

## Dog Days

It's another gorgeous Monday morning here. For some reason, no matter what the weather for the rest of the week, Mondays seem to be fine. There's even a brisk breeze, which is making quick work of drying the laundry on the line. Tumnus, my black and white cat, has found the clean laundry pile and is lounging on top of it in the sun. Malkin, the black tabby, is similarly soaking up the rays in her kitty "hammock" in the window. We're all superbly happy here.

Dan's birthday present for me came this past week. There was some strange mixup about the shipping, but I was delighted when I saw what it was. To explain fully, I'll have to go back to the first weeks we were here. Dan and I spent a good deal of time in Dublin those first weeks, dealing with the container, customs and shipping, which often required that we were there in person. One of these days, we took some time off to go visit the Book of Kells at Trinity. After the exhibit, everyone walks through the Old Library, which one of the docents described to the kids on the tour as the "Hogwarts Library." The movies' library was actually filmed in Oxford, but this library looks sufficiently alike for you to imagine its appearance. It's gorgeous--filled with ancient books all the way to the ceiling, with busts of famous philosophers all around. In the center, where we are allowed to walk, it has representative books displayed under glass. One of these books was John Gerard's herbal from 1597, a large work, with detailed illustrations of the plants. I bent over it, transfixed, as I read about the Mandrake root:

"The root is long, thicke, whitifh, divided many times into two or three parts refembling the legs of a man, with other parts of his body adjoining thereto, as the privy part, as it hath beene reported . . . there hath been many ridiculous tales brought up of this plant, whether of old wives, or fome runnagate Surgeons or phyficke-mongers, I know not . . . That it is never or very feldome to be found growing naturally but under a gallowes . . . That he who would take up a plant thereof muft tie a dog thereunto to pull it up, which will give agreat fhreeke at the digging up."

And so forth! Of course, read the "f" as an "s" and it makes more sense.:) I had the best fun reading it out to Dan in the Old Library (in reverent whispers, of course.) My amazing husband remembered my fascination and found a first edition of the replica printed in 1975--my birth year! When I asked him how he possibly remembered what it was called or who wrote it, he pointed out that his middle names were the author's name. Incredible. So, yes, I have the massive tome to peruse at my leisure and I don't have to pay to get into the Old Library or hope they've changed the page. It's amazing to read what they knew about plants even back then--yes, it has potatoes in it. The less said about the Tree Geese the better, though. Mr. Gerard was under the opinion that Barnacles growing on a Tree on a certain Island in Lancashire gave birth to Geese. Only, mind you, when they fell straight into the water. If they fell on the land, they Came to Nothing.

So, John the Stack of Bibles did finally show up. I texted our landlord on Thursday night, to see if he'd hear any more from the plumber (who was going to "call 'round" mid-week, remember?) Seamus texted back that the plumber would be with us the next day at 2 pm or he would look for another plumber. Slightly reassured, I settled back on Friday to wait for him. I had the girls' lessons to teach at 4:30, with a half hour walk to get there, so I hoped he'd be done in time. When the doorbell rang at 2:45, one cat was caught above the cupboards in the kitchen and the other peered doubtfully out of the guest bedroom curtains. John had arrived with his son in tow and they immediately redeemed themselves by pulling out the power saw and taking off the side of the bath, which had been tiled in. They found the leak right away, and I went down to the kitchen to get the dishes stacked. I heard footsteps coming down the stairs and then John drove away! I popped upstairs and asked Plumber the Younger if he wanted tea or anything. He said no, and that his dad had gone to get a new drain. About 40 minutes passed, then Plumber the Elder returned and finished the job. He even swept up with the dustpan and refused the customary cup of tea, as he knew I had to get to the lessons. (Seamus had told him.) We were very relieved to have the tub up and running again. I dashed off to lessons before Dan got home from work, and

so it wasn't until later that we noticed that the cold water in the bath no longer comes on. Ah well. Hot baths cool down eventually, right?

The walk into town seems shorter every time. The field before you get to the road from our road is getting much more muddy and impassable each day. Between the frequent rain and heavy student foot traffic, it's beginning to resemble chocolate pudding. Those at Lawrence University will be familiar with the empty lot between Colman and the Con. Over the winter, this goes from weedy/grassy, to hard (when it freezes) to swampy and slippery when it defrosts. As the mud increases, the path, and hence the mud, gets wider and wider as students try to bypass the worst of it. Here, at first, I tried just making a huge circle onto the green grass and avoiding the makeshift path altogether. But they don't call our area the Upper Marshes for nothing. I managed to find a few sinkholes filled with water in that deceptively green grass. Now I just stay slightly to the side of the path like everyone else. It's taking up about half of the field now!

We had our Driver Theory Tests this weekend. We had been studying on and off for them all week. They ask any 40 questions out of the book, and 35 have to be right to pass. My appointment was for 11:15 and Dan's for 12. The instructions on the letter said that we weren't allowed to have anyone waiting for us, even in the waiting area! Like most rules here, it turned out to be flexible and Dan was asked to have a seat while I went to get photographed and to take the test. It was much faster than I thought. We both passed. I missed one question, which I will reproduce here for those who want to submit their answers to me:

"What danger can arise with the power takeoff of a tractor?

- a) Clothing can get caught in it if it is not covered
- b) It can cause the engine to increase speed rapidly
- c) It can cause the battery to short circuit

Dan missed it as well. Good luck! Now we have the joy of setting up an appointment with the optometrist for an eye check, bringing two passport sized photos with us, going to the licensing office to apply for our provisional licenses, and then, sometime thankfully in the future, taking the practical test.

It's a good thing that we made our appointments for a leisurely time on Saturday, as we had an impromptu night out on Friday. Seamus had been threatening to go out with us for a drink many times, and when Dan came to pick me up from lessons, he walked out with us with barely a glance back. We went to his local (and our closest pub) the Malthouse. We had a couple of pints, then his brother, Ciaran, came to join us. He said his dog had died today, but as we were told quickly, this was just an expression of a day gone badly wrong. The dog in question turned out to be that his wife and his girlfriend had just been snowed in together in San Trope! Ciaran, pissed (drunk) and fairly "flash" in a leather jacket, said he did have dogs for real and was completely besotted with them. Throughout the evening, when dogs were mentioned, I thought, hmm--rottweilers? Alsatians? sheep dogs? But then Seamus turned to me and said, "Would you be familiar with Bichon Frise?" and I couldn't stop the grin that spread over my face. This guy had two Bichon Frise, which Seamus told me in tones of wonder were sent up to Dublin for grooming and hairdressing. Excellent. Later that night, we met a man named Jimmy Rogan who said he'd met Michael (Dan's dad) in NY many times. He was delighted to meet us and kept exclaiming, "Salt of th'earth! Salt of th'earth! A new generation." The next day at the Farmer's Market I met one of my fellow yogis who turned out to be from the exact same area as the Oakes. Her last name was Mullen, I think. So, the connections are coming, if slowly.

All right--I have held you hostage for far longer than I meant...Back to work with you!

Love,  
Heather

