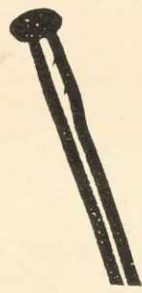


BIRD

(a tale about love and death)



F I C T I O N
by Sandy MacKay

Just after Bird twisted his ankle, he was back on the skeleton roof again. he felt fine, but his foot really hurt. . . It was his left foot, and he cautiously bent over to look at it. The wind was brisk, and so it was necessary to take caution, or else one would be flung to the winds. It as his left foot, and this is important, but not yet. His left foot, upon examination, was very queer. He decided to examine hs right foot, and this was no small feat.



Ordinarily, one would simply look at one foot, then look at the other foot. However, as previously mentioned, Bird was back on the skeleton roof again. When one stands on the skeleton of a roof, there are usually very few safe places to place one's feet. Beside one another is impossible. Skeletons of roofs usually consist of 4 to 8 rafters supporting a narrow ridge. Bird's left foot was in front of him on the ridge. His right foot was behind him on the ridge. He was perched pretty precariously; he turned slowly to get a glimpse of his right foot, and did so. Normal as beans. He turned again and looked at his left foot. Still queer. He moved again slowly, for that is the only way one moves on a skeleton roof, even if one is the Bird and used to such places. He moved his left foot, the queer one, slowly forward to a rafter, about a foot away. This foot slid down the rafter until he was able to place a hand on the ridge and lowered himself into a sitting position on the ridge. Left foot still on the rafter, he swung the right foot up to compare. Very queer. He didn't call out to those below him to look at his feet — he wanted to check this out. He pulled his cigarettes out of his pouch, and his matches, and attempted to light one.

Twelve for the day and not yet lunch, he noted, bad bad bad. Bird, like any smart smoker, quit smoking almost after every cigarette, for at least a half an hour, until the next one was lit. Bird's 12th for the day was not lit, for as he steadied himself on the



ridge with one hand, the other hand had difficulty lighting a match in the brisk wind. He cursed the Bird curse and threw the unlit cigarette away. He regarded once again his feet.

The problem was roughly this. His right foot was encased in a sturdy black shoe. It was one of a pair of shoes that had been a gift from a friend. It was an unspecial shoe. It was a heavy shoe, thick-soled and worn, what one might call a brogue, if one wished to. It was mostly unremarkable usually. At this moment, it was, however, remarkable in its solitude. Bird's left foot was encased in what one would definitely not call a brogue. It was encased in what one might call a dancing slipper. It was black, like the brogue, but there all similarities ceased. The slipper was narrow with a turned up toe, and a black marble on the tip of the upturned toe. At the midpoint of the tongue of the slipper was a black satin bow, a simple, stiff bow. The heel of the slipper was high and slightly tapered, and wooden, either black wood, like ebony, or just wood stained black. It was a remarkable slipper, not only in its fineness and style, but in the fact that it was upon the foot of one who would never, even for a sum of money, wear such a slipper.

Bird yelled down "Chiefy, I'm taking a break." There was no answer, which was not unusual. Bird was, by virtue of his own self, entitled to take a break whenever he wished. Whatever Chiefy had said, had he said anything, would have been of no importance. He moved down the skeleton roof, through the skeleton walls and to the ground below. He, more than anything, wanted to get rid of his slipper. The others would have called him "fag", and though that meant nothing to him, he still wished to be rid of it, hopefully before anyone saw it.

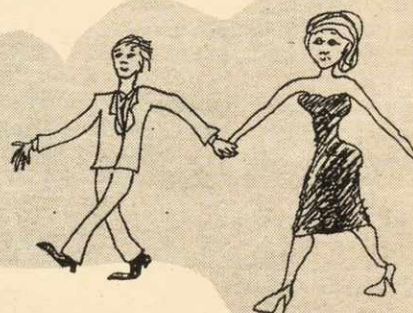
The Irish Woman, the Owner, was an interior decorator. She was a recent graduate of what is well known to be a very good course in interior design, and with the money that her Irish Husband had plenty of, she had planned in her mind and designed on the drafting board her dream home. she had a New Irish Husband, because her Old Irish Husband was dead. He had been a Protestant Irish Husband, and he had lved in Carrickfergus on the opposite side of the inlet from Belfast proper. But his luck was bad, and one day when he was innocently bystanding, a speeding bullet had carried his life away.



Much to the chagrin of the Gunner, one might add, for the Gunner too was a Protestant Irish Husband. He found out, later at his dinner table with his evening newspaper, that he had killed another Protestant Irish Husband. That caused him no end of self-reproach. The Gunner was a Professional Protestant Irish Husband, and he was mostly chagrined because his target was meant to be a Catholic Irish Husband, Wife, Daughter or Son. He knew that he had killed someone — he had watched through the scope of his rifle as the unidentified Husband fell. He had even gone to the length of the telephoning the authorities himself, to proclaim the vengeance achieved for Protestant Irish Husbands everywhere! But he had mistakenly shot another Protestant Irish Husband, and boys, was he upset with himself for his lack of Professional Care.

So, the Protestant Irish Wife lost a Husband, left the country to mourn, and then remarried. She married simply an Irish Husband, because outside of Ireland, everyone loved the Irish so much that they didn't care what kind of Irish they were; Protestant, Catholic or Hindu. They didn't care. Everywhere, but in Ireland, people wore proud badges that proclaimed "Kiss Me. I'm Irish!" And because the Irish are loved for simply being Irish, they were kissed! And more! The Irish Wife, out of Ireland nonetheless, was still very used to Death. Speeding Bullets, Bombs Hidden in Cars and Alcohol had carried away, blown away and washed away the lives of her brother, her son and her father, respectively.

The Owner (the Irish Woman, if you'll look up) was meticulous. She complained about the lack of straightness in the pieces of wood that kept the ceiling from crashing into the floor. She complained about the money the Company's Boys wasted when they broke the expensive Styrofoam Insulating Bats over one another's heads in order to amuse themselves during breaks. They didn't smoke. The Owner complained about the garbage. The Owner complained about her new Irish Husband.

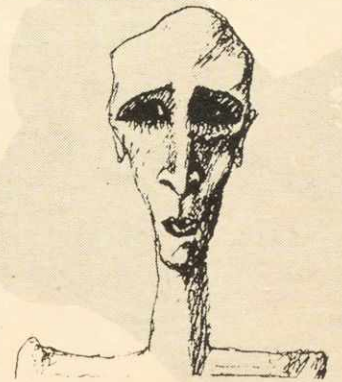


The Owner complained about lost time, lost money, lost will-power, lost minds and lost men. The fellow who she complained to listened very stoically and nodded his head in seeming agreement to her every complaint. He was stone deaf and not about to tell the Owner. He lit one cigarette from the butt of another, smiled at the Owner and nodded her on. "This" thought the Deaf "sure beats the hell out of working."

So the Owner was very used to Death. When Death happened about, she carried on. Death, she claimed, pays no attention to her which notices him not. She was sure Death was male, and carried on complaining.

"Hello Bird", crooned Kim. "I see you have a new shoe."

Bird blushed. He hadn't even wanted Kim to see his odd shoe, but better her than anyone. Bird was in love with Kim, the only woman working with them. Bird thought that it was ridiculous to have a woman working with them for many reasons. Bird couldn't say "Cunt" in front of Kim, and the others loved it when Bird said "Cunt". It usually meant that Bird had hurt himself somehow, and the others got a kick out of that. Bird couldn't talk about sex in the graphic terms he so loved in front of Kim. He also felt that Kim did very little work, but the Boss who had hired Kim was somthing called an Equal Opportunity Employer, and although he too felt that Kim did very little, being an Equal Opportunity Employer was quite a thing to be in his business. In fact, he was the only Equal Opportunity Employer in his business, and he felt that status was more important than the small wage he would have paid any woman, no matter how competent. Two workers thought that Kim did a fine job, but they were fired one day for smoking marijuana cigarettes. They refused to smoke tobacco cigarettes.



Bird loved Kim for many reasons, even though he felt that her presence was unnecessary and down-right intrusive. He loved Kim because he could ask her questions. When the radio played advertisements for products dealing with feminine hygiene, products that claimed to end the worry of "Personal Freshness", Bird loved to ask Kim if she worried about "Personal Freshness". Bird teased Kim about the boy-friends she may or may not have had, and when Kim blushed, Bird went soft inside.

Bird loved Kim especially because she was a Beautiful Woman, and one of the few that spoke to Bird anywhere. Bird loved Kim because she wore no bra and she wore loose shorts. When Bird was up on the skeleton roof and Kim was below, Bird often tried to look down her shirt to see if he could see her breasts. When Kim climbed and Bird was below, he tried to look up her loose shorts to see if he could see her underwear, or maybe even her labia major! Once, Bird caught a glimpse of her underwear as he looked up. There were flowered with yellow flowers on a pink background, with a simple cotton trim. Bird nearly fainted. They were exactly as he had imagined them. He had imagined them often, and often in the shower at night, Kim offered her pink underwear with yellow flowers to him, he imagined. Kim offered him many other things in the shower too, and since very few women offered Bird anything anywhere, anytime, he took what he could imagine. Bird loved Kim, and Bird loved to shower.

Kim knew that Bird loved her — Kim knew that many of them loved her, but especially, she knew that Bird loved her. He was too obvious. Because Kim knew that Bird loved her, she would often do things to make Bird notice her. If they were working near to one another, Kim would bend down so that Bird, if he looked, could see inside her shirt and see her breasts nuzzled up to one another like birds in a

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