

KURRVICULUM EIRE

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Discovering a new city is not unlike discovering a whole new planet for the first time. The Ancients believed the Earth limited to a few lousy islands. The Medievals were then of the opinion that it's nothing but a handful of nations, beyond which there is only The Edge, the whole lot resting on the backs of impossible monsters. By analogy, Gustaw was still stuck in the Dark Ages. The Edge somewhere near Waterloo Road, the limits of his sojourns thus far. He tried to imagine what the rest of Dublin looked like and saw nothing but Norfolk Road stretching into endless distance, a hundred square miles of Cabra, the lot filled with Poles, Indians and Chinamen, crowding round internet cafés and giant billboards screaming just how *koorva* grand it is to call Bangladesh for two cents a minute. *Troo enuf*. Only the Ancients felt exactly the same about the Pyramids, their peers on the other side of the planet just as proud of their Machu Picchu, the lot of us delighting like innocents in this wonder-filled world of ours.

Nine a.m., Gustaw's mobile whistled the theme from Peer Gynt, while its owner was still struggling with the twin taps in the washbasin - one, as we know, piping hot water, the other liquid ice, neither helping to get soap washed off his skin.

What the *fook* is the matter with the *fooking* taps in this country, *koorvayebana*?!

Trapped between extremes, Gustaw chose to brush his teeth in cold water, to save hassle and fresh burns, then listened to his voicemail render the recording of someone speaking way too fast to make comprehension possible. The gist of what he'd heard hinted at a "job", and Gustaw more or less managed to catch the name of one of the companies he'd sent his *Kurrvivculum Eire* to. He also lucked at noting the appointed time, as he heard the words "too au cloc" and there is no way, not even for an Eirish, to say "two o'clock" in anything less than comprehensible manner. *Troo, troo*. Gustaw felt *hepi*. He donned his three piece and hit the town,

starting with the bus stop, where, as we all know, the chariots of this Eirish Wonderworld have to be hailed, instead of always stopping at each stop along their route, a cruel fact of life visitors from the Continent had to learn the hard way. Gustaw waited half an hour for a bus which failed to show, before deciding to hit the pavement. He had plenty of time to kill, what with it only being ten *eau klok*. He walked the whole of Cabra, then along North Circular Road, passing along the way a hospital surrounded by a handful of protesters. Their home-made banners proclaimed that while Ayerish Wonderworld's economy was first rate, its healthcare was distinctly third. As in Third World. Gustaw assumed it was the healthcare, not the economy, they were protesting against. He strolled on, towards Dorset, and from there onto Gardiner. *Troo, too troo*, it was a fair old way. But what was one to do if buses rolled along a schedule quite separate from that printed on the stops and even then utterly refused to alight at the appointed time. Besides, he managed to pick up seven five cent coins along the way and felt like the luck of the Ayerish was starting to rub off. Meanwhile, it rained a total of of four times, the sun putting in an equal amount of appearances. He relieved himself in a cul de sac behind Talbot Street, having already been refused use of the facilities by a bouncer in the pub he was now pissing over. *When in Rome, do as the Roma*, he thought to himself.

In life, one could piss all over anything. it was just a question of decent bladder control.

“*Vistula Rules*” proclaimed the graffiti on the wall next to Gustaw. Meaning the conquistadores from Buland had already marked this territory as their own. He suddenly felt the desire to make a mark of his own, but he didn't have anything to write with, nor, what's worse, the first clue about football. *Reeli*, he didn't even know *Wisla* was not a club from his motherland capital. He had so far never had cause to mention his ignorance that to any of his hooligan countrymen, which was lucky, as they

would likely have killed him for it. *Troo*. Ignorance in all matters *futbol* is the real bane of those *Bulanders* who can't converse at length about championships or offsides or any of that. He had once travelled to Lodz to buy a used car, seeing as the dealers away from the capital were offering more favourable *deels*. The car had Lodz number plates, even the local coat of arms glued to the wind shield. When Gustaw got back to Warsaw and stopped at a red light, stones started raining upon his new purchase. He and it narrowly escaped with little more than a few dents and scratches. It was explained to him, once they'd reached safety, that the previous day Legia Warsaw had played against Widzew Lodz, and it was just his rotten luck that Widzew had won and loyal fans of the bootiful game were, in the way of compensation, hell bent on destroying every car displaying Lodz number plates that passed through their sore city.

Troo. Sport in *Buland* was a nightmare and, as already mentioned, a dangerous topic of discussion to enter into, my *deer peepal*.

Gustaw passed Talbot and walked on, picking another seven cents up off the pavement. He passed the river and reached Grafton, with its angels, devils and builders showing off their golden faces and silver helmets. This time he didn't toss any coins to the heavenly host. The money in his belt stopped pressing against his *stomak* a long time ago and he was having to watch every single cent.

Nevertheless, he sacrificed *too yooros* and bought himself a seat on the Luas, meaning to thus discover the rest of the city. The company he was heading for was based on the other end of the world, *Veriskerry* Road, scary enough so that not even the brave Luas went that far. The map inside the train told him he would have to ride to the end of the line, where another walk awaited him. Still, he felt *hepi*. The post he had applied for for was *kool*. The advert said they were looking for an *Asistant Managerr* in the *Finans Departament*, a role Gustaw was perfect for, considering he had already amended all the directorial experience listed in his Cee Vee for that of the required *chob spesifikasion*.

He also had his *speetch redi*. Riding along, he straightened his tie, tightened his proud grip on the umbrella and laptop bag he was accessorising with that day, almost bursting with pride at the bright and shiny future already awaiting him at the end of this ride and no mistaking, yessir... The rest of the world is just B.S. and now, just for a second, he could be his old *kiler biznes* Gustaw self again.

- *No speech, no language* - Gregory Isaac serenaded through the earpieces of his *aye-pod*. The landscape he was heading towards, prior to the mountains in the far distance, was all building cranes towering over the city. They reached as far as the horizon, the low vista of houses sprouting from the earth seemingly limitless. This looked like a new town altogether, a *brend-noo* world, and Gustaw felt it boded well for his *brend-noo futur*. He reached *Veriskerry* Road precisely at ten to two. The place was *beeg beeznes eendeed*. They gave him some paper *aye-dee* to hang around his neck and had him wait until called.

- You've some 'xperiencea workingen Ayreland? - he was eventually asked, the *intervue* starting half an hour late. The girl before him, no older than twenty one, had led him down to the back of the staff canteen. It turned out job ad had been incorrectly worded. They were not looking for an assistant manager, but a plain old assistant. The girl was the manager, desperate to find someone who would do all the things she had no wish to break her manicured nails on, and even if she had cared to try, wouldn't know where to start. Gustaw, it seemed, was not what she'd had in mind. *Yoo nou*, brothers from *Buland* are decent enough, hard-working and all that, and they have all these diplomas and *fings*. But this besuited chap seemed to have one diploma too many for her needs. She was right in thinking he wouldn't make much of a dogsbody. Which, Gustaw observed, seemed to make her *unhapi*.

- You finished uni, rraite? - she asked with a stupid smile, focusing those pretty, empty eyes on him instead of his *Cee Vee*.

- Yeah, sorry about it - he tried to joke, but it went right over her head. Things had turned embarrassing. Barbiedoll and some sucker in a three-piece with a broly and a briefcase in his lap. She was wearing jeans and a pink blouse adorned with one of those indecipherable, gothic font designs. And still that stupid smile of hers.

- Iamsoritosay - she pronounced - that yoo'aveto'ave'some Ayeirishexpiriens.

- But I have fifteen years' experience. You can see it.

- Yas, but'dis'doesn't'count.

- What you mean "does not count"? This fifteen years of rather good career. Made under bad economic climate, and politics trouble. What you mean "does not count"?

- Iam'sorry. You'do'not'fit ourr'criteria. I'sank'yoo'for'your'time, but...

- What you mean fifteen years does not count? What you mean by it? Who are you to say such things?

- If'you'want'workin Ayreland, you'need Ayreland'xperiens. Your Poulish'xperiens'does'not'count'here.

- But I have MBA and fifteen years history, *koor...*

- Oh, of'course, this'is'good, good, thatyou'havealldis. ButIcannot'helpyou'nomore. InAyreland thisisnot'important. Iwill'keepyour Cee Vee. Iwill'callyou ifanything'appears.

- Don't joke, just answer me: what do you mean when you saying "does not count"? What not count after fifteen years? Where are you fifteen years back, when I graduate and go to work for first time? Were you in Pampers?

- Please, calmyourself, orIwill'call'security.

- Tell me!

- YoulistenorI'call'security!

Gustav had tired of exercising his new tongue and used Polish to bid Barbiedoll farewell.

- No, no, you listen, darling. I will now turn, walk to the door and



snap my fingers. Then, I want you and this fucking barn to vanish from my sight, and remember, we never met, *kapish*, never!!!

- Security!

Gustaw was already passing back through the reception gates. *Troo, troo*, they would not call him back, not ever... But whatever! He was furious. Spitting viciously on the pavement, he lit and inhaled the whole of an unfiltered Extra-Strong in five breaths flat, then another, while Gregory Isaacs sang Beautiful Africa in his *aye-pod*. He exited *Veriskerry* Road, glanced up at the far-off mountains and listened to Isaac, doing his best from inside his plastic *aye-prison* to calm Gustaw's nerves and bring him back into some semblance of a good mood.

- *I would rather live poor and clean - he sang along - than to live rich in corruption.*

4reel, Isaac always came up with the right lines just when you needed them. Gustaw bought a small bottle of wine in a roadside offie and drank it all, walking back towards Luas. Gregory was working wonders, helping restore his inner equilibrium. Next, then *aye-pod* threw a Dandy-shaped curve ball and serenaded him with *Message To You Rudy*. The sun showed its gob for a second and Gustaw stopped punishing himself with thoughts about what happened, absorbed in Dandy's voice and the sax solo they always, thank Christ, cut out when using the tune for *fook* forsaken ads. Now walking as proud as a peacock in an army parade, though there was no one around to appreciate it, he eventually found himself back at the end of the Luas line.

- *Stop you runnin' around - Dandy crowed - making trouble in the town... aha. Fook*, it was impossible not to bop along to this tune. Gustaw bopped therefore next to the ticketing machine and wondered whether Dandy bopped too when recording this piece.

- *A message to you, Rudy...*

- *Gustaw, my dear buddy!* - Gustaw's Dandy Livingstone-themed reverie was disturbed by someone barking Polish at him. It was Bartosz, the

theologian, drunk and evidently still very much unemployed. *Yoo nou*, like Axl Rose or Onasis or their sort.

Gustaw would normally have legged it, but seeing as he too was still somewhat jobless, he took a sudden liking to the madman, though *eendeed* his mind was mashed from here to Honolulu. They greeted each other like old friends, then exchanged a few wily observations about the state of things. Bartosz seemed to be at his wits end. His face was purple and vodka must have fried what little he had left of his wiring, as he kept spitting utter bullshit, most of it unintelligible in any tongue. When Gustaw told him about his interview, his native nutter grew serious all of a sudden, appearing upset.

- Don't worry yourself, my dear. You've just had your cherry popped - said his sick smile - And now you have finally reached the point at which your eyes are open and, like every one of us, eventually, you get that they don't need Polish company directors here. They need us to shovel their shit.

Gustaw's mood darkened again. He remembered the moment when he heard Bartosz talk like this for the first time, in that bar on Parnell. The moment suddenly seemed so distant, as if it had happened on another planet.

- Really, don't worry yourself - Bartosz rambled on - we could always be worse off. Lining up in a dole queue on the South Pole. Or in Mongolia.

The Luas was approaching Ballaly station. The centre of the carriage was occupied by an elderly woman, clinging with one hand to the handrail, the other trying to pick a heavy box of paper off the floor. She kept glancing round with pleading eyes and Gustaw felt like helping out, but before he realised what that would involve, the Luas stopped, she let go of the handrail, lifted the box and exited. Gustaw's mood nosedived again. He found himself imagining what would have happened next, had he helped the woman lift the box. Helping her valiantly across the station and chatting as they went on, hinting at his struggles and the moronic

interview, and the lady responding that she is *eendeed veri sori*, that life shouldn't be like that, especially seeing as he is such a *gud men* and evidently a highly qualified professional. Next, it turns out her husband owns a bank, or better yet a big farming firm, and that she had been forced to take the Luas because her Jag had broken down and that's when she tells him, *atcheellee*, she could have a proposition, perfect for him, then takes his telephone number down, along with a copy of his *Cee Vee*, and calls up the next day to offer him the post of development *direktor*, Gustaw now being *reelee hepi*, buying himself a new three-piece and a car and calling his daughters, inviting them to his newly rented apartment, and, I don't *fooking nou*, maybe somewhere down South, the new developments there so flash, and then of course he goes out for a bite to eat and comes across various women, one of which, soon *enuf*, becomes his wife. And so on, and so forth.

The Luas passed Dumdum Mall and the train filled with people loaded down with shopping, though it was still early afternoon. Things were getting crowded. Bartosz swayed unsteadily on his feet, eventually collapsing on a seat next to Gustaw.

- *Some people will forever be poor* - he blurted out, poking himself on the side of the head - *In their own heads, forever.*

Bartosz then dozed off, and when the ticket inspector, wearing a high visibility vest, approached, Gustaw watched him rise and run to the other end of the carriage, and from there outside, just as the Luas doors opened at the next station.

Eventually, it reached the other end of its line, meaning Grafton. Angels, demons, painted faces. *Fansi schops*. Bars for the *Ayerish*. The wine kept spinning Gustaw's head, making it long for home, and for a quick nap. For a second, he forgot the morning's lesson and set off to catch a bus, even though he had no idea which line would take him towards Cabra, and besides, they never stop anyway, *doo dey?* He backtracked on foot, once again relieving himself against the "Vistula Rules" graffiti, then headed

north to eventually reach Dorset.

Gregory Isaac was singing “Universal Tribulation” via his *aye-pod* just as Gustaw was passing the hospital on North Circular and he stopped a second, to stare at the protesters, still parked at the entrance. One of them approached and shouted:

- Come'man! Join'us!

And handed him a small banner, displaying a hastily scribbled: “*EQUAL CARE FOR ALL!*”

Gustaw smiled and said nothing; something told him it wasn't equal treatment for the likes of him they were calling for. Next, he heard sirens approaching, so he tossed the banner aside and moved on sharpish. ZOMO, the old commie-style riot squads, were suddenly fresh in his memory, along with the sensation of being chased by their rubber batons along the Old Town back home. Throwing empty beer bottles at the bastards had been his humble little contribution to the fall of communism. The fight was over freedom and the right to a better life, but the smashing of a few beer bottles was never going to be enough.

They had wanted to open *Buland* to the world, wanted a future in which they would no longer have to run from anyone.

He stopped for a *cigareta*. Finally understood that he was a nobody. A pointless little *nobodi*.

Troo, too troo. Perhaps it was so. Perhaps they really didn't need directors from *Buland*, with diplomas and such. Maybe they did just need shit shovelling. *Maybe*. But *aye tel yoo*, my *peepal*: we cannot give up or get down. That's karma. “*Oh, my Poland is not yet lost, while we are a'living!*” Didn't kill us then, won't kill us now. It wasn't so bad, this *Ayerish Wonderworld*. Could always be worse. Could be job hunting in the steppes of Mongolia. Or traipsing around with his three-piece and broly across the South Pole. Polishing toilets for Eskimos. To err, *koorva*, is *hooman, men*.

Ya'bet.