

Danger Zone

By Hasan Fernandez

Paddy felt the pangs of hunger in his body. He had just woken from a drunken stupor dressed in dirty knee length trousers and a soiled T-shirt. He felt warmth in himself in spite of his hunger. The Derry Job Centre was civil to him the other day. That reminded him of his giro. He dug his muddy fingers into his trouser pockets and felt panicky when he could find no money.

The photograph on his wall was of his last job. He could not recognize himself in the picture. Everyone seemed so happy and confident. This euphoria of job satisfaction seemed likely to go on forever until one of the deputy managers had a row with a senior manager. From then on there were unexplained bangs and thuds until just last summer the senior manager was shot dead outside his home in front of a screaming wife and kids.

The media and the authorities blamed the IRA while the whole store blamed the deputy manager and hounded him out with the ritual abuse of staring, stalking and sex allegations.

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Mr. Rockwell resigned, of course. He did not have a large family so he was able to adjust to a new life outside Londonderry in Dublin, Eire. However he had a thorn in his family who could not settle for the comforts and quiet of suburban Dublin. Damian was known as the 'chief of Darkness' in his new surroundings. He felt bitter and sad at the treatment given to his father, more so than his father felt for himself. His black mane of hair and dark brown eyes added to his aura of fear that he instilled in anyone who dared

to be a bully in his school. When he went in the customary winter smog, he simply strolled along while others squirmed and crawled home in fear.

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Paddy looked dotingly on at the picture on the window sill. A sudden bang on the door awakened him to the present and he fumbled to the door.

Recker Stoner threw open the door as soon as Paddy unlocked it. The tramp squealed for mercy and fell onto the floor.

He struggled to get up but Mr. Stoner kicked him in the mouth so hard that he fell back with a trickle of deep red blood oozing onto the floor.

'Please, please, please, please.....no .no' Paddy begged his Landlord.

'You haven't paid the rent.' Mr Stoner roared his warning onto his tenant.

'Can't help it sir. I've been bad with flu.'

'Like you have, you bastard.' Mr. Stoner raised his voice to a huge volume and screamed: 'Why don't you pay the Rent?'

'I am sorry. I am sorry.'

Suddenly the landlord let out a huge roar and snatched a chain with a picture of a young girl.

Paddy wailed for mercy. 'Please sir, please, please. She was my daughter. My only daughter. Please don't do this.'

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But even words could not save the tramp from his fate. Recker Stoner immediately grabbed the poor man and kicked Him hard and relentlessly.

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Londonderry is cold on a winter's day. Recker stormed into his Employer's office and fondled the nearest girl he could find. She was only nineteen compared to his fifty years, but the man believed in the maxim: 'All women are fair play.' The girl squirmed in terror to his hands on her rear, but everyone in the office was so busy that not a single complaint was made nor was the girl allowed to remain in her post due to her 'lewd' behavior. Recker sat down with a strong mug of coffee on his table. He reached for the morning post but he began to feel tight in his collar. He quickly tried to open it but it seemed fastened to his skin. His eyes took on a greenish tinge, and he seemed to float in his chair.

'I say, Reck. Did you have a punch of whiskey too much?'

Demia shouted this out so that he could hear properly. She followed this up with a very coarse laughter. Recker dropped his bulky head low in agony over the hard gray merciless desk. He was whispering swear words while making an effort to scream abuse.

'Calm down will ya' she said. 'You been hot and angry with us all day. You may as well rest.'

'Go.....tohell'.

'Tipsy? Shame on ya'

Recker pulled his hand forward to a glass of water, and this seemed to

revive him. He soon returned to his normal self and resumed his duties. He seemed to be enjoying it until one of the sales executives was found not to have reached his weekly target.

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That day at about six, the offices closed and all the employees left the premises with a sigh of relief. Recker however, was in a jubilant mood after remembering his encounter with that young office girl. He happily mused to himself if he could test her patience again. He looked around but saw only the cleaners arrive and wondered if she were one of them.

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Damian came home from work and flung his door open with a hard push. Oblivious to the sound it made, he tossed his anorak onto the bed and sank into an armchair with a feeling of despondency. Sinking his hands into his jet black hair, he sat in one place and wept. He heard the growl of the cars outside his flat and the bangs and thuds of the doors being shut. He forced himself to have some tea and began to read the history of the Spanish Civil War. The book seemed to lighten his mood. After an hour of reading he felt better and decided he would have something for dinner.

Very soon, the sounds of the traffic were as loud as ever. He went on with reading the history book, and all those accounts of how some Republicans were driven to insanity.

Tania, his school friend embraced him warmly on meeting him .Her embrace was more like a tight clench of a fist, but he thrilled to it all the same.

‘So you were okay?’ he asked her as soon as she entered his home.

‘Was worried for you duck.’

‘What happened? Why are your eyes wet?’

‘I am tired.’

‘Get to bed and sleep then. You’re wasting.’

She obeyed with a longing look at him, and went to sleep sulking. Damian joined her later. ‘Say babe.’ he said, you ain’t the killing type.’

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Recker woke up in a jubilant mood. He helped himself to a bottle of champagne and sat down gloating over what he planned to do next with that ‘paddy’ wench. He jumped when the mail arrived like a bullet through the door. He had been waiting for the mail in high expectations of some good news.

He opened one of the letters and found the contents hilarious. His employer had written:

“Due to the numerous complaints the management of this Company have received, we find it necessary to dismiss you.”

No more was written. Recker fell over with laughter, so much that writhed on the floor. But soon the ill feeling returned. Thoughts of the mortgage on

his property clouded over him as did many others about his pet hate, the Roman Catholic Church.

‘Bah, time to take out a paddy.’ he thought shrugging and went out on just such a mission.

His car soon screamed with fury as he sped lethally along the streets of Londonderry.

He soon reached a suburb that had open spaces and large plentiful shops. He made sure he accelerated and on doing so, the shop fronts were transformed into a cascade of oncoming walls of concrete and the bystanders changed into a race of over curious aliens.

In a split second, there was a loud explosion and a correspondingly large fireball. From the Bella Donna café where the explosion could first be seen, a young man ran out and called for the RUC. Of course he had to point out that the unfortunate man was a respected landlord. This ensured the speedy arrival of the Ambulance and media too.

When all the formalities were over, and the driver was recognized as indeed a wealthy landlord by the name of Recker Damon, the young man returned to the café and bought a fresco to celebrate.

Damian poured down the drink with a satisfied grin.

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