

## Bloomsday June 16<sup>th</sup> 1204 – Part 1

Lepoldo de Bloume ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet pottage, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liverslices fried with crustcrumbs, fried hencods' roes. Most of all he liked grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine.<sup>1</sup>

Bending to the fire, he lifted the heavy clay *couvre-feu*<sup>2</sup> from the hearth and tapped the ash from the smoking rounds of wood to reveal orange embers glowing beneath. Drawing the ash aside with a small crooked stick, he coaxed the flame to life with careful application of dried moss, then twigs until a bright yellow spire of flame swayed over the whole. Mouth dry, need a drink. He moved toward the covered crock of yesterday's milk. The cat, coming out from the shadow of the gathered jugs and pails raised her tail and purred forlornly as she rubbed her flank along a smoothworn roof post.<sup>3</sup>

Mkgnao!

--O, there you are, de Bloume said, turning from the fire.

de Bloume watched curiously, kindly, the lithe black form. He bent down to her, his hands on his knees.

-- Milk for the pussens, he said.

-- Mrkgnao! the cat cried. They call them stupid. They understand what we say better than we understand them.

-- Afraid of the chickens she is, he said mockingly. Afraid of Hamelin's chookchooks. I never saw such a stupid pussens as the pussens. But cruel, playing with the petrified mice on the threshold, batting them this way and that. I should sell you off to one of those crook-backed skimmers on the Street of Saint Thomas and let them have you for a purse.<sup>4</sup> He grabbed her head, shifting the skin around on her skull with affection.

--That's just where they'll cut you, he said drawing a finger across the backbones of her neck.

She blinked up out of her avid shameclosing eyes, mewling plaintively and long, showing him her milkwhite teeth. He watched the dark eyeslits narrowing with greed till her eyes were green stones. Then he bent to the small pail, lifting the flat slate off the top, took an age-worn, wooden bowl from the table and dipped in its edge, watching the straw-coloured milk swirl

---

<sup>1</sup> Grey text denotes Joyce's text quoted verbatim.

<sup>2</sup> A clay cover like an inverted pot that was placed over the embers of the fire at bed time.

<sup>3</sup> Like Mr Bloom's cat, in the thirteenth century, cats were a well-established domestic pet and were kept for hunting mice and rats.

<sup>4</sup> Cat bones and skulls have been found in tanning pits on Thomas Street with marks consistent with skinning, see Paul Duffy, 'Saints and Skinners: excavations along the northern precinct of the abbey of St Thomas the martyr,' in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin XVIII* (Dublin 2021).

slowly over the lip and pool thickly in the hollow. He set the bowl on the broad boards of the floor, tilting it towards her and making a kissing sound with his lips.

-- Gurrhr! she cried, running to lap.

He fed the fire with some more roundwood, letting the lively flame burn itself down as he busied himself at the table where a pot sat, big bellied and soot blackened and, lifting the cloth cover, he stirred the contents with a thick wooden spoon.

Pottage for breakfast. The oats and peas well soaked. No good eggs with this drouth. Want pure fresh water. Wednesday: not a good day either for a mutton kidney at Oxmantown Green. Chopped into the pot, a scoop of butter, a fist of sorrel and a shake of pepper if we have it. Better a pork kidney at from the flesh shambles. While the pot is boiling. She lapped slower, then licking the bowl clean. Why are their tongues so rough? To lap better, all porous holes. Nothing she can eat? He glanced round him. No.

On quietly creaky boots he paused by door to the backroom. She might like something tasty. Birdmeat pasty she likes in the morning, well-greased with suet – so long as the meat's not spoiled – spice piled on to hide the taste. He spoke softly in the bare hall:

-- I am going round to the shambles. Back presently

And when he had heard his voice say it he added:

-- You don't want anything for breakfast?

A sleepy soft grunt answered:

-- Mn.

No. She did not want anything. He heard then a warm heavy sigh, softer, as she turned over and the dowls of the bedstead squeaked. All the way from Cordova.<sup>5</sup> Forgotten any little Spanish she knew.

He settled his robe, closing his belt at his waist. His hand took his cap from the peg over his heavy cloak, and he tied it under his chin. From Turstin's shop, Snug to the skull, has worn well.<sup>6</sup>

He stepped out, pulling the door gently behind him, He stopped, his hand patting his belt. No key, tied to her girdle. No use in disturbing her. She turned over that time. He drew the door towards shut, the wood swollen with summer dragging in the frame. He pulled it just so, squeezing the timbers until they stuck tight, just before the latch dropped on the inside. Looked shut. All right till I come back anyhow.

He stepped out into Church Street and crossed to the bright side, avoiding a glistening ooze of cess dropped from the nightsoil man's cart.

---

<sup>5</sup> Leopold Bloom's wife Molly, grew up in Gibraltar. Though Spanish residents of Dublin were rare, they did exist at this time. I have given de Bloume's wife a Spanish ancestry based on the entry in the Dublin Guild Merchant Roll of one William of Cordova who may have been active in Dublin as early as 1190 (Willelmus de Cordava, 6 Sol., Ref: m. 1/A (c.1190-1221).

<sup>6</sup> Turstinus Draper, 4 Sol., Ref: m. 4/B (c.1190-1221), Dublin Guild Merchant Roll.

The sun was nearing the roofridge of St Michan's Church. Be a warm day I fancy...