

Extracts of work by Cónal Creedon.
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PANA DONE WRONG.
by
Cónal Creedon.
[Extract from Passion Play]

Patrick Street was mad, it was pouring out of the heavens. A gale-force wind had the Christmas lights thrashing around above our heads. Carol singers, shopkeepers, hawkers, everybody looking for money. I got the job of relief postman, doing double shifts. Only three weeks seasonal work, but it was worth it, you need money for the Christmas.

Anyway there I was, two hundred quid in my arse pocket, Christmas Eve and not a present bought. So I knocked off early and headed into town. I knew exactly what I was looking for.

A cap for my dad for Bingo, to stop him getting soaked waiting for the bus to The Glen Hall. He'd love that. For my sister Kathleen and her husband I was getting a big box of biscuits. See, they'd have loads of people calling around, the biscuits would be handy, and for the niece and nephew - two Cadbury Deluxe selection boxes. Of course, I had to get something special for my beautiful Yvette.

This was our first Christmas together as man and wife, her first Christmas in Ireland; her first Christmas away from home, and it wasn't going too well. She had all these fairytale memories of French Christmases, yule-logs, sleigh rides, eggnog, port and brandy. I was worked to the bone, getting the post out. She was spending most of her time hanging around the flat, so I decided I'd make it up to her by getting her something special, something nice, something romantic - a bottle of perfume and some sexy underwear. The French love that kind of thing.

So, there I was Christmas Eve, two hundred quid in my pocket, outside Roches Stores, and who did I meet - only Tragic Ted.

- Ah Ted! Long time no see.

- Pluto man, how're things?

- Good! Good! Workin' like a dog though. Christmas postman, double shift. Just snatchin' a bit a' time to do a bit a' last minute shoppin', how's yerself, Ted?

- Strugglin', you know yerself, just back from England for the Christmas.

- How's England?

- England? England's a kip. Have ya time for a pint?

- God I'd love to, Ted - but to be honest, I really has to get me shoppin' done.

- Sur' look, I'll come along with ya, we can go for de one after.

Now, This wasn't exactly the plan, but what could I say. Anyway I was delighted to see Tragic, hadn't talked to him in years.

First stop the Men's Department Roches Stores for my dad's present. One blue peaked cap. Perfect. No delays. We queued at the cash till.

- So eh! What do ya think, Ted? I held up the cap.

- Not bad, not bad.., but eh, what size is it? he asked.

- Size?
- You know like, is it 7, 7 1/4, 7 1/2, 7 3/4, 8, 8 1/4...
- Size?
- Like what size is yer dad's head, Pluto?
- What size is me dad's head? Jeezus Ted, I don't even know the size a' me own head? Tell you the truth, I didn't even know that heads had sizes.
- Well, you'd want to know his head size before you go gettin' him a hat, he said.

I explained I had no time to be measuring my dad's head. All I wanted was a cap to keep him dry for bingo.

- For bingo? Why don't ya get him somethin' like a book, you know, like a book on bingo.

- Do they have books on bingo, Ted?

- They has books on everything.

A book on bingo, it was settled, we could get it later. I left the cap on the counter and walked out of the shop.

There I was, standing in a check-out line, a mile long in Dunne's Stores, one big box of biscuits and two Cadbury Deluxe selection boxes in my arms.

- So eh, who are these for anyway, Pluto?

- Me sister Kathleen an' her kids, I said.

Ted gave me one of those looks.

- Somethin' wrong, Ted?

- No, no, not at all. I'm sure your sister'll be delighted.

- But?

- No buts. But eh! I don't think too many mothers would want all that sugar an' sweets comin' into the house, ya know like.

And he was right.

- So eh, what do ya suggest, Ted?

- I suppose you could always get 'em a few books, he wasn't joking.

I explained that we weren't really a book family.

I mean the best book I ever saw was the Commitments, but I still haven't read the book, if ya know what I mean...

But Ted was making sense. So before we went to the bookshop, I had to get Yvette's present.

Now, I wasn't too happy having Tragic Ted traipsing after me around Brown Thomas's perfumery and Women's Underwear Department. Not the easiest thing for me to be doing on me own, not to mind having Tragic Ted and a langer load a store detectives on tow.

He talked me out of the perfume, saying that you can't just buy a scent for a woman, it was something more personal than that, anyway he

had me convinced that the biggest insult you could give to a woman, especially a French woman, was to buy her the wrong perfume.

- It's as personal as dog's piss to a bitch. he said.

So, we scrapped the perfume plan and headed off up to the Ladies Underwear.

I was glad Ted was with me. I mean like I'm the sort of fella who's too embarrassed to buy condoms, not to mind fingering me way through rows of lace, silk and satin suspender-belts, stockings, corsets, bustiers, basques, bras, boob-tubes, seamless, strapless, crotch-less, thongs, G-strings, French-cut, low-cut, half-cup, cotton, camisoles, baby-dolls and teddies – and that was only the first three racks. At the back of the shop I could see the leather, rubber and the odd ostrich feather.

- And they say men are sex mad!

I looked to Ted. He's busy burrowing his way through the stock.

- Eh, can I help you gentlemen?

Her head pops up from behind a rack of bras.

- No, no we're fine, says I.

- Don't mind him, says Ted. - We're lookin' for something nice for his girlfriend for Christmas?

- Does anything catch yer eye? she asks.

I push my eyeballs back into their sockets, - Look, anything at all, says I.

- So, eh, what size would you like?

- About the same as yerself, maybe a bit fuller in de chest area and keener in de waist. I say

She gave me one of those - *Men!* looks, and she lifts up a bit of a lacey thing.

- What about this? she says.

- That's, perfect! says I. - Just, put it in a bag.

- Hoi hold it! Hold it! says Ted. - Ya can't just take de first thing that's waved under yer nose, Pluto man. Ye gotta check out de merchandise.

- Ah, come on, Ted. I just wanna get outa here.

- Chill out man, now that we're here we may as well do it right. Eh, excuse me Miss? You might show us that one there, like a good girl. Do you have it in red?

. . . and off they went down through the shop. I stood there like an expectant father in a maternity ward. Eventually, my choice was made for me. A nice silk French cut knickers, with matching lacy brassiere and suspender-belt, pink in colour,

- Nothing smutty like black or red, says Ted. - and two pairs of stockings, one black and one white. Prefect, Yvette would love this.

- So gentlemen, will I gift-wrap it for you?

- Not at all, says Ted. - We'll eat 'em here.
- He laughs, she wraps.
And then Ted turns to me.
- Are ya sure 32B is her bra size?
 - Well, that's the size of the bra she have at home...
 - Yeah! But not all bras are the same.
 - How'd ya mean not all bras are de same? A 32B is a 32B, isn't it?
 - Ah! For God sake! A bra isn't like a sock, Pluto. It's not like one size fits all.
 - Look this is a 32B, and she's a 32B, and no more about it!

I was beginning to get sick of Ted and his advice at this stage.

- 32B or not 32B, that is the question, said Ted. – But have it your own way, and he stepped back. But he had planted the seeds of doubt in my brain.
- What exactly do ya mean, Ted?
- I'll put it this way, he said. - A 32B, is a 32B, is a 32B, but there's no guarantee it will fit her. Different cuts, fabrics, structures and suspension, 'tis like buying a cover for a two-seater couch, you has to try it on.
- So what are ya sayin', Ted?
- I'm sayin' put 'em back on the rack, and save yerself a belly full a' heartache, 'cause believe you me, if it's too small, she'll think that you think she's gettin' fat, and if it's too big, she'll think her *Bob-a-lou-ees* are too small.
- Her *Bob-a-whaties*?
- Look! I'd say you'd save yerself a belly full of grief if ya bought her a good book.

That solved everything, all I had to do was get a few books. So, I went to the Hi-B for a pint with Ted. I called pint. Ted called a pint. Then it was my call again. And that's the way it went for the afternoon.

At twenty to five Christmas eve, meself and Ted made a mad staggering dash to Waterstones to pick up a few books, stopping off on the way at Elbow Lane to roll a one skinner.

So that was it, that was the Christmas I bought my dad The World Book of Anthropology, Waterstones were clean out of books on Bingo. I got my sister and her family an atlas, they'd never been outside Cork in their life. And, I got Yvette a book on French cookery. What can I say, Tragic Ted is one right tulip to go shoppin' with...

It was my first Christmas with the beautiful Yvette, and my last...

FOLLOW YOUR NOSE

By

Conal Creedon

[Extract from The Cure]

A sleepy Saturday mornin' on Half Moon Street and just around
the corner, Christmas.
I'm walkin' off a bit of self-inflicted pain, you know how it is...
Three days on the ran-tan.
Three whole days – drinkin' me seasonal bonus.
You know how it is – when the belly's had a skin-full, the mind is willing
– but the body isn't able.
Well, that's how it is.

Just out for a scove – meself on me own, no particular place to go.
Just followin' me nose...

Just follow yer nose?
That's what me Grandda used to do.
A great man for followin' his nose was me Grandda.
On me mother's soul – he could find his way to work – blindfolded.
All the way from his front door step up on Dublin Hill, down into the
belly of the city – just... Just followin' his nose...

The first thing that would hit my Grandda and he leaving the house
would be the thick country smell of cattle, from the dealers fields beyond
the grotto in Blackpool.

Led on like a... Like a bull by the ring,
he'd close his eyes and follow his nose.
Past the stale stench of last night's stout and cigarette smoke
from the string of pubs along Dublin Street, past the Glen Hall – the full
length of Thomas Davis Street.

And with the first hint of crusty bread coming from the ovens of
Cuthbert's bakery over on Great William O'Brien Street, he'd know he
was at Blackpool Church.

Then that sweet smell of molten sugar
The shawlies making toffee apples up on Gerald Griffin Street,
would carry him past the oak casks of the distillery and onto the
Watercourse Road.
Ahhh pleasure...

A pleasure – cut short by the piercing, deathly, toxic, foul cloud coming
from the slaughterhouse off Denny's Lane.
But then, just for a whiff of a second the subtle scent of sherbet,

drifting down from Linehan's Sweet Factory, would carry him past the putrid pelts of the tannery,
and on to the first taste of human waste at Poulraddy.

Turnin' right onto Leitrim Street and there'd be no mistaking the warmth of the moist malt of brewing stout – billowing from Murphy's Stack. He knew then he was on the right track. So, he'd put the hands into the pockets – and whistle.

Whistle all the way from Poulraddy Harbour, to the Home Farm Stores. Eyes wide shut.

And though still out of sight – at the corner of Pine Street, the River Lee and Carroll's Quay would come into scent.

High at low tide.

Low at high tide.

Wouldn't turn left nor right,
but keep on straight to Three Points Corner – where Devonshire Street, Leitrim Street and Coburg Street melt into one.

He'd stay right on track, being passed from scent to scent like the baton in a relay race.

Spurred on by the aromatic blending of – Moore's vegetables, Griffin's shoemakers, Noreen's apple tarts,

must be Friday 'cause there's kippers in Creedon's,

O'Connell's butchered beef and O'Sullivan's cured bacon.

At Falvey's Corner, he'd stop. –

Stop dead. Struck by a tidal wave of fishy smells from the Baltimore Stores, enough to knock a horse.

And for the first time on his scove,
my Grandda'd open his eyes.

Look back at the eastern face of Shandon. Where half-past seven means twenty-five to eight.

Then turnin' right onto Bridge Street,

the fine wines and exotic spices of Madden's, would carry him 'cross Patrick's Bridge, through the gateway of the city –

all the way to work – just...

Just by following his nose...

DOCKETS AND DOWELS
by
Cónal Creedon
[Extract from Passion Play]

Like my grandda and my grandda's da, my da was a cabinetmaker, a master craftsman. The lads up in Mulla's said he was a genius; he could make a full piece of furniture, no nails or screws used.

I swear to God, you can never really know what goes on in another man's head, but it's hard to believe that something as simple as a wooden dowel could turn my dad away from the cabinet making. It was like up until then, his whole life swung around Mulla's. But one day, snap! No more. The day of the dowel dawned.

- Sure any eejit could trow a cabinet togedder dese days, he'd say.

*

Maybe it had to do with the fact that Mulla died, and his son, the Graduate took over the running of the yard; or that the Graduate ran the yard from the office and he didn't know one end of a hammer from the other. Maybe it was because there was no respect for the wood joint, or the men who knew how to make them. Whatever the reason, there was no doubt but dowels had destroyed the detail of the craft, and enough was enough, and my dad's head was turned.

- Sure dat's not furniture, he'd throw de mallet down.
- Look! Either you make it! Or the Chinese make it! Take yer pick! the Graduate would say and walk away.
- Docket's an' dowels, he'd throw the eyes to heaven, - 'Tis all docket's an' dowels dese days.

*

It was like he saw his craft die in front of his eyes and with its death he caught a glimpse of his own mortality. Somewhere along the line it dawned on him that he couldn't face eternity in some thrown together, plywood box fastened with a few aul' dowels. He was a cabinetmaker and only a casket fitting of a master craftsman would do. That's why, that's why at the age of fifty-eight he decided to make his own coffin in the kitchen at home.

He drew together boards from trees grown on different continents. Boards hand picked from shipments, as they'd arrive into Mulla's yard, boards brought together, planked and hobbled away home. It took over a year but he was in no rush, he wanted the finest collection of grains to be

found either side of the hard wood jungles of Burma and the Amazon Basin for his masterpiece.

No nails, screws or dowels used, but perfected joints, handed down from generation to generation, grains married so tightly together that no man could pull asunder.

- Look a’ dis son, he’d say. – Dat’s a dove-tail, and dat? Dat’s a T-joint. An’ see dat one dere in the corner, dat’s me own secret F-joint, and I’ll show you how to make one a’ dem one a’ dese days.

*

My sister Kathleen lined his coffin with quilted yellow, green and black silk, the colours of Glen Rovers. And in the true tradition of quilters she stitched in a square that didn’t match the pattern, a planned mistake so as not to challenge God’s pride by creating perfection; split down the middle half red and half white for Cork.

They say that you’d know a shoemaker’s wife by the holes in the soles of her shoes and there’s a grain a truth in that, because with all my dad’s knowledge we didn’t have a stick of furniture. I mean, we had beds, the odd chair and all that but no shelves, no presses, no sideboards nothing special, not if you don’t count the coffin. It stood there in the middle of the kitchen on two carpenters trestles, a sheet thrown over it protecting my dad’s handy work and a few wads of white paper to save the sheet. It was our table and we’d gather around...

Kippers of a Friday, roast of a Sunday, one of the days between Monday and Wednesday it’d be bacon and cabbage and with payday on Friday, it was usually fried bread of a Thursday. Same aul’ ding-dong dinner time, same aul’ ping-pong chit chat like Mass night after night, every day of the week, except that is for Saturdays. Saturday was my dad’s day.

- De pig, he’d say. – The pig is de one animal that you can ate every bit of, an’ d’ya know why? I’ll tell ya why! ‘cause we’re Christians dat’s why. ‘Tis de one ting dat de Catlicks an’ de Prositents has in common. We all ate’s de pig. Now de Hindoos an’ de Muslims an’ de Buddas an’ all dat shower don’t eat no pig. Dey has no God. Dat’s why we eats de pig. And here in Cork we show our devotion to the one an’ only true Jesus Christ Our Lord by not wastin’ one mouthful of de God given flesh of

de boar, de sow or de banabh...

...his excuse for the weekly feast of entrails, off-cuts and offal.

- Not only is it religious, he'd say. – it's part of our kulture. De people a' Cork were atein' pig's heads long before St. Finbarre found us.

And he was right, because where we came from, the head of the pig often kept the wolf from the door. Never the fur lined devilish faces of the cow or the sheep. Always the pig, whose human-like fleshy jowls, for some reason tasted easier on the conscience. Still and all, there's something evil when two eyes stare out at you from a pot. Maybe that's why he cooked them half-head at a time, split skull and jaw with hammer and axe, slit with carving knife down between the eyes, along the centre line of the snout, right through the palate of the mouth, all the way home to the jawbone.

I'd sit there watching. His sleeves rolled up beyond his elbows and him tearing into and devouring the pig's head. Held firmly by the ear in the one hand and the snout in the other, scraps falling from his mouth to the white paper covered coffin. He'd bate into the prime cut of the cheek muscle just above the tooth ribbed jaw bone, gristle and grease seeping down over his hard hands all the way to his elbows and the fat from the pig's eye socket, forehead and lock, being smeared all over my dad's face as he'd battle with the jaws of the beast.

*

At the age of seventy-two, he tried the coffin for size, found it a mite tight, must have put on a bit of weight. Kathleen blamed it on the pig's head,

- All fat an' bone, she said.

So he took to training, walking and things, getting fit for coffin. But as she got older and he got feeble and the potboiling came to an end when my dad's pride gave way to his age and Kathleen took a tighter hold on the household. He was lost for a while, just hanging around like someone waiting for God.

Then one day he pulled the sheets off the coffin again, rubbed his fingers

along the grain, no knots, not at all. And it all began simply enough, a little bit of inlay here and there, a simple scroll along the side. He then carved the full forty-nine lines of St. Patrick's Breastplate, you know the one,

Christ be before me, Christ be behind me, Christ be about me...

...right down the length of the lid. And then with oak, walnut, ash and cherry veneer he inlaid the symbols of his craft: the mallet and chisel, the tenon-saw and plane, the pencil and pot of glue and the square and dividers, one at each corner. It was medazza, but he just didn't know when to stop.

Somebody mentioned that the square and dividers was a Freemason's sign and suggested that St. Patrick might have been a Protestant...

- ...he spent too much time up North with de Unionists to be a real Catlick?

So he carved the Virgin Mary on the end panel up by his head, draped around her feet he inlaid the tri-colour in mahogany, ash and pine,

- Let dere be no mistake about it, he said. - not only am I an Irish Catlick, but I'm an Irish Republican Catlick.

But he didn't stop there. Glen Rovers were remembered by a set of crossed hurleys and sliotar. Then right above St. Patrick's Breastplate he carved the top section of Shandon steeple with a big goldie fish inlaid in beech. He said that the fish on top of Shandon looked down on him in life, so, it may as well look down on him in death. Of course he knew Shandon was a Protestant Church, that's why he put St. Mary's, pillars and all, on the left panel.

When my dad's brother Uncle Miah saw St. Mary's he said it was nice touch,

- ... remembering the 1916 Rising in Dublin...
- 1916?, my dad was lost.
- Ya know like, de G.P.O., uncle Miah pointed to the coffin.
- De G.P.O.?
- Dat's it dere isn't it?
- G.P.O.? Dat's not the G.P.O., Miah boi! Dat's St. Mary's Pope's Quay.
- Really? Jesus, it look's very like de G.P.O. to me, but now dat you mention it, St. Mary's look's like de G.P.O., don't it?

Enough said, my dad chiseled the words *St. Mary's, Pope's Quay*, under

the carving and so as not to offend the rebels of 1916 Rising, he put the names of the leaders down the right-hand panel. And that wasn't the end of it...

Ronnie Delaney was commemorated by a pair of running shoes and the words *Ronnie Delaney Olympic Gold, For Ireland and for Glory*. On went Sonia O' Sullivan - *No Drugs Here*, Daniel O' Connell, Michael Collins, St. Finbarre, Terence Mc Sweeney, Tomás Mac Curtain, Christy Ring, Blackrock Castle, Patrick's Bridge, he even had a Síle na Gig at his feet, and the work went on until every inch of the coffin was overlaid, inlay on inlay, sort of like a beautiful body mutilated with tattoo.

– An' not a dowel in it! he'd say proudly.

And that's the way it was, day in day out, tapping away at the coffin whenever he took the notion, right up until the day he died.

*

His funeral was a grand affair, lying in state, wrapped in silk, in a casket that would do any master craftsman proud. A smug smile on his face, they all came to pay respect, even the Graduate and the crowd from Mulla's were there, most too young to remember my dad all carpenters, not a cabinetmaker between them. They all stood around the coffin admiring my dad's handy-work; pointing out the inlay saying things like,

– *La', dere's Sonia O'Sullivan... or, – Look a' dat la', de G.P.O...*

And I standing there telling them that no nails, screws, or dowels were used, only handcrafted joints handed down from generation to generation. The women of the street ouing and aahing over Kathleen's silk lining; never the best at taking compliments, she just vanished into the kitchen and rattled a few cups and saucers.

But it was a happy occasion, you know, people telling stories that sort of thing. The priest said that in all his day's burying people he'd never seen a coffin like my dad's. And after the prayers myself, Uncle Miah and a few of the lads shouldered the coffin from the kitchen. It's a strange feeling, carrying your father in a box...

– Hoi! Hold it lads! Hold it!

Uncle Miah brought the procession to a halt.

- Back it up! Here look, try it dis way. No! No! Turn it ‘round...

We tried it sideways. We tried it lengthwise, we even tried it upright, but it wouldn't turn in the hall. One into one just wouldn't go. The crowd who had piled out onto the street waiting, were back in the kitchen again standing around the coffin, advice flying, but nothing else moving...

...the sound of bottles being cracked open, big roars of laughter from the back. The Graduate was telling me that the furniture trade had changed since the recession hit.

- It's all quality furniture they want these days, he said, – If they're going to buy, they'll only buy quality. They'll pay a top dollar for it. Leave the old dab n' dowel for the Eastern Europeans. But do you know what? he stopped. – These days, you can't get a craftsman for love or money....

...and he was off talking about something else.

*

Uncle Miah cleared the house and closed the front door behind them. We lifted my dad's board-like body from the coffin and lay him on the floor. And then with the big rusty saw from under the stairs, he cut the coffin in two, right down between,

...Christ be behind me, and Christ be before me....

Twenty-eight dowels to put it together again, six top and bottom, eight on each side and he tacked a sheet of plywood to the base. Just in case. We placed my dad back into his masterpiece.

– Com'on! Hurrup! said Uncle Miah. - Wha' he don't know, he won't know.

The front door opened out, and my dad, the master craftsman, was carried shoulder high by the tradesmen through the streets of Cork.

PLENTY MORE FISH IN THE SEA

By

Cónal Creedon

[Extract from – Glory Be To The Father]

– Do you know, Sis love,
I just don't know what to say to ya...
I'm not gonna tell ya there's plenty a' more fish in the sea,
because that's the last thing you want to hear. But there is
though!
There's more fish in that sea than you could shake a stick at, but
no, I'm not going to tell you that...
See, from where you're standing,
there's only one fish for you...,
But out there, out there is a vast ocean, Sis love..., I'm tellin'
ya!
Swimmin' around in that ocean, ya has every class a warm
blooded, cold blooded, scaly, and slimey article that you could
think of.
There's flat fish, blow fish, jelly fish, fish with thick shells and
fish with no back bone.
You got your sharks, and your sea snakes and your mullets...
And of course you'll always have the odd octopus and they
stretching out their slimy tentacles pawing at anything that
passes.
But you mark my word, Sis love D'ya hear me...
Any fella., any fella that'd leave my daughter, my beautiful Sis,
standing there waiting on the side of the street...
...Is nothin' but a fuckin' pollock!

