

THE MORRISTOWN FABLES: PART 1

PETER NEWBY

Chesterfield, Derbyshire, England

"Faith and Begorrah", muttered the leprechaun of Moricetown as he moored his canoe in a garden pond of a house in New Jersey. He had carried his mode of transport all the way from the po box he lived in in Iowa City, and was exhausted by his efforts. Nevertheless, he was proud of his craft with its name, Dilling, emblazoned on its prow. The Moricetown leprechaun was deeply attached to his canoe, Dilling, which he rarely confined to water. Hence, he had taken it with him on his visit to Mr and Mrs A. Ross Begorrah to join them and their friends in a game of charades.

The first to greet "Ace" Tranger (leprechauns have curious names) was a talking hen with a limited vocabulary. All it could say was various times of the day such as "morning" or "afternoon" and, in consequence, it had few friends. Not even the computer expert from Tucson (who is nice to everyone) had a kind word for it! After passing the time of day with the hen, "Ace" then met the ghost of Bert N. Weepy (now known as Dead Rheum) and all three of them went to the house where Mrs Begorrah greeted them with open arms and renewal subscription forms for the New Jersey edition of the Washington Sweet Home Journal. Mrs Begorrah introduced them first to a lady from Pineville, Louisiana. On sighting the shade of Weepy, the Pineville lady paled. "You're ghastly", said Mary Christine Craig gravely. Meanwhile, over in a corner, a New Zealander and an Australian were playing a vicious game of Scrabble, arguing over the relative merits of BROTHER whilst their Franciscan referee was amusing himself making as many anagrams of the word ATLANTA as possible. Martin the gardener and Chevy Chase from McManus, Maryland were looking on with quiet detachment - Martin having the Q and Chevy the remainder of QUIET's letters, all of which had been secretly extracted from the Scrabble board whilst the South Pacific players' attentions were elsewhere. Also present was a Scot who was trying to explain that, whilst ACK was a Scottish word for "act", ACK ACK GUN was not a Scottish play on military words. At the piano was Chris Long singing a Simon and Garfunkel classic, "Bridge Over Wrate", to a wombat wearing fancy dress made of partridge feathers. These were the contestants in the game of charades that was about to take place.

"Ace", the ghost of Weepy and the hen moved to the middle of the room and Faith Begorrah looked anxiously at the Scot, silently pleading with him to set the game in motion before the wretched hen killed conversation dead with its tedious obsession with times of the day.

To music from a hidden orchestra (as in all the best movies) this is what transpired:

Some hen chanted "evening",
 You will see "Ace" Tranger
 "ACHE, Ross, ack ROW, Dead Rheum"...

CROSSTALK

What's it like to edit the most prestigious crossword in the United States, the daily and Sunday offerings in the New York Times? Only three people can speak with authority: Margaret Farrar, Will Weng, Eugene Maleska. (The fourth, Will Shortz, erstwhile *Word Ways* author and guest Kickshaws editor, took over this job in November 1993.) In the Simon & Schuster Fireside Book paperback issued for \$12 in 1993, Maleska quotes extensively from his correspondence with crossword solvers (identified only by their initials). These are a nit-picking bunch, minutely scrutinizing each puzzle for factual or spelling errors; Maleska encouraged this behavior by issuing Gotcha Club certificates to readers who correctly identified such lapses. While giving due credit to these, the majority of the letters are from solvers who were incorrect in their erratum claims. It must be wearing to constantly defend one's puzzleistic decisions against cantankerous correspondents, but apparently Maleska enjoyed such logomachy, and in fact seems sometimes to have deliberately introduced definitions that would trick the reader into a false Gotcha (such as AMAT "Latin I word", where the I designated Latin One, a first course, rather than the first person for which the answer is AMO). His ultimate argument for correctness seems to be "here's at least one dictionary that defines it so", even if the dictionary does not quite get it right (for example, he defined BRAZE as "solder" according to Webster's Third, but metallurgists distinguish these processes according to the temperature). One must salute Maleska for the considerable time he expended answering his critics, usually even-temperedly, and sometimes with a bit of doggerel verse!