

The Famous Pantomime of [now read on]

Greens (chirpily) O yez! It's us!

Readers (gloomily) Oh no. It's them.

G: We bring you the Story of (TBA).

Scene 1

Prolog: <snip> so I pray my Muse

Help me to diffuse the news

Of Greenish doings

And comings and er goings <snip>

Muse: Get on with it. It's due at the editor in 24 hours.

<snip>

Enter Villain. V: I am the fearful CLAE, the Christmas Letter Assessment Exerciser, and I mean to show my villainy

By stopping any

Attempt to make this letter scan.

If I can. Ho ho, see there my daughter

Who instead of doing crosswords, oughter

Be writing yet another Research Proposal

Which (ho ho) thwarts her

Principal Boy, who is a girl disguised as a boy except that she's then disguised as a girl:

You've stopped it rhyming too,

Trust you. (Types.) We need a fully-customisable

retro-inferential partially-ordered double-

exhausting research design with before, after and

never-again controls

<snip>

Hero: If I can only get 5 items of news into this letter (ones that that satisfy dread CLAE, which you'd better pronounce as clay)

Then I shall break the spell and my Heroine will be released to get the better

Of each and every crossword-setter.

But *do the Greens have any news?* Not they.

Yet stay! Only the other day

I met a

Moderately intriguing Fact. The number 73

Is used on amateur radio to mean "best wishes to ye"

Like so:

"The first authentic use of 73 is in the publication The National Telegraphic Review and Operators' Guide, first published in April 1857. At that time, 73 meant 'My love to you!' but within a short time, the use of 73 began to change. In the National Telegraph Convention, the numeral was changed from the Valentine-type sentiment to a vague sign of fraternalism." It's now a standard sign-off on ham radio, apparently.⁵

Does that one count towards my Five-A-CLAE?

Villain: Curses. Never mind, I think you'll find the girl's resigned

⁵ Thanks, <http://www.ac6v.com/73.htm#73>

To her hateful grind. *Points to daughter, fighting with her computer*

Principal Boy: Oh woe! Ah wae! That wicked CLAE!

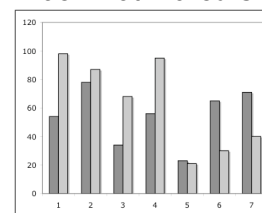
That's what I say

<types furiously> That makes 173

PowerPoint graphs.

Will that be

enough?



Hero: More news. At last our bookshelves show A book about the plants we *really* grow!

The expert's guide to Fruit/Flowers/Shrubs/you name it" has now been followed with The Expert's Guide to Weeds. (Sorry, that's weeds, not Weed - that one's still to come.)

Villain: Pah, no score, is that the best that you are able?

Hero: AND I've made a huge bird table!

Fully organic, brass screws, real wood, no preservatives, good and big and thick and strong, deceptively spacious, suit town-bred eagle with large appetite. And what have I seen? Hardly a single sparrow.

Villain: No, nor that.

Hero (getting frantic):

Please, we went to Triora to play our viols (gabbling) it has 8 churches and 5 palaces and present population is 461 and it consists mainly of hill with houses stacked up and the streets burrow through the layers of houses and

Villain: Yawn.

Hero (remembers): Wait.

We all went to Birnam, as in MacBeth, where the Birnam House Hotel has a relaxed attitude, good



We play the Jug of Slugs

food, good walks (well done Owen, the only one who read the map right) and The Oldest Oak For Miles Around. Played tunes in the bar and two French tourists lapped it up, although

Thomas wishes now

he hadn't told them the Jig of Slurs was called « La cruche de limaces »*

Villain: More curses. That makes three. If she gets her grant it is undone am I --

Though the person who's writing this plot will have to work out why.

Hero Ha! AND our grandsons both do thrive!

Owen had a gig at the ICA in London, oh so

* Find your dictionary. Hint: see caption above.

intellectual, old young men in black shirts who told Thos off for laughing when Owen's kit fell apart ... And Sarah's got another CD cover commission and is making lovely paintings. And they love their Edinburgh flat where their cat Charlie pretends to be a hot cushion. And Inge and Martin are still touring with their bands to huge acclaim, somehow juggling baby Ewen

Villain Ho, hum, I suppose that's another. Hero runs out of news. Starts to do housework. Most uncharacteristic.



Ewen reading to Jo

Muse: Back to the job. One displacement activity a day is enough.

Scene 2

P.B. <types> some incomprehensible reference ... That makes 4708 references in the bibliography, only a few

hundred to go ...
 Enter panto horse: Ahoy, Principal Boy!
 My role
 Is clear enough: I aim to thwart that evil CLAE from thwarting you from thwarting him from thwarting her from thweeing you, got that?
 P.B.: And YOU can't rhyme either.

Scene 3

Hero And so ...



T with mussels

- Thos spent some happy days with friends in Brittany - they walked across a bay while the tide was out, and he saw his first mussel beds. After the war Nantes had a huge spare submarine base so they turned it into a liner museum, where T and friend Jean-Michel gawped at the gilt and drank gin slings in a replica of a 1920s cocktail bar on a Blue Riband ship.

- After the railways were virtualised York had a huge spare shunting yard, so it became a railway museum where with grandson Alex we gawped at the gilt and looked for Queen Victoria's Royal Ham Sandwich. An astonishing and moving little play told the sad true story of a rail crash and the driver's heroic efforts to minimise loss of life.
 - Thos's very last PhD student got through and

only TODAY[#] he proudly watched her get the degree. He noted that graduands received 16 claps on average.
 - We played viols in Stockholm and walked on pretty Waxholm and ate Deep Fried Camembert, that famous Swedish dish.



Alex the Agile

Scene 4

[Every play must have 5 scenes* so I had to stick this one in]

Scene 5:

Hero is not typing.
 Muse): Oh do get on with it. It's five to six. The editor's due home for supper any minute now.
 Hero: But is there any more news, muse?
 Enter panto horse. P.H.: Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven![†]
 Hero (theatrically): Pant, O pant, O panto horse!
 P.H.: And here's the 6 o'clock news. (Crosses legs nonchalantly. @)
 Martin and Inge are getting married in May, on aptly-named Fair Isle. Thomas is already wondering what to wear. Sure he used to have a suit somewhere.
 Villain: Grr! But you still need ...
 P.H. .. And further heed!
 From April Jo cuts her hours to 80%. NINE WEEKS more holiday a year!
 P.Boy: Oh joy. Here, take away this bauble, I'm going to warble! (discards 437 PowerPoint slides and waltzes out with horse in an interesting and unusual dance for 6 legs)
 Hero: But she was supposed to marry me ... (Eyes villain speculatively)
 V: But I'm a villain!
 H: Nobody's perfect ‡
 Muse: If you can understand this plot You've got Too clever by half. But as it's a pantomime, so what? All, taking bows and catcalls:
 And to all our readers, from Number 73,
 - We wish you 73!

[#] Well, it used to be.

^{*} Thanks, Aristotle.

[†] Thanks, Marlowe.

[@] Thanks, Widow Twankey and the Forty Magic Lamps.

[‡] Thanks, Hollywood.