

the naming of Jordan

Father Krips left his study and walked across the lawn towards the church, hoping to have time for a quick drink before putting on his vestments for the naming ceremony of the new font, funded by the generous donations of Mr and Mrs Grice. Fonts were important to him, as he thought of the tradition of baptism going back to the immersion of Our Dear Lord by John the Baptist in the holy waters of the River Jordan, symbolic of immersion in the water of life, eternal life. And he had found that a font with a locked cover was a good place to keep a bottle, that he could raid between mass and confession, or between choir practice and the parishioners meeting, or between first communions and last rites. Or just between. But this time he was interrupted half way across the lawn.

A couple met him, holding a bundle, a smelly and noisy bundle. They grabbed his sleeve, as he would not have stopped otherwise, and explained. A baby, a rather ill baby, but worst of all a baby born to infidels, who left to themselves would not baptise her, so that in the quite likely event of her death she would go straight to eternal damnation. Now they, the grandparents, had the babe for an afternoon, and a quick baptism was imperative. Father Krips protested his busyness. They trumped it with the soul of the baby. He arranged to meet them at the font in fifteen minutes, and went to the vestry to put on his robes.

He got there in ten minutes, in time to take the cover off the font and remove the holy liquid. Whisky, he remembered the gaelic *uisce beatha*, water of life. The only slightly emptier bottle went behind some chalices on a shelf. He prepared himself for the arrival of the grandparents. If they didn't interrupt him he could get this baby on the road to heaven before the Grices came to see their new font named. The door opened and someone entered without knocking. He turned to rebuke the haste of the grandparents, but it was not them. It was the strangest person in the village, known to everyone as Dumwit Saint Michael, who slept in the hedges and lived in the pub and informed everyone of the end of the world, the hollowness of authority, and the beings that he saw. "Go away" said Father Krips "I'm preparing for something important". "But not as important as this" said Dumwit. "This land has become the New Kingdom, and I'm to be its New King, as soon as we know what Kingdom it is. I'm not leaving till you've done it."

"I can't make you a king" Father Krips growled, furious with the string of interruptions to his afternoon. "Just go". "Yes you can" insisted Dumwit, seizing a corner of Krips' cassock and holding it as if to tear it off, "All it needs is a name. Once it is named I will be its king."

A knock at the door. In came the grandparents. Together with the Grices. Too many, too much, too soon: Father Krips forced himself to smile and turned to face the crowd. "It is a great honour to officiate at this ceremony" he intoned, his voice wavering from irritation, tension, and whisky. "Names are important, because

names last. A name is always a name and always names what it names". He reached out and took the bundled baby from the grandparents. He realized that he did not even know if it was a boy or a girl; under the wrappings it was dressed in a long elaborate lace robe. He held the infant over the font, cradling it precariously between one elbow and the other while he dipped a finger in the water. "The name shall be Jordan".

"Jordan" mumbled Dumwit Saint Michael "I'm king of Jordan".
"The Jordan font" whispered Mrs Grice to Mr Grice. "I thought we paid for it to be the Grice font, but now it is Jordan."
"Jordan" echoed the grandparents, "our grand-daughter is Jordan; may Jordan go in piety all the days of her life."