



# WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

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All Stories New and Complete

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## SHORT NOVEL

**A TOURIST NAMED DEATH** by Christopher Anvil 6

## NOVELETTES

**A PRIDE OF ISLANDS** by C. C. MacApp 56

**MATCHMAKER** by Charles L. Fontenay 106

## SHORT STORIES

**THIRTY DEGREES CATTYWONKUS** by James Bell 37

**WHEN DAY IS DONE** by Arnold Castle 48

**HEEL** by Philip Jose Farmer 74

**A GREAT DAY FOR THE IRISH** by A. M. Lightner 94

## FEATURE

**WORLDS OF IF** by Frederik Pohl 88

**COVER** by Finlay: "Pin-ups in Space"

Illustrations by Wood and Finlay

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# A GREAT DAY FOR THE IRISH

By A. M. LIGHTNER

*Watchdogs have to be watched*

*or they keep everything out*

*—including our friends!*



**B**RIDGET Kelly stood at the foot of the rocket lift and watched the loading operation. The freight had long since been inspected and stow-

ed, and now it was the passengers' turn. Bridget was glad that for once she was not responsible. Let others worry and snoop. This time she was

a passenger herself, starward bound. Inspected, passed and okayed, she could have the pleasure of watching others squirm.

Like that beauty coming aboard with the furs and the orchid. She wouldn't be allowed to keep the orchid, of course. Bridget grinned as she saw the flower tossed into a trash can and imagined the words the beauty was mouthing. The man beside her sported a boutonniere. Yes, there it went into the can. He was still smiling, probably cracking wise. Bridget had separated so many travelers from so many items that she could tell what the passenger was going to say before he said it.

Most people knew that strenuous efforts were being made to keep pests and epidemics away from Earth. Ever since the beginnings of space travel, the quarantine of incoming ships at the Moon had been rigidly observed. But the fact that plagues could also spread *from* Earth seldom registered on the public's mind.

Bridget was all too well aware of it. For several years she had labored to that end in the Quarantine Service. Now that her savings had accumulated and her abilities as an entomologist were recognized, she was about to board one of the shining ships herself. There were raised eyebrows

when her destination was known. An entomologist going to New Eden—a planet where insects were at a minimum. But Bridget only smiled. She knew what she wanted. She was bound for the frontier, where men are men and women are scarce.

The speaker blared. The countdown was beginning.

"Fifteen minutes!" rasped the mechanical voice. "Fifteen minutes to blast-off!"

SHE took a last look at the planet of her birth and squeezed into the lift. The few remaining passengers pushed in with her. A man in a red waistcoat was commiserating with the woman beside him.

"Don't let the officials get you down," he said. "We'll have to put up with them for the journey. But on New Eden, I hear, the conditions are so good they hardly need any regulations at all."

"It isn't that," sniffed his friend. "It's just that you gave it to me and I was hoping to wear it tonight."

"Perhaps I can buy you something in hydroponics. I had no idea they were so touchy or I'd have had the orchid fumigated."

Bridget felt the scorn of the official for the general public. "If you're going to New Eden, you ought to know we want to keep it that way."

The red waistcoat looked down at her.

"Oh, officialdom without stripes?" he said. "Or are you an old hand? Perhaps you can explain the deal before we get there."

So he *was* the type that cracked wise, and she had put her foot in it right at the beginning.

"I've never been off Earth before," she admitted. "I read up on it all first."

The lift was at the lock door, and she slipped through without looking back. The speaker was croaking "Ten minutes to go" as she hurried to her cabin and prepared for takeoff. She'd have to do better than this or the trip would be a washout. Better just concentrate on enjoying it . . . the new experiences . . . the fascination of travel.

The jets roared and Bridget Kelly blacked out.

Several hours later she had recovered enough to spruce up, take the prescribed dose of covitron against space sickness, and make her way to the lounge. She found the table setting with her name on it and had hardly sat down before a familiar voice began at her ear.

"Sure and if it isn't Bridget Kelly, and it's a long time I've been waiting for herself."

She looked up into the same laughing eyes, only this time they were above an emerald-green waistcoat.

"Still determined that New Eden shall not be polluted by

snakes? Oh, excuse me, that was St. Patrick. You're worried about bugs."

She laughed in spite of herself and glanced at the place card next hers. "Mr. Patch Maguire," it read.

"I didn't mean to sound stuffy," she said. "It's just that most people don't realize how important it is . . . how much trouble just a few insects . . . well, I've worked at it and I ought to know."

"Ah, an official entomologist. But in that case, why New Eden? Or are you insurance against people like Carrie and me who might import something?"

"You never can tell. Something may turn up. It's hard to imagine a planet without any insects at all."

"Eden's remarkable that way," put in the young officer sitting across from them. "No stinging bugs or parasites. Makes everything a lot more comfortable. Still, it's pretty new. Only a small part developed so far."

"So we've insurance against the unknown in Bridget Kelly."

"And what might *you* be insurance against, Mr. Maguire?" she countered.

**T**HE officer stared. "Don't you folks know each other? Mr. Maguire's a grower of fancy plants. Sort of goes together . . . plants and insects!" He laughed. "Well, it

looks like the rest of our table won't show up for this meal."

"What happened to the lady without the orchid? She was with you, wasn't she?" Bridget asked.

"Carrie," said Patch Maguire, "is one of those unfortunates on whom covitron does not work. She won't be with anyone for the duration. I was just hoping our whole table was not similarly afflicted."

"It's a pity," mused the young officer. "So many people make the flight across space only once. If they did it more often, they might get accustomed."

"Don't you take covitron?" Bridget asked, beginning to wonder how soon she should repeat the dose. Some people said it made you sleepy, and she certainly didn't want that with things just getting started . . . and Patch Maguire . . . Patch Maguire . . .

Suddenly a window opened in her mind. She saw a letter with short punching sentences. "You think you can get away with this high-handed, overbearing, totally uncalled-for destruction of property? I'll take it to the top! I'll see you idiots in hell . . . or at least out of the Service!" Patch Maguire protesting the destruction of his shipment of seeds imported from Regulus V. No amount of explanation that the seeds had been found

to harbor a blight which, once let loose on Earth . . . Patch Maguire had a reputation as an authority on crossbreeding and mutation of plants . . . and also for throwing his weight around. It was several years ago, but Bridget remembered the consternation in the department.

She realized that Maguire and the officer were talking. They were agreeing that space sickness was only a matter of psychology, and that if you just didn't think about it, no covitron was necessary. She hastily swallowed another pill with her coffee and hoped the coffee would keep her awake.

They toured the ship together, she and Patch. They marveled at the scene from the viewport and chatted with the captain in the control room. The steward inquired about his taste in music and stereo, and he even gave advice to the gardeners in hydroponics. All doors were open to Patch, and there were murmurs about the "handsome couple" as they moved through the lounge. By the end of the trip they were making plans for New Eden. Patch insisted that Bridget was in the wrong profession and she agreed that the science of agriculture might be more rewarding than entomology under certain conditions.

At the farewell dinner, Patch gave her a bouquet he'd

had made up especially by the gardeners. But she was more interested in the small green leaf he wore in his lapel. He took it out and insisted on fastening it in her hair.

"Sure and it's a shamrock!" he cried, as he arranged it. "And have you forgotten what day it is tomorrow?"

"It's the day we land," Bridget replied. "But what day that is in our time or ship's time . . . it's too confusing!"

"It's St. Patrick's Day, that's what it is!" he said. "A great day for the Irish and a great day for us. And I wouldn't be without the shamrock on St. Patrick's Day! They should call the planet New Ireland, that they should. Wasn't Ireland the garden island, all green and fruitful and with no snakes? And I hear this planet's the garden planet and with no insects either to make life miserable. But let you and me be living there a while and we'll make it New Ireland for sure!"

And he planted a kiss on her mouth without a thought of who was looking at them.

AS THEIR tablemates drank their health, Bridget blushed and her eyes shone, and after dinner Patch escorted her to the stereo where they sat very close together in the dark. But as the pictures flashed across the screen and as Patch's arm went

across her shoulder and drew her close, her mind was besieged by an army of little doubts. Shamrock . . . shamrock . . . what had she read about the shamrock?

"Patch," she whispered. "Where did you get it?"

"Get what?" Patch murmured, bending over to kiss her.

"The shamrock, Patch? I don't believe they have it in hydroponics."

"Sure, they must have it." Patch's lips brushed hers and she found it difficult to think clearly.

"I never saw it there. Patch! Are you sure?"

"Saw what? I don't see anything but you. That's enough for me."

"About the shamrock, Patch!"

"It looks beautiful on you. Sure and I wouldn't be without a shamrock on St. Patrick's Day."

Bridget gave up. She lay back in the sanctuary of his arm and basked in the warm feeling of his lips on her hair. But the doubts kept crawling about in her mind. What was the matter with her? Couldn't she be happy when everything was perfect? Had she been a cut-and-dried inspector for too many years? But she remembered the words of Professor Schwarzkopf, the day she received her degree: "The inspectors are the watchdogs

of the planets. Without them, all that man has built can be destroyed."

When Patch had kissed her good night outside her cabin and his footsteps had died away along the corridor, she crept out into the passage and made her way to hydroponics.

"Why, no," said the chief gardener, "we never carry clover of any sort. Why do you ask?"

On her way to the control room, Bridget tried not to think. She found the young officer from her table on duty with the captain, and the two men listened in surprise as she outlined her fears.

"I don't want to accuse Mr. Maguire of anything," she said. "I'm sure he doesn't realize how serious—and of course there may be nothing to it. It's just that I remember that shamrocks harbor the golden nematode—that is, in the soil around the roots. And it seems likely that if Mr. Maguire has live shamrocks—and I remember what a serious plague they once brought over from Ireland to America . . ."

The captain pulled his mustache. "It's clearly against regulations. I can't imagine how he'd get it past inspection. But then, Maguire's a very persistent man and he's got pull in odd places. I don't want to rouse the ire of the Irish, but I see your point."

"Couldn't you search his cabin—without his knowing I said to? Oh, I'm sure he'd be very angry. But if I could only look at his plants, then I'd be sure if they're safe. You must have ways of getting in—if there should be a short circuit or something in his cabin."

"Oh, we have ways," the captain said. "Don't we, Lieutenant?"

"Perhaps at breakfast," suggested the young officer. "If Miss Kelly could arrange to make it as leisurely as possible."

"And right afterward you might go to the lieutenant's cabin—with your instruments and without Mr. Maguire."

SHE had no trouble in making her breakfast leisurely. She could hardly choke it down. Under Patch's admiring gaze and flagrant approval she was uncomfortably conscious of treachery. She left as soon as the protracted meal was over, even though she knew it would give him the opportunity to discover the rape of his plants.

The lieutenant was waiting for her in his cabin. He sat behind his desk eyeing a motley collection of clover in an assortment of little jars and boxes. Bridget brought out her pocket 'scope and without a word pulled the first specimen up by the roots and began to examine it. The lieu-

tenant watched in fascination.

"It's a good thing Mr. Maguire can't see you now," he said. "He'd take an entirely different tone from the one I've been hearing lately."

"I'm hoping he doesn't find out," she muttered. "What he doesn't know . . . Oh! Oh! Look here! A fine big cyst! Now if they're all like this . . ."

The lieutenant's face took on a look of respect. He came around from behind his desk and peered over her shoulder. "Found something already?" he asked.

Bridget pushed the scope under his nose. "See that?" she said. "In the right-hand corner."

"You mean that lump? Doesn't look very dangerous."

"No, it doesn't. But it's a nematode cyst, all right. That little brown lump, if turned loose in the soil—give it a few years and you'll have a real pest on your hands."

"You don't say. We'd better get rid of it right away. Do you think there's any more?"

"That's just what I'm going to find out."

But before she could move to the desk for the other containers there was a sound of scuffling outside, the door was flung violently open, and a rich, Irish voice proclaimed in righteous anger: "So here you are, conspiring against me! Both the culprits red-handed! And my shamrocks, my little plants, my babies! Thank

heavens I got here in time!"

The lieutenant moved to intercept him. "I beg your pardon, sir, but these plants are in quarantine, and if you have any others we haven't found—"

"You're no true daughter of Ireland, Bridget Kelly. And I'm fortunate to have found you out in time, false and faithless as you are!"

"Now, now," cautioned the lieutenant, getting between Maguire and the desk. "She was only doing her duty. You should see the things she's been showing me in her microscope. A menace to the whole planet!"

"Don't you believe a word of it!" thundered Maguire. "These inspectors are full of fears and fancies. Puffed up with their own importance. And I'll thank you to give me back my plants that you stole out of my cabin."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," the lieutenant said. "Not until Miss Kelly has examined each one—and then only the ones that get a clean bill of health." And he began to collect the little pots and remove them as far as possible from Maguire's reach.

"Well, come along then, Bridget—give them the bill of health," Maguire ordered. "You'll do that for me, I'm sure. And I don't know what all the fuss is about either, all over a few little plants, and shamrocks at that."



"The few little plants have a few little cysts all through their roots," said Bridget, whose temper was wearing thin. "I've only looked at one so far, but as nice an infestation of the golden nematode I've seldom seen. It's got to go down the incinerator."

"The incinerator!" screamed Maguire. "Woman! My shamrocks! All the way from Ireland!"

"If you hadn't spent your whole life circumventing regulations and pulling wires, this wouldn't have happened. Why didn't you get them-treated and certified before coming aboard?"

"**B**ECAUSE there wasn't time, that's why!" Patch shouted. "They only came from Ireland as I was leaving for the ship. If it hadn't been for a snooping, sniveling worry-wart—all about a worm that you can't even see . . ."

"You can see the results right enough!" Bridget's voice was rising to match his. "Did you ever hear of the Long Island potato? The best on the East Coast they were. The golden nematode ruined Long Island for potatoes. That's what the shamrock did for America! That's a sneaking, treacherous worm for you!"

"And who would want to grow potatoes on Long Island, built up into a city as it is?"

"They're going to want to grow potatoes on New Eden,

and I'm here to see they can."

"If that's all that's worrying you, I'll breed you a nematode-resistant potato. And now I'll thank you to let me take my shamrocks and make an end to this disgraceful scene."

But when he looked around, he found the lieutenant had quietly removed himself with the plants, and the door of the cabin was crowded with interested passengers.

"So you think you've put one over on me!" Patch shouted. "It's a good thing I found out in time how I was being deceived by a pair of eyes and a mouth that says one thing and means another!"

"And I suppose you're the soul of honor! With no thought of responsibility to your fellow man! You've had your way all your life, and it's lucky I found *that* out, too—before—before . . ."

But he was gone, elbowing his way through the crowd, and the onlookers drifted away, embarrassed at the sight of the stormy girl who shouted hysterically after him. Bridget slammed the door and collapsed into a chair.

"I'm sorry for the noise," she apologized when the officer returned. "I'd better finish checking the plants before it's time to land."

"Never mind the plants," the lieutenant told her. "I've put them where he won't find

them in a hurry. As a matter of fact, we aren't going to land. We're in orbit now and they're to send a rocket shuttle. They aren't worried about what we're bringing in this time. It's what we might take out. There's a howling plague on New Eden after all. Several of our passengers have changed their minds about landing."

"A plague?" said Bridget stupidly. It was hard to concentrate on anything more deadly than the golden nematode.

"Oh, nothing you or I could catch. Something to do with agriculture and the plants. Which reminds me, I've a batch of telegrams for you. The authorities are delighted to learn we've a registered entomologist aboard. Very few of them have come this way."

By the time Bridget had read the sheaf of papers, she had made the transition from the world of shipboard romance to her accustomed world of science and order. There was work to be done. Her talents were needed in a dozen places at once. She left orders for the confiscated clovers to be destroyed and went to her cabin to pack. She was on the first shuttle to leave the ship.

**T**HE weeks that followed were filled with hard work with test tube and microscope,

at her desk and in the field. The majority of her co-workers were men, but none had time to look for a laughing eye or a smiling mouth. The beautiful garden planet of New Eden was being reduced to a desert by a mysterious *something* that was swiftly attacking all the cultivated areas. Starvation was looming and there was talk of hasty evacuation. The situation was passing out of control.

The villain could not be isolated. Was it an insect, a virus, a chemical in the soil? Some of the few native insects were caught and subjected to experiment. The soils were analyzed and tested. Those were not the answer. The only thing certain was that the previously lush brown loam was turning to a yellow, chalky sand, and everything that grew in it withered and died.

Bridget visited farm after farm and trudged from field to field. She looked at worried faces and tried to think of words of encouragement. Back at the laboratory she studied her specimens far into the night and fell asleep at her desk. She was too tired to think about Patch Maguire, who, she concluded, had never left the spaceship. What would a grower of gardens, a breeder of plants do in a spreading desert? He had gone on to some more flourishing planet.

She was called to the office one day.

"I hear there's a farm that claims they don't have the plague," said the harassed young scientist behind the desk. "Better get over there and see if it's any more than a rumor. Take the heli and bring back all the usual samples. Here's the directions on getting there."

He shoved a torn piece of paper at her and turned back to his cluttered desk. Bridget picked up her collecting kit and climbed into the cab of the machine. By this time she knew her way about the settlements. Without doubt, she told herself, this farm was on the outskirts of civilization, in some valley as yet untouched by the plague. But long before she reached the limits of cultivated land, she could see her destination. It stood out like an oasis in the desert, a little patch of green between a dried-up cornfield and an expanse of stricken wheat.

Bridget brought her heli down on a velvety lawn in front of a small cottage and walked, unbelieving, to the door. A shout from within welcomed her and she entered a clean and simple kitchen-parlor. The owner of the one healthy farm in New Eden was busy in the attached greenhouse.

As she glimpsed the red waistcoat dangling from a hook, Bridget screamed, and

Patch Maguire came through the greenhouse door, a flower pot in one hand, trowel in the other.

"And if it isn't the worm-hunter herself!" he cried. "The czar of the spaceways! The dandelion dictator! And I was wondering how long it would take you to find me out."

"But you—" she gasped. "You couldn't—you wouldn't—aren't supposed to be here!"

"And why not?" he countered. "I'm not like Carrie, she'd rather go on too sick to eat in space than face starvation on this planet. And then the bargain I was offered for this place—you wouldn't believe it! All modern conveniences and they were practically giving it away. Besides, what had I to fear with the best entomologist in five solar systems working for the Department of Agriculture? Sure, you'll be having the problem solved in no time!"

"Don't be giving me that blarney!" Bridget said. "You need only look out the window to know we've solved nothing at all. And you sitting here crowing to yourself! You've been breeding plague-resistant plants, that's what you've done, and keeping them all to yourself! It's a disgrace!"

Patch began to laugh, and the more he laughed, the angrier Bridget got.

"You should be ashamed!" she shouted. "The whole plan-

et dying and you sitting here growing greener all the time!"

"And that's the way it's been," he assured her. "This place was dying on me, too. But only the last few days it's taken a new lease and I'm at my wit's end to explain it."

"You mean you don't *want* to explain it. You're hoarding the secret, and it's a shameful thing!"

"Woman, you're crazy!" he bellowed at her. "I'm no magician to breed a plague-resistant plant overnight. It takes patience and many seasons, and I've only just settled in. I put a few things in the garden and stirred things up in the potting shed. Here, come along—you can see for yourself."

**H**E DREW her through the cottage, pointing out the advantages of the kitchen so near the greenhouse. She walked about the paths and felt of the rich brown soil without a streak of yellow, and finally her eyes fell upon some little low leaves by the back step.

"Patch," she demanded, "what's that?"

"You've the eagle eye, to be sure. What do you suppose it is?"

"It's clover," she said. "Shamrock to you. Surely not the same shamrock! I gave strict orders!"

Before he could stop her, she had tugged a plant up by

the roots and pulled out her pocket microscope as she bent over it.

"Sure, they were so busy worrying about the plague here, they forgot all about the little plague from Earth. And all I wanted was a bit of old Ireland to bring with me. A few little cysts couldn't be that important. And you've got to admit that's what I've got—a green island!"

"The idiots!" screamed Bridget. "The irresponsible, shirking, doublefaced—"

Her hand went up and Patch dodged involuntarily, expecting her to throw shamrock, dirt and all right at his head. But her hand stopped in midair.

"Patch!" Her voice fell to a whisper of incredulity. "I think I've got the answer here in my hand. Don't say a word till I'm sure, but get me soil samples from all over your place—there—and over there—and *hurry!*"

Patch ran back and forth with the soil samples and Bridget looked in her microscope, and everywhere the golden nematode was teeming and nowhere was there a sign of the sinister yellow streaks.

"Don't you see?" Bridget said. "Whatever it is, the nematodes are killing it."

"It will take some experimenting to prove it, but Bridget, my girl, I believe you're right."

“And while they’re proving it, Patch, you and I are going to breed nematodes right here.”

And she had a vision of the golden horde, burrowing from Patch’s land in all directions, bringing back health and sanity to the land. Whatever would Professor Schwarzkopf say? Dear Professor Schwarzkopf! Sometimes the watch-

dogs are too faithful. They keep out everyone—even our friends.

And that was how New Eden was saved. And the nematodes prospered and the Maguires prospered and the shamrocks grew everywhere. And so there was nothing for it but to call the planet New Ireland.

**END**