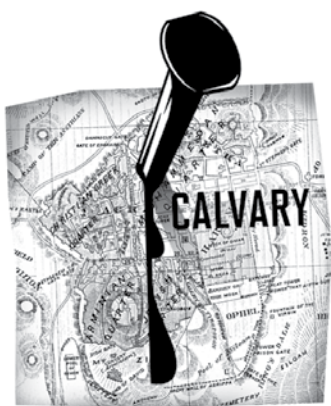


Feathertale man rewrites history, says his version “much better”

Cathal Kelly trailblazes in field of historical journalism. Finds Jesus, watches French defeat, befriends witch, gets hassled by Nazis.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRISTOPHER KAESER

CALVARY, AD 33

“Where’s the press conference?”

“The what?”

“The press conference. The Pontius Pilate press conference. That’s here, right? This is the media hotel, because that’s what the guy with the donkey told me. The Courtyard Jerusalem. That’s you, right? Christ, I’m late. I should be on the list somewhere. Which way is the press conference?”

“I’m sorry, sir. I don’t understand.”

“I need to get a question in just to prove I showed up on time. Can you make sure the mic-holder finds me? Does Barabbas go on before or after? Because if it’s before, I’m fucked.”

“Sir, I’m not sure . . . do you want the stables cleaned before we put your belongings in there? Because that’s three shekels . . .”

“That’s cute. I’ve heard you Middle Eastern types are . . . fine — here’s twenty bucks. Now if you see a goofy-looking guy who says he works for the *Post*, you tell him the whole thing is happening across town, but that you can’t remember where . . . (Sigh) . . . Fine. Screw it. What time’s the crucifixion?”

“Cruci . . .?”

“Three dudes. Nailed to crosses. One of them’s a skinny guy. In a gang. What time is this thing going down?”

“I believe the pretender they call Jesus is already making his way up the hill.”

“And that’ll take, what? A half-hour? An hour? Two hours? How big is the cross? Like, imagine it on me. How long would it take me to get it up a hill?”

“I . . . I’m . . . maybe an hour.”

“Great. Great! Now I’ll have time to eat before this shit-show starts. Can you bring me a club sandwich — no fries, green salad instead — and a Perrier? Just point me toward the closest outlet. I’ve gotta file a plugger. Does this pig need to be here?”

“Sir, I don’t know what . . .”

“Is this a hill or, like, a mountain? Because they told me it’s a hill and I’ve got a lot of equipment to get up there. They want video right away. Like, *right away*. Can you phone the kitchen and get them to put the vinaigrette on the side? And can you call me a cab? A real cab. Not a donkey. You don’t realize how bad those goddamned things smell until you’re on top of one. That’s a lot like life, right? Right? Ha ha! Anyway . . . tell him he can start the meter while I’m eating.”

“Sir, I’m afraid the cooks are already on the hill waiting.”

“Are you saying I’m missing this? Fuck. Fuck! Here, grab this. All you have to remember is take off the lens cap, press auto focus, then press play and *then* record. Try to crop the heads so the top edge of the frame is at their eyebrows. Got that?”

“No.”

“Perfect! They’re holding A1 for me.”

AGINCOURT, AD 1415

“Hi, I should be on the list.”

“The list?”

“The media list. I realize I’m incredibly late. I’m so sorry. But the fucking ferry took, like, forever. And nobody at the office told me this *whole fucking thing* would be in French. Or I’d have said no thanks, call me when . . . sorry. This isn’t your fault. I’m sorry. Maybe you should just point me toward my tent and I’ll figure this out after I’ve decompressed a bit.”

“Sir, the French are approaching and the men are mustering under banners . . .”

“Right, I get it. You’re busy. Just give me my badge and wi-fi code and I can just tap away for an hour or two on a set-up. Then once the battle starts I can figure my own way to the press box. Do you have a seating chart here?”

“I’m not sure I know what . . .”

“Because last time they put me behind a pole. I realize I’m not English and that the English guys get dibs on the good seats, but I am Canadian and our readers — you’re going to have trouble believing this — but our readers *care* about what happens here. And if I can’t see what’s happening because there’s a huge fucking steel girder in front of me, it’s hard for me to figure out what’s . . .”

“I believe the archers are launching their first volley, sir, so you might want to step . . .”

“What? It’s starting? Why are we standing here talking? Just point me . . . no, scratch that — come here and show me where the press box is. Have you got my credentials? Are they checking those things? Please do not tell me there’s a metal detector on the way there or we’ll be here all day.”

“Sir, lo. Lo! The vast French army approaches!”

“This is just stupid. I can’t see anything. Get up on my shoulders and tell me what’s happening. Can you see anything? Here, hold my camera.”

“Sir, I can’t . . . oh, Lord — I’ve been struck. I’m struck!”

“Don’t worry, man. You’ll be fine. Let me take a look at you here and I’ll . . . oh, Jesus, this is not good. This is so bad. Listen, I’m going to help you. Let me just get my tape recorder and . . . one, two, three, check. Sir? Sir? Can you spell your full name for me?”

“Urgh . . .”

“All right, now that you’ve given your life to the English cause . . . God, this is going to save me at work, this one-on-one, thank you . . . now that you’ve given your life, can you tell me what you think this day is going to mean to Anglo-French relations for the next, oh, you know, six hundred years? Try to be expansive.”

“Aagh . . .”

“That’s okay. Don’t worry. I’m going to pad those quotes, if that’s okay with you. Don’t worry. Once I’m done sorting you out, you’re going to sound, like, *smart*. You’re going to be really pleased when you read this.”

SALEM, AD 1692

“Hi, I was emailing with Laura. I should be on the list. I have an interview with the witch. Here, I’ve got her name right . . . aw, sweet Jesus, where did I write that? I swear to you, I miss paper so much. In any case, I should be on the sked somewhere.”

“What is that thing?”

“What thing?”

“That. That . . . thing.”

“It’s a phone. What does it look like?”

“It’s glowing. And shaking.”

“Oh, yeah. Thanks. I’m getting a . . . excuse me . . . Cathal Kelly . . . Rob! . . . Yes, I’m here now. It was a nightmare. A fucking nightmare. But listen, I’m just talking to the PR guy. Let me call you . . . right. Ha ha! Right! Ten minutes . . . sorry about that. How about you . . .”

“Who are you talking to?”

“That was my desk.”

“You were speaking to a desk?”

“That was my . . . listen, I need to get set up somewhere. Is there a media tent or whatever? It would be great if I could do the interview inside the holding cell or the stocks or . . . you know, somewhere with a little *atmosphere* . . . say, she’s not tied up to the stake yet, is she? Because that would be really amazing for me.”

“The heretic is being scourged.”

“Scourged? Wow, that sounds awful. Really, really just . . . so could we go there now? While that’s still happening? I’m not clear on how the scourging actually, you know, works. Maybe you have a note package or some stats on that? Do you . . . never mind. Listen, my shooter won’t be here for a bit, so if we could hold off on the actual lighting of the fire that would be really great and . . . who’s this?”

“This is the bailiff. The rest of the mob will be here soon with the shackles.”

“Wow. You guys are so organized. Usually you’re wandering all over looking for colour and you guys just . . . it’s such a pleasure to work with . . . sir, could I get you to just stand with your cudgel raised over your . . . just try to look menacing . . . right! Perfect! Now hold still for a second and let me get the focus . . . right, cheese!”

“Aaaaaaah!”

“You’re right. I probably don’t need the flash . . . yup, it’s all washed out . . . Okay, camera and settings and . . . okay, there’s no need to get so excited. Just stop waving that goddamned thing around before someone . . . we can get an action shot later once the real shooter gets here . . . and where the hell is he, anyway? These fucking guys are . . .”

“Come with us now.”

“Okay, you’re rushing. I get that. Say, if there’s more than one witch, can you make sure that I get the talker? I need someone who’s going to open up, you know, *expand* on the questions. What am I telling you guys for? You’re obviously pros. You know what I need.”

BERLIN, AD 1945

“Excuse me. Hi, I’ve been next door for an hour waiting for the media briefing to start. So do you have any idea when . . . say, can you tell me what channel the English translation is on? Do you know when the briefing is going to . . . I realize it’s a little chaotic around here, but . . .”

“How did you get in here?”

“There’s a hatch right at the top and the doorman . . . I think he’s dead, so I figured I’d just come down here and get my stuff spread out.”

“You can’t be here now.”

“Don’t play this game with me, man. I’ve got editors crawling up my ass and building a goddamned fire in there. I cannot write another one of these off television. They’ve been pretty goddamned clear about that. Listen, I don’t need any one-on-one time with the man . . . though that would be really great . . . I don’t need him all to myself. I’m happy to share. But he has to come out and talk. He has to say *something*.”

“Der Führer does not need . . .”

“Listen, I’ll be totally honest. We both know the guy is going to kill himself any time now. I’m going to write it like that one way or another — I’m comfortable with that. But if you could just give me a sign when it’s happened, then I’d feel a lot better about writing it that way. Would you feel okay about doing that?”

“Der Führer is not . . .”

“I don’t need to quote you. I can say ‘a source close to,’ or ‘a source familiar with,’ or, you know — blah blah blah. You tell me how you want me to write it and I’ll write it that way.”

“Sir, I’m placing you under . . .”

“Let’s not do this. Seriously. There’s no need for us to dick each other around. You need to get to Argentina and I need to get this story. So let me help you. My fixer can give you a ride wherever you want once he’s dropped me off at the hotel and found me some quote sheets. Can you do that for . . . listen, I think I have a little bit of money. It’s Canadian. And I’ll need a receipt. They’re maniacs for receipts.”

“Get back against the . . .”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Come on, a gun? This is not going to play well in print, you threatening me. This is such a stereotype . . .”

(Bang)

“Seriously? *Seriously!* Are you people fucking insane? Listen, take the camera and get a picture of me. It’s not the best, but it’s going to look great. Take it. Don’t run away, you . . . fuck . . .”

(Dialling)

“Rob? Yeah, it’s Cathal. I’ve just been shot and I can’t find anywhere to plug in. I’m so sick of being sent to places where it’s fucking amateur hour and . . . (Sigh) . . . sorry, I’m just a little pissed at . . . forget it . . . can I dictate something to you? Great, here goes: Adolf Hitler — H-I-T-L-E-R — right, Hitler. Adolf Hitler fatally shot himself yesterday . . . slow enough? Okay. Adolf Hitler fatally shot himself yesterday shortly after sitting down for an exclusive interview with . . .”