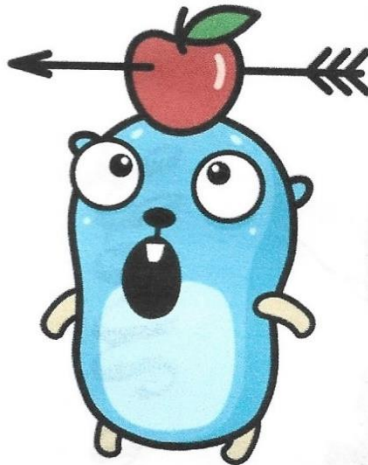
# Inkslingers Blended Session

17<sup>th</sup> February 2024

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“I always take life with a pinch of salt a slice of lemon and a shot of tequila ”

And the Visual



## Living under a tree in Co Mayo

Matthew Tubridy

The wind whips down the valley,  
I have a pot noodle and a few apples,  
I'm on the run from the police!  
I get water for a nearby stream,  
I go into Centra, but I've chopped up my bank cards like Chris  
McCandless!  
And gave all my money to Oxfam Ireland,  
But I saw some shiny peddles in the river so I pay for the groceries with  
that!  
I say those peddles have gold in them!  
I get burgers, bread, tomato ketchup,  
Biscuits,  
I go back to my tent under the tree,  
Luckily I went to Great Outdoors before I set off for Mayo,  
I had a Uncle who funded my outdoor equipment,  
I go into Castlebar,  
I put up some notices around town  
They say  
'Supertramp is having a talk in the town hall!  
You should listen to me, because I lived under a tree!'  
8pm on Wednesday came,  
Man got up on stage,  
He says I got a burger by pretending shiny rocks were gold!  
He becomes famous, goes to Dublin and does a talk there,  
He says, 'Der be gold in dem Mayo rivers!'

## The Coldest of Places

Greg Fields

The snow came bitterly the winter after Willie Meadows buried his mother, the winds blowing so hard that the flakes felt like tiny darts. The city's green patches disappeared, covered by growing heaps of white that progressively turned gray and black with the city's grime. The exhaust of buses belched clouds into the crisp air, mingled with the flakes there like a whisper, then wafted upward into a sky covered over with heavy clouds.

She had been gone for four months now, close enough for the memories to remain sharp. The funeral mass, sparsely attended because Sarah Meadows had few friends, peopled with parishioners who saw the notice of her death and Willie's sister Jessica, flown in for the occasion, her first visit to the homeland in two or three years. The priest mumbled the proper words, the censor swung its smoky benediction, then the slow procession to the cemetery where Willie's mother came to her final resting place. Cloudy that day, with a bit of rain.

'Appropriate,' Willie thought at the time. 'Mom always brought the clouds with her, even on the sunniest of days.'

And even though Willie and his sister had made known that there would be a reception at the old home down the street, the crowd dispersed, no one close enough to Sarah Meadows to feel the sting of her departure sufficiently to prolong it over coffee and cake. Willie and his sister spent the rest of the day with only themselves, awkward time punctuated only by the safest of conversations.

"How're the kids getting on?"

"Fine, Willie. Jamie's in sixth grade now and doing well, and Tommy can't find a sport he doesn't want to play. And you, Willie? You're all right?"

"Ah, Jess, always all right. There's nothing to it. I take life with a grain of salt, and then I add a slice of lemon and a shot of tequila. Work's good, the paper's doing fine, and I have my life. No worries."

"I wish I had your attitude, Willie."

But there were plenty of worries. There always were, even though Willie would never think to bring them to the surface with his sister, more a stranger now than a sibling, far enough away and ensconced in a world she rarely left and into which she welcomed few visitors, none of whom was Willie. He hid from her as thoroughly as she hid from him. The way it was. The way it had come to be.

So that afternoon as the clouds leaked rain onto their mother's freshly made grave, Willie and his sister drank their coffee and ate their cake and spoke the words that measured a safe distance. At the end of it Jessica took a cab to her hotel, slept well, then flew back to her world the next morning. Willie closed the house, then took his own train back to Washington.

Now, four months on, the snow coming down with a quiet ferocity, Willie thought on his mother's grave. He had always regarded cemeteries as almost mystical, the repository of memories and the commemoration of life's passing energies. The bodies there, each one the center of a web that spun outward into other lives, each gravestone a testament to the tyranny of time.

So there, across the miles, Sarah Meadows lay in her dark grave, beyond all sensation and sensibilities. There were no visitors, had been none since the day she entered that dark place. No flowers atop it, no one to clear the weeds, and now no one to clear the snow.

How cold it must be, and how very lonely.

## **A Date which will Live in Infamy**

**Gerard Keogh**

### Chapter 3

#### Enola Gay (B-29)

“Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” Less than four years after the attack on Pearl Harbor, J. Robert Oppenheimer quoted those words from a Sanskrit text, as he contemplated the successful detonation of the world’s first fission bomb. On August 6, 1945, a Boeing B-29 bomber named after the mother of the pilot, dropped the first of the only two (at the time of writing) nuclear weapons to be used in combat operations. There is a line that connects Pearl Harbor with Hiroshima; it meanders through numerous locations in the Pacific Ocean, from Midway Atoll, to the Solomon Islands, to Leyte Gulf, to Iwo Jima, to Okinawa. Two seismic events in world history: a perfect example of cause, followed by effect.

The decision by someone at the head office of the Imperial Japanese Navy (with civil servants, not sailors) to send Anthony Armstrong to Lisburn House was the root cause of his later problems. The Parking Fines Office, in addition to the civilian staff, also had a number of gardaí assigned to it (by law, anyone paying a fixed-penalty notice in person had to pay the money to a member of An Garda Síochána). However, all of the rank-and-file gardaí in that office were there for a specific reason: they were alcoholics; they had other health issues; or they were sent there for disciplinary reasons (or any combination thereof). One of them, who had helped himself to a little too much whiskey earlier in the day, was approached by a motorist at the cash desk, who asked for some advice on what to do with his parking fine. “My advice to you, baby,” came the reply, “would be to f-off and stop annoying me,” and he didn’t say F. Luckily for him, the motorist didn’t make a big fuss, and nothing more came of it.

But the civil servants in that place soon began to ask the question, “If the cops are here because of heart problems or as a form of punishment, then why are we here?” They felt ignored and abandoned by head office; it was as if they had been cast adrift by the commanding

officer of the flagship of the fleet. One by one, they began to request a transfer to another office within the department. The lucky few who managed to escape sent word from beyond the barbed wire fence that there was indeed life outside the straitjacket that was Lisburn House. For some of the people left behind, it was hard to see how they were going to get out of that hellhole.

Anthony had reached the end of his tether. He would lie awake at night for hours on end, unable to find relief from his torment for even a few hours. He was barely functioning as a human being. There only seemed to be one way out. However, something told him to make an appointment with his family doctor, who referred him to a private psychiatric hospital. Such was the state of his mental health that the psychiatrist wanted to admit him to the hospital right there and then. He managed to persuade the doctor that he would be all right for just a few more days, during which time he could get his things together and also break the news to his mother, who was due back from a holiday. How do you tell your own mother that you are actively thinking of killing yourself? The religious implications of that act are probably the “something” that told him to see his own doctor before doing anything that cannot be undone. You could call his religious belief the anchor that kept him alive.

What followed was a systematic, from-the-ground-up, restoration of Anthony’s belief in himself as a much-loved and valued member of his family, and of his sense of optimism for the future that lay ahead of him. It was a slow process. The medication he had been prescribed would take some time to have the desired effect. As he lay in his hospital bed, he could hear the nursing staff report on each patient as the day shift replaced the night shift. When they reached his name on the list, he would hear them say, “No change.” This continued for perhaps a week and a half, until one night, he had the most vivid and colourful dream of his life. It was as if a pair of heavy curtains had been pulled back to reveal someone who had spent far too long in darkness behind them. From that moment on, Anthony’s path on the road to recovery was one that seemed to have a more even surface, albeit with the odd pothole scattered about, here and there. Nine weeks after being admitted, he

was discharged from the hospital, like a brand-new member of the human race.

There remained the problem of Lisburn House and what to do about it. While still an inpatient, he spoke with someone from Personnel (“HR” was still about twenty years in the future) in head office, who was sympathetic to his plight and gave an assurance that she would arrange a move to another section within the department. True to her word, Anthony was transferred to Garda Payroll on Harcourt Road, close to St. Stephen’s Green. It was located in a building that has since been demolished, but it was a far more pleasant working environment, nonetheless. The work was interesting and the staff (not yet “talent”) in the office were friendly. Social life typically revolved around the pub. For the next six years, Anthony enjoyed the best time of his adult life. It proved to be a remarkable transformation from what had gone before.

The Department of Justice was no longer the Imperial Japanese Navy. Pearl Harbor seemed like a distant memory. Hostilities formally came to an end in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, on the deck of the battleship U.S.S. Missouri, when General Douglas MacArthur proclaimed, “These proceedings are closed.” With those four words, the four miserable years spent in Lisburn House were expunged from the official record in Anthony’s head.

And yet, as we know, history has a nasty habit of repeating itself. As if some vindictive deity of the Civil Service pantheon bore a grudge against him, Anthony found himself being transported back in time once again to 1941. A new front was about to be opened in this world war. It would be of a kind never seen before in human history. The Germans had a word for it: Vernichtungskrieg – a war of extermination, from which could emerge only one winner. On June 22, 1941, the largest invasion force in military history crossed the frontier of the Soviet Union along a broad front from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south. The German name for the operation was Unternehmen Barbarossa.

Anthony knew it as his transfer to the Department of Education.

## **Dublin is under the ground**

**Matthew Tubridy**

People driving into Dublin go into a tunnel,  
There's lights on,  
They go to Moore Street,  
On Moore street they sell lights,  
For the population of Dublin,  
When the children go to school there's lights on in each classroom,  
When they go out to play there's floodlights,  
The parents pick up their children with headlights on their car,  
They go to Dunnes Stores,  
The sun is constantly eclipsed,  
The car park is under the ground,  
The people of Dublin decide they need Vitamin D so they climb out of  
Dublin which is under the ground,  
They go to Co Waterford,  
The sunny south east,  
They climb out of the van,  
The sunlight pierces their retinas,  
It's the first time they saw sunlight in 20 years,  
His brother bought him a SAD lamp,  
But it's not the same  
The flag of Dublin is an eclipsed sun,  
The people of Dublin go paddle boarding,  
The sun hits their arms,  
They go on a package holiday,



It includes sunshine,

The Spanish get involved,

Their country is on a plateau,

The people of Dublin go to Spain and fly in the sky,

## **A shot of Tequila**

**Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.**

Tom McGurney was not yet at his usual level of drunken joy. No, that level of inebriated ecstasy usually took a bit more bar time and a thorough soaking of his liver to the tune of several beers and numerous shots. It had been a long week at the docks and today was Friday at last. His ritual had begun and if he were lucky, he could watch the game and slip into his version of peace without bother or interruption, maybe even say hi to an old friend or two.

At the tender age of sixty-one he'd travelled the world while in the military, fought in two wars, and endured the fun of three messy divorces. Now, his one and only consolation was this weekly liquor festival that made him both remember and forget the sloppy tapestry that was his life.

It was also the only way that he could forget his "Lupe". The woman who'd stolen his heart while he was on a mission in the mountains of Mexico. The one he'd watched explode by the rebels in a jeep they were pursuing through a dense forest. If sufficiently intoxicated and in a good mood, he could still feel her warmth, smell her perfume in his mind. Her angelic face came to him every night in what was both dream and nightmare. He was never even afforded the dignity of burying her body as they were extracted under orders, and years later when he returned to Mexico, her village was gone.

As those thoughts peppered his brain, a large young fellow about his height and stature with somewhat of an olive complexion, sat on the stool beside him. A moment later another young man about the same size and colour, sat on the stool to his left. Both glared at him with an intensity that was not rude but threatened to break the barriers of comfort.

Although there was an odd familiarity to these two, Tom chose to continue his drink. "I always take life with a pinch of salt, a slice of lemon, and a shot of tequila", he said to the two strangers. They two ordered shots in what seemed a somewhat Spanish accent.

They raised their glasses in tandem, and as though quite rehearsed, they said “To you Dad, and to Momma Lupe.”

## Astronaut

Matthew Tubridy

The astronaut is looking forward to going into outer space!  
She wants to get away from where she lives in Houston Texas,  
She doesn't like the hockey players,  
She doesn't like the postal service,  
Or the public buses,  
Or unemployed people,  
Or how you have to give your bankcard to pay for your groceries,  
Every day she goes to Space college,  
It hovers in air,  
She goes into zero gravity,  
She waits for zero gravity,  
She drives out of Houston Texas,  
To the space centre,  
She puts on the spacesuit,  
It has the American flag on it,  
She shakes Joe Bidens hand,  
When he visits the space station,  
The space centre is building a house for Joe Biden in space,  
And one for Elon Musk,

## **Beautiful**

### **Bridin Mary Harnett**

Notions of the same

Ugly...

is a difficult word...a difficult word for a woman to wear that is.

Indeed I am aware of my very own deficits bordering as they do on the edge of verbosity - hardly construed as an individual rather lacking in spiritual progression and not of the saintly variety. Being in deficit of wholesomeness as life experiences affect me as such, my sense of femininity has not been compromised in deference of this latest onslaught.

However, adjectives are rather akin to titles, albeit adjectives of personal description, worn like labels of a trending variety in similarity to declensions of Dior, Valentino, GUESS or any other such label of beauty and importance however contrived. Like most labels edged off the irate lips of a foreboding orifice, such an insult as the word ugly in frizz-by notions of flash whizz, actively turbulent, might be wielded to impoverish the progression of a given individual in the throes of struggle, whether or not these labels are carelessly donned or not. In fact the danger of labelling individuals according to traits perceived is apparent, in that sometimes without a notion in mind, we 'configure' individuals according to the traits we wish to perceive in them and often to accord with the worst traits resident in our given selves at an atemporal moment in time. Indeed people become - in terms of progression and sometimes within the unfortunate confines of perceptions of those imbued with personal agenda to fulfil, in the mind's eye of a dangerous decree. Fortunately, or unfortunately this is indeed the way of the world. Labels albeit adjectives of derogatory distinction are innovations of thought as the perceptions of an individual are contrived in appropriacy to fit into our figured worlds and often in accordance with subjective notions of how we think the world should be. Thus we fit our players.

Throw-away remarks, invasive insults such as the word ugly can be most hurtful when enunciated from the very mouth's centre and the heart

follows such conjugations. In fact, the heart may not be entirely convinced of the same, however vehemently pronounced, but the mouth dares to officiate upon such abominating remarks of decline in utterance of the same. Then what happens between the space of the mouth and the heart that such an enunciations are formed and articulated in cognisance to pronounce such a word as ugly? Someone might say, I didn't mean it.

When then, what exactly did you mean to say?

A word once spoken cannot be retracted even when uttered in the privacy of a lover's moment of adieu in mention of the real wife in her absence.

In leading this reverie to consider insults in wider incidences of the emergence of the same such ugliness, I ask rhetorically of course, whether the heart of an individual is moved to distraction or some such state of denial of an individual other's quality and somehow in a state of anger ejects such parole in an endearing moment of a projectile mass of verbal spewage and perceived by the heart of the other such as myself, as such a word might pierce the very hearing of such a given poor, unfortunate woman. This woman as uninvolved as she considered herself in loathe of the receipt of the same, folds to crumble in devastation, retrieves the crux of this word, its rile and its very spelling. And in this word ugly, as if a heart loyal to love is thrown away on the whim of another makeshift woman and the words this erroneous woman might lend into his mouth with her kiss, her touch, or some such other contrived performance to dismantle this mentor and to displace the beloved.

And I thought that I had danced beautifully.

In considering the notion of the fuse of such a word in declension as it might move from a rooted place to navigate a given perception in deference to our figured worlds in the contrivance of any given individual's efforts to configure his location in it, to fit in as it were at a cost to attach in adherence to a woman - take care - who wields rank in threatening forbearance is hardly a precedence to an 'I do' arrangement variety of togetherness in a wily neo-laissez faire mind-set to the fore.

Perhaps for fear of abandonment...

She had said gránna and he said gránna in the echoes of a night's embranglement. To the dogs – indeed it may have been said in abhorrence of coitus, hardly in love of knowledge of respective absent spouses who are none the wiser and always under order - the case of which is to spawn a falling of such masculine strength until our man might flounder into paltry usage at the brink of a command.

That is not going to happen, is it?

And it was love of a kind, but...never mind.

And now I cannot show my face to you.

But thank you.

Reclining on the adage to say what is good or keep quiet. By the by, I refuse to wear the aforesaid label, however donned, at all.

Beneath me is beautiful.

## Cycling

**Mathew Tubridy**

Rory is cycling his bike,  
It it's raining!  
He's going threw Phibsboro,  
A rude man throws a donut at Rory,  
A policewoman sees what happens,  
She runs at rude man  
Tackles him to the ground,  
She used to play Rugby in school,  
She frog march's rude man to North Circular road Garda station,  
The sergeant interrogates rude man,  
'Why were you throwing donuts at Rory the cyclist?'  
Well he looke like he didn't have much energy so I thought donuts  
would help him!  
Sergeant says Why not just call him and give him afew donuts?  
Rory the cyclist has jam on his face,  
the policewoman rubs it off,  
But she's used to rubbing off blood,  
Rude man is put in the cell for people who throw things!  
Some who throw stuff onto the pitch in the Aviva Stadium



## **A Shot of Tequila**

**Ciaran O'Melia**

I always take life with a pinch of salt, at least that's what I done in the past.

The Parish Priest in Ballkissangel thought he was William Tell and he volunteered my son to stand with a apple on his head, and as he aimed the arrow with great diligence at the apple, who pops up but the gardai to take the PP away, never to be seen again.

School settled down again, I was called as the son was to be the target. When there I eyed the bow and arrow on the ground, I asked my son "What is that"?

"Its the arrow and Father was trying to stick it in apple on my head."

"That should be easy." I said.

"From twenty feet away"?

So I picked up the arrow and bow.

Asked my son to stand with the apple on his head, I thought "this is too easy. So I moved him back another twenty feet.

"D - d -do think that is a good idea."

"No Problem."

I let fly the arrow ---

You see I just came back from the pub, where I asked the barman for a slice of lemon and a shot of Tequila.

**Paul Merrion**

**Michael O'Brien**

The third building in the Monastery, the farthest back in the property, was an old folks' home with thirty-five residents, and its position gave it the quietness and privacy the old folks enjoyed.

It was two thirty p.m. when Paul Merrion made his way across the property to the old folks' home. He had received a note last night from one of the care supervisors, as he always insisted he should when a resident in the old folks' home was not settling in. Suzie Walker was eighty-eight years old and had been admitted by her son and daughter, her husband of fifty-five years had been dead twelve months now. Possessing a free spirit all her life, Suzie insisted she could continue to live alone, but with her health deteriorating her two children who adored her, insisted she be admitted to the home on the pretence it was just temporary so she could regain her strength. But Suzie knew what their wishes were, she loved her two treasures dearly and she knew her love was returned. The fact was they both had busy lives full of young children, work, spouses, heavy mortgages, and long commutes. They both just felt this was the best option. Suzie knew they both genuinely felt this but she disagreed. She could stay at home, and if they both just called in on the odd day, and their spouses did the same it would be possible, especially if their eldest kids gave a dig out. But it was easy thinking what other people should do, Suzie thought as she stared out the window.

Paul walked through the main entrance past reception, and down the middle of the three corridors behind the reception desk. The resident's rooms lined both sides of the corridor but he didn't go to any of these rooms as he knew they would all be in the recreation room. When he entered, he found the usual scene playing, some people watching TV, some playing cards, others sitting together chatting, and some alone.

Suzie was sitting alone looking out the large window, dazing, dozing, entranced, the glass window was a portal to the past which she could see crystal clear, where she preferred to spend as much time as she could. She's playing with her two children in the back garden, they are four and six. The grass has just been cut; she's chasing them round a

table, they are both laughing so hard they can hardly run. She grabs both of them, squeezes them together, she feels them, smells them, hears them laughing.

But now, the window advances towards her, pushing her back through the time portal, she's back here, now, the cold window in front of her, in an old folk's home, alone. How did this happen? How can she be here? no husband, no children, tears rolling down her cheeks. After staring for a while longer out the window, almost comatose with sadness, she suddenly straightens up and a slight smile comes across her lined face, bringing a glimmer to her eyes. She sees Paul Merrion walking towards her, as Paul approached, Suzy leaned to her right without taking her eyes off the window and put her right arm down by the side of her chair with her hand open. As Paul passed he placed a small sized bottle of Tequila in Suzy's hand, both of them playing their part as expertly as an Olympic relay team, neither disrupting the rhythm of what they appeared to be doing.

"I expect ten rosaries out of you for this", whispered the smuggling priest. Suzy, who was one of the few residents who didn't get regular visits, smiled triumphantly. These dark days she had learned to take life with a pinch of salt, a slice of lemon, and a shot of tequila.

## **I always take life with a pinch of salt**

**Mark L'estrange**

Stephen and Paddy walked into the building together, Paddy asked one of the soldiers "Who will represent Stephen?" He walked over to a barrister and talked for him for a bit and came back to Paddy and said "Go into that room the council will meet you in there."

They both entered this huge room, there were two solicitors sitting there with blank faces Paddy asked them "What is the plan?" one of them answered "We are here to represent you both." Stephen said "What do you mean us both its only me that has to give evidence isn't it?" "Oh yes sorry I meant you Stephen."

He had to give a statement going back to the very start when he was given a strange substance that made him change into a monster. The solicitors looked at each other and then said "That is some story and we believe you although, we are going to have a job convincing the jury to believe you, the gang have a total different story than you."

Paddy got a call on his mobile and he said "Sorry for this I need to take this, I will be back in a moment." It was the Super, he said he has word from the source that there could be a few of the gang outside the court waiting for Stephen. "Be careful leaving, let the army know as well." He went back in but didn't tell Stephen because he knew he was stressed out enough. Paddy said "Sorry I had to go and take that call, getting back to our conversation I can back up everything that Stephen said, as well as my colleagues at home, can I get them to connect on Zoom?" "That should work the judge is very easy going and takes things with a pinch of salt."

"Hope he doesn't take this case with a pinch of salt because we certainly don't." They were all then called into the court, Stephen said to Paddy. "I feel very intimidated by this gang they are eye balling me out of it." Paddy went to tell the solicitors what was happening "Don't worry I will tell the judge to give them a warning."

When the judge was told this he told everyone to rise and said “This is a word of warning I have got word that a witness in the court is being intimidated, there will be dire consequences for anyone who does this to anyone.”

To be continued

## **I put my grief inside a box]**

**Tadg O'Brien**

Down in one mate! Down in one!  
Let's get plastered have some fun.  
Drink with gusto let's get high, cos  
Life's a bitch and then you die

I put my grief inside a box.  
I dig a hole deep in the woods.  
Six feet. Eight feet, ten — it's in!  
Mounds of clay a mound of dirt.  
On it, build a pyramid.  
Solid rock conceals chagrin.  
Decorate it shimmers gold  
To tell the world that I am whole.

I put my grief inside a box.  
Napalm seeping through the mounds  
it stings my eyes it burns my brain  
one sunny day the thing blew up  
fucking mushroom clouds galore —  
a nuclear winter!  
scavenging ...  
crop failure ...  
There will be. No harvest. This year.  
Any year.  
Only ... fallout.  
I put my grief outside a box

Down in one mate! Down in one!  
I remember life was fun.  
How we'd fly oh how we'd cry,  
Oh life's a bitch and then you die.

## **I Take Life...**

**Laura Alves**

Even though I always say I'm not much of a salty person, as I'm not one to fill my food with a lot of extra salt, I know salt has already been used in the cooking and, yes - life does need a bit of seasoning and sometimes hot spice is the best. They say you should try and not be entangled in an extremely quiet routine as life becomes boring. You should always try and do something different each day. If you have to go every day to the same place, try a different way each time. Life helps make things different as the weather is not the same every day and while one day it's sunny and extremely hot, next day you might get a storm. If the place is nearby, you might walk one day and the next take a bicycle.

The lemon and the shot of tequila are also important in life as the sour part of the food gives it a bit of taste that wasn't there. Unlike the salt, I do like my food with lemon! Especially fish and other kinds of meat. As for the tequila, this is the fun part of life which is also essential. Life goes by and is nothing without friends. Appreciate your friendships and live life to the full as - believe me - life goes by too quickly and we shouldn't leave till later things we can do now, especially good and positive things, as later may just happen to be too late.

## **In The Clouds**

**Heloisa Prieto e Victor Scatolin**

It all happened too fast. Vincent was in the kitchen, drinking a glass of water. All of a sudden, the boy saw the wind beating against the windows, the corridor lamp went out, thick rain drops came through the open door and hit his hair and his face. He smiled. He felt raindrops falling over his bare feet. It was refreshing.

It so happens that the raindrops spread all over and the wooden floor was slippery. Blue, his dog, came over to the kitchen, stopped and wiggled his body, splashing water all over. Blue jumped and opened his mouth nonstop, wagging his soaked tail that ended up splashing water on little Gail, Vincent's baby sister.

Vincent saw when lightning illuminated the dark room, and he leaned against the table, feeling the strong, thunder sound vibration on his hands. Gail opened her mouth, tears running down her cheeks. Vincent ran and held her tight. As his arms delicately sheltered his baby sister, the boy saw Alice, his mother, running towards them. Moving her lips calling her children, she suddenly stumbled on Lily, their panic-stricken kitten. So many moving mouths, letting out words, meows, barks, thought Vincent.

Then, lights were on again. Gail left her brother's arms and she pointed at the window. Brother and sister had made up their own signs, a bit different from those used by the rest of the family.

Gail could hear the noisy raindrops bursting against the floorboard. Vincent could not hear their sound, but he loved the touch of cold, raindrops against his skin on a warm summer afternoon.

He stretched his arm and opened up his hands to catch the rain. Gail did the same. Raindrops caressed his fingers and it felt so good.

The following day, as it usually happens in the summer, clouds started to spread all over the sky.

Gail already knew about her brother's favourite pastimes. He loved to lay on the grass and keep on watching the moving clouds. Naming them was so much fun!



“Hey, look at the Elephant cloud”

“There goes a round Violet cloud!”

“Tiny Olive Cloud!”

“Puffy Pink Cloud!”

“Gorgeous Blue Cloud!”

“Mellow Yellow Cloud!”

“Elephant Ears Cloud!”

Alice opened the kitchen door and saw her children, eyes in the sky, moving hands, laughing out loud, sitting in the backyard. Feeling so very happy, she grabbed her cell and took a picture. Then, she texted their father:

CHILDREN IN THE CLOUDS + SOOTHING HEARTS= HAPPINESS.

## **My Lost Shaker of Salt**

**Julianna Wilmoth**

Let me tell you about the week I just had. On my way to work, I stepped into a puddle of water while wearing my brand-new shoes. Then I missed the last bus of the day and the driver smiled and waved at me, as I slogged around in still wet shoes. A couple of days later, my boss called me in early for a meeting - so early in fact that I dressed in the dark and wore two different shoes. Finally, both my dog and cat ran away after scolding them for stealing my shoe – a shoe that would never be found.

And then my husband said we needed to talk – about my shoe obsession.

I shook my head and closed my eyes. I OHM-ed into my thoughts and tried to channel the stoics. They would tell me to relax, lighten up, don't sweat the small stuff -cause it's all small stuff. It reminded me of the mantra of Jimmy Buffet, American beach philosopher and crooner. He was a stoic of sorts. Laid back, chill, a bartender-stoic. Maybe he wore a toga - I'm not sure. He blew out his flip flop sandals. AND while barefoot he stepped on a pop top. But he loved to sing about the booze in the blender. If only he could find his lost shaker of salt. I guess even a beachside stoic has rough days.

## Welcome To My World

Tina Irving

My life seems to be one long trauma since I moved to Scotland in 1999. Until then, I had no problems at all, life was easy, even in war torn Libya. I made the mistake of volunteering too much in Scotland, sitting on many committees and making my voice heard, even though it is a very pronounced English accent. I was listened to, we raised money through the Dunnet Head Educational Trust, about £100,000 for the communities, including the Caithness and Sutherland Walking Festival, followed by the North Highland Way in 2008. Then resentment set in. An incomer making a difference. How dare she. There was the Battle for Brough Bay and we left under pressure from the then corrupt Police Scotland and John Thurso MP, who is now the President of VisitScotland. The Castle of Mey Trust has never put its hands in its pockets to help the development of the Way, a massive project right across the north coast.

Then, to Northern Ireland. Most Inkie's know what happened with my ex partner, Steve, who I took to the High Court in Belfast, self representing, and won. Then to the plant pots, which are becoming very expensive for the Northern Irish purse. Radius Housing Association should not have used PSNI to throw me out. Did they really think for one moment I was going to leave it alone. My solicitor did, but then he was just as bad, standing by while the magistrate threw me out. Now we are up to about £600,000 of public money spent, and rising as the first section will be sent to Strasbourg next week as the High Court in Birmingham sit on the cases. PSNI one has gone off through, through the High Court in London. Why did I not think of that before. There are lots of folk from Ireland in Birmingham.

Back to Scotland then, and the North Highland Way. Now Dounreay, who I had helped previously, have turned and refused to assist in getting folk off the busy road due to the NC500. The "Enterprise" Agency don't want to help either, as I am an incomer. It is ironic that VisitScotland have endorsed the project in my favour with John Thurso at the helm, and it is VisitScotland and The Highland Council who will intervene, as one of their Councillors threw me out of a public meeting and is under investigation by the Ethical Standards Commission and now Police

Scotland as he blamed two other Councillors for sending Police Scotland round to see me, something about sending him emails? Most odd. Especially as he had blocked my emails.

The saga continues. Two cases of corruption, greed and bullying. One in Northern Ireland, Radius Housing, the other in Scotland with the Space Hub which, will not be built if I have my way. I have already held it up for two years (almost the time I have been back in Scotland) by picking at their legal documents and finances. Financed by the UK Space Agency, the "Enterprise" Company and Dounreay. But where is the cash? No one seems to know, as there is no sign of a lift off. NorthLink will be pleased when we discuss it again when I go to Orkney on Tuesday. They don't want rockets landing on their ferries coming out of Scrabster harbour 20 miles from the launch pad. Anyway, they have one in Shetland now, why do they need another one?

I would like the Inkies, in their firmly sensible ways and fantastic ways of looking at things, especially Harry and Declan, to send me their thoughts on this, and of course Steve, as an economist. I sent him the Space Agency's economic evaluation. Also we all know I am a warrior, and have been since I was six years old when three 10 year old boys got beaten up for trying to steal my sweets. One in the road, one in the ditch and the third with a bloody nose. I am proud to be part Irish from both sides of the border, a fact I did not know until fairly recently. I am also seen as a Republican in the north. Well, I would be, I play the Dubliners!

## **Pinch Of Salt**

**Bernadette O'Reilly**

I don't take life with  
A pinch of salt  
I find lemons and life  
Can be very bitter  
I am a teetotaller  
So can't vouch for the comfort  
Of tequila  
I wish I could take life with  
A pinch of salt  
Though salt raises blood pressure.

## **The Red Arrows**

**Deirdre Powell.**

It was a grey day as young Sammy and his Dad walked along the beach. A crowd of onlookers had gathered and there was a palpable feeling of tension in the air. Some people had binoculars and were staring toward the sky, while others took a more relaxed approach and ate crisps and popcorn as the tension mounted and waited for the “next-best-thing” to happen.

Sammy wondered what the fuss was all about and asked his Dad. The father looked at him knowingly and said, “Just wait till you see what’s in store.”

Within a few minutes, a set of four planes roared overhead, circling the skies and leaving a trail of red and blue colour in the air. Round and round they circled, demonstrating wonderful acrobatics. “Wow, Dad, that’s fabulous,” exclaimed Sammy. His Dad explained that, “These are the Red Arrows, and they are among the finest air display artists that you will ever see.”

As though star-gazing, young Sammy looked at the display and although only ten years of age, he was so enthralled that he wanted to be a member of the Red Arrow team of airplane enthusiasts also when he grew up. With a determined air, he declared to his father, “when I am older, I am going to become a pilot, fly all around the world and join the Red Arrows. Do you think I can do it, Dad?”

“You can be anything you want to be, son,” he replied and smiled indulgently. Sammy’s father thought of the time when he was a boy and had wanted to become a train driver when he was older – he remembered how his father had indulged him in this dream and thought benevolently of Sammy’s grandad from yesteryear. Such thoughts and dreams, though not to be rained upon, were to be taken with a pinch of salt. He knew that next week, Sammy would probably want to be a fireman and the Dad would not take that dream from him either.

## **The Green Fields Of France**

**Tina Irving**

With the suffering in Gaza now, this song comes to mind. It's not it has not happened before. Without getting political and one sided, but focussing on the words again.

The song is about the suffering in Ireland, both north and south. One has to have an empathy with both sides. The story is of a 19 years old boy, Willie McBride, who went to fight in WWI and lost his life. "The suffering, the pain. It will never happen again". But it does, WWII, Korea, Vietnam. What is the point of it all? Usually it is money and greed, but sometimes simply because the powers that be want to be seen as humanitarian. The Yom Kippur War, the granting of lands to the state of Israel in 1948. The partition of the island of Ireland in 1922, the division of Asia – Pakistan and India. What exactly is it all for. British supremacy. It's long gone, but they still behave as though they are still in charge. The story of Ester Grey – the brave lady standing in front of the TV cameras day after day, as her daughter had been murdered just because she was who she was, a 16 year old girl, cut down in her prime.

Has nothing changed since WWII, have we learned nothing, the song gives us not hope but despair that nothing has actually changed except that the news is more easily spread, more conjecture and the news of the suffering is starkly highlighted.

The "Green Fields of France where the red poppies dance" "No smoke, no gunfire now", "The endless white crosses stand mute in the sand". Thousands of white crosses – reminders of war and what has gone before. Still visited on June 6 – D Day landings by thousands of ex military service personnel, wanting to pay their respects to those who died for their country.

Now it is happening again – in Ukraine, in Gaza, even in war torn Libya which we don't hear much about these days.- yet in the 1980s, Libya was all the rage.

To be continued, or this will be too long.

## Pinch of Salt, Scoop of Wood Ash

Elaine Reardon

Another Saturday morning snow spills from the sky. Yesterday three inches covered the ground,

Today's snow will top that off. The last big snow brought over a foot of snow, and it's still here,

except in a few sunny spots. This morning two large deer walked across the yard, browsing on any greens that stood out of the snow. The forest is quiet, no snowploughs have been out yet.

Plow trucks spread salt on the roads to melt the ice, but not on this road, because it's a gravel road and cuts through the state forest. This protects the water supply, this lack of salt. In the centre of town, five miles north, there are ten or twelve buildings, including the Town Hall, Library, and Church. Several water supplies were ruined because one fellow on the highway crew continually put too much salt on the roads in the centre. It ruined three wells. Several

homes, the Town Hall and Library have a pipe delivering water to them directly from Mount Grace. Mount Grace sits off the centre of town and weighs in at 1617 feet high, a good climb for anyone. Every year for the last day of school the upper grades climb it. Mind you, there are only 23 kids in the school, if no one is absent.

To return to the salt, though. It's important not to fall and for cars to stay on the roads. Salt, though necessary for both safety and margaritas, can ruin a well. I've taken to sprinkling wood ash on my walking paths and parking area. I like the cycle of life and recycle of it. Last year I had six trees come down in a microburst- our first mini-tornado here. They are now cut up into firewood that I'm using—maple, cherry, pine. Cherry is a lovely wood, and I was saddened to have it downed. We cut a large chunk and gifted it to a wood craftsman in town that makes bowls.

Sandy surprised us with a wooden bowl cut from it, as well as one for himself. The rest of the cherry burns hot, long and bright; it's a heavy wood that burns long. When the fire is out I shovel out the ash. I



sprinkle it on the gardens, then the meadow. Sometimes it goes directly into the compost bin. When we have ice, I sprinkle wood ash on the paths for both feet and cars, recycling of life, as the goodness of the tree goes back to feeding the earth.