

Kedgeree and Deportation... Although Not for Us, Luckily!

We've had a couple of odd adventures this week. We nearly moved house...again. I am now officially registered to stay in Ireland. We sampled a new dish last night. Life generally continues as normal.

A lovely new house came up for rent next to our friends' house in Priorland Gardens. It was nearly a third bigger than our house, with more bathrooms, two sitting rooms, a large back garden, and a GAS COOKER. All this available for the same rent that we are paying now. <Sigh> We hesitantly arranged a viewing, as the move of only 4 months ago was still firmly entrenched in our minds. It was better than we had hoped, with a really dear staircase that twisted and turned to the top floor. We expressed interest and inquired after other offers. We were told that a doctor had looked at it, but hadn't gotten back to them. Our friends told us it had been vacant since the summer. We figured we were in! After much soul-searching, we decided to ask our landlord to break our 6 month lease two months early. He's been really kind & helpful to us, so we were very worried. Apparently, though, he hadn't expected us to last in the country more than 3 months, let alone in his house! We got back to the real estate agency quickly. Nothing happened for several days. When I rang back, the secretary, Claire, asked how long of a lease we'd be wanting. This was odd, but I asked her what was typical. She said 6 months, so I said a year would be fine. She said then that she wanted to know because someone else was looking at the house and the landlord wanted to compare us by length of lease. Instantly, all was up in the air and unsettled. When we didn't hear anything for another couple of days, I stopped by the agency. Claire pretended she didn't know anything, but I got definite vibes that we hadn't gotten the place. She said she'd have the agent ring me. Instead, at 5 minutes til 6pm last night, she rang us and told us that the other people had offered a 3 year lease and they had been chosen. Very disappointing.

On Monday, I rang up the Garda station (police) to see when the Immigration officers were in to see people. When we landed in London, my passport was stamped for 6 months, with the usual prohibitions on working, etc. They didn't stamp us coming over on the ferry to Dublin, though. I think we confused them because we were driving. We had been stamped before when we traveled as foot passengers. I knew that before my six months were up, I would need to register with the Gardai to be allowed to stay. As the wife of an Irish citizen, I would also be able to claim my rights to work without a permit. So, Monday evening, we had dinner and drove off to the station. The Garda station in Dundalk is magnificent. It's up on a bit of a hill, overlooking a roundabout and it's built of imposing dark grey native stone. The back buildings even have iron bars on the windows! It's definitely anyone's idea of a jail. (Well, I've just spent 10 minutes searching around the house and internet and can neither find a picture nor a date of when the station was built. I'd guess somewhere in the 19th century. You'll have to imagine it.)

So, we arrived at the station to find only a fraction of the number of people we had encountered in September when we'd first tried to get registered. In September, we waited for two and a half hours before giving up. This time, there was only one party of four Asians giggling together in the station. Highly encouraged, we sat down to wait. We were greatly entertained by the group taking photos, giggling, and posing next to Crimestoppers posters. Every now and then, they'd throw in a comment in English for our amusement. After awhile, we struck up a conversation with them, as you do, and heard their story. They were two couples, all Chinese except for one Korean guy. Apparently, they'd run afoul of Immigration because the Chinese need a visa to enter Ireland. The Korean guy explained he was only there with his girl, as Koreans don't need visas. I was interested, and asked, North or South Korean? He laughed and said South, saying that the North Koreans weren't allowed anywhere, not even out of their own country. They were all currently living in Cardiff, Wales, and had purchased round trip tickets to Belfast. Belfast is technically in the UK, so they were fine. I guess they'd traveled across the border, though, and been picked up. The Chinese girl who was with the Korean was frustrated because the Gardai wouldn't just let them go back to Belfast to use the return part of their tickets. No, instead, they were being deported from Dublin port in a few hours to return to Wales. For a group about to be deported

they were the happiest and most silly I'd ever seen! When they were called, they picked up their giant McDondald's bag and went into the office.

We were also called in and started my process of registration, which was quite easy. I kept an ear out for our acquaintances, though, and was rewarded to hear more. The Garda in charge of them was puzzled as to why the Korean was with them. He tried to explain he was there for his girl. The Garda smiled, shook his head, and said, "Love's a terror!" As they gathered up their bags, the Garda said to the officer working with us, 'Right! We're off to the port, Colm.'" The Chinese girl said, "When we get there, can I take photos of you?" and the officer replied, "Sure, work away, work away." It was hilarious. That was the highlight of the visit, although it deserves a mention that Colm asked us whether I play football. Apparently, there's a "granny scheme" to get people citizenship faster if they play football! I now have a quite pretty registration card and number allowing me to stay in Ireland until next January. Hopefully by that time I will have my passport anyway.

I had a mushroom experience yesterday. I had been buying the self proclaimed "Irish mushrooms" at Superquinn's for a few weeks. They always have a lovely display, with Portobello (but they don't call them that) chanterelles, or other seasonals, button mushrooms, and a few others. It used to be that when you weighed them, there was just one button that said "Mushrooms" that you pressed to get the price tag. (Most vegetables here you have to weigh first, then put the price tag on your own bag to be scanned at the register. It's like the system for bulk items in the States, only you weight them yourself.) It was great, because the first time, two little Portobellos only cost 86 cent. I thought I should do that much more often! So the last time I was there, I weighed my two, slightly bigger Portobellos, but the only button that I saw was now labeled "Gourmet mushrooms." I thought, uh oh, but weighed them anyway--3 euros!! I got them anyway. Then yesterday, I saw a really lovely couple of Portobellos--big and fresh--and scrutinized the label on the display. It now said, "Irish Mushrooms: 3.99/kg" and in teeny writing "exotic mushrooms: 39.99/kg." Yikes! I stopped the nearest clerk and she thought it was definitely a misprint, but I led her to the scale and she saw that those two portobellos would have cost me 8.32!! Neither of us could believe it and I said, "No thanks, I won't take them." I then picked up a little pack of organic Irish mushrooms for 1.99 and went on with shopping. I managed to get the same clerk at the checkout and she had a good laugh, introducing me as the person who managed to find two mushrooms for 8.32.

There were no mushrooms in the dish we tried last night though. My friend Tina had told me about a dish she makes sometimes that involves smoked haddock or cod. I had been admiring it at the fish market, but didn't know what to do with it. So, last night, she sent me the recipe for Kedgerree. Oxford English defines it as: "Indian dish of rice, split pulse [beans or peas] onions, eggs, etc; European dish of fish, rice, eggs, and condiments." As we are most definitely in Europe, this recipe involved smoked fish, chopped hard boiled eggs, peas, rice, onions, parsley, and lemon juice. And a little curry paste! First you poach the fish in water, then, reserve the broth. Cook the onions for 5 minutes in butter (mmm) and add the curry paste, rice, and broth. Cover to cook. Meanwhile, peel the eggs, flake the fish and chop the parsley. Mix everything up at the end with a squeeze of lemon, some more butter, and some salt & pepper. It resembles fried rice quite a bit, only it's more steamed than fried--less greasy. It was appreciated by all...especially the cats!

Love,
Heather