

Inkslingers Blended Session

18th May 2024

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Why do French people eat snails??

They don't like fast food”

And the Visual



Church Hill Donegal December 4th

Church hill donegal December fourth 2023

Tendrils linger
Memory slivers
Of the great adventure.
Young and daft
Hitching to Donegal
From Dublin
In December.
Two students.
A few pounds left
From the grant,
And a fruit cake
Made by her granny.
I recall laughing.
A lift in a fish lorry.
Then stranded.
A flurry of snow.
A sheep shelter.
Worrying,
Remembering,
Sofas, fires ,TV.
Freezing.
Clouds clearing,
A mountain soaring
White capped,
Revealing
The point
If our adventure.

Donegal

Ciaran O'Melia

A burrrrr in the month when the photo was taken. I recall not a memory of rain in Donegal.

I used to go to Donegal, Gortahork, and Falcarragh (There is a name for you, Norse) when I was working—yes, I was working. Then, in the Sixties, I would leave my understanding wife and children and head up to Aughnacloy, Co Tyrone, skip across to Letterkenny, slip around Errigal, and return to Derrybeg.

I stayed at the Radhaigh an Errigal Hotel, a strange place. The sister ran the hotel, and the brother ran the bar. You got a rare feed in the place, and soon, you entered the bar and got another feed of stout. The clientele includes a lot of priests and nuns.

But as I write this, it never rained. It was lovely, and I got paid for the visit. It was there that I saw my first Cuck Co. I was working in wastewater treatment and the control room at the plant when I heard the Cuck Co. I looked outside for it, and the bird was seen on an ESB pole feeding the plant not 2 yards away. It stayed there, Cuck Cooing away.

I have no photographs as the mobile phone was not invented.

On another note of Donegal, I was sent to commission a booster pump in Falcarragh. Now, I was not long in the job and was given explicit instructions on how and where the job was. Of course, I lost these. Going by way of Errigal, I found a telephone on its own and decided to make a call. It went something like this.

“Pat, is that you.”

“Speak to me, ye have that fixed.” He said.

“That is what I'm talking about; what side is it on?”

“What side of the street? How the f&\$k do I know?”

“No what side of the county is it on?”

The laughter could be heard even now.

Donegal Town, hospitality. There was a man in the town at the time, a lovely man and wife. He was a Forrester in charge of the town's water treatment plant. I would visit him when in town. Sure enough, he invariable would invite me to the house. He would say to the wife.

“Throw some rashers, eggs, and sausages, and give this young fella his share.”

“Will you have some fried bread?”

“God, I would love some.”

Soon enough, we would sit at the kitchen table, drinking tea and Wolfen into the feed.

By the size of the table long, he and she were busy with the children or visitors.

While visiting a good friend and his mother in Letterkenny, Co Donegal. He asked his mother.

“What time is dinner at?”

She gave him the time, and as it was still bright and I liked walking, he asked me if I would like to walk down to the sea.

So, we headed for a walk to Ramelton, Co Donegal, which needed a car to get there.

When we got there, it started to drizzle, not rain. We braved the elements and walked out along the sea. We heard the crashing waves rather than seeing them, and we were wet as we walked.

“Never mind now,” said my friend. “I know a pub where the publican has a blazing fire.”

Assured by this, we kept walking until I found my vest wet through, on top of the pullover and a coat.

We walked the streets of Ramelton and came to the pub's door—it was a half-door lengthway. We burst in, and instead of seeing a blazing fire, we saw the owner on his knees, blowing into the fire, trying to light it.

“Any chance of hot whiskey?”

Cuck Coo, I saw a glimpse of one in West Cork as I climbed the trail by the Castle O'Donovan. The nearest village is Drimoleague. It is quiet and hilly, and not much farming is happening here. I heard him before I saw him, and in a flash, he was gone.

It is slightly bigger than a Thrush.



Eating a snail

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Fried, sauteed, in buckets, in pails. Why do the French eat those damned, slimy snails?

A deep, dark, mystery, but to be sure, those who've actually hungered, embrace sought such a cure.

In some French foreign war without 'taters' to peel?

Perhaps a desperate moment when they stormed the Bastille.

Was it under Napoleon in those long violent years? When a growling belly is all a man hears.

As for me? I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy. Where guns, food, and fools are pretty much handy.

Lady Liberty's house with apple pies, red, white, and blue lies, and greasy French Fries.

Would we eat escargot, kept on ice at the store?

Shit, we'd eat your liver, your brains, your eyes, and much more.

I'm not trying to scare you or lose my appeal.

But eating a snail? Really.....no big, bloody deal...

Embargoes

Brid Mary Harnett

Tears in their eyes.

All of them.

Men, grown men.

Palestinians in the Rafah governate were ordered to evacuate the daubed, 'Humanitarian Zone.' Flyers dropped from the sky to indicate a rite of passage of certain destruction for displaced people and I say that sardonically without meaning to as I refer to people who had the courage to stand, these ordinary civilians who refuse to take up arms with Hamas, some of them highly educated, hopes dashed and many of them at the heart of the great work of the alignment of commonality which was well underway before the shock of the latest Israeli –Gaza war.

These Palestinians are people of dignity, who cannot be tarred with the brush of terrorism or the ensuing lead to conflict. In fact, more than 150,000 displaced Palestinians are set to wander again evading war as they might, and as they move, the ground is desecrated and targeted by drones. Shot in the back so to speak, as they walk, somewhat reminiscent of the displacement of the tribe of Al Hussein a thousand years ago. Many of these targeted Palestinians are of the same tribe but there is no walk of salvation, nor does any location in this land harbor them willingly in a place of shelter or safety – and history repeats itself.

"Hey Amnah, "I used to say. "How was your holiday? Did you have to crawl through the tunnels to get home to Gaza?"

"No, she would say, 'We flew into Jordan and across the border,'" She would say." We have Jordanian passports."

Someone sent me pictures of the recent geomagnetic storm and the electrified chromatic expanse of green, pink and purple blends which somehow reminded me of one of the Jewish wives of the Prophet Mohamed, upon him be peace, that is Maimuna, the eleventh and final wife of the Prophet Mohamed, peace be upon him. Maimuna was a Himyarite, of Jewish origin, possibly descendent of the Queen of Sheba,

the beloved wife of the Prophet Solomon, upon him be peace, although I surmise as such and without the ability of certitude of full knowledge after the fact.

Madina, of Arabia, eons ago before the advent of the Prophet Mohamed, peace and blessings be upon him, was inhabited by the Jewish of Himyarite descent, whom by the account of Ibn Ishaq, an 8th Century Islamic theologian, narrated that rabbis during that period prior to the demise of Himyar, were faced with the onslaught of conflict against its people. They were recounted in vision not to destroy the land given a prophecy precluding that a Prophet of the Quraish would walk the land in later centuries.

The rabbis were true to the vision and the land was sustained.

The tenth wife, Safiyah bint Huyah, of Prophet Mohamed was Jewish in origin. It may have been that the Prophet wished that the tenth and eleventh wives would befriend each other, being of similar origin.

Only God knows.

The lit colors in the sky indicative of the most powerful spiritual karma on earth at this time disclose the power still resident in such secrets of knowledge.

And as I consider it, the Star of David, pierces the air, but the light of Jesus, peace be upon him, shines brighter than the rays of the sun or the stars. In remembrance of Prophet Abraham, peace and blessings be upon him, when in doubt as he asked the sun whether it was God or not.

Ah yes, the prostration of the sun to Prophet Joseph, peace and blessings be upon him.

Jacob, peace and blessings be upon him, advised his son not to tell his brothers about his vision in the face of their jealousy of his favour.

Prophet Mohamed, upon him be peace, in his humane sense was wrapped in a cloak, resultant of his fear of that which had been revealed at the time.

The colours of the geomagnetic storm...

Usually, polarized individuals have ways of hitting out, after experiences of isolation and marginalization. Consider school shootings in the US. Consider well managed schools with well managed support systems and school children who fall through the system, unable as they are to overcome bullying, harassment or negativity, which causes them to be marginalized in the first place.

Then it might seem that shoot to kill becomes momentous in the absence of any other recourse to justice for such unfortunate individuals without voice.

The 7th of October was the instigation of war of inexcusable acts of violence against civilians because someone had said something to trigger this response in a zone adjacent to Gaza. As a Muslim woman, I consider this reflective of the pharaonic acts of violence against the children of the Tribe of Israel prior to the exodus led by the Prophet Moses, peace and blessings be upon him, in yet another attempt to shut down the lines of prophetic lineages which might exist on either side, albeit Muslim or Jewish, in opposition to the idea of descent or otherwise of any future Messiah or saving grace.

Such is the current state of disbelief.

Perhaps I delude myself into thinking that these actions were not of Hamas, conscious as Muslims are that in accordance with Islamic protocols of war that women and children are not to be harmed at all.

Given that 18,000 Palestinian women and children have been killed and the brutal rape of Jewish women and children are similarly documented, it is sufficient to say that women and children did not choose this war. There are accounts also of Palestinian women separated from their husbands and shot to prevent any further multiple births of Palestinians, neither of Arab, nor of Jewish descent.

Children walk the rubble, unhande, unaccompanied, perhaps orphaned. And what of the account of the Israeli soldier who fell in love with a Palestinian woman because of her aromatic cooking. He attempted to carry her to safety. She was shot dead in the back.

Love did not overcome evil at all.

“It was a trick,” I hear you say. “He meant to have her killed.”

In fact, he did not.

And what of the account of the young Palestinian beauty whose mother was of Jewish origin, murdered to the effect of a sense of inert prejudiced certitude and hit from both sides because she dared to exist, that she dared to be born at all.

“Traitor,” I heard a woman say - that I dare to speak of any sense of a concocted origin.

And is it worth mentioning that regardless of the origin of such a woman that she was known in the land as a devout Muslim woman, or was it perhaps that she contrived to feign her practice to confuse people...

Isn't that what you think?

Never think good of people I hear you say.

The girl died screaming.

“Mama,” she screamed until her screech of pain pierced the very canopy of the sky as her voice rose to heaven.

The girl was sixteen years old. She had been very clever and very beautiful. She had been prayerful and her behavior had been exemplary.

She had memorized some Koran.

Then how do you judge this mother and daughter? Do they have the right to exist, or in the throes of the displacement of anger when the brunt of anger in this kind of annihilation is not aimed at the locus of conflict but at the marginal vulnerable weak individuals who have no fight with anyone.

Still someone makes a decision that they have to die. Then who are these people?

Careless wit indeed. Words.

Moans of muffled silence, babes in arms, little streaked smoke marked faces of children caught in the cross-fire of conflict who don't know any better, clad and embalmed in swaddled cloth, laid straight and not wrapped too tightly to leave space for the given soul to reside and to

breathe as its wont when summoned to earth for reasons that living humans cannot fully comprehend.

And what it is for a mother to lose a child as the soul of the mother flies to follow the soul of her child and is refused entry there because it is not her time to die. She lives after her daughter to catch the clay of a makeshift grave she marks with a scarf she might put there to signify to heaven that a human being lived and struggled for the sake of God. It might fly straight, tied as it is on a hoisted pole, a mark of life and a mark of death.

In the midst of all of this, the Jewish Orthodox refuse to fight in this conflict and remain unmoved in defiance of their own government.

Of those mentioned, all fear God, as they know that a day will come to call for account despite the Israeli government, despite the enemy, despite themselves...

The State of Minas Gerais of Brazil is 9,990 km from the locus of conflict. The State of Minas Gerais is probably impartial to the given the conflict and responsible for 50% of the nation's arabica coffee production. The flow of coffee exportation is somehow problematic, although US exports account for \$53.3 million dollars.

The problem is the embargo on buying coffee at outlets which are deemed to be Israeli, deemed somehow to be contributing to the Israeli war effort, although this means nothing to poor Pedro who works on a plantation and who earns a pittance of 1000 of the local currency per month to hold body and soul together. Perhaps Pedro has no notion as the exact location of Israel, or Palestine for that matter. In fact, the Israeli conflict is far from his mind, his heart, his culture and his social network as he has internalized it. In fact, our hypothetical Pedro is concerned only with the business of reaping coffee beans, the condition of beans and whether or not they are ripe enough to be reaped. He may worry whether or not he will have a job tomorrow.

Some employees of Israeli store outlets are erroneously listed as dissenters and supporters of genocide. They serve behind the cashier counters of these outlets in shame and embarrassment, but not in defiance in the consideration that the genocide is not their fault and what should they do anyway...

They only work as they are paid to do so. Some of these employees have no choice but to work at these locations.

Do you ask them to leave their jobs?

Palestine and Israel by the name of any other rose do not smell so sweet, responsible as they are for at least some of the glitches present in the world economy.

For now, I shall choose to daub them as residents of the land of milk and honey.

By the way, did you know that the Prophet Jesus, peace be upon him, is not Catholic, Roman or otherwise? Nor is it plausible to ascribe any religious affiliation to him except as he might prescribe in his descent.

Oh, I mentioned God at an agnostic meeting the other day. Am I so morally deficient to have done this that the meeting was called to a halt in a bid to shame and blame to tell me that really, that neither my presence, nor my ideas are worthy or acceptable? It was suggested that it should be incumbent to use the pronoun "I" as I speak about belief. To be honest, I prefer to use the passive voice in the dregs of such an admittance of a belief in God that is neither conceptually atheistic, nor is it bound to the precepts of Catholicism.

Dia amháin an t-uilechumhtach. God alone is the all powerful.

The rest of us are underlings indeed.

Embargoes.

Ballast

Greg Fields

Rosie Carter leaned forward in her chair and inspected her emails. They were plentiful, as they had been since she had run her story. She had never before gotten such a response to anything she had written. A flood it was, and much of it filled with vitriol. She had dismissed the insults and objections of those who could barely put together a sentence. No hope for those, and, in a way, pleased that she had at least provided them an outlet for their hatreds and resentments.

Others, more reasoned, took her to task for manipulating a story to a preconceived agenda. DaShawn Roberson, by all accounts, deserved little in the way of pity. High on amphetamines, he had threatened a storekeeper with a knife, then suffered the consequences. The storekeeper expressed remorse, but no one, it was said, would have done anything other.

But Rosie's story had dwelt on DaShawn. She had humanized him. A poor boy, fatherless, with a mother always off to her next hustle. The streets of Southeast Washington were filled with boys like this, and Rosie thought that at least one of them needed a face and a name. She had done so in her article, grudgingly approved by her city editor. What followed was a firestorm of criticism from the Right, and an avalanche of self-righteous praise from the Left. It had not been her agenda, after all, that created the response.

Willie Meadows plopped into the chair at his desk across the way. Rosie heard him take his bagel from the Starbucks bag, and she smelled it as he did so. 'A garlic bagel,' she thought, and shook her head. 'Jesus, who can eat something like that for breakfast?'

"Mornin, Rosie," and she replied with a grunt. Willie leaned her way, with a sly smile. "Still brooding, I see," and he bit into his bagel. A fleck of toasted garlic spilled to the corner of his mouth, and he licked it away.

"Good morning, Willie," said at last in low tones, then back to her screen. "And it's not brooding. I'm just doing my job."

“Reading through the venom isn’t doing your job, girl. Doing your job is writing the stories that create that venom. But it seems you’ve already come to learn that.”

“Go away, Willie. Don’t you have a traffic report to write, or maybe something about this week’s weather?”

Willie chuckled. “Ah, Rosie. So tense these days. Listen, this is all part of it. There’ll always be someone who hates what you write, and hates you for the writing of it. We’re the press, Rosie. We’re here to be hated.”

“That’s not why I got into this, Willie.”

“Well, it certainly wasn’t to be loved. And God help you if you thought you were going to change the world through your incisive, dynamic journalism. You’ve got to let go a bit, Rosie, or it’ll eat you alive.”

Rosie turned to face Willie. “How do I do that? How do I let go of what I saw? Of what I wrote?”

Willie smiled. “Go get drunk, and stay that way for a day or two. Have a night of cheap, tawdry sex, then wake up with a whole new set of regrets. I might be able to help with that.

In spite of herself, Rosie smiled back. “Is that an indecent suggestion, Willie? Do I have to report you to HR?”

“Ah, hell, no. I’m not saying it has to be me. Anyone will do. You want an experience, not a lover. You want to lose the burden of being Rosie Carter for a time. Once you do, it’ll be that much easier to pick it back up. Trust me. I’m sharing the wisdom of my years, young Rosie. Otherwise,” and here Willie lowered his tone, serious, if only for a bit, “otherwise, you’ll burn yourself out. And that will do no one any good. Not you. And not the people who read you.”

“There are people who read me?”

“Why the hell do you think you’re getting all these emails? Come on, let’s go downstairs for some real breakfast. I’ll even treat.”

Rosie smiled and stood up.

“And let me continue to brighten your mood with some classic Willie Meadows humor. Do you know why French people eat snails?” And Rosie cocked her head. “Because they don’t like fast food.”

Despite herself, Rosie laughed, perhaps for the first time in a week. “Oh, God, Willie, that’s terrible.”

“I’ve got a million of ‘em. Come on,” and with that the two walked out of the newsroom.

As they did so, Rosie locked her hand on Willie’s arm. Ballast, he was. Just a bit of ballast when the sea got especially choppy.

Crossed Lines

Gerard Byrne

Geraldine stabbed at her bowl of warm pasta and tried to decide what she had liked about the look of it when she seen another diner eating it on her arrival in the posh restaurant. Parts of it was quite tough, as if they hadn't been properly boiled. She was thinking about complaining to the chef, but the snotty git had looked down his nose enough at her already. Outside the window was a spectacular view of church hill. Geraldine reckoned that's what she was paying for, because it definitely wasn't the food.

The starter has been onion soup. Now Geraldine didn't mind onions. But she much preferred them on a burger or crispy next to a big ass lump of dead cow with fries on the side. Not in a feckin bowl of watery soup. It was more like drinking hot flavoured water. There wasn't even any bread or rolls given out with it. This first date was turning into a disaster quickly. She'd worn her best short tight fitting dress for the event. The one that always got her noticed on a night out. But now it was drawing condescending looks from the other diners.

Geraldine's date Jeremy had not returned from the toilet yet. He'd seemed flustered by her outfit. Even more when she told him that she'd been working the streets all day. Come to think of it, she'd forgotten to mention that she operated one of those small pavement sweepers for the council. She was the only woman she knew doing such a job, but Geraldine was proud of herself for getting it and wouldn't let anyone belittle her for it.

Jeremy had also seemed disgusted when she said that her hands where still sticky from work. Whose wouldn't after scrapping used chewing gum off the top of public bins all day. If Geraldine had it her way, chewing gum would be banned altogether. The bastards could all suck lollipops instead. Many a time she'd be pulling a chair in under herself and she'd feel those gooey splodges hardening on the underneath of the furnishings. Or some gobshites would stick it under the edge of a table in a restaurant. Geraldine tempted faith and ran her finger under the rim of the table in front of her. Yep, there was at least three or four pieces of used gum stuck up there. Dirty bastards.

After another ten minutes and no sign of Jeremy, Geraldine called the waiter over to complain about the pasta. She explained to him about the hard lumps of pasta in it and that the sauce was a bit manky. She couldn't think of a better word to describe it, but manky seemed like a general well known term that most people living in Ireland would understand. Unfortunately he wasn't as accommodating as she would have hoped. He leaned in close to her ear. Geraldine was pretty damn sure that the dirty bastard was trying to look down the front of her dress. He then whispered something about snails.

Snails?, Geraldine replied, still unsure on where he was going with this. She looked back down at the plate in front of her and turned one of the hard pieces of pasta over with her fork. Now it made sense why she kept having flashbacks to her childhood when her and the gang used to race snails down the path in her mate Joseph's back garden.

The waiter nodded diligently. Geraldine wanted to scream at the snotty prick, but her mouth was filled with something more worrying as the starter, part of the main and the hotdog from earlier came back up to pay an unwanted visit. She covered the table in all manner of wet colours. By the time she finished it look like a genuine Jackson pollock.

The restaurant went silent except for the light piano music coming from the corner of the room. Geraldine wiped the last of the sick from her mouth with her napkin, before working her way down to the front of her dress. She was starting to regret wearing something so low cut because some of the onion soup seemed to have ran right down there and into her knickers. This was a total disaster.

She grabbed her bag with what little self respect she had left and made her excuses about having to leave. Trying all the time not to look at the other diners who where now all complaining about the state of Geraldine and the table around her. She went to leave, but the waiter grabbed her by the arm and requested payment. Geraldine looked at him blankly at first before protesting that her date would sort it all out when he came back from the bathroom.

Unfortunately he wasn't coming back. The waiter seemed delighted to point this out. Jeremy, the little bastard had bailed on her. Ran out of

the restaurant and hailed a taxi ten minutes previously. Geraldine begrudgingly handed over her credit card and paid for the horrible so called meal. She then stuck her fingers up defiantly at the rest of the snooty diners and stormed out onto the street. As she passed the large window of the restaurant, she could see all the eyes still on her from inside. So to win a little self respect back, Geraldine turned her back to them, bent over and hiked up her skirt for the whole restaurant to see, "and you can kiss that and all", she roared, before storming off down the street. She was going home to her cat mister tickles, a nice bottle of wine and her favourite Dunnes stores microwaveable lasagne. At least there would be no surprises in that, apart from a bit of horse meat.

Bats In the Belfry
Halloween Anthology 2021

Angelina Kelly

The old church lay in ruins; a relic of a time long since passed! Stories abounded about a choir that sang every Sunday and Holy Days, of people, dressed in finery, attending services in its hallowed space. Of tea, coffee and pastries served afterwards where the congregation came together and exchanged news. Ah! That was a time long ago, we don't do things like that anymore.

When the new church was consecrated and all services moved to it, the old church fell into disrepair and eventually, ruin. Slowly but surely the ivy overgrew the walls and the roof caved in after years of disuse. Trees now grow where the pews used to be, and all icons have been stripped from its alcoves. The only parts that remain are the four walls and the belfry. Where once a majestic bell hung, calling the congregation to service, now bats reside.

Victoria wandered around the ruin each night bringing with her fruit and bananas, and mice and frogs from her garden keeping them well sustained. She talked to them, calling them by name remembering each one by its distinguishing feature. In the balmy nights of summer, she brought a warm duvet and pillow with her and slept with them. She had found a niche - the old sacristy - and made it her own space. When she was there the bats would fly around her, and some felt comfortable enough to eat from her hands. She called them "my lovelies" and talked to them for hours. One night, when she was asleep, some teenagers came to the church to have a party - the "breezy bar" they called it - finding her alone and vulnerable, they tried to hurt her but the bats flew around them screeching and ran them out of the ruin, they never returned - it was thereafter referred to as the haunted church.

During the day she would wander the town looking for decayed fruit and she would talk to herself. Mumbling, incoherently, sidestepping when someone came near keeping her eyes averted to discourage conversation. At close of business the shops and markets left their unsold produce out for her.

She was once a woman of high breed, but her father squandered the family fortune, her mother and siblings met a premature death in a car crash, and she had no other living relatives. The kids called her “the witch” because she dressed in long flowing black garments and spent time in her little cottage garden sweeping the yard with a broom and talking to her plants and trees. She kept to herself not looking for help or offering it. Her neighbours regarded her as a crazy lady, who did no harm to anyone, and when asked about her, they described her as having “bats in her belfry.”

Winter Comes to Donegal

Elaine Reardon

A scatter of snow covers the bare cap of mountain.
Wind blows too mightily here for trees to stand.
Gusts shiver down the mountain to town,,
slices its way into small spaces at the bottom of doorways
and crooked windows. It howls between buildings.

At the harbour, a soft sound becomes louder, much
like the clattering of a hundred tiny stepdancers. Sleet
dives onto waves, boats, and car roofs, and windows.
There is only frozen fish in Donegal today.

Now is the time to find warmth by a fire, to find heat
for your fingers when they wrap around a mug.
Now is the time that Jameson's warms you on the inside,
and you sit, warm, and listen to the cold sleet, while
snow tries its mightiest to set the crown of winter .

The World Wide Webb (telescope)

Gerard Keogh

Chapter 3

Intelligence

ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) is the ground upon which the planning and decision-making for all military operations are built. Intelligence is the end-product of the surveillance and reconnaissance effort. In the case of our “near” neighbours 41 light-years from here, initial curiosity surrounding the signals broadcast into space by us led on to a concern that we were becoming a problem, and finally to outright alarm at the potential threat posed to their hegemonic status in this part of the Galaxy. In response to this perceived threat, they sent probes to act as their eyes and ears, and they forward-deployed carriers to put them within striking distance of Earth. (The U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps position Amphibious Ready Groups close to some of the world’s many trouble spots in a similar way; around 2,200 Marines from a Marine Expeditionary Unit are deployed on an amphibious assault ship in each ARG, ready to launch on a mission within six hours of receiving their orders.) It turned out that all those UFOs that were sighted around military facilities were not there for the fun of it; they were on reconnaissance missions, preparing the way for an invading army. They gauged the capabilities of the most powerful military on the face of the earth, and they determined that it could be defeated, while sustaining minimal losses on their side. Those flying Tic Tacs that were tracked and pursued by Navy F/A-18s off the coast of California were not just trying to annoy the pilots and the sailors on the surface ships; rather, they were gathering intelligence on aircraft performance, including avionics, weapons systems, and radar; and they were evaluating the effectiveness of the Navy’s Aegis Combat System installed on its guided-missile destroyers and cruisers.

There had been persistent reports of UFO activity around ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) silos located in the sparsely populated upper-middle part of the Great Plains region of the contiguous United States. Imagine if those facilities had been reconnoitred by Soviet/Russian or Chinese aircraft (recall the spy balloon that flew over

Montana – one of the three states that are home to the land-based ICBM force – before eventually being shot down by the Air Force). The incidents would not have been dismissed as the product of an overactive imagination, nor would the witnesses have been doubted or even punished for reporting them. Why would professionals risk their careers by making this stuff up? I saw something on my way to work a couple of decades ago. It flew over Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin; it was triangular in shape and it made no sound. It looked like a U.S. Air Force F-117 stealth fighter; but that aircraft is not silent and there is no plausible reason why one would be in Irish airspace anyway. I thought of asking another person on the street if they could see what I was seeing, but it was gone before I could get confirmation from a second pair of eyes. To this day, I have no rational explanation for what I saw that morning as I walked to work. It's unlikely that UFOs, or UAPs, or whatever you want to call these objects that many of us (yes – "us") have reported seeing are on reconnaissance missions for an alien invasion force; but it is at least possible that we are being observed by a large, space-based telescope, orbiting an exoplanet somewhere out there. Maybe it's all part of a larger ISR effort, or maybe the telescope is simply detecting organic molecules in our atmosphere and wondering how they got there. If there is another intelligent species watching us, they should not get too comfortable in the knowledge that a vast distance separates our world from theirs. It may take a few centuries for us to develop the technology, but eventually we'll send a great invading army through space, and we'll do it to them before...

Do French people eat snails?

Mark L'estrange

Mary said to the waiter "We are not everybody, Simon has money that makes a difference, anyway, can I see the menu." Simon wasn't happy with Mary and apologised and then said to Mary

"You can't talk to people like that they are just doing a job."

"I know I am only joking with him can no one take a joke."

"Ok well the waiter doesn't know that; can you say it to him."

"I will now, can we just order first?" They got the menu off the waiter Simon ordered a steak and chips; Mary took a while to make her mind up.

She eventually asked the waiter "Could I have prawns and Snails to start with and a burger and chips for my mains?"

"I am surprised at what you have ordered Mary, didn't think you would like snails."

"Yes, my best friend is French, and we always order them with wine."

She asked Simon to close his eyes and open his mouth and she put a snail in his mouth, he jumped up and ran to the bathroom to get rid of it. It wasn't a great first date, when he came back, he said.

"I don't know how the French eat them things." He did see the funny side of it after he got his nice steak.

Simon left the waiter a nice tip and said sorry to him for Mary's behaviour.

The waiter thanked him saying. "You seem like a nice bloke not sure about herself." Half joking.

To be continued

Dirty Old Town

Max McCoubrey

Martha hated everything about the town and especially Church Street Upper where she and her brother were born. The county was acclaimed in song and story but she knew the real tales. She couldn't wait to leave it all behind her and catch the train to Dublin.

Derek, her twin on the other hand loved it. He blossomed with every piece of news he found out. Alison in number twenty-nine fascinated him. She had married a man from an ice cream dynasty with the promise of him investing in her stage career. With his lies ringing in her ears she had gone to bed with him and with every feather stroke of her perfect body he had told her more clichés. Seven babies later she couldn't afford to go to the theatre, never mind appear there.

The resident of number forty was another example of aborted ambition and self-obsession. The kids in town teased him. 'Nice morning' they would say and he would answer 'Nice morning in chapter seven of my novel' and they would take bets on how many words they would have to say before he'd launch into his favourite topic. Their nickname for him was 'Boor the' because any topic was an intro to his unpublished novel and his chance to Bore De Ass of the listener.

And then there was 'Sweetie' in number twelve. Abandoned at the altar twenty years ago she wore her wedding ring, and her white dress in the afternoon sitting in the garden. She flirted outrageously with men, each of them as enthusiastic about a date with her as they were about being drafted.

Yes, Elaine hated this town but Derek loved it. He loved the diary he kept too, someday, when published, it would keep him