'Brilliant'



written by

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for St. Patrick's Festival Parade 2011 & Dublin UNESCO City of Literature

Poor oul' Dublin.

Dublin was a city on the west coast of -

East.

Dublin was a city on the east coast of Ireland. Dublin was the biggest city, and the capital. And Dublin was depressed. Bored black clouds had been hanging over the city for months. Every night after dark, the M50 crawled slowly away. The waves in Dublin Bay rushed the wrong way, trying to escape. Even the River Liffey – the famous, dirty Liffey – was refusing to flow.

-I'm going back to Wicklow where I'm wanted, said the Liffey. –And I am *not* dirty.

-Go on then, said the Ha'penny Bridge. –Go back to mammy. You're only a bogger an'anyways.

All the other cities had tried to help – except Cork. Galway, a city on the east –

West.

West coast of Ireland, had sent a Get Well Soon card. Limerick had sent a Get Well Soon Or Else card. New York had sent a basket of fruit and Paris, the capital of Germ-

France.

Paris, the capital of France, had sent the Eiffel Tower – because Paris was a generous city and, actually, Paris was a bit sick of the Eiffel Tower and happy enough to get rid of it. So the Eiffel Tower, renamed the Eiffel Yoke, now sat in Dublin, right over the junction of O'Connell Street and Abbey Street. The Luas went under it and the seagulls sat on it.

-This is new, said a seagull.

-And very comfy, said another. -Did you ever try sitting on the Spire?

Other cities had tried to help too. Copenhagen's Little Mermaid now sat beside the pond in Stephen's Green, looking out at the ducks and the soggy bits of bread. But no present or card could lift the gloom. Dublin stayed depressed.

Actually, it wasn't Dublin. Buildings and streets can't be depressed.

-Yes, they can, said Westmoreland Street. -I'm feeling a bit low, meself.

-You are a bit low, said Liberty Hall. -I can hardly see yeh from here.

-Oh, always the bitter word.

A city is made of bricks and cement, and bricks and cement can't be depressed.

-I've never been depressed a day in me life, said a brick on the second floor of Arnott's.

-Me neither, said a bag of cement on the back of a truck on Bachelor's Walk. –Although I wouldn't mind a drop of water.

Dublin was made of bricks and cement, tar and, eh –

Glass.

Glass. So Dublin wasn't depressed. It was the people who lived in Dublin who were depressed. Although most of them didn't know it.

More than a million people lived in Dublin.

-And they've all walked down me, said Henry Street.

More than a million Dubliners, most of them depressed. But they didn't really know. The most used, the busiest, word in Dublin was 'brilliant'. It was the city's favourite word.

-That was a great funeral.

-Brilliant.

It was a great word, really. It burst out of your mouth when you said it.

- -How's the soup?
- -Brilliant!
- -Ah Jaysis, look at me shirt!

It was a very handy word, very adaptable. It could be used in all sorts of ways.

- -The car won't start.
- -Well, that's just brilliant.

It made people smile, even when they didn't want to.

- -My dog's after dying.
- -Ah, no. What was his name?
- -Brilliant.
- -Ahhh, that's brilliant.

And that was the problem. 'Brilliant' was a brilliant word. It lit up everything around it. It was hard to see the gloom when the word was constantly bursting all over the city, like a firework display that never ended. But sometimes, only for brief moments, when very few people were talking, the sadness was there to be seen – on the faces, across the shoulders, in the feet. The people of Dublin were low. They were worried and sometimes angry. They felt trapped, surrounded by bad news. There was no escape.

Even children noticed.

Two children noticed – at first.

They were sitting under their kitchen table. They often did this and, if they stayed still, the grown-ups never noticed. Raymond and Gloria Kelly were supposed to be in bed but they'd been under the table for an hour and forty minutes, listening to their parents and their uncle and their granny. Six more minutes and they would break their sitting-under-the-table-in-secret record.

Only six minutes, but they weren't going to be easy. Their bums were sore, maybe even dead. A spider had built a web from Raymond's left ear to Gloria's right shoulder. The spider was tickling Raymond's ear – deliberately. The spider's wife was standing on Gloria's neck, right under her ear, and Gloria thought she could hear the spider whispering.

-Whack me. Go on. I dare yeh!

It was agony. Raymond was trying hard not to moan. His bum was definitely dead. He was going to wallop the spider. Gloria was about to scream. She was sure she was – she couldn't take any more. She could feel the spider's wife climbing into her ear. All eight legs were tickling her to death.

Then Gloria and Raymond heard something that made them forget all about spiders and breaking their record. They heard the words that would change their lives.

2.

Jack and Una Kelly sat at the kitchen table, with Jack's brother, Ben, and Una's mother. The kitchen table was a bit annoyed because it was supposed to be his night off and he'd been looking forward to a bit of peace and darkness. But now he had four people putting their hot cups on top of his head. They were tapping their spoons and spilling sugar and teabags all over him. It was the night before St Patrick's Day, so their kids, Raymond and Gloria, been let stay up later than usual, to watch a film. Then they'd been sent up to bed. But they weren't up there. They'd sneaked back down from their bedrooms - and that annoyed the table too. They were in under him now, playing some sort of a stupid game that involved doing absolutely nothing. He was sick of being a table, sick of being taken for granted.

Una's mother put the teapot down on the table.

- -Get that thing off me scalp! roared the table to himself.
- -That's terrible news, said Una's mother. -Isn't it?
- -Yes, said Una. -It is.

She looked across at Ben. Ben had just told them that he was closing down his painting business.

-Are you sure about this, Ben?

Ben shrugged.

-Two years ago I stopped answering the phone because I was too busy, he said. –I couldn't keep up. Now but, the phone never rings.

Raymond, under the table, was trying to listen. He knew something bad was happening but the spider was sitting in his ear hole. Raymond saw his Uncle Ben's feet moving. He saw the white paint spots on the shoes.

Ben stood up.

-So, that's that, he said.

Gloria watched her Uncle Ben's feet walk slowly to the kitchen door. She knew by the way he moved, something sad was going on.

Gloria heard the kitchen door open, then close.

- -Poor Ben, said her mam.
- -You'd want to mind that poor lad, said Gloria's granny.

Gloria saw her granny's feet move. She was standing up. Gloria listened – she tried to. But the spider's wife was hanging from the tip of her nose.

-What d'you mean? said Jack, to Gloria's granny.

She leaned on the table.

- -Jaysis, missis! the table screamed to himself. –Go on a bloody diet!
- -Depression, she said. -The black dog of depression has climbed onto that poor fella's back.

Under the table, Raymond heard the bit about the black dog.

-The whole city's depressed, said his granny.

Gloria heard that bit.

-But anyway, said her granny. -I'm off to my bed.

Gloria watched her granny's feet. She was wearing her huge slippers, the ones with dog's ears. Gloria saw one heel stand on a dog's ear. She saw her

granny trip. She heard her granny hit the table.

- -Oh God!
- -Are you alright? said Gloria's mam.
- -No!! yelled the table to himself.
- -I'm grand, said Gloria's granny. -But I'm after whacking my funny bone.

Raymond heard her say 'funny bone'.

-And it isn't funny at all, said his granny.

Raymond watched his granny's slippers continue the journey to the kitchen door.

-It's desperate, said his granny. -Young Ben and all the others. All that happiness, stolen.

Gloria and Raymond heard 'stolen'.

-Anyway, said their granny. -I'm off to my little damp granny flat.

Raymond watched his parents stand up. There was a tiny hole in his dad's sock.

- -Her flat isn't damp, is it? said his mam.
- -She's damp, said his dad.
- -Ah stop.

Raymond heard his parents pick up cups and stuff. He heard his dad.

-Leave them. I'll do them in the morning.

He heard his mam.

- -Are you worried about Ben?
- -I am, yeah, said his dad. –A bit. She's probably right about the black dog. Gloria watched her parents leave the kitchen. She could hear her mam.
- -Her poor funny bone, she said. –We'll have to keep an eye on Ben.

She heard her dad.

-I suppose, he said. –But I wish there was more we could do.

He sighed.

-What a bloody country.

The door clicked, shut. The kitchen was empty, and dark.

Gloria and Raymond crawled out from under the table. They stood up and rubbed some life back into their bums.

- -Did you hear what they said? said Raymond.
- -Granny's damp, said Gloria.
- -Not that, said Raymond. -The other thing.
- -The black dog thing?
- -Yeah, said Raymond. –The Black Dog of Depression's after robbing Dublin's funny bone.
 - -Yeah, said Gloria. -And they're worried about Uncle Ben.
 - -The Black Dog's been on his back.
 - -Did you see him on Uncle Ben's back, Rayzer?
 - -No.

Raymond and Gloria loved their Uncle Ben. He was easily their favourite relation. He made brilliant breakfasts when he stayed in their house. He knew exactly how to talk to kids. He never teased or embarrassed them and he always gave them great sweets.

- -We have to get the funny bone back, said Raymond.
- -Yeah, said Gloria. -It'll cheer up Uncle Ben.
- -Let's go.
- -What's a funny bone?
- -It's the bit of the body that makes you laugh.
- -And does Dublin have one of them? Gloria asked.
- -Granny said so, said Raymond.
- -Ah, well then, said Gloria. -Let's go.

Raymond ran to the kitchen door.

-Where are we going, Rayzer?

- -Upstairs, to get our clothes on.
- -Oh yeah.

They ran quietly – kids can do that when they want to – up the stairs, into their bedrooms. They took off their jammies and put on proper clothes. Then back down the stairs – quietly – back into the kitchen.

Raymond was 10, and Gloria was 8. Raymond was unlocking the back door, about to step into the night.

The door was open.

- -Where are we going now, Rayzer? Gloria asked.
- -Don't know, said Raymond. -But we have to find the Black Dog.

They ran out.

3.

They ran outside, into the back garden. The security light from O'Leary's house next door went on, with a click and a blast of white light.

- -Oh my God!
- -Come on!

Raymond led the way, to the side passage. It was cold and there was a smell of old wheelie bin. O'Leary's security light clicked off.

Raymond stopped.

- -I can't see.
- -Brilliant, said Gloria, and the word popped open above them and filled the passage with gentle, yellow light. Raymond got going again and Gloria followed, to the front of the house and out to the street.
 - -Where now, Rayzer? said Gloria.
- -There are three black dogs on our road, said Raymond. –One of them might be the Black Dog of Depression. Come on.

They ran along the street, to Mooney's house. They went – they crept - to

the front door. Raymond pushed open the letter box and, together, they looked through the slit.

They saw two black eyes - and a tongue. The eyes and the tongue belonged to Lulu Mooney.

The tongue tried to lick their faces through the letter box.

- -I don't think Lulu's the Black Dog of Depression, said Gloria.
- -No, Raymond agreed.

Lulu started barking.

-Run!

They ran back to the street. They could hear Mister Mooney from inside the house.

-Shut up! Or I'll go down there and take that bloody bone off yeh!

Gloria stopped running.

- -The funny bone!
- -No, said Raymond. –It's just an ordinary bone. It's Lulu's. She's been minding it for years. Come on.

They ran to the next house, O'Driscoll's. The black dog, Fang O'Driscoll, slept in a shed in the back. They crept down the dark side passage.

- -Can't see.
- -Brilliant.
- -Now I can.

The shed door was open.

-Here, Fang.

Fang was an old dog. He didn't get up.

-Are you depressed, Fang?

Fang farted.

- -Is that depression? Gloria asked.
- -Don't think so, said Raymond. -Or if it is, Dad's really depressed. Here's

the test, watch. Fang?

Fang's tail walloped the floor – and stopped.

-Fang?

The tail drumming started again.

-See? said Raymond. -It's not Fang. Depressed dogs don't wag their tails.

This job was going to be harder than Raymond had expected – although he hadn't really expected anything. There was one more black dog on the street but Raymond didn't know if there was any point in –

-What are yis doin'?

The voice came from nowhere.

Gloria screamed – but nothing came out. She could feel the scream in her throat but it was clinging there, too scared to climb out of her mouth.

Gloria wasn't afraid of the dark. She never had been. And that had always made her feel a bit special. But it wasn't the dark that was frightening her now. It was the voice. A voice with no body.

The scream, finally, came out.

-.... ohmygod!

Then she saw the head.

Raymond saw it too. An upside-down head.

- -Ernie? said Raymond.
- -Wha'? said Ernie O'Driscoll.
- -What are you doing?
- -Hangin' upside-down, said Ernie.
- -Yeah, said Raymond. -Why, but?
- -Well, said Ernie. -I'm a bit of a vampire, like.

Ernie was 16. His name was well known all along the street. 'If you don't do your homework, you'll end up like Ernie O'Driscoll.' 'If you don't eat your broccoli, you'll end up like Ernie O'Driscoll.' All the local kids knew Ernie but the fact that he was a vampire was red hot news.

-A vampire?

Ernie nodded once, upside-down.

- -Since when?
- -Last week, said Ernie. -Me ma told me to get a job, so there you go.
- -Vampire's a job?
- -There's a recession, bud, said Ernie. –We need young people with vision. And I get to stay in bed all day.

Gloria wasn't scared anymore.

- -Why are you hanging upside-down, Ernie?
- -Seen it in a fillum, said Ernie. –It's good for the oul' digestion.
- -Did you suck someone's blood tonight?
- -An oul' one in Finglas West -

East.

- -Finglas East, said Ernie.
- -Cool. Did she scream?
- -She didn't notice, said Ernie. -She was watchin' Corrie. Hang on.

They heard a grunt, and the whoosh of a black cape – and Ernie was standing in front of them.

-Brilliant!

They could see him clearly for a second.

- -You don't look anything like Robert Pattinson, Ernie, said Gloria.
- -He can't have everythin', I suppose.
- -Did the light there not hurt your eyes?
- -No way, said Ernie. -That's just a story.
- -But you really drink blood, don't you?
- -Ah yeah.

He belched.

-It's heavy goin', but.

-We're chasing the Black Dog of Depression, Ernie, said Gloria. –Want to come?

Ernie thought about it.

- -Is he big, is he?
- -Huge, said Gloria.
- -Grand, said Ernie. -Dessert. What're we waitin' for?

Gloria laughed.

-Are you coming, Fang? said Raymond.

Fang thumped his tail and farted.

-There's your answer, said Ernie.

They followed Ernie out to the garden, then out to the street.

-So, said Ernie. -Where's this Black Dog?

But, as Ernie spoke, they saw the Dog. At the end of the street. Not the Dog - its shadow, for only a second. It was huge, sliding against the wall as it turned the corner. It made no noise. But it was definitely the black dog.

It was gone. But they'd seen it.

-Come on!

4.

They ran to the corner but the Black Dog had gone. It was cold – a kind of moving cold - like a freezing, invisible animal was rubbing against them.

-Come on, said Raymond.

Gloria didn't want to go any further. The cold frightened her, the way it seemed to move. She'd been frightened twice now, and she didn't like it.

Raymond started running.

Then Gloria thought of her Uncle Ben, and the weight of the Black Dog on his back, and she went after Raymond. They ran to the next corner.

No Dog. Just the cold. Waiting for them.

They could see nothing on the street ahead, no shadow or anything solid. It was very late, very quiet.

-Here, Ernie, said Raymond.

He shivered.

- -Can you not fly?
- -Oh yeah, said Ernie. -Forgot.

And they watched him -

- -Brilliant!
- as he lifted himself off the ground, higher, like he was in an invisible lift, higher and higher.
 - -Look at this bit, he called down to them.

He spread out his arms so his cape looked like a huge bat's wings.

- -The biz, wha'!
- -Can you see the Black Dog?
- -No, said Ernie. -The houses and stuff are in the way. Hang on, but -
- -What?
- -I can see somethin', said Ernie. -And it isn't the usual stuff.

He glided back down.

- -It's like a cloud of smoke or somethin', he said, when he'd landed. Darker than the dark, like.
 - -Where?
 - -Down this one, said Ernie.

He ran ahead, and they followed. He waited for them at each corner and, at every corner, they were quickly cold. The corner was a cold hint – the Dog seemed to be leaving a trail, telling them which way to run.

They preferred to run. They stayed warmer that way, and stopping for too

long made Gloria nervous.

- -Where are we, Rayzer?
- -Don't know.

They'd run out of the place they knew and, for the third time that night, Gloria was scared. She really didn't want to see the Black Dog.

- -Look!
- -Oh my God!

Raymond had seen it – the Dog. It was moving, just a shadow, right under a bunch of small trees, in front of a huge building. He knew it. He'd been here before – loads of times.

They were at the Liffey Valley Shopping Centre.

-Come on!

There were no cars or people – it was very late. Just Raymond, Gloria, Ernie. And the shadow. Raymond ran at it. He'd never grabbed a shadow before. He knew you couldn't hold one, that shadows were made of light and shade. So he wasn't just surprised when his hands touched something solid.

He was terrified.

- -What's the story? said Ernie.
- -I felt it!
- -Felt what, Rayzer? said Gloria.
- -The Dog.
- -But there's nothing here, said Gloria.

She was right - but she wasn't. There was no dog near them, or in among the trees.

But there was something.

The cold.

It seemed to be right over them now, an icy, black cloud. Or the freezing,

silent animal leaning over, sniffing them.

-Ah here! said Ernie. -It's only a cloud.

Gloria laughed.

-Brilliant!

And the cloud, the weird lump of extra darkness, moved away.

They weren't sure it was even there now.

- -Here, said Ernie. -Why are we doin' this, an'anyway?
- -For our Uncle Ben, said Gloria. -He's depressed.
- -And the Black Dog has Dublin's funny bone, said Raymond.
- -And Uncle Ben will feel better if we can get it back, said Gloria.
- -Says who?
- -Our granny.
- -Ah, well then, said Ernie. -Fair enough.
- -Do you know our granny, Ernie?
- -No, said Ernie. –But I always feel brainier after I've drunk some granny's blood.
 - -Really?
 - -On the level.
 - -Cool.

The cloud was back – it was definitely there. They were definitely looking at it. But they weren't sure it was a cloud. They hoped it was, just a cloud behaving strangely. But they watched it sink to the road ahead and, whatever it was, it stopped being something they thought they'd seen and became something solid and real that they could definitely see.

-The Dog!

A big black dog. A real, ordinary dog – they could hear his paws smack the ground as he ran away.

-Come on!

They ran after it.

They ran along the side of the N4, towards town. They knew where they were now. The Dog stayed ahead of them. Sometimes they seemed to be catching up, even though Gloria and Raymond were getting tired and Ernie had forgotten he could fly. And sometimes the Dog seemed to be getting away but they could still hear his paws, just ahead of them.

- -Is he letting us chase him?
- -Think so.
- -Why?
- -Don't know.

They kept running. They could see Phoenix Park, and the shape of the trees, ahead, to the right.

Left.

Left. And there was something else they noticed now. They could hear other feet, other shoes hitting the ground, behind and beside them. And they began to see the other kids. Two of them, then four, eight, nine, more. All of them running, all of them chasing the Black Dog.

5.

But the Dog was gone again. They could still hear his paws but they couldn't see him.

-Where is he?

They were near town now, on the stretch of road that led to Kingsbridge, down where the Liffey used to flow.

They stopped.

They all stopped, the other kids too, girls and boys, all panting. Ernie seemed to be the only vampire. Although there was one boy there who looked like he might be a leprechaun.

-Hey, Rayzer? Gloria whispered. -Is that fella a leprechaun?

-Think so, said Raymond. -But he's a bit on the tall side.

They all stood looking at one another. And they felt it – the cold. The sliding cold, telling them to follow.

They ran. Over a bridge, to the next corner. Phoenix Park was right in front of them. They felt the cold again, guiding them right.

Left.

Left. Then they were running into Phoenix Park. And, again, Gloria wondered.

-Why is he letting us chase him?

They kept running, up a steep path. It was darker now because the trees were on both sides of them, blocking the moon and other light. They ran together in a group, like a dark cloud of their own.

- -Why are you chasing the Black Dog?
- -My da.
- -My mam.
- -Is she depressed? Gloria asked the girl who was running beside her.
- -Yeah, said the girl. –She's down in the dumps, like. My auntie said something about getting the Black Dog off her back. And then I seen him.
- -Me too, said a boy. -My da stays in bed all day since his job got shut down.

The boy was panting. They were still running along the path, up a hill.

- -The Black Dog blocks the bedroom door.
- -Where's the Dog now, but?

They all felt it, the rush of cold wind. It went past them. Then it came back, on the other side. It pushed them – it seemed to – off the path. Then they could see it, the darker shape in the darkness, going into the trees. And they heard paws - and panting. The panting that only dogs make. And they could see the Dog now. He barked – he yapped – just before he disappeared into the darkness of the trees.

-Come on!

They started to run at the trees. Then they heard a voice.

- -Be careful!
- -Who said that?!
- -None of us, said Raymond. -It was an oul' fella's voice. Come on.
- -They wouldn't listen to me, said the Wellington Monument, who'd been standing there since 1861.
- -Ah now, said the Papal Cross who'd only been there since 1979. –We all have our cross to bear.

The kids were in among the trees. And lost. And Gloria's question, 'Why is he letting us chase him?', seemed to answer itself.

-It's a trap, said Gloria.

But no one heard her.

But she heard the voice.

-I'm not going to bite you, said the voice.

It was the Dog. Gloria was sure of it, even though she couldn't see. She'd stopped moving because the branches were grabbing at her face and legs. She was afraid she'd trip. She could hear the other kids around her, but none of them were near enough to see.

-No, said the voice, the Dog. -You're not worth biting.

It was a horrible voice.

-You're useless.

The voice came with a stink.

-That's right, said the voice. –That's how useless you are. That's what happens to everything around you.

Gloria wanted to cry. She felt the Dog's fur against her face.

-Useless, he whispered.

She couldn't hear the others now. It was quiet, as if the Dog was whispering the same thing to all of them.

-You're no good to anyone.

Gloria knew it wasn't true. But she *felt* like it was true. She was going to lie down on the cold ground.

-Good idea.

But then, she had a different idea.

-Brilliant.

She whispered it, and it produced a little, whispered light. She heard a groan.

She said it again.

-Brilliant.

Louder. The groan was further away this time. The Dog was moving, slouching away. The stink was gone. And she knew the Dog was a liar. She wasn't useless.

-Hey, Ernie!

- - - Wha'?

Ernie sounded sad.

-Fly up in the air and shout 'Brilliant'!

--- Why?

-Just do it! Brilliant!

- - - Okay.

She heard Ernie smacking the leaves and branches.

-Brilliant, brilliant, bleedin' brilliant!

The trees were lit up and gorgeous. She could see the other kids now. Some of them were getting up off the ground. They all looked like they'd been asleep and stuck in a horrible nightmare.

-Everyone shout! Brilliant!

They all walked side by side through the sparkling trees.

-Brilliant!

They could hear the Dog charging away from their voices and the light.

They came out at the other side of the trees. They could see the dark

shadow – the Dog – huge and curling, gliding towards the Zoo.

-Come on!

The tall leprechaun spoke.

- -Can we not just, like, go home?
- -No, said Raymond. -We have to stop the Dog.
- -Yeah, said Gloria. -And now we know how to.
- -Come on!

They all ran towards the Zoo.

-It's shut, said the Wellington Monument, but no one was listening.

6.

They saw the Black Dog gliding over the wall of the Zoo. He seemed to be even bigger now, and longer.

He was gone, over.

It was still nighttime, although the morning birds were starting the sing. The Zoo was shut.

- -Told you, said the Wellington Monument.
- -How'll we get in? asked a girl.

Some of the kids were a bit relieved that they couldn't go any further. They were cold and frightened. The bad dream with the Dog in it – *Useless!* - was still floating around their heads. They wanted to go home.

- -Ernie, said Raymond.
- -Wha'? said Ernie.

Raymond lifted his arms.

- -Hold me, said Raymond.
- -Wha'? said Ernie. -No way.
- -Go on, said Raymond. -You can carry us over the wall.

-Gotcha, said Ernie.

He grabbed Raymond under the arms -

-Ahh, you're tickling!

And he flew straight up, as if he was in his invisible lift again.

-Goin' up, said Ernie. -Monkeys and accessories.

His cape flapped and he disappeared over the wall, with Raymond.

Then he was back.

-Who's next?

-Me!

They were all over the wall, inside the Zoo, in less than three minutes. The kids who'd been frightened felt less frightened now, inside the Zoo. They felt safer near the animals. And they all knew why they were there: they had to stop the Dog.

They stood outside the souvenir shop.

- -Ernie.
- -Wha'?
- -Can you see the Dog?

Ernie started rising.

-My batteries'll be wasted.

They all watched as he rose way over the shop and started to turn slowly.

- -See anything?
- -Over there, said Ernie. -The big things. The what're-they- called? The elephants.

He pointed ahead, a bit to the – right?

Well done.

- -They're goin' a bit mad, said Ernie.
- -Come on!

They all ran together - they felt safer together - past the meerkats, the

lemurs and spider monkeys.

-I'm glad I'm not paying for this, said the tall leprechaun. -It'd be a terrible waste of money.

They ran past the flamingoes but they didn't stop to look.

-The nerve of them, said a flamingo, but they didn't hear.

Gloria was running beside Ernie.

- -Is it good being a werewolf, Ernie?
- -Couldn't tell yeh, said Ernie. -I'm a vampire.
- -Is it good?
- -It's alrigh', said Ernie. -A bit borin'.
- -You like drinking blood though, don't yeh?
- -Ah yeah.

Gloria was feeling better now. She was feeling almost happy. She'd outtricked the Black Dog. She'd found out what his weakness was.

They ran along the forest trail, towards the elephants.

They had the Dog on the run and she knew they'd be able to beat him.

-Brilliant.

They couldn't see much on the trail. The path was bendy and the trees were close by. There was one last bend that made some of the kids laugh and bump into one another. And then there was the shock.

The Black Dog was there.

Waiting for them.

They heard his howl before they saw him. A howl that ripped the Zoo apart. Everything was gone. Just the howl. A howl that stayed and became a word that hung there, like poisonous gas.

USELESS.

The fright made them quickly tired, exhausted – they'd been up all night. USELESS.

They sank to the ground. All of them. Even Gloria. Her eyes were stinging and sad. They were closing. There was a word she needed, an important word, but she couldn't remember it.

USELESS.

It was true. She was useless. She was too tired to do anything. Her eyes were –

-Excuse me!

Gloria's eyes stayed open. There was something pink. A flamingo. Lots of flamingoes. Marching up to the Dog.

-Some of us are trying to sleep, you know! We need our eight hours! USELESS.

-We're pink! said the flamingo at the front. –Of course, we're useless! That's the point!

Gloria smiled – she couldn't help it. Flamingoes that could talk. It was –

-Brilliant, she said.

She remembered. It was the word she'd forgotten, the word she remembered she needed.

- -Brilliant, she said.
- -Thanks very much, said a flamingo. -Too little, too late.
- -Brilliant!

She heard the groan – they all did – and the weight of the Dog seemed to lift off them. The night, the dark, seemed to be sailing away.

-Brilliant!!

They were all standing up again, some of them yawning, one or two of them crying. They were upset, low. But they could see it, and feel it. The Black Dog was moving away – running away. He'd become an ordinary dog again. A very big black dog jumping over the fence.

-Come on!

Raymond started to run. And all the kids followed. They all knew what they had to do.

-Brilliant!

They were winning again. They'd get rid of the Black Dog for good and they'd go home to happier houses.

-Brilliant!

It was brighter now, dawn, and the birds were working hard.

-Cheep, cheep! Cheep, cheep! The difference is we're Irish!

They were coming up to the gate.

- -Are you not afraid of the daylight, Ernie? asked Raymond.
- -That's just an oul' myth, said Ernie. -To make you feel safe in the daytime.
- -The Black Dog's afraid, though.
- -It's lookin' that way.

The Zoo was open. A man was opening the gate.

- -Here, Mister, said the tall leprechaun. -Do we have to pay to get out?-No.
- -See yeh, so.

The kids ran, back out to the park and the city.

7.

It was early morning in the city of Dublin. People lying awake could hear a sound that everyone liked, a ship's foghorn out on Dublin Bay.

But it wasn't a foggy morning and it wasn't actually a foghorn. It was the Spire on O'Connell Street, and he was teaching the Eiffel Yoke how to speak proper English.

- -What's the STORE-Y?! he said, again.
- -Wot iz ze stor-ee?
- -No, listen. What's the STORE-ORE-Y?!
- -It must be foggy down at the O2, said Raymond.
- -Yeah, said the tall leprechaun.

They were running along the quays, beside the Liffey's dry riverbed.

-Where is he?

They'd lost sight of the Black Dog. He'd been in front of them, a few corners ahead. Then he was gone.

They all slowed down, unsure, a bit worried. Relieved, and disappointed.

-Keep going, said Raymond.

He knew that if they stopped now they probably wouldn't start again. The other kids knew it too. They wanted to stop – but they didn't. They knew they had to beat the Dog.

-What's the STORE-ORE-Y?!

They kept running, past Collins Barracks

-Are you actually a leprechaun? Raymond asked.

-No way am I, said the tall leprechaun. –People just think that, because I'm tall.

-That's mad.

They were looking up at the sky, at every corner, for any sign of the Dog.

-I've got kind of a leprechauny face, said the tall leprechaun. –But no one would notice. Only, I'm six foot, two. And they see the face and they decide I'm a – God!

The Dog was there. At the corner of Smithfield. First a shadow. Then the shadow became solid, and muscular. The Dog kept coming around the corner, like a black truck slowly turning.

This was the biggest he'd been. He was monstrous, horrible. He started to open his mouth.

-Quick! said Gloria. -Shout before he does! Brilliant!

-Brilliant!

Nothing happened.

-What's the STORE-ORE-Y!

It was daylight now, so 'brilliant' didn't light up. It was just a word. Some of the kids slowed down. Some stopped, too frightened to go any nearer.

But Gloria kept running at the Dog. So did Raymond and Ernie.

Gloria knew now that the Black Dog wasn't afraid of the light. But she wasn't going to give up.

-Brilliant!

The Dog didn't budge.

-Brilliant!

They kept running at him, straight for the mouth that seemed to be growing bigger – and deeper.

-Brilliant!

The mouth stopped growing.

-Brilliant!

The word was working. The Black Dog had heard it. 'Brilliant' had hit him, like a dart. He turned sideways, to get away from it.

-It's the word he hates, not the light!

-Brilliant!

The other kids saw what was happening and they followed Gloria. And other kids too. They came from behind, running. There were twice as many now, and all of them shouting.

-BRILLIANT!

The Dog was up on his hind legs. Then he fell backwards, and landed on his front paws and charged away, down Arran Quay. His paws smashed down on the street. The kids could feel the weight, the vibration in their feet as they raced after him. Other kids, hundreds of them, were running across the Father Mathew Bridge, to join up with the kids on the south –

North.

The Northside.

-BRILLIANT!

The Dog was charging away – they were winning again. But he was getting even bigger. His fur rubbed the sides of buildings as he ran along the quays. The railings in front of the Four Courts got a shock.

-What in the name of God was that?! they asked.

Then hundreds of kids ran past, shouting and panting.

-What in the name of God was that?!

-BRILLIANT!

The Dog was too big to escape quickly. They all saw him turn on to Capel Street. They heard his fur scraping bricks. They heard glass breaking.

They ran over the broken window glass as they turned the corner and followed. They were all tired now. They'd been running for miles and hours – all night. The 'brilliants' were getting smaller.

-brilliant.

They were out of breath and it was harder to say the whole word.

-illiant.

The Dog turned on to Mary Street. They heard the crunch of corner bricks. And they noticed, he was slowing down. That gave them new energy.

-BRILLIANT!

They charged around the corner, over the rubble, on to Mary Street. The Dog's paws on the street, the hundreds of children's shoes, the shouting, hundreds and hundreds of voices - the noise was unbelievable.

- -I'm phoning the Guards, said Mary Street.
- -I'm phoning Childline, said Little Britain Street.

The Black Dog was on Henry Street, heading straight for the Spire.

-What's the STORE-ORE-Y?!

Then he lifted. He took off, exactly like a plane. He flew slowly, a colossal, dog-shaped cloud, too dark for rain or anything normal. He sailed over O'Connell Street, over the Spire and the Eiffel Yoke, over the statue of Big Jim Larkin, whose big hands seemed to be reaching up to help the kids and grab the Dog.

The kids stopped at the Spire. They were exhausted, thirsty, frightened again.

-Do we have to keep going? one of them asked. -He's floating away.

-Yeah, we do, said Gloria.

She'd just remembered why.

-He has Dublin's funny bone, she said. -We've got to get it back.

8.

The Black Dog seemed to be spreading out – the cloud was getting wider and thicker. He covered more and more of the city. The kids could feel his weight on top of their heads. They could see grown-up people along the street, sitting on the ground, holding their heads.

-Shout!

-BRILLIANT!

The cloud had made the city centre very dark, so the light from the word was explosive –

-BRILLIANT!

The cloud started to shift, to move away, over Talbot Street and Connolly Station, over the Five Lamps, East Wall and Fairview.

-Come on!

Years later, they would never really understand how they'd been able to run so far and for so long. But now they just kept running. More kids joined in, kids who'd been running all night. Thousands of kids ran through Fairview, under the railway bridge. They could see the Dog ahead. He was covering all of Dublin Bay.

-What's the STORE-ORE-Y?!

They were beside the sea now. The wind was strong and loud.

-BRILLIANT!

Spray from the waves flew at them, like freezing spit. But they kept running.

-BRILLIANT!

They ran alongside the sea but they couldn't get any nearer to the Dog.

Until they came to the wooden bridge that went out to Bull Island. Now they could run straight at the Dog. They knew – they felt it: This was the last fight.

The Battle of Clontarf.

-Charge!

They ran across the wooden bridge – trip, trap, trip, trap.

-Who's that tripping over my bridge? roared the troll, as he climbed out from under the bridge.

-It's only me, said the smallest Billy Goat Gruff.

Wrong story - sorry.

They ran across the wooden bridge.

- -Wazzup? said the troll, as he climbed out from under the bridge.
- -We're huntin' dog blood, bud, said Ernie.
- -Cool, said the troll, and he ran beside Ernie.

They were off the bridge now. They ran past the golf club, straight into the gale and the darkness – BRILLIANT! – all the way down to the beach.

They stopped. They couldn't run any further. There was no more land. They were on the edge of Dublin and the Black Dog was right over them.

He was turning, starting to move. His fur, the cloud, was rolling, growing. A cloud seemed to grow out of the main cloud, and became his face.

He snarled.

USELESS.

-It's a trap! Raymond shouted.

He knew what was happening – he suddenly knew it. The Black Dog had dragged the kids away from the city and now he was going back, to destroy it.

USELESS.

-Shout!

BRILLIANT!

- -Louder!
- -BRILLIANT!!

Every kid shouted – one huge shout. And it was working. The Dog was slowing, curling, buckling.

But he was still moving – escaping.

- -Ernie!
- -Wha'?
- -Grab me, said Raymond. -And fly right into the Dog.
- -You're jestin', said Ernie.
- -I'm not, said Raymond.
- -Me as well, said the tall leprechaun.

Ernie held onto Raymond's collar, and the leprechaun's, and he lifted himself.

-Hate this.

Fast this time, he flew straight into the Dog. The kids below could hear the three voices inside the cloud.

-BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT, bleedin' BRILLIANT!

The wind grabbed their own voices. They'd no breath left. They could see chinks, tiny holes in the cloud. They were winning. But they were drenched; they'd no more strength. They could hear the boys in the Dog. But then that stopped too. There was just the wind. The holes in the cloud were filling in.

Useless.

Gloria got enough breath back.

-One more time, she said.

All the kids grabbed mouthfuls of wind, sent them down to their lungs – and fired them back out, and straight up.

-BRILLIANNNNNT!

This time was the last time. And it worked. The word ripped through the cloud. The holes were bigger – the kids could see sky. The cloud was breaking, becoming smaller, harmless clouds.

But that stopped, and the cloud snarled. The snarl came from a mouth and the mouth was holding something very big and white.

The funny bone.

Gloria was ready.

She'd kept her breath, just enough for one last word.

- . . . brilliant . . .

It was enough.

The word hit the cloud and the Black Dog exploded. It just disappeared. One minute, there was the gale and the snarling Dog. Next, there was silence – nothing. Except blue sky and quiet.

And guts.

They ran to the dunes, to get away. They heard the guts fall, slapping the sand like hard-boiled rain. The air was full of the caws of hungry seagulls.

And the shouts of three screaming boys.

-Look out!

The kids ran again, into the dunes, even into the water. They heard the thump – they felt it. They turned, and saw Dublin's funny bone. Lying on the beach, white and bright, and kind of funny.

Ernie, with the two boys, landed beside it. He stood up and shook the guts off his cape.

-What'll we do with this thing? he said.

* * *

Raymond and Gloria crept to their back door. They looked in the kitchen window. There was no one there; they couldn't see anyone.

- -It's Saint Patrick's Day, Gloria remembered.
- -Oh yeah, said Raymond. -They're still in bed.

They opened the door and got smacked by the smell of rashers and sausages.

There was someone at the cooker.

-Uncle Ben!

He turned to them, and smiled.

* * *

Big Jim Larkin stood on his plinth, on O'Connell Street.

At last.

He'd been waiting all these years, with his huge hands in the air. Those kids had brought it, down O'Connell Street. And now he was holding it, Dublin City's funny bone. Holding it proudly up to the clear blue sky.

- -You have your hands full there, Big Jim, said the Spire.
- -That's what they're there for, comrade, said Big Jim.



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