

Dís
le Siobhán Ní Shúilleabháin

‘Sheáin?’

‘Hu?’

‘Cuir síos an páipéar agus bí ag caint liom.’

‘Á anois, muna bhféadfadh fear suí cois tine agus an páipéar a léamh tar éis a lá oibre.’

‘Bhíos ag obair ar feadh an lae, sa tigh.’

‘Hu?’

‘Ó tá go maith, crom blúire den bpáipéar agus ná habair, “Gheobhair é go léir tar éis tamaill.”’

‘Ní rabhas chun é sin a rá, seo duit.’

Lánúin cois tine tráthnóna.

Leanbh ina chodladh sa phram.

Stéig feola ag díreo sa chistin.

Carr ag díluacháil sa gharáiste.

Méadar leictreach ag cuntas chuige a chuid aonad...

‘Hé! Táim anso! Sheáin! Táim anso!’

‘Hu?’

‘Táim sa phaipéar.’

‘Tusa? Cén áit? N’fhacas-sa tú.’

‘Agus tá tusa ann leis.’

‘Cad tá ort? Léas-sa an leathanach san roimh é a thabhairt duit.’

‘Tá’s agam. Deineann tú i gcónaí. Ach chuaigh an méid sin i ngan fhios duit. Táimid araon anso. Mar gheall orainne ata sé.’

‘Cad a bheadh mar gheall orainne ann?’

‘Ní dúirtse faic le héinne.’

‘Ach dúirste. Cuid mhaith.’

Two People
by Siobhán Ní Shúilleabháin

‘Shawn?’

‘Huh?’

‘Put away the paper and talk to me.’

‘Ah, now, *what has it come to* if a man can’t sit down at the fire and read the paper after a day’s work.’

‘I was working all day in the house.’

‘Huh?’

‘Oh, alright, pass over a bit of the paper and don’t say, “You’ll get all of it in a while.”’

‘I wasn’t going to say that, here you are.’

A couple by the fire in the afternoon.

A child sleeping in the pram.

A meat-steak defrosting in the kitchen.

A car depreciating in the garage.

Electricity meter counting away its units...

‘Hey! I’m here! Shawn, I’m here!’

‘Huh?’

‘I am in the paper.’

‘You? Where? I didn’t see you.’

‘And you are there also.’

‘What are you on about? I read that page before I gave it to you.’

‘I know. You always do. But this piece escaped your attention. We are here the two of us. It’s all about us here.’

‘What would be about us there? I never said anything to anyone.’

‘But I did. Quite a lot.’

‘Cé leis? Cad é? Taispeáin dom! Cad air go bhfuil tú ag caint?’

‘Féach ansan. Toradh suirbhé a deineadh. Deirtear ann go bhfuil an ceathrú cuid de na mná pósta na tíre mí shona, míshásta. Táimse ansan ina measc.’

‘Tusa? Míshona, míshásta? Sin é an chéad a chuala de.’

‘Tá sé ansan anois os comhair do dhá shúl. Mise duine des na mná a bhí sa tsuirbhé sin. Is cuimhin liom an mhaidin go maith. I mí Eanáir ab ea é: drochaimsir, dorchacht, dochmacht, bílí, *sales* ar siúl agus gan aon airgead chucu, an sórt san. Eanáir, Feabhra, Márta, Aibreán, Bealtaine, Meitheamh. *Ba* cheart go mbeadh sé aici aon lá anois.’

‘Cad a bheadh aici?’

‘Leanbh. Cad eile a bheadh ag bean ach leanbh!’

‘Cén bhean?’

‘An bhean a tháinig chugam an mhaidin san.’

‘Cad chuige, in ainm Dé?’

‘Chun an suirbhé a dhéanamh, agus ísligh do ghlór nó dúiseoir an leanbh. Munar féidir le lánúin suí síos le cheile tráthnóna agus labhairt go deas ciúin sibhialta le chéile.’

‘Ní raibh uaim ach an páipéar a léamh.’

‘Sin é é. Is tábhachtaí an páipéar ná mise. Is tábhachtaí an rud atá le léamh sa pháipéar ná an rud ata le rá agamsa. Bhuel, mar sin seo leat agus léigh é. An rud atá le rá agam, tá sé sa pháipéar sa suirbhé. Ag an saol go léir le léamh. Sin mise feasta. Staitistic. Sin é a chuirfidh mé síos leis in aon fhoirm eile a bheidh le líonadh agam. *Occupation? Statistic.* Níos deise ná *Housewife*, cad a déarfá?’

‘Hu?’

‘Is cuma leat cé acu chomh fada is a dhéanaim obair *Housewife*. Sin a dúrsta

‘With whom? What is it? Show me! What were you talking about?’

‘Look there. The result of the survey that was made. It is stated there that a quarter of the married women of this country are unhappy, dissatisfied. I am amongst them.’

‘You? Unhappy, dissatisfied? That’s the first I’ve heard of it.’

‘It is there now in front of your two eyes. I am one of the women in that survey. I remember the morning well. In the month of January it was: bad weather, gloom, bills, sales and no money to go to them, that sort of thing. January, February, March, April, May, June. It would have to be, that she would have it any day now.’

‘She would have what?’

‘A child. What else would a woman have but a child!’

‘What woman?’

‘The woman who came to me that morning.’

‘Whatever for, in God’s name?’

‘In order to do a survey, and lower your voice or you’ll wake the child. *Whatever is the world coming to* if a couple can’t sit together in the afternoon and speak nicely, quietly and civilly to each other.’

‘I only wanted to read the paper.’

‘That’s just it. The paper is more important than me. What’s read in the paper is more important than what I have to say. Well, so here you are, read it. What I have to say, it is in the paper, in the survey. For the world to read. That’s me henceforth. A statistic. That’s what I’ll put in any form other form I’ve to fill in. *Occupation? Statistic.* Better than *Housewife*, wouldn’t your say?’

‘Huh?’

‘It doesn’t matter which of them it is so long as I do the *Housewife* work. That’s

léi leis.’

‘Cad a dúrais léi?’

‘Nach dtugtar fé ndeara aon ní a dhéanann tú mar bhean tí, ach nuair nach ndéanann tú é. Cé thugann fé ndeara go bhfuil an t-urlár glan? Ach má bhíonn sé salach, sin rud eile.’

‘Cad eile a dúrais léi?’

‘Chuile rud.’

‘Fúmsa leis?’

‘Fúinn araon, a thaisce. Ná cuireadh sé isteach ort. Ní bhíonn aon ainmneacha leis an tsuirbhé – chuile rud neamhphearsanta, coimeádtar chuile eolas go discréideach fé rún. Ríomhaire a dhéanann amach an toradh ar deireadh, a dúirt sí. Níor cheapas riamh go mbeinn i mo lón ríomhaire!’

‘Strainséir mná a shiúllann isteach sa tigh chugat, agus tugann tú gach eolas di fúinne?’

‘Ach bhí jab le déanamh aici. Ní fhéadfainn gan cabhrú léi. An rud bocht, tá sí pósta le dhá bhliain agus ba bhreá léi leanbh, ach an t-árasán atá acu ní lamhálfaidh an t-úinéir aon leanbh ann agus táid araon ag obair chun airgead tí a sholáthar mar anois tá leanbh chucu agus caithfidh siad bheith amuigh as an árasán, agus níor mhaith leat go gcaillfidh sí a post, ar mhaith? Ní fhéadfainn an doras a dhúnadh sa phus uirthi, maidin fhuar fhliuch mar é, an bhféadfainn?’

‘Ach níl aon cheart ag éinne eolas príobháideach mar sin a fháil.’

‘Ní di féin a bhí sí á lorg. Bhí sraith ceisteanna tugtha di le cur agus na freagraí a scríobh síos. Jab a bhí ann di sin. Jab maith leis, an áirithe sin sa lo, agus costais taistil. Beidh mé ábalta an sorn nua san a cheannach as.’

‘Tusa? Conas?’

‘Bog réidh anois. Ní chuirfidh sé isteach ar an gcáin ioncaim agatsa. Lamhálann

what I said to her too.’

‘What did you say to her?’

‘That nothing of what you do as a housewife is ever noticed, except when you don’t do it. Who notices when the floor is clean? But if it is dirty, then that’s another thing.’

‘What else did you say to her?’

‘Everything.’

‘About me too?’

‘About both of us, my treasure. Don’t let it worry you. There are no names *given* in the survey – everything is impersonal, all information is kept discreetly confidential. A computer makes out the results in the end, she told *me*. I never thought that I’d be ammunition for a computer!’

‘A stranger of a woman walks into the house to you, and you give her all the info on us?’

‘But she had a job to do. I couldn’t but help her. The poor thing, she was married for two years and she dearly wanted a child, but the apartment that they had, the owner wouldn’t allow a child there and so they were both working in order to get the money for a house because now they were expecting a child so they’d have to be out of the apartment, and you wouldn’t want her to lose her job, now would you? I couldn’t close the door in her face, on a cold morning like it, could I?’

‘But no one has any right to acquire private information like that.’

‘It wasn’t for herself she looking for it. There were a series of questions for her put and to write answers down. It was a job for her. And a good job too, so much per day plus travelling expenses. I’ll be able to buy myself that new stove.’

‘You? How?’

‘Take it easy now. It will not affect your income tax. They permit...

siad an áirithe sin: *working wife's allowance* mar a thugann siad air – amhail is nach aon *working wife* tú aige baile, ach is cuma san.

‘Tá tusa chun oibriú lasmuigh? Cathain, munar mhiste dom a fhiafraí?’

‘Níl ann ach obair shealadach, ionadaíocht a dhéanamh di fad a bheidh sí san ospidéal chun an leanbh a bheith aici, agus ina dhiaidh san. Geibheann siad ráithe saoire don leanbh.’

‘Agus cad mar gheall ar do leanbhosa?’

‘Tabharfaidh mé liom é sa bhascaed i gcúl an chairr, nó má bhíonn sé dúisithe, im bhaclainn. Cabhair a bheidh ann dom. Is maith a thuigeann na tincéirí san.’

‘Cad é? Cén bhaint atá ag tincéirí leis an gcúram?’

‘Ní dhúnann daoine doras ar thincéir mná go mbíonn leanbh ina baclainn.’

‘Tuigim. Tá tú ag tógáil an jab seo ag dul ag tincéireacht ó dhoras go doras.’

‘Ag suirbhéireacht ó dhoras go doras.’

‘Mar go bhfuil tú míshona, míshásta sa tigh.’

‘Cé a dúirt sin leat?’

‘Tusa.’

‘Go rabhas míshona, míshásta. Ní dúirt riamh.’

‘Dúraís. Sa tsuirbhé. Féach an toradh ansan sa pháipéar.’

‘Á sa tsuirbhé! Ach sin scéal eile. Ní gá gurb í an fhírinne a insíonn tú sa tsuirbhé.’

‘Cad a deir tú?’

‘Dá bhfeicfeá an liosta ceisteanna, fé rudaí chomh príobháideach! Strainséir mná a shiúlann isteach go dtabharfainnse fios gan aon ní dí, meas óinsí atá agat orm, ab ea? D’fhreagraíos a cuid ceist-eanna, a dúirt leat, sin rud eile ar fad.’

‘Ó!’

that much: *a working wife's allowance* is what they call it – as if you are not *a working wife* when you are at home, but that doesn't matter.’

‘You are going to be working outside? When, if you don't mind me asking?’

‘It is just temporary work, doing substitution for her while she is in hospital having the child, and after that. They give a season of vacation for *taking care of* the child.’

‘And what about your own child?’

‘I shall take him along with me in the basket in the back of the car, and if he's awake, *I shall carry him* in my arms. It will be a help to me. Tinkers understand that well.’

‘What? How have tinkers anything to do with looking after your child?’

‘People don't close the door on a tinker-woman who has a child in her arms.’

‘I understand. You are taking this job and being a tinker from door to door.’

‘Doing surveys from door to door.’

‘Because you are unhappy and dissatisfied in the house.’

‘Who told you that?’

‘You.’

‘That I was unhappy and dissatisfied. I never said *that*.’

‘You did. In the survey. Look at the result there in the paper.’

‘Ah in the survey! But that's a different matter. It is not necessary that it is the truth that you tell in the survey.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘If you were to see the list of questions about thing so private! A unknown woman comes in and I'd tell everything to her, is it a fool of a woman you take me for, is it? I answered her questions, I told you, that's completely different.’

‘Oh!’

‘Agus maidir leis an jab, táim áthógaint chun airgead soirn nua a thuilleamh, sin uile. Ar aon tslí, tusa fé ndeara é.’

‘Cad é? Mise fé ndeara é?’

‘Na rudaí a dúirt léi.’

‘Mise? Bhíos-sa ag obair.’

‘Ó bhís! Nuair a bhí an díobháil déanta.’

‘Cén Díobháil?’

‘Ní cuimhin liom anois cad a dheinis, agus dheinis rud éigin an mhaidin san a chuir an ghoimh orm, b’fhéidir gurb é an oíche roimh ré, n’fheadar. Agus bhí an mhaidin chomh gruama, agus an tigh chomh tóin-thar-ceann tar éis an deireadh seachtaine, agus an bille ESB tar éis teacht, nuair a bhuaill sí chugam isteach lena liosta ceisteanna, cheapas gur anuas ós na Flaithis a tháinig sí chugam. Ó an sásamh a fuairas scaoileadh liom féin agus é a thabhairt ó thalamh d’fhearaihb. Ó, an t-ualach a thóg sé dem chroí! Diabhail chruthanta a bhí iontu, dúirt, inár sclábhaithe acu, dúirt. Cad ná dúirt! Na scéalta a chumas di! Níor cheapas riamh go raibh féith na cumadóireachta ionam.’

Agus chreid sí go rabhais ag insint na fírinne, go rabhais ag tabhairt freagra macánta ar gach aon cheist a chuir sí?’

Bheul, ní raibh aon *lie detector* (*brathadóir éithigh*) aici, is dóigh liom. Ní fhaca é ar aon tslí. Ní déarfainn gurb é a cúram é, níor mhór dóibh síceolaí a bheith acu i mbun an jab mar sin. Ó, chuir sí an cheist agus thugas-sa an freagra, agus sin a raibh air. Agus bhí cupa caife againn ansin, agus bhíomar araon lánsásta.’

‘Ach ná feiceann tú ná fuil san ceart? Mná eile ag léamh torthaí mar seo. Ceathrú de mhná pósta na tíre míshásta? Cothóidh sé míshástacht iontusan leis.’

‘Níl aon leigheas agam ar conas a chuireann siad rudaí sna páipéir. D’fhéadfaidís a rá go raibh trí ceathrúna de mhná na tíre sásta sona, ná féadfaidís,

‘And as for the job, I am taking it to earn money for a new stove, that’s all. Any way, it’s all because of you.’

‘What? I brought this about?’

‘The things you said to her.’

‘I said? I was working.’

‘Oh, yes! After the damage was done.’

‘What damage?’

‘I don’t remember now what you did, but you did something that morning that annoyed me, perhaps it was the night before, I don’t know. And the morning was so gloomy, the house arse-ways after the weekend, and the ESB bill had just arrived, when she dropped into me with her list of questions, I thought that was down from heaven she had come to me. Oh the satisfaction I got letting myself go and tearing men to pieces. Oh, the weight is took off my heart! They were all complete and utter devils, I said, and we were enslaved by them, I said. What didn’t I say! The stories I made up for her! I never thought that I had the natural potential for creative writing in me.’

‘And she believed that you were tell her the truth, that you were giving honest answers to every question she asked?’

‘Well, she didn’t have a lie detector, I suppose. I didn’t see one anyway. I wouldn’t say that that was he concern, they would have had to have had a psychologist doing the job. Oh, she *just* asked the question and I gave the answer, that’s all there was to it. Then we had a cup of coffee, and both of us were fully satisfied.

‘But don’t you see it’s not right? Other women reading such results. A quarter of the country’s married women dissatisfied. It’ll foster discontent in them.

‘I can do nothing about how they put things in the papers. They could have said, three quarters of country’s women are happy and satisfied, couldn’t they,

ach féach a ndúradar? Ach sé a gcúramsan an páipéar a dhíol, agus ní haon nath le héinne an té atá sona, sásta. Sé an té atá míshásta, ag déanamh agóide, a gheibheann éisteacht sa saol so, ó chuile mheá cumarsáide. Sin mar atá: ní mise a chum ná a cheap. Aon ní amháin a cheapas féin a bhí bunoscion leis an tsuirbhé, ná raibh a dóthain ceisteanna aici. Chuirfínnse a thuilleadh leo. Ní amháin “an bhfuil tú sásta, ach an dóigh leat go mbeidh tú sásta, má mhaireann tú leis?”

‘Conas?’

‘Na Síniigh fadó, bhí an ceart acu, ta’s agat.’

‘Conas?’

‘Sa nós a bhí acu, nuair a cailltí an fear, a bhean chéile a dhó ina theannta. Bhí ciall leis.’

‘Na hindiaigh a dheineadh san, nárbh ea?’

‘Is cuma cé acu, bhí ciall leis mar nós. Bheu, cad eile atá le déanamh léi? Tá gá le bean chun leanaí a chur ar an saol agus iad a thógáil, agus nuair a bhíd tógtha agus bailithe leo, tá gá lei fós chun bheith ag tindeáil ar an bhfear. Chuige sin a phós sé í, nach ea? Ach nuair a imíonn seisean, cad air a mairfidh sí ansan? *Redundant (iomarcach)! Tar éis an tsaoil. Ach ní fhaigheann sí aon redundancy money, ach pinsean beag suarach baintrí.*

‘Ach cad a mheasann tú is ceart a dhéanamh?’

‘Níl a fhios agam. Sa seansaol, cuirtí i gcathaoir súgáin sa chúinne í ag riar seanchaíochta agus seanleigheasanna, má bhí sí mór leis an mbean mhic, nó ag bruíon ia ag achrann léi muna raibh, ach bhí a háit aici sa chomhlúadar. Anois níl faic aici. Sa tslí ar gach éinne atá sí. Bhí ciall ag na Síniigh. Meas tú, an mbeadh fáil in aon áit ar an leabhar dearg san?’

‘Cén leabhar dearg?’

but look all they said. But it’s their concern to sell the paper, and nobody cares a whit for the person who is happy and satisfied. It is the one who is dissatisfied and is causing controversy that gets listened to in this life, by all the media. That’s how it is: it’sd not me who thought it up. The was one thing, I thought myself, was wrong with the survey, was that she didn’t have enough questions. I would add not only “are you satisfied”, but also, “do you suppose that you will be satisfied if you stick it out?”

‘How *do you mean*?’

‘The Chinese long ago, they had it right, don’t you know.’

‘How come?’

‘With their custom that when the man died, his wife would be burnt along with him. That made sense.

‘It was the indians that did that. Was it not?’

‘It doesn’t matter, as a custom it made sense. Well, what else could be done with her? A woman is needed to bring children into this world and to rear them, and when they are reared and they have gone off, she is still needed to take care of the husband. That’s the reason he married her, isn’t it? But when he goes, what will she live on then? *Redundant!* After all is said and done. But she doesn’t receive redundancy pay, just a small miserable widow’s pension.’

‘But what do you think ought to be done?’

‘I don’t know. In the old days, she used to be put in a sugan chair in the corner, producing old stories or remedies, if she were on good terms with her son’s wife, or bickering with her if she wasn’t, but there was a place for her in the family. Now she has nothing. She’s in everyone’s way. The Chinese had sense. Do you think that red book is available?’

‘What red book?’

‘Le Mao? Ba dheas liom é a léamh. Ba dheas liom rud éigin a bheith le léamh agam nuair ná geibhim an páipéar le léamh, ag nuair ná fuil éinne agam a labhródh liom. Ach beidh mo jab agam sara fada. Eanáir, Feabhra, Márta, Aibreán, Bealtaine, Meitheamh; tá sé in am. Tá sé thar am. Dúirt sí go mbeidh sí i dteagmháil liom mí roimh ré. Ní théann aon leanbh thar dheich mí agus a dícheall a dhéanamh... Is é sin má bhí leanbh i gceist riamh ná árasán ach oiread. B’fhéidir ná raibh sí pósta féin. B’fhéidir gur ag insint éithigh dom a bhí sí chun go mbeadh trua agam di, agus go bhfreagróinn a cuid ceisteanna. Agus chaitheas mo mhaidin léi agus bhí oiread le déanamh agam sn mhaidin chéanna, níochán agus gach aon ní, agus shuíos síos ag freagairt ceisteanna di agus ag tabhairt caife di, agus gan aon fhocal den bhfírinne ag teacht as a béal! Bheul, cuimhnigh air sin! Nach mór an lúbaireacht a bhíonn i ndaoine.

Lánúin cois tine tráthnóna.

Leanbh ina chodladh sa phram.

Stéig feola ag díreo sa chistin.

Carr ag díluacháil sa gharáiste.

Méadar leictreach ag cuntas chuige a chuid aonad...

An bhean

Prioc preac

liom leat

ann as

Tic toc an mhéadair leictrigh ag cuntas chuige na n-aonad.

‘By Mao? I would love to read it. I would love to have something to read when I don’t get the paper to read, and when there is no one who would talk with me. But I’ll have my job before long. January, February, March, April, May, June; it is time. It is long time. She told me that she would be in contact with me a month beforehand. No child goes beyond ten months no matter how hard she tries.. That is if there was ever even any child in question, or any apartment either. Maybe she wasn’t even married. Perhaps she was lying to me so that I would have pity for her, and I’d answer her questions. And I spent my (*whole*) morning with her and I had so much to do that same morning, *doing the* washing and everything and I sat down answering questions for her, giving her coffee, and not a word of truth coming out of her mouth. Well, just imagine that! How deceitful people can be!’

A couple by the fire in the afternoon.

A child sleeping in the pram.

A meat-steak defrosting in the kitchen.

A car depreciating in the garage.

Electricity meter counting away its units...

The woman

Jibber jabber

with you with me

neither here nor there.

The tic toc of the electric meter counting away the units.