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Mrs Trelawneys house stood like a delapidated temple reaching up to the Mile End sky. So delapidated it was that one almost expected, if one stood facing it for long enough, to see a wiry goat appear roundabout the level of the third floor window ledges, as if grazing on some foreign peak. Indeed, there was more than enough grass and dandelions growing from the guttering to feed a small herd of antelope for the length of the dry season, and the story Mrs Trelawney told of a fine salmon being thrown up by the Thames in the great storm of '68, and coming smack down her chimney and into the casserole dish on the stove had every sound of truth about it except that it was a good twenty years since any of the chimneys had been swept and the nearest thing the household had to central heating was a pile of Sunday newspapers stuffed up the fireplace.

Mrs Trelawney believed in keeping what warm air there was, in the house. For the 'benefit' she would explain, without really explaining.

In the days of her girlhood, when Mrs Trelawney first came to London, she had dreamed of owning her own hotel. She would walk up and down the length of the Bayswater Road and imagine every detail of the furnishings and fittings of what would one day be 'The Trelawney Hotel', 'Trelawney Lodge', 'Pension Trelawney'. Now, twenty five years later, it had not turned out as she dreamed. Her house was falling down, her bills were piling up and disgrace upon disgrace, she had been forced to take the unemployed and homeless courtesy of the D.H.S.S. in order to make ends meet.

Grace Trelawneys fourteen year old teeth were chattering under the thin blanket that her mother had fashioned from a combination of tea cloths sewn together. The mice queued by the skirting board to eat their way out of the house sure in the conviction that the weather must be more clement outside, amidst the frost, then it was in the icy bedrooms of number twelve.

Grace rose and pulled on another pair of woollen socks making the total seven.

The pressure on her feet from the desperately stretched wool and nylon mixes caused her toes to knit together and intertwine so encouraging a walk made only possible by grasping walls and furniture and lunging from side to side. It was all in the distribution of weight Grace decided.

Mrs Trelawneys only lavatory was situated in the basement, and at night, with no electric light to help, it was to prove a long and hazardous journey. Strong men, determined not to be beaten by the maze of dark winding tunnels, had been known to take a wrong turn somewhere about the upper pantry and never

be seen again. Others, over confident having made it all the way to the basement and flushed with a sense of victory, had made a vital mistake near the back door and had locked themselves, half naked, in the bitter garden, to be found rambling and frost bitten by the local constabulary in the first light of morning.

Grace picked her way along the damp corridors, her penlight offering a yellow circle so tiny it was useless except to ascertain the exact position of her own feet and that she already knew. She passed the deep bronchial rumbles from room fourteen and from beneath the door of number eight there was the unmistakable smell of Mrs Delaney attempting to give a family of four a midnight feast with a tin of sardines and two crumbling digestives. Grace hesitated as she passed the livingroom, its table already laid for breakfast and the milk, carefully measured in advance into the bowls causing the cereal to lie like a grey swamp awaiting the footfalls of unsuspecting tiny travellers. The livingroom window, a mixture of rusty nails and many glasses, including the right thigh of St Francis complete with accompanying rabbit (a recent acquisition from the church lawn after a stormy night), was not a window to either repel or contain noise. Outside Grace was certain she sensed a ghostly presence. The night wind howled about Trelawney House dashing the icicles from the electric light fittings and filling Grace with the same sense of dread that she always felt in the pit of her stomach when the fire prevention people called. Raising her penlight above her head dagger fashion, she prepared to draw back the curtains and meet the ghostly one beyond.

Kieran McCarthy couldn't see his hand in front of his face. He hadn't seen darkness this dark since he'd fallen backwards into a vat of Guinness at the Enniscorthy Donkey Races in 1987. The piece of paper with the address barely clung to his fingers blue and benumbed as the were in the frosty London night. Before him towered Trelawney House, boarded windows spitting desperate orange curtains into his face. He squinted into the darkness in search of some clue as to the number of the house, but the front door, draped as it was in creeping foliage, gave nothing away. Kieran stumbled up the path, avoiding the badger traps which lay in wait for visiting television license inspectors. In the bowels of the house, Charleton, the guard sausage dog, lay beneath his blanket his mind absorbed in doggy dreams and a million miles away from intruders creeping up the garden path. As Kieran stood defeated by the numbering system on the front door, he stepped across the rockery narrowly missing a saucepan of bleach placed strategically to deter council officials from venturing further. As the young Irishman placed his face to the window and peered into the dark and cavernous front room, he was suddenly grabbed around the throat by strong hands and pulled right through.

Barney Scanlon smacked at the earwig which was making its way beneath his trousers and by now was dangerously close to the gaping leg of his Dennis the Menace boxer shorts. Manoeuvring was proving difficult within the confines of the dustbin and he had pins and needles in his feet which was hardly surprising bearing in mind he had been sitting there, in below freezing temperatures, for over two hours.

The rubbish beneath him had turned into a disturbing slush, and earlier in the evening when the lid had been lifted unexpectedly by a young girl who Barney had taken to be the daughter of the house, he had been forced to empty the contents of a Tescos carrier bag liberally over his head as a cunning split second attempt at camouflage. It had worked perfectly, but now, an hour later, he was still picking rasher rind from his hair, and the tea leaves had, by force of gravity, made their way to a place just far enough down his back to be out of reach from either above or below. Barney Scanlon was cold, tired and irritable yet dedication was his middle name. Never had he come so close to his dream of being an undercover agent as he had on this night in a wintry, windswept Mile End. Soon, with this case cracked, he would leave the D.H.S.S., and after modestly explaining his success, it would not be long before he would be accepted into the Metropolitan Police, Scotland Yard.

A small circle of yellow light appeared in the window of Trelawney House. Scanlon checked his Snoopy watch, it said 1.15a.m. Scanlon made a concise note in his book.

Mrs Trelawney lay deeply asleep, but this was not usual. Normally it took four cups of cocoa, and up to six chapters of Barbara Cartland before drowsiness set in. Sometimes she was forced to give up her pursuit of slumber altogether and retire by candlelight to the kitchen where she would fry a single sausage and eat it from between her fingers, her candlewick dressing gown tucked down the leg of one of her bedsocks and her late husbands old trilby on her head for extra warmth. Often Mrs Trelawney would remind tenants and family alike that 70% of body heat is, in fact, lost through the head. Amongst the advice and fire regulations pinned upon the inside of every door, there was included a recommendation underlined in red pen that 'TENANTS WHO REFUSE TO WEAR A HAT IN BED HAVE ONLY THEMSELVES TO BLAME'.

Mrs Trelawney was only half the woman she used to be, this was another fact often arising in her conversations. She was wracked with worry as to the future of her only daughter Grace, and struggling against all odds to keep her hotel, and thereby her daughters security, from disaster. It is not easy for a woman to raise a child alone and the struggle had changed Mrs Trelawney from a dreamer to a mercenary fighting for no more than her own and her child's survival. She changed sides frequently and had long ago relinquished all ideas of loyalty except to her own flesh and blood. England of the 90,s was a

desperate place, a world of kill or be killed, a land where only the fittest survived. Mrs Trelawney had decided long ago that her daughter would survive.
Mrs Trelawney loved Grace.
Unfortunately, Grace didn't know.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A STORYLINE.....

When Kieran McCarthy leaves Ireland in pursuit of a job in London, it is the beginning of a chain of events which will leave him and a circle of his friends and enemies alike, changed forever.

Arriving in London with no work, no money and no idea where he is or what to do next, finally the D.H.S.S. put him in TOK 41 with the Trelawney Hotel where he goes in search of a room. Already he has learned that the streets of London are far from paved with gold, and the Irish are not welcome amongst the rising ranks of the unemployed.

Kieran is only sixteen.

The Trelawney Hotel is an old ruin on the edge of collapse. Mrs Trelawney offers the homeless and unemployed the kind of living conditions that would shock a Victorian slum dweller at the turn of the century, the D.H.S.S. provides an endless queue of customers.

Kieran is installed in a broom cupboard cunningly disguised as a bedroom, so for a time he has a roof over his head. He has lied to the dole about his age and anyway, he has come to England to work, not to take money off the state. The next day he goes in search of a job. When the search proves impossible for a boy with no apparent skills or job experience, Kieran follows in the footsteps of his ancestors and gathers with the Irish down by Docklands to be chosen for a days illegal labouring.

Grace Trelawney can't remember her father but she had often imagined him, coming from Jamaica to England, with a key inside his head to a world which has always been closed to her.

There were days when she would announce to her friends at school that she was Jamaican, there were days when she would say that she was just as English as they were. Her mother never spoke of the father who had died eleven years ago in the London Hospital.

Grace read avidly.
Books about history.
Books about far off lands.
Books about women adventurers whose stories had been hushed up by fearful and jealous men. Stories of danger and intrigue were amongst her favourites.

It so happened that the week before Kieran arrived at the Trelawney Hotel, Grace had been reading a story called THE COAL HEAVERS FIGHT FOR JUSTICE IN THE EAST END. It was a true story. Grace particularly liked true stories. It told of the Irish community in the East End of the 19th century, fighting for the rights of all working people. It told how a certain black family had harboured Kieran Connolly, one of the leaders of the Coal Heavers Strike, after he had been sentenced to death for his part in the struggle.

Grace believed in reincarnation.

When Kieran arrived at the hotel that day Grace began to see clues and signs. Slowly she began to put together the pieces.

Grace and Kieran become friends, each of them sharing an understanding of what it is like to be 'outside' and 'different'. As Kieran's situation worsens and he becomes more desperate for work, he agrees to do dangerous jobs for which he has no experience. Pursued by a D.H.S.S. inspector and homesick, his friendship with Grace deepens as they invent the Mile End of the 19th century and Kieran explains his Ireland for the first time to someone else. Although Grace is only thirteen, Kieran has seen many young people of her age homeless in England. Kieran is pretending to be a grown up in a country whose *Customs* country and culture he fails to understand. Together the two young people help each other to make sense of their plight, through the invention of their previous adventures, and Kieran, full of a different culture, introduces Grace to a particular brand of Celtic wisdom, which stretches all the way from the importance of claiming your cultural identity, to the existence of Starry Gazey Pie. Grace tells him that his head is full of dreams and he has boats on the brain- to prove it Kieran makes a boat from paper and wears it on his head, as they invent a world where social justice will be done and courage will triumph over corruption and the mean spirited.

One day Kieran returns from another day's work having been severely burned by a paint stripping machine.

He cannot claim compensation.

The contractor has disowned him.

Alone, and broke, Kieran is at the mercy of Mrs Trelawney, Grace, and the D.H.S.S. inspector.

Do they help him or turn him in ?

Are there bad people or just individuals locked in desperate struggles ?

Can the past lend us wisdom and courage for the present ? .

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