

Inkslingers Blended Session

20th April 2024

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Never Trust Atoms, They Make Up Everything ”

And the Visual



Walking Tour Of Manhattan

New York, New York

Bernadette O'Reilly

I sometimes think I would love to live and write in New York. Yet everything seems so fast there. Pavements, the tube, seem constantly crowded.

A friend of mine visited her son in his apartment there. Her son did not feel comfortable letting her out on her own while he worked. He would warn her not to go out till he got back.

My friend ignored him, she went walking and took trains, not a bit frightened of getting lost. She also spent time writing.

I want to be like my friend, brave, independant and adventurous. I read stories set in Manhatten, I live the life of the characters in my imagination. I am riveted by their work life balance. Their conversations. I want to eat and drink in Manhatten restaurants. Write in the cafes. Walk those streets as night falls.

Maybe one day I will.

Walking Tour Of Manhattan

Angelina Kelly

Recently, on a walking tour of Manhattan, I came across a stone statue of two well-dressed gentlemen, in period costume, leaning on a plinth with a dollar sign on the front. The headline on a poster behind them read "The outlaws who built Manhattan." Both had their hands outstretched to the side and a depiction of a besuited male hand, reaching out of an open window, placing dollar bills in one of the hands and a pretty female hand reaching out from a similar window on the other side, suggested bribery for business.

I don't know Manhattan, I only visited it once briefly, but stories abound at how wealth is ill-gotten in the city. Some paying for security and protection and others for exemptions and leniency. Deals are struck and business is transacted and the wheel turns driven by profit and gain.

Business, at the best of times, is shady but most cover it up with an air, or at least an illusion, of respectability. The more arrogant ones blatantly display their obvious wealth with an air of grandeur and superiority.

I'm not a businessman – I don't have the acumen for shady, or even legitimate deals - so I think it best that I stay out of the limelight and let the outlaws get on with their business.

Touring Manhattan

Ciaran O'Melia

Getting to know Manhattan is a problem in itself. I wandered downtown and went into a bar. I had a pint of Stout, and it was great. I recall Guinness sending a bunch of pull tasters. Typically, they were to show the barman or ladies how to pull a pint.

In my wanderings, I found a pub called Ulysses, thinking, why not? I went into it and ordered a pint. It was a quiet time for the pub, and the manager/owner enjoyed a chit/chat. But he marked my cards for me, and they had no connections with Joyce. No, it was a wanderer over in Greece.

Now, I must back up here. I am from Dublin, and my sister bought tickets for a recital of Joyce's songs on Usher's Island. This is where Joyce got the idea of "The Dead", in my opinion, the best short story, ever. It appeared Joyce was at a Christmas recital given around the turn of the century by his aunts.

We went to the recital, and the overflow was sitting in the front room, with the doors drawn back. There was a heated exchange between the classical guitar and piano player, and with that, the guitar player said something like "fuck that" an unclassical remark and walked off. Anyway, the recital got going; it was very nice, and we were served warmed mull wine halfway through, which was great for the head, that I can say with authority. The only thing was the MC/singer kept saying, "There are more coming and such fine singers." But he kept singing, the day was great.

Eventually, and much to the MC's joy, his brother arrived and gave us a rendering of Sally Gardens as in keeping of the night that was in it. Later, after the singing was over, it transpired that the MC was in the same class at Synge Street School.

Back to Manhattan, and about four years later since the recital in Dublin, in my conversation with the owner of Ulysses, at this stage, we warmed to the conversation; you see, he was Irish. I told him of the recital in Dublin, and he paused as I did when he said, "My father was the singer and a great storyteller."

We had another pint, and I told him about his father's effort to keep the singing alive and the joy it gave me. Then he said, "My father died about two years ago."

"Oh," was all I could say.

The Atoms of Memory

Greg Fields

In darkness the atoms of thought, the pulsations of memory, flash like bolts of lightning, and cannot be denied. The woman rose from her bed, recognizing that sleep would not come, that she would not be able to surmount the tangled web of memory and draw some measure of peace, some measure of rest. The microscopic atoms of regret pelted her mind, and, in their embedding, brought her to the kitchen, where she drew forth a bottle of pills. She took one, and washed it down with the cheap whiskey she had bought at the corner store.

In what passed for her living room, she put on some music, and took a seat near the far window, the one at sidewalk level, where she could look out directly and fully at the garbage people had left behind. The throwaways, the detritus, the empty, lost and forgotten.....

As the pill's haze began to take hold of her, Janelle Roberson recalled a day years ago. They were in the park, a Saturday or a Sunday, one of those rare days when she had no obligations and carried enough energy to be a mother. Dashawn was seven. A boy of seven, young enough to be wondrous of the world around him, but already showing signs of the despair that bled through these streets like dirty rainwater.

She recalled sitting on the bench there and watching him run with no direction and no purpose, other than to be in motion as fast as he might. "Mama, watch me." He ran the length of the park, then back again, then threw himself into the small playground there where he climbed on the bars and swung on the swings and slid down the slides, free at last to be a boy of seven. Janelle sat there and watched it, early summer sunshine warming her face and her arms. So free it was, and so easy.

Before they left the park they bought ice cream cones, and Dashawn laughed his way through the licking and the splattering and the dripping, his chin lined with streams of strawberry and his shirt smattered with bits of the melt. He didn't care. This was summer, and he had ice cream, and the sun was shining, and he was seven years old. Janelle saw it all, and for the first time in memory, she felt pride in being a

mother. Gone for the moment were the struggles of putting food on the table, of sustaining a place to live and doing all that while still trying to be find the pleasures of being a youngish woman with all those needs and wants.

She could pull this off, she thought. All by herself. Chucky had left before Dashawn's crib got warm, and it was just as well. The man didn't have an ounce of sense, or a notion of responsibility. Off he went to God knows where – to his drugs and his women and his sick friends. She could handle all of it alone, and Dashawn would be all the better for it.

Now, years later, Janelle Roberson recalled that afternoon. She recalled, too, the phone call of a few weeks ago, the one from the police asking if she could come down to look at a body. She did so, saw what no mother should ever see, and her world emptied.

After some time she was able to reflect a bit, to recognize that the seven-year-old boy in the summer park was ephemeral, and that her son was someone else again. Dashawn became who he was meant to be.

'Just a matter of when,' she told herself. 'Never was a question of if.'

A discarded newspaper blew from the sidewalk against her window, and a whiff of wind sent some dust into the glass. Somewhere down the street a cat was yowling in heat. There would be no sleep tonight. No loss in that. Just another night, its noises and garbage indistinguishable from her own.

She rose then and went back to the kitchen for another pill. Better to blot it all out, to split the atoms, then watch them detonate into massive sky-rocking clouds of misery, and regret, and loss, and the inevitable agony that haunts the tattered soul.

A Tour of Manhattan

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

A tour of Manhattan? The walking tour?

Are we talking Wall Street or a section poorer?

See, the rich" live above in a nest of expense wielding many green dollars but too little sense.

The downtrodden, homeless, and poor live below. Feasting on trash that the middle-class throw. Row after row, dirty sidewalks flow. A landscape of hell where grass doesn't grow.

And don't bring your young ones, kids, or a wife, that guy with his hand out? He's hiding a knife.

Browns, blacks, yellows, and whites, fighting for rights. Girls on "the menu" smoke crack through the nights.

There's also World Trade where the memory fades. Proud twins once stood till they chose to invade.

Perhaps ride the subway if you're feeling real brave. Lots of fellows with guns pave a path to your grave.

Predators roaming, real danger is loomin'. One or two lads are simply sub-human.

Don't stand by the platform beware evil forces, hobos nutty as fruitcakes, rats bigger then horses.

Or stroll through The Village for the show of your life, where a plant is a friend, and a dog is a wife.

Life for a penny, a soul for a quarter, please send more tourists like lambs to the slaughter.

And right in the middle you'll find Central Park, a small spot of green in a jungle too dark.

Pretty Please....let me know when you're taking the tour.

Brokerage

Bridin Mary Harnett

And while in debt, the soul is attached to whatever is owed until freed of it.

Imagine your soul attached to a given sum of monies. An epistemic arrangement difficult to get shot of - in essence at least.

So then what do you do to recover yourself?

Mind, I do not have any truck as the French might say with the idea of patent brokerage given the legalities of variant matchmaking systems with regard to the perpetuation of houses of lineage, the breeding of heirs and so on...

To such brokers, I say, long may they broker!

Specialists. Gifted at it as they are.

However, there are such cowboys afoot who defy the legalities of such brokerage systems and often in mercenary efforts to make a bob or two, and usually off the back of a poor unfortunate woman, or man, and for a myriad of reasons.

Of political imbuelement and the like...

As I write, I review the performance I was privy to...A tacky performance of the song Back to Black indeed. Not enough soul, I should think...Of the 'try harder' group, I should think...It is never advisable to imitate another person, a matter of envy really. Did the performer think that could she sing her victory over the voice of a loved one rendered dead given code switch appearances? I should think not. Indeed Saddam Hussein is said to have had several body doubles or duped performances. And yet our duped singer cum performer is said to have more than one – living at least.

Sinister that really.

Excuse my distraction.

Yes, brokerage is the thematic notion I render significant here.

‘She wasn’t sufficiently beautiful,’ He had said. ‘What could I do, I couldn’t place her?’

Note that he had given the order to cut her tresses of hair after a little maiming of the nose, skin removal solutions and the like, so that he wouldn’t have to lie about her lapse in beauty. Except that there was a problem...she was still very pretty, but not more than his chosen woman whom he had paid millions in order that a sundry would stare open-mouthed at her beauty.

And that is what they do. Open-mouthed as they are to say I do.

She is indeed beautiful and he feels desire for her. May she take his eyes upon her to lessen his envy of what others have that he has not got.

Yes, indeed, we are sick of kowtowing and pussy-footing in avoidance of his envy and hatred. Perhaps we are blindly loyal to him since we feel great love as we bring to bear for him. However, our responses must be ever so expectantly kind and polite and with kind regard to his and hers. Indeed, we are a fated kind of auxiliary support group indeed.

As long as no harm is inflicted from her side whether or not he orders it on us.

After all, I do value my cupid’s bow. Don’t you have one? And please, no more frame widening or inoculated weight gain.

What is wrong with you? Don’t you have what you want in your arms?

Yes, every woman on the planet is designed with attractive features and I am no different to any other woman in that. Not that I deliberately forge my sense of femininity, however I do exude it in a discrete kind of way, but not to everyone I see.

I can say that the aforesaid male does not see me, the reason for his remark. In fact, I do not blame him for this. What is one man’s meat is another man’s poison, as they say. And in a toxic way, the aforesaid woman, deemed not sufficiently beautiful by him, causes him to be vindictive as seen through the eyes of his other woman – the nature of the polygamous relationship indeed.

He has tried a defamatory slander or two, but society is not going to let him away with that at all.

Mind you, our woman's hair is replenishing somewhat and she is not in deficit of love. However, he endeavours to put her down; she manages to rebound as a quite beautiful category.

She is in good hands indeed. She is much loved and much favoured, and theoretically speaking, for all his millions, she would not swap these feelings she has earned from people for the world, or anyone in it.

A singular cavity of love expects a whoosh of expectancy in pleas of helplessness. Ay yes, it's love indeed.

Periodically and in a puerile way, she is given to 'God pleas'.

'God, make me the most beloved woman and never let me fall from your proverbial hands (given that God does not have hands). God, don't leave me, not even for the blinking of an eye.'

She repeats this prayer fervently and daily, and she feels its effect.

'God, give me better than I have lost,' she says.

She experiences delighted elation when her prayers are answered, in glee as she is, in the knowledge that she will never be alone or tired again.

I return to the beginning of our account and the poor unfortunate mercenary cowboy.

'And if that doesn't work, there is always another way,' he might think.

And further to that, he might think as follows...'Yes, indeed, to control the feeling of woman is to damage it so that it no longer is, whatever it might be, however it might develop in its beauty.'

For some men, feelings are not expedient, a waste of time and effort - possibly the reason that great women of feeling are travested in moments of pure needledom.

Consider heroine victims in efforts to numb any sense of moral feeling under the duress of erroneous brokerage.

Reflect on the following life story as related to me.

I consider that heroine is administered initially by a second party with an agenda to a first party victim, as no one in their right mind would

inflict such incisive, invasive damage on themselves given the normal social contexts we traverse in our daily life trajectories.

“Left arm first, mind.” The mercenary might say.

“Set the line up,’ the mercenary might say. ‘Don’t tell her, ‘The mercenary might say.

‘As good as gold I am,’ the mercenary might say in receipt of subsequent dividends to inflict such damage.

The left side is closer to the heart for optimum damage. Perhaps the unfortunate victim may not be aware of the regulated overt sinister erroneous damage to her body as the veins of the arms are flicked upon in efforts to pronounce the line for hook-up, the end of which is to quieten the very beating of the seeing heart until it beats no more. Until the woman in hand is silenced into death at repetitive exposure to such a substance as heroine and in deliberation, until the beauty and vulnerability of her face is without a single defence in this world. She may be none the wiser.

Perhaps not even privy to the mercy of God. We might not know until it is too late.

Woman might wince, groan and without an inkling she might enact such cavorted gestures in tow, captively subdued until woman in exposition makes no sense at all to anybody, not even to herself. They say that initial intravenous drug-use is resultant of a series of blows to the head, shot, so to speak with 21st century stunning devices, sometimes used to stun animals in avoidance of any pain an animal might experience before slaughter.

To the slaughter. Slaughtered.

Pumped up and chunked up according to the diversity of active sexual requirements. Meaty frames are more resilient in all apparency with less of a demand on narrow women – too fragile. They don’t last long and no woman is indispensable.

Women, daughters, mothers, and without distinction. Cowboy brokerage is a mercenary activity.

“Who do you think you are?” A predator might ask.

Remembering a young woman of promise, let's call her Maura, gifted, tall and lanky of the modelling variety, pocketed with academic awards and her ensued demise into the abyss of heroine addiction. I met her walking on a bridge in a state of psychotic confusion, wounded as she had been with lesions of fresh blood dripping from her head and in search of sanity, of positive life rhythms, in search of any deliverance from no return. She had earned a bachelor's degree with distinction some years back.

Her beautiful long arms were the cause of her end. At least, that's what I think. Arms of lineage and length.

Arms of kindness.

'Poor self-esteem,' they say. 'That's what happened to her and she had had everything going for her.'

That's what they might say.

"What happened to you?" I had wanted to ask.

She had no recollection at all. She had even forgotten herself. Not completely - but she knew that she had been knocked up. She had had an empty paper cup in her hand. Perhaps, her only possession in the world.

Paper.

I haven't seen her since.

In fact, having everything meant nothing. For her proposed life partner who had thought so little of her, she was merely collateral, pure and simple. A prop, a kind of trophy who had sufficient interpersonal connections to raise the given partner him - and to hell with her aesthetic sense. Yes, to hell, he might think. Such a man expends effort to avert such involvement with good old feeling. Feelings are not conducive to fiscal gain - he might think.

'Oh no, not at all,' They say.

"Feelings hurt after all."

The defamation of woman indeed.

Apparently, the possession of a master's degree rather positions woman in a state of respectable brokerage, given natural propensities for marriage.

In fact, as I write this, it is as if I can hear a kind of running commentary to the effect of: -

'Yes, indeed, she will marry well. She has a master's degree. Of mastery she is and so we can position her within her rights to entitlement.

Fermenting Freddy

Gerard Byrne

Fermenting Freddy, fell out the door of Murphy's traditional Irish bar with a loud clatter as his bottle of beer smashed off the ground beside him. The staff inside had taken offence to his complaint about how the pub was far from being like a real Irish pub. A real Irish pub didn't have American staff. A real Irish pub didn't expect you to tip every last person working there for the slightest bit of service. And a real Irish pub wouldn't serve drinks called Black and Tans and car bombs.

Fermenting Freddy, a nickname that went a long way back to his days working in a brewery, thought he was justified about pointing out these observations, as he tried to discreetly pocket the tip cup beside the till. But he was busted by Mickey the bouncer. A tall, broad man from the bronx who insisted he was Irish because his great grandfather on his mother's side was from Cork. The big brute had fired him out the door and that was where Freddy now found himself. Lying among the fag butts and traces of the previous night's sick. He kind of hoped it might be his own, but he was pretty sure that carrots hadn't been consumed in a very long time.

Fermenting Freddy rose to his feet and stretched out his painful back. It couldn't take much more of being thrown out of places. If only he was back in Ireland. No one would treat him so poorly back in his hometown of athlone. He was respected there. Well, he was liked there. Maybe not that either, but people definitely wouldn't throw him out on his arse like here in Manhattan. Bloody expensive place and all. You'd need a large credit Union loan to eat in some of the places that lined the streets.

Fermenting Freddy caught sight of himself in the reflection of the pub window. Something was missing. Something that he couldn't live without. He looked around the sidewalk for his cherished item. Unfortunately a cat had snatched his toupee and was away up a drainpipe with it. Freddy cried out in anguish. He needed that hair piece for a sure thing later on with one eyed Jess from the gift shop down the street. He figured that he could have stayed on her blindside, but that wouldn't work all night. No, he needed something else to cover his head.

As he walked past a souvenir shop, Freddy snatched a green baseball cap from the stand outside and kept walking. He placed it on his head and stopped at the junction of the blocks and looked around for another Irish pub to be thrown out of at a later time in the evening.

Suddenly Freddy was surrounded by a horde of Japanese tourists. They were all waving photocopied pages in their hands and saying stuff in broken English. It took Freddy a few moments for his drunken stupor to finally falter and let his brain actually do a bit of proper thinking for once. This lot thought he was a tour guide, because of the green baseball cap. He was about to put them all straight when a couple of them started to hand over fifty dollars each. He accepted the money gracefully, before fixing the cap on his head. He cleared his throat from ten hours of constant cigarette smoking and addressed the whole crowd, "welcome folks to your very own walking tour of Manhattan"

This was gonna be feckin awesome, he thought to himself as he walked the large group of sightseers into Hell's Kitchen. Unfortunately not as many came back out as went in. But that's a different story.

Remy Had a Little Lamb

(for Remy)

Tadg O'Brien

Remy had a little lamb,
His fleece was black as coal.
And everywhere that Remy went
the little sheep would go.

"My little lamb why don't you scam
I'm tryin' to take a pee!"
The little lamb his crest fell down
and thought - he no love me!

The little sheep so small and meek
he wandered in to town.
Where would he go what would he seek
so sad and feeling down?

He found a park and heard a bark
and startled with such fright!
A dog he saw with open jaw
who chased him — then remarked:

"Now don't you sweat I see you fret
I won't hurt you — don't bleat.
For I'm a collie not a threat,
My purpose is to greet!"

"Oh doggy friend I can't pretend
I have a broken heart.
My bestest pal I did offend —
He sent me to depart!"

"My little sheep your pain is deep
consumed you are with woe.
I see the tears with which you weep,

but something you must know:

"Remy is my friend as well,
I see him time to time.
And know him well, this I must tell:
He would not do this crime!"

The collie said let's bring you home
and took him by the paw.
And when along the path they roamed,
A worried boy they saw.

"Oh little sheep I could not sleep
my sadness overpowering!
I'm not a fool — I'm no Bo Peep,
but desperately scouring!"

In to his arms the sheep he leapt
and Remy held him tight.
Then slowly back to home they crept,
And well they slept that night.

Simon and Mary story continued

Mark L'estrange

It was starting to get busy in the office, the door opened again, and an unexpected visitor arrived he came in like a sly fox he burst in and said "I'm Bernard, Marys Boyfriend just saw a nice message on WhatsApp how much have we won" Mary pretended she never saw him before she turned saying in her extra posh voice "Who are You?" Bernard said "are you joking Love, you just sent me a message look, who are all these people." "This is my loving husband and my mother in Law." Simon said you must be joking "So you have been cheating on me too, this changes the situation completely I think they call it adultery is it Mam?" his Mam nodded in agreement.

Bernard said "you never even told me you were married Mary," Simon turned and said "why doesn't that surprise me" Mary said "none of you can prove any of this I'm going to get on to my solicitor I deserve half of the winnings" little did she know the lady in the lottery office had the whole thing recorded because in the lotto office they record everything in case the winner wants to go public. Simon thought he had a choice but was informed for the euro millions he has no choice it must go public.

They were about to all leave the office when the lady approached Simon and congratulated him and said "you seem like a really nice guy, and I didn't like the way you're so called wife was treating you, I have it all recorded, I started recording it the minute that guy Bernard came in the door I know you thought he seemed like a bit of a sly fox, but sorry I think Mary is a big sly fox or the female equivalent, anyway I will give you that recording to you because I don't think she deserves a penny."

Simon had the hots for the girl in the lottery office and he could tell she was interested in him too, but he was worried she was only interested in the money he was thinking once bitten twice shy.

He thanked Susan for her help that was the lady's name in the lotto office. Susan said "no problem at all it has being lovely to meet you maybe we can meet some time for a coffee?" "I would like that!" said Simon.

Mary saw the Simon talking to Susan and saw that she was very attractive, she approached Simon “so is this your girlfriend Simon?” “I’m not like you,” ” Simon and his Mam left the building with the check and went for a nice meal in one of the top restaurants in the city.

To be continued.

The Exile prologue

Declan Cosson

It was a sunny but chilly morning in Geneva where a major U.N. headquarters. It was a grand building in which all the flags of the world fluttered in the breeze while the sun gleamed on its white structure. Outside the U.N., life went on as normal as cars darted to and fro across the streets. People went to work as usual or went out on walks while children played in the playground. But while this merriment was taking place outside, a much more tense atmosphere was developing within the U.N. base itself as outside its checkpoints, fleets of S.U.V.s were arriving and dropping off a variety of statesmen, representatives and even major world leaders from all around the world who were now in the courtyard discussing what was about to happen at today's security. A S.U.V. arrived and it dropped off four well suited black men who all looked tense and anxious. As they passed by the fluttering flags, one of them asked the leading man,

"Monsieur Poitier, you think they'll finally listen to our case? After all, we've already come here four times."

"Yes, that is true, monsieur Uhuru, but this time, the secretary general has assured me that what is happening on our Northern border will be the dominant topic of today's security council."

"But what about the permanent members of the security council, will they listen?"

"I doubt that they will, but I feel we've got to try."

Although Jean Uhuru, having played the role of spokesman for the Democratic Republic of the Congo did not feel reassured by President Poitier's words, he pressed on, continuing towards the building. The tense atmosphere continued as the various member states took their seats in a circular room with a large screen behind the central chair of the secretary general. For now, there was silence until the secretary general arose and announced.

"Ladies and gentlemen, today's meeting covers a conflict that isn't as much a media sensation as those you've heard about on the news, yet

nevertheless has important ramifications for our world today. So as to inform you all on the situation in the Congo, I have invited President Assane Poitier to speak on behalf of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the urgent matter.”

As Assane rose to take his place, most of the council applauded him, but among the five permanent members, the reactions were more mixed. Although the French gave their applause, the British applauded more slowly but cautiously, both the Russians and Americans scowled while the Chinese looked on apathetically.

Summoning up his courage as one of his assistants prepared the projector, Assane announced to the crowd saying.

“Ladies and gentlemen, it has been an honour to speak on behalf of my nation which is trying to enter a new age of peace and prosperity. We hoped that the promotion of small businesses, economic autonomy and fair trade along with the end of the Katanga and Kivu conflict would make that possible. But I come to you today because we have a new wave of violence. To our Northern border, our outposts have been attacked, embassies have been bombed and pygmy communities have been displaced. My soldiers have tried to contain the attacks but have found themselves outgunned by equipment far more advanced than anything your average militant group can wield...”

The atmosphere became even more intense as the council saw the type of machines that Poitier was talking about. He continued. “As you can see, these machines are Russian models and not of the Cold War, which has led us to believe that these militants are being funded by Wagner merc...”

Suddenly, the Russian spokesman shouted. “President Poitier, you’re not really suggesting that Russia is behind the inciting of some savages to cause trouble on your border.”

Anger flared through the room as the Secretary General stated firmly.

“I did not call on the Russians to speak at this time!!!”

“This baboon is slandering my nation and presumes that we would be responsible for whatever savagery is going in his country!!”

“I said be quiet!! These meetings must be held in courteous manner without insults!”

Despite the flare up, Assane turned to the Russian and said, “Well good sir, how would you like to explain the constant reports and images of T-90s, BM-21 Grad artillery vehicles and even a Ka-52 gunship among the armaments of these so called “savages”? They couldn’t have manufactured machines like that on their own, could they?”

Seeing the images of the Russian looking vehicles on the projector, a lot of the other representatives muttered amongst themselves. The French even whispered amongst themselves, “This sounds awfully familiar...”

“It is, it’s what they did in Mali and the Central African Republic. It’s why we got kicked out after we mopped up the terrorists.”

Furious, the Russian spokesman bellowed. “This is fake news!! These photos are doctored, these accusations are not valid!!”

“For the last time sir, I did not call on the Russians to speak!”

But then the Chinese spokesman announced.

“China stands with Russia and rejects these false accusations.”

Despite all this disruption, Assane continued as he announced.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have come before you to do so that we may take action against these terrorists! We already have a military presence in the Congo and since 2024, it has been reinforced by 10,000 Irish, 3,000 Indians and 5,000 Swedes among other nations as peacekeepers in the Congo. We have the numbers and the equipment needed for this task, but now we need to make a move before they do.”

Although the word “Yes” got shouted a lot, and many representatives clearly agreed with Poitier, the US spokesman coldly said. “Thank you for your input, Mr. Poitier, the security council will take it from here!”, which led the Secretary general to announce.

“Those in favour of intervention in the Congo, vote yes. Those who are not vote no.”

At first, Assane was hopeful, for many of the gathered statesmen voted yes but their numbers were not a match for the five permanent

members. Although the French voted yes, the Chinese, Russians and even the Americans all voted no. The British ambassador, although hesitant, voted yes but with three of the five powers voting no, the veto was too strong.

Having gotten the results of the vote, the Secretary General seemed to tremble as he tentatively announced in an embarrassed tone.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the security council has spoken, due to the veto, there will be no intervention in the Northern Congo. We might reconsider after further inquiry but now, the case is closed.”

But then he slumped down, his face sick with regret, afraid to look at the Congolese, knowing he had let them down. Furious shouts and boos directed at the permanent members of the council. Comments such as “THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!!”, “Disgrace” and “This security council has achieved nothing!” were thrown around the room.

Among the Irish, a younger statesman, clearly baffled asked President Conolly.

“But we all voted yes, only three states voted no...what happened?”

“Our votes do not matter because Net man has done it again. One veto from a permanent member state and that is it, there will be no action to address the situation in the Congo. My God, why do I attend these meetings?”

Soon after the meeting was over, President Poitier and his men were walking down the corridor. Jean Uhuru said to him. “I tried to warn you, Monsieur, it doesn’t matter how much support you have among the nations of the world. If those imperialists on the council decide to vote no, nothing is done!”

“Well, I learnt that both the French and the British voted yes, hopefully the other three will recognise these attacks as threats to their own interests and finally agree to intervene. At the very least, our plight will now get public attention.”

“That is all well and good but at this moment, the U.N. is not going to act, but we do now?”

“For now, we return to Kinshasa. We must reorganize our army and move more of its assets north to deal with the problem ourselves!! Any U.N. forces already there wish to intervene, I welcome their support, but we must not rely on foreign powers to save us.”

Meanwhile back in Kinshasa and a day after the now infamous U.N. meeting, the usual motions of the modern city took place as people from many different nationalities and ethnicities did their business under the harsh burning heat of the sun. However, there was heightened tension amongst the city as soldiers and policemen alike patrolled the streets of Kinshasa fully armed. Foreigners, especially Europeans mopped their brows under the sheer heat of the day as they left the N’djili international airport, walking past street merchants who wished to sell them exotic merchandise or boys that begged for their money. But most of the time, the foreigners passed them by and boarded taxis to their respective hotels. For now, things went on as usual, but if one looked closely, one might notice smartly suited men and women from the CIA surveying Congolese statesmen and foreign diplomats alike, recording data to their superiors.

At a small park in the city, things were slightly more calm than in the city centre and people were relaxing on the benches and observing the lake while the children were playing at the playground. At a bench facing the playground, a young smartly suited Irishman with blue eyes and auburn hair seemed to keep one eye on two of his children that were in the playground but most of his attention was focused on a copy of *The Chatham House Version* that he held in his hands. Leaning beside him was a young woman whose fair skin had been tanned by the sun while her wavy yellowish-brown hair fell past her shoulders. Resting on her lap was their youngest son. The boy seemed to wake up and when he did, a lizard scurried onto his mother’s lap. Seeing the lizard and being intrigued by it, the boy followed it and as it scurried off, clearly in panic. Hearing all this, the man turned over, closed his *The Chatham House Version* copy and shook the woman awake saying. “Claire, Claire!!”

“Nick, what...where’s Aed??”

Immediately, the woman, Claire turned to see her child about to fall off the bench.

Acting on instinct, she grabbed the boy and managed to rest the boy on her lap, saying, "Where did you think you're going, Aed?"

"Another lizard, Claire?"

"Yes, Nick, I guess, if there weren't any lizards, he'd be going after butterflies."

Putting his hand on her shoulder, Nick remarked. "Look on the bright side, it means that he's that's growing, three more years and he'll be able to walk."

"I guess so...oh Nick, my brother, Pdraig is coming over with his family. He's going to go north where a Safari is to take place but I was wondering if on the way back, they could stay with us for the night? Please, Nick?"

Nick seemed a bit surprised as he responded. "I don't see why you need your permission for that, if the O'Laoghaires want to stay at our place, they can when they w..."

Suddenly, the word "north" came into his mind and Nick asked in horror.

"What?? They're going to a Safari up north, near the border of the Central African Republic?? Claire, that's where all the raids and attacks have been taking place. Whole pygmy tribes have been displaced!!"

"Nick, would you please clam down. Surely the U.N. will do something about that, won't it? Doesn't it stand peace, justice and human rights? Last I checked, the Taoiseach sent 10,000 men as peace keepers to the Congo earlier this year, did he not? Surely that will make the north of the country safe, won't it?"

"Have you not been reading the news? Yesterday, the President, Assane Poitier personally spoke at Geneva about the matter but powerful nations in the security council vetoed any action. That means we could dump a nice big heli-carrier straight of the Avengers and we could still do nothing because of that veto."

Claire's blue eyes widened. "What? Why?"

"I don't know, Claire, I'm just a mere diplomat. From what I've known on meeting Poitier, I can't find much too hate in him. He cares for his nation as much as any good statesman with any self-worth should but both the Russians and the CIA loathe his guts. Call me conspiratorial, but I wouldn't be surprised if one of those two stirred up these events because they want him gone. Somebody wants to keep this continent dark."

For now, Claire clung onto Aed and clearly looked uncomfortable as she took in her husband's words. The young man was always tense, even when she first met him but now, Nick seemed more tense than ever. But still, she asked. "Nick?" When Nick turned around, she passed Aed to him, which left Nick a bit embarrassed as he asked. "Eh yes?"

"Just hold him for a while...ever since we came to the Congo, it's not often that we spend them together."

"Claire, please don't guilt me for the amount of time I spend time on the job. My money is what's keeping us and the kids afloat. It's also keeping a clear chain of communication between the DRC and Ireland."

When she heard that, Claire frowned sadly and such a frown was enough to make Nick regret what he just said. He said to her sternly. "Look Claire, I love you and believe me, I kill to have more free time but as an ambassador, I have a duty to Eire as well."

But before Claire or Nick could say anything else, a loud bang could be heard in the distance which shook everyone in the park and jolted them out of their comfort. The bang was followed by an explosion and a rumble. This terrified Nick and Claire while causing Aed to cry. When Claire asked nervously. "Nick? What was that?", Nick's eyes widened all the more because he could see the smoke was emerging from the direction of the Irish embassy. Passing a sobbing Aed back to Claire, he ordered. "Claire, get the children back home. I'm going to find out!"

Comforting Aed as best she could and putting him back in the pram, Claire announced to her other two children. "Fionna, Mac, come on, we need to get home."

As the two children rushed back over, Mac asked, "What's happened, Mammy? What was the bang?"

“I don’t know yet, but your Daddy going to find out.”

For now, the two children clung onto their mother, following her as they were clearly frightened when they heard the sounds of sirens wailing through the streets.

Meanwhile Nick’s heart raced rapidly as his taxi came to a halt outside the Irish embassy where he usually worked. As Nick got out of the taxi, he became as white as a ghost as he saw the fire fighters desperately trying to put out the fires that were raging in an embassy whose entrance had been smashed to smithereens. Policemen kept the curious crowds away from the perimeter built around the ruin while paramedics ran to and fro from their ambulances carrying bloodied and battered bodies on their stretchers. Some officers from the U.N. were present, observing the scene. Their white skin, green uniforms and blue berets made these officers stand out from most of the crowd. As he peered beyond the perimeter, Nick was clearly horrified by the scene before him and when he saw two paramedics carrying a battered and badly bloodied body past him, he rushed after them muttering, “Oh no.”

Despite the disfiguring that the explosion had done to the youth, Nick recognized him as O’Reilly, an Irish boy who was their latest recruit who had served as Nick’s clerical officer. A paramedic ordered Nick. “Non, monsieur, stand back...there’s nothing we can do for him!”

“But that was O’Reilly, what happened here and what am I going to tell his mother?”

“A man with robes came, the police tried to stop him. That boy was performing reception duties when the man suddenly blew up the reception.”

Standing beside the medic was a police captain who said sternly to Nick.

“Monsieur O’Driscoll, we believe that it was Boko Haram, an Islamist group from Nigeria that operates across Central and West Africa. They’ve been stepping up attacks for a long time. Monsieur, I suggest that you seek police protection.”

Nick was now completely speechless and before he could ask any questions, his phone buzzed in his pocket. Hearing that, Nick said to the captain,

“Excuse moi, capitaine.”

As he headed off, pressing his phone to his ear asking. “Hello?”

“Nick, what happened? Are you alright? The kids keep asking what is going on?”

“I’m alright but I don’t how to sugar coat this for you or the kids...”

“Nick, you don’t need to sugarcoat this for me, just tell me what happened?”

“Right, a suicide bomber blew up the embassy and killed O’Reilly. The police believe it was Boko Haram.”

“What? Them, here?? Oh, Nick please come back!!”

Nick, sensing the anxiousness in his wife’s voice said to her,

“Don’t worry, I’m on my way home honey.”

Nick put the phone back in his pocket and slipped back into a taxi. As he did so, he uttered to himself. “Oh Padraig, you chose the wrong time and the wrong place for a Safari.”

Springtime

Deirdre Powell.

As I walk through a leafy green Dublin suburb,
The cherry blossoms have sprung to life
With their pink petals shivering in the breeze,
And I caress an unsuspecting bloom,
Its petals turn to confetti at my touch,
And maybe a trust is about to be forged.

A strange feeling of protection
Envelops my soul,
And a sense of peace and place
Hovers around me,
A feeling that I cannot make up
Or invent in this Dublin suburb.

A zephyr tickles through the flowers,
The aroma of a sweet fragrance
Almost itches the back of my throat,
And there is the call of a finch's song
Permeating the air,
Melodically, mellifluously, munificently.

True, it's not Manhattan, Hong Kong or Canberra,
And though the dream of far-away hills can be ever present,
Walking in this Dublin suburb,
And watchfully waiting for the arrival of summer,
Suggests a transcendent presence,
An unknown beauty to be born.