

The PUB CAT

I. ARRIVAL AND ACCESSION

STRANGER SHE WAS IN THOSE DAYS, AND A WANDERER
NOT IN THE BEST OF CONDITION; THE CONNACHT WINTER HAS BEEN HARD.
PAWS ARE SORE AND BLEEDING, AND TAIL
STRIPPED OF OUTER COVERING LIKE A PEELED CARROT
GOD KNOWS HOW. A TOOTH MISSING, AND ONE EYE
SWOLLEN SHUT, AND NOT MUCH OF A MEOW

BUT WHAT SHE MOMENTARILY LACKS IN FELINE BEAUTY
SHE MAKES UP FOR IN APPETITE. SCRAPS OF STREAKY BACON
ARE HER SPECIAL FAVORITE, FOLLOWED CLOSELY
BY ANYTHING RECENTLY INVOLVED WITH POULTRY.
AND OF COURSE WARM MILK, AND GOD KNOWS
A DROP OF PORTER IN THE SAUCER NOW AND THEN
DOES HER NO HARM.

RESPECT IS NOT LONG TURNING INTO AFFECTION:
THE KINDLY OWNERS AND PATRONS OF THE PUB
ARE ALWAYS READY TO DO HER BIDDING.
SHE GETS HER VOICE BACK, THEN HER FUR -
BROWN WITH LOVELY BLACK STRIPES.
THE EYE AND PAWS HEAL NICELY, AND SHE BECOMES
IN AN IMPERCEPTIBLE BUT RELENTLESS WAY
THE OFFICIAL PUB CAT, ACKNOWLEDGED AS SUCH
BY MAN AND RODENT ALIKE. EVEN THE OWNER'S TWO DOGS,
LORDS OF THE CHASE, LEARN, WITH ONLY A MINIMUM OF LOST BLOOD,
THAT THIS SOFT DARK THING IS NOT TO BE TRIFLED WITH.

II. IDENTITY CRISIS

SOMETIME IN THE SPRING OF THAT YEAR
THE LADS DECIDE TO HOLD A CONTEST
TO PROVIDE THE PUB CAT A NAME.
THEY CONFOUND EACH OTHER WITH SUGGESTIONS
DREDGED (MUCH TO THE AMAZEMENT
OF A VISITING PAIR OF BOSTON TEACHERS)
FROM SOMEWHERE DEEP IN THE CELTIC PAST:
NAMES THAT RING WITH STRANGE CONSONANTS
WARRIOR NAMES, FEARFUL, COLD NAMES
LIKE ARROWS BOUNCING OFF A BRAZEN SHIELD...

IT IS A WONDERFUL AFTERNOON ENTIRELY.

The PUB CAT

**EVERYONE IS THOROUGHLY EDIFIED
AND EXHILARATED FROM SUCH CLOSE CONTACT
WITH SUBJECTS THEY WERE SURPRISED
TO KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT.**

**IN SPITE OF THE EFFORT, HOWEVER,
THE CAT REMAINS *GAN AINM*, GAELIC FOR "WITHOUT A NAME";
BUT SPENDING MOST OF THE DAY NIBBLING ON A PIG'S TROTTER,
SHE SEEMS NOT TO MIND AS THE DISCUSSION CONTINUES.**

**FINALLY JIMMY CLEARY FROM ACROSS THE LAKE,
REMEMBERING THE OLD STORY OF THE MONK'S CAT,
SUGGESTS THAT "PANGUR BÁN" MIGHT BE A GOOD NAME.
THE COMPANY IS LOST IN THOUGHT, UNTIL AT LAST
MARTIN'S NORA, JUST OUT OF SCHOOL, SHYLY MENTIONS
THAT "BÁN" MEANS "WHITE", WHICH HER FELINE LADYSHIP
CLEARLY IS NOT, AND SO
THE MATTER IS REFERRED BACK TO THE COMMITTEE,
WHO THEREUPON WISELY DECIDED TO REST THEIR FACULTIES
WATCHING A HURLING MATCH ON TELEVISION.
(OF COURSE CLARE WINS.)**

III. MUSIC APPRECIATION 101

**A SOFT SUMMER EVENING: THE MUSICIANS ARRIVE
AND BEGIN A QUIET BUT DETERMINED SESSION OF MUSIC
WITH THE RESIDENT FELINE ENJOYING IT AS MUCH
AS ANY OF THE HUMANS.**

**- *BEGOD, THE BEAST KNOWS HER JIGS AND REELS, NOT A DOUBT OF IT,
SAYS LITTLE TOM THE PIPER. THAT PURR SHE HAS,
MAKE NO MISTAKE, YOU COULD ALMOST TUNE TO IT.***

**- *AND NO JOKES NOW, SAYS DENNIS THE TEMPERAMENTAL FIDDLER,
ABOUT FIDDLES AND CAT-GUT AND THE REST OF IT,
OR THE JOKER WILL FEEL THE TIP OF MY BOOT
WHERE HE LEAST EXPECTS OR WANTS IT.
I WILL STAND FOR NO FOOLISH BLATHERING
THAT INSULTS EITHER THE INSTRUMENT OR THE ANIMAL.***

- *HEAR, HEAR!* SHOUT SEVERAL VOICES FROM THE BAR.

**PRETENDING TO BE UNAWARE OF HER IMPORTANCE,
GAN AINM YAWNS, STRETCHES FORE AND AFT,**

The PUB CAT

AND REPOSITIONS HERSELF IN FRONT OF THE FIRE AS THE LADS START A RAKE OF REELS. SHE DOZES, BUT OPENS HER EYES WIDE EVERY TIME YOUNG SEÁN MANAGES TO PLAY AS F SHARP THAT CRUCIAL NOTE IN THE "FLOGGING REEL" THAT EVERYONE ELSE IN THE PUB (AND IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM, FOR THAT MATTER) ALWAYS PLAYS AS F NATURAL. HER LOOK OF WONDERMENT - DISAPPROVAL? - IS NOTED, LITTLE TOM GESTURING WITH HIS HEAD IN HER DIRECTION WHILE THE OTHERS - EXCEPT POOR SEÁN - NOD KNOWINGLY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CAT'S POWERS OF MUSICAL PERCEPTION.

LATER, UNNOTICED BY THE COMPANY, A CONTRITE SEÁN APPROACHES THE CAT - DOZING AGAIN - AND SOFTLY APOLOGIZES FOR THE F SHARP. SHE LISTENS, THEN DECIDES THAT YES, HE MAY SCRATCH THE MAGIC SPOT BETWEEN HER EARS.

THE PENANCE IS DONE: HE IS FORGIVEN. SHE GIVES HER FACE A WIPE AND RETURNS TO DOZING.

IV. CAT AS CRITIC

AS TIME GOES ON, IT BEGINS TO BE PERCEIVED THAT GAN AINM, DESPITE HER LOVE FOR THE MUSIC, WILL UNFAILINGLY FIND REASON TO DISAPPEAR FROM THE PUB WHENEVER LARRY THE THUMPER FROM TWO TOWNS OVER ARRIVES TO CHALLENGE ALL AND SUNDRY WITH HIS BODHRÁN INTERPRETATIONS.

IT IS A COMMON BELIEF AMONG THE MUSICIANS THAT LARRY'S DRUM CAN BE HEARD TWO PARISHES AWAY.

A SCHOOLMASTER VISITING FROM TUAM ONCE HAD THE MISFORTUNE TO SIT RIGHT NEXT TO LARRY AT A SESSION, AND LATER, AFTER HE RECOVERED HIS HEARING, HE DISCUSSED HIS UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE WITH THE LADS.

- I FEAR ITS VOLUME IS IN INVERSE PROPORTION TO THE SKILL OF ITS DRIVER, HE SAID OF LARRY'S BODHRÁN.

NOW SOME OF THE LADS WERE A BIT PUZZLED AS TO WHAT "INVERSE PROPORTION" MIGHT MEAN; NED FAHEY WHISPERED THAT THEY SHOULD BE CAREFUL SINCE IT MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH SEX.

The PUB CAT

**- I'LL PUT IT AS SIMPLY AS I CAN, SAID THE SCHOOLMASTER.
THE LOUDER THE DRUM, THE POORER THE PLAYER.
THE LADS NODDED THEIR HEADS IN SILENCE.**

**- SURE WE KNEW THAT ABOUT LARRY ALL ALONG, SAID TADHG RUA AT LAST,
ONLY WE DIDN'T HAVE THE PROPER ACADEMIC NAME FOR IT.**

V. MYSTERIOUS FELINE - ENVIOUS HUMANS

**THE LADS EVENTUALLY NOTICE ANOTHER STRANGE THING: GAN AINM
WILL BEGIN TO STIR AND MEOW AND LOOK UNCOMFORTABLE
MANY MINUTES BEFORE LARRY THE THUMPER EVER COMES NEAR THE PUB.**

**- I TELL YOU, IT'S UNCANNY, SAYS LITTLE TOM.
SHE KNOWS - AND DON'T ASK ME HOW, BUT SHE KNOWS
THAT LARRY, GOD HELP US ALL,
IS ON THE WAY HERE WITH THAT ACCURSED DRUM OF HIS.**

**- MAYBE SHE REMEMBERS THAT THE VIBRATIONS ARE PAINFUL TO HER,
SAID DENNIS THE FIDDLER, BECAUSE I KNOW THEY ARE TO ME.
I CAN FEEL THEM WAY DOWN IN MY UNSPEAKABLES WHILE HE'S PLAYING,
AND SOMETIMES EVEN FOR A HALF-HOUR AFTER HE GOES HOME,
AND I HAVEN'T ANYWHERE NEAR THE SENSITIVITY
THAT OUR FELINE FRIEND HAS. I DON'T WONDER
THAT SHE LEAVES - I WOULD MYSELF
IF HE WASN'T MY BROTHER-IN-LAW.
BUT HOW IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN DOES SHE KNOW HE'S COMING?**

**- I HAVE A THEORY, SAYS EAMONN THE BOX PLAYER.
I THINK MYSELF - AND YOU CAN DISAGREE IF YOU LIKE -
THAT HER CAT'S HEARING CAN DETECT THE SOUNDS OF LARRY
LOADING THAT GODFORSAKEN DRUM IN HIS CAR
CLEAR OVER IN CAPPATAGGLE WHERE HE LIVES.
LUCKY BEAST - THAT GIVES HER
AT LEAST A HALF-HOUR HEAD START ON ANY OF US ...**

VI. LARRY'S OTHER MISTAKE

**SOMEBODY HAD OFFERED ME A JOB IN TORONTO
AND I HAD TO TAKE LEAVE OF THE AREA SHORTLY THEREAFTER.
WHEN LAST I HEARD, GAN AINM WAS STILL ALIVE AND WELL
AND RULING THE LITTLE PUB FAIRLY BUT FIRMLY,**

The PUB CAT

**ATTENDED NOW BY SEVERAL LITTLE PRINCES AND PRINCESSES
WHO BY ALL ACCOUNTS MAKE UP IN PERSONALITY
WHAT THEY LACK IN CREDITABLE PATERNITY.**

**MY SOURCES HOWEVER ALSO STATE THAT LARRY THE THUMPER,
HAVING BY WINK AND NOD BEEN MADE AWARE OF THE FACT
THAT GAN AINM WOULD NEVER REMAIN IN THE SAME ROOM WITH HIM,
ONE NIGHT AFTER TOO MANY PINTS REFERRED TO HER MOST UNKINDLY,
THE PHRASE "SMELLY STRAY" BEING THE MOST POSITIVE
OF LARRY'S ALLUSIONS TO HER.**

**... WHEN THE GARDAI FINALLY ARRIVED, THE WRECKED BODHRÁN
WAS SITTING FASHIONABLY ON LARRY'S SHOULDERS
WITH HIS UNCONSCIOUS HEAD,
LIKE SOME KIND OF GROTESQUE FUNGUS,
PROTRUDING FROM WHAT REMAINED OF THE SKIN.**

VII. EXCERPT FROM OFFICIAL GARDA REPORT 256-BC, PAGE 2, PARA [C]:

**"NO ONE IN THE PUB HAS ANY IDEA
HOW SUCH AN UNLIKELY ACCIDENT COULD HAVE HAPPENED."**

**IT SHOULD BE RECORDED FOR ACCURACY'S SAKE
HOW TOUCHED THE GARDAI WERE WHEN SEVERAL OF THE WITNESSES
EXCUSED THEMSELVES TO GO OUTSIDE SO THAT THE OTHERS IN THE PUB
COULDN'T SEE THEM CRYING.**

**UNOFFICIAL GARDA REACTION 1: "JAYZUS, MICK, THAT SOUNDS
MORE LIKE LAUGHING THAN IT DOES CRYING, DOESN'T IT?"
UNOFFICIAL GARDA REACTION 2: "AH WELL, YOU KNOW HOW IT IS,
THEY'RE ALL UNDER A LOT OF STRESS.
THEY'RE SAYING THAT DRUMMER IS A GREAT FRIEND OF THEIRS..."
UNOFFICIAL GARDA REACTION 3: "THESE MUSICIANS ARE ALL BONKERS."**

VIII. EPILOGUE

**THE AFOREMENTIONED MICK RETIRED FROM THE GARDAI LAST YEAR
BUT HE STILL WONDERS HOW THAT BODHRÁN
WOUND UP AROUND LARRY'S NECK
AND WHAT THAT CAT WITH THE FUNNY NAME - BANANA? -
HAD TO DO WITH ANY OF IT ...**

- *MAYBE IT WAS A CULT OF SOME KIND, HE THINKS, THEN FALLS ASLEEP*

The PUB CAT

WITH THE TELEVISION AND HIS SOCKS STILL ON.

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