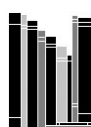


EAMONN LENIHAN

Six Pack



a nobetterman book

For: Richard Gollner... And David Marcus...

Available in e-edition only.

Copyright © Eamonn Lenihan 2000, 1998, 2000, 1998, 1991, 2015

“File Under Popular” was the winning entry to a short story competition sponsored by IBM and PCI (Post Consult International). It was first published in the June 2000 issue of "Postnews" magazine.

“Candid Photography” first appeared in "Phoenix Irish Short Stories 1998". It was published in London by Orion Books; David Marcus edited the anthology.

“Munchausen Mick” is from a forthcoming novel, “Drowning The Shamrock”. It first appeared, in slightly different form, in “Comma, Vol.1 No.2”, launched in Galway by (the current President of Ireland) Michael D. Higgins.

“Where There’s Life” first appeared in "An Cloigeann is a Luach"/"What Worth The Head” This hard-back compendium was published by Limerick County Council in 1998, and launched by the the Irish President, Mary McAleese.

“A Baby Blue Note” first appeared in "An Grian", a short-lived alternative lifestyle periodical printed in Scariff and available in East Clare during the early 1990s.

“The Rain Don’t Come” has never been previously published.

Every character in this publication is fictitious.
Any resemblance to real persons is purely coincidental.
The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

Published by nobetterman Limited

www.nobetterman.com

ISBN 978-1-910724-04-0

All rights reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written consent of the publisher, except in the case of a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with an article for insertion in a magazine, newspaper, blog or broadcast. Furthermore, the book may not be circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published.

Front cover artwork by Eamonn Lenihan.

FILE UNDER POPULAR

A light bulb had been smashed. To set the mood for the two going at it - hammer and tongs - under the desk. Round here, you were always likely to find some pair coupling in a darkened corner. Several others were in the room. Men, mostly. They hadn't shaved for days. Smelt a bit, too. Otherwise, the air was sweet with the aroma of good-quality Moroccan.

A scruff, strumming Dylan, ratified the mood. "Know any Abba?" I enquired between songs.

"Sorry," he said, re-tuning his top string. "I'm not doing requests."

How many years? he wailed, and he was off again. My cue to move on. I'd been drinking in the Student Union bar. I couldn't do much else, these days. I'd gone there hoping she'd show. Not that it'd have made much difference if she had; I was having problems getting us off the ground. As an item.

Obsession is too strong a word. Deeply curious is better. I'd become alarmed at the lengths I was prepared to go to meet her: would I, a confirmed meat-eater, have joined the Vegetarian Society if she wasn't Chairperson? Signing up at the open day, I should've at least asked if she ate fish. Or was a vegan. As I said, I wasn't getting my act together. Perhaps I trod a careful path for *her* sake - drunk, at a party, some rat had apparently taken advantage. Which explained her paranoia regarding men.

* * *

Days before the end of the last academic year, I bumped into her in the Student Union launderette. There, while I watched her lace white undies slowly tumble in the spin dryer, she suddenly revealed she was staying

on campus for the holidays. What an opportunity that would have been! Most other male students - the competition - gone for weeks. Sadly, I'd already arranged a summer job abroad. But I remembered to send her a birthday card from the States.

Her politics were left-ish. Round here, everyone claimed to be left-wing. Which shade - Marxist, Leninist, Maoist - that's what caused all the arguments. I knew little else about her. Following my hunches: her kind face, gentle green eyes. She wore black. No leather, or anything like that. Soft fabrics. Mohair cardigans and such.

Coming out of yesterday's Western European Politics lecture, there she was, in company, looking sensational in her cardigan. I watched her dash all the way over to thank me for the card.

"It was really sweet of you."

"Yes," I said.

I should have asked her out there and then, but I couldn't. I needed to work on my approach. Besides, I had a seminar to get to.

* * *

The Student Union bar isn't the best place for reflection. Always full of students, no matter what time of day. Slamming balls down the pool-table. Or getting physical with the arcade games. The noise never lets up - some sucker will keep feeding the jukebox right up to chucking-out time.

That sort of ambience I can do without. After two beers, I sauntered down the corridor. Checked the mail-room for any internal correspondence (none, as usual); made my way down to the lift to get me out of the building. I was astonished to see a light on in the Registrar's Office at that hour.

Rent strike... Just the beginning.... Three times the increase in grants... The posters inside left nothing in doubt. This was an occupation, and I had no reason to remain. Until I saw the cardigan. Black mohair, casually flung over the back of a typist's chair. Hers? Very likely. Her discovering me here might work to my advantage. But where was she? *Surely not under the desk?*

A filing-cabinet blocked my swift exit. The gorilla at the door - his job seemed to entail moving furniture about - bore that certain proud

countenance I'd seen on the faces of students taking Introduction To Political Theory: radicals like the volatile, bearded Basque or the dour German woman. An expression that instantly said: violence is the only way to seize power, to dispossess the privileged few of their wealth. Something in the eyes - a mad glint - proclaimed big brother, the state machine, freedom of assembly, smashing the system, self-determination for the Cypriot people... Two years hence, the man on sentry duty would be "involved" in industry, or - clad in pin-stripe - one of thousands commuting to London E.C.1 on the tube. He'd no longer empathise with a proletariat toiling at the coal-face/on the factory floor. But - for now - he revered Babeuf, read Engels in his spare time, grew defiant bristles, had something to believe in.

Me, I was looking for something to do.

"Go ahead," he said. "It isn't locked." The man pointed with a simian-like digit. "Or don't you want to look at your file?"

"Yes," I said. "That's why I'm here."

"What department are you in?"

"Government."

"Try the middle drawer."

My own college application didn't interest me. Her file - which I came across in seconds - that was another matter. Father, a C.N.D. activist. Figured. Mother, a social worker. All this *goodness* - such selfless altruism - and yet, one only had to read the papers to see the reverse was true. Hobbies: archaeology - Christ! Of course it was her application form - I remembered stretching the truth on my own. The biggest shock was that she'd wanted to come here. Most other students - myself included - had been placed here after failing to achieve the grades our preferred colleges required.

"Makes interesting reading, doesn't it?"

A pair of eyes, gentle green, regarded me favourably. Had she already guessed that her file was in my hands?

"Especially," I ventured, "my ex-Headmaster's summing-up."

Meanwhile, fingers searched frantically, surreptitiously, for a file - my own - that wasn't in the drawer. Only then did I notice the dossier she clutched to her breast.

Is this what they mean by a stand-off?

OTHER NOBETTERMAN TITLES...

- ★ A novel, “Power & Perdition”, is currently available in print and Kindle formats.
- ★ Audiobook and iBook editions of “Power & Perdition” will be available from August 2015.
- ★ The first in a series of nobetterman non-fiction eBooks and pocket-books will be published in December 2015.
- ★ And look out for the novel, “Drowning the Shamrock”, due for an early 2016 launch.

nobetterman books

words to your eyes (and ears)

**AVAILABLE WORLDWIDE -
IN BOOKSHOPS AND ONLINE...**