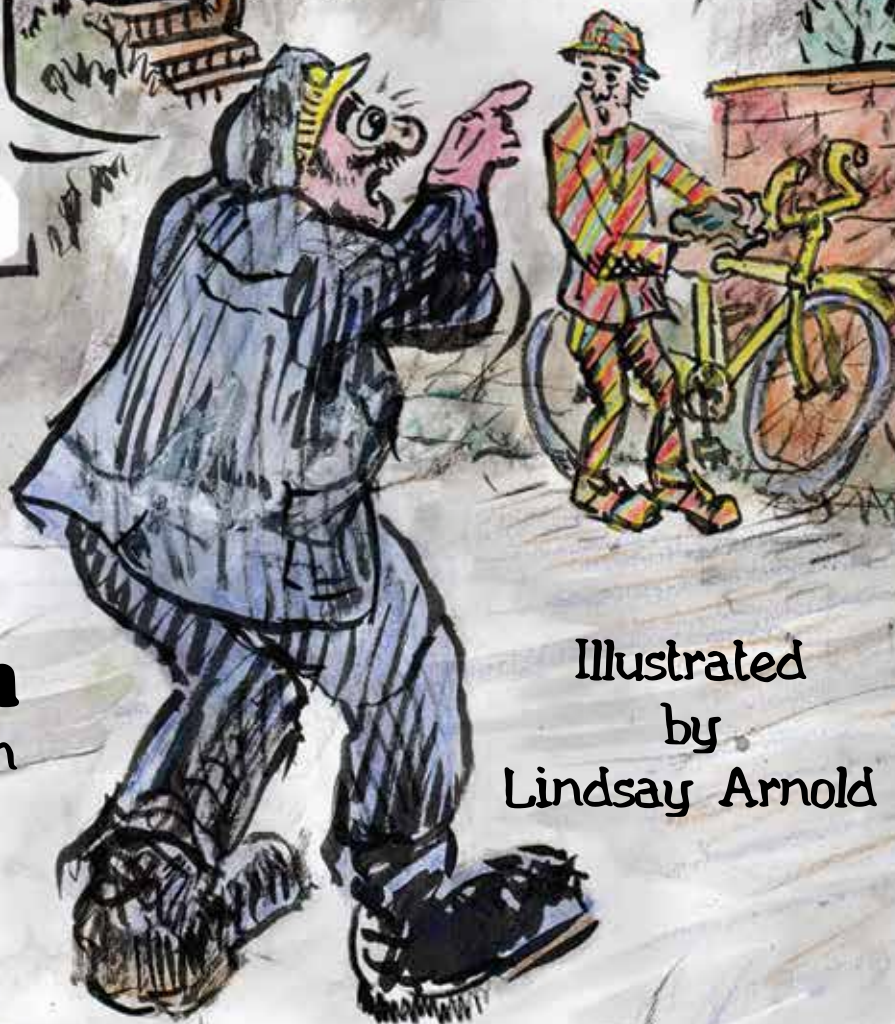


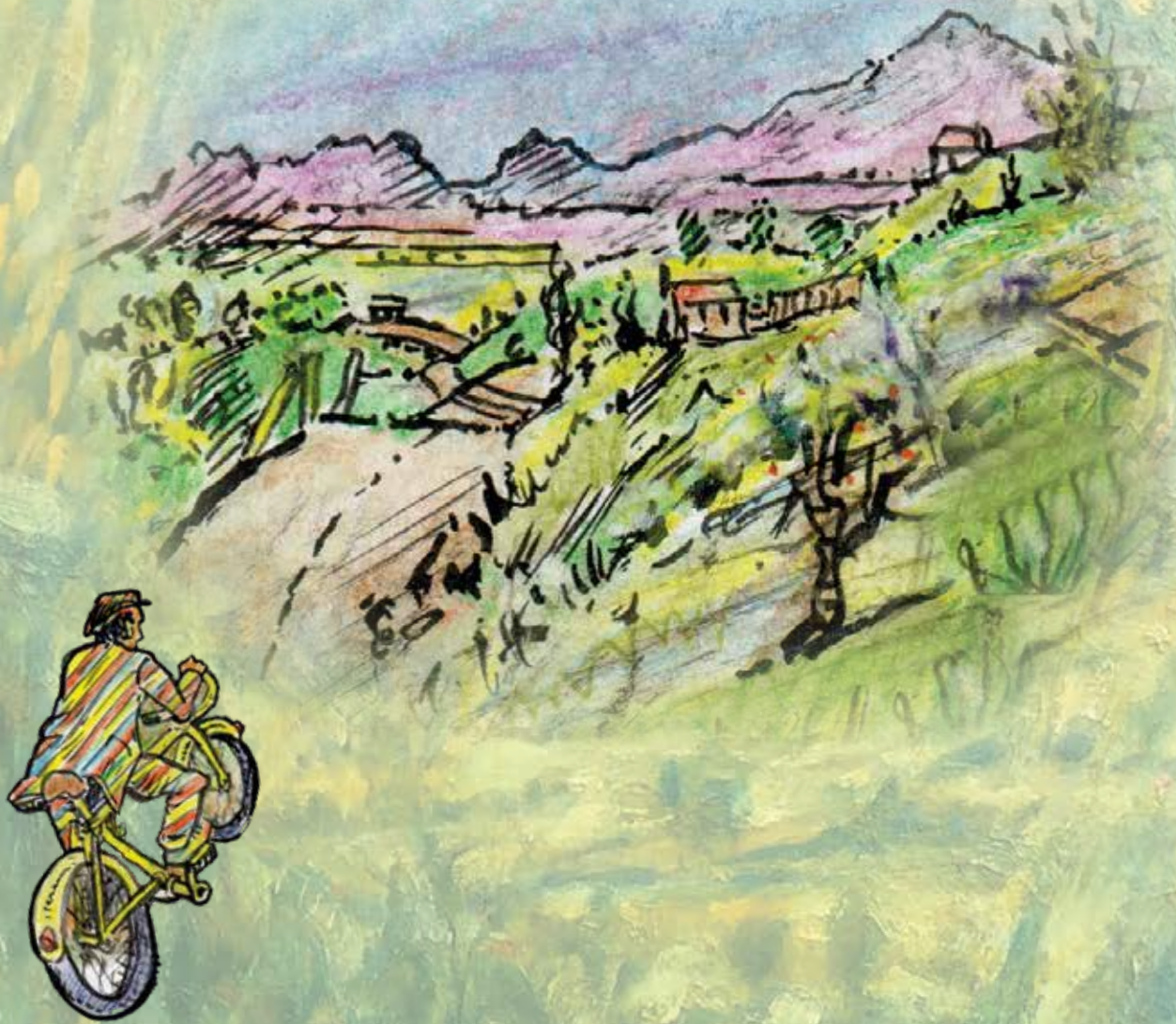
About a Bicycle

DO YOU
LIKE
STRAWBERRY
JAM?

A Key
to
**The
Third
Policeman**
by Flann O'Brien

Illustrated
by
Lindsay Arnold







About a Bicycle

A Key to The Third Policeman, by "Flann O'Brien."
Rejected in 1939. Published posthumously in 1967.
Illustrated by Lindsay Arnold.

Just now I imagined Brian O'Nolan spoke to me, the way that "Joe" does to the man in his tale:

- What the devil do you think you're doing?

Sorry, I said, I'm trying to promote your book.

- How's that? Is it money you're after making?

That would be a turn-up for the books truly, I said. Look, there are these pictures-

- It's too pretty!

Well, I'm hoping to get bright youngsters interested in reading it. You see, it's now regarded as the greatest Irish novel of the twentieth century.

- Is that so? I never knew that. Well - go ahead.

And that's the metaphysical extent of it.

However, a mundane terrestrial fact is as follows:

If you were to drill a hole accurately straight through the planet from here in Tasmania, and burrow along it, you would emerge somewhere south-west of Ireland, still well at sea, but closer to the kin you left behind when you were taken south to purgatory that time.

-- 16th September 2020

"Hell goes round and round. In shape it is circular and by nature it is interminable, repetitive and very nearly unbearable".

THE narrator of the story does not know his own name, so neither do we, the bemused readers.

At the top of the tale, he confesses to a murder, but no details are offered.

Instead, he tells us something of his early life.



He had a father who spent his time in private colloquy with the family dog.



The mother was forever kneeling red-cheeked at the fire, when she was not running a discreet bar in the corner of the house.

Then all three of them die, one after the other, father, mother, and dog.

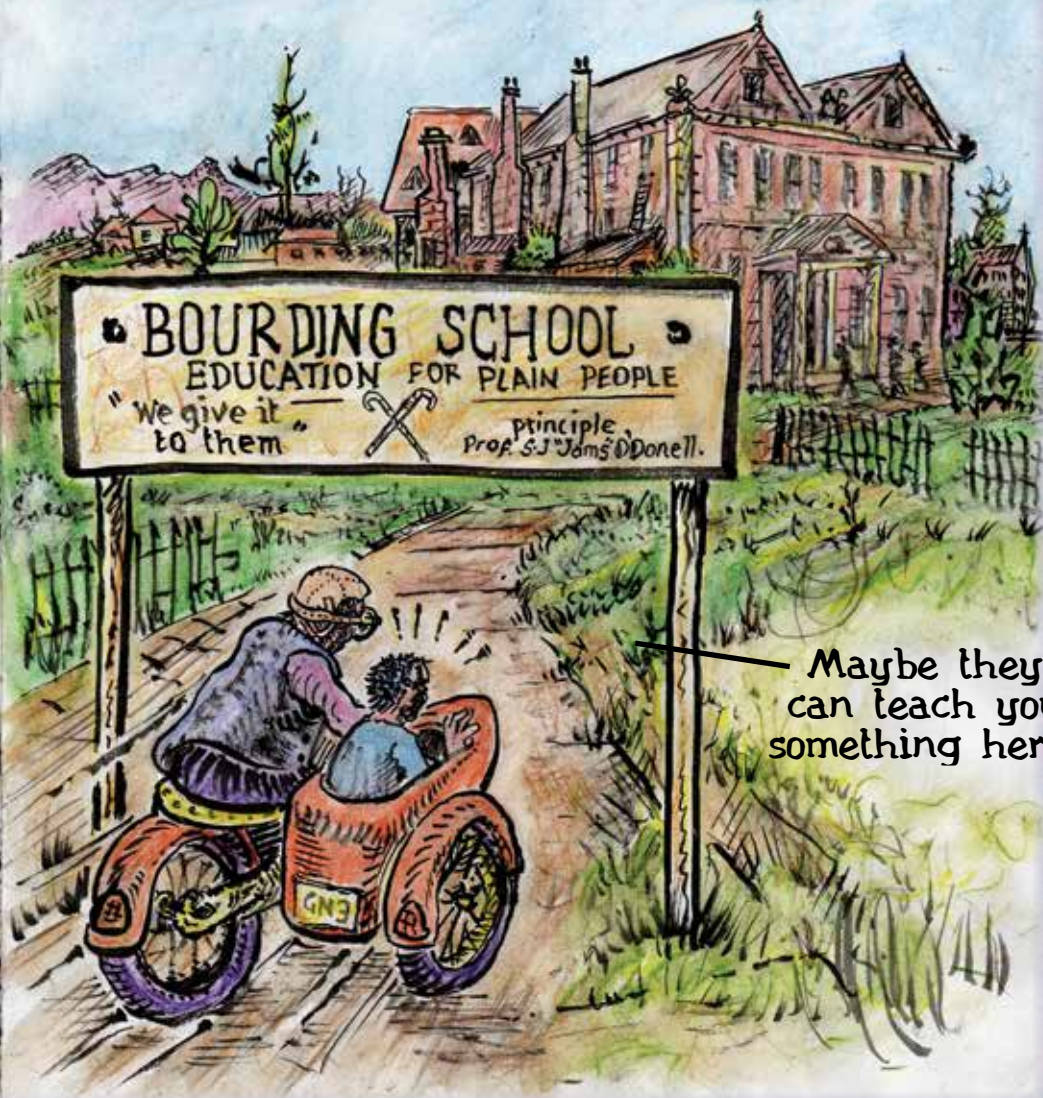
He suspects they have run away, perhaps been stolen, or simply disappeared.

It is then that gloomy strangers come foostering about the place, taking notes and measurements.

He overhears what could perhaps be his name spoken.

When told perfunctorily that he is to be taken for a ride in an outside car, he believes his parents may have been found, and perhaps he is being taken to a police station to claim them.





Maybe they can teach you something here!

Instead of a police station, he is delivered summarily to an imposing building, and left there for the duration of his childhood.

He discloses nothing of his formal learning or his life at the school, besides commenting that the place is peopled by strangers.

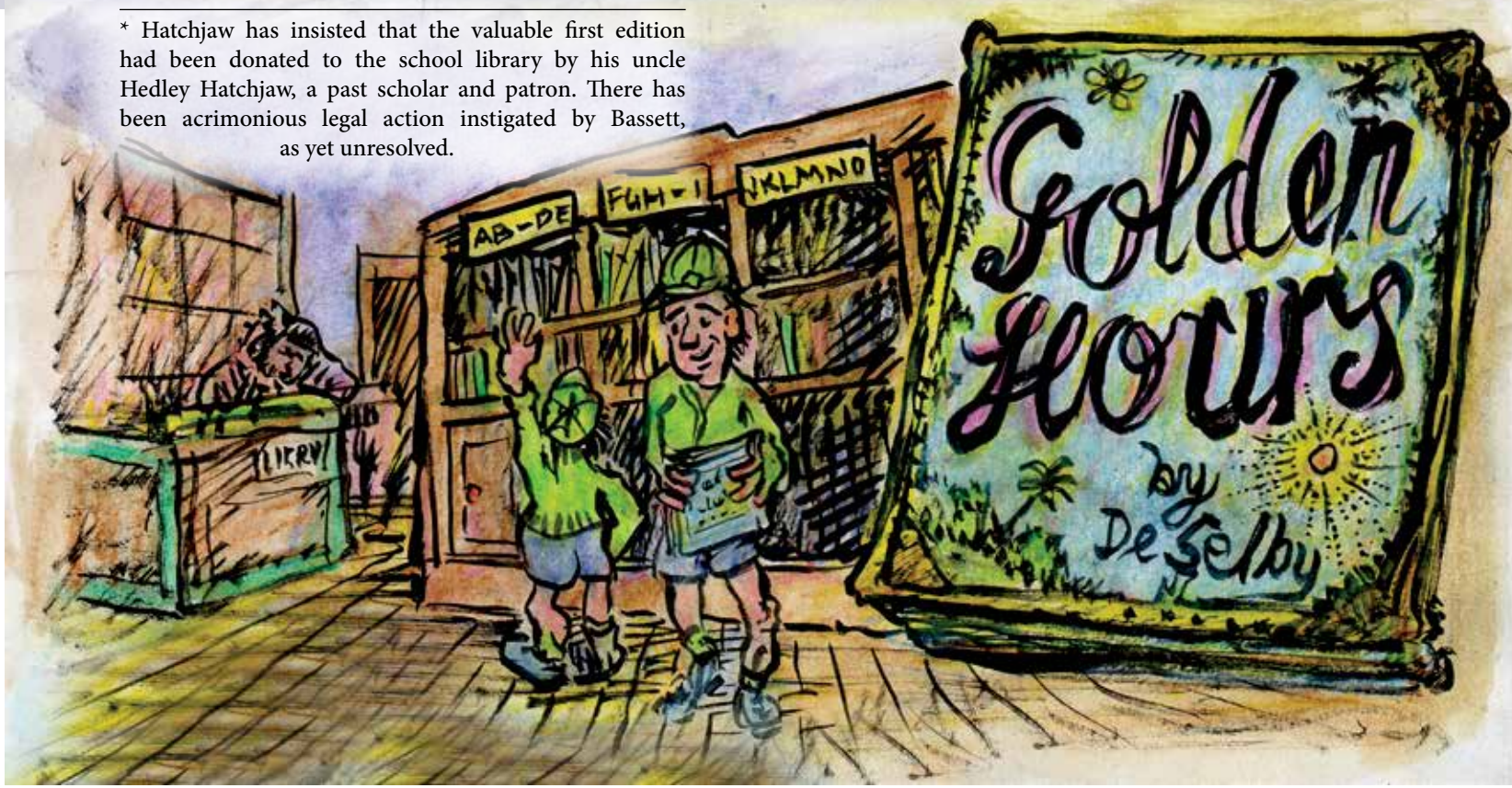
He learns how he is situated in the world.

His people are dead, his education has been paid for and the family property will be his when he reaches maturity.

It is doubtful that anything of use for his Life's journey can be taught him at this Institute of Knowledge.

However, the way it comes to pass, he does make a momentous discovery there, which leads to a lifelong obsession with the arcane philosophies and theories of a recondite scholar, de Selby, whose learned tome he chances upon and surreptitiously borrows for further perusal.*

* Hatchjaw has insisted that the valuable first edition had been donated to the school library by his uncle Hedley Hatchjaw, a past scholar and patron. There has been acrimonious legal action instigated by Bassett, as yet unresolved.



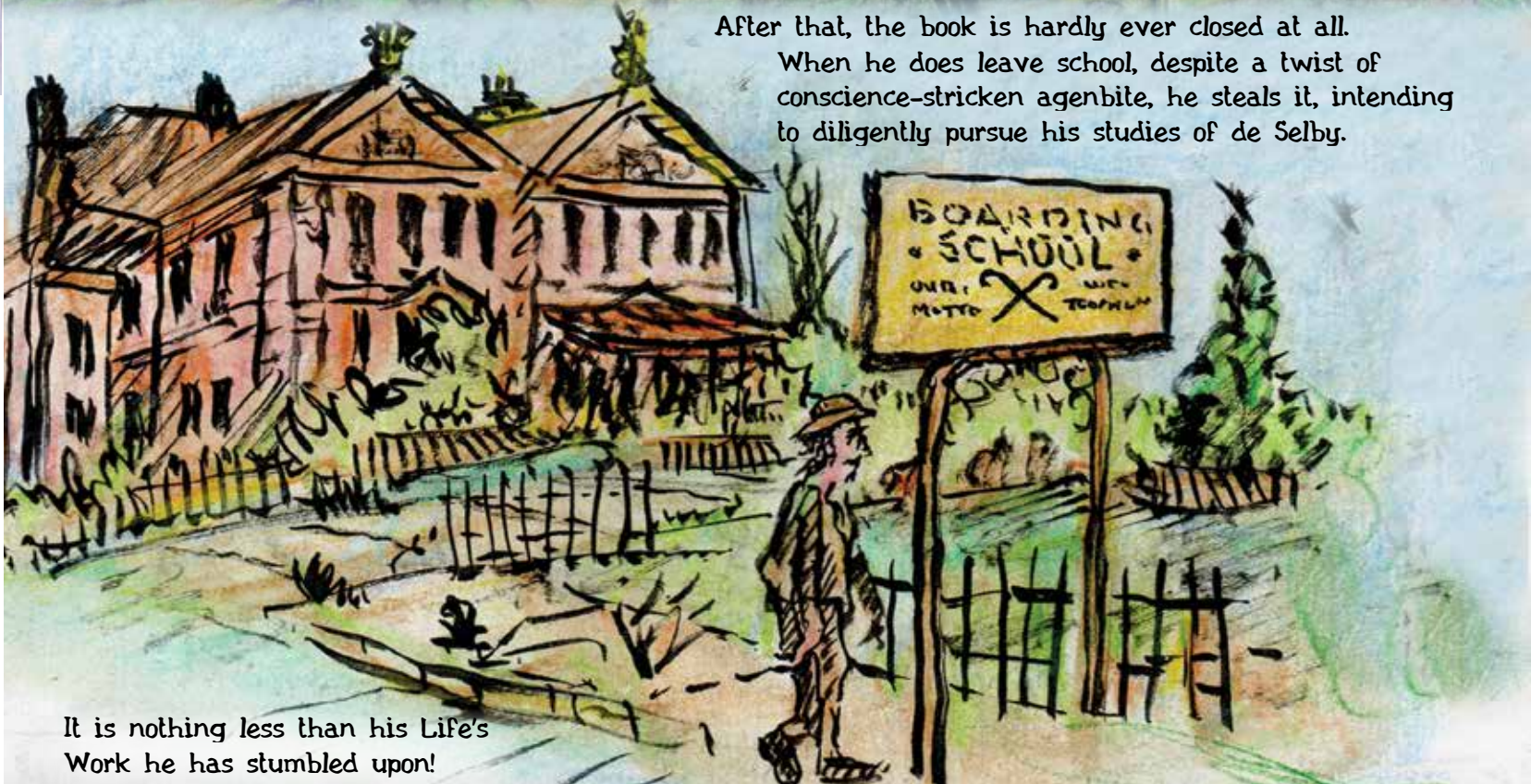
One of de Selby's most beguiling postulations is that night is an insanitary condition of the atmosphere due to rising accretions of black air.

This is the class of idea which arouses in him a powerful desire to follow the teachings of such a great thinker. He is fascinated like a gosling within beak-strike of a wee boy's dilly-worm.



After that, the book is hardly ever closed at all.

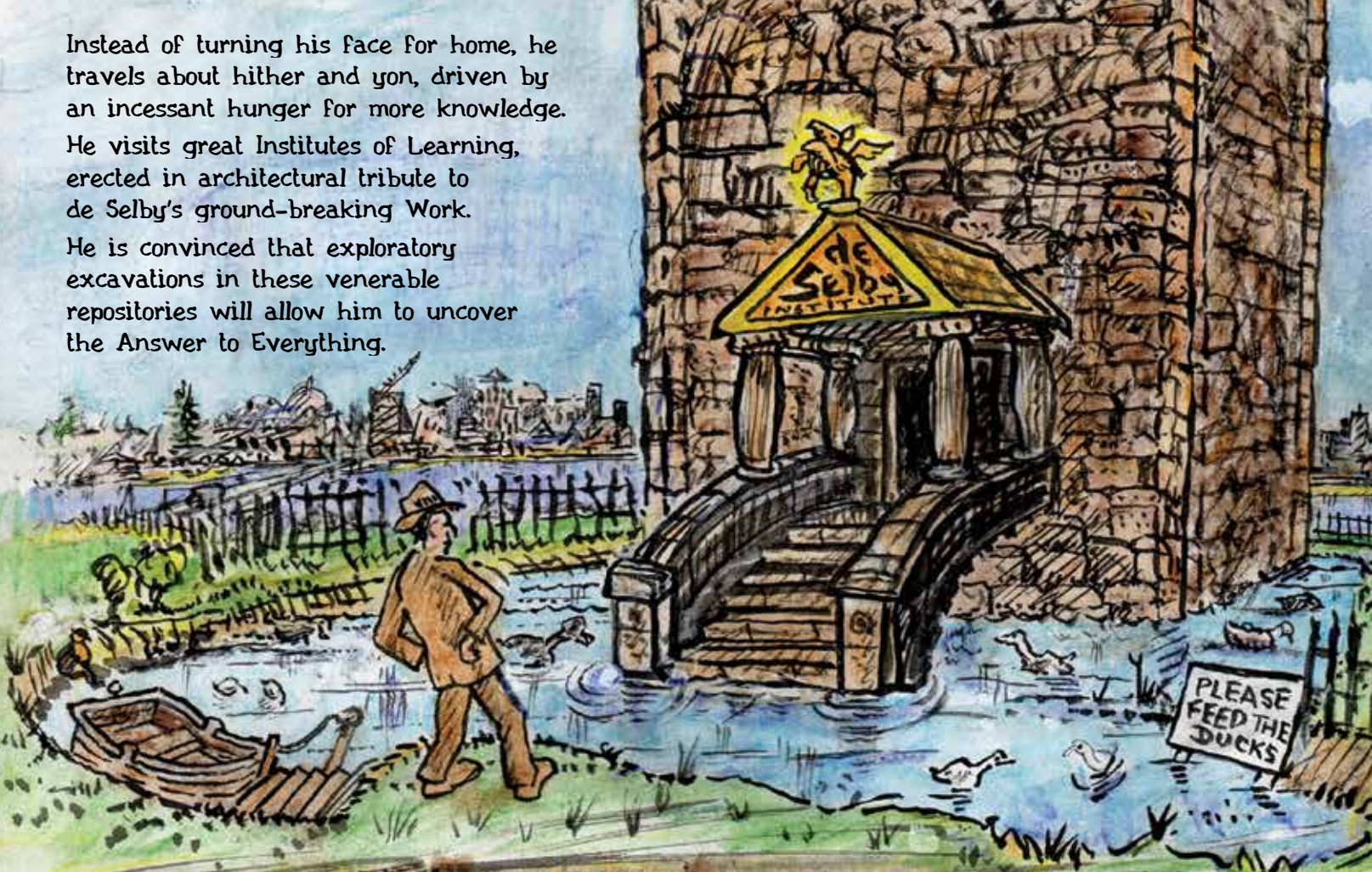
When he does leave school, despite a twist of conscience-stricken agenbite, he steals it, intending to diligently pursue his studies of de Selby.



It is nothing less than his Life's Work he has stumbled upon!

He will unravel de Selby's secret codes. He will solve the Universal mystery of Mysteries.

Instead of turning his face for home, he travels about hither and yon, driven by an incessant hunger for more knowledge. He visits great Institutes of Learning, erected in architectural tribute to de Selby's ground-breaking Work. He is convinced that exploratory excavations in these venerable repositories will allow him to uncover the Answer to Everything.



He pores over ponderous palimpsests, manifold manuscripts and unpublished papers, everything from correspondence about types of water tap to grocery lists and indecipherable desktop doodles.

The inspirational literary style* of the great man and his acolytes has him so, he is hooked, landed and salted, a 'holy mackerel', as Kraus crudely put it.

* A sample: "The deep diversity and sheer broadness sitting at the bottom-most heart of de Selby's Worldview would startle the heart out of a church-full of carved stone saints!" [See: *De Selby: Tellurian Time Lord? Reflections* by P. Peachgrove. Vanity Press, Ventry, 1947.]

De Selby experimented widely and relentlessly in laboratory and field.

7

So much to learn!

One little lifetime will not be enough.

He must hasten.

Enlightenment is within
his grasp!



He will continue his studies at
home, if it is still there

There is many a mossgrown
misconception about Time
and Space cracked apart by
de Selby's innovative work
with mirrors.

He designed and constructed
an ingenious contraption
enabling him to interact
with people's reflections,
which, of course, were in
the Past. He could walk
public streets backwards, in
a different time zone.

He even proved to his own
satisfaction that he had two
left hands.*

* Hatchjaw and Bassett both accept
this, but dispute whether his right
hand simply transmogrified, or a third
digital appendage grew on the left arm
[See *Letters Du Garbandier-Le
Fournier* 1927-43, De Selby Museum
cat. 10003cd.



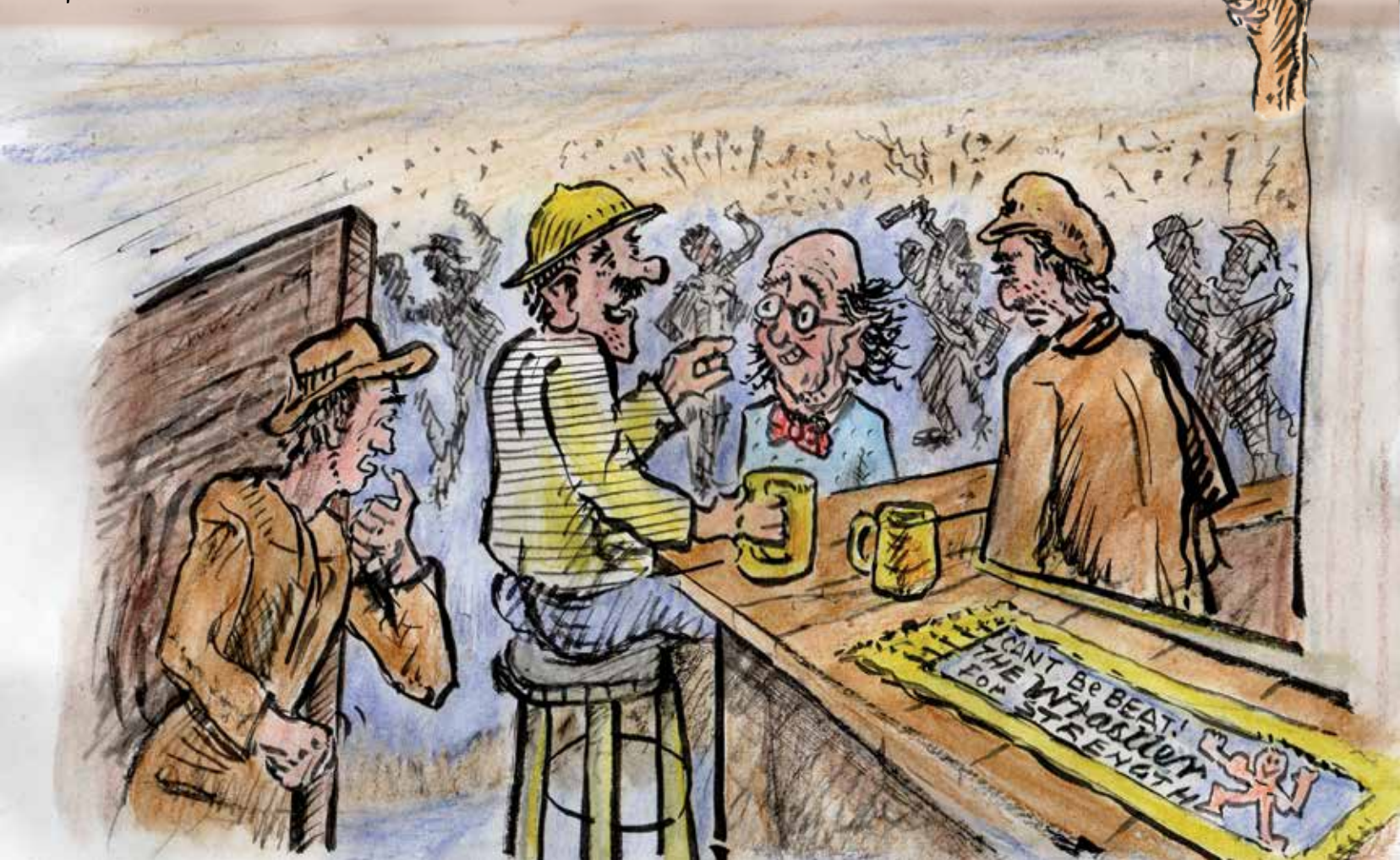
On his journeyings, he mentions casually that he has managed incidentally to break a leg in six places, so he is now limping home with a wooden replacement, possibly an intricate plot device seeded into the narrative, an allegorical hint for the prescient reader, do you see.

The old place appears to be unchanged from his childhood memories. Before leaving school, he'd been told of some legal arrangements regarding his home, but the whole gist of it was hazy to him, and hence to us.

But for distant cattle lowing and crickets singing, everything is tranquil and peaceful.



When he puts his head into the quiet cosy bar his mother had overseen so daintily, what should he find but a rowdy crowd of roistering corner boys, and they being servilely attended by a man who used to work for his father, by the name of Divney. A strong potion called "The Wrastler" has them all well flustered and stocious.



This Divney is a low untrustworthy type of skiver, a sly skeeven who would pinch the eyes out of your head. He has been running the place to ruin all these years, employed by the lawyers.

He would just have to settle in to his studies, keep a steady lookout and try to understand how things stood.

After a time or two, Divney displays to him a device he has contrived for some nefarious purpose: a heavy metal bicycle pump.

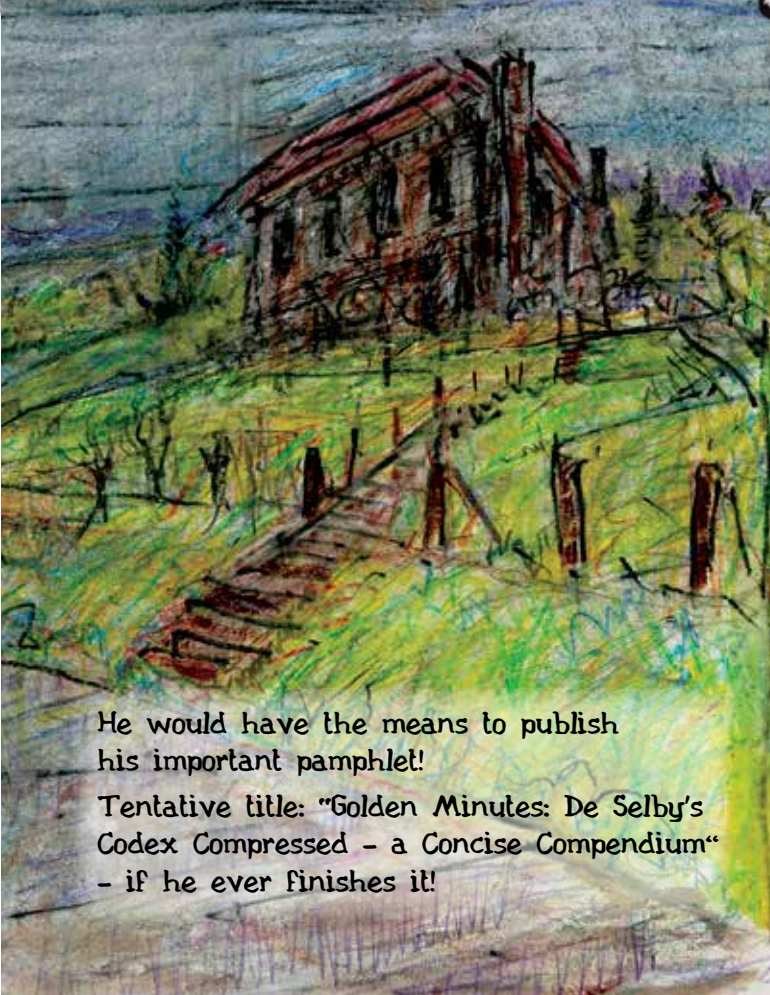
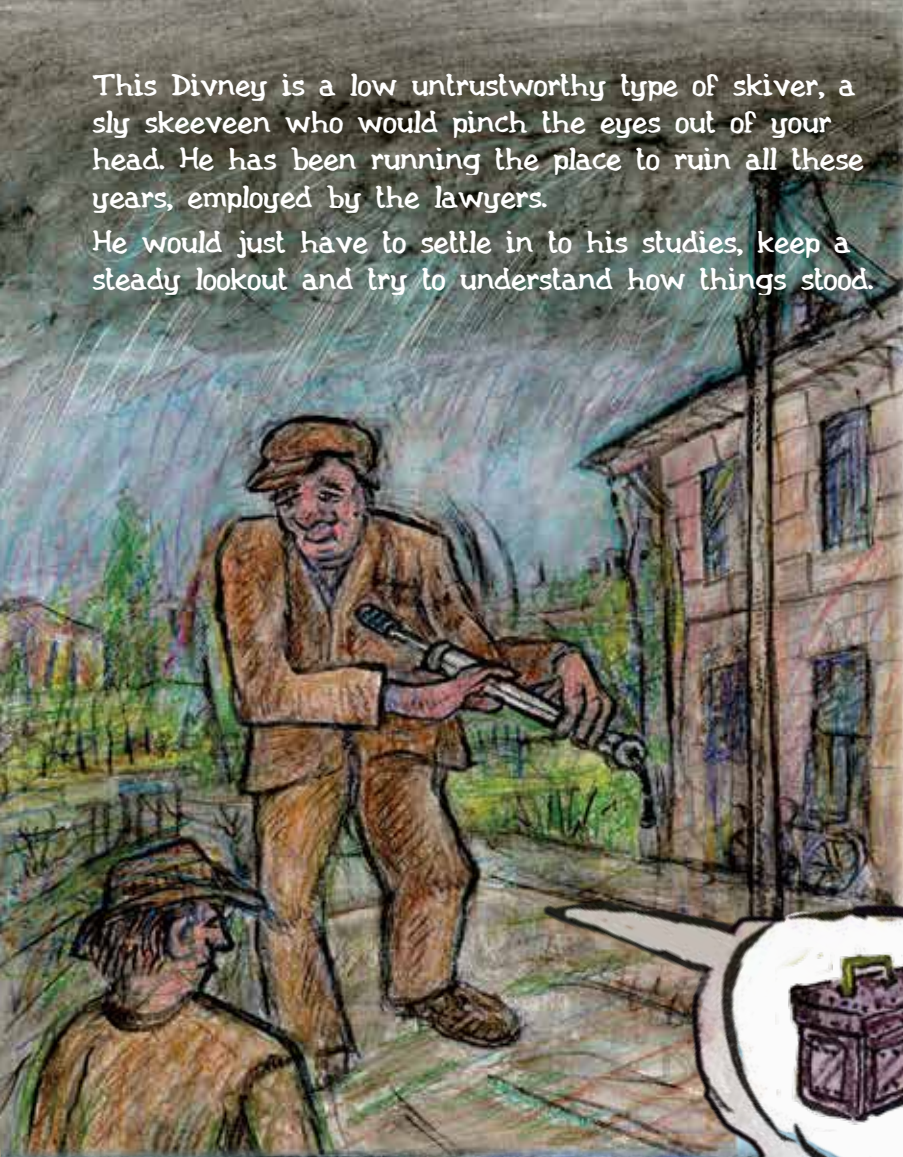
His wicked scheme involves a black box full of some class of untold riches. It is said to contain more wealth than the King of the Blaskets and Midas together.

Although the legal owner of the property has returned, Divney stays on. He keeps deferring his departure back to his own people, and never ceases blathering about this black box and its treasure.

It belongs to an old man, Mathers, who lives nearby in a house familiar in the district.

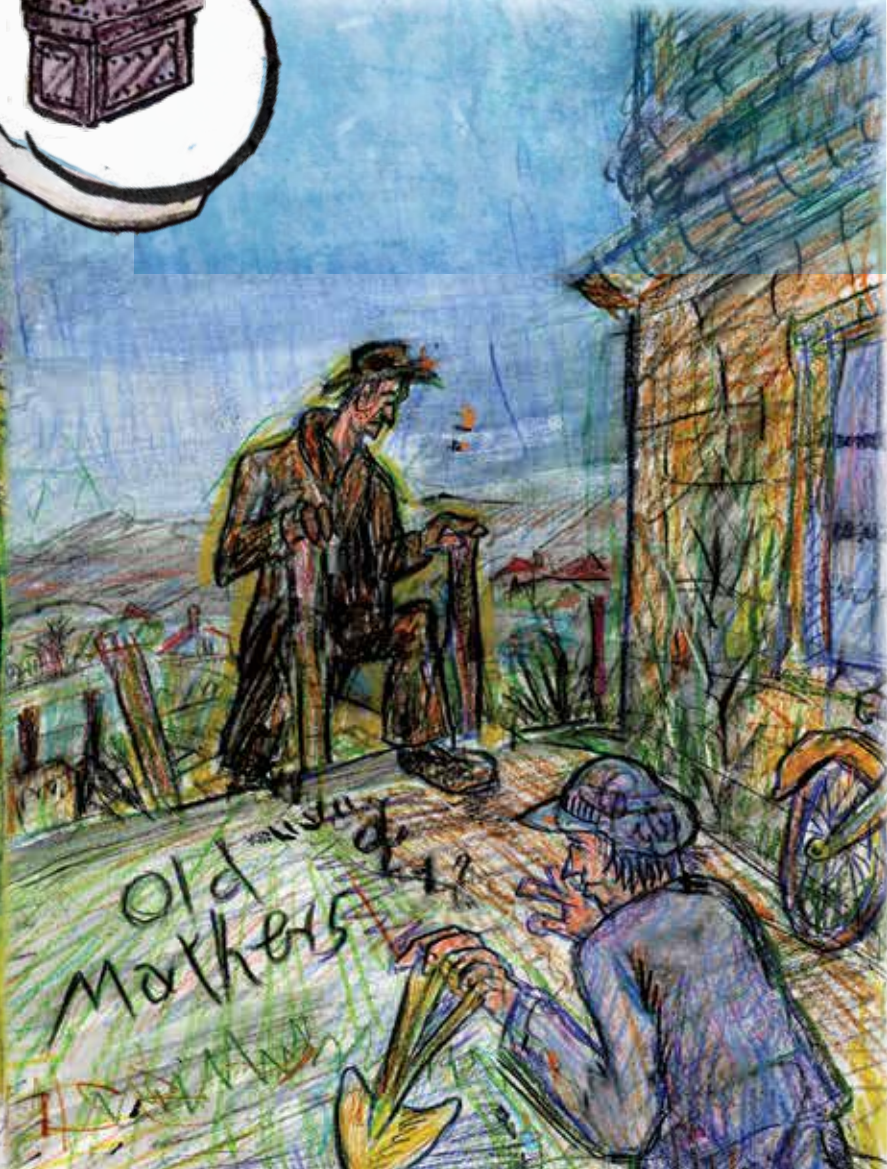
As soon as they have it, says he, they will both be rich beyond any dreams, he will marry his girl Pegeen, and off with them to America.

Think of it, man!



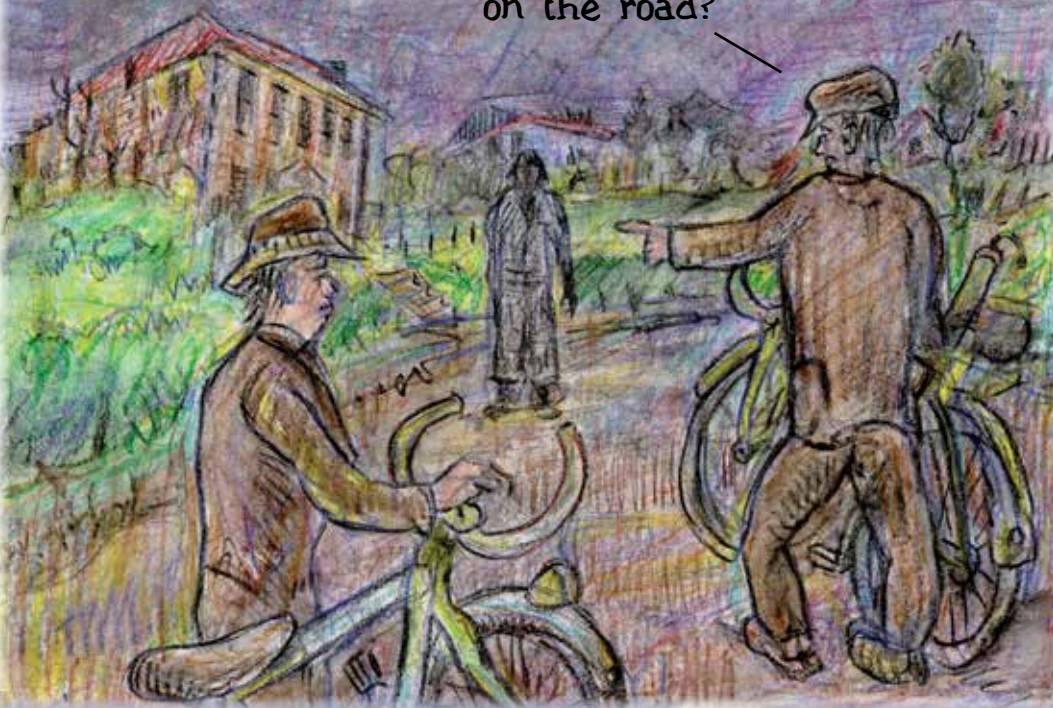
He would have the means to publish his important pamphlet!

Tentative title: "Golden Minutes: De Selby's Codex Compressed - a Concise Compendium" - if he ever finishes it!



Perhaps predictably, he does ultimately succumb to Divney's pernicious pestering about his heinous plan.

Would that be your parcel on the road?



You may be sure, once agreed upon, it is not long before a propitious time is divined, and their pedals are turned toward Mathers' house with their shovels on board.

They creep about outside, and who should they come upon in the road but old Mathers himself standing silently in the gloaming, tall, still and impassively innocent.

Divney uses a cruel ruse to distract him, and -

"The abhorrent homicide which then takes place is judged as being so unprecedentedly reprehensible that to include it graphically here could only be regarded as unconscionably confrontational.*

Once he has eagerly rifled its pockets, Divney soon abandons the necessary disposal of the poor old victim's pathetic corpse and sidles off towards old Mathers' house, the intent of the man obvious as the cross on a donkey.

He is alone with his hard gruesome work, his eyes scanning about uneasily. A guilty cloud has arisen from his labouring heart, like a miasma in the icy air from the peat bogs yonder.

It is a savage case of the jitters upon him until, an eternity later, Divney comes back, casual as you please, and helps conclude the job, with some fastidious camouflage work.

* Quoted from *The Estate of Bassett*, Barry B. [letter from P.C. Peachcroft regarding deSelby's half-proven belief that Death is nothing more than a long sleep. Bassett regarded this as 'cissy pusillanimity' and subsequently disinherited Peachgrove of a promised valuable collection of de Selby's Sleep Apnoea pumping machinery, which now occupies the basement of the De Selby Museum.]



When the grim task is done, they cycle off homewards, with all the appearance of two tired labourers after a hard shift.

He pries Divney for some elucidation.

He is told the box is in a safe place and it will be wise to wait until things quieten down before retrieving it.

This hurls his mind and his Studies into dreadful disarray.

A deep suspicion that he is being swindled by a cunning Jackeen prompts him to watch Divney closely, even to extremes such as following him everywhere, and never leaving his side.*

* Krause coarsely claims that bed-sharing references may have a prurient undertone. Peachcroft has written at inordinate length about this. See *The Wise and Morecambe Defence: A Fairy Story of Litigation* by P. Peachgrove.]



Neighbours believe they are fine friends, with a high regard for each other. A salutary Example.

It is only after several years of this agonising tension that a day dawns when Divney startles him.



The box, he promises, is under the floor in a room of Mathers' vacant house.

It is not many hours later before they have returned to the scene of the crime, on foot, due to a puncture. He has followed directions diligently to the room where his heart's desire awaits, while outside, Divney is sportingly standing by for his fair share.

Visions of first editions, signed monographs, overlooked marginalia and bibliographic fame surge through his brain. A Cosmological Cornucopia!

He fumbles devoutly about in the dust and gloom.

Sure enough, it is there beneath the floorboards.

He reaches eagerly for his fortune, and -

Something - something inexplicable, indescribable and ineffable happens to him.

Time stands still.

Everything has abruptly changed.

The box is gone.

He realises he is not alone in the room.

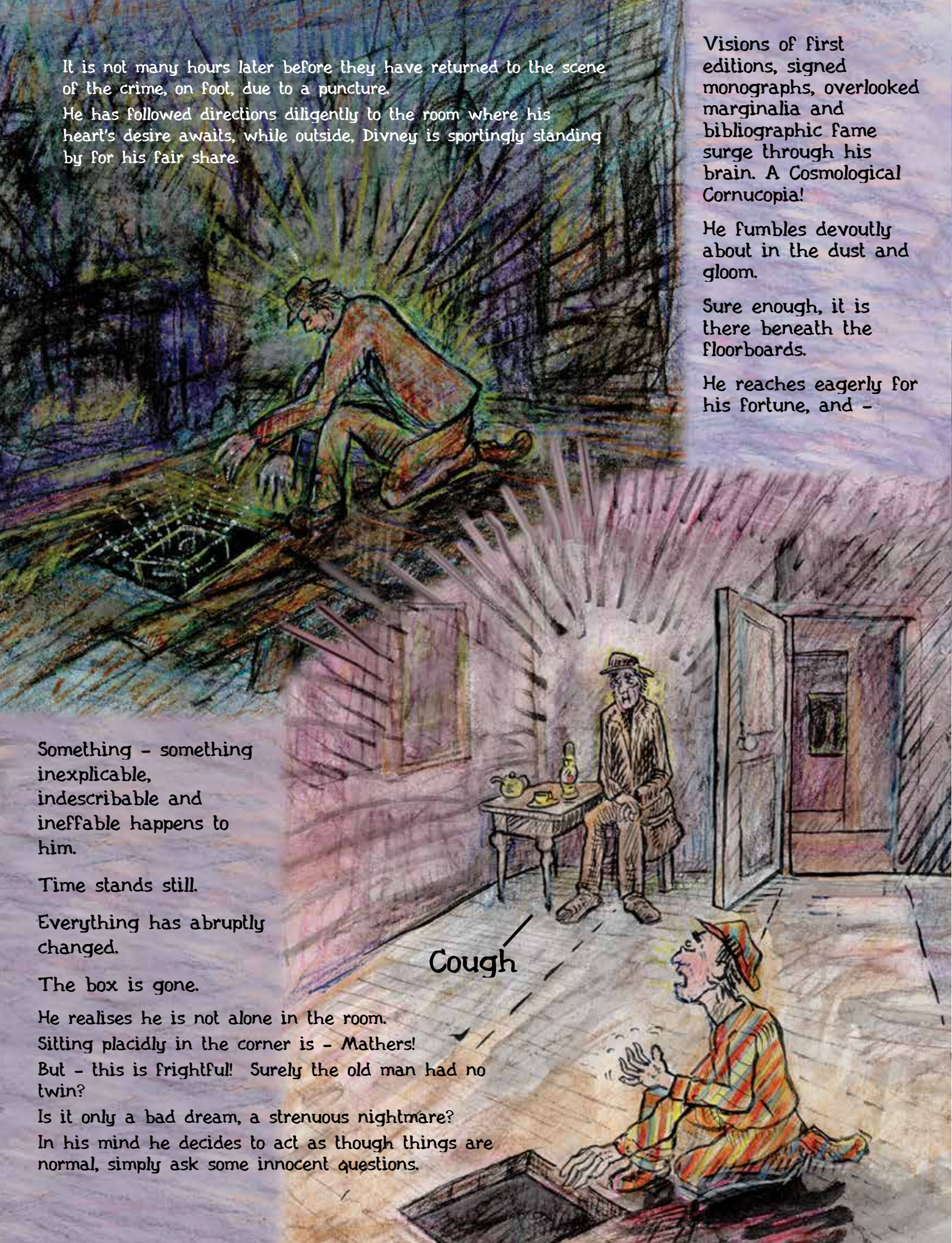
Sitting placidly in the corner is - Mathers!

But - this is frightful! Surely the old man had no twin?

Is it only a bad dream, a strenuous nightmare?

In his mind he decides to act as though things are normal, simply ask some innocent questions.

Cough

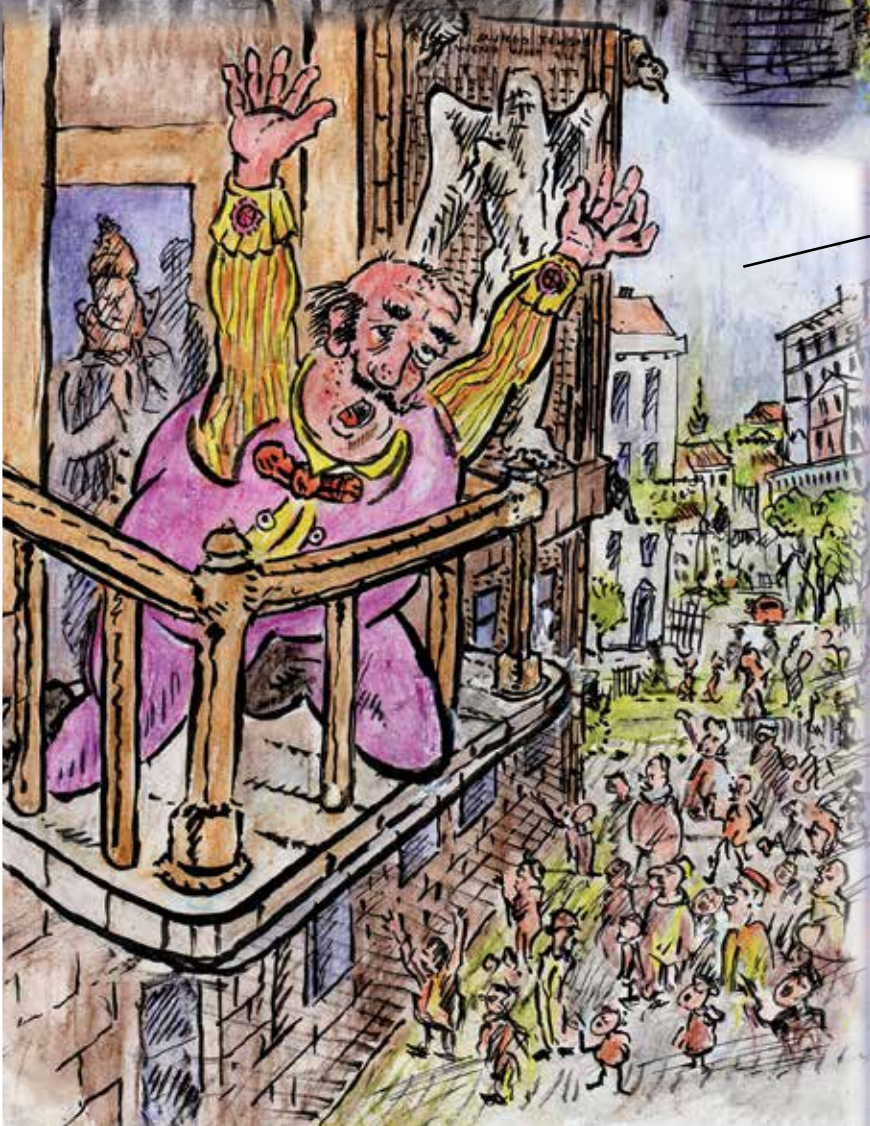


His queries are all met with the same plain abrogatory nullification.

It is then he hears a voice within himself named "Joe".



He believes it to be his own soul advising him, in the way of a farmer with a cranky sheep, a prankster..



* Purported postcard of Bari in Rome, seconds before the tragic accident which permanently altered his range. [inscription verso, ink: "Baz at the Vat" dec 57" -Illeg. sig. possibly 'DuG']

Mathers commences to expatiate imperturbably. His abstruse topics begin with the extensive rational evidence proving No to be a better word than Yes.

He next explains the diverse colours of winds, and their effect on human lifespan, calculable by the colour of little gowns bestowed at birth by policemen. All very official and scientific. Sufficient enigmatic wisdom, you may be sure, to satiate the most stringent mystical savant. But nothing about boxes.

Just as he is nearing the heel of his patience, Mathers confides this: there are Policemen in a barracks nearby who can help him find the box. The Policemen's names are Pluck and McCruiskeen, while another called Fox has not been seen for years. Fair enough, he will go there.

It is not until the next day* that he strikes out for the barracks, hoping to find constabulatory assistance in his search.

It could be reasonably supposed that there is a want in him for some of the grey stuff inside the old noggin.

Many a muddy mile
he blunders along
the windy wet road,
wondering whether a
barracks exists at all.

* Hatchjaw argues that the gratuitous overnight stay here indicates a dream sequence, but is out of order, and should precede the next scene, in a ditch, omitted due to continuity considerations. Bassett theorises that these recurring sleeping fits are a deft allegory, a symbolic invocation of mortality, increasing exponentially as the narrator and his narrative unravel. Kraus, however, has hinted that Mathers in his retirement from the beef industry ran a Guest House, or worse. Ref. *De Selby Times*, interview vol.65/7.]

Along the way, as it happens, he comes upon a shifty looking character altogether, loitering by the road, reddening his pipe. Joe advises him to mind his step. Steady here. Take no chances. He looks a slippery customer, a tricky man. His trepidation spirals when the man roughly grunts that he is a robber with a knife, who will take his little life without a qualm for sixpence. Plead poverty and destitution, urges Joe. Ask for the loan of money. He swears by his hand he has not a sixpence to bless himself, so - they sit a spell and haggle over the price of his life.

He sincerely assures the tricky man a sixpenny bit would be cheating him, if only in light of the fact that he is not even a complete man - and with that, what should he do but open his trouser-end and show his wooden leg.

All at once the man sheaths the knife and displays his own leg. He becomes entirely brotherly, affectionate and benevolent. His name is Martin Finnuacane. He is Captain of all the one-legged men in the country.

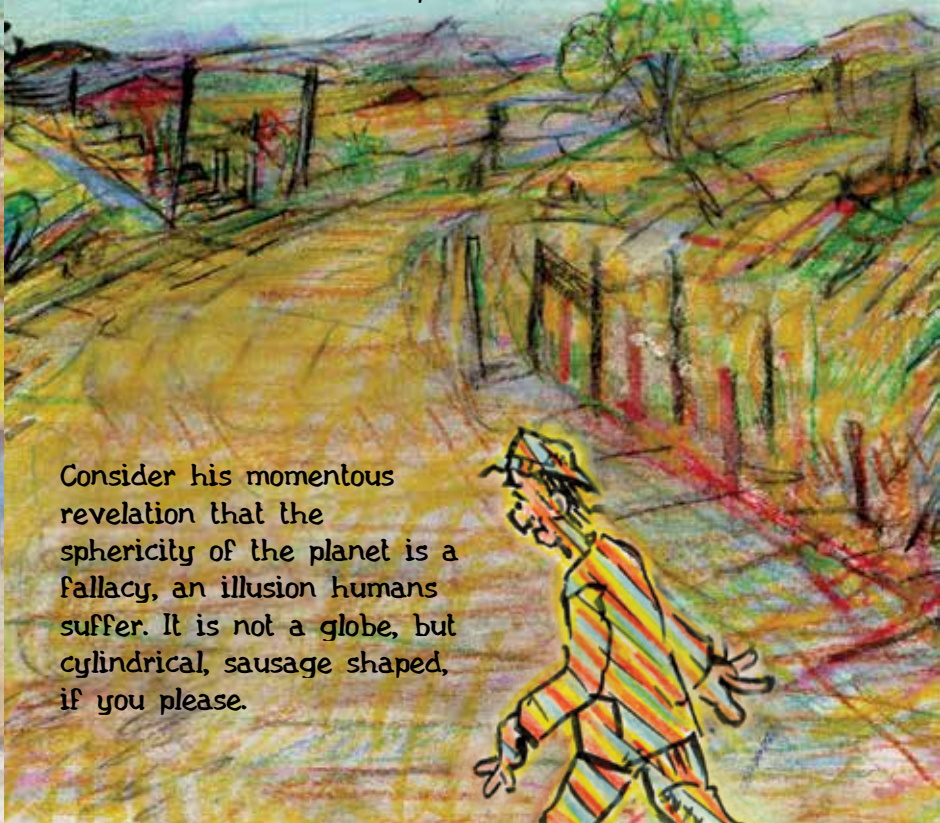
What's more, this fine friendly Finnucane promises his new one-legged friend, if he is ever in any trouble whatsoever, the army of one-legged men will come inexorably and promptly to his aid.



His new brother of the wooden leg directs him onward to the barracks, with an assurance:

Goodlooking sweet man, good luck to your luck and do not entertain danger without sending me cognisance.

A droll customer, says Joe. Off he trudges again, full forward on his lonely quest. Everything has gone awry. Are there now one-legged men watching his back? His continuous consternation is immense and craggy, like a howling gale off the cliffs of Sleá Head. And why would it not be? His mind rewinds to its customary churning over of de Selby's thoughts and theories, an enchanting Intellectual Universe to aspire toward.



Consider his momentous revelation that the sphericity of the planet is a fallacy, an illusion humans suffer. It is not a globe, but cylindrical, sausage shaped, if you please.

People move around its circumference, but cannot travel "along the barrel", the way their senses are compromised due to incorrect road signs, and the eccentric axis.*



*H. Barge and Le Clerque call this a blatant joke. They are wrong. It is no joke:

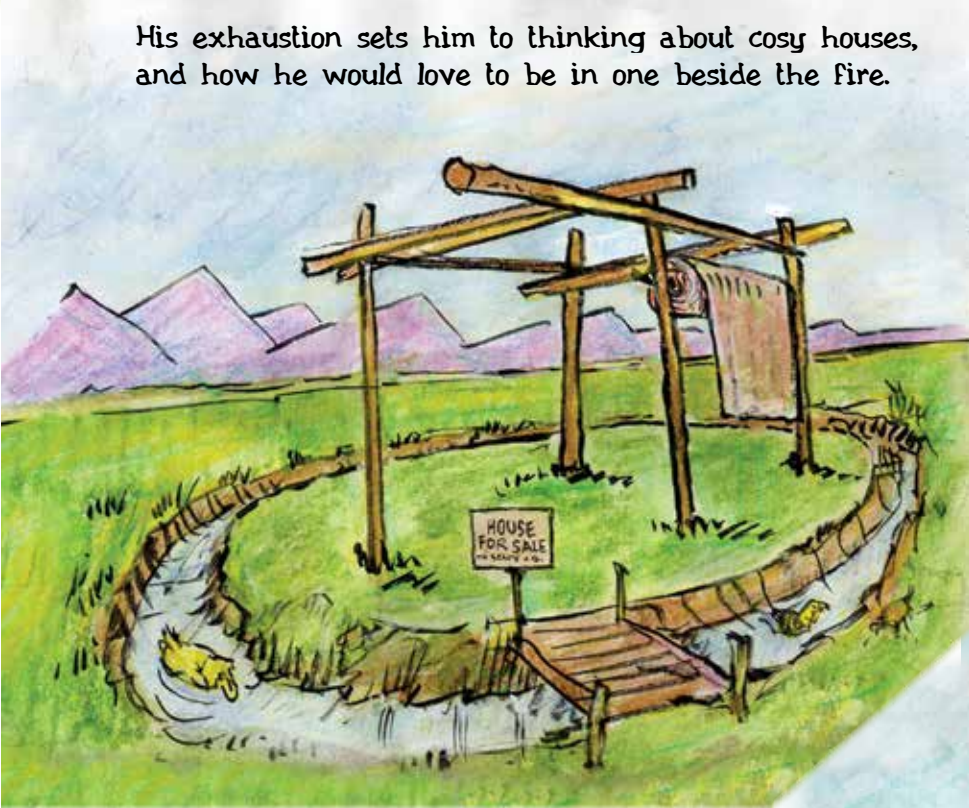
Many brave lives have ended attempting to reach the East magnetic pole, of which de Selby wrote: "Its powerful force can suck in anything smaller than a whale. as internal grist, while the West pole, being negative, is barren and repulsive". [Golden Hours pp. 41-3.]

Off he stumbles, searching for the mythical police barracks where the box or word of it may or may not be. He must be cautious. A wrong word could be fatal. Make something up: tell them his watch is stolen.

Joe reminds him he never had a watch.



His exhaustion sets him to thinking about cosy houses, and how he would love to be in one beside the fire.

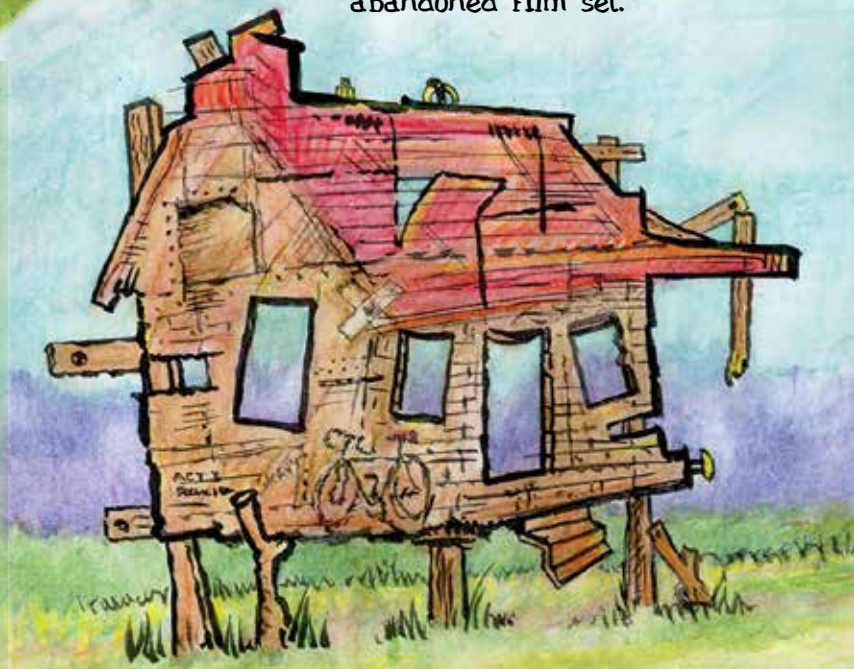


A natural rapid cerebral concatenation recalls to him De Selby's delvings into Affordable Architecture.

He believes this deceptively simple de Selby design to be eminently worthy of consideration by the Congested Districts Board, if only for its moveable canvas walls, adaptable to any wind direction. Sadly the submission was rejected on the grounds of insufficient Public Land*. His thoughts are distracted when he approaches a house which begins to change its appearance as he gets closer. It starts to look strangely false, unconvincing, like a worn and broken roadside sign or an abandoned film set.

The feeling of unreality that is with him persists and intensifies, until he is ready to give in to it, forget everything, and devil take it all.

It is then his faltering steps carry him further, and the building does begin to assume a hazy form. He can see it is indeed a house, He comes up and inspects it.



* Rumours exist that the ruins of a hamlet built along de Selby principles have been unearthed on a remote isle off the coast of Kerry. Bassett has sponsored a series of satellite searches, but nothing was found other than an ancient beehive hut inhabited by rabbits.

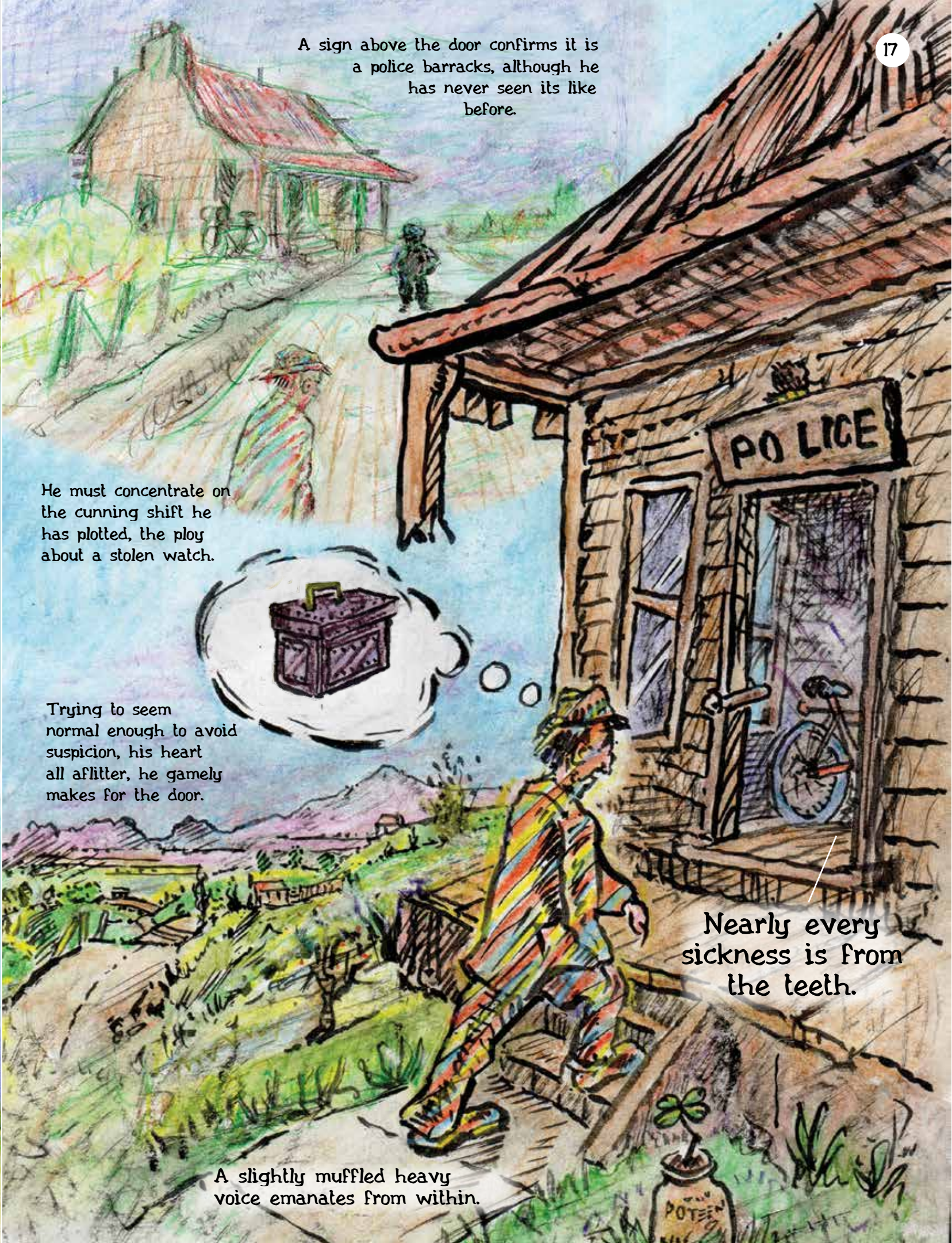
A sign above the door confirms it is a police barracks, although he has never seen its like before.

He must concentrate on the cunning shift he has plotted, the ploy about a stolen watch.

Trying to seem normal enough to avoid suspicion, his heart all aflutter, he gamely makes for the door.

Nearly every sickness is from the teeth.

A slightly muffled heavy voice emanates from within.



It is Sergeant Pluck he finds inside, on duty and alert, immediately enquiring his business, his *raison d'être*.

IS IT ABOUT A BICYCLE?



Puzzled, with alarm squeezing at his innards, and guilt over old Mathers gripping him so his bag may burst, he denies knowing anything about a bicycle.

The policeman exclaims "Well, that takes me to the fair! Would it be true that you are an itinerant dentist and that you came on a tricycle or a patent tandem?"

Pluck is plainly nonplussed and incredulous that no velocipedal malfeasance is involved.

Then he is officially required to state his cog, his surnoun, his little nomenclatural handle.

Joe impishly suggests "Signor Bari, the eminent one-legged tenor".

When he explains he has no name, Pluck remarks, "That is a great curiosity, a very difficult piece of puzzlement, a snorter".



Then another big Peeler arrives and there is much discussion, along the lines of mysterious meter readings, 3-speed gears, invisible needles, slow leaks, wristlet watches, shrinking chests, American dentures, wooden rims, dynamos, rat-trap pedals, and that class of thing*.

His perplexity crescendos when the policeman looks him between the eyes and asks a ponderous question.

* Copyright issues in respect of trade name misuse preclude their inclusion here. See *De Selby: Patent Abductor and Porno King* by H Barge, Provenance Press, Dingle. 1953. [also: *The Malvern Star Trials* by Henderson and Mockridge, revised ed.1967]



“Did you ever hear tell of the Atomic Theory?”



It is having an enormous effect on the parish.

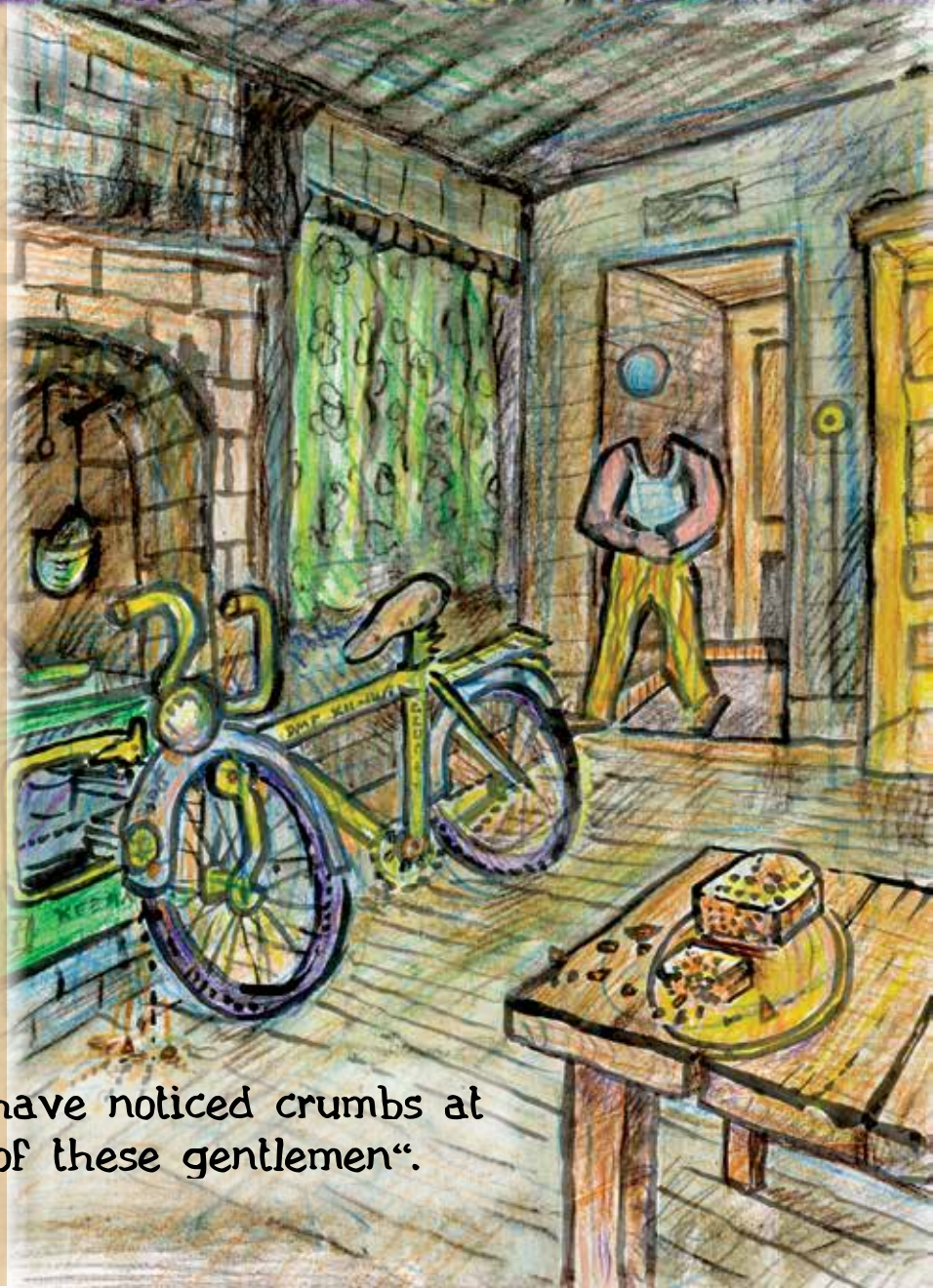
Men who habitually cycle over the rough roads for years on end are putting themselves in grave danger.

They are inadvertently and steadfastly exchanging their human atoms with those of their bike, and the outcome is that their behaviour begins to display bicycleish traits.

Into the same concomitant bargain, your two-wheeled metal fellows are likely to start acting in queer human-like ways.

Sometimes in cold weather they are found somehow closer to the stove. Food has been known to disappear.

“It is not the first time I have noticed crumbs at the front wheels of some of these gentlemen“.



"When a man lets things go so far that he is half or more than half of a bicycle... he spends a lot of his time leaning on one elbow on walls or standing propped up by one foot at kerbstones".



The policeman has more to say about loose handlebars, broken sprocket-teeth and little leather straps to keep wheel hubs shiny.*

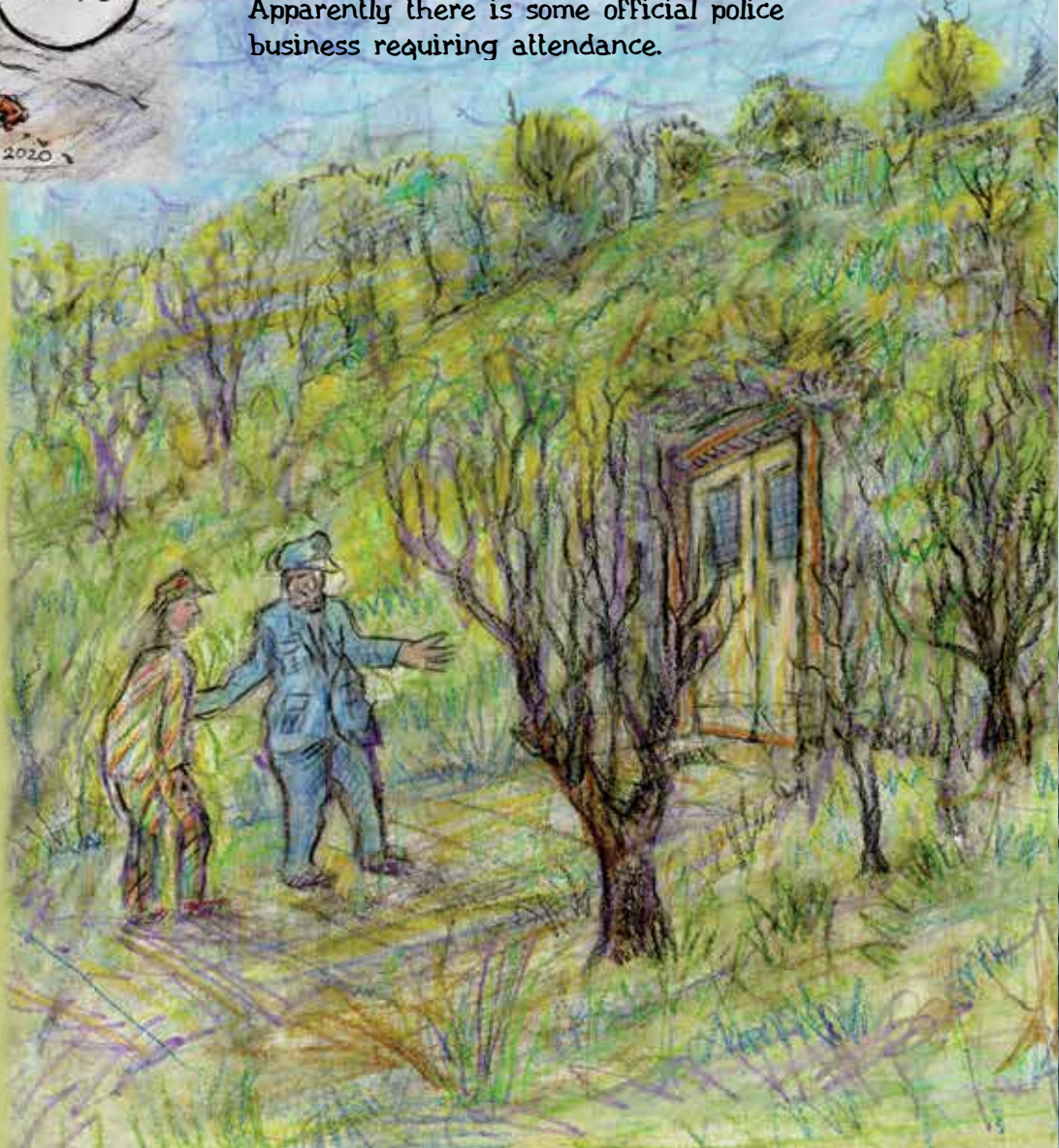
All very well and fine, but hints about an unsolved homicide in the parish and discussions about the cost of materials to build a scaffold are making him wish he was somewhere else -- in a curragh beside a whale perhaps, or carousing over in Scotland.



The policeman tells him that eternity is nearby, along a secret road. He points to the ceiling and what should be there but a map of the parish showing where the road starts, near a dead insect behind Jarvis's outhouse. He will now be escorted there. Apparently there is some official police business requiring attendance.

Never mind that Joe protests vigorously against such a vapid venture, even threatens to absquatulate altogether! Yet the way his mind is half destroyed with the guilt and the terror, he ignores Joe and meekly follows like one of your Hollywood Zombie men. After squirming and struggling through dense prickly forest and not a sign of a road, they eventually find themselves before an unlikely looking entrance, so accordingly enter it.

* There is a plethora of potential scientific research laded into this entire middle act of the story, viz: The questionable legality of hanging a nameless man; mounting from the right; is a bell necessary if a rubber hooter is attached? and other intriguing topics, sadly deferred here. [see *The Man Who Married a Bike* roman à clef by Kraus.]



Inside, a lift drops them with precipitate perpendicularity into a clangorous metallic maze of of passages with bolted iron floor-plates.



The walls are covered with clocks, dials, meters, switches, levers, buttons, pipes, tubes, handles and knobs, among which the policeman fusses officiously, taking fastidious readings and making cute adjustments.

The prevailing normality in this place is that Time does not exist and anything at all is possible.

He is shown how a brand spanking new bicycle, a thing of breathless beauty, is easily produced from a door in the wall.

He is told it is all done with something called Omnium.

While here he cannot age. He can't wait to leave eternity -- as indeed, who in their right mind would not?



But alas, the bags of greedy loot he created there could not be taken away with him, due to lift weight readings and the cessation of the day back where they had left it, so that in literally no time they are back in the barracks.

He feels his brain is like an ivy near where swallows fly.

He goes straight to a bed and lies idly gawping at the cracks in the ceiling, the parish map, the way to eternity, where he'd just now been given a guided tour.

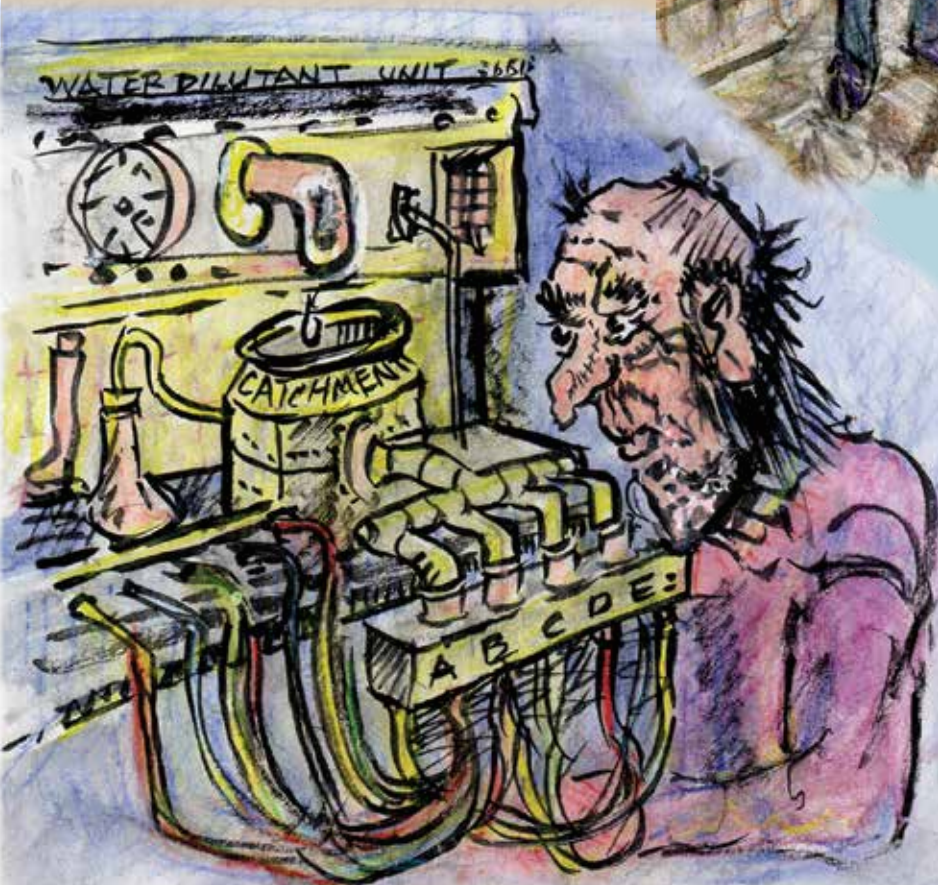
Or had he? Was it real?

Is this place really a police barracks?

Is he to be hung for murder?

What is his name? He knew it once.

He tries not to think, until his mind slides into restless slumber, another symbolic death, if you will.



He is deeply embroiled in a lucid dream about de Selby's highly anticipated but unfinished dissertation on the problem of Water Dilution. He believed it to be too strong.

Just as the dream nears a climactic epiphany, perhaps a solution to the legendary Water Box* experiments, which were aborted by de Selby's sodden death by drowning in a seal cave, so it is that a sudden intrusion now aborts the dream itself.

* The De Selby Water Box has been described variously. "One of the most compressed and intricate pancakes ever known" — "Its like will not be seen again". Source: Barge & Kraus: *De Selby: Devious Inebriate or Incontinent Genius?*

His sleep is abruptly shattered by loud hammering.

Working men are buzzing and scurrying about outside, busily constructing what can only be a scaffold.

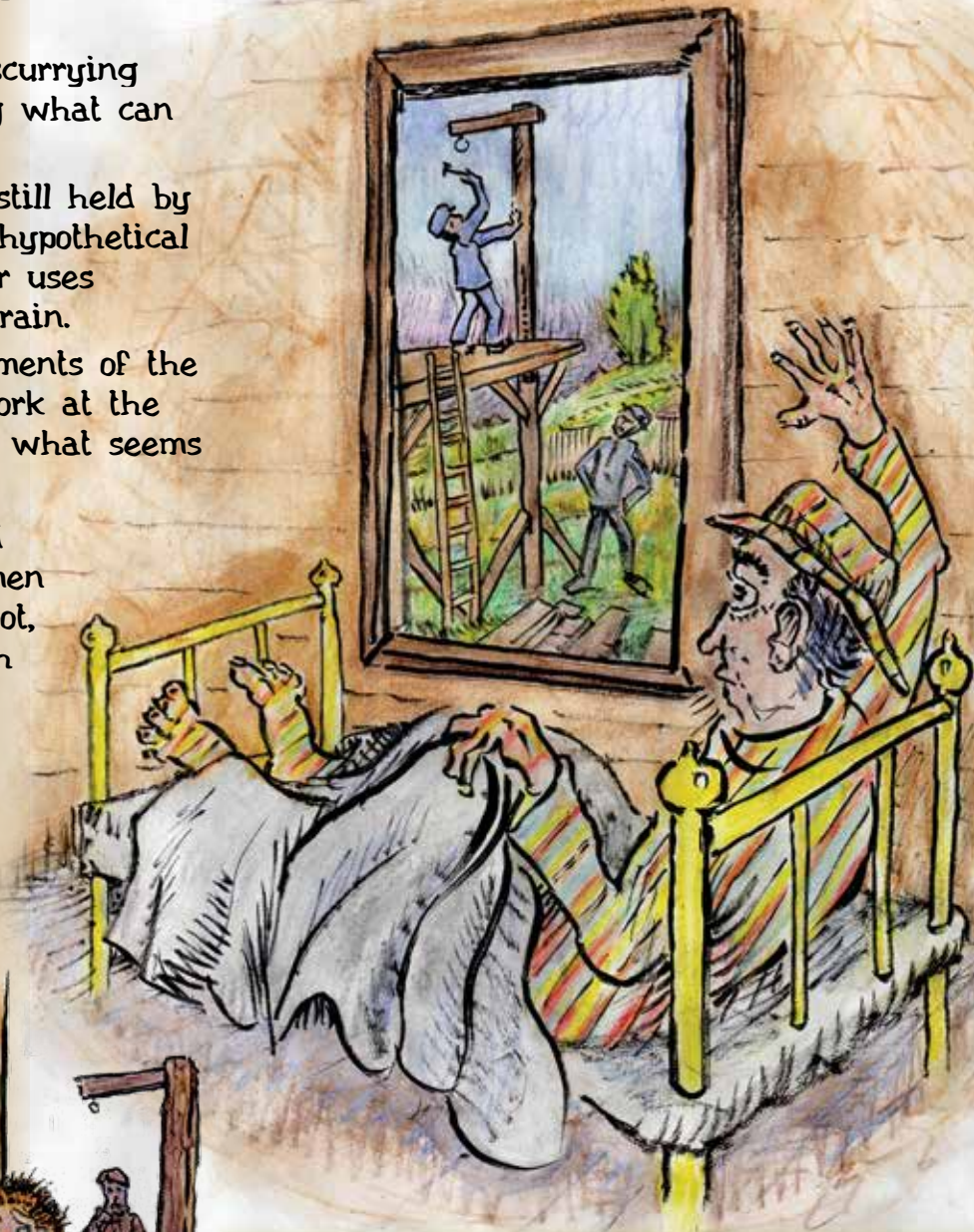
He is trapped inside his dream, still held by the de Selby lore, unimaginable hypothetical images of Water Boxes and their uses continue to course through his brain.

His bleary eyes follow the movements of the men going about their honest work at the expense of the parish, and with what seems like indecent haste.

Joe notices something queer, and urgently points out: One of the men has dropped a hammer on his foot, but not in the least did he flinch or so much as bat an eyelid.

This could be a glorious opportunity, a moment of golden Fortune!

He gleans Joe's meaning and throws open the window.



The man is hailed over. He is the middle O'Feersa brother, and when asked freely admits one of his legs is wooden.

He cries "Musha!" and demonstrates boisterously which one.

When it becomes understood that they are indeed Brothers of the Leg, he becomes instantly sweet and sibling-like. He says he is almost a cousin of Martin Finnucane, and always on call, standing by and ready.

Joe urges him to scribble a note and send him for assistance. This is no sooner said than done, with a rapidity not unlike a black-backed gull after a herring.

Without pause, and nothing but unbounded alacrity, the middle O'Feersa brother is away off beyond on his potentially life-saving errand of mercy.

Before long, the way it can happen that things will worsen before they improve, true for him, it is not much later that he is quivering in the firm grip of the law beside a hurriedly completed trapdoor, due to a note which was found magically tucked beneath a plate, an official alert for all officers:

"One-legged men on their way to rescue prisoner. Calculation on tracks estimate number is seven. Submitted. Fox."



This had frightened him clear out of his remaining wits.

Due Process has been put forward forthwith, and hastened with vigour.

Something is moving steadily toward them along the distant road. Can it be the one-legged men?!

But it is Policeman McCruiskeen who skids to a halt, and he in a dreadful panic. He frantically bellows up at Pluck.

With that, Pluck slackens his grip, orders the prisoner to wait, slides surprisingly lithely down the ladder and jumps onto the crossbar of the bike. The two pedal off furiously as one.

Left alone again, he goes into the barracks.

Curiously, in light of his situation, what should he do but sit himself down and proceed to doze off again*.

At some point, McCruiskeen had come back to lock up his bike, and told him the meter readings have now been successfully calculated, regulated and rectified, just in the nick of zero-hour. The danger has been averted.

Next time he comes to (or is metaphorically reborn) he notices something different.

The bicycle is now at the open cell door.

He does not see it move, but it seems to come closer.

He feels as though it is somehow flirting with him, being coquettish.

Temptation overcomes him.

He wheels her gently outside.



* This sleeping fit of course denotes another dream sequence symbolising the brevity of Life, according to Bassett in his *Somnolent Seer or Epileptic?* [Kraus was heard to remark casually at the De Selby Lore Conference in Ventry 1983, that it represents nothing more than a euphemistic toilet break, albeit delicately and adroitly handled. [See Peachgrove's Diaries, vol. 13.]

Politely mounted upon her ample saddle, as they glide effortlessly and companionably along, lulled by friendly helpful breezes, tuneful birdsong and roadside water ripples, he is overcome by the feeling he has known her for years. There is no thought of any need for cottages or cozy snugs so, his mind eases into its familiar cogitations.

De Selby's infamously foiled fabrication, the fully functional canvas Tent Suit, would have ensured that nobody was ever bereft of residential shelter regardless of weather; an indisputable revolutionary boon to mankind. Yet the franchise was destroyed by the ruthless machinations of the Nylon Industry. See "The Hemp Wars" by Le Clerque*



* Hatchjaw suggests that "doodles" found posthumously on de Selby's desk are actually detailed scientifically coded designs for inventions including Tent Suits, Water Boxes, Endless Belts and the like. Kraus strongly refutes this, claiming they are neurological doodles, a symptom of a psychological disorder, a preposterous postulation. [ref. intro. to revised *Codex*, pp, iv.- viii.]

The infused McCruiskeen atoms in the bicycle help convey him expediently along the darkening roads until he notices a building which looks familiar.

He realises he is almost home.

It is the house of old Mathers.

As he is parking the bike, there are heavy footsteps, and the large voice of Policeman Fox accosts him.

Fox is a prodigious, vast and robust figure, exuding hearty unimpeachable Authority. The frightened escapee is invited compellingly to partake of a little chat in the house where the humble barrack is.

He then notices something startling about Fox. The face on top of this gigantic policeman's frame is not at all hale and rosy or round and bejeweled to match his immense bulk. Rather, and on the contrary besides, it looks dessicated, pale, worn and sallow, like - like old Mathers!



"I thought you were dead!"

There is not a sign of any heed paid to this, as if it were just another day of standard policing procedure.

He'd had an hallucination, a flash aberrational vision, that was all.

Fox cordially escorts him into the house by an awkward, cramped and circuitous route involving squeezing through a tiny overgrown ground-level window, and tight labyrinthine manouevres through mazes of crooked passages and impossibly lofty doorways. The symbolism could not be more obvious.*

* See *The De Selby—Huxley Letters* vol.3 [edited by leClerque]. Note: Kraus insists the edited portions relate to de Selby's apocryphal illegal poteen plant near Ballyferriter, which has never been found. [ref. A pint of plain is your only man AS2B, etc.]



THIS IS A BRAVE NIGHT!

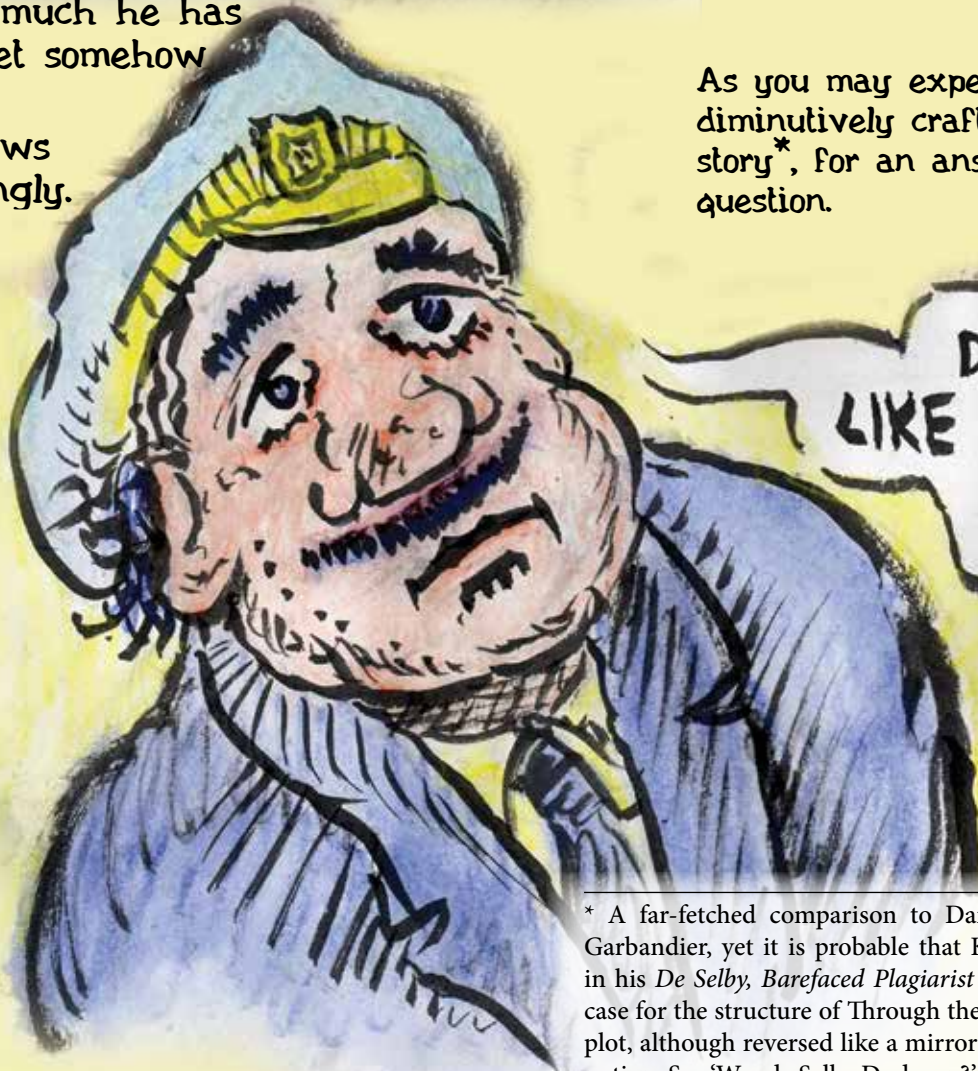


The interior of the house is nothing like his memory of it. Everything looks shifted, stretched, with tall narrow halls and doors, as if it were the work of one of your mad renovator artistes. The policeman must turn sideways to lead him up a ludicrously slender stairway.



It looks impossible, like so much he has seen, yet somehow worse.

He follows unwillingly.



On the landing above is another, even narrower door. In spite of his perilous position, and no restraining voice to be heard from Joe, he poses what can only be called an ill-advised question.



As you may expect in the way of this diminutively crafted intricate mystery story*, for an answer he receives a question.

DO YOU
LIKE STRAWBERRY
JAM?

A show stopper.

Obscure, to be sure. Possibly patronising, even fatuous, or merely rhetorical? Maybe it was simply a part of Fox's official municipal enquiries.

* A far-fetched comparison to Dante's *Inferno* has been made by du Garbandier, yet it is probable that Kraus is even further from the truth in his *De Selby, Barefaced Plagiarist & Despoiler of Alice*, which makes a case for the structure of *Through the Looking Glass* being the basis of the plot, although reversed like a mirror to end at the beginning, a ridiculous notion. See 'Was de Selby Dodgson?' *ibid*.pp 13-21]

The barrack room is hardly wider than its door. There is no space for chairs. He realises that Policeman Fox's private Police Station is situated between the walls of Mathers' house.

They sit in cramped alcoves set into the walls. The strength of his obsessive desire overcomes his fear. He keeps blurting questions about the box, and while he's about it, whether naively or cannily devil knows, he admits that he has escaped.

"Are you sure?" asks Fox, who then himself admits to shifty behaviour: It was he who drove the lever up, for certain top secret Peelers' purposes.

This has multiple implications.*

There is cordial talk out of Fox about correctly boiled eggs, Bull papers and bicycle lamps, before he confides that the box is indeed recovered and in a safe place. Its contents consist of 4oz. of omnium. Omnium, which produces endless bicycles in eternity. He who has it can have Anything. A house full of strawberry jam!



The box has been sent by express bicycle, and is awaiting retrieval at his home. He must just fill in some Departmental forms first, then he is free to go and reclaim it.

His head is near to bursting with plans for the omnium. He will be able to resurrect deSelby for instructive fireside chats. His leg will grow back!

The paperwork quickly finished, Fox politely shows him off the premises by torchlight.



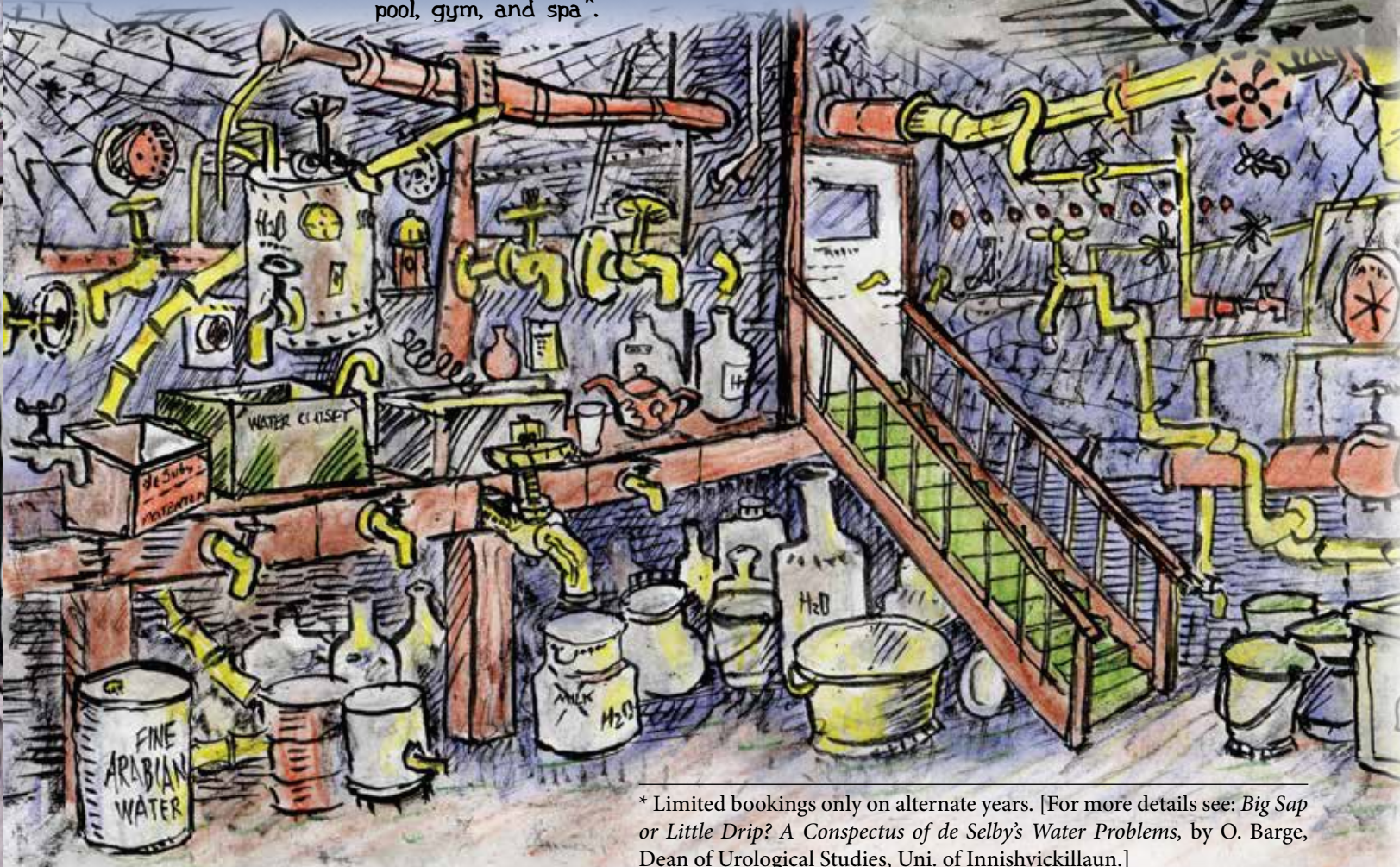
* See Knobs, Gauges, Levers and Meters: Their Use in the Symbolology of De Selby [based on a series of lectures by Hedley H. Hatchjaw, 1923, cancelled for want of attendance. Pub. Dunquin Press 1947.]

At last the box is within his grasp.
He gropes anxiously in the night for the
bicycle, afraid it has gone away.

The poor dilatory gawm
had tied it up with
string, and the same bike
being 48% McCruiskeen!

Away he goes as fleet as a flea off a black-faced sheep in a dip. As they glide along in the freedom of the open road, his past travails slip away and his ruminations naturally return to de Selby, whose home is now a Museum, a veritable living monument to his Work. With working models and displays, the Museum constitutes a tantalising clue to the enigma this giant of Theology and Science has left in his wake. Visiting scholars can access rare learned journals. Maps, plans and elevations of inventions can be purchased. Board games, jigsaws and colouring books are available. There is a pool, gym, and spa*.

The next thing, what should he
feel but a familiar handlebar
float into his hand, fondling
him, by his palm.

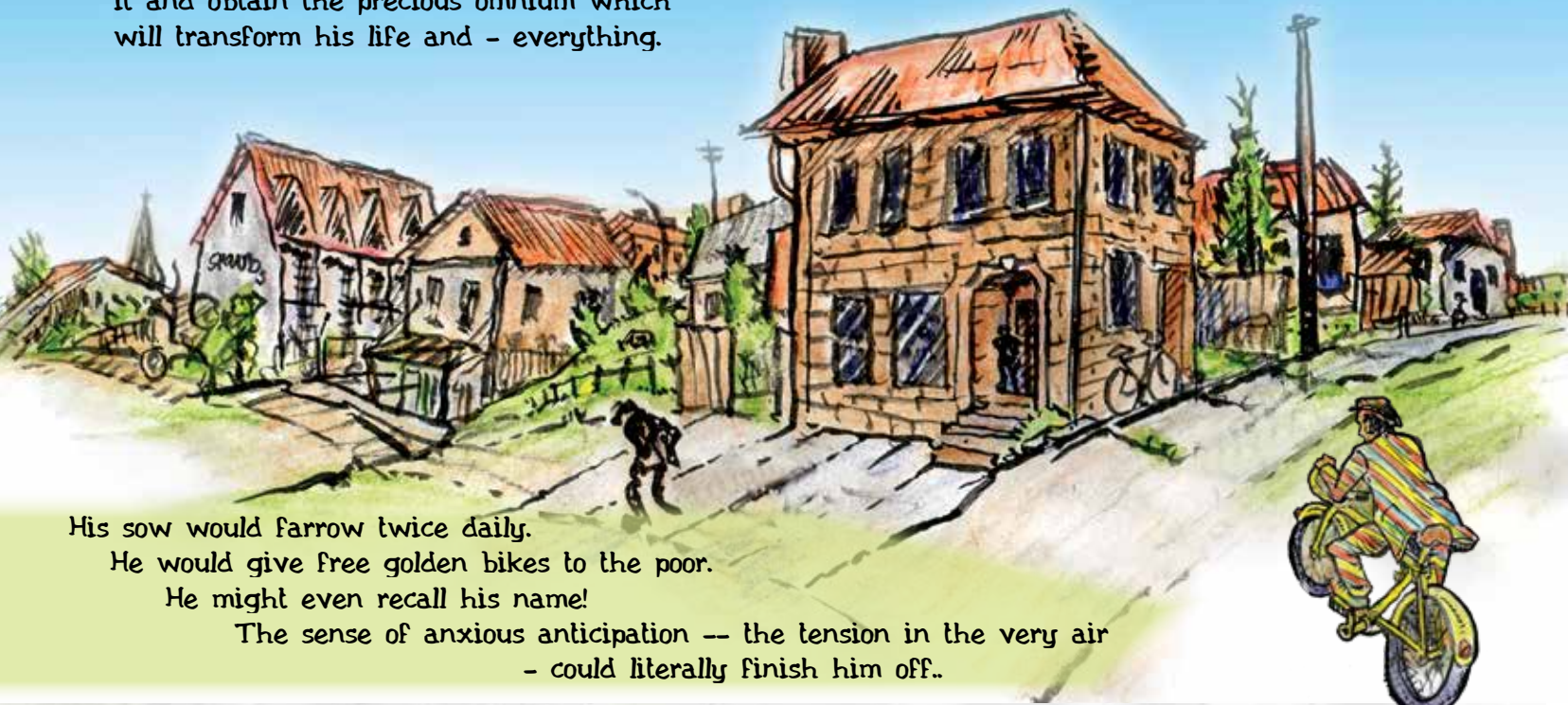


* Limited bookings only on alternate years. [For more details see: *Big Sap or Little Drip? A Conspectus of de Selby's Water Problems*, by O. Barge, Dean of Urological Studies, Uni. of Innishvickillaun.]

His old home is still there, unchanged and in its proper place, looking solid and placid, comfortingly real.

He is in a fearsome hurry, in case Divney already has his snout in the box.

His only thought is to take possession of it and obtain the precious omnium which will transform his life and - everything.



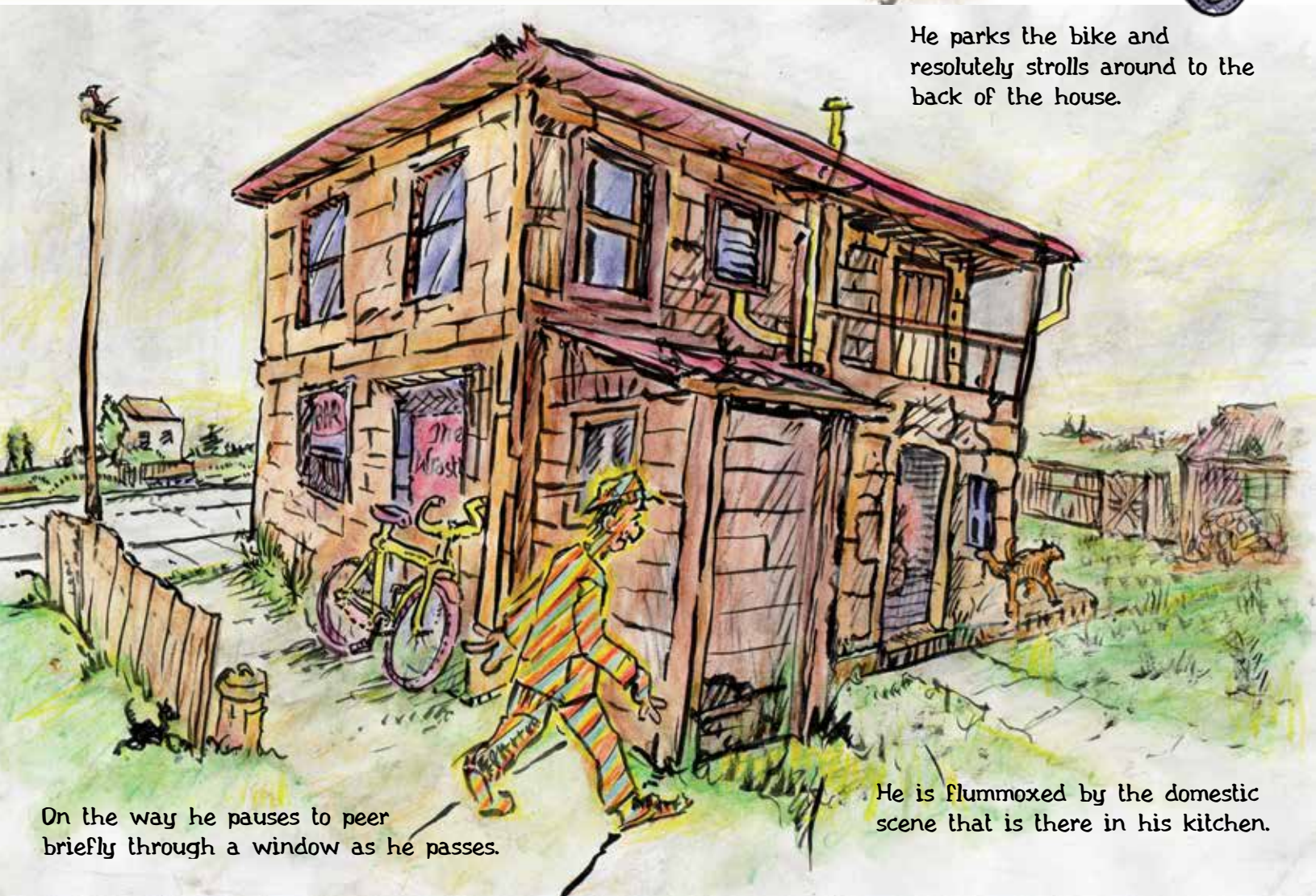
His sow would farrow twice daily.

He would give free golden bikes to the poor.

He might even recall his name!

The sense of anxious anticipation -- the tension in the very air
- could literally finish him off..

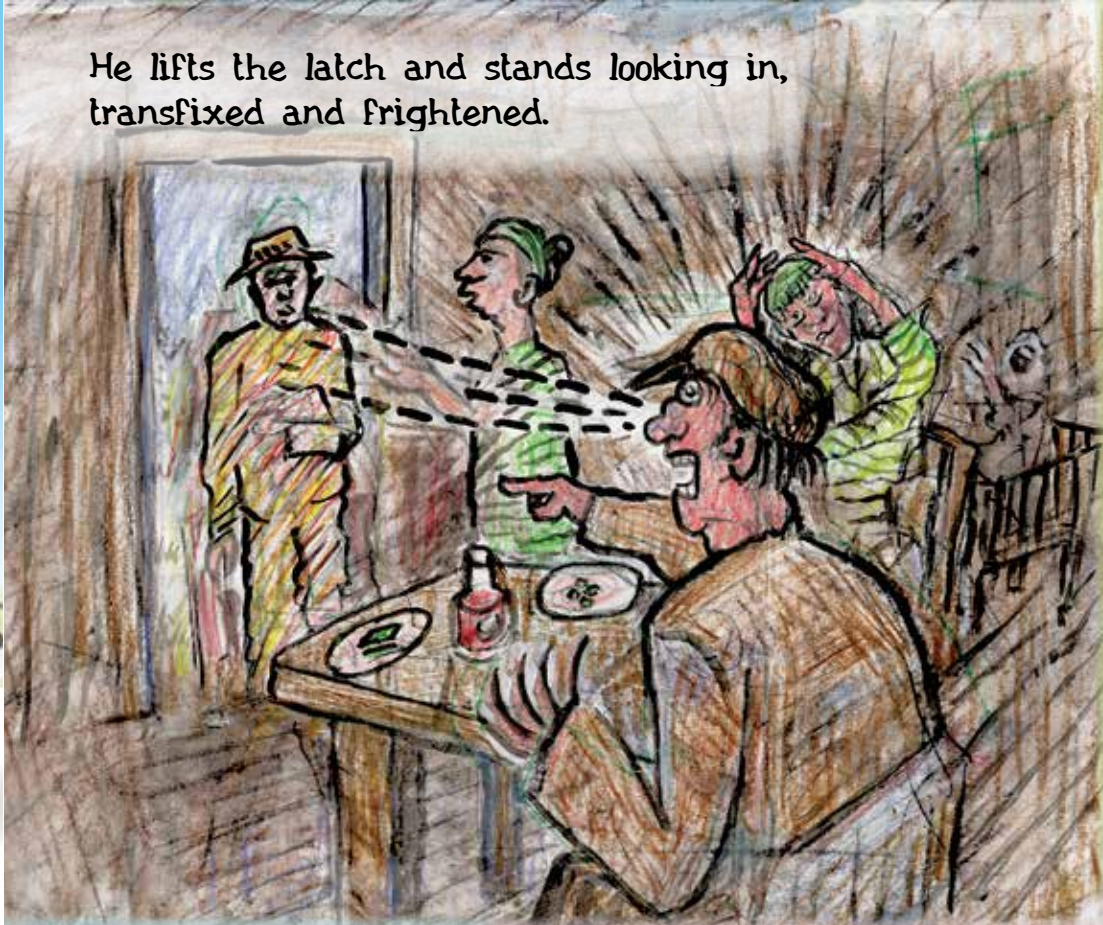
He parks the bike and resolutely strolls around to the back of the house.



On the way he pauses to peer briefly through a window as he passes.

He is flummoxed by the domestic scene that is there in his kitchen.

He lifts the latch and stands looking in, transfixed and frightened.



A plainly pregnant and vexed country woman he recognises as Divney's old girlfriend Pegeen is eating the head off the same Divney, his old friend is at the side of the hearth draining a glass. An unfamiliar young lad is with them.

The appearance of the pair confounds him. They look worn, older, greyer and grosser.

Neither woman nor boy takes a skerrick of heed or notice of him, but Divney stares, and an expression of sheer terror comes across his face.

He utters a piercing reverberating scream as he topples to the floor and sprawls there writhing agonizedly about like a dying fly, gibbering pathetically from the fear that is upon him.

Pegeen fusses about, keening and crying, rapping on about his drinking. She knew this would happen. She'd told him a thousand times. Too much whisky taken would kill the life out of him one day. She'd not the strength to get the fat oaf into bed.

He puts his head in and asks if he may assist. The woman ignores him. Divney becomes more craven with fear, hurling himself about like a child in a tantrum or a madman in a fit.

The son is sent for help.



He is dying. He is dying.

The boy runs mumbling past him, without a glance.

CAN I BE OF ANY HELP?

KEEP AWAY
KEEP AWAY

RUN AND GET THE DOCTOR FOR YOUR FATHER TOMMY!

HURRY!
HURRY!

It seems it is surely time that he takes himself away from there.

The bicycle is nowhere to be found.



In his ungodly throes, Divney sputters strangled words at him.

His mind abruptly freezes. It becomes void and empty. It is white in colour.

MATHERS... BOX...
SIXTEEN YEARS!

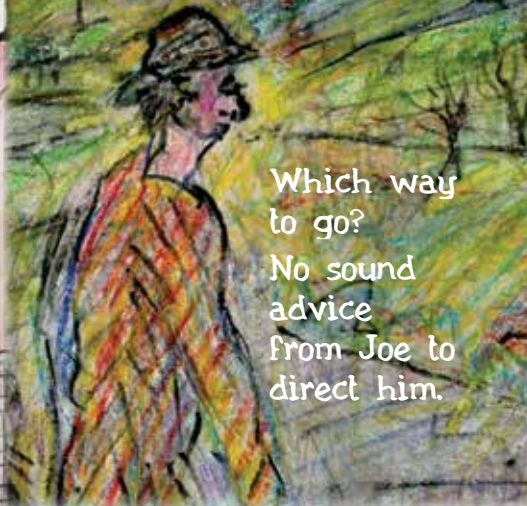
It would not be unreasonable to assume by now that Joe has fully abandoned him to his fate. Well, he threatened to take his departure did he not, back at the barracks, what with all that malarky about eternity and bicycles. He gave fair warning, be japers.

Mile after weary country mile he trudges the muddy hard road lashed with cold showers, his wooden leg throbbing throughout his entire being as he hobbles onwards, ever onwards, by the Holy Hokey. It is a soft old day, he thinks ironically to himself.

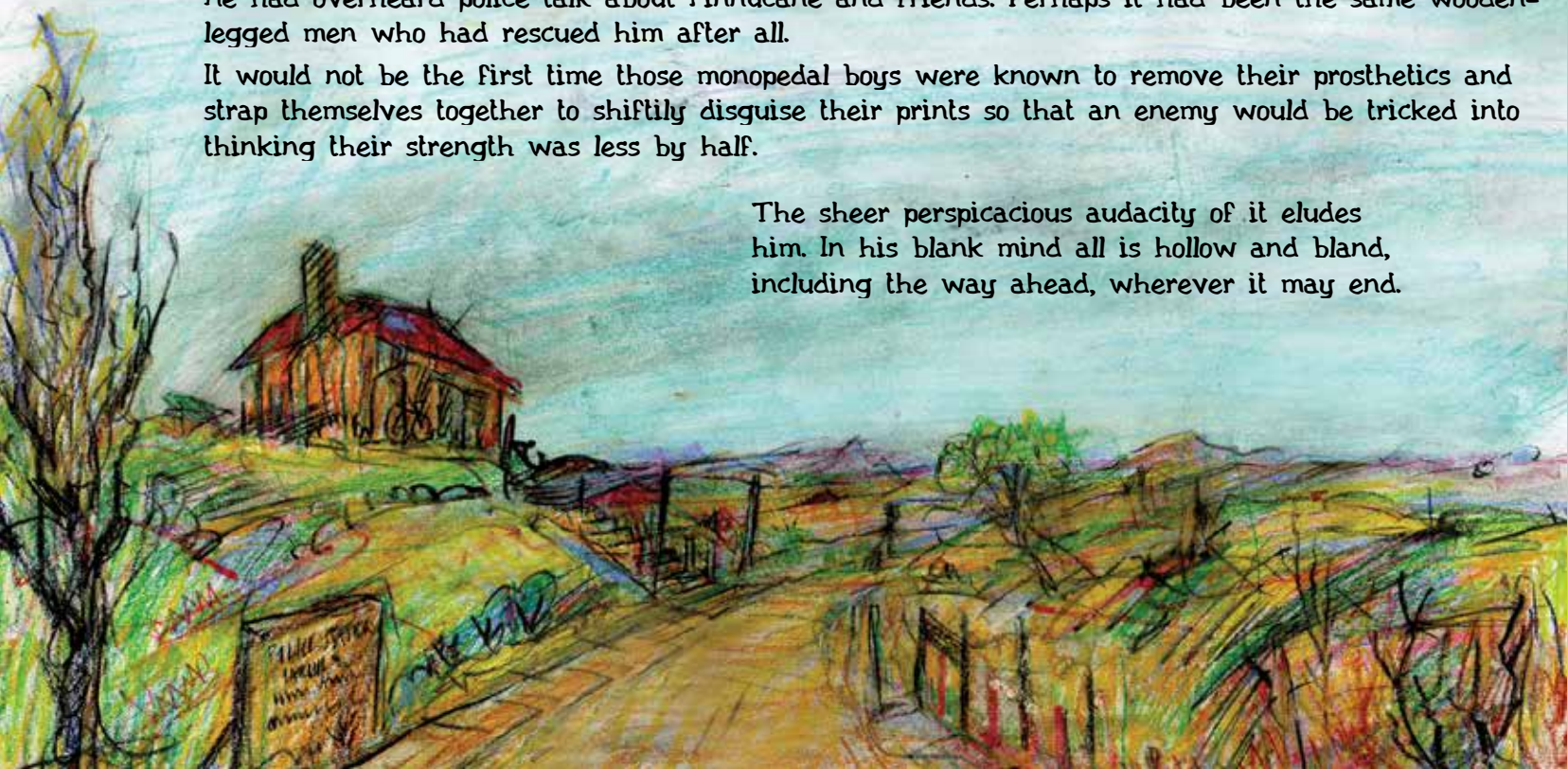
He had overheard police talk about Finnucane and friends. Perhaps it had been the same wooden-legged men who had rescued him after all.

It would not be the first time those monopedal boys were known to remove their prosthetics and strap themselves together to shiftily disguise their prints so that an enemy would be tricked into thinking their strength was less by half.

The sheer perspicacious audacity of it eludes him. In his blank mind all is hollow and bland, including the way ahead, wherever it may end.

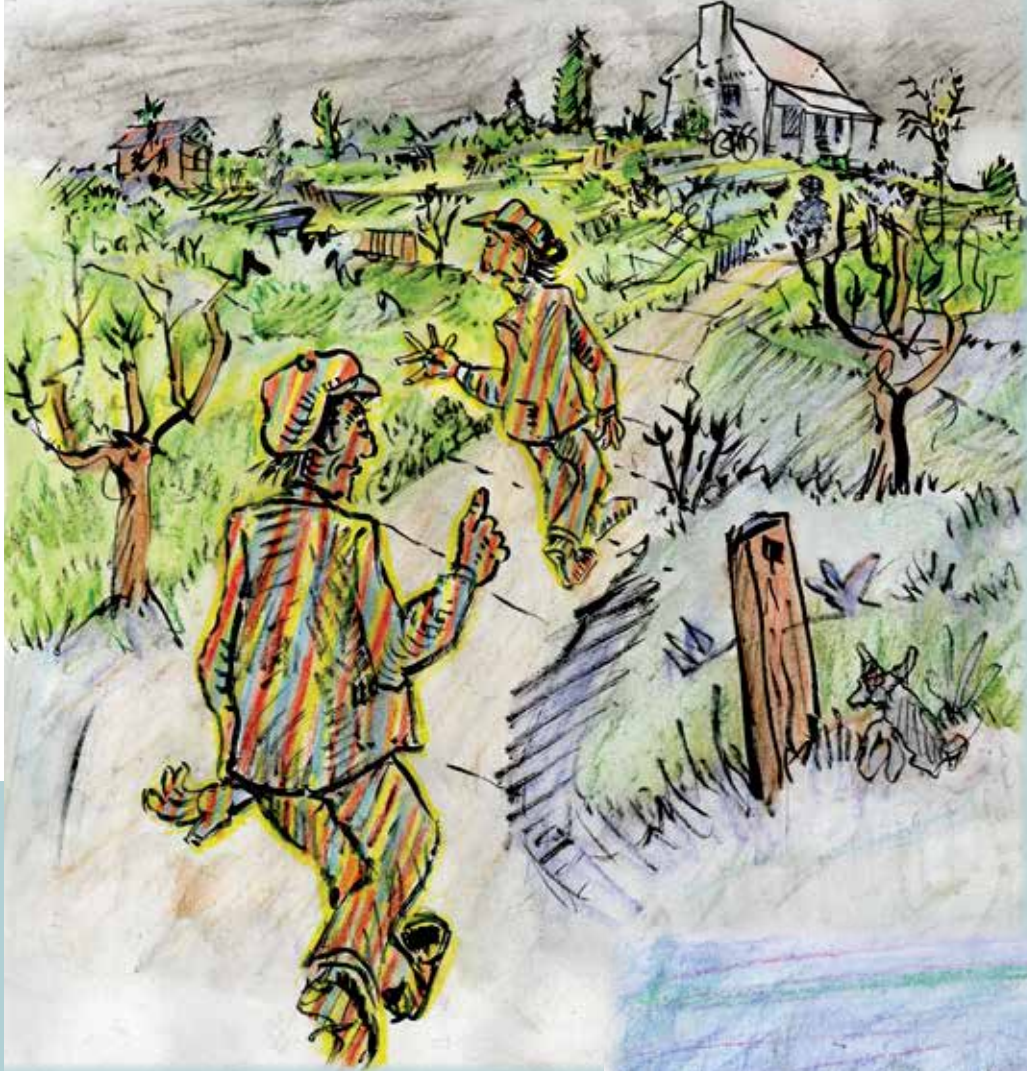


Which way to go?
No sound advice from Joe to direct him.



As the road winds mindlessly along, he never once entertains a thought of de Selby*, or indeed anything at all. He is altogether banjaxed. Eventually he finds he is approaching a house that

seems familiar but then appears to fade into unreality, some class of illusion or hoax, like a phoney amateurish billboard.



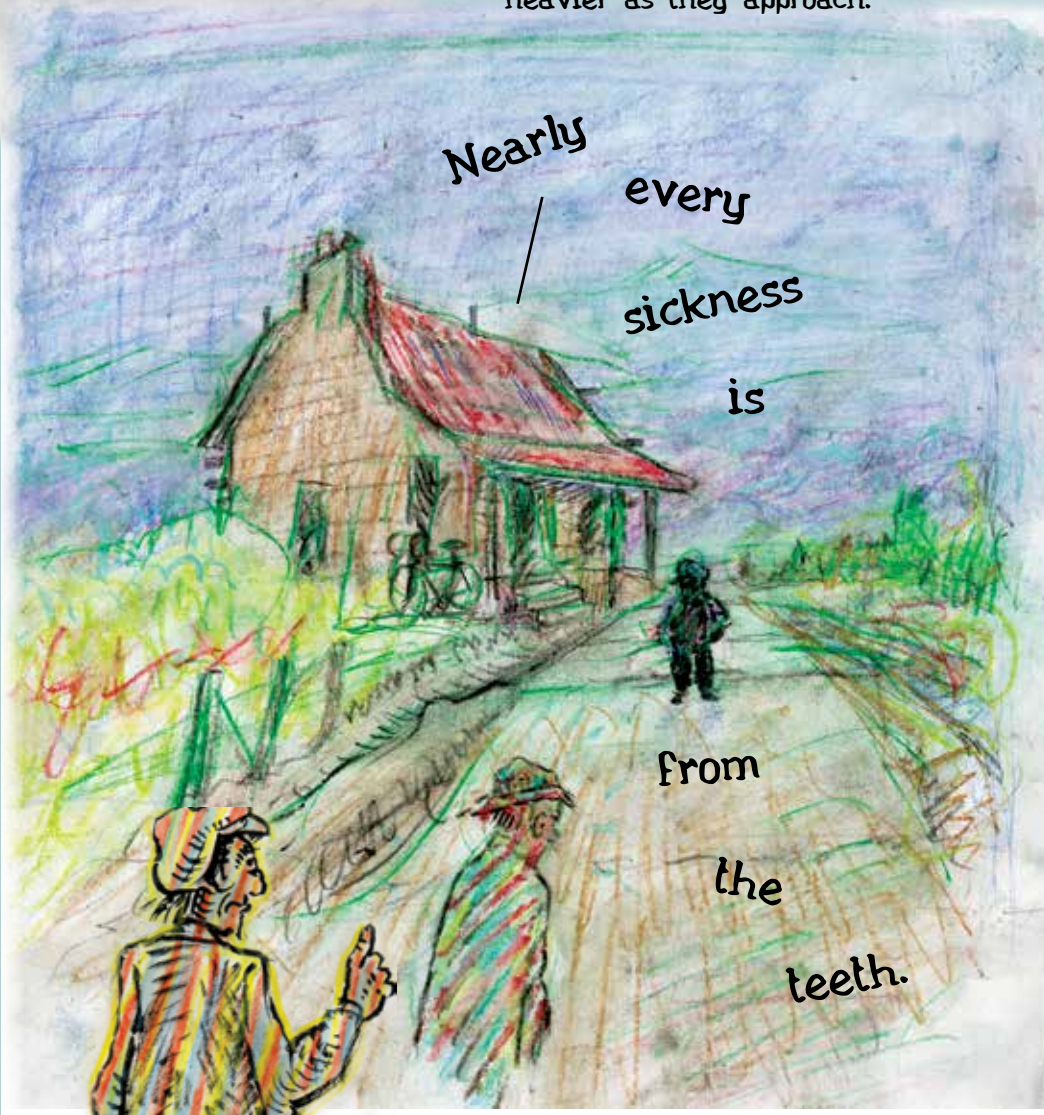
Just like before, as he approaches, it becomes more substantial until he notices it is a police barracks. He stops in his tracks. He has never seen its like before. Standing motionless, he hears hurried footsteps coming after him. They get louder and heavier as they approach.

* "This is symbolically ratified by the post-Fox cessation of all annotative allegorical implications, a not unknown obfuscatory ploy of crime writers. In this instance, it entirely affirms De Selby's status as the 20th century's seminal seer in the Arcane Sciences, and seals his position as a senior subGenius." [The Efficacy of Slack, Q Peachgrove]

At last they come abreast of him, and he finds it is his old partner in crime, Divney. They say not a word, and do not look at each other.

He falls in step and they march together into the police station.

A gruff voice can be heard muttering from within.



Nearly every sickness is from the teeth.

They advance meekly from the door until they are face to face.

Is it about a bicycle?



Note on footnotes

TO SUGGEST that “The Third Policeman” is littered lavishly with footnotes would be akin to saying if the night is clear there will be stars.

If so, it could be that they are the glittering key to the twisty tale itself, entirely.

Accordingly, to our good fortune, this Key is also graced with similar expert commentary, compiled by a direct descendant of the distinguished de Selby pundit P.C. Peachgrove.

Ms. Q. Peachgrove’s generous contribution and her expertise in de Selby lore cannot be gainsaid, nor is there any paucity of veracity. Led by the light of her lineage, she has spent her life from the cradle pursuing the Work. Without her guidance, this much-needed Key to the De Selby mystery would be all the poorer for it, so it would.



An ultimate end note at the heel of the hunt quotes some correspondence between the author and a fellow avid de Selby researcher, collector, trapeze artist and part-time writer, the Hollywood actor Seamus O'Donnell Jnr.

Then, within that note itself, as you may well believe, there is yet another.

It alludes to your soul-man Joe. It is his explanation of things:

“It was again the beginning of the unfinished, the re-discovery of the familiar, the re-experience of the already suffered, the fresh-forgetting of the unremembered.”

OMNIUM



IT IS THE
INEXORABLE
PANCAKE

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About a Bicycle -- A Key to Flann O'Brien's The Third Policeman. A song and dance about its deep underlying message, which is as plain as the nose on your face. All revealed here.

"At last." Q Peachgrove. [Chief Curator, De Selby Museum and Archive, Main Rd. Beiginis West, Kerry.]



"God is as near as the door".
— O'Crohan.

ARNOLD LINDSAY