Bandits in The Lough
By David Walsh

The other day I had a dream. It was one of those familiar, recurring dreams that resonate with something real, deep within our deepest sleep. Once again, it seemed so real to me.
I dreamt I could smell the organic, intoxicating mix of burning methanol blended with a more kindly oil.
Oil pressed from castor beans.
A smell so sweet, so familiar.
A memory so rich that I could hardly believe I was dreaming at all.
I was travelling along a narrow road.
One with no crossroads, just the odd divergent track.
Hedgerows. Hedgehogs. Warm, clear, Northern skies.
Ahead, a house, white, of no particular importance but one that seemed a welcoming place nonetheless.
A jolt. Stop!
A sharp turn to the right, the scattering of stones and a long bumpy descent.
To the Lough.
What a smell!
Evocative.
Now amongst many friendly, fantastic faces.
And the odd foe.
Quite a few, if truth be told. Some in my way and dressed for action, a few unseen.
But this was a happy dream, free of those dreaded anxieties, sweats and tightening of chest.
A spinning, swirling merry-go-round appeared. Spinning faster and faster, and more joyous with every dizzying turn.
A merry-go-round is a child's delight, but I saw men and women laughing, too. Cheering. Reaching out for something. Excited. Looking toward me, perhaps hoping to catch a reflection in this child's eye.
Now, a crowd. A large crowd. A turbulent sea of faces whooping it up.
Then, just one single face. Friend?
Then, the sea of faces. Foe?
Then, the single face. Foe?
Then, back to the sea. Friend?
Then, the face. Then, the sea. Then, the face. Then, the sea. The face. The sea. The face. The sea. Faster. Sea. The face. The sea. Face. Sea. Face. Sea. Face. Seas. Many seas. Faces. Seas.
Face. Sea. The face. Sea.
Father!
There, in the crowd. Silence. Peace.

Just before I awoke, I left that place, again. And ascended the track of scattered stones.
Looking back over my shoulder, as night drew in, I saw dereliction. Decay. Where once there was life, so much life, now only a decrepit old shack; barred beyond bolted gates.
From up there, I thought I could see the ghosts of the good spirits I was told lived in my garden when I was young.
I was wrong.
The Lough was one hell of a garden, sure. And then, like the rest of us, they were gone.
As for the Bandits?
Well, at last I opened my eyes and knew at once, that after all these years and one recurring dream,
They do, of course, live on.

David Walsh is an undergraduate of American and Canadian Studies at the University of Birmingham, and former Berwick Bandit.

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