

Inkslingers Blended Session

13th April 2024

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“You Sit On A Throne Of Lies ”

Will Ferrel From the Movie Elf

And the Visual



“Along Came A Spider...”

A Throne Of Lies

Max McCoubrey

You sit on a throne of lies
And weave a web so fine
To make a silver hue
To bring all ears to you
The drama in your head
Becomes your lips thread
And in and out you weave
Until we are deceived.
And then, with certainty
You tell it all to me
repeating the disguise
That boasts your throne of lies.

Why, Then

Greg Fields

It didn't sit right with her. The shooting. The shopkeeper with the sad eyes. The young boy who went out of his way to be in that place at the time, who rode a bus from Southeast up to Connecticut Avenue just to rob a store. And to do it poorly, at that. So poorly that he ended up bleeding out on the tiles while the shopkeeper's eyes grew even sadder

Rosie Carter had always been taught to ask, "Why?" And with an innate curiosity and a trusting, almost innocent soul, she lived her life with the question before her. In college she was the one who sat on the edge of her chair when her friends told their stories, pressing and probing and sometimes, most annoyingly, asking the devilish question, "So what?" A story was only good if it meant something, if it shone a light on something that might be hidden, or unknown, or ill considered. It was only right, then, that she should study journalism, and with a ferocity reflective of a mother lion, she sought the answers to all the times she asked herself, "Why?"

So that question itself gnawed at her, especially since the story would not die. Willie Meadows, her older, sadder, cynical colleague, had done most of the legwork, and his reporting on it hit all the right notes. Standard, and thorough for what was known at the time, and teasingly sympathetic to the shooter, who, in the realities of the day, fell closer to the Washington Post's preferred demographic. Willie's work fit the narrative – wayward boy loses it all in a foolish attempt to be something he could never be. He was neither John Dillinger nor Ned Kelly. He was Dashawn Roberson, and no one would ever remember his name.

The community was not pleased, but the media did all they could think to do to placate the outrage of a young black boy gunned down by an overanxious white man. The roiling continued, even after press conferences, the promise of an internal investigation, and countless apologies. Dashawn's mother, invisible while he was alive, was suddenly omnipresent, weeping and cursing and screaming for some form of justice. To most of the readership, though, it was just another

shooting in a city where bullets were as common as the pigeons trawling the streets.

With her questions still sitting outside the answers given, Rosie took some time to see what she might find out about it all. Curiosity that was both blessing and the darkest curse, an obsession to uncover whatever throne of lies that rule our days. She spent a few hours freelancing, diving through public materials on the neighborhood, on the statistics of the city's shootings, on the fragile balance between white and black. There was nothing, of course, about Dashawn Roberson. His name had never appeared until it no longer had any meaning.

Flynn Murphy, the sad man who pulled the trigger, had worked at the store for more than twenty years. A native he was, born and raised on the city's northwest side. Married a local girl, raised two sons who were grown and gone, and lived quietly outside the spotlight. Consumed by the tragedy of having to shoot away another life, no one - reporter or police - had paid any real attention to who Flynn Murphy might be, and so Rosie thought to take a deeper look.

No criminal records beyond a speeding ticket. No public disturbances. Paid his taxes on time and loved his family. A graduate of Carroll High School all those years ago.

Rosie sniffed, smelled nothing, but sensed an odor. And with that, she pulled the Carroll High School yearbook from Murphy's graduating year, just to take a peek. Nothing spectacular there at first glance. Flynn Murphy played two years of football and then took to the stage, acting in the school's production of *Brigadoon* his senior year. Just another guy.

She flipped to the back of the book, to the index that listed the graduates and all their accomplishments. And there she saw, under Flynn Murphy, next to his football and his acting, "Charter Member, The White Knights."

Rosie Carter sat back and sighed. The White Knights. Who were The White Knights? A car club? A social service group? Or something else again.

At her window she looked out onto 15th Street, at those shuffling past. White faces. Black faces. And the pigeons milling about, looking to take whatever they could. Why, then? Always and forever, why?

A Job for Life

Gerard Keogh

To the best of my knowledge, I've never met anyone named Anthony Armstrong. On the other hand, his story as told in the preceding chapters sounds eerily familiar to me. Jeez, I wonder how that could be? My time in the Civil Service came to a premature end in 2006, when twenty-seven years of conflict, criticism, and crisis finally got the better of me, and I had to call it quits for the sake of my own well-being.

The working environment in the Department of Transport in the early 2000s was such that the fear I experienced there from Monday to Friday became almost a physical presence; it was debilitating and overwhelming. When the phone on my desk would ring, I would react as if a bomb had gone off. The electronic sound of an email arriving in my inbox would elicit a similar response. I was left with two options: remain in the Civil Service and hope that things would improve eventually; or watch it all slowly disappear from my rear-view mirror as I drove down a different road. I chose the latter, and brought to an end a career that had begun with the optimism of youth in July, 1979, but then ran out of road in August, 2006.

Not long after leaving the Service, my mother suffered a mild stroke and soon after that she began to show signs of dementia. Gradually, I took on the role of carer, until it became a full-time job that brought with it a different kind of stress. I was determined to take care of her myself and keep her in her own home for as long as possible. If that meant sacrificing my own physical and mental well-being, then so be it. The final eighteen months of her life were extremely difficult. I paid a high price for my dedication to the task of keeping my mother safe, happy, and comfortable, but I don't regret it for one second.

It was the hardest job I've ever done; but it was also the most important and the most rewarding job I've ever done. Parking tickets and radioactive pigeons can go to hell, as far as I'm concerned. I gave up my "job for life" and found myself doing a job that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Some things are just meant to be.

Spiders

Mary Walker

My father liked spiders. For some reason I always associated daddy long legs and my father. I don't know if that was because my daddy had long legs or if it was because my father liked spiders or if it was because the place I spent more time with daddy long legs than anywhere else was also the same place I spent more time with my father than anyplace else, or simply because I loved my father and for some reason I loved daddy long legs. I loved the funny way daddy long legs would dance across the windows at night, dancing across the reflection of the light and me in my bed lying with my head on the pillow watching the dancing daddy long legs. My father liked to dance. Not often. Actually I don't ever remember him dancing. Maybe he just liked to watch dancing. I cannot imagine him dancing. He liked to walk. When we went to our home in the country he would wear stout walking boots all summer. In the morning he would put on his bathrobe and his stout boots and walk down through the oak woods to the sea for his morning skinny dip. I would see him from my bed, this tall elegant professional man, naked under his bathrobe, in his stout boots, more of him emerging from the woods as he climbed up the path, head wet and towel around his neck, in stout boots.

My father lived a different life in the country to the city. In the city he wore only tweed suits, white starched shirts that came from Brooks Brothers in America, a hangover from his time in Chicago studying with Mies Van der Rohe. I wonder why he ever returned to Ireland from America. I think he must have had a great sense of duty, responsibility for his mother and only sister. I don't know how old he was when his father died. He would have been aware of his father's ill health. It was after all his first job as an architect to design a house for his father to live in, a bungalow, a place with no stairs that would not aggravate his father's heart condition, a legacy from his father's soldiering in the first world war.

One of the great drawbacks of being raised in a well-to-do family that expresses no emotion and that values the intellect above all else, is a decided dearth of communication, of personal story-telling.

Along came a spider

Ciaran O'Melia

, who wriggled and tickled inside her. Or so he said as he defended the case of murder put to him by the chief of detectives.

“What happened then?” Said the Chief.

“You know what,” said the accused.

“No, I don't; I'm trying to help you; you should help me.”

“Well, she died ----- horribly.”

“Can you tell me how her stomach, --- no, or how she died?” Said the Chief.

“You see, when I went into her apartment, she didn't look well,' said the accused.

“What happened then,” said the chief hurriedly.

“Well, she died.” He was thinking of something to say. “I asked her, that was before she died. What ails you.”

“And what did she say.”

“I fell asleep on the bed.” The defendant explained.

“Then what happened?”

“She snoozes and snores with her mouth open.”

“What,” said the agitated detective, he was about to blow his top.

“She snoozes with her mouth open, and she felt movement inside her,” he paused here to shed a tear before saying, “It seems the spider lowered himself or herself down into her mouth.”

“And what happened.” Asked the detective.

“That was the end of that.”

“But, the crisscross on her belly, excuse me, her torso?”

“What was I to do but get the spider out? Hence, the knife,” said the defendant.

“Jesus Christ almighty, you sit on your throne of lies.” He knows this is an often quoted line, but he can’t remember who said it first.

Then the defendant drew out of his pocket a wrapper, bloody hankie, and unfolded it there. It contained a lot of blood, and there was a giant spider in the middle.

“So, I can get out of here. I have a funeral to arrange.”

A Bad Day

Gerard Byrne

Amy was having a bad day. Unfortunately everyday was a bad day since she fell off that feckin horse and broke her neck. Stuck in a hospital bed as nurses and carers seen to her every need. This was no way to finish out her life. Amy was only twenty six and most people her age had a whole life stretched out in front of them. Not for poor old Amy anymore. She didn't blame buttercup (her prized horse) for the accident. Amy had pushed the animal too hard that day. Too many jumps over ditches and low hedges. No wonder the horse bucked up and threw her off. Unfortunately her father Desmond hadn't seen things the same way and had blasted poor buttercup with both barrels of a shotgun. Amy tried not to dwell on that mental image. It was too hard to think about. Better to watch the local news. That might distract her mind a bit.

The main story was about a dangerous spider that had escaped from the zoo. It had some big long name that was unpronounceable. A cold shudder went down Amy's spine. She wasn't sure was that a mental reaction or did she really feel that. Either way she was scared. She hated spiders with a passion. Ever since her grandfather made her watch the film arachnophobia. That film creeped her out as a child. Dirty little creatures with all those legs. Ever since that day she would run at the sight of one. Her grandfather used to joke about how he was gonna make her sit on a thrown of flies, so that the little creepy crawlies would scuttle over in her direction. That hadn't helped things.

The reporter on the telly was standing outside the zoo, looking all serious as the authorities muddled around in the background. Amy figured things must be pretty bad if so many uniformed official looking people were involved. But all that went quickly out the window when she looked up into the corner of the ceiling and spotted the exact same spider spinning a rather large web from one wall to the other.

Amy froze where she lay. Which wasn't difficult, all things considering. She didn't know what to do. The corridor outside was quiet and there was no way to press any panic buttons. She did the next best thing and tried to scream. Unfortunately her under functioning internal organs

wouldn't let her take enough of a breath to make a large enough sound. It just squeaked out as a whisper. She looked to the door once more. No one was coming. She glanced back up at the corner of the room. Unfortunately the spider wasn't there anymore. Her eyes darted around frantically, until finally she looked directly up, just in time to see the spider fall from above, right down onto Amy's face.

She shut her eyes and clenched her teeth. Anything to stop the spider from cavity searching her bodily holes. The weight of his body was more than she ever expected. His little hairy legs tiggling her soft skin. Amy was frightened out of her wits. Death was coming knocking on her door and there was nothing she could do about it. The little bastard was gonna have his way with her. End her life from where the horse riding accident had left off.

But then something clicked in her mind. A way out. To end all this suffering. It was then that Amy prayed for the spider to finish her off. To take her away from all this misery. No more being cared for and treated like a helpless baby. Let her family finally live their life again. She clenched her teeth tightly and waited with a new found hope for the spider to attack. And that it did. Unfortunately not the way Amy had hoped for. The spider lunged at the nurse that came into check on her. Sinking its poison into the young woman's neck, before scuttling off out the door and down the corridor. Amy cried tears of anger. Her hell would never end.

Aracnophobia

Bernadette O'Reilly

I like many do not have a good
Relationship with Spiders
Or indeed any kind of creepy crawlies
I pretend to be brave when other adults
Are around
On my own
I let out a howling scream
Which I am sure frightens the spider
As well as deafening my neighbours
Picking the spider out of the bath
I drown him or her in the toilet
Never giving thought to their family
Or animal lovers thinking I am a murderer
I simply panic
When we were young my brothers bedroom
Was dusty
He told our niece that Fred the spider lived
Underneath his bed
She didn't try to confiscate his childhood
Board games
For fear of encountering Fred.
She tried to send me underneath this bed
Without any success.

Carnival

Michael O'Brien

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

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

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

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

supernatural as far as she was concerned, almost as if they'd met before.

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

He picked her up from school on his motorbike once, her eyes flared when she saw him and it was made all the better because her friends saw the whole scene, making her feel she was in a movie as she jumped on the back and sped off into Hollywood coolness.

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

him she did, it was like that in most of her relationships these days, the only one who had the edge on her was her daughter, and she could live with that.

A Lazy Saturday

Deirdre Powell.

There had been a flurry of to-dos, what-nots and meetings around the holiday weekend, with the result that I felt tired and, in spite of time-off, actually needed to rest to recharge my batteries as a result. It was Saturday morning, and I slithered down the stairs and into my kitchen to treat myself to some coffee and eggs benedict. In minutes, there was a down-at-home feeling to the kitchen as the scent of scrambled eggs with ham and stuffing filled the air. I breathed in the aroma of warm coffee just freshly brewed and could feel my muscles relaxing. What would the day bring?

I had been too lazy to get up early enough to buy today's paper, so I contented myself with reading the newspaper from two days ago, with out-of-date news. It occurred to me that it was time to snap out of my cocoon and reconnect with the world. But part of me didn't feel like it – I could quite happily while away the day in my home and my office and no-one would miss me – or so I thought.

There was a ping on my phone. Bother – technology – I didn't want to hear from anyone. I took a peek at the text message – it was from my friend Elisa. She had guessed that I was feeling tired and was contacting me in order to see was everything all right in my world. I texted back to say that it was – we would probably meet later in the week.

I sat on my favourite kitchen chair, slipped off my slippers and wiggled my toes, comfortable in the knowledge that I was not needed by anyone at this time. My well-fed pussycat emerged from her sleeping basket and started to rub her head against my feet. Yes, it was feeding time for the animal. Without warning, she jumped, her two front paws enveloping something on the floor. It turned out that she had caught a spider and wanted to eat it. Unfortunately, her paws were quicker than my reactions; I was unable to save the spider, and so it met a rather sad end.

I sank my teeth into the scrambled eggs – they had turned out to be fluffier than normal, and I wallowed in the laziness of the morning. I looked at the TV guide and saw that Will Ferrell was starring in "Elf, The

Movie” in the afternoon. Well, it was as good a plan as anything else. I could sit back, enjoy a box of chocolates that I had recently received, and watch the world go by. Yes, “if chocolates be the food of love, then play on!”

Simon & Mary Might lose their home

Mark L'estrange

Simon was a very wealthy man who had a lot of luck in life he was a business owner of a music company where he had a lot of bands and musicians working for him selling out venues every week. Mary his wife never needed to work because Simon was bringing in a lot of bread every week.

They lived in a mansion in Dalky it was worth about a million euro and had all the mod cons like swimming pool games room gym you name it they had it. Simon also treated Mary to great holidays every year. You could say they were living the life.

Then Covid struck and things got a little tight for Simon as you can imagine because all the pubs and venues were gone. Simon had a good bit of money to back them up, so he was ok for a good few months. Simon had a lot of his money tied up in stocks and shares which started to tumble over the last few months so now he is feeling the pinch.

He said to Mary one day "You're going to have to look for a bit of work love" she said in a posh voice "me work I wouldn't know where to start," He said, "You better start somewhere," Then Mary saw that bills were starting to stack up and went missing.

Simon was ringing Mary to see what was going on, but the phone was switched off. Simon rang the bank manager explaining that "I can't pay the mortgage at the moment because my business has gone into difficulty." He wasn't very understanding and said you need to pay us by the end of next week.

Simon rang his mother in distress saying "I don't have the means to pay for this.

His Mother would never take any money off Simon even though he was always offering to buy her a new home anywhere she wanted, in the good times. She lived in the Ballymun flats that's where Simon was brought up. She said to Simon "don't worry love your room is always here for you in the flats, I have even done it up for you." Simon then

said, "Don't worry Mam I'm sure I won't have to, but thanks a million anyway."

The next day he went into the bank, to see if he could have another go at talking to the manager to explain his situation, but again he got the same response "we need money by the end of the week or you out on your ear."

On the way home Simon realised it was Friday so he popped into his local shop to do the euro millions, something he would not normally do. He asked the shopkeeper for a three-euro quick pick, he said "the luckiest you have please" he had his fingers and toes crossed as he handed over the money. The shop keeper said with a laugh "this is the best one I can find good luck." "I need it" Simon said back.

When he went home, he made use of all the great stuff he had in his house thinking to himself he could be kicked out any time now. Later he rang a few of his friends in the music business to see if any of them could help him, but they all said "we are all in the same boat as you"

The next day he was awakened by a five load bangs at his door, and shouts let us in it was the bay lifts saying you need to leave this house. Simon said, "I thought I had a few days?" They said no "we have this letter from the bank saying we have to represses your property you have till six o'clock today to get out of here." He then asked, "what about my stuff?" "You can bring a few things now and come back for the rest latter on." Off they went saying "we will be back latter make sure you're ready to go." Simon rang his mother saying Mam 'I'm going to have to take you up on that offer. He headed off with a few things to Ballymun flats with a big money head on him. When he got there his Mam had a nice meal ready for him. She said, "I'm delighted to see you son great to have you home," "He said nice to see you Mam, but I can't believe I have lost my home" "don't worry I'm sure things will sort themselves out and you will be back there in no time."

Simon headed off to bed early this night and said thanks to his Mam for letting him back into the flat, she said "of course I would let you in anytime you're my only son. He woke up and hear the radio playing downstairs. The dj said "someone in Dublin has bought the lucky euro millions ticket and needs to claim it, it was bought over a week ago in

spar shop in Dalkey.” Simon jumped out of bed and said to his Mam “have you seen my jacket I think I’m after winning the euro millions.

“I haven’t seen are you sure you brought it with you son” He searched the whole flat for his jacket, but he couldn’t find it anywhere. He was up to 90 looking for it he said to his Mam “I need to head back to my house to find my jacket see you later and we can book some flights to a place of your choice.”

He jumped into a taxi that brought him to his home in Dalkey. He didn’t have a key of the front door but remembered he had one for the back door, he let himself in to search for his jacket he tore the place apart to try find it but it was no use it wasn’t there.

He was looking out the window remembering all the good memories he had of living in this great house but then he couldn’t believe his eyes he saw his jacket hanging on a chair beside the swimming pool. He ran out and grabbed it, reaching into the pocket of his jacket to find the lotto ticket still intact. He scanned it on his phone, and it said you need to contact lotto headquarters, he jumped up in the air with excitement.

He rang his mother saying I think I have won the euro millions this is incredible. The next thing heard was squad car outside the property and two guards came into the back garden saying “you are trespassing we are going to have to arrest you. “This is my home I just came to get my jacket that’s all,” “Did you contact someone to be let in?” “No, I never thought to do that sorry can you not just let me off with a warning please, I think I have won the lotto” but the guards where having none of it and brought him to the Garda station.

He rang his Mam again saying “you’re not going to believe this I have been arrested for going back into the house” “don’t worry son I’m sure you explain you just needed your jacket they will understand” The Sargent came into Simon then saying “We are going to let you off this once with a warning if you need to go in again you need to contact the landlord or us and you can get in” “Thank you so much for that I’m really sorry for that said Simon.”

Simon skipped out of the garda station into a taxi saying with a laugh “Lotto headquarters please” He went into the reception and said to the girl I need to see someone please I think I have won the euro millions.

He gave over his lotto ticket to the manager who came back with a big bottle of bubbly “congratulations Simon you have won the lot” He heard the door open behind him and a familiar voice it was Mary his estranged wife saying this is great we are rich.

When Simon got the check, he had mixed emotions he was so happy to not have to worry about money again, but he wasn't happy to have to share the money with Mary, after her leaving him when things got tough for him. When Mary said, “Will we go public so we can get more money?” he was even more shocked than before, “are you mad Mary do you want the world and his mother knowing we have one this amount of money just for a bit of extra cash you are happy to sit on your throne full of lies aren't you?”

“Ok just an idea no need to put me down you always put me down that was one of our major problems”. His Mam arrived, she was so happy for them, she didn't realise that Mary had left him when he wasn't working, Simon never said. She gave the two of them a big hug she said, “a big congratulations to you both what are you going to do first?” Simon said, “I have something to tell you something, there is no us anymore Mary left me when things were hard, so I don't care I know I have to share my money with her, but I need a fresh start Mam.” “But I love you,” said Mary.

“You love the Money how did you find out about this anyway?” “I rang your Mam to see if you were ok because I haven't heard from you.” “You mean you heard the big money was won beside where we lived, and you wanted to find out if I had one it” Simon said to Mary. “Can't believe you think so low of me” said Mary. His Mam butted in and said “Your right son that was the first that Mary asked when she rang did you hear the big check was bought beside the house where me and Simon live.”

The Exile

(Sampe Chapter)

Declan Cosson

Back up North, under the hot burning sun that beamed down upon the jungle, Vassily's army was now attacking a Congolese position. As he saw the battle take place, he developed a smirk of glee as he looked upon the developing battle below. In contrast to the long sluggish trench and artillery war that took place in the frosty landscape of the Ukrainian winter, combat in an African jungle and bush was quick, sudden and despite the lower number of losses that seemed to have been inflicted in such battles, the combat itself seemed so much more brutal, gory and visceral. This was probably due to Boko Haram itself inflicting as much as violence upon any man they captured regardless of his race or nationality. At this moment, Ilya watched using his binoculars to peer at a checkpoint that was being defended by a company of entrenched Congolese troops whose defences consisted of a network of machine guns, mortar emplacements and even camouflaged tanks.

Thus, despite being less advanced than what Vassily Ilya had in his arsenal, the Congolese clearly had better organisation, professionalism and discipline which allowed them to bog down the militants. Even when being showered by missiles from BM-21 grad trucks, they continued to hold their ground. Even Vassily, instead of being angry, he whistled as he remarked. "Well, I have to admit, these fucks don't crack very easily, I can't wait to see Vlad Trotsky's face when I unleash these boys on him!", He then heard Abdaol shout.

"Captain Ilya, sir?"

"What is it, I'm enjoying the spectacle..."

"But Captain, there is some white men among them..."

"What? How do they dress?"

"Blue helmets and berets...."

"Impossible!! Thought the U.N. had a veto unless..."

Suddenly Ilya seemed very nervous as he peered through his binoculars and saw that one of the emplacements had a white man with a blue beret. The man had tanned skin, jet black hair and blue eyes. He seemed to be directing some other white soldiers with blue helmets under the advice of a Congolese officer. Vassily grumbled in disbelief.

“No....no...why did it have to be him?? Whenever that Byronic Leprechaun shows up, the U.N. seems to grow balls of steel. Their men seem to not follow the standard U.N. protocols under him...”

He then bellowed to the militants. “Boys, there’s a black-haired, blue-eyed fuck who’s come to enforce the will of the French!! Skin him alive!!”

“But sir, their position is too strong, we’ll lose too many men who we won’t replace easily...”

“Then wait for now, Abdaol, I’ve got a special present for McDonagh and his little gang of Leprechauns and Uncle Toms!”

Vassily chuckled as he ordered one of his mercenaries to come over with a radio.

Back down at the Congolese positions, McDonagh’s forehead was soaked with sweat and his lips were becoming cracked and dry under the blazing heat of the sun. Along with his sergeant, he fired one of the machine guns at the attacking militants till he had to reload. But then, just as he prepared to reload, one of the Congolese soldiers shouted. “Look monsieur, they are retreating...”

Nobody, especially McDonagh himself, felt any sense of victory as they saw the militants retreat back into the jungle. Completely baffled at why they would retreat, his sergeant asked. “Captain! What are they playing at?”

“I don’t know, sergeant Keneally, let’s hold our positions for now!”

As he said this, McDonagh could hear the Congolese captain order in French.

“Nobody move! Stay to your posts, it was probably a feigned retreat.”

Suddenly the trees began to ripple and blow in the wind which caused a sense of alarm amongst all of the men. The rattling of rotor blades got louder and louder as suddenly Congolese tanks got blown up, erupting into flames as their tankers emerged screaming in agony as they were immolated by the flames. Even McDonagh was shivering to the bone, as he looked up to the sky with disbelief. Swooping towards them was a Ka-52 gunship that was darting towards their position, McDonagh's eyes widened with horror as he saw the shark faced copter shred through more Congolese troops. He was in a sense of disbelief as he muttered. "Lord God, there's no way a bunch of savages could have facilitated such a machine on their own."

He continued watching through his binoculars as he saw a bald white man that he was all too familiar with, saying with horror. "They're not facilitating this machine on their own...it's him, the same thug I encountered in Syria and the Sahel, the one who revolted against Trotsky..."

But then sergeant Keneally asked. "Captain!! They are launching another wave at us!! There are even some Russian mercs among their numbers!! What do we do??"

Looking around him, he could see that the Congolese were trying to bring down the gunship, but they were not successful as it safely retreated to refuel and re-arm. Realizing the futility of the situation, McDonagh turned to the Congolese officer and said.

"Captain? There's another wave of militants and mercenaries coming, I suggest that we retreat to our outpost not far from here, we'll be in a better position to hold them off!!"

"No, we can't afford to retreat, Capitaine, McDonagh!!"

"But..."

"You should withdraw your men to your outpost, we'll slow them down. You have a country to retreat to, once we lose Kinshasa, we will have nowhere else to go!"

McDonagh sighed as he got onto his jeep with the rest of his men, but he said to Keneally.

“Sarge, contact Captain Smuts, I want some of those Rooivalks in the air right now!”

McDonagh felt a cruel sense of guilt as he saw the outnumbered and outgunned Congolese continue to defend their position, and he said a quick prayer in hope that the South African and Irish gunships could arrive in time to cover their eventual retreat.

Meanwhile, the sounds of the battle could be heard as far as the small town where the O’Laoghaires and Archers stayed. It was still Monday morning and Pdraig, dressed in a white outfit packed the suitcases with the help of Cody into the jeep. As Cody heaved another suitcase into the jeep, he asked Pdraig. “Mr. O’Laoghaire, do you think that Ian will have another episode like he did last night?”

“He might but from now on, we’re taking the boys with us until we get back to Dublin. So don’t worry, you won’t have to endure another night like that again.”

Cody whistled a sigh of relief as he straightened his slouch hat. But then Pdraig remarked.

“Cody, when it comes to our boys, just think of it as boot camp for being a Dad.”

“Yes, thanks, Pdraig...”

Back in the house, Alicia was packing backpacks as Roisín covered Fergyll with sun cream. Sitting the little boy on her lap, Roisín was dressed in a green dress and her red hair fell in thick wavy locks past her shoulders and down her back. Ian sat on the couch as if wanting to get as much sleep as possible before the journey began. Turning around and looking at Roisín’s dress, Alicia seemed rather bewildered as she asked.

“My goodness, Roisín, is that the most suitable costume for the occasion that we find ourselves in?”

“Not really, but it was the only costume I found that I didn’t pack away in my wardrobe. It does keep ye cool in the heat though. Besides, I came packed for a holiday, not a war.”

Letting Fergyll off her lap so that he could sit on the couch, Roisín crossed her arms and slumped down. Alicia came over, noticing that

how white Roisín's skin was. As she reinforced Roisín's shoulders and arms with more sun cream, she said.

"Roisín, please stop blaming yourself for what happened last Sunday, it's not your fault that a bunch of Islamists decided to lynch our sons for the sole crime of being Western."

"I know, I try to remind myself of that all the time but...I still was the one who decided to go on a Safari and I still allowed Ian to the market. I mean his body still has the wounds..."

"Roisín, I know how you feel but parents aren't perfect and you're not the Virgin Mary, every other parent has done things they have come to regret. So, chin up young lady, let's get out of here while we still can."

Roisín managed to smile as she stood up, picking up Fergyll and waking up Ian who then just clung onto her as they left the house. Padraig was checking his watch but before he could say anything, he could hear the sound of rattling rotor blades. Cody, looking up, shouted. "Yeah, go boys, Padraig, look up!!"

Padraig was less enthusiastic as he saw a squadron of Rooivalks fly over the town, painted white in the colours of the U.N.. Cody asked curiously. "Are they our boys? O'Meallaigh bought some of those fellas for the Irish Air Corps."

"Can't tell from down here. They could be South African. Anyway, if they are here, it means that the battle is getting closer and closer so it's time to leave."

As Alicia, Roisín and the boys came out, Alicia suddenly noticed that loads of local townspeople were packing up their vehicles and fleeing. She remarked. "Oh my God, the whole town is leaving!!"

Before anyone could respond, she heard a voice she knew announce. "It's the right decision...I suggest you do the same!"

Alicia turned to see Jacques in a jeep coming to a halt as she asked.

"Eh Jacques? What about the reserve?"

"We're shutting it down; we released the animals in the wild so that they can hide or defend themselves. Boko Haram advances as we speak."

A Congolese platoon is slowing them to buy the rest of us time to escape further South. In open defiance of the Veto, McDonagh is sending air support to supplement our limited air force. Intelligence now suggests that the man behind all this is Vassily Ilya...”

Everyone went pale when they heard that name. Alicia asked.

“What are you going to do, Jacques?”

“Me? My boys and I are going to rendezvous with the nearest army base so as to offer our services to the army. Alicia, I suggest for your sake that you leave as soon as possible.”

Padraig responded. “Don’t worry, Jacques, we’re about to do that. Come on Alicia, onto the jeep. Let’s hit the road while we still can ladies!”

Without question, everyone got onto the jeep with Padraig firmly at the wheel while Alicia sat beside him to give road directions. Roisín sat in the back seat with Cody and the boys, keeping an eye on what was happening behind the jeep. Padraig drove the jeep as fast as possible so as to not be bogged down via a convoy of refugees. He had all of his adrenaline pumping through him as he drove faster than he had ever done before, even on a motorway. Noticing this, Alicia pleaded.

“Padraig, for the love of God, slow down!!”

“Can’t afford to, Boko Haram might catch up with us...as your friend said, they’re advancing as we speak!”

“Well, you’re going to have slow down when we go further South, we’ll be driving through towns and cities!!”

“I know, don’t worry.”

For now, they continued and it was clear to all that Padraig wanted to get to Kinshasa as quickly as possible.

For now, Padraig firmly kept his hand on the wheel and his green eyes on the road that was ahead of him. As he came up, a huge refugee convoy of vehicles ranging from cars, vans, buses and trucks was coming into view. Padraig had sense of dread as he muttered.

“Oh no, no, no, that’s exactly what I wanted to avoid.”

“Padraig, now it might be best if you slow down, you might be able to see if you can get around it.”

“Right, let’s hope this works out.”

Padraig took his foot off the accelerator so as to slow the car down when Fergyll said.

“Dad, why are there funny vehicles behind us...”, Curious, Padraig looked into the mirror and his eyes widened even more as he saw a troop of pickups gaining speed behind them, followed by APCs and escorted by motorbikes. Seeing that the figures on the pickups were waving what looked to be AK-47s, he shouted. “Fuck!! That’s the last thing we need!! How did they slip past the army?? Where are those Rooivalks when we need them??”

Padraig was in such a panic that he forgot to press his foot on the accelerator in time, leading the jeep to stall which caused everyone to get a bump. Frustrated at himself and clearly overstressed, he was wet with perspiration as he shouted. “Fuck!!”,

His heart raced like a cheetah as he sought to restart the engine. The closing in of the militants not only terrified Roisín and the boys, it also ruined any Padraig of calming himself down enough to go through the proper motions of engine ignition. Putting her hand on his shoulder, Alicia said.

“Padraig, you might need to take a break. You’re worked out, let me try.”

“What? Alicia, by the time we’ll have swapped places, those fuckers might be onto us...come on, I have to do it, I HAVE TO DO IT!!”

Both Roisín and Alicia looked alarmed as they saw Padraig in desperation trying to start up the engine again but he clearly couldn’t. Up ahead, some of the other vehicles in the refugee convoy had the same problem which caused all sorts of commotion and panic. Padraig had little choice but to accept Alicia’s offer to drive the jeep, at least for a while.

The Exposition

Bridin Mary Harnett

'Tell him how you feel,' She had said.

'What? Shall I expose myself to such vulnerable exposition under such trying circumstances?' I had thought to myself.

'That's what I do,' she said. 'I free myself – call it a venting of emotional disquiet - and the recipient male has no choice but to cave, pending on the intonation patterns I use and of course, on the quality of enactment.' She had said.

'In doing so, man, given his God given donned sense of responsibility experiences an incumbent sense of duty to comply with my feeling,' she says, 'and he takes actions accordingly. It's all a bit of a laugh,' she says.' But sometimes I surprise myself in terms of how authentic I am in broaching the topic of love, when all I want to do is to conquer man's sensibility,' she says.

What? Inflict my emotional self to sideline the essence of man out of himself and to trick him into thinking that he might have to shoulder my feelings, regardless of his own feelings, which he may or may not have for me?

I think to myself and I baulk at that.

Doesn't such an exposition of feeling rather send maledom into a sense of passive receptivity? I think that such an exposition of feeling, such as the fatal, 'Didn't you know that I love you,' sentiment to initiate a relationship and out of the blue rather diminishes and curtails the freedom of man to pronounce love for a beloved of his choice.

Doesn't it?

And then how should I begin to expose such depth of a wail? Shall I conceive a familiar defined context and blubber into a blurting sob with such rhetoric as -

'You know, I've something to tell you, 'and in suchlike rhetoric as follows, 'It's just that lately, I've developed crushingly...well experienced

a kind of upheaval...and how shall I put this...elliptic sort of variety of speech.

And as I write, I remember one of the greatest ladies who rather chose to propose to her future husband via the conduit of her servant, au pair, sort of thing. A fearless woman with clout in a state of shyness who made such an appeal in reciprocated positivity and a glad tidying was then was announced to humanity.

Really.

And then, were I to initiate such a discussion, the male in question might respond in simplicity with something like this –

‘Oh, do we have to have this discussion right now?’

‘Not now, not yet,’ sort of thing – a response which might ratify my internal sense of embarrassment.

I might scathe in recoil into the very temple of my spirit at such a response.

Well, on the other hand, at the very least, in agreeing to hold such an in-depth discussion the given male might say,

‘No,’ in fierce rebuttal, responsible as he is for a number of personal issues – a matter of organization.

But in his gentility, ‘Never’ is a response he does not engender. No indeed, a gentleman does not respond with such negativity.

He might say, ‘How sweet!’ I feel honoured that you have such feeling for me, but really, it’s a matter of accessibility.’

Then I shall have to say thank you in gratitude that he provided the emotional epistemic space for me to work up such expiations of cadenced overture.

Then he might say, ‘You are welcome indeed,’ until both parties of us experience such discomfiture, wielding anxiety to the very livered sense of a derangement and derived of an imagined reality.’

Becoming of Ophelia - really.

Indeed, I am in fear of such a rebuttal of such aforesaid dwindling.

‘Tell him how you feel, ‘she says to conjure the vicissitudes of a pelted receptacle, in the knowledge that his feeling may be rather thwarted in an alternative involvement of his own select choice in addition to the depth of feeling he may or may not have for a real woman. There is always a real woman and isn’t that what woman wants to be for her man?

A real woman for her man.

At least, that is what we think. Indeed, unless he is by religious virtue a polygamous male, in which case he may conceive of an alternative involvement, but given the precepts of monogamous relationships, unless there is a very good reason – the lapse of sexual attraction, hurtful or harmful, deemed abusive interaction and so on with disallowed practices, multiple intimate love is not permitted at all.

Indeed, there is a limit to the love a polygamous man may have. He too has a responsibility.

The exposition of feeling at the hesitant outlying outset of a relationship is to rather hijack the responses of man under circumstances of feminine duress which may leave him vulnerable and endanger the emotional and physical safety of woman. In his sense of duty to somehow comply or fulfil the outlying unsaid sense of duty to follow up in some wretched sense of false duty, man may waiver. I must admit that if tables were to be turned and a given delectable male might jumpstart such a phrase such as, ‘Do you know how I feel about you?’ with the intention of initiating a ‘relationship thing,’ then regardless of my feeling impartial or otherwise, I might feel chuffed in retrospect which might collate in a kind of compliant satiation of the impulsive variety if I am left to my own devices.

Indeed, I am in gratitude for my social support base who love me unconditionally and sufficiently to protect me from my wily emotional self. Otherwise, I might just do that thing on the basis of the strength of my ego and not in accordance with my natural responses.

And then, where might I find myself?

Perhaps in something I may not be able to get out of.

But there is something else. My eyes might not fill with the presence of such an available man, even if he declares his feeling for me- before 'the thing' is under way. The results of the empty receptivity of such rhetoric might progress into subsequent window shopping for the 'right person' whilst keeping the man of feeling in tow.

Not recommended at all.

Erroneous indeed.

One at a time, I say, so as not to cause insult or injury.

Yes, true love is a matter of consideration and not of an erratic deed, and just because someone might think I am nice.

Then perhaps, the variety of such conversation at the outlying outset of a relationship may not be appropriate at all.

I rather defer such strains of conversation until the 'thing' – you know, 'the relationship thing' is well under way.

Don't you think?

It is true that man can find a myriad of reasons for choosing not to sustain such emotional male female commitments. When feelings of love and loyalty are absent from the heart, in fact, there can be nothing at all. Such feelings take time to build and effort to sustain in the belief that any given relationship between a man and a woman can earn interactants embarking on love, either heaven or hell.

It is said indeed that mercy descends between the heart of man and woman in love.

Isn't it man who holds spells in his heart for woman which lance of a cupid's arrow into the receptacle vessel of the heart of woman? I rather conceive that my heart has been captured in such a way, more than once. Yes, I have been floored, flummoxed, disquieted and rendered helpless in the eyes of male on occasion, which knowingly in deliberation pierce the fabric of my material being, metaphorically at least. In such mortal state of femininity as I am, I consider the states of the variance of death in repetitive physiological states of yielding as periodic explorations of the authenticity of love rear themselves. Subsequently, I might die, over and over again. I imagine it to be so.

The fear of being overcome.

Until dead, I expect.

And what are feelings of attraction made of?

For when spells of love are wound up in the release of a spring in a single squared look of love and under the duress of the feeling of his spirit and in accordance with that which male finds in you, woman may expect a question.

Any question. Questioning is a useful ploy suggestive of an indicative mark of interest.

And does man realize that he is further defined by the woman he chooses?

That the chosen woman is in a state of elevated delight, however close she may be to his heart.

That her name with his, may be written on the door of mercy – with those well-wishers who mean no harm.

And no, there shall be no disclosure of such aforementioned feeling at the outset of 'a thing' at all, unless man gives his wherewithal and in public.

Yes, the value of public declarations of love.

In fact, with love, the less said, the better.

Webmaster

Fergal Canton

Then there were only four of them left. The Barflies had been big in the Naughties They had covered everyone from Airship to Zeppelin. A contract was in the offing until Johnny Buzz chased the dragon right down into the grave behind Cobain. They drifted around a bit then, never getting the right singer, the right sound. They tried the hologram thing but it seemed too sick. Now Scarab, the drummer, was dead, and not in a nice way. Drumroll please , decapitation by sword can put a top hat on a career. That and a note from the Spider saying that the rest of the band were next.

So I caught the case and it definitely looked like one of their many drug addled fans. Some Mark Chapman-type collecting the kudos and making it into the Guinness book of records as the most promising Nihilist of the year. God knows where that would end up. We needed to close this down before another sensational execution. I told my Captain that we had to bring the barflies back for a memorial Gig for Scarab, draw the psycho out with a four for one offer.

“And what if it’s one of them, Vic? How’re we going to protect them if we’re outside looking in and the killer’s already in the band with poison, or a blade or acid?”

I didn't have an answer for that, then I thought,“ Hell, I wasn’t a bad singer, and by now I knew all their lyrics. “What if I replace Johnny Buzz and watch them up close? The captain looked as if his eyes would bug out of his head. That won't fly Webb . Good one captain, Seriously look at my record, I close cases and I think if this one is an inside job I’ll sniff it out. They will be all be like “now we’re safe” while I’m supposed to be watching for “along came a spider.”

So here I was with a badge and gun inside the leather jacket, singing at the top of my voice, thinking to myself,“ Webb, you sit on a throne of lies”. I planned to do them all after the gig with a bomb on the bus, a bus I would miss. And if any of those sick bastards who led to my son’s overdose escaped, well, I still had my sword.

Slim Jim

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

It was parole day for James Post, but he was terrified. Formerly known as “Slim Jim” for his small waist and ability to crawl into tight spaces during burglaries, the high starch and calorie diet of incarceration had driven him toward the latter end of the scale over the years. Now he could scarcely believe that his day of liberty had arrived after twenty years in the can. He’d ordered his favorite noodles from the cantina and had scheduled his monthly poker tournaments with the other inmates.

Now his life, the only life he’d known for two decades, was being suddenly upended by a pesky thing called “freedom”. As he marched out of the prison with a small box of belongings in his hands, he waved goodbye to the guards, many of whom he knew as though they were close neighbors.

A sort of odd sadness settled in his chest as though he’d been thrown out of his parent’s home. The bus that took he and his fellow parolees into town felt like an alien vessel, a Jonah-like fish that had swallowed him whole, kidnapping him in a direction he had neither desire nor courage for. Worse yet, the things he saw through the bus’s windows unnerved him more than his first time in the prison showers. The world as he knew it had changed!

The one thing he did want to look into was the whereabouts of his long-lost daughter, only two years old when he’d gone away. He’d lost contact with her over the years. That thought quickly dissipated and was replaced by a more realistic albeit sinister one.

“I’ll be back in my nice, warm cell before sunset. I’ll show these bastards they can’t evict me!”, His mind conjured.

The bus stopped and he didn’t bother bringing his little box with him. He jumped out and ran into a nearby building that housed a pre-k on it’s first floor. He walked in nervously as there was a teacher reading a nursery rhyme to a group of children.

“..Along came a spider and sat down beside her..”, the young woman was reading.

Jimmy looked around nervously and then placed his hand in his rather large sweat pants while pretending to be holding a gun.

“I don’t care about Miss Muffet, her damned tuffet, and whatever else, she can stuff it! This here’s a stick up! I need you to call the coppers and have me arrested!” He screamed at the teacher.

Then he took note of her name tag. “Miss Post”, it said, and he found that curious.

Without missing a beat, the teacher said “We have a special guest today, children. This is my Dad; he’s just come home from a long trip.”

“Good morning Mr. Post”, a chorus of little voices announced.

Not-so-slim-Jim waived, smiled, and then sat at the back of the room.

Wednesday

Tadgh O'Brien

Once upon a Wednesday morning:
Me and the dog were on our way;
I threw the ball he'd catch we'd play
for seemed like hours and he'd adore me.

Once upon a Wednesday meeting:
A document that I had made
My manager she heaped on praise
amendments and great parts deleting.

Once upon a Wednesday recess:
An ache inside me took its toll,
A macchiato made me whole
and I moved on to further conquests.

Once upon a Wednesday lunchtime:
I spliced a big baguette and plopped
on mayo meats and cheese and chopped
a little piece for doggy munchtime.

Once upon a Wednesday errand:
A woman skipped ahead of me,
In haste a crate she banged her knee
jettisoning many lemons.

Once upon a Wednesday evening:
I went upstairs to get a thing.
Whatever thing — I did not bring —
And there were no more Wednesday evenings.