

## The Weight of the Universe *and other large numbers*

By Steven Fritz

**In** September NASA announced that they were going back to the moon—Earth's moon to be specific, which is a meager 250,000+ miles away. This drew my attention to how I think about numbers big and small.

Is the universe expanding, collapsing, or steady? To try to answer this question, scientists work with extremely large numbers to count (calculate) the total mass of our universe, a seemingly impossible task. They need to know this number to calculate the perfect balance between the force of gravity and the expansion force initiated by the Big Bang event. That's right, you must have a big bang if things are moving away from each other. Einstein's theory of general relativity is used to calculate this value, which yields an average density of  $10^{-29}$  gram per cubic centimeter. The current mass of all subatomic particles in the universe is then calculated to be  $10^{80}$ . This is one big number.

One of our best minds on the topic of the raw materials of life was Fred Hoyle (1915–2001). Fred and one of his colleagues were challenged to calculate the odds of the required proteins (organic soup) for life happening by chance. They calculated the probability at 1 in  $10^{40,000}$ . And this doesn't get you humans, just protein. The major reason for such a big number is that you

...continued on page 2...

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## Letter from the Editor

**Welcome** to the end of the year and the holiday season. As you are sharing inspiring moments with friends and family, take a couple of mental notes about your life observations and write me a little article. Your thoughts are more important to the rest of us than you might initially realize.

Enjoy the fall weather and, as always, keep the submissions coming!

Dan, [dan@fritzcomics.com](mailto:dan@fritzcomics.com) ☒

## Adventures in Vexillology (formerly "Know Thy Flags"): **Part 2**

By Nathaniel R. Herr

See Page 6

## Right Before I Got Kicked Off *Kids Incorporated* by Nathan Beach

See Page 2

Mattlock Investigates!  
 at a local restaurant  
 By Calderwood and Fritz



Right Before I Got Kicked Off  
*Kids Incorporated*  
 by Nathan Beach

**Late** one morning, there was a knock on the dressing room door. I opened it to find a square-jawed security guard on the other side. It seems the maid reported there were three turkeys floating in the bathtub. After some quick explaining and a call to the butcher -- who confirmed my side of the story -- I was off the hook. Several hours later, a crowd watched through the window as I cooked turkeys in the rain. As lunchtime approached, the rain stopped and a few shafts of sunlight brightened the day. The cast and crew couldn't believe their eyes as my servants brought golden-brown turkeys and all the fixings into the green room. After a delicious meal, and despite all my effort, they stared at me in silence. From now on it would just be Mario López and the *other* kids incorporated. ☒

...*The Weight of the Universe, p. 1...*



only have 15 billion years (the estimated age of the universe) to get the job done in. Fred concluded that this was “an outrageously small probability that could *not* be faced even if the *whole* universe consisted of organic soup.”

Francis Crick (1916-2004) was the man who broke the DNA code and at one point worked with Fred to understand how this short amount

of time could give us something as complex as humans. They concluded that life is far too improbable to have *begun* on earth without a lot of help from the outside.

They postulated that the universe is filled with the seeds of life (Panspermia – meaning “seeds everywhere”) while others speculated these seeds traveled here on the solar winds at thousands of miles per second. Well, that solves the problem of *our* planet being much too young to give birth to you and me. Sorry to bring this up... but... where did *those* seeds come from?



Thomas Gold, who worked alongside Fred and Francis, claimed that a spaceship from a dying civilization landed here and only the *bacteria* from the astronauts survived. Sorry to bring this up... but... where did *that* guy come from?



If you thought that all the matter in the universe was a huge number, Hoyle's is insane. Throw in the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle for good measure, and I've got all

I need. For me it takes more faith to believe in soup than I have to offer even if it's delivered from the other side of the cosmos. We could talk about parallel universes, universes inside universes, banging then collapsing then re-banging perpetually universes, branching universes, or any other kind of universe but it doesn't make Hoyle's number any smaller. Intelligent design is looking really good right now, which is where I put my money. Sorry to bring this up. ☒



PICTURES FROM THE TOP DOWN: EINSTEIN, HOYLE, CRICK, GOLD.

BabbleList of Distinction

Reader's Choice Winners:

- “Urban Vernacular” by Amanda Hall
- “Mattlock,” Vol. 3, Iss. 4, by Grant Calderwood & Dan Fritz
- “This Flesh is Legal Tender,” Vol. 2, Iss. 2, by Brett Martz

Thanks to all contributors each and every month. ☒

*Tower of Babble-ON's*  
 "Before-and-After" Corner  
 By Susan Fritz

“Kevin Bacon and Eggs” ☒

Submission Suggestions

Your contribution can be anything that fits onto a sheet of paper. Here are a few ideas:

- |             |               |            |
|-------------|---------------|------------|
| Editorials  | Reports       | Philosophy |
| Reviews     | Ramblings     | Rants      |
| Comics      | Puzzles       | Jokes      |
| Quotes      | Polls         | Trivia     |
| Drawings    | Poetry        | Recipes    |
| Photographs | Short stories | News       |
| Predictions | Advice        | Graphs     |

Please send all of your submissions by the deadline to [dan@fritzcomics.com](mailto:dan@fritzcomics.com). ☒



## Wine Country

By Steven Fritz

**Welcome** back everybody. I celebrated my fourth anniversary just last month. As a gift I got an outstanding bottle of Silver Oak Cabernet Sauvignon. I'm not going to open this 2001 bottle for a few years but I do have experience with their 1999 release. As one of the super premium wines this cab has a full-bodied taste with a berry and chocolate nose that lasts longer on your tongue than other cabs. That's a good thing. The taste only gets better as the flavors get more and more complex with the passage of time. Expect to pay \$65 for the 1999 and \$85 for the 2001. In the prior release section of their web site ([www.silveroak.com](http://www.silveroak.com)) you'll find the detail descriptions of the many berry flavors present in their wines.



## Enjoy one of my bottles

You've read several tips about wine this past year. Do you have a bit of wine knowledge you'd like to share? Let me know via email at [S L F@msn.com](mailto:SLF@msn.com). As a reward you could get one of my favorites. Email me two things. 1. Name the wine I featured in the June 2005 issue – Winery, Year, Type - this is especially important because that wine is the prize. 2. Provide a tip, favorite of your own, or some interesting wine lore. The winner will be randomly selected from all valid respondents prior to the next issue. You must be 21 and be able to prove it.

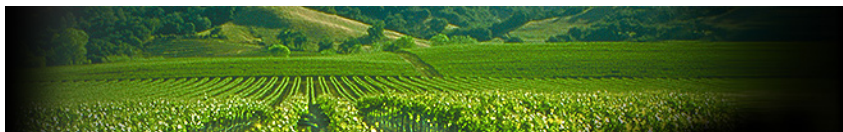
## Dry Wines

Ever heard the term "dry" as a way of describing wine? We all know that wine is wet but the term speaks to something else. If there is no perceptible taste of sugar it is considered to be dry. You should be able to taste the sugar when it reaches a 0.5%+ level. Below 0.5% and you can't, hence dry.

## Another word on the red in reds

I mentioned in previous issues that wine becomes red when the skins are left with the pulp of the grape. Some reds are much redder than others because of the size of the grapes. Smaller grapes have a higher skin to pulp ratio, which translates to more skin, which translates to redder wine. Here's toasting you.

☒



**Do** you want to be a published, international celebrity? Send in a submission to *Babble-ON!* All submissions are due the Friday before publication. See the website for details.

<http://www.babbleonline.com>

## BryTunes

by Bryan D. Murray

**As** I was playing on-line poker one desolate evening, I was thinking of songs I could (legally) download. I went to the Rolling Stone Top 100 and discovered "great" songs do not always equate to favorite songs. Seriously, how many of you enjoy "Hey Jude" by the Beatles? Not I... In this segment, we're going to discover and reconnect with some of both our favorite and despised tunes. With each installment, I will offer up a couple of tunes to sample or enjoy again. I will also include a guest spot (a person I choose at random) to offer their opinions. Here's my "BryTunes" for October 2005:

**1) Headsprung** – LL Cool J. A vastly underrated and relatively unknown song from Mr. Cool James. Truly the original Will Smith, as he has been somewhat successful in both the music and acting arts. However, I feel sorry for him for appearing in *Charlie's Angels*. I wonder if Hollywood even puts any thought into writing scripts anymore.

*Best Line: "They call me Big L'y, Big Silly, Big Money, Big Billy / When I'm sliding in them all, can ya hear me?"*

**2) Gin and Juice** – The Gourds (Snoop Dog remake). One of the few remakes I enjoy. Just picture a country band singing about "it's hard being Snoop D-O-double G." I was drinking in Bodega's Alley, a bar in Nebraska, when I first heard this masterpiece.

*Best Line: "I got bitches in the living room gettin' it on, And they ain't leavin' til six in the morning."*

**3) Magic Carpet Ride** – Steppenwolf. I usually don't hit the "classics", but this tune transcends time. Many of the older songs these days are being sold out for advertisement jingles, and this one is no exception.

*Best Line: "Why don't you tell your dreams to me, / Fantasy will set you free."*

Guest DJ: Lauren Shafenberg  
Favorite Animal: Baby Pandas

Favorites:

- 1) "More than Words" - Extreme
- 2) "Golddigger" - Kanye West
- 3) "Footloose" - Kenny Loggins

Horrid:

- 1) "These Boots Were Made For Walking" - Jessica Simpson version
- 2) "Boyfriend" - Ashlee Simpson
- 3) "Milkshake" - I don't know who sings this, but they should be ashamed of themselves. ☒

## We are the youth and we are knocking on Death's Door.

### MTV Kills People

By James Schneider

**The** commercials drag on-and-on. It's really insane. I now know why high school kids want to kill themselves. Watching MTV is more painful than plucking your eyebrows or shaving your nuts. Um, er, I think.

I was bored, sitting at 3 p.m. and waiting for Claudia to get back from work. Nothing else to do I decided to watch MTV2, because—as sad as this sounds—it was the best thing on. The show was pretty much a high school version of *Punk'd*....

I took a sip or two, or several hundred, of beer. I was going in. I was gonna enjoy the shit out of this episode of high school hi jinx. Hold on let me get another beer; it hurts that bad.

Okay, okay. Budweiser freshly cracked. King of Beers drowning my sorrows one hopsy drop at a time.

MTV's commercials run anywhere between 5:30 minutes and 7:45 minutes. I couldn't believe it myself. There is not only more commercial than show—a common complaint these days—but there is also an intolerable wait in between shows.

There's a recap and there's a freaking KICKER before every commercial break. I know that this new Gen ZZ, or whatever, has no memory. How could they when two minutes of show get a full minute of recap. When we rejoin the people who weren't leading wholly interesting lives to start, well, let's just pick up from where we left off. When we come back, see how I pull my finger out of my asshole.

You can judge a lot about a show by the commercials that play. As someone who works in TV, I'm not really bothered by your standard 3:15-4:00 breaks. I don't really channel surf; it's not my bag. Well, I noticed that this MTV features films, music, music gear, and video games. It's not that bad; really it's not.

It IS that bad. It's that bad, because I'd imagine that watching a show about kids who are in high school talking about how it's the best time of their lives and how they'll never live more than they will in this moment, and add in the endless YOU MUST HAVE THIS PIECE OF SHIT WE ARE SELLING; well, that pretty much blows, dude.

Just fucking take your own life. You are watching kids rule the school. The cool kids. You are NOT the cool kid. So sorry. So sorry. So fucking sorry. What is wrong with you? Why aren't you perfect like those kids? You are a fucking fat ass, sitting at home watching MTV naked, playing with yourself. Those—those are the cool kids. You—you are not the cool kids. They are having fun; they are the IN-CROWD. You are hoping not to piss yourself before you go back for another steaming pile of shit on your face. Get over it fuckhead. This is MTV. You are nothing.

And so it goes. MTV kills people. Sure the jumping from heights, the sleeping pills and the rope help, but really, in the end, MTV is sabotaging our youth. Raising their hopes that they are actually better than they really are. Which is helplessly normal. And ignorance is true bliss, until the gun is in their mouth. Then it's an after school special. But not an after school MTV special. You'll have to wait 7:45 till it's back on. ☒

## GRE Question of the Month

By Susan M. Fritz

**To** kick it off, I am offering up an interactive question...well, to the extent that you can submit an answer to this Analytical Writing Sample Issue question and send it in for valuable “word count” points towards your first, second, or even third *Babble-ON* award. Become a *Babble-ON* award “Little Scribbler,” or work towards your “Grimmelshausen Contributor” award. The feeling of achieving these great honors is indescribable....

Note: The statements of Susan M. Fritz have in no way been influenced by the presence or cajoling of *Babble-ON*'s editor, D.L. Fritz. The similarity of last names is coincidental.

Source Material: *Kaplan GRE Exam 2005 edition.*

Here's what the folks at Kaplan have to say about “The Issue Essay”:

“The Perspective on an Issue essay requires you to construct your own argument by making claims and providing evidence to support your position on a given issue.” (duh!)

To get to the point, I will write three sample issues about which you may formulate an essay. If you feel like taking me seriously, spend no more than 45 minutes to “agree, refute, or qualify” the issue. Support your assertions!

The prompts!

- 1: The invention of gunpowder was the single most destructive achievement in history.
- 2: The main purpose of a college education should be to prepare oneself for a specific career. (woops!)
- 3: The drawbacks to the use of nuclear power mean that it is not a long-term solution to the problem of meeting ever-increasing energy needs.

Good night and Good luck GRE sample question test-takers! ☒

## Chess-Whiz

By Dan Fritz

**This** month's edition features an under-utilized maneuver, namely castling! This is the only move in the game that allows you to move two pieces at the same time, so why not incorporate it into your strategy when possible?

If you meet the requirements for castling, it's an extremely handy move in the latter half of the game. It helps protect your king, and it moves your rook into attack position up the middle.

(The king moves two spaces toward the rook. The rook moves to the other side of the king.) ☒

### REQUIREMENTS FOR CASTLING

- 1) King must not be in check.
- 2) King must not move through/into check (when castling).
- 3) King must not have moved already.
- 4) The chosen rook must not have moved already.
- 5) The spaces between the king and rook must be empty.

TWO LOST SHAKESPEAKEREAN SONNETS FOUND!

**While** frolicking in the back storage room of the Oxford University Library, Easley Von Ripple, PhD candidate in Library Management, stumbled upon two of the greatest finds of the 20th century: two lost Shakespearean sonnets never before seen or read. Though they will be up for auction at Sotheby's London in December, they are reprinted, for the first time, in their entirety here.

*SONNET 1*

When mother passed yon fairest vessel  
Hidden by thy sea of time  
I came upon this sun that fadeth  
The rend'ring back to Earth was mine  
I see'st to it with brow hung low

'Fore ere long, mine sister cameth forward  
Sorrow streak'd the mirrored face  
Blazing cheeks and rumbling tendrils  
She speaketh with thine hurried pace  
The words doth seeketh targets looming:

"His Lord doth bury mother silent  
as would a dog with thine bone slobber drenched,  
Have ye no compassion for, lo, her keepings?  
Have ye no heart compelled to be wrenched?"  
She spake with tongue but moved by longing.

Engulfing arms for blood-one comfort  
Though clawing at mine sash compels  
So oft in situations harbored  
Invoked by thee denial swell'd  
Pride melteth yon into the walls

I raise my voice above nary a whisper  
As I stroke her familiar hair  
"Fair sis upon thine mother's passing  
grace is not a brother's care.

But, lo, with knowledge brimming sweetly  
Above thine rim of life is known  
This I sayeth to thee meekly  
As fate and those before doth shown

Tis not the brain, nor flesh nor blood  
Nor frown nor smile nor face nor hand  
That makest thou who moved thine body  
But, that which leaves with passing of sand

Tis the caress of thine hand or the laughter within  
Or the thoughts that trip'd with shackles broken  
The learned gaze of majesty preening  
The songs gaily sung, words softly spoken

She hath gone forever, flesh cold, heart unbeaten  
Spirit bridged o'er sundry lights  
I bury not that muse of dreaming  
For she hangs fore'er in starry nights."

*...continued in right column...*



*...continued from left column...*

*SONNET 2*

I toucheth that which others dash'd  
Faces painted with open fright  
O'er the last night tingling wonder  
Hands a' wrapped as though 'tis right

Thine fleshy staff with bulbous flag  
Ere the blood rush cease to be  
I bounce it hither and trouse it yon  
Mine discov'ry of unraveled glee

To wet the sides as though a pallet  
For docile and swift motion aided  
My new'r distraction now fills mine schedule  
To have explosions unabated

Here it cometh, Oh! The fury!  
Rushing out, the brook now river  
Collapsed in sweat my friend of digits  
No motion but a pleasant shiver. ☒

Running to Stand Still

*By Al Fishman*

**I've** run about twenty miles over the last 5 days. And, surprisingly, my feet, ankles, shins, and knees all feel pretty spiffy. No shin splints here (with fingers crossed), which feels like a bit of a milestone because I managed to screw up my leg the last time I ran this much. I'll do my best to stay jackass free from now on. That being said, I went out last night scheming to tackle some nasty neighborhood hills. And I did just so. The plan was to jog my normal loop around the East Atlanta Village and Brownwood Park, run the loop again and head up Garrick and Nancy's ass-kicker of a street, and then down to Van Epps and up the mountain on Van Vleck. I used to live on Van Vleck, and that bad mutha' kicked my ass back and forth more times that I care to remember. (I still have flashbacks sometimes.) I would reach the 6 mile mark right around the base of this bitter, sadistic beast of a hill. But would I have enough juice to run all the way up? And if so, would I keel over and die at its apex? The following haiku is my answer to these and many other of life's most mysterious questions.

Okay, Let's do this!  
Legs kick, Lungs breathe, Heart pumps, High.  
I'm still here, aren't I?  
☒

## Adventures in Vexillology (formerly "Know Thy Flags"): **Part 2**

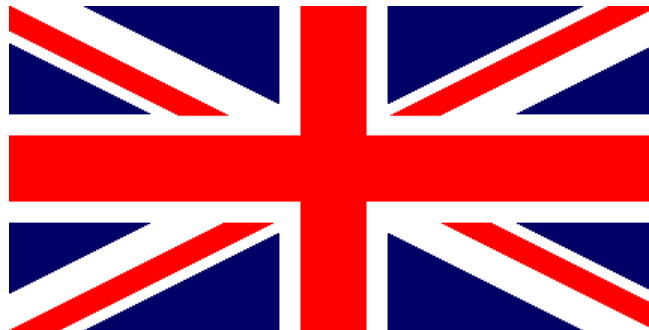
By Nathaniel R. Herr

**This** edition examines a flag that has a great deal of complexity to it. This is not for the faint of heart.

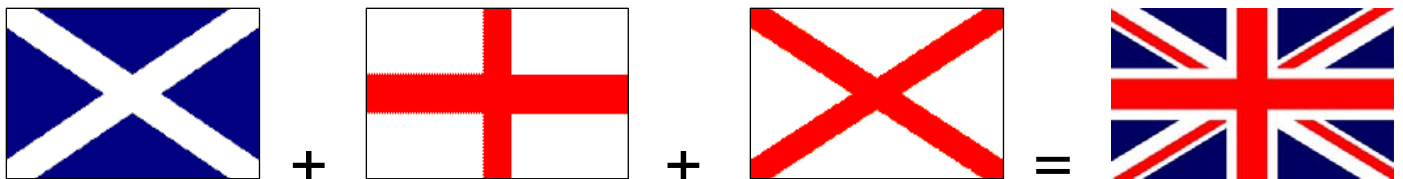
**\*\*New Feature!\*\*** Did you know that flags are not all the same size? All flags will now include their proper proportional height by length listed as "height:length."

### UNITED KINGDOM:

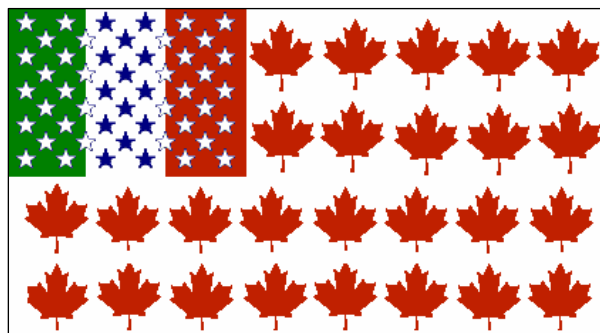
Adopted: 1801. Dimensions: 1:2.



What do you get when you take a bunch of angry and violent clans of white people who represent themselves with symbols of saints and put them together on some islands off of Europe? The answer, of course, is the flag of the UK, also known as the Union Jack. What's so interesting about this flag is that it is a composite of the flags of the patron saints of Ireland, Scotland, and England. The latter two are now most often used as blood-rags following soccer hooligan brawls. You see, it's all simple math:



That is, Scotland's Cross of St. Andrew plus England's Cross of St. George plus Ireland's Cross of St. (who else) Patrick equals a whole mess of pope love. To give you a comparison, I've taken the liberty of creating our inevitable flag, pending the North American conquest:



Back to the point, though. There are a few important things to notice about the UK flag. First of all, the cross of St. Patrick is not perfectly centered on the flag. You'll notice that it is slightly rotated counter-clockwise on the cross of St. Andrew. This was done so that the Scottish cross did not just look like a background for the Irish one. In fact, the original Union flag was created before Ireland was part of the UK, so the flag looked similar, but did not include the St. Patrick cross. Because the Patrick cross was added later, it, and not the Andrew cross gets the slight rotation. Finally, you may notice that something is missing. That's right, it's the symbol of the bastard son of the UK, Wales. Clearly the reason for this is that the English could care less about the Welsh because, honestly, are they really going to try to stand up to the crown? Author note: I spent a lot of time making that North America flag, could you go back and look at it one more time so I can feel like it was worth it, thanks! Bonus note: The Welsh flag has a big dragon on it! ☒



THE TRAGIC TALE OF  
MADELEINE ALBRIGHT'S CAREER AS A FASHION MODEL  
IN 19TH CENTURY NEW YORK  
(PART 5)

*By Several Bored Office Pukes*

*In our last installment, Ulysses S. Grant's General Store and Whiskey Distillery went up in flames as the gang of Mexican Greeks, Strom, Bob Dole, and Teddy all battled each other over Madeleine. Little Maddy threw a tantrum in the back alley of the general store just as Teddy ran back into the burning building.*

**Madeleine** threw her shoulders back, turned around, and promptly slipped and fell on top of some bloated rat carcasses. The grade of the hill, the viscosity of the sludge, and the ball bearing-like, bloated rat carcasses made for a very slick surface, and Madeleine began to gather tremendous speed as she slid down the alley way.

As she slid faster and faster, she called out to the person hunched over at the end of the alley. "Help, Help! My knickers are getting all cruffy."

The person was almost a blur as she bumped off of rocks and rats as she slid like a slick bellied beaver down the street. But as she neared, the person stood up and drew back its cowl to reveal a hideous face and bright red hair.

A sickening feeling fell over Madeleine in the split second before she hit the flat part of the cross street and zipped down the next hill. She was going so fast now that she actually took flight as she passed the redheaded monster. She knew she was sliding into hell, little Ireland, NYC....

The clouds gathered, lightening flashed, thunder boomed, and rain began to splash gently in the muck and mud. The falling water washed the mud from Madeleine's face, hair, and dress. The cotton turned gossamer and clung to her. She was reminded of a photo shoot she had done in a highly suspicious barn in Northern New Jersey for a man who took her picture with an egg crate on stilts.

She was jolted from her uncomfortable reverie by the pitter-patter of little feet on a wooden porch to her left that was swathed in ominous shadows. A high-pitched giggle began to emanate from the porch, starting softly and slowly but then rising in a hideous crescendo until glass shattered in windows along the street. A bright light went on, a spotlight from some magic lantern, and the beam shot upward from the porch into the pitch-black sky. From the wavering beam of light emerged a horrid, shrunken face, its mouth twisted into an evil smile framed with pointed teeth....

"Ring around the rosey! Pockets full of posey! Ashes, ashes, we all fall down! Hehehehe!" squealed the impish creature, picking it's nose and flicking the boogers at Madeleine. "We all fall down, I says!" The piercing giggle that followed caused Madeleine's legs to buckle, sending her into a puddle of alley filth. "Hehehe! Methinks ye like me song!"

"Wha—what—who are you?" Madeleine stammered.

The imp pranced around her and began playing a new game. "Duck, duck, duck," it said, tapping her on the head. "Hehehehehe!" As Madeleine tried to protect her head with her arms, the top button of her drenched blouse popped off and disappeared into the muck. "Lost your button, have ye? Hehehehe! Nice bumblins...very nice...."

*...continued in right column...*

*...Madeleine Albright, from left column...*

As if Madeleine didn't already have a bad feeling about this, she suddenly became keenly aware of her compromised position. Images of North Jersey momentarily flashed through her head again. "Lovely bumblins." The creature's beady, pale gray eyes sliced right through her. "Duck, duck," the imp continued.

"Ye have tree seconds to scam, young Flarty O'Ryan!" yelled an authoritative voice from the porch....

Flarty took one last, long look at Madeleine, sighed, and ran under the porch. Madeleine could feel the stale stench of the imp's breath, that seemed to hang in a fungible cloud, all around her. She saw the beady eyes, staring at her from under the porch and could see the glint of what she thought must be the only clean thing around here, realizing immediately that it was the putrid imp's teeth.

The lantern light cast a shadow on the face of the figure that had saved her from the imp's attention. That same shadow had been across the face of her employer in that barn in Northern New Jersey before he uttered his last breath.

"Come ye out o'the rain, Felicity!" the person said with a whiney grandmotherly voice. "Ye catch col', and young Flarty might take you under the stoop if yer not careful."

Madeleine stood slowly up and walked cautiously toward the lantern light. She kicked mud under the porch hoping some of it would wipe that glinting grin off of the imp's face. Madeleine climbed up the rickety stairs and what she could now see as a woman, backed away toward the entrance of the house. That shadow stayed on the woman's face and Madeleine could not help remembering how she had fled the barn in North Jersey with a fist full of silver dollars and the pitchfork she had used to throw her employer's guts to the dogs. That was, after all, how she bought her way to the big city.

The woman said in a squeaky voice, "Come inside that we may warm yer bones, Felicity". . .

Madeleine recoiled in horror. Step inside the house of an IRISH woman? She started to shake with rage and let out a rage-filled bellow. She turned and delivered an enormous kick to the encroaching Flarty O'Ryan which resulted in him being flung through the air and crashing through a wall across the alley way. The crash resulted in lights going on in windows all along the alley, shutters being flung open, and soon the night sky was filled with rain, angry Irish shouts to "be mer quiet, ya blabbers", and then potatoes, thousands of potatoes. The potatoes splatted noisily in the muck and smacked into Madeleine like large, starchy missiles. She screamed in frustration and promptly slipped in the filth and fell directly on her derriere. She curled into the fetal position, sure that she was doomed to death by potato.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE



