

## *The Real Hero of This Scene Isn't on the Stage at all.*

*A van arrives at Frans Bekkerstraat and stops near to the waiting audience. The stage manager descends with a light, folding chair which s/he places on the ground after s/he walks to take a place in the middle of the rectangle delineated by the castle's foundations. On the back of the chair is taped a piece of paper with the words "The Grave" Written on it. For a moment s/he pauses, surveys the audience and then looks around and up, as if regarding the interior walls of the invisible castle.*

Good afternoon. This performance is called "The Real Hero of This Scene Isn't on the Stage at all" and was written by Giles Bailey. It was made at the request of Anna Łuczak and Eloise Sweetman for their project Het Mooiste.

It lasts for about ten minutes and ends when I get back in to the van and drive away.

*A Pause.*

The name of this street is Frans Bekkerstraat and it's in Rotterdam, one of those cities that looks grey and unremarkable when there are clouds in the sky or rain is falling, but when the sun shines it comes alive; as though it were a different place altogether.

We are located at latitude: 51 degrees 53 minutes and longitude: 4 degrees 27 minutes and, as you can see, I am standing on the stage.

*S/he indicates the rectangle of the foundations.*

You can see how it lies. North West that way, to the edge of the Waalhaven and South East down there to the Dorpsweg. Round the corner there was a great night club that has closed down. There were galleries too, that were open for a while and closed down also. No doubt new ones are opening now though; filled with objects and images of different kinds.

All sorts of people live here, have lived here before and will live here in a time yet to come. Some you'd recognise, but many more that you wouldn't.

*A pause.*

So, let's begin.

The sky is beginning to show some streaks of light over in the East there. It is morning, in prehistory.

As you recall we have crawled out from under the water, spluttering, to discover we can survive quite happily on the land. Primitive creatures. Finned, gilled, scaled, we evolve. Our subaquatic lives are behind us and time rushes forward.

At first we are just wriggling aimlessly in the mud, consuming whatever nourishment we come across by chance. Many of us perish, but the stronger ones press on. Slowly things become more orderly.

Our rudimentary brains are still capable of very little, but, unusually, there lingers in each a very simple image: the image of a red rectangle. For most of us it is not a memory, nor a premonition, Just a shape with an edge, so that we can distinguish between an inside and outside.

*S/he draws the rectangle in the air.*

Within and beyond these edges is something undefined. It is like water, or grease; murky and indistinct.

However, blinking in the morning sun, one among us (one slightly less finned, less gilled and with fewer scales) realises there is more to this shape than at first she thought. She sees the purpose it serves as a stage.

*The stage manager points to the edges of the foundations*

So, this stage. It has no curtain and no real scenery except for this. (*S/he indicates the chair. S/he opens it and sits, looking at the audience, a relaxed smile on her/his face.*)

Death provides a useful vantage point. Here, in the company of the ancestors, there are plenty of people to speak to; people with experience to draw on, who can make things less mysterious. For instance, I am here with the primitive creature – with her fins, gills and scales – who sees the rectangle for what it is.

*S/he stands*

Anyway, looking through the rectangle, the primitive creature sees the many things that will take place on the stage. They slip past her. However, she finds that she pays particular attention to a stone building that stretches up from the rectangle towards the sky. It is the only structure of note for many miles. Verdant green islands, surrounded by water, stretch away in every direction. It is a castle. I am standing in its grand hall right now, surrounded by tapestries of unicorns and brands in iron fixtures on the walls. The best way to get a picture of it in your mind is to imagine a castle in a cartoon; a tower stretching up, battlements, arrow slits and a lone horse grazing outside by a trough. Imagine it as she sees it, in soft, powdery colours. Imagine bird song and maybe some suitable lilting music. Imagine it sitting exactly on a red rectangle.

She thinks, “The day is May 30th 1380.” (*The day and month change in accordance with the day the work is performed*) The particularity of the date surprises her. She thinks, “This image persists.”

“There goes a messenger, hurrying from his horse to knock at the door. And here an errant priest, disgraced and absent without leave (*the stage manager gestures*). Now, with no fellow clergymen to assist him, he has botched his tonsure. The withered, roasted body of a boar turns on a spit over the great fire while sweet jellies set on a stone sill. Children play about the heavy skirts of a noblewoman. Lances splinter in the tilts. Shadowy characters cast spells over animal entrails. Stacks of bodies bloat and decompose. There is a powerful and unpleasant smell. Cats prowl.”

*S/he pauses*

These cats she sees keep prowling. Much as they prowl now. They prowl back and forth across time stopping just a few millennia ahead of her. The primitive creature imagines her helpless body lifted up the jaws of a sleek-furred tabby, grown fat on saucers of fresh, Dutch cream. She imagines fur and the fire of pain.

To remind herself she is living, she wriggles in the mud which grows cold as the sun gets lower. As we move senselessly nearby with our red rectangles, she feels the foundations and the shape they will

take around her. She feels the cold stones and hears the idle conversations spoken as they were laid into the deep trenches. Clouds gather overhead.

*After a pause S/he sits again in the folding chair looking reflective for moment*

From a distance she can see a town grow around the castle's ruins. Viewed through the red rectangle the foundations appear appear buffeted by the flow of our human activity around them but strain against it and stay fixed. It reminds her of a takeaway menu on the surface of a canal that the current somehow can't unmoor.

*The stage manager looks up.*

Opening her eyes again she thinks "Yes, it's clearing up. There are the stars doing their old, old crisscross journeys in the sky. Scholars haven't settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there. Just chalk ... or fire."

*The stage manager consults her/his watch and then stands and addresses the audience*

Hm... it is *(states the time)* on Frans Bekkerstraat. So, same time tomorrow. Good afternoon.

*S/he lifts the chair, folds it and climbs back into the van which departs.*

THE END.