

The Spin
Bernadette Smyth

I steered through fantastic streets of boisterous traffic, past tall buildings and glittering shops, and footpaths where lanky streetlamps beamed on shoals of shoppers. I beeped the horn when I saw Mrs Sweeney.

“Can I’ve a lift?” she shouted.

“No problem!” I said.

“The town’s mad today,” she said, getting in.

“Packed!” I said “There’s hundreds in town.”

“*Thousands* more like.”

“*Millions* even -- I’d say there’s easily a million people doing their shopping today.”

Mrs. Sweeney tightened her headscarf.

“You’ve plenty of groceries there,” I said.

“Sure haven’t I ten mouths to feed Petulia?”

“*Ten?* That’s nothing -- I’ve fifteen.”

“*Fifteen?* If I only had *fifteen* children I’d be laughing -- I’ve *twenty* you know.”

“You said ten!”

“No -- ten *at the moment*: John-Joe, Jemmy, Jamesy, Josey, Bridie, Concepta-Mary, Mary-Concepta, Patricia, Ignatious and Alphonsus, are away on their holidays.”

I went back to the steering.

“How’s Paddy’s leg?” I enquired.

“It’s gone.”

“Gone?”

“Chopped off!”

“And how does he manage?”

“He has to hop.”

“That’s desperate!”

“It is Mary-Brigid, especially with twenty children knocking him over.”

“Still, it’s better to be missing a leg than have an extra one. There’s my Johnny and he’s awful bother with the three legs.”

"*Three?* That's nothing -- I've a brother with four."

"*Four legs Mrs Sweeney?*"

"Four -- he has to crawl so he does."

"And has he a tail?"

"No, just..."

Mrs. Sweeney's voice collapsed as she looked towards the house. Mammy was standing at the kitchen window.

"I TOLD YOU TWO ALREADY!" she shouted, "NO PLAYING IN THE CAR -- GET INSIDE NOW!"

Michelle scrambled out of the car, leaving behind Mrs Sweeney and her imaginary groceries, Paddy and Johnny, and the other deformed characters who lived in the space between the car's upholstery and our imaginations.

I ran after her, over the path and into the house where our tea was waiting.