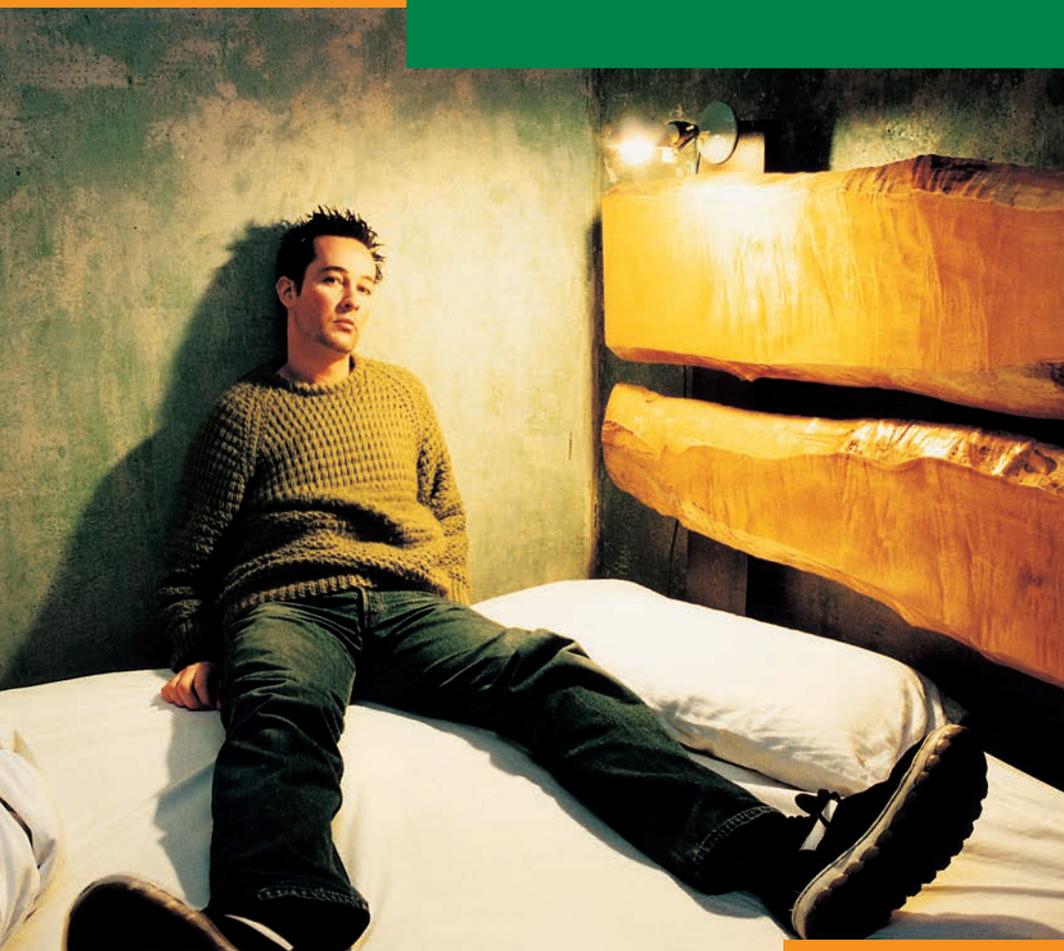


Chasing danny boy

powerful stories of
gay celtic eros



Featuring

Neil Jordan

Oscar® Winner, *The Crying Game*

Jack Fritscher, Winner, Best Fiction

edited by
**mark
henry**

“Everyone fascinated by Ireland and the Irish—so tangled in passion vs. repression—will love this book illuminating aspects of Celtic culture usually left in shadow.”

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Race, Sex and Gender, London

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in the best sense of the of the word.”

— *Washington Post*

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Checkmate Magazine, New York

“‘The Story Knife’...a fine enjoyable piece of work.”

—George Stambolian, Editor,
Men on Men 1, New York

“Wit as warm as hearty stout....

These stories exhibit the delicate heart of Celtic lovers
trapped in the escapades of love.”

—Elle Hills,
Timeless Voices Newspaper, Macon, Georgia



Chasing Danny Boy

Powerful
Stories of
Celtic Eros

Conceived and Edited by
Mark Henry



Palm Drive Publishing
San Francisco California



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For Oscar Wilde
at the centenary of his death
and
for Lady Gregory,
collector of Irish folk stories

“For I’ll be here
in sunshine or in shadow.
O, Danny Boy! O, Danny Boy!
I love you so.”

—“Danny Boy,”
Frederick E. Weatherly

KELVIN BELIELE

Love's Sweet Sweet Song

LAWRENCE W. CLOAKE

Fiachra's Cath

The Checkpoint

Bike Boy: Transporting

BOB CONDRON

Lost and Found

Visions of Sean

JACK FRITSCHER

Chasing Danny Boy

The Story Knife

P-P HARTNETT

Dublin Sunday

Email: Remember When We Weren't Queens?

NEIL JORDAN

Last Rites

PETER PAUL SWEENEY

Flight

MICHAEL WYNNE

Loman

Puppydogs' Tails

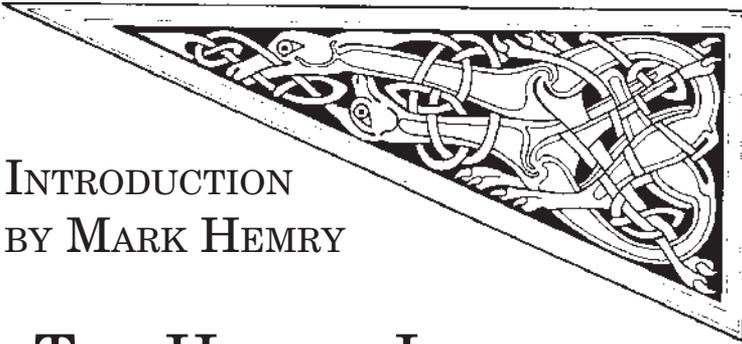
Quare Man, M' Da

Mam and Me: On the Lake

The Lake of Being Human: Dead Sea Fruit

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INTRODUCTION
BY MARK HEMRY

THE HIDDEN LITERATURE OF IRISH CULTURE

On June 23, 1993, the government of the Republic of Ireland finally liberated the apartheid state of homosexuality. That summer night, coincidentally my first night in Dublin, sex between consenting same-gender adults became legal. The draconian laws that had persecuted Oscar Wilde and sent him to jail were abolished. Watching the celebration in one of Dublin's gay pubs, I saw a diversity of men free at last, joyous, celebrating their independence. In that happy brawl, the first thought of uncloseting the till-that-night hidden literature of Ireland became for me a concept finally actualized in this book.

The pursuit of the Irish is older than the invading Vikings and the occupying British. The latest invaders, American tourists, myself included, come to Ireland chasing our roots, chasing Irish culture, chasing Danny Boy. My own Irish-born great-grandfather, after emigrating to the United States, where he lived for twenty years before he decided to marry, chased after Irish eyes, Irish blood, and Irish culture, by chasing back to Ireland to choose between a pair of twin sisters from County Mayo. He chased the black-haired one until the red-headed one caught him and they married and he carried her off to St. Louis, Missouri. The erotic quotient of Irish culture, as well as the eros of emigration from Ireland, both long sentimentalized heterosexually in rhyming love songs, can as of that historic date, June 23, 1993, the "Gay Bloomsday,"

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finally embrace the love that once dare not speak its name.

These seventeen stories by eight authors are the first collection of gay Irish eros to be published in America.

The quest was to create an anthology of emergent fiction focusing on the Irish male experience of same-gender eros throughout Ireland and the world. Authors and storytellers were eligible from any nationality, gender, race, or age. Good writing was the only criterion to tell erotic stories—subliminal eros to overt sex—revealing gay male Irish soul, culture, sexuality, issues, problems, troubles, and triumphs in any time from myth to cyber, any place from coffin ship to Aer Lingus; and any societal setting of local color from tribal clan to soccer scrum to post-modern gay pub. A good story creates specific characters in a specific place at a specific time. Cliches turn inside out. New archetypes emerge. The universally ignored masculine-identified homosexual is ideally the man most needing investigation, but that still allows stories of sissies, queens, and drag. Perhaps one, in fact, surely needs to know a multitude of long suppressed gay stories to know how the Irish really saved civilization. The final criterion was that erotica should appeal to the intellect and the emotions as much as to the naked Id.

Gay writing, at heart, is the hidden literature of Irish culture.

The storytellers in this book live in Ireland, England, Germany, and the United States.

In the story giving title to this collection, “Chasing Danny Boy,” San Francisco writer Jack Fritscher, whose mother is Irish, reaches back into Celtic myth in his modernizing the classic old story of Dermid and Grania. His backstory detailing Dermid’s adventures in Dublin in the last summer of the twentieth century references the ancient Irish folklore collected by Lady Augusta Gregory in the late-nineteenth century. Perhaps, if Lady Gregory were alive today, she’d be collecting this update of an ancient Irish folktale that investigates the male psychology of the young hunter Dermid before he meets Grania and before he receives his love spot—his erotic sex appeal—that makes him the most desirable man in the world to all who see him.

In addition to insight on why some young Irish men emigrate, the title story also furnishes a keen, comic, whiplash

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satire of Irish-American tourists traipsing about Ireland on buses, looking for their roots, in search of their own “inner Danny Boy.” Of course, women, as well as men, chase Danny Boy, because the Irish race itself has been hit with a love spot gorgeous enough to give any tribe a bit of justifiable vanity. One breederish Brigid lectures the sexually ambiguous Dermid that wasting Irish blood is a crime against the Irish nature. Their mission is to head out from Ireland to populate the world. Driven by irony and eros, this story races through Dublin to a climax on the last summer solstice of the last June 20th of the twentieth century.

Incidentally, as editor, respecting the essential storyteller, I treated the texts the way a stage or film director might read a script, keeping the writer front and center, while keeping the reader absolutely centered, in that editing was—beyond consistency of format—a simple matter of re-ordering words in a sentence, or a sentence in a paragraph, or a piece of dialog in a line of dramatic exchange, all the time merely pressurizing the absolutely basic story, characters, dialog, drama, and psychology through the standard tools of the editor who cares for exhibiting the core kernel of universality in each story sequence’s specific time, place, person, action, and dialogue. Short glossaries quickly explain readers’ multi-cultural questions of geography, culture, and language.

As in Peter Paul Sweeney’s story, “Flight,” which occurs in Los Angeles International Airport, most of these stories are journey fables told as hunting stories wherein the chase is the journey, where desire pursues love, where the object of desire most likely lives in an uncharted part of the forest, the town, the road, where maybe the journey takes the hunter out of bounds, beyond the pale, searching deep into the present state of love to find the archetype of the “true past of manhood” too long so denied that action must be taken, taboos broken, new totems hoisted. In a Celtic culture driven by warriors and monks, the Irish with the emigrant gene seem most likely to be carriers of the DNA of homomale sexuality. For that reason, in Sweeney’s crisp story of a confession heard late on an autumn night in Cork, flight is sometimes survival; other times, displacement of the heart. The hunters in these stories are chasers, sooner or later, and they take no prisoners.

In the story by Bob Condrón, “Lost and Found,” for

instance, the straight man chases the gay man until the straight man is caught. Again the old axiom of labels pertains: a man can have heterosexual sex a thousand times with girls named Zoe, but one time of homosexual sex shifts his shape and his reputation forever. In parallel to the Irish legalization, the Catholic Church itself finally admits that the state of being homosexual is not a sin, because it's a thing a man cannot repent, because one cannot, despite doctrines of original sin, logically repent one's own nature, and by extension the actions that proceed from one's essential being. Homosexuality is a gift of God, a vocation, an internal calling often announced kindly by another homosexual or pointed out cruelly by straight bullies or frightened parents. Accepting this call to character change is central to the story, "Lost and Found," which succeeds as filmic storytelling in author Condrón's talent for comic action, swift dialog, and poetic sex. Furthermore, Irish eros has little of the typical hardness of American porno, because carnal expression is still somewhat hesitant, innocent, and fresh. In Condrón's "Visions of Sean," the boys genuinely try to find themselves by trying to be someone else, until identity—personal and sexual—teaches them to be true to their real natures.

To give this collection depth as well as breadth, most of the authors, where possible, are represented by two stories. Dublin's Michael Wynne actually authored five incredibly subtle stories of the deep feeling and homoerotic anxiety of contemporary gay Irish psychology.

In what can be called his four or five "Abbeyview Stories," Michael Wynne supports a positive vision of masculine-identified man-to-man love. In the *pas de deux* of the storyteller and Duck in "Puppydogs' Tails," Wynne's gift for language fills in the angles of sex with the colors of poetry, and humor, with sensitivity that is romantic, a bit psychedelic, and very modern. Sex and politics mix, or don't mix, in school and beyond school when rebel music style becomes ideology. Parental guidance ends up deadly when a gun becomes the ultimate lover to the archetypal rebel who develops a conspicuously masculinised version of himself. Wynne writes an erotic poetry of "spatulate fingers," "carnal fecal whiff," and "boys sexy in a highly skittable way." He conjures dramatic development on the repetition of the words *determined* and *dead* in the phrases "determined

father and dead mother.” Born and raised in the rural West of Ireland, Michael Wynne embodies a type of legendary oral tradition that accounts for his inherent flair for writing the spoken word. His amazing narrative voice carries his stories’ dramatic arcs, characters, and dialog about fathers in “Quare Man, M’ Da,” about mothers in “Me and Mam: On the Lake,” about families in “The Lake of Being Human: Dead Sea Fruit,” and about young lovers in “Loman.”

His sardonic story, “Quare Man, M’ Da,” makes bitterly ironic the role of religion in life as actually lived, because caste and class and commandments themselves cannot stop the flow of nature in men who are their father’s sons. In the drawling, easy vernacular of “Me and Mam: On the Lake,” a quite lovely confessional tale reveals that while the family name comes down from the father, sometimes the family story comes down through the mother, and the telling comes only after a mutual truce directed by the gay son. The style is a brilliant use of designed dialect that is easy to read and conveys local color. Wynne offers cutting insight into the kind of sensitive boy who has no idea he’s gay, or that the feelings normal to him are gay, until told so—outed, taunted—by straight bullies who see his difference and exploit it. The direct pairing of the hot-tempered feelings of the mother and son bonding as they row across the surface of the lake, gliding across the deep subconscious from which they both pull the submerged secrets of their lives, integrates like a film edit into another Wynne story, “The Lake of Being Human: Dead Sea Fruit.”

This second water-borne story, “The Lake of Being Human,” is a psychological tale of an adolescent boy coming to grips with not only his own sexual identity but also with his mother’s. In the undertow of the plot, the boy’s distant father appears and recedes in a story of male potency and impotency symbolized by the Tarot-like reality of “The Drowned Man” floating—like the corpse of another father—in the lake where the boys swim. Sorchá, as the artist and the boy’s mother’s lover, is also the boy’s psychic mentor into art, sex, and the lake of being human. The psychology of the story is spun in terms of intuition, sexuality, and magic that sets up the existential question: if events can be foreseen, then what is the nature of free will? Can a father leave his child, a husband leave his wife, a mother abort a child, or a daughter desert a father? Is

any one of them responsible for their actions? Or do characters swim predestined through the lake of their lives, at various depths, or out of their depth, so far out that they drown.

Michael Wynne layers his narratives with intermixing stories that at first seem episodic, but, in fact, are totally connected in the free-floating psyche of the young boy who is the storyteller of the summer when they all fed each other chunks of their lives, their “dead sea histories,” wondering about the predestination of sexuality.

Just as Neil Jordan conjures up “the quality of the raised aura of green light” in “Last Rites,” Michael Wynne in “Loman” takes on the high June twilight, the mist over Galway Bay, and the moon rising as two friends travel the journey of the Pride Parade to step out of ordinariness into a kiss that bonds the sexual predestination they’ve felt towards one another since infancy. A certain symbolism, specifically in circumcision, drives this story as well as the story, “Dublin Sunday.”

In the suffocating burial cairn of “Dublin Sunday,” P-P Hartnett tells a fairy story as haunted and weird as any ancient myth from the heath. His shape-shifting fiction compares to Tennessee Williams’ gay short stories in narrative, character development, poetic sense, and abject feeling of loss. Hartnett’s tale is as erotically romantic as Tennessee’s physical-and-psyche mutilation story, “One Arm,” yet he is as brutally realistic as if Foucault directed at Falcon Video studios in Los Angeles. Claustrophobia confronts desire when the tired old queer, Paud, meets Keith, the lad in apartment #8A. Hartnett integrates an astonishing range of *blue* into his jazz riff on the ritual “blues” party-boys universally feel late on Sunday when the weekend crashes down toward Monday. Hartnett’s cautionary fairy tale probes into the stereotype of old queens to stick pins—quite literally—in the archetype of seniority: no person needs to grow into the cliché of himself.

Is it possible that a little onanism leads, if not to self-actualization, then at least to survival of the ego’s identity for one more day? Perhaps, and perhaps not, in Neil Jordan’s filmically impressionistic “Last Rites” where the transformative magic of autosexuality seems to drown in the June heat. (Is it the summer solstice that makes June such an important month in Celtic storytelling?) Jordan swims laps in the existential Irish Sea. Water imagery of erotic birth and sexual

baptism abounds: the working-man's public bath becomes the sea, the rain, the "green rising mist," the transcendent "raised aura of the green [Irish] light." Jordan's adolescent, blue-eyed protagonist sinks, hard-on in "the self-immersed orgy of driving water," like stone, hardened by his cement work in England. Propelled by a "hidden purpose," this unnamed "Danny Boy," an immigrant out of Dublin, walks through this tale of anonymity "slowly, stiffly" because of the "unnatural straightness of his back," because of "anticipation he never questioned fully," because of "the secret thread of his week's existence emerging," because of sexual desire closeted and erotic personhood yet unidentified.

Neil Jordan's "Danny Boy" is innocent literary cousin to the flaming Anthony Burns who finds ecstatic love and death at the baths in the short story, "Desire and the Black Masseur," by Tennessee Williams, who, like Jordan, authored poetic fiction, drama, and screenplays. Jordan's "hard-biceped" boy, "black hair like a skull cap," enters his closet, his confessional, his coffin when he strips in his ritual chamber, a solo shower-stall where each anonymous man, aware of every other anonymous man—like Everyman caught in the curving infinity between two mirrors—waits in line for the next of the seventeen cubicles. The unidentified adolescent, readying himself to masturbate himself into identity, reflects his self in search of his self: first, diversely, in the outcast otherness of immigrant blacks in the streets; second, culturally, in the resentment of overheard, isolated Irish voices in the bath; and third, literally, in the steamed mirror of his shower. This Danny Boy is no Narcissus, but this Danny Boy is chasing himself. His reflected body, measuring pleasure versus pain, life versus death, cuming versus not-cuming, is all that is real to him, precisely because he is so horny, adolescent, and alone. Adolescence shifts the shape of the body on whose physicality boys invoke the erotic magic that makes their sex rise.

While the twenty-something Neil Jordan, himself working as a labourer in London, wrote "Last Rites," he was scripting in intimate detail a nude erotic sequence in a screenplay: narrative, characters, flashbacks, voice-overs, multiple points of view imagined in italics, editing shot-by-shot insert cuts (blood and semen mixing with water) that punctuate the "ultimate solitude of the boxed, sealed figure." As in the fast edit

of the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, the quick verbal cuts of the shower scene in "Last Rites" pierce with sensual detail: the flap of hot plastic shower-curtain against wet skin, poppies of blood on the summer sand, stalactites of water dripping from each finger tip. When the boy orgasms, Jordan match-cuts elegantly to a cinematic close-shot of lemon-soft shampoo squeezing out in a pop into the brown hands of a young Trinidadian man in the next shower. The object of this young Irish lad's double-taboo affection is intimated in his inter-racial curiosity about other colors, same gender.

At the end, ambiguity is the wonder of any adolescent's tale. The texture of local color comes from the writer's experience, but the psychology of the character is a created fiction. Fiction is not autobiography. The storyteller, spinning a character's erotic consciousness so subjectively, cannot be forced to separate what really happens from what the character imagines happens in his masturbatory fantasy of ego identity. ("I'll kill myself and then see what they do!") As psychological dramatist, Jordan knows the cliché of suicide is rarely a satisfactory resolution in the coming-out genre. He demonstrated for all time that he is a trickster-storyteller at the pivotal moment of erotic identity revelation in his film, *The Crying Game*. He spins the reader, from appearance to reality, with the sheer weight of sensual detail which grounds the "Last Rites" masturbatory fantasy on the first page, in reality, as a "solipsistic victory," and reveals that *le petite morte* is just the wonderful *grand mal* seizure of eros.

Neil Jordan's not-yet-out teenager is resentful, on the one hand, of "lipstick girls" whose "blonde pubes" cannot keep him straight. He is "bored to death," on the other hand, with the social pressure to be straight—itself more boring and brutal than the work week. He can be played—a surviving archetype—as alternate younger version of the older men in Hartnett's rather horrific "Dublin Sunday" and in "The Story Knife," a second tale by Jack Fritscher. The protagonists of both these narratives are gay men in their fifties, each peddling as fast as he can not to star in *Death in Venice*. Hartnett's existentialism vies with Fritscher's romanticism which takes a positive spin on Irish-American Catholicism, priests, Aids, and sex. Technology arms both the warrior-heroes. One sets on his journey with a video player; the other sets out on his

hunt with a video camera. The way Hartnett works “blues,” Fritscher works words, objects, and sexual psychology around the word “crystal.” Both writers, as much as Michael Wynne, love language as much as Neil Jordan loves “directing” his story.

As a voice speaking, P-P Hartnett has the gift of a stand-up comedy performance artist in his oratorio: “E-Mail: Remember When We Weren’t Queens?” Hartnett’s emigrant Rory cannot escape orbit around Planet Ireland. (If you catch Danny Boy, then what are you going to do?) Avoiding the cliché that all Irish writing relates to James Joyce, one can fantasize in all the inventive styles in *Ulysses* that Joyce in a way anticipated the E-mail style which itself is often so freely associative. If form follows function, then E-mail, with its streaming stream-of-consciousness content instant on the worldwide web, replaces telephone calls which have replaced the letter. For Irish people in a world diaspora, in this way, the delivery of the Irish gift for language changes.

Lawrence W. Cloake is a Dublin writer of three stories in this collection: the ancient Irish setting of “Fiachra’s Cath,” the updated myth of “Bike Boy: Transporting,” and the contemporary sex-politics of “Checkpoint.” As true-toned a popular culture tale as any Celtic myth gathered by Lady Gregory into her canon, “Fiachra’s Cath” peeks beneath the action-adventure genre that usually censors the sexuality of most old stories of warriors defending the rath (ringed fort) where they live. Lawrence Cloake writes in the present tense which reads as crisply as the description introducing the camera directions and dialog of a film script. Subtly, tribal life folds back and Fiachra, as a young man recognized as different in the rath, chases no man who does not chase him first. Bravery among men opens up the rubric of fertility rites to include love and comfort between warriors in a way that complements the mythic story, “The Lad of the Skins,” collected by Lady Gregory. Fiachra, chased and penetrated by an enemy warrior, gives new, internal meaning to “shape shifting” as he shapes his anal ring to accommodate the hardening, shifting shape of his enemy. Finally, in the protective shape of male birds, Fiachra finds protection: much the same as in the legend of Finn and the Lad of the Skins, who did not return to live with his wife, instead leaving to live with his wife’s father, Manannan.

In the great tradition of Irish stories of enchantments and

changelings, of ghosts and horror on the fringes of the Other World of Myth, Cloake's "Bike Boy: Transporting" proves the age-old axiom that "what you are looking for is looking for you." Eventually, one becomes—shifts shape to—what one is looking for as an individual person and as part of a group. The enchantment of the changeling in "Bike Boy" parallels the personal psychological journey of coming-out from the straight to the gay. Bike Boy feels himself transforming, and sees himself actually changing in the mirrors of the Dublin shop windows he roars past late at night when all the spirits and fairies come out to play. Bike Boy spends every night chasing the gang, the clan, the other bike boys. This story is a wonderful sexual pun on the mechanics of sex. Lawrence W. Cloake gives a short prologue to his storytelling in the first person, and then for the body of the story, switches smoothly to the third person, using an abrupt stream-of-consciousness interior monolog that keeps the character of Bike Boy focused extremely tight into the exact moment of what he is feeling, thinking, and experiencing. Bike Boy finds personality in community. His mentor, rising from the fog, references Finn MacCool, who in Irish legend is the leader of the ancient warriors and hunters, the Fianna.

Cloake's briefest story carries the biggest punch. His bike courier, Tony, stalled in a British checkpoint on the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in the south, is a protagonist on a journey. Distracted by sexual heat for young British soldiers, Tony is caught at a dramatic kind of Romeo-Juliet impasse: will the sexual message be delivered or not? Cloake interestingly works the attraction-repulsion of heterosexuality-homosexuality as well as British-Irish politics. Will love's message, or sex's message, cross through the star-crossed borders? Storytelling in the immediacy of the present tense heightens the crackle of the fireplace, the glow of the lamp, the roar of the bike, the sheen on the guns, the lust in the lonely night.

American author, Kelvin Beliele, also tracks a pair of erotic hunters in "Love's Sweet Sweet Song," a conscious gesture toward "forbidden" Joyce. In this story of a summer afternoon in Dublin, two young men, (one a leatherman, the other a young drag queen), cruising along the bank of the Liffey, override all the disguises, the masks, and roles, the switching trickster

identities, the politics and the religion that so confuse their chase and infiltrate their consciousness. By trying to define the undefined desires of men together they make themselves human to each other so that love diversifying itself, always new and fresh and helixed beyond explanation, is possible. The negotiated peace talk between the lovers in this story brings up the beginning success of folding sexual liberation into Irish liberation.

For gay people in Ireland, the twenty-first century began on June 23, 1993, the night Irish storytelling came out of the closet and into the world.



Puppydogs' Tails

Place: Ireland, Abbeyview Academy

Time: four years ago

Characters: Duck, a student

The Storyteller

Glossary:

Junior Cert: high-school Junior Certificate

Sinn Fein: a political organization, founded 1905, advocating Irish national independence and complete separation from Great Britain. Pronounced “Shin Fayn”

Antrim: one of six counties in the province of Northern Ireland partitioned from the Republic of Ireland in the south in 1921. Originally, part of Ulster, one of four traditional Irish kingdoms. Antrim is famous for its rugged coastline. Belfast, where *Titanic* was built, is the capital.

MICHAEL WYNNE

PUPPYDOGS' TAILS

Duck smelled a certain way some students sniffed after with sneers, but to me his musk was one of the most powerfully sexual attractions about him as he walked through the crowded corridors of Abbeyview Academy. I admired his rebel aura of recklessness. I liked his rough don't-give-a-shit look. His regulation drainpipes, badly torn, inked with graffiti, rode his legs and arse tight on him as a rind. In the proper halls, I looked for his padded red biker's jacket with the psychedelic names of bands spelled out with industrial marker across the upper back. He had wide spatulate fingers embrowned by the burning butts of the countless Majors he smoked during breaks. His nails were lined with grit. His arrogant gift was a lazy right eye that twitched cordially seeing over, above, around, and through the boys of Abbeyview.

During fourth year, Duck's mother died suddenly. Death lifted him out from our adolescent world, isolated him on a plane at once adult and pathetic, gave him a forlorn mystique. He sat opposite me in history class, hunched ferally under the crinkled map of Ireland that he and his kind had dented with pea shots and spit wads. Often, as he passed by me to his seat during his frequent late-comings, I caught a carnal fecal whiff that set me up imagining sucking his thick, skid-marked fingers back in some bog.

I can't completely remember Duck's first name, only that it was something that seemed exaggeratedly Gaelic and outside the pale of our Abbeyview alphabetical list of Christian names of innumerable John's, Patrick's, and Paul's. His determined father and dead mother called him something like "Garbhan,"

or “Cein,” an odd name anyhow lost in the files of officialdom and replaced by the nickname “Duck,” conferred on him in his first term as a chaw, as the freshers at Abbeyview were disdainfully called. Did the caricature signify that some older boys’ eyes were caught by the prominence of his arse as definitely as mine had. Surely for most boys, the dismissive “Duck” was short-hand ridicule that Garbhan’s bulky butt somehow aligned his owner’s walk somewhere between a strut and a waddle. Once tagged “Duck,” he sometimes aggressively exaggerated his walk comically, as if to say kiss my arse, becoming all the more tempting.

Due to low grades and low esteem, I’d stayed back when I should have been going on to do my final year at Abbeyview. That’s how I got mixed in with Duck and his bunch. Of course, I’d been noticing him before we ended up in the same year, but not for very long. The likely reason for this was that he only really filled out, took on his more manly dimensions since sitting the Junior Cert, returning to Abbeyview after the summer a newer, conspicuously masculinised version of himself. His bigger body made his substantial arse seem properly proportionate for the first time.

Duck had an unexpected penchant for Irish history, a passionately opinionated interest that often brought him to loggerheads with our usually congenial teacher. The main-spring of this interest came to light after I’d had him, had him with surprising ease and surprising thoroughness, toward the end of the school year. In fact, it wasn’t until that day we fucked that we finally got around to properly speaking to one another, beyond random comparisons of bands we liked. It was Sports Day, a concept that appealed to neither of us, but we both turned up, mutually offering the reason that there was no harm in rooting for our more athletic peers, but perhaps really propelled by the fantasy of wanking under cover of the outdoor squash alley while eyeballing all that exposed flesh and all those well-filled shorts on the playing field.

I was particularly keen to see another boy, Loftus (whose first name also escapes me), minimally rigged out. Loftus was a sometime sidekick to Duck and even more studly. He had an arrogantly out-size chin he had to shave twice every day, and muscular arms that swaggered with animal defiance as he carried himself from study hall to pitch. Sexy he was, yes,

but in a highly skittable way. Fantasies of him evaporated entirely when Duck, sidling up to me at the edge of the all-weather field, actually made the side-mouthed suggestion that we share a joint up in the old bell tower.

There, we smoked the spliff on our hunkers at the edge of a charred mattress. The sounds of our more athletic fellow-students, locked in hunkering contest below, drifted up through the ancient slats of the bell tower. Obscene and satanic messages scrawled on the tower walls around us were hieroglyphs from Abbeyview's mini-underworld of gothic boarders acting out mock-Black rites, Ouija readings, and jerk circles. The floor was littered with dead lighters, half-burnt matchsticks, cigarette butts, stained and tattered tissue paper, and a condom.

We didn't talk much as we passed the joint. Duck wore headphones which he took on and off to offer me samples of his CD. For the most part, I feigned interest, even in his favourite music track, which he insisted I listen to three times on his personal stereo. "Puppydogs' Tails" it was called; it had a sly riff and a piston beat pumping a hard, dirty, oily sound under screaming lyrics celebrating, as far as I could make out, gender confusion and sexual insatiability.

His headphones squeezed my ears. His music filled my head. His smell turned me on. His look made me excited watching him sit stoned, in his scuffed jacket, cross-legged and cross-armed, his eyes closed, head gently rocking to some internal rhythm. From where I sat, I could see a rip in the seam at his crotch, and toward the fade-out of "Puppydogs' Tails," I handed him back his headphones and impulsively dared paw ever so deftly across his thighs to slip my fingers into his torn jeans, shoving my hand into the underside of his briefs and feeling around the plump globes of his balls.

Duck made no resistance. In fact, he rose to the occasion, headphones on, wordlessly, only his lazy right eye looking at me, humping himself against my touch till he was rock-hard, cleverly locking his thighs about my hand so I could not pull out, and moving us connected as one over on to the mattress where he flopped on his back expecting frontal work; but as much as I wanted his penis, I wanted, maybe more, to see the hefty spheres of his famous Duck's arse exposed. Jerking down his trousers, I turned him over, flat on his belly, and studied the full pair of his downy-white cheeks, ran my free hand

over them, reading their surface softness single-ply over the underlying tough muscle. Slowly I rubbed my face against his twin scoops as he lay with his face on his forearms, his breath shooting shallow on his thick wrists.

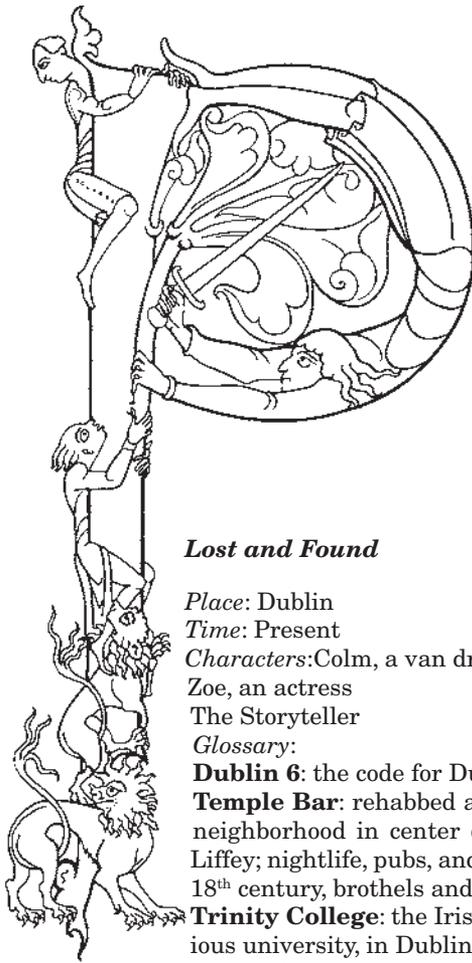
The deep tokes of the joint made me incredibly horny. I jimmied two fingers deep into the trench of his tight butt-crack, then three, prying, scooping, four fingers at a time, smelling his famous smell, and pulling apart the round ducky-duck cheeks, burrowing my face so deep in Duck I could taste the wild Garbhan rardered up inside him. My adoring tongue tasted his unwashedness, relishing the abandon of burying myself freely in his natural wasteland of furzy maleness. Tasting Garbhan, I, for the first time, realized my primal desire for the essence of men.

Working down from his hole, I flat-tongued his sweaty, slung balls. To headphone music only he could hear, he rified and beat and moaned, bucking his butt up eager against my lapping. He pushed his dirty body open to new sensations, intimacies unexplored, and rebellions possibly barely dared conceived of by him sitting on his ducky arse at Abbeyview. I licked him all the more thoroughly, from slow to frenzy, working him like the lashing tracks on one of his headbanger CDs, making him moan all the louder, in the surprise pleasure of tongue and the wild desire of fingers. I squeezed the head of my engorged dick against his dirt-streaked Doc to hold off from my own cuming. He rose up on his knees and backed up doggy-style over my face. He came in my mouth, the first time I let this happen with anyone. I wanted first seed to happen with him. I stuffed my face with his cock as soon as I saw his spit-wet bollocks contract. Tasting before swallowing, I erupted also, and quickly withdrew from underneath him to plant one last stolen kiss on his hoisted heath-brown asshole.

I don't remember much about what we spoke of afterwards, though I know he mentioned in passing his dead mother, and alluded with veiled pride to the Republican links he owed to his determined father, of whom I had vaguely heard, a prominent member of Sinn Fein. He planned to follow his father's footsteps. Thinking he was inflating his personal ego upon my purely sexual curiosity, I changed the subject from him to his CDs, but he lost interest, and abruptly he pulled up his jeans, and together we climbed down the old bell tower,

and sat silently together watching the boys, led by Loftus, on the playing field, as if I weren't sitting beside him with the taste of him ripe in my face.

Four years later, well up across the northern border, deep in Antrim, along a lonely coast road near the Glenariff Forest, Duck was shot at point-blank range in the head by the ex-army officer who, quicker at self-defense, had himself been chosen as Garbhan's target for his initiation into the games of the sectarian world. An old Abbeyview school-class photograph, taken in the grounds during our last year, with the bell-tower prominent above, shows Duck standing in the middle row, his thick thumbs looped at his hips, his eyes, squeezed together, his lazy right eye determined, straining beyond the camera, toward the sun and the seemingly limitless future. He was twenty-two.



Lost and Found

Place: Dublin

Time: Present

Characters: Colm, a van driver

Zoe, an actress

The Storyteller

Glossary:

Dublin 6: the code for Dublin City Centre

Temple Bar: rehabbed arts, music, and bohemian neighborhood in center of Dublin, near the river Liffey; nightlife, pubs, and the Irish Film Centre. In 18th century, brothels and craftspeople

Trinity College: the Irish Republic's most prestigious university, in Dublin near Temple Bar

Quay: pronounced "key"; the roads alongside the river Liffey which flows through Dublin with tide coming and going from the Irish Sea to the east.

O'Connell Street: Dublin's main north-south route and most busy street; named for Daniel O'Connell, the liberator in pursuit of Catholic emancipation. Site of the General Post Office which in the 1916 Easter Rising was held by Irish patriots proclaiming the Irish Republic before being shelled by the British. Fourteen Irish rebels, including James Connolly (not to be confused with Daniel O'Connell) were caught and shot, and have become venerated as martyrs for Irish independence.

O'Connell Street Bridge: built in 1790, this bridge is a symbol of the ground-zero heart of Dublin. *The Irish Times* internet site focuses a camera on this bridge to post live images of Dublin worldwide.

trainers: shoes, particularly athletic shoes

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[HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK](#)

BOB CONDRON

LOST AND FOUND

A pint of Guinness in each hand, Colm squeezed through the crush of bodies and wove his way from the bar. Without spilling a drop, he maneuvered his short, stocky physique around animated groups of drunken revelers and between the narrowest gaps of crowd and chairs before finally arriving at our table none the worse for wear.

He had big hands. I noticed how his thick fingers gripped the pint glass he held out towards me whilst taking a gulp from his own. He sat down on the bench beside me, lowering his glass into his lap, and revealing a foamy moustache left by the head of his pint. His soft, pink tongue lapped the residue from his top lip. He grinned. I felt compelled to turn away. The gesture somehow struck me as more intimate than he intended.

The pub was a riot of noise. Cigarette smoke streaked the air thicker than the onset of dense fog. Mackey's Bar was a commercial success at recreating in Dublin the ambience of the traditional Irish pub. Nothing new in that. The theme surely went down a treat with tourists, but Dublin offered us natives way more and I wondered why Colm had asked to meet me at Mackey's. It wasn't one of my regular haunts. In fact, the last time I'd been there was the first time I'd met him.

*

The night in question was a Saturday night some ten days before. Then there had been a whole gang of us in Mackey's as part of a group celebration. Friends from university had debuted in workshop a new play three of them had written, a musical, actually, about Oscar Wilde's wife and his mother

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titled, *Constance and Speranza*. At the end of its interesting but brief run, I got an invite to the festivities. Colm, whose theatre experience was limited to delivering a heavy piece of scenery by truck one afternoon early on in rehearsals, had got an invite too. Zoe invited him.

Zoe is a cartoon actress. That seems to say it all, but maybe not. She doesn't act in cartoons, she simply behaves like a cartoon. Larger than life, she never stops performing. She's delightful and infuriating. Glamorous and amusing. She will be whatever it takes to remain the center of attention. When it comes to men, her own attention span is strictly limited. She likes them blue-collar, rough, and ready. Colm was clearly her type and, therefore, had my sympathy.

Before we ever spoke, I felt drawn to him. Protective of him. Despite his athletic muscularity, he was no psychic match for Zoe. The way he kept looking around the pub, without really looking at all, gave me the distinct impression that he was out of his depth. Still, I didn't rush to be his savior. On the contrary, I remember holding back, liking watching him drowning, all too beautiful and, therefore, too dangerous. Blue-black hair cropped medium short. Luxuriant eyelashes. Heavy-lidded, liquid brown eyes. A Turkish father and Irish mother leaving him with the body of a young bull, and a second name that I found unpronounceable.

Now and then, he'd relax sufficiently to bare brilliant white teeth in a smile that would charm the pants off a saint. Of one thing I was certain, the last thing I needed was to play the martyr to another tender-hearted straight man. As if I needed reminding, Zoe, having caught me looking in his direction, placed a hand on my shoulder and lent into my ear, "Don't even think about it!" She talked through teeth clenched in a smile like a ventriloquist.

So I didn't think about it. I partied, pub-paddling in a slow drift toward where Colm, turning around, might discover me. I was standing by the bar when he appeared at my shoulder. He introduced himself with a firm handshake. Pleasantries. A look. Then he caught me unawares.

"Yer gay, aren't yeh?" he asked. His broad Dublin accent collided with his Mediterranean good looks.

I was more startled he asked than that he knew. "How did yeh know?" I stood solid, not wobbling mentally too much at

the question, which was not exactly an opening line between lads at Mackey's, and wondering between *does-it-show* and *what's-it-to-yeh?*

"I'm straight-forward."

"Brilliant. I'm gay. Yer straight...forward."

I checked his guard and he started to backtrack, "I wouldn't have known, only Zoe said..."

"Yeah, well, Zoe spoke the truth for once." I grinned to improve on his discomfort, and then to let him see how some questions feel shoved up his arse, I said, "And yeh?"

"Eh?" Like he was suddenly struck deaf, Colm cupped his ear over the surge of noise from the bar. Was he waiting a beat? Had I struck a chord?

I lent towards him, "Are yeh?"

"What?"

"Straight-forward, straight," I shouted, "or are yeh gay?" Fulfil the good-looking ones' biggest worry: nothing's more crazy-making for a straight man than everyone figuring he's gay, because he's in good shape, or well-dressed, or clever.

Colm was stung. His eyes blinked rapidly like a court witness hesitating between lies over truth. "I don't know." Bingo! "Sometimes, I think...." He focused. He shook his head. "I don't want to talk about it."

"Neither do I," I lied.

"What?"

His innocence, his face, his body, a thousand years of dark Turkish muscle mixed with a thousand years of red Irish blood, erected my...sudden surge of empathy. "If yeh ever do want to talk about whatever yeh don't want to talk about, yeh can talk to me. Okay?"

He turned his dark eyes to meet mine. I had dared speak the oldest seduction-of-virgins line in the world: "Yeh can talk to me." Still, I felt like a rabbit caught and trapped in the dazzle of his headlights. So I smiled implying I had special powers of understanding, harmless to straight men, which was no lie. "Yeh can." I smiled again. "Just talk."

"Thanks," Colm said. He may have been hesitant, but he wasn't weak at all.

Immediately the music and smoke sucked up our secrets and lies. Colm drained his pint and came up all animated and full of banter. Public houses exist to keep private conversations

from becoming theatrical scenes, which is something I learned from Zoe, who believed the opposite. She was always on the prowl for a new venue, bumping her pert little tits right into Colm and me, announcing we all must run on to the latest hip and trendy club, and within minutes several of our theatre party exited through the double doors led by Zoe divinely ready to exhibit us all in the traveling performance-art show starring her.

In the sweep to the exit, pints being emptied on the fly, Colm disappeared from my side in the crowd of drinkers standing in the pub like immovable stone pillars oblivious to our leaving. Against the flow of incoming patrons, I found him waiting for me by the door. Zoe had her arm around him. Colm threw his arm around me and the three of us, cruising along the cobbles in the usual clan of the eight or so of our crowd, set off on the short walk to clubland.

In the streets of Temple Bar, Zoe was all over Colm like a chronic rash, marking her territory with lip-gloss kisses that seemed more for my benefit than for his. Within two blocks, she was distracted by another member of her entourage, who had the pockets of a pharmacist, and, disengaging herself from Colm's arm, slid away.

Stuffing my hands deep in my jeans, I walked silently on beside him.

He broke the silence, not once wiping off Zoe's kisses. "Yeh seem sad," he said.

"Do I?"

He touched my shoulder. "I don't want yeh to be sad."

We both stopped walking.

"Do yeh like me?" My question seemed inappropriate, pathetic even, as it escaped my lips.

His smile was all the more brilliant for my acting so heart-rending human, except I wasn't acting playing-Zoe-playing-a-part, playing coy to get laid.

"Wha"? Yeh mean sexually?"

"No. I mean *me*. As I am. Do yeh like me?"

"Course, I do." His arm slipped around me once again.

Zoe appeared, wedging her divine presence between us, *I'll return him*, she said, as if Colm were her own private Turkish wrestler, and dragged him on ahead, her hand on his buttocks, promising over her shoulder *absolutely, darling, I'm*

only borrowing him to screw the lid off a jar, whilst I hung back. It was only once I got into the club I realized they would never arrive. They had, the pair of them, better things to do.

*

I turned to look at Colm. Same pub. Minus Zoe. Ten nights later. His pint was two-thirds empty whilst mine was barely touched.

“So, why the phone call?”

“Yeh said if I needed to talk...”

“Why here? We can’t very well talk in here.”

“Let’s go outside then.” He quickly finished his drink. I pushed mine aside.

Outside, the night over Dublin glowing orange with street lights, I looked up to the heavens but couldn’t see the moon, not above, nor in the dark Liffey flowing below. I could see only my breath turning to vapour, mixing with Colm’s breath as we went silently walking west along Burgh Quay toward O’Connell Street. No words. Nothing other than a heightened awareness of his presence. His shoulder brushing against my shoulder. The back of his hand touching mine. Abruptly he caught hold of my elbow near O’Connell Street Bridge and backed into a darkened shop doorway.

He was trembling as I took him in my arms. He was the way I like ’em—even second-hand from Zoe—short, compact frame, wonderful proportions and rock solid. I looked down into his face. I liked that, being taller. Night and sex so dilated his eyes that the irises appeared jet black. Cars honked.

“Kiss me.” His voice was barely a whisper.

His lips were wet and warm. Timidly, he brushed them against mine.

For a moment I hesitated. “Are yeh sure this is what yeh want, Colm?”

“Sure I’m sure.”

“Yeh don’t sound sure.”

“Gimme time. I’ve never done this before.”

“Yeh sure?”

“I’ve never been more sure.”

He took my face in his hands and, directly and purposefully, began planting tight-lipped kisses in short, noisy smacks.

I let him lead the dance. I slowly worked both my hands down to cup around the strapping globes of his buttocks. Clutching them, I drew his stiffening groin to press against my own. His tongue shot into my mouth. Determined. Hands gripped the back of my head pulling my face by force down to meet his eyes and chin and lips and breath. More ravenous than gluttonous, his appetite was ferocious. His mouth threatened to consume me. Sucking and chewing on my lips and tongue. Licking and gorging himself on my chin, my cheeks, my neck. His hunger bordered on starvation. Hands felt me up and down. Wanton abandon. Virgin excitement. His mouth found my ear.

“Fuck me. I want yeh to fuck me.”

“What...here?” I replied with alarm. The inexperienced lack judgement.

“Anywhere....I need to feel yer cock inside me.”

“Not here.”

“Will yeh come home with me?”

“Taxi!”

“Don’t make a joke of me.” He took my hand and kissed my knuckles. “I can’t wait to get yer pants down.”

Riding at the back of the bus, Colm fondled me under a “To Let” section of *The Irish Times* on the short journey to Rathmines and his attic flat at the top of a Georgian off Leinster Road. No elevator. Climbing the endless narrow stairs, I was winded; but for him, it was a winning sprint to the finish line. Inside his door, passion turned polite. “Yeh want some coffee?” He threw his coat on the bed and his keys on the bedside table. He flicked on the table lamp and turned to the galley kitchen.

I looked around to read his personality. His room was an instant Polaroid. Telling all. Soft lit. One large room arranged around the double bed made up under a couple of soccer posters. A pile of neatly folded towels. A portable CD player. Basic, clean, and comfortable. Still so straight he hadn’t yet started collecting the postcards and beads and tacked-up memorabilia of gay men. Hooked on the door, his work jacket hung with the name of the hauling business on the back.

Pulling off my jean-jacket, I lit the gas fire, and sat myself on the rug before it, warming my hands. He came back with coffee and, handing me mine, sat himself down on the edge of the bed opposite. Big hands toyed with his cup. Knees spread. Narrow waist rising up to the v-neck of his wide shoulders.

A scramble of chest hair rose up his neck, met his throat and cheeks that he hadn't shaved in two days. "Yer the first gay man I've ever known."

"I very much doubt that."

"It's true. I swear."

"I mean, yeh've probably known a lot of gay men. Yeh just didn't know they were gay."

"Yeh can't tell by just looking?"

"Gay men are like toupees...." I paused to measure his cleverness.

"Oh, I see." He laughed. "Yeh only see the bad ones."

"Dublin is full of closets."

"Welcome to mine." He took a swig of coffee. His big beautiful eyes followed his cup as he lowered his hands perfect in that workman way from his lips to his lap. He was a natural.

Then I saw the theatre programme by the hearth. Picking it up, I flicked through the pages. "Did yeh bring Zoe back here or did yeh go to her place?"

He lifted his eyes, suddenly alert. "Fuck Zoe!"

"So yeh did...at my expense."

He sighed heavily. "I pissed yeh off, standing yeh up at the club, didn't I?"

I repented immediately. "I've no right to complain." No need to introduce him to the queer spin that comes into gay behaviour after sex. "Who am I to bitch."

"I should have stayed with yeh, should have talked...." He took another gulp of coffee and set his cup aside.

"Zoe can be very persuasive."

"Not persuasive enough."

"Eh?" I said. "Why not?"

"Couldn't get it up."

"Yer lying."

"Yer so fuckin' beautiful," he blurted. "Even Zoe says yer fuckin' beautiful. Why are yeh so fuckin' beautiful? If yeh weren't so fuckin' beautiful, yeh wouldn't be fuckin' up my life."

I took a deep breath. "Yeh never been with a man?"

"No," he said.

I did not read him as one of those guys who's been a gay virgin a hundred times.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Scared."

“Yer fuckin’ beautiful yerself.”

“I’m trembling.” The balls of his feet touched the floor. His nervous heels were pumping fast up and down on his toes. His bed shook.

“Shall I come over there, or will yeh come over here?”

He lowered his eyes, “Do what yeh want.”

I crossed the short distance that separated us and, kneeling between his shaking legs, took him in my arms. He clung to me. *Bless me, Father, for I have clung and been clunged.*

His body surrendered in a sigh. “Do what yeh want with me.”

I lay him back on the bed, his feet still on the floor, intent on toying with each moment of undressing him methodically, stripping him slowly, making him naked. Unlacing his trainers, eyelet by eyelet, and pulling them off his feet. Peeling his sports socks down off his beautifully knuckled toes. Large, sturdy feet to match his hands. So far, perfectly formed. Reaching, up, I unbuckled his thick leather belt and top button over the zipper of his pale canvas jeans. His ribbed white teeshirt clung to his narrow waist, fanning out over his muscular chest like a second skin, lifting off the hairiness. I had him easily stripped to the waist, gripped his hard-skinned hand, and eased him up to a seated position. From his hunger in the street, he changed in a way that I knew that he, so far, had been completely docile with men. He smiled like a student. He knew no other way from his nonsexual life with teachers and coaches and bosses who all told him what to do. He was compliant throughout. He had raised his arms in surrender as I had peeled his teeshirt ever so slow-motion up and over his head. Mussing his hair. He looked all the better. He could do no wrong.

He lay back, eyes fixed on my fingers, as they reached for his zipper which was stiff to my little tugs, jerking, unzipping, like pulling a train on a track splitting open its little metal ties and rails over the swollen mound at his crotch. With the parting of his fly, his bulge burst free of his canvas jeans, restrained only by his white cotton jockey shorts defining his strong buttocks and thighs and perfect knees and naked calves.

He was a sight to behold. His squat, brawny body, a cut-away package of muscle and masculinity. I liked his brush

of body hair, black-gold, dark as a raven, covering his broad chest, sturdy legs, and big, beefy forearms. His nipples, round and erect, stood out a shade darker than his natural dark complexion. My mouth watered. I had the hunger to eat him.

I stood, and stripped naked for his pleasure.

“Why are yeh so fuckin’ beautiful?”

I could not answer him but with actions more powerful than words. I fell to my knees between his wrestler thighs. Spreading my fingers, I placed both palms on his quivering belly and swept upwards over the taut mounds of his chest, around hulking shoulders, and down over swollen biceps, towards calloused hands. I sat back on my haunches as he sighed heavily enjoying for the first time riding the other side of the bed.

Slowly licking a path from knee to groin, I buried my face in the crotch of his tented underwear. I inhaled his raw essence. My lips traced the outline of his pulsating organ as the white cotton struggled to contain its risen package. He was trembling again. Trembling as my mouth rolled the sack of both succulent bollocks in turn. Soaking the material with my saliva. Hooking my thumbs under his waistband, I yanked his underwear down over his thighs with one swift pull.

His awesome uncut cock sprang free. I grabbed it, retracting the slick foreskin. My mouth consumed the length to the root. He gasped, surprised, suddenly understanding the secret knowledge that a man knows how to suck a cock better than any Zoe. I cupped the fullness of his ball sack, squeezing, rolling, milking his nuts. My saliva drenched his shaft and dribbled over my fingers whilst he gripped my head and boldly dared work his hips towards a deeper penetration at the back ring of my throat. He was activating up out of his passivity, ironically the opposite of the passivity he thought male sex might require.

My mind was blown. Something to be said for how much fun a man can have stepping out of a closet. I ripped his shorts from his ankles and, lifting his legs aloft, fixed my sights on one magnificent ass. Two solid mounds of prime beef steak parted to receive my ravenous tongue. Colm clutched a pillow to his mouth and moaned into it, half fear, half begging, as his free hand clutched one cheek and pried his buttocks wide to my licking of his tight little hole. Loosening him up. Tonguing him

up for that thing all men fear, and many men want, fingering up in the plug of themselves alone when wanking.

“Fuck me.” His request became command. “Just fuckin’ stick it in me.”

“Condoms and lube?”

“In a plastic bag under the bed.”

“Yeh must have been pretty sure of yerself!” Was he a trickster?

“Till now, till yeh, I always wore the condom.” He laughed expectantly until my cockhead pressed against his moist, pulsing ring.

“Just relax...” And so saying I entered in.

“Oh, fuck! Oh! Like that!”

I eased into him effortlessly. Inch by inch. Willingly, eagerly, he swallowed me, whole. I held still, buried deep in unbelievable heat. “That feel okay?”

“It feels fuckin’ brilliant!” he groaned. “This is what I want. What I’ve always wanted. Full up. I feel full up.”

“Don’t be so fuckin’ analytical,” I said. I pumped a slow ram, then bolder, firmer, stronger until my bollocks were slapping his buttocks with every thrust. I could do no wrong. The inexperienced think everything is brilliant. Only the jaded hold up the Olympic judge’s cards to tell you how they think you are doing.

His knees, hooked over my shoulders, began to grip and draw me deep. His big hand encircled his prick and squeezed it up huge. Popping his foreskin open and closed, his thumb spread pre-cum over the engorged tip. He jerked his rod backwards and forwards, slapping its trunk against his belly as his big balls bounced in the left-slung sack hung between his open thighs.

Sweat covered my forehead, my back, my chest. Beads of sweat bathed his dark golden torso. A sex mist shimmered around us in the soft lamplight. We were ourselves and other than ourselves. Words sprang from my lips. “Yeh are one sexy fucker...one sexy fucker.” I gasped, “Take me into yeh. Just take it. Take it.”

“More,” he pleaded. “Fuck me. Fill me up. Do it! No mercy. Fuck me rigid.”

I plunged no mercy into him. Fucking him. Ramming him. Filling him with secrets men realize in themselves, in their

very selves. His eyes squeezed tight shut with tears. His jaw and teeth clenched. An intensity of feeling mapped his face. Intent on orgasm. Whacking his cock. Driving it home. Driving it out of his closet on the fourth floor off Leinster Street in Dublin 6.

“I’m gonna cum,” Colm shouted. “I’m gonna cum. Here it is! Here it cums!” True to his word, the fat head of his dick spewed an arc of flume that hit his throat. The second spurt shot pearls across his chest. The third splammed his belly, and the fourth gushed frosting clots over his fingers. In the instant, he stuffed those same fingers in his mouth and began to suck them clean.

His transformation was more shift than I could take.

“Yeh asked for it!” I shouted. “Now yer goin’ to fuckin’ get it! Here’s yer reward, Colm. Take it...Take it!”

I exploded inside him. Out of my head. Gushing on and on into the steaming rubber. Swelling it with a load so copious it threatened to pumping burst. Deep breaths. Big, deep breaths. Filling my lungs to capacity with the gamey smell of our sex. Pulling out slowly, I collapsed down beside him. The condom tip hanging a milk-pod between us. Our breathing remained as one. Outside, a far-off clock tolled the late hour. We lay looking, face to face, nose to nose, knees to knees. Bedside, a digital clock hummed.

“Does this mean I’m gay then?”

I did a double take.

He burst out laughing.

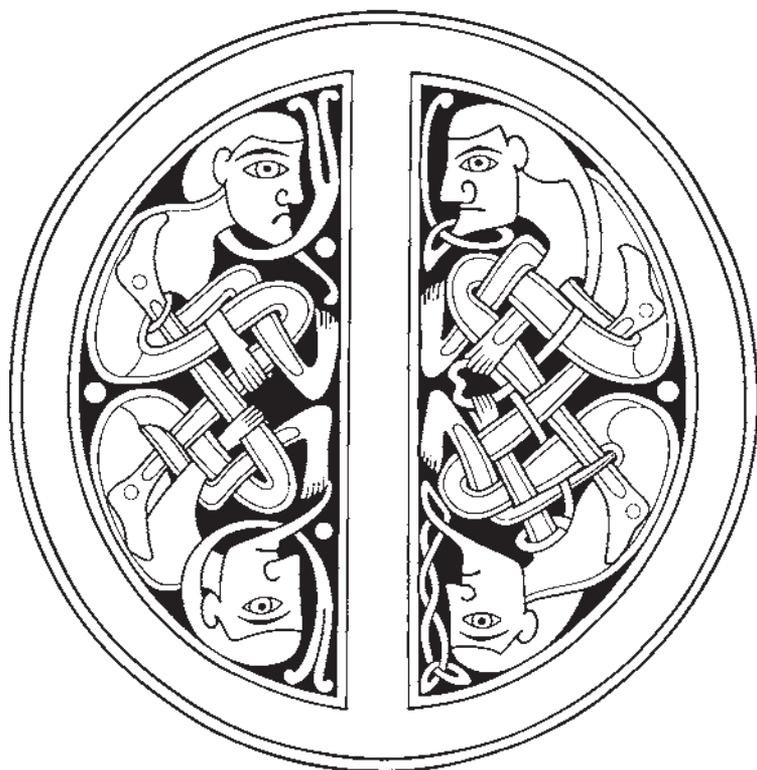
“Colm?” I said.

“Yeah?”

“I wonder what Zoe would say if she could see yeh now?”

“Fuck Zoe!”

I rolled over onto my stomach, “Nah, fuck me. It’s my turn.”



Loman

Place: Galway, ancient Irish city on Galway Bay in the west of Ireland, home of University of Ireland, Galway

Time: Gay Pride Day, June 16

Characters: Loman, a student

Dary, a worker, a porter in a hospital

Glossary:

Y-fronts: cotton undershorts, briefs

Leaving Certs: a certificate granted on leaving school

lorry: a truck

St. Patrick: Ireland's patron saint who in 450 AD converted Ireland to Christianity, and, so legend says, drove all the snakes out of Ireland

MICHAEL WYNNE

LOMAN

Loman's circumcision finally freed him up to fulfil his sexual potential. That was how he gladly put it to Dary the June Sunday night they lay with their shoulders together against the grassy slope of the barrow, watching the waxing, earth-shining moon, themselves a bit over the moon, hours after the pride parade wound the crowd out of the university and down through medieval streets of Galway where they had dared display their closeness to the entire town.

At Loman's crotch, Dary curled his hand, cupping and stroking Loman's hard, newly-cut cock through his jeans. Loman lay, smiling, relaxed, savouring the sensation with relish and relief. Finally clipped, set free from the strangling collar of skin that had kept his cockhead blind, he could enjoy himself with the abandon he'd always imagined a man was made for. As stars fell around them, Loman confessed feeling on the brink of fulfillment. He spoke unbridled toward the gibbous moon with Dary, the partner by his side, who was for him the most perfect.

Loman himself was slim and limbre, with long, light auburn hair. Dary was dark, big-chinned, with generous lips slickered rosy wet, hands that were large and knobby, and an adolescent body that was still filling out, thickening, becoming unrelentingly manly in the way that sheer heft dooms boys to become layers of brick and drivers of lorries whether they want to or not. He and Loman were friends from preschool days. They'd been intimate as infants, had pressed tongues together to see how they tasted when barely knee-high, had compared their earliest erections in Dary's mother's car. As preteens they

had indulged their instinct for exhibition together, had twisted the seats of their Y-fronts into thongs and took turns mooning themselves in the bathrooms of their respective homes, laughing and parading before the washbasin mirror, daring the other to knead or strike lightly the stark white buttocks, to squeeze the member straining at the cloth. For as long as they could recall, each had been filled with curiosity, rabid and unquenchable, about the other's body. They strove to see, to feel, to fuse in some way their flesh at every opportunity. Over time, they had made certain their families stayed best friends to each other.

From the onset of adolescence, Loman had been impressed by Dary's big dick, so comfortably fitted with loose foreskin, its thickness, inclined to the left in all states, the puce nudity of the glans making the heavy-veined shaft look both urgent and pleading when erect. The first time, at eleven, Loman had taken it in his mouth—slid down on it, swallowed it with untutored expertise toward his gullet, fearlessly tonguing the venous underside of the long shaft freed from the suction-cup of prepuce—Dary was so overcome, so carried away with astonished delight, that he had cried. When finally, with a wariness, Loman had allowed Dary do the same to him, he had ultimately wept also, but with the severity of the pain his constricted foreskin caused. Clipped, he could, for the first time in his eighteen years, see the whole of his glans and appreciate the warm bliss of having his cockhead well sucked and massaged by his partner's rosy lips.

At the parade that afternoon, dancing atop the float, in a flapping array of flags and "Interdict STD" posters, they had shared a lingering kiss before a cheering throng. Loman had costumed Dary as a priest in a black soutane-cassock rolled up to feature his large forearms bestowing an ironically sombre Sign of the Cross over the crowd. Loman, dressed as a novice, had knelt at Dary's feet, telling his rosary, until his knees gave out and he stood up and cheered back at the cheering crowds.

On the float, gyrating fanatically to a rave beat next to them was a nearly naked Saint Patrick, with no staff and no mitre, with wild dishevelled hair and hung with a girdle of rubber tubing, painted to look like dead snakes. From a bum-bag hanging at his side, the berserker Saint Paddy flung fistfuls of rubbers, dental dams, and latex gloves to the good-humored

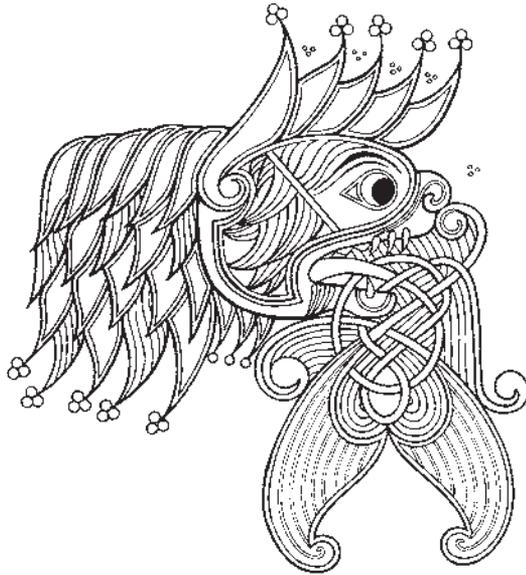
crowd lining the ancient streets of Galway below them.

As the float neared the dock, Loman and Dary had kissed, suddenly, spontaneously, spectacularly.

Before the parade ended, they jumped the float and changed in the lavatory of a pub on the quay, while someone boisterously roared the words of “St Patrick the Gent” in the room adjoining. To the accompaniment of this tipsy vocalist they expanded into talk of their futures. Loman, after his Leaving Certs, would get a job on the trains while Dary would remain in his post as porter at the hospital. They would live together in the room Dary rented over the video store. Dary, the quiet one, thick in thigh and shoulder and back, and nimble of head, had conceived of these plans and spoke of them in his cautious rumbling voice as they fumbled with their clothing in the smelly toilet. When Dary paused over his socks, Loman impulsively lunged over and licked his mouth, massaged the big moist rosy lower lip between his, sought with his for the hesitant tongue. For a moment, with the blare of the parade stalled to a finish outside, it was a reassuring return to the innocence of their infantile play, to the time of their blind-headed need when they were boys.

A Galway mist lifted light out of the Bay and drifted briefly over the end of the parade. The June light sparkled up into the vapour and slowly fell into sunset bringing up twilight with the moon rise. After dark, Loman led Dary from the town out the eastern boundary. They made for the foothills where they’d played for years. They were no longer wee boys. Under the stars in the fresh clear sky, Loman’s unzipped dick stood erect in his friend’s hand. Its tender skinned head shined sensitive in the moonrays. Dary hardly touched him, and he came, shuddering with the profound aching freedom of the release.

Afterwards Dary listened to Loman, his oldest companion, made newer, more whole, as he talked of love and friendship and growth, in a voice become rich and dreamlike and wise, as though the man he would be was soothing with farewell the child he’d been.



Fiachra's Cath

Place: Ireland, a battle-line outside a ringed fort

Time: 500 BC, an age of inter-tribal warfare and cattle rustling

Characters: Fiachra, a young warrior

Sons of the Sons of the High Kings

Glossary:

souterrain: the subterranean area beneath a hut within the ringed fort

berserker: an ancient Norse warrior of great strength and courage

High Kings: the ancient Ireland of the Celts was made up of 100 kingdoms owing allegiance to higher kings at Connaught and Munster, with a High King living at Tara, the political and spiritual center of Ireland until AD 1000. For information about the High Kings and ancient legends and stories: Lady Augusta Gregory's *Complete Irish Mythology*. In the mid-19th century, Lady Gregory, gathered the oral tradition of Ireland into written form. With WB Yeats, she was also one of the founders of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (1898).

Cath: war

Bodh: pronounced "bud"; penis

Magairlí: pronounced "mogerley"; testicles (Mogerley coincidentally also just happens to be the brand name of a very popular sausage company based in Dublin)

Tóin: pronounced "tone"; arse, butt

Póg Mo Thóin: pronounced "pogue mahone"; kiss my butt (Pogue Mahone was the original name for the band, The Pogues)

Claidhemh Catha: Battle Sword

Bodhrán: pronounced "bow ron"; tribal drum (handheld)

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LAWRENCE W. CLOAKE

FIACHRA'S CATH

A clear crisp day and the battle lines are drawn. Fiachra stands with his tribal companions, ritually stripping himself of his leggings, his heavy winter cloak, and sandals. He stands proud and naked with his boyhood friends, sons of the sons of High Kings, ignoring his shriveled both and cold-retracted magairlí. They are preparing to line out against the cattle-thieving tribe across the dew-damp meadow, in this, his first battle for his people.

Beneath the hands of the men of the tribe, his naked body is daubed blue with war paint. Great slashes of colour run across his burgeoning torso and down his trembling abdomen, finishing on his coltish thighs in sharp tails. The paint makes him safe and fierce. With sword and shield in one hand and his throwing spears in the other, he laughs and jokes with the men as they approach the front line, their tribal bodhráns drumming, goading them on.

High above, unnoticed by the naked warriors, a lone raven hovers, observing and unobserved.

Shouldering into his place, Fiachra throws his first withering look across the battlefield where the naked warriors of the attacking tribe stand.

The shouting and taunting begins. The two offensive lines trade insults and abuse and spears with one another.

Fiachra jumps ahead in line with the rest of the men as they work themselves up into a frenzy. His tumescent both bouncing between his thighs slowly begins to harden with battle lust.

The enemy turns as a man and, rear-face, present their tóin to Fiachra's tribe and shout, "Póg Mo Thóin!" Their

buttocks shine glorious in the early morning light. Fiachra could swear he sees a winking hole, here and there, between the twitching buttcheeks. Curious, he feels a stir of desire for the other tribe mix with the rising lust of battle. His bodh stiffens to its full glory and he takes a sidelong glance at the men beside him. In this his first battle he can't understand why they all sport a rage of hardons. He thinks for a moment that they must all be like him. Lovers of men. But it makes no sense as he knows that they are not like him, even though the men directly beside him nudge and wink at his engorged manhood.

He chews on the truth that he is born rampantly wilder by nature, living askew amidst all these desirable men, warriors fighting shoulder to shoulder, with his pulsing bodh displaying open lust for their nakedness, his very hardness challenging their courage. Not having to cover up from their knowingness thrills him. Some nights dark shadows cross the grass of the ringed fort and he guides the shadows hand-first into his hut and down into the storage souterrain beneath the hut where lies refuge and comfort.

He chases no man who chases him not first.

He swings his hips from side to side wagglng his bodh against his thighs and contracting the muscle in his groin. He shivers with desire and almost shoots his essence.

All around him the yelling and curses have drowned out his thoughts. The battle lust has completely taken over. The charge begins. The pounding of the drums replaces his own heartbeat and drives him forward ecstatic.

As the two lines draw closer, Fiachra charges mesmerized by the rampant enemy. So many bodhs aimed at him and all he wants is to fall to his knees and worship their splendor. The array of so many different bodhs charging towards him pushes him over the brink. His bouncing manhood throbs, splattering the ground before him with his spunk. He keeps running on with the charge. Flume trails from his pulsing meat and sticks to his pounding legs.

The lines of naked men crash together and danger itself shrinks as he dares and ducks beneath a sword whistling over his head. He drives up, his Claidhemh Catha held stiffly in front of him like a strong bodh, and skewers the man whose blood spurts out across Fiachra's muscle-lean torso and

sensitive ringed nipples, thrusting twin points hardened to pliable leather by fingers and mouths. He swings his strong arms left and right, his bodh hard again with blood lust, loving the men he is cutting down.

Berserk with battle high, he hacks and slices, cleaving the muscle and flesh that he would rather lick and suck. One clear moment stands out starkly before him, as with a back swing, he slices a strapping big bodh from between the attacking massive thighs of a huge wide-shouldered warrior no older than himself. He almost cries as he sees, in tranced motion, the surprised piece of spermy young flesh pulse, and flop, on the ground like a dying fish.

All the while the raven keeps a vigilant eye on Fiachra's deathly dance, moving slowly with the eddies and drafts of death screams and berserk roars. His wings turn with Fiachra's charging swath of lust and muscle through the ebb and flow of battle which Fiachra and the sons of the sons of the High Kings must win or themselves suffer starvation, slavery, or death.

Suddenly grabbed from behind by a berserker with huge arms, Fiachra feels a raging bodh slide between his budding buttocks, push against his snug-knot sphincter, break the sacred ring of his tóin, ram up inside him, lifting him momentarily off his feet.

Reversing his sword as the man strangles him, Fiachra drives his blade stabbing backward into the man's heaving gut.

He feels the man, fully sized up inside him, thrust deep inside his tóin, contract, ejaculate, slamming convulsions in one final death-defying charge of seed and blood and fury.

The rictus of cum is hot, and Fiachra twitches his tóin, feeling the enemy cum boil up to his strong heart.

With no time to savor his warrior's first bliss in the man's captured juices, he spins, ready for the next attack.

But it is all over. All about him bodies lie dead and dying.

He straddles the berserker's face and he streams golden down across the dying man who dies.

He has murdered the enemy champion.

Fiachra's tribe is victorious, and he the most berserk of all. His companions gather him up and carry him on their shoulders back towards their line. Cheering rings through his ears as they shout their approval of his exploits. He has

become a totem hero of the tribe's rites of manhood.

Fiachra raises his hand to his eyes to hide his tears at the terrible waste of flesh all around him. His own bodh is now quiet and aches from the constant cumings that had wracked his young body throughout the battle. His bodh and tóin had paid homage to the blood orgy of hardened manhood. He feels empty. He wants the embrace of a strong man to ease the ache of survival as he calls the names of his childhood friends. Some of the sons of the sons of the High Kings are laid on their shields. They are keened, waked, and storied.

Later, after the tribe celebrates victory, Fiachra seeks out and lays himself down with a wandering man. A man who explains how death is the greatest aphrodisiac in human experience. A man who leaves Fiachra, after fucking him into the sod, sleeping in oblivion. A man who disappears in the smoke and mist with the flutter of dark wings.

In the night, the raven settles beside his shoulder, watching over him, his sharp beak a lethal guard over the handsome young warrior, Fiachra.



Love's Sweet Sweet Song

Place: Dublin

Time: Present, June 16, Bloomsday

Characters: Charles McGinty

Patrick Feeney aka Patsy Rose Kathleen ni Houlihan

Glossary:

Kathleen ni Houlihan: the symbolic Kathleen ni Houlihan is the personification of “Ireland” itself. The first bank note printed by the new Irish Free State in 1922 carried her image. She is the spirit of suffering or martyrdom often required for Irish independence. William Butler Yeats, the patron poet of Ireland’s rural west, wrote a play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, inspiring young males to lay down their lives for a free Ireland.

Bloomsday: June 16, celebrated annually in Dublin, was created by James Joyce in his novel, *Ulysses*, describing a day in the life of Dublin, June 16, through its character, Leopold Bloom.

James Joyce: one of Ireland’s most influential writers; his classic *Ulysses* introduced the Irish storytelling tradition of stream-of-consciousness to the world. As a young man, Joyce worked as a projectionist in Dublin, and some say his disjointed viewing of movies spurred his streaming style. Joyce, with his wife, Nora, left Ireland an emigrant for Paris. Also of note, Joyce’s novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. *Ulysses* was banned as obscene in the United States until the famous Supreme Court decision of 1933 that freed up speech in print for writers. *Ulysses* was banned in Ireland until the 1960s.

IRA: Irish Republican Army

Fenian: a member of an Irish revolutionary organization founded in New York in 1858 with the goal of establishing an Irish Republic free of Great Britain. In early Irish myth and history, a Fenian was a member of the Fianna, a band of warriors similar to King Arthur’s knights.

Papist: Catholic, loyal to the Papacy in Rome

Orange Man: a Protestant, a Prod, a proddy, with ties back to William of Orange who completed England’s conquest of the Irish at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 when the most elemental freedoms were denied the Irish by the British.

Gerry Adams: a bearded leader of the Irish Peace Process

KELVIN BELIELE

LOVE'S SWEET SWEET SONG

Near-empty streets, rainy sultry day, small raindrops dotting the Dublin sidewalks in late afternoon. Charles McGintry saw her as she scurried out of a beauty shop door into the June rain. Down the street, walkin' toward him, a sight she was, moving against the flood of pedestrians parting like the Red Sea before her movin' quickly, slyly, twitch twitch wiggle wiggle, tight skirt slim hips beneath umbrella swaying sashaying like a vision appearing in the blue exhaust of traffic stalled along the twitch wiggle quay promenading toward O'Connell Street Bridge.

Another silly drag queen, like all the others, but no! She's different, not as dusty and tired and old-while-young, not just another drag, he knew, felt it inside, inside his heart inside his rising hard, nearly busting his balls with her presence, her aura, her allure. Gotta have her, know her, love her at first sight. O cunning queen! Stunning queer! What a beauty, such a cutie! Nipples probably hard and hot, he thought, steamy like this weather ready for his lovin'—pretty pristine and prissy sweet sissy looking over her shoulder smiling wettin' lips with tongue red and ready checking licking light lip gloss on her pretty teeth—and her hard too, hard and throbbing already drippin', sticky, and clear.

Charles took another drag and tossed his cigarette to the ground—ground it out on the wet steamy concrete, needing a tight bum a warm body hot toddy toddling, across the bridge now he followed her over the Liffey grey day, lifeless skiff

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floating by on black water, her without so much as looking in the glass doors as she passed the losers in MacDonal'd's. He stuffed his fists into his jacket pockets—never wanted a queen before—but this one, girlcock inside sweet smelling perfumed panties, no jock strap, no boxers, no Y-fronts, lace and frills, and hot throbbing meat.

His cock quivered, inching down his left thigh, leaking onto the denim of his jeans. He reached into his pocket, stroking his penis, feeling the squishy loose foreskin, he squeezed, feeling the hood slip over his cockhead, popping it back slipping it over popping it back. She is so pretty, so red and fair and so fuckin' Dublin Irish, freckled and pale—not like him, black Irish—so fuckin' hot—better than the men he was just after leavin' in the boring boozing snoozing bar behind him. What the hell did they know about leather or sex, those drunken lazy vinyl/plastic/naughahyde stand-and-pose sloughs?

He could tell by lookin'—the one herself in front of him walking slowly in her high heels, short tight skirt, flipping her red hair as she strutted thick high strong freckled calves inside their sheer nylons, sheer lust for sheer nylons. Carrying a condom in his hip pocket, fingers digging for the plastic packet to be certain the latex was still safe there, fresh, bought just this morning in a shop on Bloomsday, national holiday for this proud confused country that should be one with the North, and the North free, and not chopped up like all of the old empire. Fuck Britannia! May she and all her patriots burn in hell, all the fuckin' ships and all the shitty lords and dukes and whatever the fuck all the damned bloody aristocracy called themselves now rulin' nothin' and turnin' themselves to business and adultery and heroin.

Patrick Feeney aka Patsy aka Rose aka Kathleen ni Houlihan in the heart of Dublin looked back over his own her own shoulder once twice thrice still smiling, after a long week of standing all day everyday in that hair salon, beauty parlor, dream palace, catering to the whims of rich vain women wanting a miracle worker, combing curling, cutting, permanent waves and dyes and—needing a break, wanting this man who followed. Big burly leather-jacketed tight denim jeans, tight cotton undershirt, white see-through, transparent from the humid wet drippy Dublin day, showing off his thick forest of black chest hair lookin' almost like an American, tan

and muscled and hair perfect and smiling like an American tourist, how the hell did they get their teeth so white, so very white, and perfect, perfect Americans, always suspected those Americans and their perfection, and their bed-head tourist-lady hair and their slavery and sodomy laws. What kind of democracy was that? Anglophiles, that's all Americans are. Want their independence and then they kiss the asses of their oppressors, slaves bottoming out to the owners that once ruled them, paying money to tour Buckingham Palace. Well, to America, Kiss My Royal Irish Ass, and not the sweet good kind of ass-kissing either, eat my shit, America, standing by in Heathrow watching us on CNN get killed by the Brits and their cruel laws.

Patsy looked back at the intense man following her. He's rugged Irish enough for me to want: a bit of the spit of Gerry Adams. I can tell by the way he walks, the way he looks around him, a Protestant, proddy. Come to that little bridge when we cross it, just like that bridge both of us just crossed cruised walked followed. She had this one snagged, like a big fish she'd pulled from the river, she had known, standing on the bridge, she had her a big one, and he was all hers. She could tell that he was in for the long haul, at least twice around the clock, stuck and struck, and it was likewise, him wanting and needing and her wanting to be needed and wanted and needing to be wanting.

Charles McGintry walked faster as he followed her. He was a bona-fide man, leather, top, Protestant, not going after some queen, some friggin' Papist queen! He watched her cross herself as she passed a Catholic church. A Roman red queen—not an orange but a green queen Catholic crucifix fixed in crux of her bosom between her boygirl breasts small hard and real, god dammit, who was the traitor here? Where did the loyalty belong? Enemies. But the peace accord—didn't that apply to Northern Ireland, part of the bleedin' dyin' Empire, vanished colonies India Africa the United States Ireland all once property of their insane majesties the fat victorian bitch in love with the dead idiot and QE2 and her crew who couldn't even control that rebel princess they just threw away until she drove into that tunnel that summer night in Paris.

This boygirl, he smiled at her, in a dripping blind alley, against the brown-red bricks, reaching for her, leaf-green air,

pressing himself close, wet twilight, mouth to mouth, this one was here alive, hot and hard and ready, like a fucking furnace. Even in a dress and makeup, smelling like sex and roses, such a hot man! Catholic and Fenian, by God, this boygirl hand on my knob freeing the Irish kick ass from British rule is only half the troubles! Her tongue in the red brick leaf green wet twilight mixing into the fight gays, homosexuals, bisexuals, drags, TVs, all oppressed just like the Irish. She and her kind, my kind, the mixed army, men with men, and then some, quite some, queers fighting all the lies of all the oppressors while sucking the brass off a Dublin door knob.

Coupled, they stumbled, ran together, slipped and slid in the rain, grabbing at each other, laughing, taking shortcuts through alleys, romping young spinning past fliers posters billets newspapers and zines, racks of post-Armagh massacre rallies, for the future hope of Ireland, united in peace, beyond color or religion or baptism or communion or confession or gender, leaving all definition dogma disaster behind them, they ran down alleys, crossing town quickly, hornily, readily, silly as lovers, in slow motion, spilling at last into an apartment on Eccles Street—a poster of Gerry Adams above the couch, on the floor young laughter beneath his stern bearded face. Charles decided that Adams was not bad to look at, not bad for a Catholic and the Catholic on the floor beside him. Maybe she killed his brother.

—Did yeh?

—Did I what? She giggled at him.

—Kill my brother? In Belfast. I seen yeh in Belfast before, right?

—Yeah, yeh seen me in Belfast. The giggle turned to a growl. And in Cork and in Galway and wherever yer randy hardon takes yeh. So, Mr. Proddy, did I kill yer brother? It's a war. What did he look like?

—Like Prince Edward, he snickered, liking this game, role-playing. All this war and religion and bullshit, cowpoo, newspapers and television keeping the war going after all the people on both sides are longsince fuckin' sick and tired of the whole bloody nonsense.

—No, I killed nobody that looks like 'princess' Edwina. She unbuttoned her blouse in the candelit afternoon evening, twilit through the thin curtains, her sweet hot buds like June

rosebuds reaching toward the ceiling and toward his rough calloused huge hands red and chapped but so very kind and willing for a Protestant

—My brother was killed in a bombing a few years back. Charles whispered into Patsy aka Rose's hair. I miss him. I know yeh didn't kill nobody.

—How can yeh be sure?

—I just wanted to tell yeh about him. He was like yeh. Like me. Like us, I mean. When yeh drive wild things inside yeh, pushing, fucking ourselves....We get killed too. Our kind get killed too. We've our own troubles. Never fear mentioning it. Sometimes I need to talk about him.

—So yeh accuse me of killing him? Patrick Feeney kissed Charles McGinty's nose, licking at his moustache. I was with the IRA. Once. Even carried a gun for a while, about an hour, a day, a week. Is it making yeh hard? But never hurt anybody. Killing's crazy. That's why I came south, to get away from all that stupidity. Queers shouldn't have hate. Ain't we had enough of the war inside this war?

Noble she was, this boygirl, a high queen herself riding her high horse her dick her lust, thinking living fucking for Eireann she imagined cuming for the country cuming for the language. Fuckin' Joyce, fuckin' over his Nora, couldn't even learn speak write Irish blaming his own kind for their problems leaving for Paris not waiting to fight or bleed or die, didn't even wait for the Independence like her depending independence from men on men like this fucking beauty of a man beside her.

—Where the fuck was he? Patsy aka Rose asked the man, the big strong cock-lovin' man beside her, this big macho fool ready to plow into her bum and she would turn him over and do the same to his hairy big strong man-ass, toppin' the top's bottom, his calves ankles feet ridin' her strong shoulders.

—Where was who? Charles spoke quietly slowly, his hands roaming drifting over her silken bare flesh, her clothing on the floor, slipping her slip under his nose, inhaling papist roses. His dark eyes burned into her. He looked just like Gerry Adams, that's why she brought him here.

—Where was Mrs. Joyce's boy, James, Easter Monday, 1916? She asked as if it were yesterday and Jimmy Joyce had stolen the public cookie. She turned to him, responding

to his touch, her voice deeper now, becoming a fucking Fenian detective, her cock hard and ready, her hands tough and certain. Patriots died while Joyce drank sea green tea at Les Deux Magots.

—They're all dead. Charles knew his lines. We're here and we want this: flesh to flesh. Joyce was a genius, the greatest writer Ireland ever produced, at least the greatest one who eloped with a mollusk. He held her close, smelling her sweat, her masculine aroma, her lying glands.

—The world's our oyster now, Patsy Rose gasped. Yeh big beautiful man. Eat me, big Orange Man, she sighed silent saying, the pairs of my nipples balls eyes ready for yeh. I'm a needy slut for a big hairy man all man all Protestant, but no bloody Brit! Yeh'll fuck me in the ass or maybe I'll fuck yeh and I'll recite Hail Mary's blessed art thou among women and yer the one I want today and tomorrow, maybe I won't want yeh tomorrow when I wear my jeans and boots, flannel without my make-up mungering stomping manly across town not this girl but a different boy who might not want yeh at all, fickle as any molly girl in and out of bloom, lying around all day I might be, not even rising out of the sheets pillows duvet, and yeh'll serve me breakfast in bed and I won't even want yeh won't even look at yeh.

He growled, burrowed his nose between her legs juicing his mouth with her devotion and faith and energy and lust. He was thinking as his lips teeth tongue worked on her, played with her, praying, thank all the saints and the gods and the angels and the everythings for lust, the great oil of the universe, lust for something, for anything different, that's what oils the universe, motivates all humans, all living creatures. Godbless! What a juicy little piece, better 'n all the leathermen, as thick and long and throbbing as a pulsing heartbeat, veins like purple earthworms fat and squiggly in his mouth, just as strong, macho in her own way, bollocks and a cock, tough little girlcock, boycunt ready for action, acting like a boygirl queenmaster.

—O yes! She mumbled, she sighed. Patrick aka Patsy aka Rose aka Kathleen said. Tomorrow and the day after that and....

She threw her head back, shoving her hips up and out, down into his throat, the tight, miraculous throat, he taking

her like a priest at Holy Communion, sucking the blood of Christ, mouth-watering, eating the body, her flesh between his fleshy lips, scratchy beard stubble like splinters on the Cross, take me right up to Calvary, and hold me up high and watch. Transfigure me. She spread her thighs, lifting herself like a high queen to meet his hungry need, the need of men, salvific in all the books she'd read and the stories told late night. Finally enemies making friends, burying the past the way he was burying his face in her groin, her panties wet from his tongue, his hands gripping her hips, nails digging into her buttocks, her ass kept firm and tight and full bubbly muscular by weightlifting, shoving her glutes out as she lifted the barbell, high above her head, down to the floor, like this man's head between her legs down to the floor, and he took her cock to the hilt, nose in bush, her man-head deep in his throat, her balls against the unshaved chin, whiskers like pins and needles pricking her prick.

Slowly regally extricating herself from the exquisite heady sweaty encounter, pushing away the greedy hungry ready rutting man.

—Now, she whispered. Onto the bed and yeh'll kiss and suck and I'll be the girly boy and I'll do what I do with a big handsome ruttin' bloke full of jism.

She rose to her feet leading him by the hand to the boudoir, the bedchamber, the pantry of pleasure, the coupling place, a couple of paces away.

He stood in the middle of the room, pants around his ankles, and it was sticking out, not as tall as hers, but equally stiff, wider, blunter, the hood hiding the head, fat, grizzly hood dripping and appetizing, thick enough to fill her up two or three times. After all, they had all afternoon, all the blessed afternoon, and evening and night, and probably tomorrow morning.

—Stay awhile? She ran a finger along his furry belly, flicking the head of his pecker with her fingernail. It bounced, head pulsing, balls rising and falling tripping left over right and right over left. Yeh gotta be anywhere? She wrapped her hand around his shaft.

—I gotta be in that bed with yeh. He pushed her back into the ruffles and lace. I gotta see what yeh want tomorrow. See if yeh can follow through after yeh get what yeh want.

—Tomorrow's what I want. Patrick Patsy Rose Kathleen ni Houlihan stretched out on the bed, smoothing her hands down her sides, to her hose/stockings, her garter belt/suspenders, to her priapic crotch. Tonight's what we have.

Charles looked down at her, spread-eagled on the soft, perfumed sheets. He joined her on his knees between her legs, her pink glowing thigh flesh, her dick erect.

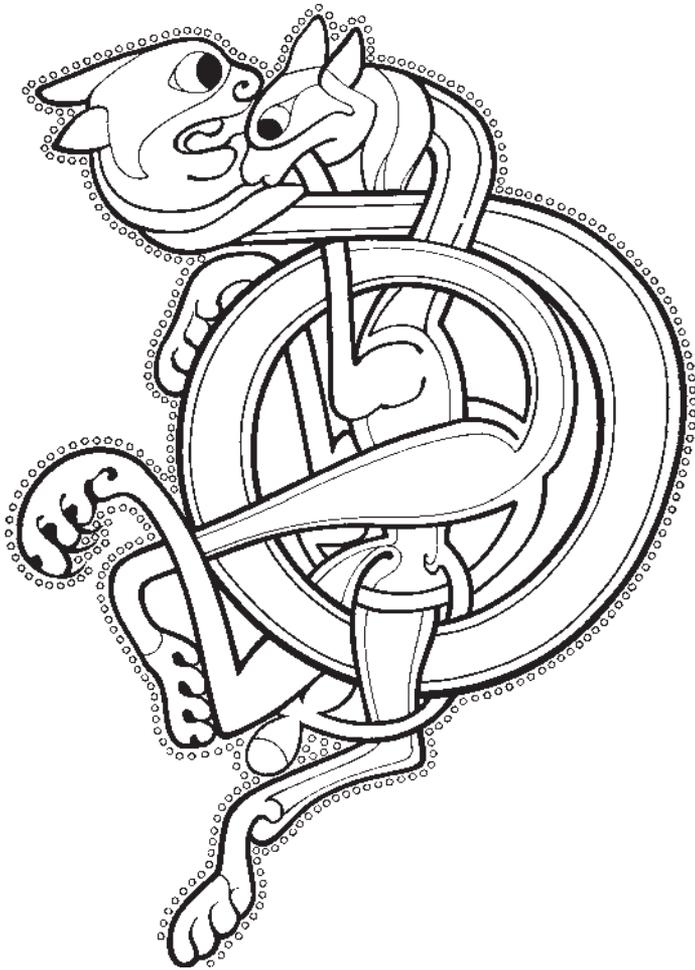
—Who fucks who? He tickled her inner thighs, walking his fingers through her pubic hair, grabbing her shaft in his hand.

—Does it matter?

The two men, Charles McGintry and Patrick Feeney, looked at each other, hot and ready, eager, beyond talk, inextricably connected by history and politics and religion and sex and lust and probably possibly love. Little queen, caresses her hard, manly chest, pumped from her hours at the gym lifting weights, pecs like full round breasts, filling her brassiere, the nipples like little jewels, trophy tits, on the smooth healthy muscles, her pouty lips opening for him, her cock....

The hairy visitor looked at his hosty hostess host. Male vigorous vital boygirl, smooth slick cool pretty hands lotioned and nails lacquered glistening reflecting the candlelight, the moment of first love/lust, thrusting together, panties full and bulging, hard at attention, saluting, deep navel, nipples blushing reaching out to touch somebody's hand lips tongue smiles all around cooing purring the top smiling through his dark heavy beard wet with rain and sweat, the bottom smiling, hard purple head, demanding attention as it salutes pointing at the ceiling at the face poster above it, on her back and yes the scent of roses filled the room from the bush outside the window and lightning flashed yes thunder rolling the bed the mattress fluffing the pillows and he was on top of her, sitting on her manhood, her cock getting bigger as he settled himself onto her lap yes now their faces liplocked and she sighed nails scratching down his yes hairy back and they were together hairless legs lifted kissing lowering the black lace lingerie red roses to match red roses in cheeks on pillow cases, the hairy top murmured the soft bottom responded and they floated into each other yes roses and lace denim and leather, these two together yes into the warm and she glanced at the rosary on the yes and she held this man yes and tighter raising to meet his every yes and yes they sighed deep into her hot throbbing

tomorrow yes and yes.



Checkpoint

Place: Border, heading north from Dublin to Belfast, between Irish-Catholic Republic of Ireland in the South and Irish-Protestant British-ruled Northern Ireland

Time: Present

Characters: Tony, a motorbike courier
British soldier

LAWRENCE W. CLOAKE

THE CHECKPOINT

Yony powers his messenger bike out of the corner on the narrow Newry Road. The biting mountain chill nips through his gloved fingers and leather trousers. Directly before him stands a border post. Cars. Checkpoint. Wheels inch ahead slowly over a long line of speed-ramps. Stop. Start. Two lanes shut down to one between the walls of corrugated iron sheets and squat British Army bunkers. He brake-slams his bike, squealing to a halt that attracts attention he hardly fucking wants. His face burns beneath the soldiers' intense scrutiny as he pulls to a stop alongside the line of humming cars. The warm exhaust of his hot engine is a rising comfort. The throb of his idling machine vibrates his packet between his thighs. The ramp of traffic headed north towards Belfast starts and stops and starts forward again. The drivers are as bored with the drill as the soldiers. Tony impatiently over-throttles on the next-to-last ramp. His boots and gloves struggle. The Honda four-hundred-four lurches to a stop. The front wheel hits against the last ramp. He bounces down hard on his saddle, crushing his nuts against the petrol tank.

A waiting soldier, chewing, spits. He judges Tony's performance and recovery as a bit of attitude. The soldier's booted feet kick out to a no-shit stance. His camouflaged crotch, padded with armour, peeps out from beneath his rifle. He stands confidently, directly in front of the bike.

"Ye've noo brakes! 'Ave ye?"

The soldier's accent is thick Northern English. The SA80's stock nestles familiar in the crook of his right arm. His big trigger finger limns the cold barrel. His left hand is part of

the barrel's moulded grip.

His stood-back squad grins. Tony's nerves prove they're doing their job. The soldiers are no older than bike couriers themselves, but they are trained, poised, posed, pacing.

To the beat in his head of the Horslips' "Dearg Doom," Tony's hazel eyes glimmer inside his black helmet. He thinks himself the Red Destroyer descending from the hills of ancient Ireland.

He stares at the British soldier, always the same ambivalence, wondering how he should feel about this invader.

Always the same revenge fantasies.

Tony strips the square-jawed soldier mentally like an action-figure boys play dolls with. His uniform lies scattered across a floor, a bunk, a room with no windows. The handsome young soldier stands, flesh naked, tumescent, powerless, captured, and desirable before Tony's lust and rage and rape.

Rampant images tumble through Tony's mind fusing into his groin. A kicked, splintered, front door crashes through the pre-dawn quiet. Six years before, when he was thirteen, warm, eager, alone, hard with dreams against the sheet, waking to a start under the snug duvet, boots stomp up the stairs, the jangle of buckles and straps, click of armoury, goggled, masked, crackling miked voices commanding, strong, rifle-hardened hands, gun barrels tossing his bed-cover aside, revealing succulent, twinkling rump, the laugh, breath heavy with tobacco, cold press of gunmetal, goosebumps, his nakedness, rough scratch of combat fatigues, shivering skin, boots on the duvet, they do nothing, everything hangs suspended, the very nothing they do threatens everything, they never fail to excite, disappoint, they leave. It's a hard memory.

Inspecting the bike. Inspecting the messenger.

Hard in the leathers. His face flushed red with lust, not shame, on his visor-shadowed cheeks.

"The state o' yer bike," the British soldier grimaces. "Ave ye noo respect for your machine, mon?" The soldier circles Tony, giving the street-banger bike a closer inspection. He frowns at the courier-punk tangle of bungee straps holding the pedals up, saddle and headlight in place.

Tony fancies some headbutting. He looks directly at the soldier whose legs remain spread wide across the front wheel blocking the way. *Stupid*, he thinks, *or trusting?* He guns

the four-cylinder up to a roar and says, “Is it my brakes yeh wanna check?”

The soldier cannot hear him. He smiles at the sweet sound of the shortened back pipe of the four-into-one exhaust. It pops with back-crackle, and punctuates the engine’s growl. *For fuck’s sake*, Tony thinks, *is this inspection or foreplay?* He studies the soldier, a boy hardly a year older, but more muscular than himself, and—serious as a punch in the face—into the authority of the laces, straps, and buckles of his uniform. His bored mates have long since turned into their cigarettes.

“So why,” asks the soldier, “do ye fuck up the looks,” pointing to the mud-scarred casings, “o’ such a beautiful machine?”

“Clean bikes have a nasty habit of disappearing, especially in the courier game. Who do yeh think would steal a rat bike like this?”

The soldier laughs and nods.

Tony gets it. *Yeh’d steal it*, he thinks. *Yeh fuck! Yer a beauty under that uniform.*

“Ye got some piece of machinery all right...”

Yeah, it fits between my legs.

“Not much to look at,” the soldier says, “but good performance?”

The ambiguity of machines.

The soldier’s long index finger rubs his gun’s long barrel.

This could be very unsafe sex.

The tip of the barrel grazes the leather on Tony’s knee cap. *Accident? Threat? Come-on?* Tony hardens. What’s he inferring: *We kill queers? Suck my dick?*

“Where ye headed?”

Tony’s dick squirms.

Business or pleasure?

“I’m delivering papers to a solicitor’s office in Belfast.”

“Where ye coming from?”

“Dublin.”

“Are ye stayin’ overnight?”

What’s the answer?

“God no! Just a quick drop and straight back.”

“That’s two hundred miles. Rather ye than me, mate.”

The soldier chucks his own chin up. “Too bad,” he says. He finishes with a wink.

Too late.

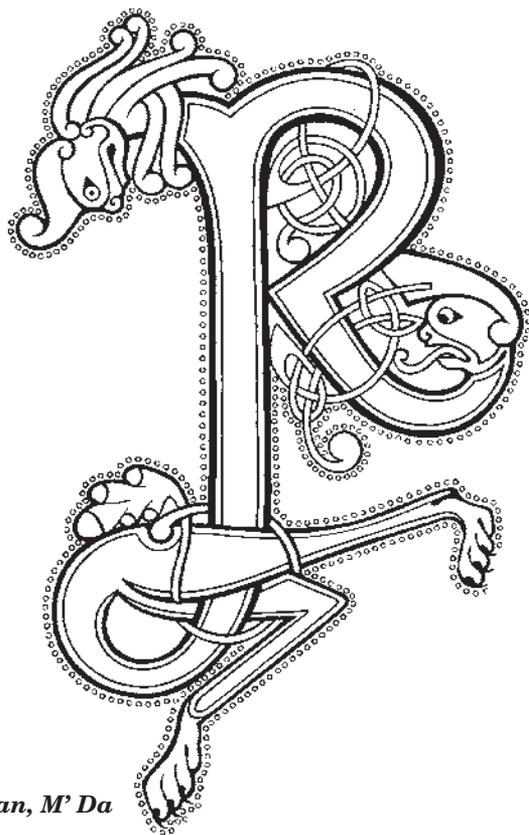
Tony's heart pounds.

"Take her handy," the soldier says.

Too dangerous.

Tony taps his Honda four-hundred-four into first gear, slipping the clutch with a hardon little rise of the front spoked wheel, gunning up the courier bike, smiling at last, rocketing on out, happy, heading north alone, with the six condoms of drugs safe up his bursting arse, up toward the town of Newry.

Left standing in the cloud of blue exhaust, the soldier calls to his stood-back mates: "Fag."



Quare Man, M' Da

Place: Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim, Northwest of Ireland

Time: Easter Sunday

Characters: Conall, a Catholic

Éibhear, a lapsed Catholic

Dad, Éibhear's father

Aiden, a soldier

Glossary:

Carrick: the tiny capital of Ireland's most sparsely populated counties sits on the banks of the Shannon River and the Shannon-Erne Waterway and is Ireland's main recreational boating center. Many 19th century churches and abbeys mixed with the Georgian architecture attract a thriving tourism to its theaters and marinas. The Shannon is the longest river in Ireland.

Quare: queer, odd

M' Da: my dad

Connacht: Connaught, spelled both ways, is a province, in the west of Ireland, to which Catholics were banished in the 1640s.

Dylan Thomas: Welsh poet

The Host: Holy Communion

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[HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK](#)

MICHAEL WYNNE

QUARE MAN, M' DA

Like a mother, proud, Conall kissed the closed, sleeping eyelids, nibbled them with pu-pu-puckering lips, felt the hooded mounds tremble with the pressure. Naked, he slid outside the single cover, superimposed himself along the lithe, sheeted sleeper, breathed: “Éibhear, it’s Sunday, Éibhear, Éibhear.”

Propping pale arms, full-length, on each side of the prone motionless shape, soft groins pressing through thin white linen, he dipped his neck, drew the point of his tongue the length of the grainy trenched chin, across the closed mouth expiring in the meditation of slumber, precisely through the strait of the philtrum, straight without pause to the tip of the smooth broad-tipped nose.

“Yes, Éibhear,” Conall said in response to a short snort of a stir; again dipped his head to nip the side of the taut throat, nose-nuzzle the underchin, whispering calm urges.

Buttery sunlight tinting the wisps of his thigh, his buttocks, Conall chin-butted the other’s chin, flipped his tongue along the underflaps of the warm moist lips. A shoulder rose, slipping from the sheet. Tenderly, Conall nestled his armpit socket on the shoulder, blowing on the eyelids that, flinching and creasing, opened finally over grey eyes, dream-dazed, blinking at the sunny brilliance of the spring morning ablaze in the window.

“Are you going, Conall, heading now?” Éibhear mumbled, flexing his neck on the pillow.

“I’ve a bit, a bit of time,” said Conall lowly, rolling from him, stroking the sleep-slackened jowl.

Heavily, Éibhear turned from him, eyes again lapsing.

Conall, hands clasped at his nape, went to the sun-filled window, his shrivelled sliver, the head silver-scaled, shivering at a draught. From the window he watched the bend of the river beyond the green sloping bank, boats floating down the Shannon. He looked away, yawning, to the walls of the room, white-washed, monastically bare, then back at the nitid ripples and wavelets of the wending current. “The longest,” he murmured, eyes riveted on the river, the heel of his hand kneading the root of his pudenda, pressing the crisp pubes longest in Ireland, and he laughed with no slow priapic irony across his shoulder toward the bed.

Éibhear, lifting his head from the cratered pillow a little, listened for what he’d missed, caught instead a steady inhalation, then a tentative restrained recitative:

“Oh the holly she bears a berry...”

Conall repeated certain bars rendered with a facetious formality. Parody, parodic, parodial. Declension. Very clear-headed, it’s a wonder. Éibhear’s head sank back, languid eyes on the clutter covering the locker: sundry time-pieces; a phial of nitrite; tissue and foil scraps; Dylan’s *Poems*; a supine gin-naggin, bone-dry. Dragging the sheet close so that it twined about his upper arms and thighs, he felt separate folds lodge in his posterior cleft, caress his underbody, form a firm sack around his scrotum.

“...And Mary she bore our Saviour for to be,
And the first tree that’s in the Greenwood...”

What did I dream of? The word *tolly* stands out, all it entails. A *goo-goo* word, safe babbling baby slang speak. So-called protective nonsense term, substituting one thing with the same thing essentially. Pretty, pointless, only results in having to relearn. Any benefits? *Tollywolly*. Good to exercise formation of sounds. Who coined it?

Burying his head deeper in their pillows, Éibhear breathed from the tick his, Éibhear’s smell, and his, Conall’s smell, emanations exhaled and exuded, intimate, mildly mucid, identical essences commingled.

And the toly tightens, thickens, twitches towards tumescence. Am well awake now.

He stretched, loosening the sheet’s embrace, low-hummed to Conall’s continuing carolling. From himself Éibhear swished the sheet so it billowed a little, shifted his thighs so

his arousal sprang from constraint. Argus-eyed he watched Conall approach: silently smiling, tight-lipped; hands hipped; sharp-pileated penis horizontal, a demanding flushed arrow. At the same moment that Conall's shins rested against the bed-end, Éibhear switched position swiftly, like a lizard, so his head lay across the foot, stretching his neck, his arms out-splayed. Upwards Éibhear gazed directly at the knitted dendritic gonads, the quivering levelled member.

"Have we time? Conall said, his fingers like tendrils reaching to the thighs. For consuming consummation.

"Yes, yes," came the answer, restive.

Conall sank, sinking his face, his expectant maw onto Éibhear's fired, wire-drawn sex, his own likewise sinking into Éibhear's wet receptive mouth.

Connected, they swivelled to the middle of the billowing huge mattress, their penises sliding piston-like, smoothly synchronous, past slimy inner cheeks, lubricious palates, the ready entrances of seasoned gullets. Arms looped around each other's lower back, with heads undulating from side to side, mechanically impassioned, they took each other whole at each stroke, hands gripping, groping along tensed spinal trenches, furred buttocks and furrows: one fused, pulsing organism, the mutual consciousness sensually drenched. Simultaneously they felt the other tremor, surge, and surging, urgently quicken, then erupt, bolting curdled gobfuls of gobs which, hungry, unthinking, they swallowed like it was their own phlegm, nuzzling each other's softened hardness with soft porcine sighs.

As Conall slipped alongside him, Éibhear murmuring kissed his shins, lapped the darkly filamented flesh, the broad bones, hands clamped in the constricted houghs. *Did the owl man do this in his day?* In the mouths of men, in our mouths: a clandestine oral tradition, tacitly carried, time out of mind. Hushed human music, mouth-organged, rootsy. His earliest sentence, almost: the first remembered, said with father's pride as he searched my reaction for same: "You're like me. How like?"

Disengaged, Éibhear turned on his back, crossed his wrists at his abs, eyes loosely closing.

A little drained. Sex is arduous.

He felt the bed dip at his left, felt Conall rise up, felt parted

lips press on his eyebrows, his eyes, felt the flat of a tongue sweep his flank. Conall's words: "I'll get ready downstairs and head off. See ya, love." Éibhear heard Conall leave, sonorously humming his hymn.

And the mousey as blood it is red. Playful terms for the dirty parts of the dirty body, dirty, dirty. The naiveté of common verbiage. Dad fell for it, of course. Some funny coinages of his, must have been his, the way he thought. What I dreamt of in part. *Crack for fart, mousey, wolly*, so on. And something else, my whole sonship encapsulated in a vision, seen from his eyes, his mind. Something very sexual in it. Looking down at his calloused hands, the veinal arms, that had become mine, mine through him, a dream-blent version of us, the arms and hoe-holding, hod-holding hands focused on because exposed mostly. And me in miniature centering him, not forgotten for a second, my child's mind concentrated on by him, a new universe expanding, requiring a clean flippant lingo. Like breaking into, raiding his brain. Was it like that?

He reached to squeeze the wispy testicles.

Wet dreams induced by my father's suppressed potential, unrecognised otherness. Knowledge is impossible. Limits as it builds, reduces. Start out with all it takes, have our strengths whittled down as we advance. Delightful desires that make us gods if given free rein: nipped, lopped at from the word *go*. Pitiful.

Sleepily sitting, he lazily stroked his glans till the penis lifted from the pubis.

Begotten, not dead for ever. No necessity, however, for me to beget. Not now, no.

Delicately he worked his length with a ringed finger and thumb, a licked index searching beneath him for the rucked anus, the post-coitally tingling tract. Head lolling, his digit sinking to the middle joint between the snappy walls, he held himself more securely, the palm facing outwards, and pumped himself with steady speed re-envisioning the vision seen inside his father's memory.

Dad's Aiden (ah!) in civvies in the brown-yellow photograph always by the marriage bed throughout my childhood in Sooeey with black greased hair in waves like slick liquorice *who was he* was never explained a *dead friend killed in his prime* Dad said a *fine man* seen as sexy then with oiled locks

shoulders wide (ah!) a curved crotch distinct from the sepia tints like an icon on my mother's doily locker next to rosary-case psalter ribboned sprigs big mouth open a big smile a fine man *all fine men back then* (ah!) working the land till their backs nearly broke all red meat eaters.

Aiden, his name was, I knew it before mine, a mystery man historyless with wide shoulders widelegged stance hands like scythes *what a man* bumped off in the prime of his prowess (ah!) writhing big-buttocked in my father's mind's eye through the build-up to my actual conception why not (oh!) shag a dead stud.

In two quick shots, Éibhear came, fetched deep-lunged breaths, his shoulders and neck flexed; rising at length from the bed, he stalked across to a basin by the double-hung window, soaked his hands, pat-dampened his face and axillae, flicked glinting globules at his torso, his crotch. Over his shoulder to the purling Shannon he crooned,

“Woe betide you, Shannon water!

By night you are a gloomy river,

And over you I'll build a bridge,

That never more good sex may sever.”

He turned back to study thoroughly in the frameless facewide wall-mirror his dark gums, his tongue and quite even teeth, his hispid chin and jaws, the bleared bulging eyes.

Eyes dark-rimmed, fawny. “You're like me,” says Dad. Opening wide his mouth he peered in deep at the shiny uvula pink-tinted where Conall and the others, strangers, had poked.

Éibhear remembered that years since, remembered last night. *Good night last night. First time for me to fuck at a club. Not Conall's first.* Something wonderfully primordial about it, hands gripping cold porcelain, the pubis and rump colliding, compressing against the other with the pall of piss around us, the fallen folds of denim at our ankles, all consciousness of self and nurture sublimely abandoned with the wrestling, wrenching intenseness, privates on show to the sleazy strobe-streaked dimness, all holes bared with the heedless, happy hunger, shameless and helpless, the shared enormous hunger of us. Us. Concealed by nothing but the pumping lasered dark, our moans merging with the muted tub-thumping beat and the fervid butt-thumping alongside us somewhere, the smell of men so fetid and heavy we could taste it nearly.

Reaching down, Éibhear raised the lower window sash to its height, aimed a bright yellow jet, obliquely arced, so it plashed splashed on slabs edging the embankment beneath. All last night's tippie drained off: pissed at the club, nips swiped as we drove, driving all night from the capital to Carrick, full of the hard stuff and stiff, stopping off for a feel outside Longford, to fondle our longs. How horny we were. And reckless.

Éibhear brayed a laugh, his wrists crossed against the window frame above him, his sungilded trunk leaning forward with the stream from his dick jerking to a dribble on the outer sill. Taste of Conall still lingering. Beautiful to see him again, in the exact same spot standing, shouldering the pillar, his foot on the step. Classy man he is, massive, as they have it, wherever they got the wordy word words in the porno magazines, protective erotic nonsense, this, massive, and all those goo goo toly wolly substituties. Greeting each other with extended tongues, memories of the last westward trek rousing. Took no time to get back to. And remembered my name, Éibhear, Éibhear, so good to hear him freely use it, often. Introduce it at Mass perhaps, most ceremonious: If we may say a prayer, folks, for Éibhear my fuck-chum. Renaissance is right. I'll dress.

From a chair by the bed, Éibhear removed a pair of black jeans, a grey form-fit teeshirt, a polyvinyl waistcoat, dark socks. He donned them in seconds and, stepping into crumpled boots, he left the room, descended a short flight to a cramped hall. In passing, he lifted from the newel post a faded green bomber jacket with an outline of Connacht cresting one breast, a red ribbon pinned askew to the other. Smiling wryly, but smiling all the same just in case, he dipped a finger in a Cross of Calvary font mounted by the light switch, lightly tipped the Holy Water on the bridge of nose, his lips, his breastbone. Stepping out of the house, he carefully clicked the door after him and turned down the bright street whistling, his thumbs looped. He entered a squat shop on the corner and bought a tabloid which he wedged into the jacket under his arm as he crossed the dusty deserted road to the church.

Antiquated shells, these, before long now. Anachronisms. Already hear of many chapels and abbeys turned into offices and galleries, secularised wholesale. And high time. Much

more practical. Leave their outsides ornate, curiosities, bitter reminders to the last of the repressed.

Passing through a side-gate, Éibhear walked, tensed, into the church, through to the shadowed, stout-pillared nave, through to a sombre chilly susurrating stillness.

The handsome priest stood in white vestments reciting the prayers.

His view of the altar obstructed, he watched the leaning attentive bodies of the aged kneeling hearers lean into the vitality of the priest. *Very strange scene to me now. How I've grown out of the embarrassing solemnity of Mass.*

Éibhear leaned forward, old habits dying hard, at the sound of the priest's homily concluding, rhythmically paced, mildly commanding, delivered in the resounding sonorous monotone of a divinity scholar. Intellectually off and not too much spiritual comfort either with no one noticing or complaining or demanding anything anymore. Then the priest, wishing them kneeling in their own prayers and thoughts and fears a peaceful easy Easter Feast. And to him, "A Happy Easter, Father," from the flat-toned supplicants, dutiful, Godfearful.

Offer up the bloody body here. And as blood the willy's red. My childish pronouncements dreamed of, seems to suggest what we're fools to try sublimating: our carnality, its facets. Gas too, that hairy, weird episode, weird, dad making a pass at me in his senility, me just out of the bath and he approaching, stroking my sternum, and the seminal smell of him, and pleading, "*Aiden, why, Aiden?*" And me wondering how far they went, how far, and how, and wondering how well did m' Da once know how a man smells, tastes, how he sounds when in heat, and wondering how the hell had I ever suspected before I knew what there was or that there could be something to.

Standing by the side pillar, on the gospel side of the church, Éibhear levelled his eyes on his fuck-chum, his Conall, high-collared, roman-collared, and robed, standing commandingly, his person pressed to the altar-edge, holding the Host at arms-length above him.

"And what do you do?" Conall had asked.

"I take striplings for Music and as I advise them on their crotchets, I do cross-surveys on their crotches. And you? What do you do?"

And the land I had when Conall told me.

“You’re what?” I said.

Quare man, m’ Conall, handing out the Host, “Body of Christ.” Mmmm. Quare man, m’ Da. The Ulster expression, shows disbelief. Strange it is. But it’s apt.

Éibhear stood, hands pocketed, watching on, watching inhibitions flagrantly rescind, history change, the Shannon roll brightly on carrying tourist boats against the current while churches turn into performing arts centers.

Chasing Danny Boy

Place: Dublin, City Centre, Temple Bar

Time: January-June 20, 1999

Characters: Dermid

Oscar O'Sheen

The Brothers O'Morna:

Goll O'Morna, Conan O'Morna

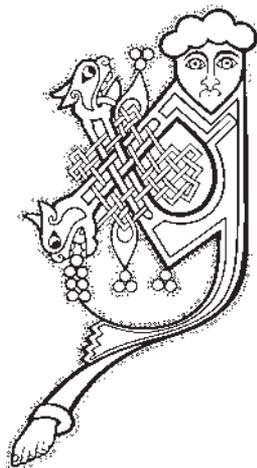
The Yanks from Chicago: Wethers,

Frankie X, Knuckles, Patch

The He-She Banshee

Gran

Brigid, Dermid's sister



Glossary:

23 June 1993: Irish Government legalized homosexuality and the age of consent doing away with the laws that sent Oscar Wilde to prison.

Wilde One's Pub: Oscar Wilde meets Marlon Brando; Irish dramatist Wilde (1854-1900) jailed for homosexuality; wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Banshee: the screaming banshee, often female, signals imminent death

Cuchulainn: Ireland's most famous mythic warrior, formerly known as Setanta, swelled up to huge proportions in battle, and was killed by the wicked Queen Maeve's sorcerers. His statue stands in Dublin's General Post Office on O'Connell Street commemorating the martyrs of the Easter Rising in 1916.

Dermid and Grania: the Romeo and Juliet of Celtic mythology

Dolphin's Barn Junction: a neighborhood in Dublin

DART: Dublin Area Rapid Transit system of light-rail trains and subways

Eamonn Owens: redheaded young Irish movie actor—with the map of Ireland in his face—in films, *The Butcher Boy* and *The General*

Great Famine: the potato famine of 1845-1848 killed more than a million Irish and forced another three million to emigrate, mostly to the U.S., thus making emigration into a feature of Irish culture. Presently, 3 million Irish live in Ireland itself; 7 million Irish nationals live temporarily elsewhere, extending Irish culture and genes throughout the world.

Firbolgs: an ancient tribe in Ireland

Gardai: police

Aer Lingus: an international Irish airline

Lir, the Children of Lir: Lir's four children were turned into swans by their wicked stepmother's spell which also gave them the extravagant gift of song. (Lir is pronounced "Lear")

Mickey: like "Mick," an American derogatory term for an Irish person

Otherworld: the night world of myth and legend where heroes, enchanters, tricksters, and fairies live

Paddy Goes to Holyhead: a satirically named rock band

ejjit: idiot

Tuatha de Danaan: originally the people of the gods of Dana, the tribe who arrived in ancient Ireland on the feast of Beltane, May Day, landing at Connacht, displacing forever the earlier tribe, the Firbolgs

shebang: party, the whole thing, a celebration

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JACK FRITSCHER

CHASING DANNY BOY

Love hides where? The question dogged Dermid on the hunt. His gang of lads, slumming through Dublin, looked for love hiding inside the pubs, revealing in doorways, cruising through the pathways of St. Stephen's Green. Across the clipped lawns and cobbled quads of Trinity College. On Bachelors Walk beside the black water of the Liffey flowing under O'Connell Street Bridge. Night times, pissing in a construction dumpster on the corner of Dame Lane where one door led up to a Turkish sauna and another door, guarded by beefy hooligans, opened into the crowd of lads at the Wilde One's Pub.

Chasing scores down in Dolphin's Barn Junction, the south inner city, where a crowd beat some Aids junkie to death. Right in the street. Fifteen rib-kicking anti-drug vigilantes cheered on by a scrum of women and children. Steel-toed boots striking sparks on the cobbles. Junkie blood on the steel shutters. In the Barn, anyone who risked the vigilantes and dared the dark streets turfed out by the dealers could score grass, acid, ecstasy.

Dermid and his boyo's were full of themselves with the success of their hunt. They had outsmarted the dealers and outstepped the vigilantes. Inside the Wilde One's, the queer pub air hung thick in a silken blue cloud of smoke that shimmered with the thump of the disco beat from the dance club upstairs.

"Was that love?" Dermid, at twenty, was a pub-wonder at discussing a premise in detail, standing with a pint among his friends. A pearl of foam hung on his short-clipped dark red goatee. Not a single freckle marred his perfect white face

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[HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK](#)

or cheeks ruddy as rowanberries.

“Was what love?” Oscar O’Sheen asked. He was happy with their raid into Dolphin’s Barn, hunting and scoring sixteen hits of acid he could sell for double to the kids in from Galway for Saturday night outside, two blocks away, on the trendy streets of Temple Bar.

“Was it love when that old Aids junkie threw his skinny fucking body across his twenty-three-year-old partner to protect him from the steel-toed shoes.”

“Get over yourself,” Oscar said. “Maybe it was love of family, yeah, driving the men to kick the shit out of two dope-dealing heroin addicts ruining the neighborhood.” Oscar was a joker always playing tricks and acting out: “*Move the fuck out of the Barn!*” Oscar, who was very tall, drove his hands down in the way he learned from hip-hop American rap artists on Sky TV.

Dermid laughed and his blue eyes laughed. He liked the hunt, the drink, the talk, the fact of the lads all together.

“In those flats in Dolphin’s Barn,” Conan O’Morna, who was twenty-two and the darkest of the lot, said, “the addicts are dealers and the dealers are users and it’s fucking clear what they love.”

“But the junkie,” Dermid said, “when he was dying bleeding on the cobbles said, ‘Keep away from me: I have Aids.’ Was that not a kind of love of your neighbor even when he’s killing you.”

“Ain’t you just a fucking Jesuit,” Goll O’Morna said. “A truer Irish statement of suffering was never made.”

At twenty-four, Goll, the older blond brother of the dark Conan, was touted a dare-devil for all his adventures, and the three others had looked to him since they had been boys walking through the wet woods down in the Wicklow mountains, hunting wild rabbits and quail with snares, playing guns on and off the old Military Road, that wound like a scar through the mountains to the south of Dublin, long before they had practiced smoking cigarettes and shaved their heads down to a rasp and played at being post-U2 Iggy Pop rockstars calling their air group, Tuatha de Danaan.

Long before Goll had been sent off for six months to the Priory, which was what Conan and Goll’s Da politely called the prison, where Goll had turned fifteen and learned much more

about men's bodies than ever he learned about not stealing tourists' cameras down at the Irish Sea side in Bray where their fathers worked.

They had discovered their bodies together tutored by Goll. Curious. Sizing up. Joking. *You're fucking gorgeous*. Measuring up. Competing. Hardening up. Shooting first. Cumming last. White flesh slip-slapping. The serious dare to put that in your hand *your mouth* your ass longest deepest hardest biggest. What they had done in quartet, in trio, in duo, and back to quartet, circling, jerking, arguing, wrestling, which dick *which face* which hole, sucking with quick sucks each other's nipples, pumping shooting, pals lads rebels rockers mates friends for fucking ever.

The Tuatha.

One for all and all for one staring at the piece of paper Goll pulled from his pocket with the address of a man in Dublin who was a friend of a convict mate in the Priory who wrote down the name and told Goll that fags were a soft touch a lad could use if the lad weren't a fag himself.

A punch in the face could prove the Tuatha rebels weren't fags.

Together, stripped naked, they took grooming turns shaving each other's heads, standing barefoot in the pile of Dermid's red hair, sculpting black sideburns on Conan, and goatees on Oscar and Dermid, and on Goll a chinstrap blond beard.

Conan took a needle from his Ma's sewing kit and pierced their ears for gold rings Goll had filched. The three of them had held Dermid down to the floor and pierced his right nipple with a gold ring and he called them cunts and they rose up wrestling and laughing, hard and sexy and surprised, turned on in the mirror at the sudden changed image of themselves. The small bedroom exploded in a flash of revelation.

They were boys no more. Their manly heroism was in their pride and joy in each other. They were bigger than their little seaside town. Neither the amusement arcades and the fish-and-chip shops, nor even the casual summer trade of Brits lazing along the strand willing to pay for quick sex, could keep the lads long in Bray which was a red dot on the DART rail network that couldn't roll fast enough on up the commuter tracks into Dublin.

“Don’t look now.” Oscar punched Conan on the shoulder. Conan in turn punched Dermid. “Your search for true love, Dermid, is over.”

Goll stubbed out his cigarette, exhaling hard, snorting a laugh. “There’s a Whore at the Door.”

The blue air in the Wilde One’s split apart opening a path down the bar through the crowd of regulars from the door to Dermid’s feet.

“It’s the He-She Banshee,” Conan said. “coming to take you away. *Goo-goo goo joob*.” It was the man to whose Temple Bar address Goll had taken them six months before.

Dermid winced.

The He-She Banshee was an irony of nature: one of Ireland’s high-hearted queens and the most handsome man in the underworld of Dublin, dragged up in a smart black suit of impeccable taste, with skin so fair that no light but night or fog had ever touched his face. He was a sort of gangster, not of the usual politics, but of porno, with ties some said to Amsterdam.

He was the owner behind the manager of one of the sex shops upstairs over a vacant lot on King Street offering Czech videos, and American gay magazines wrapped tight in plastic, and Taiwan toys inflatable and insertable. The shop existed beneath the radar of the Dublin Gardai, which gave Dermid and his friends the deluded idea that they too existed like an outlaw band outside the view of the police, free as the Banshee to do what they liked.

“It’s a free country.”

“Aye, and getting freer.”

Even being queer was suddenly legal. Vertigo spun the whole shebang. All of them could feel Ireland, poor little Ireland, no longer an isolated island, shrinking under the Euro and the internet and the Aer Lingus planes direct from Chicago. The Gardai were busy running bomb-sniffing dogs and drug-sniffing dogs through the strangers and tourists and daytrippers taking the jet-propulsion ferry back and forth from Holyhead in Wales to the Dublin port at Dun Laoghaire where the Banshee was always greeting someone or seeing someone off to the tune of “Paddy Goes to Holyhead.”

The Banshee fancied Dermid, but he was forty, an old man, a dirty old man to the lads. Still, as the convict had

predicted, he had money and, one by one, Goll and Conan and Oscar had, each more than once, trekked up the stairs to the rehabbed loft the Banshee kept as a pleasure penthouse on Wellington Quay looking back over Temple Bar. His interest in the muscular Goll was intensified by the sizeable Goll's wee stay at the Priory.

His appreciation of the sensuous hue of Conan's bog-dark looks had turned into a jape the lads used to provoke Conan who got his Irish up merely being reminded that the Banshee had told him the story about the Spanish Armada going down off the coast of Ireland: "From the looks of you, Conan, at least one of the greaser sailors made it ashore to at least one Irish whore's bed."

For the Banshee, as for everyone, Oscar, hip-hop, with pockets full of drugs, was always the life of any party. "A cool life," Oscar said, "is always played coolly before cool spectators."

Truth was, the Banshee after his fashion loved Dermid, but loved the pursuit of Dermid more. He chased the young man but purposely never caught him, as if captured, Dermid might vanish. Always the Banshee stopped the hunt short of erotic seduction. Or something stopped him. Curious. Were forces at work somewhere over, above, around, and through Dermid? Love hides where, indeed? And what hides love?

The Banshee noticed a peculiar thing. Dermid was unaware that he was the most cruised youth in the City of Dublin. Nobody ever won him or could buy him. Dermid's sex was confined within the brotherhood of the Tuatha. Those other three, fucked with drink and sex, were hard cases who had walked Dermid, like their vestal virgin, down to the commuter train tootling out of Bray. Four handsome wild boys from the Wicklow mountains.

The Banshee was an expert listening to pillow talk, hearing Goll's bragging, and Conan's whispering, and Oscar's mooring over all the sex rashomon among the four Tuatha.

He imagined the lads of the Tuatha in the fast-forward, slow-motion, and freeze frame of the porno videos shelved in his shop. *The hot wet mouths of those handsome handsome handsome four swanlike boys lipping down slow then eager on jutting cocks spit wet tongued fucking pink butt yes like dogs taking every shape cum spurting on lips nose eye lashes stripped naked in the shed barn woods no no no yes linen*

sheets stained with shit dewlaps hot young sweat browning each other those four drip cum into me cum into you fuck into you fuck me oh yes wipe it on me eat it eat it swallow more more fucking yes you and you and you those four ah ah ah.

The Banshee, flushed with the winter's night, walked through the Wilde One's crowd straight up to Dermid.

Goll stepped in front of the Banshee, and said, "Ain't you just the Lord of the Fags?"

"Why hasn't," the Banshee said, "the Gardai arrested you yet!"

"Because I ain't yet fucked you to death," Goll said leaning in and kissing the Banshee's cheek.

"You'll have to wait," the Banshee said. "I can't stay." He turned to Dermid directly. "My, ain't you deadly good tonight."

"You spotty fuck." Goll laughed at the Banshee. He was jealous. He thought maybe Dermid had got a leg up by not fucking the fag.

The Banshee laughed back. "I said I can't stay. My dogs are outside. That great big doorman, with his girlfriend, is holding my hounds, mmm, leashed. I've come down simply to tell you four you must come up to my place tonight. Some Americans are in."

"Yanks?" Dermid said. "Why for fuck's sake, Yanks?"

"Because they're all rich," Conan said. "They smell like dollars."

"Faith and begorrah," the Banshee croaked like a stage Irishman, "they be comin' here to Ireland chasin' Danny Boy." He turned, chin up, for his exit, and threw back. "I have some white powders that will take you to the Otherworld."

"You're a right prick!" Goll was happy.

The Banshee gestured grandly to the pub full of men. "It's paradise this." He waved. "See you at the stroke of midnight. Cheers!" He disappeared out the door in a silken cloud of blue smoke.

"One time," Oscar said, "everyone left Ireland. This time, everyone's coming back."

"Jayzus, Jamie," Goll said putting his finger up his nose. "Yanks." Ireland was full of tourists looking for their roots. "The poor creatures."

Dermid followed the Banshee out the door to pet his dogs. The girl holding the three leashes smiled at him. He pet the

dogs who licked his face and he smiled up at her.

"I'm Gran," she said looking freezing shoulders in her little tittie tanktop.

"Aye, you are," Dermid said. He rose up to his full height, and walked back into the pub, leaving her revealing herself in the doorway, vexed.

Oscar looked at Dermid. "Yanks are no problem," Oscar said. He signaled for pints all around. "Are they?"

For a fact, they all agreed, Saint Patrick's Day fucks Yanks up. Especially the queer ones. Those boyo's, coming out of the States, think, *don't yeh know*, wearing green at a parade and drinking piss-pints of Guinness, *puttin' on the Irish*, qualifies them for a duty-free trip to Ireland where life is One Great Big Fucking Saint Paddy's Day.

Drink up, lads.

Their travel agents all so eager to take the Visa and book them round-trip smack into one of those shimmering green fantasy posters of the Emerald Isle that turns out to be a night in Sligo. Ha!

Gimme a cigarette.

And, oh, it pains a man a bit. Them rich Yankee queens pretending they're married, out on their Irish honeymoon, buying Waterford crystal, swinging their cameras, hanging by their heels to kiss the Blarney stone, combing the highways and back-combing the byways, cruising for Eamonn Owens, standing posed like movie stars in Aran sweaters on the edge of windy cliffs, pissing out whiskey *too good for them* into the hedgerows by the roadside, leaning next to their Tour Bus, staring out like a bunch of Ryan's daughters at the westward sea.

Pretending they're standing in their immigrant great-grandfather's shoes, making jokes about always loving potatoes, talkin' imitation Irish, *starvin' far patatas*, taking panoramic snapshots of green fields crisscrossed with them rock fences, *bless us and save us*, that look so romantic to Yanks imagining stone fences built by red-headed men with uncut cocks white as perch.

Finish up, boys.

A fella has to love them, the American cousins, flying back economy class, tourists without irony, looking up long lost relatives who didn't particularly know they were lost, working

as they are at computer companies in Cork and belonging to the EU. The Banshee's waiting with some easy marks, so's remember to lay on the brogue and the charm and say "wee" a lot and don't tell them Yanks we never eat corned beef.

"So," very droll, Goll said, "here you are your first trip to Ireland."

One of the four Yanks said, "To Dublin actually."

"Actually," Goll's ear spun the funny-sounding American idiom. "Dublin *ag-shoe-alee*...as opposed to Dublin virtue-ally."

"Dublin. Yeah," Conan said.

"Where the love that dare not speak its name first learned to hiss." Goll licked his finger.

"Boys, boys, boys," the Banshee said. "Let's forego the old Dublin irony for some Irish hospitality."

"Ain't 'hospitality' the new name for a fuck," Oscar said. He inhaled deep and blew a spew of cigarette smoke into the Yanks' faces, muscelfucks one of them was, with big biceps and a stalactite crystal hanging very new-age between his bulging pecs. "You took your shirt off, I guess, because...?"

Attitude caused the posh furniture in the penthouse at the top of Wellington Quay to shift. Chic white chairs and plush white sofas and glass-top tables clattered back against the egg-white plaster walls. Red Berber rugs rolled up revealing the waxed pine of rough-hewn floors. Across the high ceiling, 12-volt track lights scooted into position. Candle flames guttered in the rising incense. Outside, below the windows of the penthouse, Dublin lit out in a maze through the ink-black Saturday night where anything was possible.

"Mmmm. Excuse me!" The Banshee moved like a stage director to arrange the eight men standing in the room. "Dermid and Oscar," the Banshee said, "and Conan and Goll, this is Mr. Wethers."

Wethers stepped forward, solid, impressive, thirty, and himself a redhead. He offered his big hand all around. "You fucks and my boys are gonna get along," Wethers said. He pointed and named Knuckles, Frankie X, and Patch who nodded their heads atop their thick necks and said nothing.

"Tough guys, huh?" Conan checked out the tattoo on Frankie X's neck.

"Patch is from the Patch in Chicago," Frankie X said.

"Why's Chicago need a patch?" Oscar cracked.

“Wise guys, huh?” Knuckles said. “Who do you think you are? Sean Penn?”

Wethers laughed and when he laughed, all his boys laughed.

“You wanna know the Patch is the Irish northside,” Knuckles said, “and you wanna know why I’m called Knuckles.” He locked his thick fingers together and made snapping sounds like little gunshots.

“Brilliant!” the Banshee said. He pointed to a table. “Food. Drink. Et Cetera. Name your poison. Especially on the Et Cetera.”

Like a magician, he aimed his black plastic remote at a CD player and music exploded in volume and beat beat beat filling the penthouse with pulse and blood pushing the rhythms of the eight men sitting down *zip* smoking leaning pacing slamming a whiskey *ahhh* walking around one another looking *zip* checking sniffing *oh yeah* touching punching unbutton stroking rubbing the inside leg squeezing *don’t go there* groping sizing slow-stripping laugh snort *hey* pose smack smack smack *yeah fuck dude come on*, Wethers grabbing *zip* Dermid’s *zip zip* crotch: “*Show me what you got, Danny Boy!*”

“Don’t fuckin’ call me Danny Boy!”

Fighting words. Dermid’s goodlooks flushed blue, warriors from the weir possessed when confronted, *yeh fuckin’ shite*, punches tossed and blocked, lust rising, the room spinning round, men half-naked ripped naked, cocks gorging hard and rising, whiskey glasses dropped down on tables, *c’mere you little shit*, smoke inhaled deep, torn off shirts shed, nipples grazing nipples, the fighting stance of love, half nelson full hammerlock, penis poking butt slapping, *momentum, baby*, a harder dance rocking the room, *going farther faster than the fastest horse than the fastest jet than the fastest internet because sex between men, even if it goes slow itself, goes swifter in the end than the swiftest thing in the world, for men’s desire is a natural river that never stops while horses die planes crash satellites fall* and over the tub-thumping music the TV screen of silent Prague pornos shoots *digital bits of analog sex* into a room of grease lube oil spit shine sweat sheen O’Sheen red goatee tongue hunger *fingerknuckles nipple plucking* suck on me you him *fucking cocksucker* friendly thighs suctioning *rush the enemy naked* possessed with warp spasm of Cuchulainn

into the *outrageous rage of the river of eros flowing*, the evening rising hard high clear brilliant, *sex sparkling like water gaining speed over rocks*.

“Everybody seems,” the Banshee said, “sufficiently stoned.” He looked with pleasure at the eight young gentlemen roaming his penthouse, sitting naked on his white furniture, walking naked about his table he had casually set with plates and knives and paté and white wine and biscotti because he had forgotten bread.

Oscar, thinking of the sixteen hits of acid in his trousers hanging on a lamp across the room, rejoiced to be a bit wrecked on someone else’s stash.

“Drugs is the fucking glorious Otherworld,” Conan said.

Dermid, always thinking of the hunt for the clarifying force of love hiding maybe somewhere in the penthouse, looked at the Yanks comparing them to his lads and his life and feeling weird.

Goll, thinking of the Americans, naked, circumcised, taking a break, well fed, huddling together laughing joking, liked their gangster style, four or five years older than him, tattooed, buftie boys, and imagined himself living back in the Patch in Chicago, an emigrant success at last, not like his Da and his grandfather and great-grandfather and all his family before him who’d never been able to get off their doffs and escape the emerald-green backwater of filthy gritty stupid old Ireland, and migrate out where there was money and sex and real luck.

“Danny Boy is a stupid fuck,” Goll yelled. “A stupid fuck for staying stuck.”

They all laughed at Goll standing naked and hard, throwing little amateur boxer punch-up punches, biff biff biff, in the middle of the room.

Wethers said, “Go fuck yourself, Danny, you stupid mick, cuz nobody else will.”

“Fuck up, you,” Dermid said. “You fucks only come to fuck us.”

“Hey, fuck!” Knuckles said, “do we look British?”

Dermid stood up, blood boiling cock erect, hard, red, veined, big, thick, long, proud, stabbing into the sweaty air. He pointed at his prick, its big head mushrooming out the purple-red cowl of foreskin. “This what you want? This what you’re chasing?”

“Fuck no,” Wethers said. “Turn around. Show off your fucking cunt butt.”

Dermid stuck his snotty fuck virgin butt out pulling his round white cheeks apart to the deep line of red furze growing thick and moist in his crack making kiss kiss kissy smooches. “You can kiss it.”

“Pucker up,” Patch said.

“Fuck you,” Goll said.

“Fuck yourself, mickey,” Wethers said. “Once me and my boys fucked a United States Marine Corporal while I made him sing ‘From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli.’”

“Fucking droll,” Conan said.

“Like me and my boys are gonna fuck the four of you...”

“I’m wetting myself,” Oscar whinnied, “fucking ass-bandits.”

“Shut up,” Wethers said.

“Yeah.” Francis X stood up.

“Yeah.” Knuckles stood up.

“Oh, yeah.” Patch stood up.

Goll pointed. “Look, ain’t they a fucking Hollywood western.”

“And the movie ends,” Wethers said, “with me and my boys fucking you four river-dancers while you sing ‘Danny Boy.’”

“I love musicals,” the Banshee said, drooling over the raw male energy in the room.

“I’ll make you a bet,” Wethers righted the room with good-natured belligerence, “that I can make you want to do it.”

“Name your bet,” Goll said.

“Never dare a Dublin man,” Conan said.

“We ain’t Eurotrash,” Oscar said.

“Fucking us,” Dermid said, “will be stepping up for you, because what you’ve been doing will make you blind.”

He started laughing, and he was figuring fast what to do to rescue the lads and his ass, and his laughing and the whiskey and the grass stepped him out of time, slipping to another time, another Yank, who had come on strong, taking him on a long drive in a rental car out from Dublin City Centre north along the road to Howth at the northeastern end of Dublin Bay.

The ride had been lovely, really. Dermid had never been the few kilometers north, looking out east over the Irish Sea so familiar from down south in Bray, and then back west toward Dublin, but that City view over that posh neighborhood

had disappeared, driving back, when the honestly handsome Yank had cut off the road and driven through the dunes along the beach, grinding gears through the sand, his hand on Dermid's knee.

The tall grass spotting the rolling dunes gave way to the miles-long flat sandy shore of Dublin Bay marked off in the distance by the twin stacks of the electricity works guiding in the jet planes to Dublin International. The car sped across the smooth sand, daring the broad lazy inrolling green green waves of low tide, leaving wet tire marks behind in the white froth.

What was it with these Yanks showing off?

The beach was deserted. The car roared. Then stopped. The Yank, with a rasping black stubble of a three-day beard, came on strong, stronger than in town, with wet tongue kisses, demanding Dermid's ass, and Dermid thought of his mam telling his sister Brigid going on a date to always take bus fare home just in case.

When his sister made it home, she was, she was, she was very, and she said she was going to keep it. One time, that taboo would have been the end of a girl's name and the shame of a family, but in the vertiginous new times, pregnancy was a style and paid for and given little knit booties and pennies enough for a ride in the stroller to MacDonald's.

Only one last taboo remained, and that too was a style, and legal, except when paid for, which is what, in that car on that beach, the Yank with the expensive American teeth had told Dermid he'd do. For fun, Dermid had said *how much*, knowing no matter what bumboy price the Yank put on his hole, he'd refuse, but at least he'd know how much a Yank thought his Danny Boy ass was worth, which, when he heard the price in Irish pounds, was almost mystical news.

That time the wisdom had come to Dermid of how to save his ass. The handsome Yank, grabbing and groping, was all big-dick talking big-dick big talk, because really what the Yank wanted was Dermid fucking him, which Dermid did, in the car, in the sand, on the beach, in the late afternoon, feeling brilliant actually at turning the tables and driving his dick in and out of the athletic-built Yank in a fierce fuck that brought the Yank to tears, shooting his cum, untouched by hands, crying, putting his hands on Dermid's rosy white

cheeks, touching his red red goatee, staring into his blue blue eyes, saying the kind of illuminated fuck-poetry men with stars in their own crossed eyes say after sex, "Some men have a look other men recognize, but you are as yet unmarked," and Dermid was told later by the Banshee that the Yank meant that Dermid had not yet ruined his body with the usual poisons of the adult world.

"Fucking you," Wethers stepped into Dermid's face, "maybe I'll become a permanent resident up your Irish hole..."

"Ah, the bragging of the wee folk," Dermid said.

"...and make you want it," Wethers said.

"Don't tease tossers," Goll said. He stood shoulder to shoulder with Dermid facing Wethers' three boyo's. "As for this back-up group of wah wah sissies," Goll said. "We're the Tuatha!" He strummed his headbanger air guitar. "Waaaah!"

Dermid looked at Goll. The four Tuatha looked at each other, *fighting lads we are*, then looked at the four Yanks, *fuckin Firbolgs*, then looked a warning at the Banshee, the would-be queen of the Tuatha, and ran like berserkers, shouting, across the room, jumping the Yanks, surprising them, and a terrible row shook the penthouse, arms and legs tangling, yelling, *wankers*, chest to chest, heads butting, cocks and tongues and bollix swinging, *we are the champions*, the hounds of the Banshee yapping barking, flailing fists gut punches pec slaps *you want a piece of me* music thumping Depeche Mode *wrestle this* thighs spread feet dug in sharp jabs soft palms strong fingers interlocked *get down* veins startling on forearms *on your* cockheads unsheathing excitement *knees* body slam onto couch shoulders into pillows, tongue-puking Yank deodorant, leg lock fierce breathing tight choke hold *choke on this* porno video bits jerking sweat rising smoke from ashtrays candles incense ram it *Dermid!* battling across the floor up against the wall *ouch goddamit* pressure of flesh drive of thigh sweat in the small of backs dust spiraling up in the fuming cones of track light *watch your fucking teeth* rising in pairs then threes *Goll Goll!* falling back in pairs physical primal animal *jay jay jaysis* teeth bared cocks rampant, Wethers rising, huge engorged blue veins *fuck jab 'em* thrust *boys* cries ravaging triumphant fluid *what forces work* spear impale, steam billows from the bodies clouds the smokey room, onscreen actors in the Prague video freeze in violet haze of digital bits, the dogs howl,

muggy penthouse windows inside sweat with juice, outside a mist drifts lifts rifts through the high orange light glowing cumulus over Temple Bar and a dark fog rolls up from the cold black waters of the Liffey carried in by the ancient tide from the Irish Sea on the cum cum cum cries of night birds.

Three weeks later, Dermid wondered how his butt that night had become part of the Irish tourist industry.

Wethers himself had popped his cherry.

Coming out of the Infirmary, Dermid gave thumbs up to Oscar sitting with Goll and Conan on the long wooden bench. “The nursie says I’m okay.” They all laughed nervously. “Ain’t we just the mystic knights of the Fianna defending Ireland from foreign troops.” The English doctor, who had drawn their blood and swabbed each of them front and back, had told them they showed no signs of any social disease.

Yet.

Conan said Frankie X had whipped out a condom before he fucked him. Oscar claimed Patch shot dryfucking his thighs, and Goll admitted to no more than Knuckles had fucked his face. Then Oscar remembered that Patch had cum twice, *mmm*, once inside his butt. Dermid noticed how Goll denied that Knuckles had screwed Goll as well.

“It was all so fucking furious.” Dermid studied Goll’s expression.

“We was all so fucking stoned,” Goll said.

“The doctor wants to check our blood in three months.” Conan said.

“Fucking Aids,” Oscar said.

“Fucking suspense.”

“Fucking Yanks.”

“Fucking us.”

“Fuck.”

At a curry cafe where they were not known, Dermid said, “Wethers and his boys put us well underfoot.” He looked at the plates of sizzling tandoori. “I’ll be changing my tune.”

“What are you on about,” Oscar said. “You turning down a life in Vaseline Alley?”

Goll sat a bit moony. He was remembering Knuckles who had whispered sweet nothings to him. What good did it do him to be sitting in Dublin with these gits when he could be working back in Chicago with “Wethers Bros. Bricks, Paving

& Landscape.”

He had drawn his brother, Conan, in on the intention, as much as the thought, that they two should be off to the States. Some fancy it was, but whether the Wethers or not, Goll was figuring his good old Dublin days were about over. He and Conan could lay bricks. In his pocket, he had two green card immigrant work applications, and Knuckle’s Chicago phone number on a slip of paper.

Who was chasing who?

Goll looked at the other three lads. They looked at each other. What feeling was shame—suddenly at a soul-piercing glance—turned to a loud exploding laugh of relief.

“Waaaah! It was a fucking teen sex comedy,” Goll said, “...starring us!

“Fuck us!” Oscar said.

“Fuck the Banshee!” Conan said.

“Indeed, fuck us,” Dermid said. He raised his glass. “Fuck the Banshee! Fuck the Yanks! The doctor said we flirted with death.”

“Jay Jaysis, Dermid,” Goll said already imagining himself leaving Ireland behind. “Lighten up, dude.”

Six months later, in summer, Dermid’s shaved head was grown out to a lustrous red. He felt like a new man. He rubbed his long fingers over his moustache and goatee. He faced himself naked in the full-length mirror at the Sauna on Dame Lane. What a fire trap. His body was tall and lean-muscled. His skin clear and unmarked. Eyes bright. He was happy the doctor told him his blood was clean. He looked at his cock hanging soft and thick and long between his thighs. He flexed the muscle between his bollix and his asshole to make his cock bounce. He looked only at himself, neither to the left or the right, ignoring the eyes watching him from the lockers and the showers.

Life in Dublin had speeded up too fast for him.

He could not go back down to Bray and live like Bridget with her kid in their parents’ house. He had found a room without a bath close to Dolphin’s Barn where he lived alone. He towed his shoulders and back. He had slowed his life down to a discipline.

Men could live without a bath or a kitchen.

He was tuning into the inner language of men.

Moving quiet around Dublin, ignoring what temptations he noticed, becoming a solid man, he said, working as a waiter among the starving young artists at the *Idée Fixe* Café, the good old *IF*, on Fowne's Street off Temple Bar.

"You've become a fucking monk," Oscar said. He was working for the Banshee. He had money. It was Oscar who brought the Tuatha de Danaan together one last time. He paid for the taxi to drive Goll and Conan out the M1 road to Dublin Airport.

Conan was worried about leaving the country, scared about climbing on the Aer Lingus jet, wetting his pants afraid about landing in Chicago and getting fucked all over again.

Goll was exuberant justifying himself "Seven million Irish can't be wrong living outside of Ireland!"

"Meaning what about the three million of us living here," Dermid said. "Do you think this is the land time forgot?"

"Love hides where?" Goll imitated Dermid. "Love hides where?" He shoved his hand along the taxi seat under Dermid's buttocks and laughed.

"You're a right prick," Dermid said.

"But together we're deadly grand," Goll said.

The Tuatha de Danaan laughed. All together. One last time.

In the taxi heading back through the warm June night to Dublin City Centre, Dermid wondered what it was that drove so many Irish out of Ireland. Himself, he was staying put. He looked at Oscar. Also staying put, he figured.

Oscar was a good friend. His sister Brigid had taken a fancy to him despite his hip hop phase. And a convenient thing it was, them both being from Bray, knowing each other since kids, and Brigid's boy looking so much like Oscar, it was a wonder to think about.

Brigid herself was a dirty old mouth, invited by Oscar, coming to that curry house for the Tuatha farewell supper, saying goodbye to Goll and Conan, laughing and wishing them well, and saying mystically later at the pub, well into her second pint, "The secret Irish purpose is spreading Irish blood all around the world." And what barbed thing had she meant, saying, "Wasting Irish blood," looking hard at him, "is a crime against the Irish nature."

"If being Irish is all a person is," Dermid had answered.

With Goll and Conan O'Morna headed out over the North

Atlantic toward America, Oscar in the taxi let Dermid climb out at Temple Bar.

It was half-ten and the crowds of kids, five years younger than Dermid, sat smoking and running and jumping on the steps of the plaza. Tourists from Galway and the States were strolling out of the small experimental theaters around Andrews Lane and heading to the expensive pasta restaurants like Paolo's where he'd like to work.

Dermid wandered on down the cobbled street of the pedestrian mall. Ninety minutes to midnight and the last light of the high summer twilight had finally darkened the lower sky.

Off Eustace Street, on the five-story outside wall of the Irish Film Centre, Dermid watched the rippling canvas screen wave under the huge Technicolor motion picture image of Liza Minnelli and Joel Grey dancing and singing loud over the crowd seated below in the courtyard enjoying the movie and the warm summer night. Middle-aged American queens were standing in the back rows singing along to *Cabaret* like it was fucking karaoke.

Maybe he should have gone back with Oscar to Bray. Maybe he should have flown off with Goll and Conan to America.

Down the street he walked through the crowds milling outside the music pubs from one spill of music to another. What a scene. One last tour of the street, was all he promised himself, and maybe a midnight pint over at the Wilde One's, when his ears pricked up, and his eyes lifted up, and he saw eight young girls singing on the corner, "We're Goin' to the Chapel and We're Gonna Get Married."

Something drew him to them. Their voices. Their innocence. Their fun.

Seven of them stood around a dark-haired girl whose head was swathed white in yards of net bridal veil. She was beautiful. The light of her beauty was shining on the walls of the small shop front as if her glow was the light of a candle.

Dermid watched several tourists watching her. Something was going on. People were putting money in the bridal box at her feet. He was curious. He walked up to the girls who were calling out "Sir, sir, madam, madam" to the tourists who walked by staring captivated, but a bit timid at stopping, figuring the girls might play them like street mimes somehow for public fools. Dermid walked straight up toward them.

“Sir, sir,” the girls called to him. Their pretty hands played through the white white white bridal veil floating around the dark-haired girl.

He smiled at them.

“Come here. Come here.”

Dermid ventured up.

“Sir,” the girls said, voices laughing talking saying singing sighing everything all together. “Sir. Please. Buy a piece of her wedding veil. She needs the money to buy herself a wedding dress.”

Two Irish women standing by, four white plastic bags of groceries hanging straight-arm down from their four dumpling hands, said, “Ha Ha Ha.”

“Performance art?” Dermid had seen everything at the *IF* Café.

The dark-haired bride with dark eyes smiled directly at Dermid.

“Brilliant.” He grinned.

One of the girls held a scissors. “I’ll cut you a piece. Yes? It will bring you luck on your path.”

“With the looks on him,” the two women standing by cackled, “he don’t need luck.”

“Aye, OK,” Dermid said. He reached into his pocket for coins and looked at the dark-haired girl and pulled out a pound note. “This is rich.”

The two women standing by said, “All these eejit girls want is seed and cash.”

The girl with the scissors cut a three-inch piece of veil into a patch.

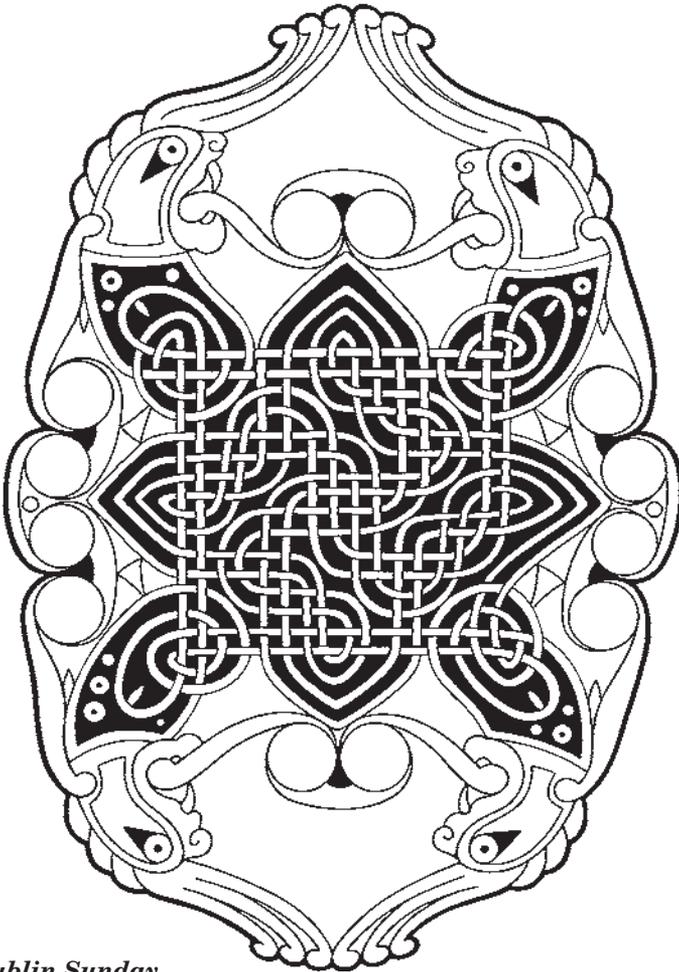
“Come here,” the dark-haired bride said to Dermid, “and I will put a love-spot on you...”

“Are you a witch now?” He laughed and played along and went over to her.

“...that no one will ever see without giving you love.”

She put her hand on his forehead, and she touched the piece of net veil there, and minutes later on his way home, in the high June midnight, walking the long walk toward Dolphin’s Barn past the Wilde One’s, Dermid, already forgetting the incident, feeling cocky in his pants, strolled past the beefy hooligans guarding the pub door where, lighting a cigarette, the girl in the little tittie tanktop stood, calling to his back as

he rambled by, “Where you been hiding, lover?”



Dublin Sunday

Place: Dublin

Time: Sunday, late afternoon, June 16, Bloomsday

Characters: Paud, 50-something

Keith

Glossary:

wanker: masturbator, jerk, fool

Caverject: medical aid against impotence

Bollocks, bollix: balls

P-P HARTNETT

DUBLIN SUNDAY

Sil, nipple clamps, dildo, magazine collection, videos, poppers, and Caverject. All at room temperature. Below 25° C. Paud, no longer seeing Paud in the mirror where a brittle stranger stood, hoped that somewhere in the miscellany he would find pleasure.

Paud initiated his evening of self indulgence with a large glass of low-budget brandy and a couple of pain killers. A teensy flickerette of energy raised both eyelids a fraction. Dilated pupils reflected light in the inert water of his eyes.

It was another beautiful summer sunset, making him feel pretty bloody awful. The more beautiful the skies, the uglier the Dublin rooftops, making that man stuck in Paud feel stuck in hopelessness.

The tears on the right of his face rolled faster than those on the left. (His shirt was actually wet with tears.) A clear mucus ran from his nose. Sundays were always difficult. Having an appointment with himself helped.

Over one of his latest breakfasts in Temple Bar he realised he was far from being in the mood for a spot of yoga. No, so he'd done what he always did when he felt that way. It had worked since the age of three. Huddling himself into the far corner of his wardrobe, knees tucked up to his chin, bottom resting down an inch above his heels, face buried in his hands, he'd allowed himself to sob soundlessly, like a girl (like a small boy) humiliated and lost, for three full hours. Occasionally he'd experienced mild breathing difficulties as the afternoon slipped away.

His left hand was fingering the deep wrinkles in his forehead. He knew exactly how he'd pass the evening. He

wasn't really in the mood for what he was going to put himself through. But it was in his diary. *W*. Inked in: *W* for *Wank*.

He wasn't getting any younger. Who'd have him when he left sentences hanging? Who'd help him when he couldn't be bothered with food anymore, or washing? Who'd be the first to make him a bowl of clear soup, tidy his bedclothes, do his laundry, help him to (and from and during) the lavatory? Who'd attend to his needs, day and night? Answer: no one.

Just thinking about his life was enough to render him immobile, paralysed by regret and indecision and ruminations on what might have been. The purposelessness of it all, not to mention the incompatibility of pheromones, phobias, and fetishes.

The highlight of the day had been the (hand) washing of his seven pairs of socks and two of his four shirts in a pink plastic bowl. Any activity usually dragged from him a feeling of (uselessness) weightlessness. The hot soapy water briefly rinsed over his condition of indifference to (pretty much) everything. The highlight of the day had been ruined by his washing the socks before the shirts, getting the procedure back to front as he did from time to time. Because of this, he'd had to use double the amount of washing powder to avoid what he considered to be a contamination of his shirts. He hated waste. Waste made him feel stupid.

The room swelled with pure piano. He sat proudly at the edge of the room behind the (very impressive) baby grand. Forehead creased with concentration, shoulders a little hunched, finger-synching to the notes, rhythms, and crescendos. Reflected in the window were his fingers, running up and down over the keyboard cover, shielding the ivories from his out-of-practice touch. When the CD finished, he lifted the lid, but was unable to do anything more than breathe in that very special smell he'd spent years savouring.

Pouring another drink, selecting another CD, he returned to his stool to continue his pre-recorded performance. He sat, still. Stiff. Ready. —Nothing. He'd forgotten to press PLAY.

I wonder if anyone will ever know about the emptiness of my life, Paud thought. I wonder if anyone will ever stand in a room that I have lived in and touch the things that were once a part of my life and wonder about me and ask themselves what manner of man I was. How to ever tell them? How to

ever explain?

Paul hoped that no one would ever guess the emptiness of his life by touching the things in his flat, by looking in a mirror he'd gazed into for long hours, hating himself. He knew he'd end up alone, deciding at an early age that loneliness would be all his when his (fair-to-middling) looks had gone, money spent. He was right.

The silence of his old age was broken with sniffs, occasional sighs, and slightly hysteric giggles every once in a while. A small blue suitcase he kept under his bed contained mementoes of happier times (sexy times) when he could get his dick to shoot three or four times a day. When he could get his dick up without shooting it up with Caverject. Times when his arse was penetrated by as many as six men (twenty) a night. Times when he had love bites and bruised nipples. Times when he had large phone bills from late night chats to men he liked to think of as lovers.

A laugh.

Paul, or the man Paul saw, appeared at the mirror in a grey-and-white striped, short-sleeved shirt. He was fielding the pages of an old (wonderful) diary, then looking out at the view. Several times he returned to the pages. 1997. He looked like he had a problem either with his concentration or that he was trying to remember where he'd put something.

"Ninety-seven," he said, circling an index finger over the date. He was going to have the worst hangover of his life the next day, but he didn't know that then. Each and every adventure had been compulsively catalogued since 1986, lest he forget. The exhaustive fuck journal was reassuring. At times the pages came fresh to him, like reading the adventures of a stranger. This way he experienced some fun. Again. The journal was not enough, though.

He sifted amongst snapshots, Polaroids, envelopes containing pubic hair, a pair of heavily stained Calvins, cigarette packets, a glossy 10x8 of Johan Paulik, napkins with phone numbers stabbed down. He was looking for a memory (to hit him hard) from out of nowhere. No joy came from a knotted condom containing sour spunk, two cigarette ends, dried flowers, postcards from Amsterdam. And, ah!, he was remembering that time in Paris where he got up to so much ooh-la-la.

A Pee Wee Herman doll: present from a soldier now

stationed in Yokohama. That was in 1990. Magnus. Big dick. A competent fuck, but mechanical. No fun for either of them. A black plastic comb, a stolen souvenir to remember Alberto who'd advertised himself in *BOYZ* as "Hot Latino Action." What the old man wanted was the glorious stink of that young male's sex there under his nose right that minute. Him, and all the other boyz he'd paid to savour by the hour: Aaron, Cerith, that tall Scott Butler.

An empty bottle of poppers, a greasy index card. (*Height: 6'1/1.84 Chest: 38/98 Waist: 31/79 Inseam: 34/86 Shoes: 10/28 Hair: Dark Blond Eyes: Hazel Specialities: Hands, Teeth, Fire-eating, Watersports.*) Ticket stubs for clubs and bath houses and dirty little cinemas: *Show Palace* in New York, *Century* in Los Angeles, *Yanko* in Paris, and his very favourite, *Sex World* in Munich. A well-thumbed copy of *Vulcan*: some wretch calling himself (or called) Randy Ray in a wet teeshirt and little else spreadeagled over a motor bike. Anal wall on show. And Leigh's ad:

WEIRD + HEAVY GUY, 39, seeks big-cocked handsome, totally horny brainy dirty lads (beer-bellies a bonus) for snogging, oral, tit torture, digital and mutual fucking. Also keen to start fisting. No SM shit. And a big NO to Christians. My pussy needs a lot of verbal abuse, Lycra + other genuine attention. Leigh on 0171 790 XXXX.

Paud shook his head. "God bless Leigh," he said to the scrap of paper out torn out of something called *Capital Gay*. Sometimes he felt so pathetic, thinking of all the years he'd spent pumping cum out of his dick, all those years alone, all those thoughts. Years of humiliating, debasing, painful, abusive, roped, gagged, cock-spurting experiences. Years spent in fear of syphilis, hepatitis and herpes had been ended with the start of a new fear (genocidal serial virus) hatched out in the late seventies. He smiled. What a great time he'd had when he could get it up without the aid of Caverject.

He'd lived, taking his life in his hands dressed in black leather—whatever the weather—in neighbourhoods which were non-neighbourhoods. Where the clubs were, where the action was. Many was the time (wandering, hunting, stalking)

he'd come across more than the occasional couple in an alley, casting shadows as long as monsters' teeth, fisting and fucking, getting blown. Shadows projected from artificial light, streetlights and neon. Only rarely sunlight. Dawn.

He could tell many a (smart cocktail) tale of ballerinas who'd had abortions, or what young men used to get up to, in the hope of advancing (ha ha ha) their careers in the record industry. Those were the days.

Mind collapsing backwards through the psychedelic spermotheque of the past—seeing his life clearer with his eyes shut than his tired old eyes had allowed him since his fortieth birthday—fond (flashback re-wind) memories of Chad Conners, Steve Marks, Kip Harding, Danny Sommers, Ryan Idol, Wes Daniels, Brian Maxx, Al Parker, Anthony de Marco, and Joey Stefano hit him. Not forgetting, oh no, not forgetting Jeff Stryker. (Mmm.) The he-man screw-man of his dreams.

Men in rubber, leather, sportswear, military uniforms, and fundoshi, groaning and groining. Youth famous for inheriting outrageous equipment from the gene pool.

He remembered evenings in (at home) with *Body Network*, *Uncut Club*, *Muscle Hunting*, *Muscle Time*, *Power Grip*, *Power Tool*, *Stryke-Out 1*, *Loaded*, *Daddy Trains*, *Squaddies*, *Hard Hats*, *Bondage Dreams*, *Lunch Hour*, *Stiff Cocks*, *Comparing Cocks*, *Inch By Inch*, *9½ Inches*, *The Bigger The Better*, *The Biggest One I Ever Saw*, *How Big Is Big?*, *Bigger Than Huge*, *Jaw Breaker*, *Like A Horse*, *Face Down*, *Dream Lover*, *Horny Arsehole*, *Deep Inside*, *Pumped*, *Electro-Anal Kink 2*, *SM*, *Dank*, *Man Shit*, *Human Toilet Seat...One More Time...* and evenings out at Manhole and Back Drop. Paragon was always good on Wednesdays (fat & hairy), Thursdays (naked only). Trips to Time Limit, Nagoya Topman, Megamix, Sexy Dream Host. All essential toys from the *C'est Bien* catalogue. Dialling 03-336X-XX69 to choose a boy by numbers: A88 in black Speedos, B12 in blue jeans, B16 in the wet, skin-tight, superfine white knickers. (Lovely little waist on that one.) Dialling 03-390X-XX82 where Mastercard, Million Card and Visa were all so welcome. Dialling Body Bank on 03-33XX-XX45 to snack on No. 31 in his thong, No. 83 in his snug-fitting cartoony boxers. When he rewound the smutty little highlights of his life, the big-dick contests at King, 579 Sixth Avenue, would always creep in. The majority of contestants were working

boys. Nicely available. Handy. Big dicks and broad shoulders (bodyguard-wide, commando-thick), that was his style.

Paul looked at the ticking grandfather clock. The pain killers, he reckoned, would be taking effect by the time the injection (eagerly awaited) was beginning to work. It was, indeed, time.

Beside the oil, nipple clamps, dildo, magazine collection, videos, and little brown bottle of *Rush* was the Caverject. The essential little crank-starter in something resembling a child's pencil box. Blue. Plastic. Caverject in the Caverject box. A little vital something ten months away from the heavily stamped use-by date. Magical Caverject in the magical Caverject box: a blue, plastic "little something" containing one glass vial of Caverject. 20 micrograms of the stuff. Inside the blue, plastic "little something" there lay, so tidily, one glass syringe containing 1 ml of clear-solution bacteriostatic water, two antiseptic pre-injection swabs, soaked in isopropyl alcohol. A couple of sterile, non-pyrogenic, single-use needles.

"What is Caverject?" Paul was so pleased, making irony of himself in Camera #1, repeating the imaginary question from the imaginary late-night chat-show host for the imaginary mini-documentary on erectile dysfunction. "Caverject," Paul, playing directly to the imaginary studio audience, explained, "Caverject Powder, is *alprostadil*. A substance similar to the natural substance in the body called prostaglandin E1, something which widens blood vessels so that blood can flow in the penis more easily. Without it (ha ha ha) I can't get an erection."

"Go on," the imaginary late-night chat-show host for the imaginary mini-documentary on erectile dysfunction half-whispered.

"I'd been having trouble with my waterworks, having to get up three or four times a night, bursting to go. Sometimes there'd be nothing more than a dribble. So I went to the doctor and he sent me off for a scan. Some cold jelly—KY?—was slapped here, on the lower abdomen, and my internal plumbing flashed up on the screen. Quite spooky, really."

Paul began to prepare for the injection, thinking to show it to Camera #2.

"My prostate had swelled to such a size that it had squeezed the urine track into an S shape. I was given an epidural which deadened feeling from the waist down and

put on the kind of chair you often see women in. You know, a legs-up-in-the-stirrups job. (Could have used that in Amsterdam.) I watched the operation in the reflection of a darkened viewing gallery window. Went in through my penis, they did, with this little saw.”

“We can cut that later,” Paud imagined the imaginary chat-show host saying.

“I was cathetered until the bleeding stopped. Hospitalised for three days in all. Wonderfully looked after I was, particularly by a little hunchbacked nurse whose name I can’t remember for the life of me. The doctor said, ‘You’ll be back in shape down there in three to four weeks.’ But I wasn’t and it came as a bit of a blow. With nothing happening down south, nothing moving from the perpendicular to horizontal, I went back to the doctor and said, ‘Hey, I’m a practicing homosexual and I don’t want to get out of practice!’ I felt he could have been a little more sympathetic. Didn’t get so much as a smile out of him. He just said, ‘Wait, and see what happens.’ Story of my life.”

Paud could see his own face (not bad) talking (big close-up) on the imaginary chat-show screen when suddenly at the bottom appeared the gigantic words ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (not imaginary) for all the imaginary audience (a sympathy of applause) to see.

“I was offered three options: 1) a pump, 2) Caverject, and 3) a prosthesis of a permanent spring-like stiffy.” (Oh no.) “I tried the pump, a bit like the one Jeff Stryker’s brother uses on himself in *Powertool 2*, but it didn’t do much for me. So it was Caverject or nothing. Then the doctor said I had to be circumcised because of my tight foreskin. Talk about one thing after another. Can’t inject Caverject if you’ve got a penis shaped like a banana or a tight foreskin. Hard to believe, but true. Right then, let’s get started. You’re supposed to wash your hands and dry them on a clean towel, but we’ll skip that.”

The sad old man (international sex tourist) got busy with the pre-injection (multi-lingual) swab, the *tampon a ulitiser avant injection, the tupfer für die Injektionsvorbereitung, the totallita para uso previo a la inyeccion*. It smelled of school test papers.

“I find that a dose of 10-15 micrograms does the trick for me,” Paud whispered to Camera #3, flicking up the flip-off

plastic cap.

“Here we go now,” Paud said removing (dramatically) the rubber cover over the syringe. “Upjohn Ltd., I thank you.” His unsteady fingers had difficulty prying the needle out of its protective casing. “Bloody things.”

Having fitted a 22-gauge needle to the syringe, having gently tapped the syringe to work any air bubbles to the top, Paud held the needle close to his eye (checking out Camera #3) but up and away from him. Slowly, very slowly—he didn’t want to waste a drop—Paud pushed the plunger until some liquid squirted out of the needle.

“Push the needle through the rubbery middle of the powder vial top,” he said, even straight he sounded not campy but a camp parody of campy, “then push the plunger down firmly to squirt all the solution onto the powder.

Silence.

Paud gently swirled the vial until the powder dissolved.

Silence.

The mixture looked fine: totally dissolved. Clear.

Silence.

“You are now ready for your injection.”

Making sure the needle tip was at the bottom of the vial, Paud carefully pulled up the plunger and drew the measure into the syringe.

Change of needle. A finer 30-gauge needle.

Silence.

Tapping the syringe again, ever so gently to drain any air bubbles to the top, Paud repeated the routine.

“There. 15. Let’s go for it.”

Right-handed, Paud (fully clothed) held his penis (hugely exposed) in his left hand. Index finger underneath, in front of those testicles, thumb on top, just where it joined the body, he yanked the thing over (towards) his left thigh and squeezed it between thumb and finger.

“Hello,” he said to the bulgy muscle in the upper half of his penis.

Silence.

Quick antiseptic pad wipe.

Silence.

A few seconds for the skin to dry. A nervous cough.

Silence.

The searching for a new point of entry, avoiding veins, avoiding obvious blood vessels under the skin.

“Just a little prick,” he winked at imaginary Camera #1. “Just a little prick,” he sang (camped).

In went the needle, precisely as shown in diagram A of the instructions he no longer relied upon. Straight through the skin into the muscle, as shown in diagram B. Instructions he could quote word-for-word right down to the compulsive twenty-line Note-for-Doctors-Only paragraph.

Withdrawal of needle. Firm press of pad against needle mark. Gentle massage of penis to help get the Caverject spread through the muscle.

It would be half an hour before the erectile tissue was on the go. Thickening, but not lengthening. Half an hour to go. Time for another drink. Walking about his room, penis out, exposed, expectant of lift-off.

Paud breathed in deeply. He could smell (only) himself, not the *pot pourri* mouldering in assorted Chinese containers on the mantlepiece. Not the African violets and small begonias thriving by the window. Not the vase of lilies, beside him, which sent out a sweet scarf of scent his way. No. Just him. And he needed a wash.

Pushing his video cassette (porno) in through the rectangular slot (like mailing a letter) of the machine, black but for the silver SONY, Paud crossed his trousered legs (his penis rolled out ready) as if for a chat over coffee. When the screen popped on, the porno star (also an actor in a cigarette commercial) was walking down a road with a sense of solid sexual purpose. The video fluttered, copy of a copy originated in Hollywood, images scrambling. A long shot. A speed boat. Four boys. Tight, white, wet skintight shorts. Close up. Startling bulge about to be pulled out of blue jeans.

ADULT BOYZ FOR ADULTS ONLY

The pirated video had been badly transferred. The copy guard had turned its images different shades of blue. Blue shirts, blue shorts, blue towels. One beautiful big-dicked (blue) boy after another fucked themselves (blue) crazy.

“Mmm.”

A close-up: amazing pale blue swimming-pool eyes floating...floating in blue, teasing out of a blue face. Blue flesh. A blue boy burying his blue cock in between the blue bollocks of

another slightly smaller blue boy. Later: a sizeable Hollywood stud's blue penis shooting a wad of pale blue semen over a shaved blue blond boy's butt, second in attention-grabbing to the homosexy assault of the soundtrack of oinks and grunts over a 130 bpm track. Covered with blue spunk, already pulled down by gravity, the blue boy looking up to the screen with a (cheeky naughty boy) grin to say, "Same time next week?" Just the four words. Another scene, a particular favourite, began, starring Rock Hardon.

Paud, in shirt and trousers with penis (exposed) lay stretched staring on his couch, finally smiling as he approached, remote control in hand, that blue footage of Rock Hardon he'd seen over and over. Lovely cum shots. Slow motion. Freeze frames. Paud controlled the hardons and cumshots in others he could not command in himself. He put his hands together and gave a few claps for the divine body of lucky Rock Hardon. Pornography (the constant gift) was his saviour. Only money would have got him a helping hand. He had planned ahead. A couple of years back he'd palpitated up close to a heart attack at Cork Airport when he'd smuggled back three porno tapes from NYC. Those titles! *Suck, Hard, Inches*.

Paud rewound the video (repeatable, obedient) to the beginning.

Masturbating at his (open) trousers, he eyed the charming blue man lying face down on a bed of blue sheets, jockstrap framing pale blue buttocks. How Paud smiled as the camera zoomed in on that arse, made hairless the morning of the video shoot with a fist full of depilatory. How he smiled as those dream-boy bollocks tightened and relaxed, buttocks sprayed with oil and water to emphasize the (lovely) shiny, clear contours, those (delicious) sharp shapes. He knew the video so well. Knew the point where the young man rolled over. Knew the dick wasn't that big, but, pressing HOLD, he knelt (worship, whoreship) before the screen at that (transubstantiation) point where the porno stud raised himself up to stand above the camera. (Change of lens, switch to wide angle.) Paud's lips hungered (desperate) for action. His throat and man-hole ached to be stretched by that cockhead freeze-framed across his screen.

The Caverject hit him full force. His dick rose, and Paud (Himself, at last Himself, again Himself) sprang to life.

Consciousness changing. He rose from his knees, reached for his toy box, and tore his shirt off. When the clothes pegs were pinned to his enlarged nipples, poppers inhaled in alternate nostrils four times (ceremoniously), the black-rubber dildo (size of a baby-doll) slipped in, up, slowly, increasing pressure, down on the thing, he exercised the kind of breath control a midwife would applaud. He'd taught himself a (traveller's) thing or two in the long years of pleasure seeking. The change of consciousness he'd been circling for rushed through him like a fix as he leaned up close enough to kiss his screen.

"Yeah, you like that big cock, don't you?" Paud whispered to himself. (Oh dear, yes.)

The video screen steamed up with his breath. He kissed what he saw in the mirror of the screen: half American porno-star arsehole, half himself (his beloved late lamented self). His false teeth met hard reflected false teeth. False smiles smiling back all the way from L.A.

Gradual, pulsing jerks, pumped with warmth (stiffened) the object that the Caverject had made of his penis. The thing became enormous, somehow lifting off detached from its stubbled pubic mooring, glans *sans* sheath (glossy and purple and newly clipped). The thing shuddered like a (fun-house anatomy) part recalling the whole, rebelling against the whole wrecked ruined fun-house. Paud's bald head (neatly shaved), haughty face, pigeon chest thrust out, paunch and short legs were what this (exactly nationally average-sized) penis was straining to detach itself from. His dick was so pumped up, so redheaded, so animatedly erect, it waggled like a huge rechargeable dildo plugged into his groin. The circumcised tip was burning (exciting) what with the skin stretched so tight. "Thank God for Caverject." The mass of the thing (tumid) between his legs sucked blue images of the porno-star into his tired old eyes that had seen everything (except in blue). Enormous weariness suffused the man's hopeful face. Sweating. Running wet with sweat.

Outside his window, evening heat (bloody hot June), humidity rising off the tarmac of the street, cooked the sweat and humidity in his flat, trapped back between the buildings, in rooms where his penis (victim of years of tossing, shaking, squeezing, itches, rashes, teeth marks, mysterious dribbles, cock rings, infections, menthol rubs, sores, handcreams, oils,

warts, condoms, spit, acrid urine, and cum-become-catarrh) was barking like a dog to perform its #1 Trick.

The heat reminded him how, shirtless in the hot afternoon, the lad from upstairs, the lad from #8A had passed him by at the bins. Keith. Sexy fucking shirtless Keith, nipples of maroon and brown, carrying two stacks of books bound with nylon string, hands made for playing the piano. What a funny feeling (forgetting fuck) twice a day since then: wanting to cuddle. Sniff of poppers.

Paud's memory clicked into PLAY, rewinding and freeze-framing the premiere of his imaginary video, "Keith Imagined," on his imaginary chat-show. Levi's 501's, white ones, brand new, bit on the stiff side, belted, a piping of hair (pubic) tapering up out of the jeans toward his navel, rising up from the thick black (curly) triangle (teen) of his sweet yolks. Paud imagined stroking gently (tugging) that hair, combing that hair (with his teeth), shaving that hair. Catching Keith shirtless at the bins, cutting Keith off, stepping out of Keith's way, Paud spied Keith's goods free-hanging, rubbing directly on denim, no designer waistband, his lovely bum, a textbook arse in bleached-white denim. Hard and boxy buttocks. Perfect skin. Deep crack. Hairless. Not a blemish. Fresh from the shower, smelling of nothing sweet (but himself). He wondered if the upstairs lad from #8A would ever have a dildo or fist (or thermometer) up that tiny kiss of his the way Paud had the doll-sized dildo up his own arse. Keith stripping (naked) brought the old boy's charged penis close to ejaculating right under his nose. Eyes bulging, tongue wagging, the man Paud saw in the mirror of the video screen had the penis of a cartoon dog wagging in his hands.

Paud squeezed the thing attached rock hard on to his body, bending it (pleasure), bruising it (ecstasy), watching on his video screen a threesome (sort of) in progress. An indigo black youth bent forward sucking his own dick. A second black (blue) bent backwards sucking himself. A third bent his own ten inches into his own ass. Paud had seen the video and, one summer (ages before), the Greek urn it was based on. Into the loop of his endless cassettes he mixed the maroon nipples and cracked buttocks of sexy fucking shirtless Keith sneering at him (cuddling) to fucking move out of the way.

Paud (grateful for small mercies) jerked off silently,

making occasional moan rubbing new menthol on his fire-raw rock hardon. Timing the Caverject, he fast forwarded the video. That orgy scene was good, but he liked what was coming better. His eyes fixed upon a scene featuring two blue boys frolicking amidst the aquamarine bubbles of a Jacuzzi. Occasionally he'd shut his own faded-blue eyes (forehead rippling like a monk), then open again to focus directly on cobalt cock, azure arse, robin's egg balls, perfect lapis-lazuli skin. His fleeting, freeing splash (compliments of Caverject) was on its way toward lift off behind the fire-raw re-chargeable dildo attached to his groin.

He wished to be whisked away. Exit Ireland. Just like that. Go away and be gone.

He wished...he wished...he wished...

He could not take off.

He wished for 3-D TV as he fast-forwarded again, rolling tape fast, in a kind of beautiful terror, decapitating the (blue porno) head smiling his way, sticking on sexy fucking shirtless young Keith's face, and the royal blue eyes in that face were young Keith's, and the neck and the chest were lovely young Keith's, and the nipples on the chest—Keith's—and the ribs and the long flat belly and belly button and the operation scar camouflaged with a (leaping dolphin) tattoo and the jungle of hair spinning upward from the long, dark, heavy, swinging (huge) dick approaching, ejaculating over a pane of clear glass in front of the video camera lens: Keith's. Lovely young Keith. There. For Keith. With Keith. In Keith. Not an orifice on the lad up in #8A failed to get stuffed, licked, sucked, rubbed in the man's imagination. Paud would have sold his soul (again) to have the devil there beside him.

Suddenly, the phone rang (three times) for the first time in two days. The answer/fax picked up. His own voice. (Leave a message.) Hope bloomed inside the old man's chest. (I'll get back to you.) Under his old man's skin, his heavy heartbeat boomed. (Beep) No message. (Beep) No fax. (Hang Up) Only fury.

Final sniff of poppers.

Fuck Keith! Fuck them all! His splash lifted off, building tremble behind his twitching nostrils, in the wrinkling of his nose, in the urgent licking of his (sybaritic) lips. His stomach hollowed. The ache of anger raged down from throat to thighs.

He sniffed. Beyond desire. Rattling his bouncing testicles. Contracting the muscles of his abdomen close to doubling up. Rolling (furious) a little like an epileptic. Jerking away swiftly. Remembering the shiny, blue tracksuit bottoms on (desire) some dumb boy at the bus stop. Sweating. Heart beating like a fire bell. The uncorked (sparkling) explosion came when he couldn't hold back (had to let go), came, came again, quickly, came in rage enraged. He looked in need of (urgent) medical treatment.

The cry the old Paud made just before he came was kin to a vampire's groan at the first light of day. His disconnected ejaculation sprinkled, scattered, and shot three separate arterial sprays as his ticker went ding-a-ling. He thought he'd die, but he (disappointed) sucked in big (Keith-scented) breaths of *O* and *O* and *O* again. He splashed the video screen, and the double-page spread of Randy Ray on a motorbike, then dribbled into his fist, blue-red faced, mouth wide open, teeth gritted, falling back buttocks on heels, the babydoll dildo dropping (popping) out (don't look).

"Ahh!" he said to the close-up of a blue blown-stud blowing, hatred in his hallucinating, fixed eyes, launching that (classic) unbearable look all over his face of someone fighting for air (life), fighting against the close (closing) loneliness of the hot humid Dublin Sunday night. That mouth of his formed another great *O* before squeezing out one long turd of a moan.

As if dying, as if.

His heartbeat slowed from a ferocious old club dance-beat (quaint) only he heard (could never forget). He hiccupped half-unconscious, made brief rattling gasps followed by the more usual fit of (poppers) coughing. His eyes looked out his window at the far distance of the next building, heard the bins banging, everyone in, working tomorrow, Sunday night Dublin blues, Keith kicking up his motorbike, sweet hot fucking Keith, and he passed out into the intimate kind of peace (coma) reserved for world-class wankers. **Flooded. Sticky. GAME OVER.** Paud (wiped out) wiped himself with a tissue. On his video screen, the blue video whores continued to jerk off without him. He'd feel better after a good night's weep huddled in the far back corner of his wardrobe, chin on knees, sobbing for the humiliation and, worse, for the loss of he wasn't sure what.



The Story Knife

Place: Cruise ship, Inland Passage, West Coast, North America, to Alaska

Time: June 16, Bloomsday, to June 20, the Summer Solstice

Characters: Brian Kelly

Cabin Boy from Genoa

Stewardess from Scotland

Dr. Bernie Wiegand

Mountain Man

Glossary:

Fleadh: festival

Himself: an Irish way of substituting a grand pronoun for a name defining the difference between subjectivity and objectivity; for instance, referring to Sinead O'Connor as Herself and to the Pope as Himself. Meant positively, but often used very ironically. "It's Himself!"

Camcorder: portable video camera

Klingit: a native people in Alaska

Dreamtime: the virus-free 1970's after Stonewall Riots (1969) to the recognition of the virus in 1982

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[HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK](#)

JACK FRITSCHER

THE STORY KNIFE

After Skagway in Alaska, in the long arctic light of the summer solstice, Brian Kelly, heading north, heading toward true north, realized the twilight of the gods must not be desperate. On his American cruise ship, docked against the granite mountains of the North Pacific, he had caught Himself catching the eye of a cabin boy from Genoa.

The boy was, in fact, freshly tipped over the cusp of adolescence, a young man, the Italian kind who gives occasion to sonnets, whose innocence beguiles, whose dark curls and darker eyes and supple-shouldered body cause notes of invitation, of assignation, accompanied by a cabin number and a hundred dollar bill, to be written in hope and then crumpled and thrown away in confusion.

Sex was not the quest.

Beauty was.

Love was on dangerous times.

To touch a stranger put life at risk, but the need to touch beauty, to trace the curling hair of the head and thigh and foot, even more than the groin, bit into his fifty-year-old heart.

He Himself had always worshiped beauty.

Never was sex itself his purpose. Sex was the hook to distract beauties in their own tracks long enough to savor beauty itself incarnate. Brian Kelly, Chicago-born out of a Dublin Dempsey come over to marry a Boston Kelly, was not some feckless rover traveling ignorant through the world. He knew what some people are for. The young man from Genoa may have hired on as ship's crew. But he was not for that. His beauty was his true vocation.

Daily, the cruise ship, which had embarked from

Vancouver, swirling in colorful serpentine of merriment, heading north up the waters of the Inland Passage, washed away the anxiety which had become Brian's habit at home. He traveled alone. He was happy keeping to Himself. In San Francisco, at the jammed Bloomsday Fleadh Festival in Golden Gate Park, he had stood separate from the sunburnt crowd cheering Van Morrison and Elvis Costello singing out the anthem of the "thousand miles of the long journey home." On the cruise ship, he gladly avoided the endless programs of entertainment and distraction. He made Himself invisible.

As the ship cruised northwards, he walked the wooden decks, sometimes warm with June sun, sometimes cold with pelting arctic rain, purposely neither smoking his cigarettes nor saying his rosary, leaving himself open to what flow of smell or thought or feeling might come from the sea, the passing blue ice, the mountains.

Always his *Daybook*, full of scribbled notes, was in the pocket of his long Australian slicker that flapped like a cassock around his ankles.

Always he carried his Camcorder, shooting with exotic angles the wake of the ship, the rain dripping on the decks, and the empty chairs and empty tables of the piano salon.

The Reverend Brian Kelly purposely kept people out of his rectangular video frame. His footage, viewed and re-viewed alone in his cabin, made the classic ship, built in 1957 and never done up for disco, look empty of the present, and so reminiscent of romance he wondered that no Hollywood location scout had exploited its varnished wood decks and steep stairs and vintage carpet in the long hallways below that led to the perfectly preserved period state-rooms and cabins.

Films, he mused, because films had been his late-night refuge alone, lonely, in the rectory, were no longer about romance on the high seas. Hollywood had turned to crash-and-burn adventures with action scripts that would have no use for the venerable ship but to blow it up.

His camera zoomed in on the ship's nooks and doors and rails, and tracked down the gangways, with an aching nostalgia. His blazing blue eyes searched for imagined forbidden trysts of sophisticated passion from those romantic times past when, as a young priest sitting in the dark confessional, whispered sin had once been interesting, before the limp

whinings of neurotics, seeking reconciliation face-to-face, had caused him to laugh out loud, because he was only a priest, not a psychiatrist.

Other passengers nodded to his head of red hair haloed by the bright summer sun, nearing solstice, but could not penetrate his aura of privacy. He protected Himself from the presumptuous privilege of strangers thrown together for a week, eager to make new acquaintances, and tell their life stories.

His cabin stewardess, a worldly little blonde from Strathclyde, Scotland, hardly surprised him with her openness. At first he had been uncomfortable with her constant attentions, making up his room, turning down his bed covers. He felt viscerally the class distinctions of the world. He, no aristocrat, had never felt comfortable with the parish housekeeper, because he always empathized with the people who cleaned other people's bathrooms. But his stewardess put him at ease. She was on top of the roles acted out on shipboard.

She too knew what people were for.

He figured she knew what he was for.

His stewardess, pretending the black-and-white Roman collar that tucked out of his suitcase was for the last night's costume party, told him what no one else would tell. She told him how passengers, perhaps pursuing some metaphor of life's voyage in a ship, boarded to die, how one or two each trip died, how they were quietly taken away to refrigeration below decks. Old people, ancient ones, and sickly people, terminal ones, invisible among the fiercely robust breeders and feeders determined to have the good time they had paid for, had boarded the ship to die. That was not what the cruise ship's frenetic television commercials had promised, not the way they promised shipboard partying, sports, and fun.

Father Brian Kelly, after twenty-five years in the confessional, was not surprised at her tale.

But he had not expected the dark surprise of the cabin boy from Genoa.

He'd thought he was beyond temptation.

The young man slept well below the passenger decks with the crew. Brian's stewardess told him of their small rooms with no windows. "This is a prison for us, it is," she said. His own cabin had a porthole whose three brass bolts he had

unscrewed to let in the cool North Pacific air. Small icebergs flowed south past his porthole north of Ketchikan in the Inland Passage. He kept to his cabin surrounded by his books and papers and cameras.

The other passengers feasted, gorging themselves from breakfast to midnight buffets, orgying through croissants and custards, each day appearing in new clothes brought on board in incrementally larger sizes as they ate their way northward, intent on getting their money's worth. The wives of businessmen and contractors and doctors were continents unto themselves: plump, pink, bejeweled members of the charge-card classes, cruise-ship women, towing what was left of their silent husbands, impatient wives of living male mutes, waiting for the man they had married to collapse leaving them at last free to enjoy all the riches of insurance dividends that funded the cruises of the real widows on board.

None of them, old or young, husband or wife, bothered him, because, between the fat and the dead, he found the silent thin thread of his own individual life so sweetly unlike their straight coupled contempt for each other. Anyone who thought priests should marry could be cured listening to the confessions of married people. Their marital boredom rather amused him. They had replaced athletic lust with guileless gluttony, but they seemed so ordinary, so harmless, so nice, he wondered if sins any longer actually existed, because God could hardly take offense from such poor creatures. If the old traditions and taboos had evaporated, was he Himself, as a priest, irrelevant?

The ship, mercifully, and mercy was all he found Himself wanting at home in Chicago, from where he'd fled, was carrying him away from his daily life, his daily things, his daily routines of Mass and prayer and counseling. No priests of his acquaintance could telephone him from the Archbishop's office with gossipy updates on who was doing what to whom, on who was drunk or dying or dead. He read no news. He watched no television. He attended no films, and the less he saw and heard, the more visible he became to Himself.

In his *Daybook*, he wrote: "Zen and the Art of the Priesthood." His Jesuit spiritual director had warned him he read too much for his own good. Reading had colored his thinking.

He stood naked alone in his cabin with the sea breeze

from the open porthole cooling his body and his Camcorder recording his solo movements. Once, after a port-of-call at a lake where he had helped row a canoe with twenty other passengers, picnicking on Tlingit reindeer sandwiches, he returned to his cabin and danced for his camera, a slow undulating male dance to ancient music no one but he Himself could hear. The hypnotic rhythm of the ship's engines, way below decks, was a white noise broken only by the splash of waves against the ship.

He was more than naked.

He was not his telephone ringing. He was not his car driving. He was not his Roman collar. Not his sermons. Not his books. Not his face smiling kindly at the sick, blessing the children, comforting the widows.

He was, stripped clean by the ship, simply becoming Himself behind his smile, behind what breezy conversation he sometimes felt impelled to make as a reality check, behind his gentlemanly stroll among strangers quietly, expectantly, waiting to be spoken to, eager to be ignited by someone who had not yet heard the story about themselves they had told a million times.

He was Himself in his cabin. Despite his abiding grief that his priestly life had turned into a disaster, because no one needed priests anymore, he was overflowing with ironic energy, laughing at the ship taking the sick and the old from his tribe into the ark sailing toward the ice floes. He admired their bravery. They no longer bothered to ask any priests for Last Rites. They sailed free-choice straight into Death's cold waiting embrace.

Love and death.

The death of love.

The love of death.

He had fled everything familiar at home because his personal telephone Roladex of priests who were friends read like the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*. He could no longer cry when a classmate from the old seminary died. His grieving had run out of tears. So many priests died so young. He had bought passage on the cruise to be alone for healing.

He had to think over his Jewish doctor's advice. Was it cynical or not?

"Father Brian," Dr. Bernie Wiegand had said. "When your

test comes out negative and you know what *safe* is, then the plague is over for you. Keep safe. Keep your act together.”

What act he had was driven by beauty more than lust, but driven all the same.

“What do I know?” he wrote in his *Daybook*, “I’m a burnt-out case.”

The third night, his stewardess pulled him aside. “A man must have jumped overboard.”

He was as fascinated to listen to her as she was insistent to prove to him what she had said was true.

“Overboard. Many do,” she said. “They come up here to die.” Her Scottish burr gave a credible chill to her voice somewhat the way his Dublin-born mother’s soft lilt still entertained him with conversation. “He’s nowhere on ship. The crew’s looked everywhere. It’s not unusual. Jumping is better, for me, it is. Better than finding them in the morning lying their in their beds. I leave them till last. The dead ones. Clean the other rooms first, I do.”

She was certainly progressive enough, and Protestant to boot, not caring a fig for priests, but he could not bring Himself to ask her about the cabin boy from Genoa. He could not profane to a woman the secret way the young man’s eyes met his own, the way the young man smiled knowing full well what was wanted, and what he was for.

Remembering their first exchange of looks, that first look, Brian could not deny the rush in Himself. He had no poker face. He knew the boy recognized the look.

The boy knew what the man was for.

Brian could not tell the stewardess about the looks men sometimes exchange. He was confused, unfamiliar with ship-board etiquette, uncomfortable with the pinched confines of class distinction that made the boy and him virtually inaccessible to each other.

Was the boy’s look really beauty smiling back?

Did the boy really know what he was for?

Or was his the coined smile of a Mediterranean hustler, hot for business in the North Pacific?

On the fourth morning, the ship docked at Skagway. The other passengers stampeded for the curio shops that were the same as all the other curio shops in all the other ports.

Brian, instead, stood quietly in the center of the village to

listen for the sound of hammers, following the sound, finding the local men, talking with them, telling lies, pretending he was a teacher, saying his principal had made him promise to bring back to his students some documentary truth about the people of Alaska.

The men, accustomed to cruise ship tourists, chatted easily and kept working as the priest knelt before them recording them with his Camcorder.

Only minutes before returning to the ship, he approached a mountainman sitting in a beat-up van with a canoe strapped on top, a stove pipe jutting through the rear roof, and a large Husky panting on the passenger seat. The mountainman talked angrily about big government and oil companies and clear-cutting and how stupid the voters of Ketchikan had been to allow a nuclear warship to homeport in their fishing waters.

His Camcorder worked like a magic confessional.

The lens sucked in people eager to spill their opinions and their secrets.

Everyone wanted to be on television.

The mountainman, shilling into the Camcorder like a TV commercial, showed him, through the driver's window, objects he had crafted while snowed in the previous winter.

Brian was fascinated by a small knife, its blade an ancient smooth mammoth tooth, its six-inch handle a beautifully burnished willow twig, honey-colored, accented with dark woodknots. He instantly liked the delicate object held in the mountainman's hand.

"It's a story knife," the mountainman said. "When the Tlingit or the Eskimo elders tell a story, they use this knife. They smooth out the snow and with the knife they draw a rectangle. The children watch the knife draw the story in the snow. They understand better when the knife draws the image of one person or two in the rectangle. As the story moves on, the storyteller wipes out the drawing, smoothing the snow, drawing a new rectangle for the next part of the story."

Brian turned his Camcorder off, hung it from his shoulder, and reached into his deep oiled canvas pocket where he kept his money in the flap of his *Daybook*. "I'd like to buy it."

"You want to know how much?"

"You made it. You tell me."

"At those shops over there, it'd cost you twice as much. Me?"

I don't have any overhead. I can let you have it for a hundred."

Brian wondered how people arrived at a price for beauty.

"I'll take it," the man said.

"No haggling?"

"I don't know how to haggle," Brian said. "I don't usually shop at all."

"Then I should've said two hundred."

"Okay. I'll haggle. Here's a hundred."

That easily, he bought the story knife which he planned to keep next to his laptop computer. He imagined Himself teaching *Bible* stories and *Catechism* and the *Lives of the Saints* to children in a whole new way. He'd tried everything else.

The fourth night at sea, the evening of the day at Skagway where he had videotaped the men building fences, he stood in the lobby outside the main dining room, purposely leaving the table a bit hungry, smiling at a group of Australian doctors who were inviting everyone to come hear the papers each had written prior to sailing.

"We'll give any other health professionals on board a letter saying you attended our seminar. For tax purposes."

Standing in the midst of their lucrative laughter, in that carpeted lobby, on the main deck outside the Purser's Office, surrounded by the tax-evading doctors and their cheerio wives, he saw the cabin boy, all innocence, so dark and young, come passing toward him, his angel's face smiling a smile more genuine than the polite smile crews thrive on.

Brian smiled.

Their eyes locked.

The boy cut courteously through the clutch of doctors straight toward him.

Face to face, neither having spoken to the other, the young man crossed all bounds. He placed his right hand on Brian's left shoulder in a quick flowing gesture noticed by no one but Brian Himself who said nothing in his flush of surprise.

It was the boy who spoke.

He used his deep voice lightly, as if the upper register of speech would promise more than threaten: "How are you this evening, sir?"

Brian Kelly, born with the gift of gab, could say nothing. His fair skin blushed red as his hair.

As fast as he had appeared, the boy was gone down the

stairs.

In years past, before the world was scared sexless, Brian might have dared follow the boy down the stairs to some private place.

Pacific whales would have spouted in the northern sea.

Brian, that night, could not, would not, by a conscious act of will, follow. Assniation required discussion. A thousand doubts of language and reason and vexed passion sent him careening down the long, carpeted, sloping passageway to his cabin.

In the long-ago Dreamtime, on one of his trips to the Greek isles, before the viral horror, this boy could have made his heart sing. He threw open his porthole to the cold midnight air. He braced Himself against the force of the wind.

Desire beat his brain with lust for the boy's beauty.

He had been careful so long, he would be safe if he continued his care, but the only care he knew for Himself, because he had taken vows he had only rarely broken, was abstinence.

He loathed his own self-discipline.

He raged against the circumstances of contagion.

He sat at his desk writing furiously in his *Daybook*.

His face grew hard as his groin.

He slammed the book shut and wrote three notes, throwing all three away, not knowing how to gain access to the young man.

He walked from his desk to the open porthole. The June night-wind below the Arctic Circle blew silken and silent around him.

The Alaska midnight, at this longest daylight, was the constant twilight his life had become.

He slept fitfully.

The ship cruised northward fast.

He rose early for the docking at the village of Sitka. A Russian Church, filled with gold icons, sat in the town center. He hadn't come to Newcastle for the coal. He pulled away from the crowd of passengers flocking into the church and headed to the combustion-engine sounds of a hundred small fishing boats bobbing at mooring. The crews of one or two men in rubber waders, heavy jackets, and watch caps, smoking and talking, drinking their coffee from steaming paper cups, paid him no attention as he shot them close-up with his

Camcorder's telephoto lens.

He could look and long for everything, but he could not touch.

How had he become so dead?

He was beside Himself.

He became Himself watching Himself.

How had he become a voyeur of his own life?

At Juneau, Brian boarded the helicopter tour which set him down on top of the windswept ice desert of the Mendenhall Glacier. The tiny chopper lifted off leaving him and three strangers alone to wander for an hour.

He set his Camcorder down firmly on the ice, recording, in the distance, the mountains, and, in the bottom of the frame, the glacial ice running a rivulet of topaz blue water.

He walked into focus in front of his own camera.

He was his own best director.

Who else would bother shooting his private dances?

Who else would shoot his private rituals?

He was a lone pilgrim kneeling on the ice-cap at the top of the world.

He reached into his pockets for the dozen healing-crystal rosaries he had brought from his previous pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock in Ireland. He immersed the clear-cut beads into the freezing blue trickle where they became indistinguishable from the ice of the glacier itself. If his priest friends believed the crystals to be curative, then his submerging them into the ancient arctic ice, melding them with the clear water in the bright light, might empower all the more the crystal rosaries he took back to the ones desperate for any hope.

Later, in his cabin, watching himself on screen, he realized his hands—the anointed hands of a priest empowered to call down the Body and Blood and Soul and Divinity of Christ under the appearances of Bread and Wine—looked very young for a man his age.

After Sitka, on the fifth night, heading from the smooth flow of the Inland Passage, out to the open sea, northwest, hundreds of nautical miles towards Anchorage, he realized the cruise was passing him by.

Only two nights remained. He had to decide.

He wrote lists in his *Daybook*.

If the young man found him a fool wanting to discuss safety, he would not have too long a time onboard to be embarrassed.

He was overheated and underventilated.

He felt unreasonable being safer than safe.

Was his life reduced to a search for safety?

What was living without risk?

He had always, almost always, disciplined his passion with absolute purity.

Had he no trust in his reason to govern his lust?

If alone with the young man, would absolute abstinence explode to absolute abandon?

It would be simpler to throw Himself overboard.

He was not afraid to die quickly.

He was afraid to die slowly.

He felt sick.

He had not eaten all day.

He headed down the rolling corridors toward the main salons. He could not walk a straight line. He pitched from wall to wall.

The open sea of the North Pacific lifted, then dropped, the ship. The line at the buffet was short. *Mal de mer!* He fled back down the stairs to his deck. He skirted around two passengers with dangerously green faces. He noticed white paper bags had appeared, stuck every ten feet into the railings along the passageway going to all the cabins. He had will-power. He willed he would not be sick. He slammed his door behind him. His *Daybook* slid from the desk to the floor. The story knife flew through the air. The room was hot as a furnace. He pressed his hands to his temples. He was wet with sweat.

He opened his door to let the cold air blow through.

He was not prepared for the sudden spectacle.

There stood his stewardess. Her face wide-eyed in astonishment.

A gluttonously heavy woman, supported by two other women, had just, as he opened the door to his cabin, thrown up on his stewardess's shoes.

"You bitch!" the stewardess screamed.

He ran past the four women, hitting first one wall, being tossed against the other wall, down the stairs to the Infirmary where the good ship's Doctor Marcello told him quickly

of something new: “A shot of Promethezine will fix you in minutes.”

He rolled up his shirt sleeve as three new patients arrived tossing at the tiny Infirmary door.

Calmed almost instantly by the injection, he felt suddenly superior to the rough seas. He lay on the guerny smiling, relaxed, freed, his blue eyes staring up into the bright light, feeling thoroughly Himself, floating up, out of his body toward the light.

Always in his life he had decided what he would do; and what he had decided to do, he decided he could undo.

He returned through the deserted passageways to his cabin. He was no longer at sea. He was on the sea. The self he had felt the first days alone onboard seemed anemic in comparison to the sense of self-purpose he had suddenly gained.

He stripped off all his clothes.

He paused once, only briefly, to consider if the Promethezine might be affecting his judgment.

He opened his porthole, and thrust his slender upper body out into the air, a pink human torso with flaming red hair sticking out from the port side of the white ship. The waves made by the prow spread out on the topaz water like foaming epaulets into the never-ending summer twilight.

It was June 20, the solstice, the year’s longest day.

He felt chilled by the wind. He could not afford to catch a cold. He pulled himself back into his cabin. His white teeth chattered. He had never intended to jump, but he laughed at how easily he could have flung Himself into the freezing sea when he realized that many had made their exits through open portholes. The scenario offered so perfect an exit it was ridiculous. He was getting pleased with Himself. That was a good sign.

He had the luck, he did. His mother and father both told him so.

The ship’s engine throbbed its white noise in backbeat to the sound of the waves. His senses, soothed by the injection, shook themselves out. The rhythms of the sea and the ship played bass line to the melodic flow of the ancient Irish blood-sea inside his body. He felt the ship roll, seeming so lightly a rocking cradle, back and forth. An ashtray slid across his desk to his laptop computer whose gray screen lit the cabin.

The story knife rolled into his hand.

At that moment, so abrupt, so crystalline, it surprised him, he knew what he would do, how he would make the best of times in the worst of times. It was not the twilight of the gods. He congratulated himself that he and his kind, sacred and profane, were always so goddam clever.

He sat down at his desk and wrote in his *Daybook* of Himself that he who had told a mountainman he could not haggle had actually perfected the self-haggling of a scrupulous, oversensitive, outmoded conscience into a lifestyle.

He took the story knife into his consecrated hands and felt the power of its nature.

He reached for a sheet of ship's stationery and printed very clearly a message, saying "1 AM, Cabin 336," and stuck a precious hundred-dollar bill with the note inside the envelope.

He rang for his stewardess.

"Did you see what that pig did to my shoes? Now she's off already to the midnight buffet!"

He was glad she was madly distracted.

She took the envelope, glanced at the name of the young man from Genoa, and smiled.

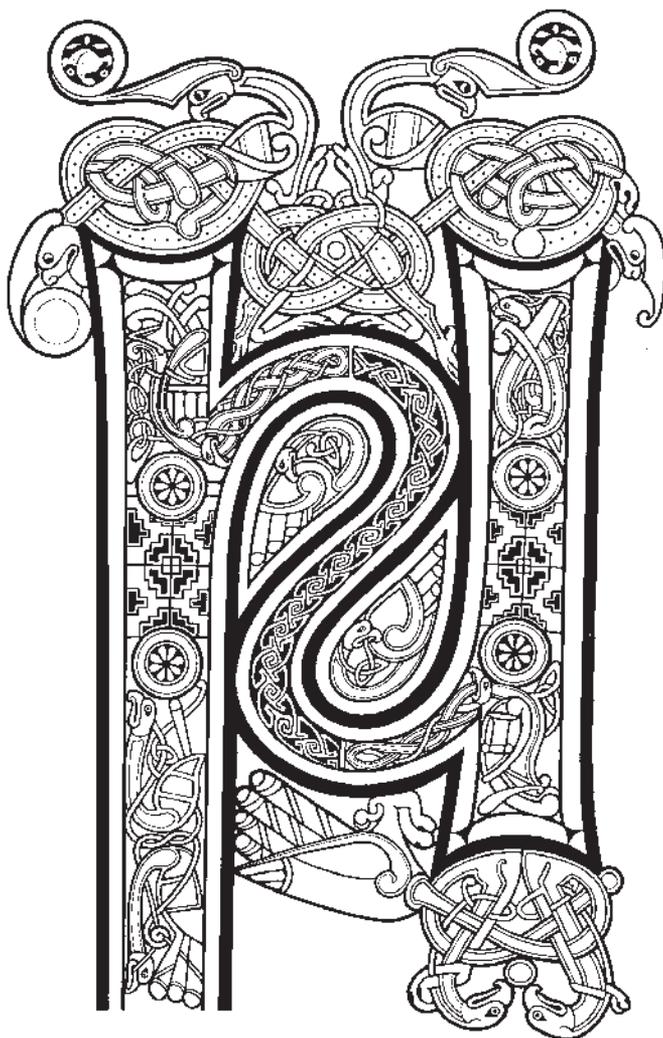
It was not her first *billet-doux*.

He gave her ten dollars, shut the door, and carefully placed the crystal-bead rosaries in the dob kit on the table next to the bed where he aimed his Camcorder into the soft light, framing the waiting rectangle of white sheet like a Tlingit elder smoothing snow for a story about to be told.

He sat in his chair, holding the delicate story knife, and waited.

His Camcorder hummed softly.

There were safe ways, ways as good if not better than the old ways, for savoring beauty and making it, always before so passionately fleeting, last forever.



Flight

Place: Los Angeles International Airport (LAX); University College, Cork, Ireland; and the Beach at Youghal, Ireland

Time: Present and 1978

Characters: Brendan O'Mahoney
Cathal, the Storyteller

Glossary:

Aula Maxima: grand hall, auditorium

Leaving Cert: certificate granted on completing education

Youghal: pronounced "Yawl"; an ancient town in County Cork, a fishing port

PETER PAUL SWEENEY

FLIGHT

I saw him. Near the magazine shop in the busy departure lounge of Los Angeles International airport. Loudspeakers announced gate changes and Aer Lingus flight departures. Luggage-toting passengers scurried to and fro. There he was, quiet, above it all, standing on a ladder, in a stream of businessmen and holiday travelers, adjusting a light fixture above his head. The paint-splattered work clothes, the unruly hair, the baby face, the sad eyes. It *was* him. It was Brendan. Not the Brendan of today. No. It was the Brendan of twenty years ago, the blond Brendan of my youth.

“Get it together,” a lady in line behind me said, “by the time you buy those magazines, they’ll be back issues. Keep moving. This is L. A.”

Was she talking to me or into her cell phone? I turned to apologize and my armload of magazines cascaded to the floor. I knelt to gather them, while the woman stepped around me, still talking into her phone, and made her purchase.

When I looked up, Brendan was gone. For one insane moment, I considered running into the corridor to search for him. But what if it weren’t him? And worse, what if it was? I regained my composure, paid the Korean cashier, and trekked to the gate for my flight to Dublin. In the waiting area, I was beyond reading, shaken really, shocked actually that old lust could come alive in one unguarded instant. Ironic. I’d been afraid of California earthquakes, and here I was shaken, shocked, trembling, my mind rewinding back twenty years to Cork to one particular defining night on the beach at Youghal. Worse than ironic. My dick stirred. I thought that phase of my life a closed chapter in my past.

Memory rushed back. My heart rose up. Clear it came to me: a stretch of wooded land ran beside the River Lee as it flowed through the campus of University College, Cork. The river bank was the perfect place for a couple of young men, boys really, to share a cold bottle of cider and smoke a cigarette on a warm Indian summer night. We walked in the fading evening light that October night in 1978. I swung our bottle of cider. Brendan O'Mahoney clutched a pack of cigarettes he'd pinched from his father's shop. We had climbed down the steep hill from the University quadrangle and sat down on a smooth river rock that had ages before been uncovered by the River Lee. I uncapped the plastic cider bottle. Brendan fished a cigarette from his pack. He lit it, took a puff, and handed it to me. He lit one for himself.

"Yer some doctor—smoking and drinking cider," he joked. "Ah, they're just little sins," I replied.

Three days earlier the wooden floorboards of Aula Maxima had creaked beneath my feet as I'd marched up to receive my medical degree from the President of UCC. I had secured a training position at a hospital in Dublin, and in a few days I would be leaving Cork.

From Dublin, fate was to take me to the Emergency Room of the Martin Luther King Jr. Hospital in Los Angeles, and, from there, to a successful private medical practice in Southern California. My links to Cork were to weaken and break. But on this unusually warm autumn evening, I did not know the future. Instead, I enjoyed the cider, the cigarette, and the company of my friend along the banks of the River Lee.

I handed the cider to Brendan. He pressed it to his lips. It was fairly early in the evening, but the northern night comes quickly in autumn in Ireland. Brendan wiped his mouth with his hand, and thrust the cider bottle over to me. He had worked at his father's shop that day, knocking a wall and carting away the rubbish. A thin powder of white dust covered his jeans and his faded denim jacket and his pale skin and his blond hair. He smelled chalky like hammered brick dust was mixed into the sweaty man-smell of himself. Dried paint speckled his heavy boots. He was perfect, or the cider was, or the night. My head swam as I studied the shimmering reflection of streetlights in the River Lee. I dared not touch him. He was bricks and I was books and bricks always look

good to books, but bricks don't care.

"Remember," Brendan said, "that time at school? We turned Mr. Duggan's desk upside down."

"How could I forget?" I said. "I thought my parents would never let me out of the house when we got caught."

We ran through memories from our school days until the cider and the cigarettes left nothing but the still of the night, and something unspoken, between us. The wind rustled the trees behind us. Brendan broke the silence.

"Cathal," Brendan said, "before yeh go off..." He lit a cigarette. "...I need to ask yeh something." He always chose his words, *need* to ask *yeh*, and his tongue rolled a bit thick with drink and his hard day's work.

"Ask me anything."

"In school, did I ever do something to make yeh angry at me?" he asked. "When yeh went to university, we weren't friends any longer."

Was he really insecure, or was he sniffing around the edges.

"Yeh think that?" My voice was not yet a doctor's Beverly Hills voice. My fingers gripped the sharp surface of the rock on which we sat.

"In school, always we were together," Brendan said. "I was at yer house, or yeh were in my dad's shop. I thought maybe I'd done something..."

"Brendan O'Mahoney!"

"...or maybe I wasn't clever enough among yer friends..."

"That's not true at all."

"...to be yer friend?"

"Yeh amaze me. How could yeh think such a thought."

A light appeared on the pathway around the corner of the rock. Brendan and I fell silent. An old man carrying a torch, pulled along by a large dog on its evening walk, approached us from the entrance gate at Western Road.

"Evenin', lads." He raked the light from his torch across us. The dog strained at its leash to investigate. "Nice evenin', thank God."

Brendan stood up, pushed his hair from his face, put his cigarette in his mouth, and chatted about the weather with this old man who once worked in his father's shop. In the beam of the torch, Brendan shined blond and solid with a face that

took faces at face value. My other friends, the friends who confused Brendan, never took anything at face value. Brendan was pulling his world against mine the way the owner pulled back on his dog. The two men were laughing. Blue smoke billowed out of their mouths and haloed their heads. The dog began barking and dragged its owner down the footpath.

“God bless,” the departing figure called out.

I prayed the distraction would stop Brendan’s line of questioning. Instead, he stood over me, big as he was, and resumed exactly where he’d left off, as if he had been planning this conversation for a long time. “Maybe someone,” he said, “working in his da’s shop would embarrass yeh in front of yer med student friends.” The drink made him bold. “Before yeh went that time up to Dublin, I was surprised yeh wanted to see me that time up on the beach in Youghal.”

“Yeh know I’m not like that.”

“I felt yeh cut me. Yeh were busy, yeah.” Brendan grabbed the cider and took a long pull on the bottle. “Tell me, Cathal, what did I do to make yeh stop being my friend?”

My heart hurt for him. He was genuinely suffering.

“Yeh didn’t do anything,” I said. “It wasn’t about yer father’s shop.”

“So it was something.” He sat down facing me dead on, inescapable, cornering me, wily dodger me, for whom flight had always been survival.

“Give me the bottle.” I took another shot of courage. “I don’t know how to say this.” Truth fears rejection. “How I always wanted us to be friends.”

“My ears have ears,” Brendan said.

“Remember when the Leaving Cert results were announced, and I learned I’d get to study medicine?”

“Yeah,” he said. “I was happy for yeh.”

“Truth is? Leaving didn’t make me that happy.”

“What are yeh saying?”

“Some of us went to Youghal, like yeh said, for a couple of days to celebrate.”

“My one night in Youghal,” Brendan laughed. “I had fun.” He was not a wild boy. “My da killed me for staying gone all night and not telling him.”

“Actually,” I said. “My own first night in Youghal, before yeh arrived, when all my friends were clapping me on the

back? I wasn't really that happy." I reached over and lifted the cider bottle from between Brendan's legs. My hand brushed his thigh the way you can touch a man so ambiguously he takes no account that you're sampling. My blood warmed even before I lifted the bottle, put its neck to my lips, and tasted the sweet cider.

"The next day, I sat on the beach, staring out at the sea," I said, "when suddenly, I realised I was actually, really, truly happy."

I hesitated. He was made of brick and hammers and engines, but he was smart and men like him were no less divergent than men like me.

"Why was that?" Brendan asked. He sat knee to knee straight on with me. Or were we sitting knee to knee on a big rock of ambiguity on the bank of the River Lee? His concerns, his posture, the night itself made him seem...finally...possible. Maybe all the time, all along, he had wanted me, stupid me, to pop the question.

"I was happy because I was thinking yeh were coming that day to be with me..."

"Cathal," Brendan was laughing, "do yeh need such a big bush to beat around?"

"All that day, knowing yeh were coming, I was happy. The sun shone brighter, the food tasted better..."

"In Youghal?"

"...even the stupid jokes my friends told seemed funny to me. I didn't notice my hangover. And when yeh showed up..." I took a final swig of the cider.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. And when I showed up with the cannabis..."

"That night," I said. "That night, remember, we slept next to each other on the beach. At least, yeh slept. I lay awake listening to the waves..."

"It was good grass."

"...the waves made a voice. A quite human voice. A most human voice that said, over and over, *congratulations, congratulations*. Not for my Leaving Cert. Not for medicine. Not for my awful friends. *Congratulations* because the person I loved most in the whole world was next to me, under the same blanket, on that cold night. I stared at yer face in the moonlight. I was happy, happier than before or since."

We shut up for a minute, long enough for stars to derail off their tracks, for the river to boil, for the night to turn cold, for Brendan to leap down off the rock and grind out his cigarette with the toe of his boot.

“I wish yeh hadn’t told me that,” he said. He walked down the footpath towards the Western Road exhaling blue smoke spewing around his big form silhouetted in the streetlight.

Brendan never spoke to me again.

An announcement brought me back to the Aer Lingus lounge in Los Angeles: “First-class passengers may board the aircraft at this time.”

I gathered up my magazines and searched my jacket pocket for my boarding pass. The woman with the cell phone stood ahead of me seeming to talk to herself loud enough for everyone to hear she was a producer heading to Ireland to capture film development funds from the government.

So I walked onto the plane, wrestling my carry-on’s into the overhead bin with the ghost of Brendan O’Mahoney, whose contents would certainly have shifted during the flight I’d had to offer.

If it had been him.

Or not.

He had his chance.



Visions of Sean

Place: Dublin, Killarney, Pawtucket Falls

Time: Present and 1972

Characters: Sean Kieran Hickey

The Storyteller

Glossary:

Busaras: bus station

Granny Smith: an apple

'Ti Jean: Jack Kerouac, American Beat writer

Bollocks: balls, also spelled "bollix"

BOB CONDRON

VISIONS OF SEAN

Last night I dreamt that Jack Kerouac was a musical instrument. An alto sax to be precise. In place of a cockhead he had a mouth piece. And when I blew him, he moaned out a melancholy jazz riff, spiraling up the scale towards high 0. Behind him stood a closet and, as if on cue, with the final blast, the doors flew open to reveal Allen Ginsberg blowing his own trumpet and keening a gut-wrenching howl.

Sean introduced me to Jack Kerouac. Not literally, of course, but to his literature. This event marked the transition from passing acquaintance to friend. Sean Kieran Hickey was about to become my best pal. Appropriately enough, the transformation occurred “on the road.” Crushed together on the back seat of a ramshackle bus. Rattling our bones all the way from Belfast south to Dublin.

I hadn’t wanted to talk. I was determined to read. My head was stuck in a book as soon as I’d found a seat. But from the moment he stashed his hand luggage overhead and squeezed himself in beside me, he made it impossible to concentrate on anything beyond the friendly press of his athletic knee and his mellow voice, talking on and on and on. Thing was, once he started, I was happy to have him continue.

I’d only known him by sight. We’d both finally completed our first year of teacher training, but our paths seldom crossed. Him, Physical Ed. Me, English. Sure, I’d seen him strutting around campus often enough and had watched him battle it out on the soccer pitch a couple of times, but we’d never had reason to connect until that holy day, that day of revelations.

“Yer majoring in English?” Sean said. “Do yeh know Jack Kerouac?”

“Who’s Jack Kerouac?”

“Who’s Jack Kerouac! Only the Daddy of the Beat Generation! Only the greatest American author-poet ever!” Sean leapt to his feet, reached up to the luggage rack, and, from his battered sports bag, produced a well-thumbed copy of *Book of Dreams*. Tossing it into my lap, he said, “Meet the man!”

I flicked through the book till I reached the back page. There was a photograph. A portrait of the author as a young man. Handsome, virile, a football jock. Blue-collar casual with Gaelic features and an athletic build. Super-handsome. I did a double take at Sean.

“But this Kerouac looks like yeh!” By chance or design?

Sean beamed, clearly delighted. He set out his stall to convert me. As his passion erupted, he fairly swept me away. By the time we arrived in Dublin’s central bus station, I was totally beguiled. Sean and I shared a coffee in the Busaras on Store Street whilst he waited for his connecting bus home to Killarney. His eyes were a flame that never diminished.

“Yeh could borrow the book,” he said.

“How can I return it?”

“Yeh must read it.” He gave me his address. “I want to know what yeh think.”

“I’ll write yeh.”

“I want yeh to.”

Last night I read into the wee small hours. Fell asleep with my face in the book, my nose pressed up against the print. Could smell Sean on the pages, the lingering odours from his sports bag. Man-sweat, liniment, damp earth. Colouring my dreams in my dreamscape of a library, the size and shape of a soccer pitch. At one end a goal where Sean, with soccer shirt hiked up in line with his nipples and shorts dropped around his ankles, was wanking furiously over an enormous pile of books. When he shot his load, cum spray gushed foaming, creamy across covers and titles and open pages of the spill of books. In the moment, I became the heap of books, a face looking up through the photographs of authors, looking out through a bubble of translucent goo. Sean stood looking down at me, his face knuckled up in the pleasurepain of orgasm. When he spoke, his question was rhetorical. “In for the big win? Join the winning team!”

I have a photograph from that first Summer. Black and

white. An almost exact replica of another photo of Jack Kerouac and his soul brother, Neal Cassady. Except that in our photo Sean and I take on their roles. Standing up against a pale stone wall, an arm casually slung around each others' shoulders, our free hands stuffed in the pockets of our jeans. We're not smiling but somehow knowing.

Sean never looked more handsome. His thick, dark hair swept back from his strong forehead. His face, tough, resolute, like a boxer, yet somehow vulnerable like a wounded boy. The bulge at the crotch of his faded jeans still hits me as hard as it did at the time, like a fist on the chin. I loved him then. He didn't know it. But behind our pairs of eyes in that photo, I can still see how I adored him then, and him pretending he was too cool to notice.

Even as I'd fallen in love with the Beats, I fell in love with Sean. Love scared me and thrilled me. Sean was the first guy I'd ever allowed myself to feel such feelings for and those feelings simply escalated with each letter he'd written. He was sharing himself with me. Sharing intimate thoughts and feelings. Sharing his passion.

As I devoured the collected works and delved into the biographies, the Beats enraptured me, fueled my fire for the daily ritual of our correspondence between him, shepherding tourists in Killarney, and me correcting student essays in Dublin. We'd compare and discuss critiques. We'd philosophise over friendship. The intense relationships between Kerouac, Cassady, and Ginsberg seemed to mirror, if not model, the burgeoning relationship between Sean and myself. Within the month he'd invited me to come visit. To share, face-to-face, soul-to-soul. Hence the photo. Against a pale stone wall. Very serious. A gag shot. A jape. A joke. Clowning that summer. Arms slung around shoulders. In Killarney.

His great-grandfather, Sean assured me, had been rightfully proud of the bathroom. The first of its kind in the village. He turned on the taps. Hot and cold water began to creak and chug through the pipes before gushing into the huge cast-iron bath. Sean kicked off his boots and pulled off his socks whilst telling me how, as the youngest of twelve children, bath time had been done in shifts. Three and four in the bath at any one time. So if I wanted to join him, it was no problem. His little joke.

He undressed with all the assurance of an athlete who, with a life spent in a communal locker room, knew he compared with the best. I sat back on a wicker bath chair and watched him as he yanked his teeshirt over his head. His upper torso was impressive: chest and broad shoulders. He popped the button fly on his blue jeans, let them fall around his ankles, and stepped out of them, wearing only white cotton boxers he peeled down without a blush. He crossed to the washbasket and dumped each item inside. Taking his time. Time enough for me to enjoy his muscular nakedness. His cock was a joy to behold. A handful-and-a-half curved out from a dark bush of pubic curls. His ballsack swung beneath, jewels his great-grandfather would have been proud of, rich, round, and rolling. He smiled the way Kerouac must have smiled at Cassady.

I didn't want to stop his show. I cast my eyes up to the ceiling. I made conversation. "I was just wondering..."

"Yeah?" He climbed into the bath.

"Ginsberg had sex with Cassady and Kerouac..."

"Yeah? So?"

"Does it bother yeh?"

"Why should it?"

"I don't know."

"Did sex hurt their writing?" He slid down under water and, with a whoosh, resurfaced, his dark hair shiny and slicked back. "Did sex hurt them?"

I studied him, smiling, droplets of water glistening on his tanned skin. "Yer full of surprises."

"Am I now." He smiled more broadly. "They were rebels, right? Constantly testing the boundaries, challenging convention." He squeezed water from the end of his nose. "A lot of love there."

"I guess."

His eyes narrowed to a new intensity. "Come on. Don't tell me yeh wouldn't suck my cock if I asked yeh."

His words caught me short. I managed to stifle my reflexive gasp. Then a pause whilst I scabbled around for what to say. What was the answer? My mind was racing, but my mouth was stock still. Was this a test? Yes? No? Words failing me when I needed them most. I could win or lose either way. Then he spoke again.

“Ah come on,” he smirked. “Don’t worry. I’m not about to put my theory to the test.”

I wanted him.

“In any event, make yerself useful.” Again he grinned. “Wash me back?”

“Is this another wind-up?”

“Would I?”

“Silly question!”

“Yeh can reach better than I can. Please!” He leaned forward, bringing his knees up to touch his chest, wrapped his strong arms around them. Please!

I knelt behind him as he handed me a sponge and soap. Green apple soap. I remember the bouquet was crisp as a crunch into a Granny Smith. His skin was magic under the lather. I pressed the sponge against the top of his spine and squeezed. Suds oozed out and eased over his shoulders, running down to the water line lapping at his narrow waist. With a sweeping rub, I wiped the sponge across the width of his back. Sean flinched.

I pulled back. “Yeh really caught the sunburn on yer neck and shoulders.”

“Yer telling me!”

“Want me to stop?”

“No. Lose the sponge. It scratches. Use yer hands.”

I dropped the sponge into the water and spread my palms over his pliant skin that was warm to my touch touching him. *Ah, God!*

“Gently does it,” he sighed. “That’s the ticket.” He sank under my hands back into the water of his great-grandfather’s tub where his chest and thighs and head and dick rose like islands in the soapy wash of the bath water.

Legend tells how the band played on whilst Titanic sank slowly beneath the icy waves of our collective dreams. I was there. Kerouac and Cassady and Ginsberg formed a jazz trio, merrily chugging out a version of “Sea of Love” whilst chaos reigned all around. Sean looked dapper in evening dress and bow tie as he grabbed me urgently by the elbow and pulled me into a suite already abandoned. The door closed and we were alone together in our own dark, silent world, going to die, gotta go sometime, twining our arms tightly, chest to chest, as the ship groaned, I love yeh, Sean, I’ve always loved yeh, going

down, going down together, drowning in a sea of sperm, the only way to go, Sean laughing and singing along with Kerouac and Cassady and Ginsberg.

I woke in bed alongside him. Sleeping together. Only sleeping. Something I had never done before. Had never slept alongside a man before. Morning light streamed in through the window as Sean lay on his belly, his head turned towards me, his face shaded from the sun, quietly snoring. His hands were tucked under the pillow that cradled his head exposing his curly armpits. From where I lay, I could smell him. Could breathe in deep and fill my lungs with the heavy scent of him. A sweet, rich, earthy smell offset by only the merest hint of apple soap.

He woke. His eyes opened to meet mine studying him. He was not surprised at my vigil. "Sleep well?" He murmured and cleared his throat.

"Yeah. Dreamt a lot," I said.

"About me?"

"As a matter of fact."

"And what did we get up to?"

"We went down with the *Titanic*."

"Together?"

"Aye."

He was silent for a moment. "There's friendship for yeh. Together forever beneath the deep, dark sea."

"Yeah? That's one interpretation, barring a lifeboat!"

"I'm serious. It's like that beautiful passage at the end of *Off the Road*."

"Yeh mean *On the Road*?"

"No. Cassady's Missus wrote her own Beat biography. At the end she describes this moment when Jack and Neal's ashes were brought together, intermingled. Together forever. It totally blew me away. That woman is some talent, I tell yeh."

"Guess that moves to the top of my reading list."

"Right." He reached out his long-fingered hand and clasped my shoulder, "One day, yeh and I are going to visit his last resting place. Pay our respects to 'Ti Jean."

"Then we'll go stand on the banks of the Merrimack. Go stand at Pawtucket Falls. Go with the flow."

"Yeh got it! Soul brothers like Neal and Jack. Yeh and me, brother. Yeh and me." And then he asked me, "Yeh ever

kiss a man?”

“What? A proper kiss? Full mouth?”

“Yeah.”

“No.”

“Do yeh want to kiss me?”

“Guess so.”

“Come here.”

The first kiss was clumsy, awkward, virginal. His lips grew moist and warm as he pressed his stiff cock against my hip. The friction of cock and lips ignited. He open-palmed the flat of my belly. His middle finger toyed with my navel before sliding up to brush my nipple. A shock wave hit me. Such a simple action but profoundly felt. He was keenly aware of the power of his touch upon me. His fingers and thumbs tweaked and tugged my tender nipples.

I leaped up. I flung the sheets aside and dived open-mouthed down on his big erection. Even as my throat struggled to swallow him full down, my mind spiralled off into outer space. Intoxicated. Every sensation intense and acute. Every cell and fibre of my being up and yelling in celebration of this moment. This passionate consummation of fierce friendship.

I curled my fist around his cock and drove my tongue around his salty bollocks bouncing full and fertile enough to be a million times somebody’s father. The tip of my tongue licked from his ballsack to his forested crack. I gripped the back of his knees, hoisting them, gazing wantonly at his perfect fair skin pulled tight over muscular buttocks. His hot little hole rose up exposed for my inspection. I ploughed my face between his ass cheeks. He growled like an animal in rapture, clutched my head, and forced me to eat deep.

He groaned. “Oh, yeah, love me, brother, lick my fuckin’ hole, know me like no other, fuckin’ do me!”

“I’m doin’ yeh, Sean. Have no doubts. I’m lickin’ yeh head to toe. Tastin’ every inch of yeh.”

“And yeh?”

“Yer goin’ to taste every inch of me.”

“I love yeh, soul brother, love yeh like no other. Yer a poet.”

“Shut up.”

I turned my attention once more to his beautiful phallus. Translucent droplets of pre-cum oozed from his piss slit as I slid my lips over his crimson glans. My tongue probed into the

opening and, in the instant, must have pushed him beyond his endurance for he yelped, flipped free, spun around, and crushed his mouth against mine, pushing me down, chewing on my lips and tongue. His taut, muscular body ground against mine, forcing my legs apart, his dick jabbing into my welcoming hole.

“I want yeh. I want to be a part of yeh,” he said. “I want to be inside yeh.”

“Climb on into me.”

Spit and push was all it took. I relaxed and welcomed him home. The fullness of him stretching wide my ring with his sheer width was a revelation of what an asshole could be really for. Slowly pumping, we fused to one, building a head of steam. I wrapped my legs around his powerful back and drew him ever deeper into me, wanting him whole, his lips kissing my lips, never leaving my lips, his arms holding onto me for dear life, and for Neal and for Jack, neither of us knowing or caring what this meant.

That summer in his great-grandfather’s house in Killarney, there was no skill or artistry in our lovemaking. Only innocent bodies clashing in a raw, aching experiment, trying to find ourselves by being someone else. We were both strong and fit and young. Quickly, athletically, he shot his load inside me. An outpouring of tender energy. A magic moment. The very essence of him inside me. All the while telling me he loved me. “I love yeh.” On and on, telling me he loved me. “I love yeh.”

Last night I dreamt that Jack Kerouac was a musical instrument.

Finally, living in America, I stood on the banks of the Merrimack. Where were you, Sean? Of course, I know. Home in Belfast with the wife, the kiddies, the job, and the pension plan. You always say you admire me for living the dream. That you just took another road. But I think that’s okay.

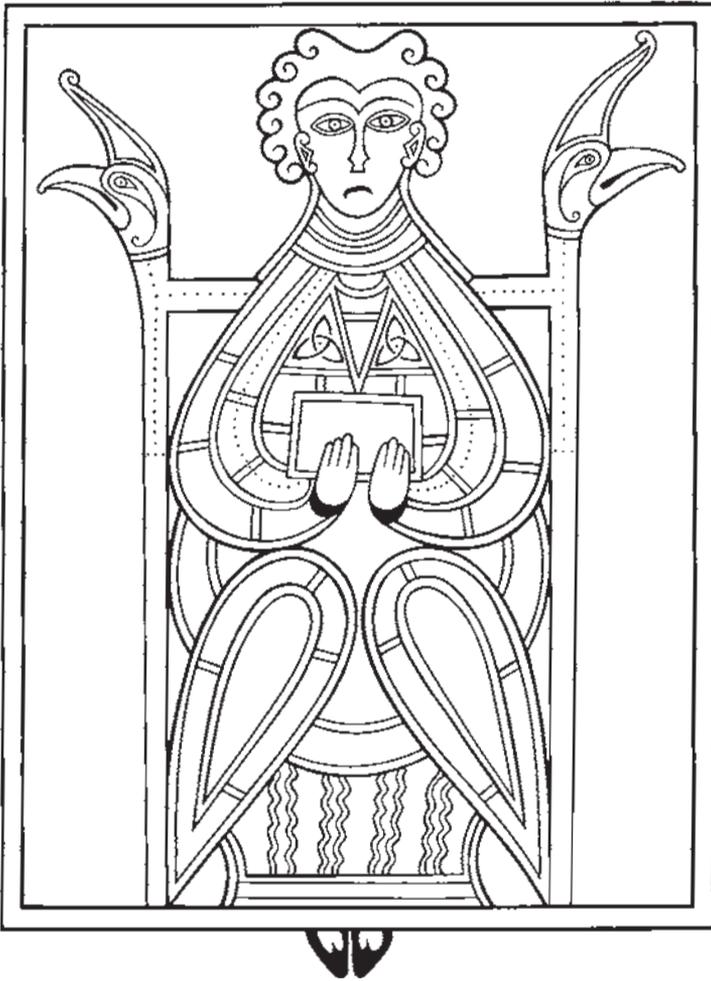
I visited Jack’s grave. The cemetery was closed when I arrived, but I jumped the wrought iron railings that ringed the perimeter. I’d come this far. Nothing was going to keep me from reaching my goal. A winter frost had turned the soil underfoot as solid as cement. The trees were bare of leaves and bird song.

I found his resting place in a matter of minutes, knelt on the frozen earth, and kissed the plaque that marks the spot.

“Ti Jean, John L. Kerouac, Mar 12, 1922 -1969, - He Honoured Life - ” And I told him, “Jack, I guess this is as close as we’ll ever get.” Just Jack and me. The graveyard was deserted. For one moment I had him all to myself.

And yet, Sean, you were also beside me in that moment. Your spirit. His spirit. Reunited. God, I loved you—yeh—back then. Took you with me to Pawtucket Falls. Looked down into the foaming waters. Felt your arm around my shoulder. So strong and handsome and heroic. And I love you still. All that happened? You just took another road.

So I raise my glass to you tonight and before I drink, I spill a drop for lost brothers.



Me and Mam: On the Lake

Place: A country lake in the West of Ireland

Time: Autumn, the present

Characters: Me, the storyteller

Mam, his mother

Glossary:

Gunning: a school bully at Abbeyview Academy

Corncrakes: an endangered bird important in the West of Ireland

oul: old

MICHAEL WYNNE

ME AND MAM: ON THE LAKE

And we rowed out on the lake that day near the end of summer, me and Mam, and she told me of what she called the murder that she done. I wasn't shocked, no, well not much, and she told it with tears in her eyes like the time she said her mother never kissed or cuddled her. I was sorry for her that time, and sorry this time too. I'm sorry for Mam, my poor mother, all the time, and wonder sometimes if my love for her is all pity, and hope it's not because she deserves more despite the harm she done which was only done because she was fierce harmed herself by a mother who was cold, it's as plain as that, and sure her mother was cold because she was hurt the same, of course that's it, cause I understand these things.

That day we rowed on the lake with all around the sounds of the birds, *corncrakes*, Mam called them, though it took her several frustrated minutes to get the word. We talked again about her mother who never I remember wanted to be called "Granny" but only "Mum" so she could feel younger and neither had she let her own kids call her "Mum" or "Mammy" but wanted people at Mass and at the market or wherever to mistake her daughters for sisters. *Never once did she introduce me as her daughter*, said Mam, *she was vain like that, very vain, snobbish too*. When Mam gets goin it all comes out. *Though she'd her good points, so yer grandmother did*, Mam would say, *very clean, yes, like her husband, clean, and loved nature, little animals and knew all the names of the holy trees and healin plants around about, great like that she was*, and

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you can hear the admiration in my mother's voice when she says it and the longin, the longin, the longin in her voice still for her mother's approval though the woman's dead this years, this years, but anyway it was talk again of her, and her oul coldness, that led to talk of murderous feelins and people we'd liked to have killed once upon a time.

I told her of the Gunning fella that gave me such grief for bein girly up at Abbeyview the first three years and used to spit into my mouth in the long corridor and piss on me from a height on the way home from school where the high wall was and break all my pencils in the woodwork class and me who never was inclined to do woodwork at all, forced into it by dad who boasted about havin *never been a child but a grown man from the earliest age, a fine man among fine men*, fine men all, in his time, as he'd have us imagine, pushed into it anyways with this Gunning wanker who made me aware of how I talked and acted and never was I aware of it till I met him. "Girly" and "Mary" and "gayboy" he called me all the time, and I used to make up elaborate plans durin Mass to do with lyin in wait for him on the high wall with a loose jagged rock and droppin it down on his crown when he passed on his way home down toward Gallows Hill. I used to even hear him pleadin *no, ah, no, don't*, then I would, and I'd even hear his skull crack and see his brains runnin down the footpath, or I'd think up schemes about feedin him sweets with rat poison injected in them, *here have a few, Gunning*, I'd imagine me sayin and see him thinkin, *ah this sissy, this sucker*, and grab them as thick as anythin and I'd imagine me seein him wander home thinkin, *ha ha*, he'll be in agony in no time now, and be dead tomorrow and no I won't go next or near his funeral but shite on his grave and I never did nothin about it unfortunately, and I told Mam all about this for the first time and I could see her thinkin, *oh God, sure I can relate well to this*.

Then for a while we were quiet, with the island risin up behind her as we rowed toward it with the lovely lappin sound of the oars as I rowed and the threatened corncrakes goin crazy with their harsh raspin sound and the water all lovely evenin colours, navy and silver and inky and shades of blue I wouldn't have a clue of the name of, and the leafy hilly island behind a certain blue, like another colour altogether, not much like blue at all, yet blue at the same time, and then she

came out and told me of the nurse she'd worked with, *a devil, oh a demon, she was*, my Mam said, *a pure basterin demon, God she asked for what she got, by God did she, and God she was the whole time at me that one, gettin at me for bein from the country, bein a blow-in, makin me feel dire, that I couldn't do my job, and sure wasn't I just as good as her, just as good, and oh a terrible hate for her I had and all of a sudden didn't she get sick, cancer it was, cancer it turned out, well wasn't I delighted, oh I was, delighted, and she was in bed the whole time. She lived in, yeh see. And one night I was on, the skeleton shift it was called, so it was, and wasn't I asked to look in on her, give her her pills mixed in with her soup or whatever it is she was eatin, well not a pill will I give her, the oul so-and-so, says I, and I didn't, not at all, not a hate of a pill did I give her, why would I, the hateful old, hateful old thing, and down to the ward she was brought the next morning, and she died the next night, well, I cheered.*

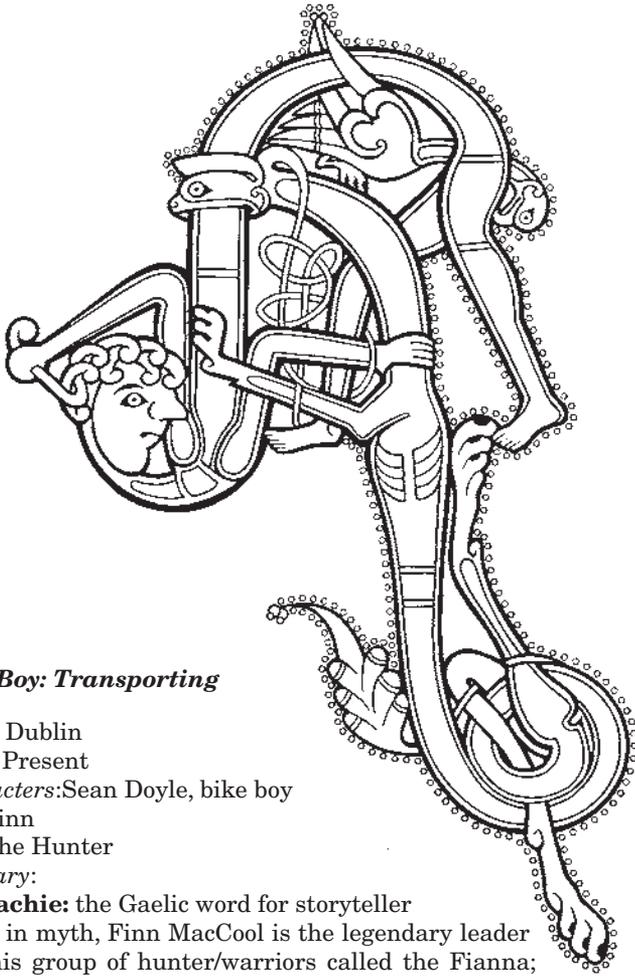
For me, no, I wasn't shocked, Mam was right, she had it rough, and *yer wan had it comin*, and *yeh were dead right*, says I, my poor Mam with her life like a long string of dismal disappointments and let-downs and a weak-as-water husband despite all this claptrap about never bein anythin but a man, a big man like his dad and uncle, who was in the RIC as it was called in his day, *the oul traitor*, as Mam called him, *wor-kin for the queen*, and Mam with her other useless children, except me, who stood by her when all else up and left or died on her, and, yes, we were like allies, me and her, and she never minded about me bringin home the odd man from the jacks in the town, not a hate did she care.

Even when she walked in on me that New Year with yer man from Scotland I picked up and we suckin away at each other suckin away like babies we were and goin at it goodoh. God he was good, goin at it wild-like with good dirty passion and everythin, and not afraid to whisper inta my ear what he wanted or how he wanted it or anythin like, *fuck me slow or lick me balls all over gently*, all this, I was well into him. Well she, she let on she saw nothin, went out quietly, left us at it, *hope yeh a good night* was all she said the next day when I brought her her tea and *True Crime* and *did yeh see who's made Bishop of the diocese* she says later the same day, and who was it but this gobshite taught us civics at Abbeyview

who did nothin but advise us to always wash our penises but not to get excited rubbin ourselves down with a towel afterwards, *don't get excited, and don't get excited when yeh think of girls and get hard, of course sure, yeh wouldn't be right not to think of girls but don't touch yerselves or think too much about it, boys, don't get excited* he'd say over and over, and he'd be leanin back on the back legs of his chair stabbin his desk with a pen as he raved away, his bald crown grazin and greasin the blackboard and him beamin around at us all with this big stiff grin on his big bloated shiny face, the lenses of his black-framed glasses shinin with a flat white light, and the only beatin I ever got ever at school was from him for flickin a bit of paper on the carpet without thinkin after he got us to Hoover it, and "Butch" was his name cause he was burly and big, but no more butch than I was, and *the Bishop he is now*, she says and she talked away about him and kept away from the subject of seein me with yer man altogether fair play to her.

That day we rowed out on the lake, when I turned us around in the boat and made for the shore with the little bats skitin like shadows so close they nearly grazed the crowns of our heads, she said, *I don't have a bad family, indeed sure, yeh could be miles worse*, and I thought of me sister who she fostered out as an infant to a family, some sorta half cousins of ours, livin at the other side of the lake, and me other sister she sent away to her own flat when she got pregnant by another cousin of ours, and me older sister I barely knew who threw herself off the waterfall when Mam wouldn't let her marry the Prod, and me brother she never had a heed on who grew up joyridin and womanizin and who fecked off to England without any exams or nothin and who hasn't been heard of since, and the other brother who's a porter in the mental hospital who doesn't talk except a bit about soccer, and I thought as well of, when she used to call me *sissy* but that's well behind us I thought and I pulled the oars lookin at her as she said that about us with pride, and that she's content now cause of me cause I've stood by her and listen to her and get her to speak like she wasn't a mother at all but more like a lover or friend from old days and I think of the privilege that it is sittin here with my Mam in the deepenin twilight and the lovely smells and sounds of the lake in the dusk and to chat away with her about everythin after all we've been through and as we

head back to our lives on the land, dad is brought up out of the blue, and we talk about visitin him in the nursin home where he was just after havin his second stroke and where he sits wrapped in an afghan ravin through bubbles of spit, and *from the way that he had with the men*, Mam said, *his way o' talkin and lookin at them*, I'd a notion a long time he was one of yer kind, never mind all the childer we had, and she left it at that and I'll always remember that time and that day we chatted about our murderous sides as also bein the closest she ever got to talkin about me, what I am.



Bike Boy: Transporting

Place: Dublin

Time: Present

Characters: Sean Doyle, bike boy

Finn

The Hunter

Glossary:

Seanachie: the Gaelic word for storyteller

Finn: in myth, Finn MacCool is the legendary leader of his group of hunter/warriors called the Fianna; Finn's dog/beast was called Bran; Finn is equal to the gods, but he is not a god. Oisín (pronounced "Osheen") is his son.

Fianna: great-bodied, manly men, with quiet eyes and large movements flowing from some impulse more mystical than personal

Teamhair, Tara: home of the ancient High Kings

Newgrange: 6000-year-old stone burial chamber that lights up through its one window on December 21, the winter solstice; in Celtic lore, the burial place of the High Kings; excavated in the 1960's; Newgrange is in the Boyne Valley, the cradle of ancient Irish civilization.

squat: apartment so cheap and squalid it may be free

plaice: white fish, as in fish and chips

hookers: small boats

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LAWRENCE W. CLOAKE

BIKE BOY: TRANSPORTING

All my life I have suffered from a constant humming in my head. The buzz started in adolescence with the onslaught of sex. I'm not saying that sex was a problem. Because it wasn't. It just didn't seem real. As though I hadn't found a proper expression for my sexuality. And let me tell you, I investigated every conceivable variation I came into contact with. Straight. Queer. S/M. Anonymous. Monogamous. Dirty. Fetishes of every sort, including vanilla. The closest I ever came to being satisfied was the transporting passivity of homosexual sex.

If it had been possible to change my sex, back and forth, I would have. Not that I didn't try with a humungously butch dyke and her array of dildos. But even she and her pile-drivers could not quell the constant humming at the back of my head.

However, I have found what I was looking for. But there is no point in continuing with the first person singular, as it will no longer apply to me, a foolish old seanachie, who has been known for good reason to leave the first person, singular, behind, which is, of course, the gift of storytelling, escaping solitary confinement inside one's own skin.

* * * *

The night streets of Dublin rock to the sound of bikes growling in dark corners and dingy alleyways. They are only ever heard as they doppler pass, quicker than the eye. A warning rumble quakes quickly through the pavement underfoot,

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but the brick acoustics of the street confuse the ear and their direction is lost in the urban thunder. They never arrive, having already passed.

Sean Doyle chases their passage, but to no avail. All he traces is a hint of oil and smoke on the wafting slip-stream. And something else that is completely indefinable. An elusive scent that teases him. Internal combustion.

Tonight he refuses to fail. His energy will wash him up on the shores of morning, satisfied, or knowing the reason why not. Too many nights in his Lesson Street squat, frustrated, and hounded by his humming head, have hardened his heart and desire.

Across the handle bars of his big-bore Beast lies his bed-roll wrapped bungee-snug around his one and only change of clothes. The fuel tank sloshes between his gripping knees as he flips through the nightscape traffic. His groin rubs gently against the worn paintwork of the tank, responding to the vibration of the bike's 1000cc-four-cylinder engine that connects with the humming in his head. A light release suffuses his body. But only when he is in the saddle.

He wheelies. The Beast gains the pavement outside the George Pub. A touch of the brakes halts as he heels the sidestand. Finally stationary, he glides from the saddle and preens himself in the plate glass window before entering the Friday night cacophony of Dublin's premier gay bar.

Laid-back and leathered from head to toe, Sean bulls his way to the bar and orders a pint of Guinness. While he waits for the pint to settle, he looks around at the packed crowd. But nothing, nor no one, catches his eye.

Too many limp wrists and sibilant platitudes flutter in the barn-like room. He feels a gentle, cold nudge against his hand as the barman serves up his usual pint. He nods, pays, but never breaks his predatory gaze eyeballing the smokey room for the right face.

Sean fingers his coins and pockets his change. He turns slow and deliberate, ten beats slower than the gaily bouncing room, and shoulders his sinuous way into one of the darker corners of the bar, but with a clear view of the door. Through the window he can see his Beast glinting in the neon light of the street. He feels the familiar, irresistible pull of the machine, its promise of the pounding open road louder in his

ears than the humming buzz of the pub that is too much like the humming in his head.

His satisfying first draw of his pint is bitter and cold and silky. Almost as good as the freshest semen gliding down his eager throat. He can almost taste the metal of the draught pumps beneath the hops. His throat contracts in welcome and he shivers as it hits his stomach.

A large shadow looms over him.

“Hey, boy!”

Sean looks up at the man who has greeted him. He notes their difference in height, the broader width and overbearing assurance of the dominant. He smiles up in hope, but a little voice at the back of his head tells him he has been here before. Not with this particular man. Though he can be fairly sure that there is nothing new here. Yet Sean will leave no stone unturned in the search for his heart’s desire: the complete transporting abandonment of the self.

“Hey, man!” said Sean. “What do yeh want?”

“Yeh,” grunts the hunter.

Sean grins and downs his pint, opening his gullet to the rush of Guinness. He follows the man, ignoring the envious looks of the bar’s denizens. His shoulders straighten under the inspection. His helmet, swinging from his hand, knocks off the odd blocking knee as he passes the arched eyebrows of the plucked.

Outside the Beast has company. A sleek Jap powerbike, lightweight and quick, bristles beside Sean’s brute Goliath.

Sneering, the man asks, “Where?”

“Yeh lead. I follow.”

“Aye, yeh fuck.” The man mounts his machine and thumbs it into whining life. He studies the way Sean stands over the saddle of his bike and throws his weight downward on the Beast’s kick-start. The compression lifts Sean angrily as the bike roars awake, before settling into its customary growl.

The loud metallic clunk of first gear engages the cogs beneath the sure tap of his heavy boot, courses through him, jacks him up ecstatic.

The throb of the engine connects with his crotch as his hands ease the clutch and throttle synchronously. He and the Beast are a covenant of flesh and steel, a poetical movement.

Brazenly, the hunter nips away and cuts into the

slow-cruising traffic, causing chaos with his two-stroke impatience. Sean glides on into the flowing red river of tail-lights.

Headlights wink oncoming as he whispers through, streaming quiet on the tail of the screaming rice-rocket of the hunter. Smoothly up through the gears, Sean rides eager on the jet-draught behind the hunter's kamikaze insolence.

They dash through the side streets down along the river onto the Liffey's quays, their engines' echoes rebounding off the narrow street's steep sides. Gaining the more deserted quays, they surge into a race through the lighter traffic like the expected moves of foreplay. In and out together between cars, they rip their machines. Sean feels clinical and passionless. The roaring duet is too safe. He raises the stakes, throws out a challenge, throttling past the hunter, tugging on his flared handle bars, gearing down as his front wheel rises in an exuberant wheelie.

The hunter, passed, looks ahead in anger, revving himself along in Sean's wake.

Crossing the river by Euston rail station, they swoop into the Phoenix Park.

Pulling up beneath a small copse of trees, the man grapples Sean from the Beast's back and throws him face-forward against a rough pine. He pummels Sean's arse through the leather of his jeans.

Sean hugs the tree, his prick rubbing wood, straining inside against the soft leather of his crotch. Behind him he hears the rasp of the man's zipper as he unbuckles and drops his pants. The man's huge paw gropes between the bark and Sean's crotch, unbuckling and yanking down his leathers. With a cracking slap on Sean's hot naked arse, he pinches the pale buttocks to squeeze out the turn-on cry of protest.

Sean smiles to himself, his dick hardening against the bole of the tree, as he feels his arsehole exhale expectantly. Ahhhh. A whispering sigh lost on the grunting rutting man.

The man grasps a buttock in each hand, spreads them, and drives himself into Sean's hole, resting his chin panting on Sean's shoulder humping and grinding him into the tree. All the while whispering in a chant, "Yeh think yer quicker than me." His flanks grip Sean's thighs as he grinds harder. "Better than me." His pace increases as he nears his orgasm. "Who's fucking who? Yeh bastard."

Goading the fuck on, Sean says, “Is that the best yeh can do?” Even when his foreskin snags on the rough bark, he baits the man. The rhythmic squeak of his leathers a familiar comfort rocking as he rides the man fucking to exhaust himself. His hole tightens on the man and grips like a wanking hand, milking the pounding penis. “Who is fucking who?” Sean says. So gripped, with a final shudder, the man up-rams himself, spends himself in shock waves, and quickly withdraws.

An audible pop announces the disconnection of flesh.

Sean clings to the tree for a few moments, looks at his watch, laughing at the new world’s record at the cuming and going of the cursing man speeding off.

He stands back and pulls a rag from his pocket, reaching back to wipe his arse of the oozing spunk, polishing his cheeks with the shiny wax of cum. No need to clean his prick not even worked up to pre-lube. Let alone an orgasm. Nevertheless turned on by the dispassionate fuck. Number one for the night.

Once straddling the Beast and settling in the saddle, he grinds his fucked hole against the worn leather and gasps as he feels a throbbing twitch in his sphincter muscle. The slight ache of desire connects with the vibration of the Beast roaring again into life. The Beast thrills his flesh with its steel heartbeat like no man, or woman, ever could. Faithful and patient. Untiring in its attention. Constant.

A sound breaks his reverie, humming through the air, through the trees, through the Phoenix Park. Bikes are howling in the night like the hounds of Hell. Quickly he guns and gears, clutching the power and spinning his back wheel grabbing for purchase on the nightslick grass.

The big black back-wheel bites through to the dirt, driving the treaded Beast into the darkness, its single cyborg eye cutting forward through the night. His blood surges through his veins, pulsing in crotch and arse. The constant humming in his head quiet, strangely, for the first time. Maybe not quiet, maybe in tune with the sounding roar ahead on the streets, maybe with the hard-ass purr of the Beast. His awareness slips from the brainpan of his head, down his spine, through his fuck-wired prick and anus, vibrating on and in and through and out the Beast’s iron skin and bones, as if his blood pumps through its fuel lines, its oil stretches his veins, its power infuses his being.

Gaining the main road, running through the heart of the park, he plunges into the fog drifting up from the Liffey. Between the Park Gate exit he catches a glimpse of disappearing tail-lights. The heavy broil of the passing pack fills his senses: oil and man, wheel and leather, exhaust and sweat, piston and prick, night and soil. The chase is on.

His skin electrifies fully awake and alive. Sensitive to the rushing brush of fog and night. His leathers defining his protruding knees and elbows. He is a radar pursuit unit aware only of the pack of biker boys he chases.

He pushes the Beast harder than ever. Demanding performance in every gear. Thrilling at the scream of its burning pipes. He plunges into traffic, giving chase to the elusive pack. He touches his brakes looking for gaps, the rocking motion connecting his fresh-fucked hole and his throbbing dick rubbing against the tank. The drum pulse of his red heart beating through the blue vein of his hard hose, goading the Beast that nuzzles back with a hungry hum at the directional compass of his cock, increasing the humming in his head, as if the Beast on its own can track the pack cutting through the night. His head feels explosive. His streaming eyes glance at the clocks. The speedo-needle bends straining upwards to the demand for power and speed.

For the first time in his life Sean lifts off beyond fear. Gut-wrenching coldness cramps his abdomen. If a chaser, not a catcher, then a chaser be, until caught. His body, blood, soul, and infinity, freed into hot pursuit, rise beyond the old realm of feeling fear, melding with the Beast.

The covenant of Sean and the Beast becomes a reality. The Beast anticipates his commands reading his mind. Sean no longer recognizes himself in the speeding mirrors of shop windows. He watches the parallel ride of the Centaur shoot alongside.

But the pack remains out of reach, elusive.

He hears them, ahead, race past O'Connell Bridge, their passage echoing through the heart of Dublin. Goth kids on the sidewalks, smoking Bidis, neon-punked by the city's nightscape, shiver as if the Banshee had screamed out last call. Towards the docks, Sean keeps the blue exhaust of the pack in sight. Down the long length of the North Wall and into the East Wall road. Their twinkling tail-lights lure him

into the docks proper.

A deserted wasteland of oil-tankers and storage towers. His tires slip on the rail tracks embedded in the road's surface. Wheel-spinning and power-wobbling, he wrestles himself back on the pavement.

He feels damp between his legs. Wonders for a moment if he has pissed himself. Not until a final spasm passes through the length of his hard dick does he realize that he is ejaculating in the excitement of the chase. The humming buzzes back into his head with a vengeance. He gasps. The pack of phantom bikers roars off lost, untrackable, unheard under the roaring humming. He squints after them, sniffs after them. No sign remains of them in the folding murks of mist.

Sean turns for home disappointed but hopeful. He has made a significant discovery.

He is not alone. This is the first time he has come so close to the pack of bikers. He is not afraid. He is sure if he hadn't cum, he would have caught up with them.

Locking the Beast to the railings in Lesson Street, he makes his way up to the squat.

Various bodies are crashed on the floor. Where once he would have gladly joined them, tonight he ignores them and kicks open his own room. A piece of territory he has staked out for himself. His mattress sits amid a host of cannibalized engine parts, spares, and trophies.

He strips and crawls into his bed, curling up fetus-like, his hands cupping his dick and balls, quickly descending into the world of dreams. His pucker weeps one small white bead. A perfect pearl.

The dreamscape draws him onto the open road. He is riding the Beast, but not alone.

He is naked and he has a passenger, also naked. His arse is skewered on the passenger's huge penis. His own prick is ejaculating a constant stream of cum all across the Beast's tank. He feels he is the brain of the machine and the passenger behind is the sex of the machine and the Beast is their mobility. In dreams, his head never hums.

When he wakes in the morning, belly down on the log of his prick, the humming is back.

Trawling the city in vain, Sean heads for the docks. Saturday afternoon and nothing stirs in the industrial section. He

passes through and heads toward the ferry terminal.

The area is deserted.

He finds a disused track that seems to lead towards the coast. Bored, he coaxes the Beast onto the dirt track.

Halfway along he comes across a youth, about his own age. Late twenties. Lithe and blond, a direct contrast to Sean's darker, Celtic coloring.

Sean slows to a smouldering cruise and pulls up. "Want a lift?"

"Aye, yeah, sure." The man hops onto the pillion.

"Yeh know where this leads?" asks Sean.

"Wherever yeh want it to," says the stranger.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Not that many bike boys," the man says, "wander down this far. When they do, they are usually looking for something."

"No shit!" says Sean.

The bumps in the track travel up through the Beast's suspension, sending shudders through Sean's body.

He almost freezes and spills himself and his passenger onto the dirt when he feels the man's hand groping at his crotch. Smiling to himself at the man's blatant intent, Sean ignores the grinding hand that pops his dick free of his jeans and concentrates on guiding the Beast over the bumpy ground.

The man has his hand firmly wrapped around Sean's emergent dick, wanking his tumescence. Sean ignores the hand piping his rod, wagging his half-stiff prick against the petrol tank. Squeezing the head in encouragement.

Sean slows and stops when he reaches the end of the track. "Where to now?"

"Turn left and follow the headland," replies the man. "Yeh'll know when to stop."

Sean can feel the man laughing through his back. He ignores it and turns the Beast. He enjoys the man's attention even though he doubts sex will be successful. The humming thrums on in his head with no promise of stop, but the warm hand on his prick is comforting.

They finally enter a clearing and roar to a halt.

Sean is fully hard but dry. Rampant cock in cool air.

The man dismounts and instructs Sean to stay where he is with the engine running, and to put the bike up on its center stand. This Sean does without dismounting. He places his heel

against the center stand and heaves back on the handlebars.

Reaching into his jeans, Sean pulls his balls out and drops them on the vibrating tank, massaging his muscle slowly as he watches the man strip naked before him. The man has curious seams tattooed down his arms and legs. “Who are yeh?” Sean asks.

“Finn Fianna,” he replies. “A biker like yeh. Now slide yer arse back a bit on that saddle.”

Obedient to the instruction, Sean is amazed as Finn mounts the steady idling Beast backwards, facing him, resting his shoulders and his elbows back on the handlebars.

His buttocks hover like a lapdance over Sean’s hard dick and he says, “Fuck me.”

Sean raises himself on the boot pegs and drives his prick up into Finn’s waiting hole. He is shocked by the rubber heat of Finn’s innards and their piston-like grasp. He leans forward, around Finn’s shoulders, clasping the handlebars for leverage. His hand twists on the throttle clearing the throat of the Beast. Finn begins to rock the Beast on the center stand, impaling himself further onto Sean’s dick. The engine’s vibration courses up through his balls as Finn’s buttocks crush them against the tank with each downward thrust.

Unable to contain himself, Sean howls with the pleasure and pain of the first real orgasm he has ever experienced.

Finn reclines, shoulders back against the handlebars, Sean’s prick jutting up from the vibrating tank still embedded in his arse. A large grin splits Finn’s face.

Reaching out with his hand Sean tries to trace one of the seams running from Finn’s elbow down to his wrist. Finn slaps his hand away. “Never do that again.”

Recoiling in shock, Sean pulls back, his softening penis withdrawing from Finn’s vulcan depths.

Finn hops off the bike and quickly pulls on his clothes.

“Yeh are one of us,” he says. “Be here at midnight tonight and we’ll welcome yeh into our circle.”

Thoughts tumbling through his mind, Sean looks challenged but fearless at Finn. One of us? Who? How? “One of what?” Sean asks.

“Be here tonight and everything yeh ever wanted will be yers.” Finn smiles at Sean. “I know what yer looking for. Last night when yeh followed us, I lay back aways, watched yeh

pass, followed yeh chasing us.” He grins. “Yeh almost caught us too. Aren’t many who can ride style like yeh. Be here.”

He turns and strolls away without a backward glance.

Sean watches him until he disappears in the distance and then looks down at his stinging prick, thick, slick, satisfied. Tucking himself back into his jeans, he pushes the Beast back to earth and heads home. In his Lesson Street squat, hungry for food, he realizes Finn had not cum. He pushes the thought like an irrelevancy from his humming head wondering what will happen the coming night. Fuck the food. He heads out, grabbing take-away, rolled up greasy as a lube job in newspaper. He sits gobbling chippers on the Patrick Kavanagh bench by the canal, the Beast parked in front of him on the toe path, his feet propped up on the leather saddle. Beside him the sculpture of the poet sits in quiet repose, ignoring Sean wiping his fingers greasy with battered plaice on his skin-tight leathers. Without regret he thinks back over the escapades that led him to this point sitting himself next to a metal statue.

Memory wafts back on the acrid smell of disinfectant sloshed thin over the reek of piss and shit surrounding the young Sean sitting on the public toilet waiting for someone to come in and peep one big eye through the hole in the door of the cubicle. Always afraid it would be someone who knew him. Easily done in such a small rural town, near Kinvarra, popular with sailors off the hookers. But it wasn’t always a big eye coming through the hole.

The evening he had finally lost his virginity to a rough-handed farmer who didn’t believe in lubrication, and ripped his pleasure from Sean’s virgin arse, his head bashed off the cistern as he bent over the cracked toilet bowl and peeled his asscheeks apart for the rutting brute who shoved his face down into the fetid water.

The night his first girlfriend seduced him and he failed to please her. Too soft she was for his enjoyment. And him unable to be brutish with the weaker sex.

And always the humming in his head. Bashed off the cracked toilet bowl. A constant taunt of his lack of sexual fulfillment.

Turned desperate, splayed spreadeagle, restrained with ropes, Sean gazed at the large rented lesbian where she knelt

rubbing her redheaded buzzcut between his trembling thighs. She slapped her harnessed dildo against his soft prick and balls. Her predatory grin at the human sacrifice of one more pig. As she ripped maevishly into Sean, the stink of her excited banshee cunt confused the sexual boundaries in his mind as if it was his man-cunt and his man-tits pressing up against her heaving torso, and what a freaking nightmare, the danger of transporting her, him screaming, leaving, running cuntfree down the street toward the first pub of lads he could find.

Snapping back to the statuesque Patrick Kavanagh who had not moved an iron muscle, Sean belches the fish and chips, and shivers in the descending darkness of night. His legs, cramped from his reclined position, twitch as he sits up straight. His cock, roughed up and ready, stirs.

He turns to the statue of the poet who preferred his drink and says, “Not yer kind of man-to-man thing is it, Patrick? What would yeh have to say about me? Not a rhyming line I suppose. What do I care. Yeh did yer thing. I’ll do mine and the hell with consequences.”

The Beast growls with impatience eager for what is to come. Sean eases the Beast through the glistening Saturday night streets. He decides to skip the pubs, wanting to be clear-headed for the midnight rave with Finn and his mates.

He cruises the maze of Dublin City Centre streets like a farewell parade, kissing off some kind of final goodbye to windows and doors where he had tricked and the humming had never stopped, wondering how far out coming-out could take a man.

Turning into the docklands, Sean feels fear hit him in the chest, grab a fist around his heart. He knows he must turn back or forever shut-the-fuck-up. He drops fear. He tosses the key to his squat over his shoulder and it strikes iron sparks bouncing across the cobbles, disappearing in the dark.

The Beast lifts its nose in the air, expands its chest of a tank, rackets up its massive handlebar arms, and blasts its powerframe 1000cc-four-cylinder engine down the tracked road deciding Sean has no more say in steering his mind. The pair are too close to fail now. The Beast senses that their covenant of flesh and steel and blood and oil is about to become real as transubstantiation.

Sean clings to the wild Beast’s back for dear life. No

control over throttle or clutch, over pud or pucker. Riding the runaway. The control not his. The Beast possessed. Fear rises up in him, hardens him. Terror is his only turn-on. Suddenly he is more frightened and more erotic than he has ever been in his short life. Thrilled.

The headstrong Beast transports Sean up to the dirt track rutted where spinning tires claw for traction in the mud and rock. Sean guides the bucking machine, coaxing its knowing cyborg eye along the treacherous headland. The Beast, surging alive beneath him, takes away his breath, his mind, his will, and delivers him roaring up at the site where the bike boys wait.

A bonfire blazes tall on a fire mound at the center of a ring of two-wheeled machines sitting silent and dark, their riders' heads bowed in ritual reverence. One space stands open, vacant, expectant, waiting in the fire ring of steel and leather and flesh.

Acknowledging the ancient ring of men circled on machines, Sean pulls into the space opened by the composite beings for whom instinct does the work of reason. He settles his buttocks down on his vibrating saddle, eyes adjusting, when he sees, on the ancient mound, close to the brilliant blaze, a huge machine, the Big MacCool of all bikes, gleaming in the light of the fire. Its brilliant headlight searches outward, turning like a beacon, lighting instant bright the fire-red faces of the acolytes. Its frame so shuddering with power that Sean feels his own boner growing to a piston, answering a lust that has no control.

Feeling a hand grip his shoulder, Sean turns in his saddle and faces Finn.

"Welcome to the Fianna." Finn's easy grin shines red in the firelight. "Come on. Time for you to worship." His palm moves from shoulder to face, reassuring Sean who quickly licks Finn's hands, safe hands, for luck.

Dismounting the Beast that shudders with anticipation, Sean follows Finn into the circle.

Stopping before the Big MacCool bike, Finn says, "Strip and prostrate yerself."

Peeling his leathers, Sean eases himself, face down, hardon, to the cool ground. His buttocks, mooning up, quiver under the burning eyes reflecting fire in the dark faces of the ring.

His cock plows into the velvet soil that suctions his body into the contours of the heath. Turning his head to one side, he stretches his arms and legs spreadeagle as far apart as he can and waits. Directly before his eyes, he sees the great machine MacCool rising above him, poised to ride on into him. Fear hums up and down his spine. Fear transports to thrill. He hears a wall of heavy-metal sound rushing toward him. The ground beneath him hums and rumbles. He sees the bikers moving in on him.

Rubber tread pulls the hairs of his inner thighs as the Big MacCool tire rolls up between his legs, pinches his ballsack, nudges up the split of his buttocks, cracking the thrill of fear, heart pounding, remembering the transporting passivity of male sex, murdered in some ancient ritual older in secrets than the Druids. A tire up my butt, ironic, some reward for trusting Finn Fianna.

The wheel rolls the iron bike weight of the MacCool up over his quivering cheeks, tread stubs down on his hole like a boot toe grinding a cigaret, grinds his rose ring, and slowly whorls up the long twin muscles of his back. The weight pushes him harder into the dirt. Agreeable pain. He feels the searing heat of the forward flaring exhaust pipes singe his twitching asscheeks. Something hard and pointed bursts slow-throttle welcome through his knot of hole. He raises his head to cry out to the Finn MacCool motorcycle. The penetration throttles, guns, rams deep, wide, and hard. His nipples rub against rock. His cock fucks down into the mud. His whole body is on fire. His being opens up. The bike MacCool above him shifts, roars, rolls back and forth, fucking his pleading hole, the engine humming louder than any hum. He grinds his chin and chest and nipples down, lifting his white buttocks and blooming hole up to the bike, the night, the riders, the tire catching and squeaking on the nubs of his spine. The mechanical transport fucks his hole. He fucks it back, stunned at the revelation that there is no passivity in sex. He shoots his spunk from his big cock into the dry earth. The Big MacCool shudders, roars, gears burning, rams forward and reverses faster, rising to a screaming whine, gears smoking, tires burning, a hundred boots kicking the kickstand, finally rips a deep skid out of the hole of his humming arse, splattering oil, grease, petrol, piss, and rolls off him.

He pants, grunts, ruts. His butt burns with desire, then surprise. Another bike guns up to follow the place of the Big MacCool and revs to a fuck, disassembling him in the assembly line of bikers.

Sean rises up transported out of his head, looking down at his sweet body and the monster bike rolling over it. A piston-like rod, nine or ten inches of gleaming steel, roots between his bleeding buttocks. The cheeks of his bum look red, and seem to glow within, from the heat of the pipes riding over them.

He watches the wild fuck of his body until the blood orgy ends. All the bikes, and their riders, fuck him, mechanically. His hole rages ten times bigger, hungry, insatiable. No humming in his head. The hum hums in his butthole. He returns to his ravenous body, slipping into the dreamscape where always he is naked, riding the Beast, with his arse stretched on his passenger's huge penis, and his prick is ejaculating a constant stream of cum across the Beast's tank.

Transported, Sean screams, smiles, screams again at humans' greatest fear and fantasy. He exists in total bondage. He is sitting on the Beast's back thrashing against the immobility in his limbs and body. He realizes he is no longer a separate entity. He is finally one with the Beast. His hands and feet are melded into the handle bars and foot pegs. His legs are restrained in fender casings. His groin hangs low, coiled flesh, powerful steel, nethered beneath the Beast. He breathes, stretched and limned in the perfect balance of bondage in and on the steel frame. Panic sweeps over to thrill, and thrill to perversity. He's heard of a horse that shivers with terror, or of a dog that howls at something a man's eyes cannot see, and of men who, living primitive lives where instinct does the work of reason, are fully conscious of many thrilling things that non-transported minds cannot perceive at all. He looks at the other bikers looking at him in recognition. They too are one with their machines.

Finn pulls up puttering beside him with a smile of welcome. "Fuck me," he says. He rides in front of Sean, backing up, laughing over his shoulder, exposing his shining steel valve-like sphincter beneath his pillion seat.

Faster than Sean can think of mounting Finn, the Beast beneath him rises up, front wheel rolling along the saddle and nudging into Finn's back. Sean's steel penis unsheathes itself,

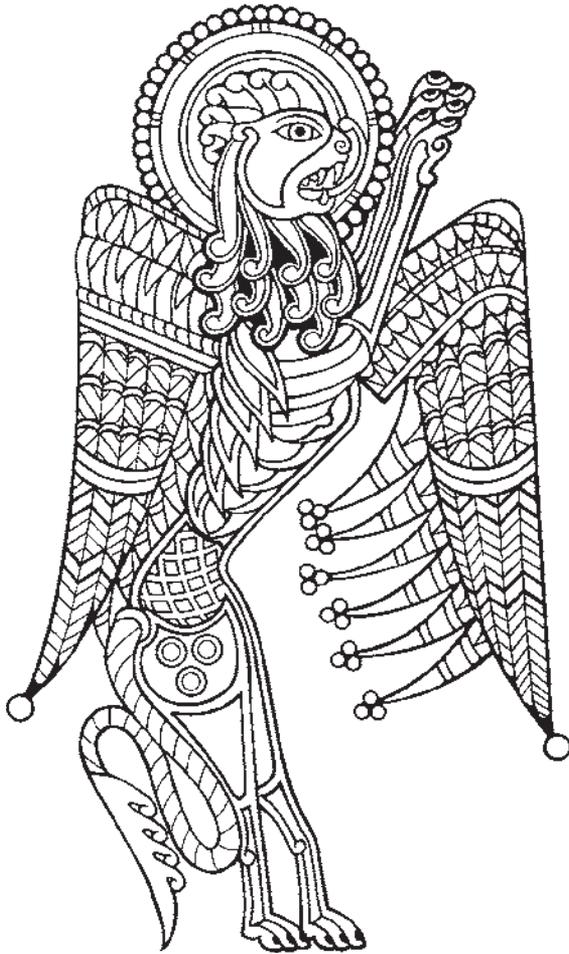
augering, drilling into Finn's gleaming arse.

He fucks it. Again. And again. Relishing the feel of his oiled steel cock rammed deep in Finn. The humming in his own body purrs. Transported, he is transport transporting. He is both himself and the Beast. Tremors of delight race through his veins and oil-lines, his heart and piston chamber pounding in synchronization. Muscles and gears strain as he pounds into the tight hole. Internal combustion explosions rock Sean the Beast as he ejaculates into Finn's valved sphincter.

Roaring up, Sean the Beast drops pattering, finished, from Finn's back. Sean the Beast watches his iron dick telescope itself down in sections into its sheath. A large pearlescent drop of black ejaculate oozes from his customized tip.

The circle of bikers roar the approval of clan and kin and family. He gulps large gulps of oil and grease and sex. Home. Heading home. Moving his hips, Sean Doyle, member of the Fianna, feels Himself the Beast move instinctively, smoothly, motoring into line in the single file down the beaten track toward the five white roads that lead to Teamhair, Tara, and Newgrange.

One.



E-Mail: Remember When We Weren't Queens?

Place: The Cyberspace of Emigrants; and England

Time: Present

Characters: Rory, the Storyteller, an Irish Emigrant

Donal, a man in Dublin

Beth, Donal's girlfriend

Sean, an Irish hustler, a rentboy

Glossary:

Catalina: a California adult video company

Stand: bus stop

Chunnel: the tunnel under the English Channel connecting England to France

P-P HARTNETT

E-MAIL: REMEMBER WHEN WE WEREN'T QUEENS?

Dear Donal,

Just ploughed through that gaga Beth-O saga. Poor Beth. Every fag needs a need-I-say-more. I always knew she'd do something breederish like that. Bad girl. And with that bad boy. Bad boy. And on your quilt. You'll just have to buy yourself a new one. Try www.AuntieGayQuilts.com or www.Frol-iqueQuilts.com. Right now VernaMays.com has a green and white "Chum Dash" which'd be a good replacement, only \$95. Go on, treat yourself. And don't for heaven's sake be shy to ask re stubborn stains. (Will we ever forget that "Rose-of-Sharon" applique summer spread—circa 1860—that made you heave?)

If, however, you insist on letting that mutt of yours (Bad dog!) anywhere near your bed, (*Urgh!* the thought of all those hairs) then go for a scrappy log-cabin thingamy, something with lots of colour to hide the dog hair and spots. I'm still so pleased with my double-sided brick quilt, but I'm sure some of those sections are recent—more 1999 than c.1900—but at \$65 who's complaining about child labor in Asia. Wouldn't get anything half as nice over here in these London shops. The alternative to those two US websites is that guy in Northumberland, but his prices are way over.

Right, guess what. News. HOT news. And it's juicy. About time, I hear you holler. I *should* be sanding the floors, but it's too damn cold. Maybe in an hour. "I've just got to share,"

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[HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK](#)

as Scottie would put it. Strictly between you, me, and the Internet God, I've discovered I want a Paddy for a boyfriend. Ridiculous, I know, homesick, having ferried myself over here to Merry Old to get away from them that looks like me, but there you have it. Perverse, I am, seeking the island incest I fled. As you know all too well, the edited highlights of my frequently sordid sexual history include an Andy, an Anton, a Felix, a Wawing, and a Phil (R.I.P.), but never an Aidan, Colum, Declan, or Sean.

"Mum, Dad, this is Sean." Can you imagine? Oh, they'd have loved that on the front steps in Dublin back in '85, giving up on controlling my preference but consoling themselves saying, "At least, he's Irish, and Catholic, thank God," but what did I do? Drag in Andy, that Aberdeen Arsehole, for the quickest once-over—never to be welcome within five miles of Mum and Dad again.

The list of introductions has been many(ish) and varied. I'm sure that behind my back it's a family joke: a Scottish man, a Dutch man, a Jamaican, a Chinese, and a Brit. Never a Paddy.

Actually, I can't figure why not? Perversity? After all, my father's one of those. And so's yours. And weren't they a couple of mad men. (Good job we're queer, dear. Imagine passing on that genetic inheritance.)

Anyway, so here I am, Monday morning, 11 AM. Fuckin' freezin' I'm telling you. Heating on MAX. And I'm excited. Very. Scale of 1-10? Um, maybe 8 and that's high for a slapper like me.

Having been here at #10 a month now, I thought I'd go wild and get a bus into Burnley, so I did. Last night. Worked Classic Homo Look #9. We're talking white Gap tee, grey Fruit of the Loom hooded top, old skool Adidas trainers (the ones Johnny Wilson used to favour), black leather jacket and brand new deepest indigo 501's. Considered a Bike jock strap, but decided on the old reliable of no knickers. Took me ages to get that casually dressed, but you know how it is in this neck of the woods, leave the Westwood for London. Oh, and my hair's real short now after a the local barber misinterpreted my directions. Kind of flat-top again, after all these years.

Yikes, age—the things it does to a girl. That mirror-mirror on the wall has dictated that I cut out the booze until

my birthday because I'm doing all the new-year cliches: yup, joined a gym. Lost five pounds already, mainly in the showers.

I'm drifting.

So, last night off I went to The Green Room. Don't think they've heard of House Music in Burnley. If they have, then it's not what they were pumping out in St James Street between 8 and 10. *Boyz* describes the place as "relaxed." What a cod. "Rigor mortis," more like.

I was more than a bit disappointed, to tell the truth, all set to make a grand exit when—here we go, seat-belts on—in walks this guy and my eyes go POP. Tall? Jesus, he had to *stoop* as he came in, *that* tall and you know I like 'em big. Now, I'm 6-2. This guy has got to be 6-5/6-6 at least.

Well, up he went to the bar and I started ticking off the usual criteria thinking Well, what is this we have here?

Butch stride? Yup.

Packet? Mmm.

Rump? Humpy.

Drink? A pint. Lager.

Smoke? No, what a relief. Didn't light up.

I know, you want it in one. OK, close your eyes now and no peepin': he's kind of a really young Clint Eastwood meets Morrissey meets that Versace slayer (whose name I can't think of for the life of me) with Matt Dillon eyebrows. Lord, I'm getting hard.

Sat himself down he did across from me by the door. Enough to say, I gave it a few minutes, not wishing to appear obvious like, then upped. Pretended to look at the jukebox selection, didn't I—that old B-girl trick— then sat a couple of tables down from him. Dead casual.

Kept thinking someone'd waltz in, up he'd get, and they'd go kiss-kiss and that'd be it. But no. As a few people came in, there was the occasional nod, a hiya. He was cool. (Still no sign of a cigarette.)

I kept giving him sidelong glances, but he was stuck into *The Pink Paper*. Then I looked at my watch and thought of the sanding and the locksmith and the coal delivery and my *Things To Do* list which is the length of your Joey's you-know-what (lucky you!) and wished my car weren't still in the garage and, kind of impatiently, just walked out. Just left. Not like me at all.

Traipsing back up towards the bus station (desperate weather, got fierce wet), I was thinking of Mr Tall Dark & Handsome when who the fuck should walk on by only to cruise me over his shoulder confident as ordering pizza, but Mr TD&H himself. He kind of smiled, but I somehow felt it wasn't for me. Doesn't that sound daft? Like it was more of a Hi, yeah, that place was crap tonight. I'm off too. Cheerio.

All I could think of was, How does me hair look? Is me nose shinin'?

So there I was, at the bus stop. Stand C. And he's kind of shuffling between A and B, and I'm wishing he were going Trawden way/wishing he were the coalman/the locksmith/the sodomite next door. I decided to strike a kind of 70's porn pose. You know, you want it—you come and get it. Well tra-la it worked. Up he came for a sniff.

Donal, my little heart was going boom-boom in my ears. This one's the answer to a gobbler's wettest dreams. Ab-so-fuckin'-lutely.

Details omitted thus far: white caucasian, good skin (freckled), light-grey tee (ragged), charcoal v-neck (not cashmere), faded blue denim shirt (Wrangler), big hands (the worst nails; bites 'em), black Levi's (gone grey), black donkey jacket (remarkable in this day and age), Nike trainers on promising big-big-big feet with box-fresh laces.

Basically, Donal, dear, over he strolls like an XXWE stud out of one of your Catalina videos, leans against a lamp-post or bin or something and whips out a pack of Silk Cut. I thought a great big anti-smoking, uh-oh, here we go, if I ever get him round to #10, he's gonna stink the place out. But, in spite of his total gorgeousness, when he shoved his fags my way, I hit him with that spinsterish "Don't smoke" line of mine, said in the usual tone of voice that's half fact, half mother's good advice.

Back they went into his pocket. Zzzzip went the zipper. So filmic.

"Nor do I," he said blushing. "I quit." Then he kind of giggled. "I'm quitting."

Sss-weet, really sweet. Donal, he's too "me" to be true, a real dote. The "me" that's tired of boyfriends named Anton and Felix and Waving and R.I.P. Phil. Tired of foreign meat? Try a homeboy. Get this: Mr TD&H is Irish!

Some facts: born in Kildare but raised in Burnley since

the age of nine. Age: 24. Works in a factory making gas boilers. Name, wait for it...down girl...Sean.

"That's S-E-A-N, not S-H-A-U-N." He actually spelled it out like that. Ooh, I'm telling you...it's the closest I've come to being hypnotised since sexy Felix dropped his drawers. S-E-A-N, alack 'n' alas, could do with a bit of expensive dentistry. What Scottie would call, "a very European look." His eyes make up for that. Ah! Those lashes, really long and thick and curled. Not a thing on 'em. Natural. (Makes ya spit.)

Oh, that reads terribly, so Barbie. DELETE! DELETE! (Remember the time when we weren't queens?)

Just as I was debating internally as to whether or not I'd stab down my phone number on a bit of scrap, along comes the X43. We're talking ten-second sayonara.

Could I get a wink of sleep last night? Answer: giant N giant O.

I was, oh you know, stage-directing it all in me head. He'd come over and we'd have a few beers by the fire, chatting and stuff. Maybe a joint on the go, Pete Tong on the radio. Really matey. Then I'd show him the house, walk him round, and, right on cue up the top, in the room you described as my John-Boy Walton jerk-off haven, it'd go all quiet and we'd hold each other like a couple of honeymooners, then kiss...and it'd be really nice and slow. Special. Ha! You know, like we were in lurve.

Kind of think this S-E-A-N guy might like poppers 'n' things. Now, you know me. I can cope with piercings above the waist, but I hope to God he's not pierced down below or anything. Nothing worse than a Prince Albert banging against one's veneers. How did Vickie ever do that? Take out her choppers?

He does work a bit of over-stylised facial hair in the form of lambchop sideburns. More skinhead than faggot though. (Oh I know, skinhead is faggot. You know what I mean. Evil queen.)

We're meeting same time same place next week. (Bar, not bus stop.)

He's Irish and, if not Catholic by God, me Ma and Da can bite half a loaf. Think of Beth-O's parents desperate-to-be grandparents, but not the unmarried way.

Another thing though, bit of a minus, a somewhat annoying little detail really, he's got a boyfriend. A teeny weeny complication, you'll agree. He says it's an open relationship.

Yeah, right, OPEN as in #1, like the Chunnel; OPEN #2, to the risk of infection; OPEN #3, both the above, and then some: he's a rentboy. (Bad Boy!) Cry me a river.

Any news of Finbar?

XXX Rory



The Lake of Being Human: Dead Sea Fruit

Place: Lough Nasool, a Lake in the West of Ireland; Dublin

Time: Some years ago in summer 1978

Characters: The Storyteller

Sorcha, the storyteller's mother's lover

Ruden, Sorcha's son

Lar, a workman and writer

Freddie, a teacher in Dublin

Glossary:

Lough: lake

Easkey: a seaside beach

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[HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK](#)

MICHAEL WYNNE

THE LAKE OF BEING HUMAN: DEAD SEA FRUIT

Of course. Why not? We continued to swim in Lough Na-sool after finding the body. With more enthusiasm really, if anything. I saw it—him—first, marooned among the reeds, lazily bobbing, looking both aged and ageless. He was floating on his back, and was inclined a little toward me as I calmly breast-stroked nearer, his mouth open and giving on to a darkness that suggested an infinity of night, like a black hole breathless. He was dressed only in thermals, and the one visible arm was curved crookedly along his body in a way that looked both coy and guarded. I treaded water for a minute, something I'd not properly mastered up till that moment since being taught to swim by my mother's lover the previous spring, and, fascinated, I watched the lakewater play with his hair, the colour of burnt corn, and buoy this capsule of dead flesh.

The first thing I thought was that he looked like my father. Or more exactly, I suppose, as I'd often wishfully envisioned my father before the wish was unexpectedly realised. His feet—the floating dead man's—were encased in heavy woollen socks, whose saturation could not disguise the fact that they were an oatmeal pair like ones I owned; and his half-open eyes were flat, bleakly opaque, with a look at once of querulousness and a kind of insensible acknowledgement of the uselessness of complaint. They were the sort of eyes, I remember thinking,

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that were created to be carried by a corpse. Against the bared upper part of his chest the grey-on-black hair was splayed like a water-logged nest. Gripped in his bloated hand, which was an off-white like the hand of an over-inflated rubber man, was a curled-up colour photograph.

It was the sight of the photo that brought home to me with a shock that all of this had been foreseen. The photo made me wheel about and stare across the flat black of the lake to look for my companion, Ruden, and call. I saw him somersaulting in the water yards away with a flash of the puce drawstring trunks almost identical to mine. "C'mere, c'mere quick, there's a body here dead, dead!" My voice, I suppose, sounded entirely disbelieving in the reality of death, although death was not something I was unused to.

For, as I have already suggested, my father had died, but my experience of mortality was not limited to his largely un-mourned demise. It was a stroke that killed him. A strange way to go, it was said, for a man so relatively young. The idea of my father being taken in any way as young I thought bizarre since, for as long as I could remember, he had insisted, with an unchallengeable self-adoration in his voice never otherwise present, that he had never been without the ways of a man, a grown man, with emphasis on the adjective, and from this I had imagined him carrying from the start the traits of stale middle age, and not the dauntless virility which, as I see now, he was trying to convey.

I was seventeen when this specimen of unquestionable manhood that had fathered me, and me alone, suddenly stopped existing, a time when I was on the verge of falling rather desperately in love with Ruden, who is my mother's lover's son. It was all very complicated. Horrible at the time. And in most ways hilarious, for precisely that reason now, nearly ten years later. My father died on another continent, somewhere in Australasia, according to my mother, though I never cared to discover exactly where. He had always said, to the mostly sceptical of those who knew him, that he wanted to travel; but it was the actual learning of my mother's love for Sorcha, her old colleague from the art college, which gave him the shock he needed to jumpstart him into realising a dream he, doubtless, had not the courage of fulfilling otherwise.

His face had wrinkled prematurely, and since his marriage

and becoming a father, the lines of his cheeks and eyes and forehead had intensified to a fretted network, like a human graph baldly schematizing the confused frustration and emotional disillusion that charted his responses to his own life. He seemed to me to live in a constant state of confoundment caused and complicated by an expansive, restless, and unpredictable wife, as well as by a son who was clearly like no other male he had ever previously encountered or conceived of, a son whose failure, for instance, to fit the mould of someone unquestionably ready to “kick football” with him at every instigation floored him irrecoverably.

I was about four years old when he said the first words I can distinctly remember him putting to me. He had come into the bathroom to take over from Mum the chore of bathing me while she bandaged the gashed shin of our next-door neighbour, a widowed dress-making tippler who was in the habit of shambling bloodily over to our house whenever she took a tumble down the stairs. In the middle of clumsily soaping my shoulders, he gently took the toy-cow sponge I was splashing about with and, drawing the cow upwards so my eyes met with his, said simply, “Do you like me?” in that heavy toneless voice that, in me, could only inspire indifference at best. He said it again, “Do you like me?” before I rather nastily pried the sponge from his big fingers and, not answering, began busily bubbling it between my legs, hoping, no doubt, that he would go away, a wish I sustained until the day he finally did, forever.

Because the poor deluded man’s accepted standards were built around the longing for a family life of blissfully ordered convention—a vague idealism as lofty as it was impossibly outmoded—nothing ever turned out in the least as he hoped or imagined. His peevish, unthinking resistance to the wonderful random chaos of free life prevented him from gaining a modicum of worthwhile wisdom, or the least peace of mind, and kept him struggling neck-deep in that mire of perplexed, perpetual, and petulant disappointment to whom those who refuse to learn empirically are doomed. It was this floundering of his that disabled me from granting him even a fraction of the respect my mother would repeatedly advise me he deserved almost in the same breath as she’d describe him, with irritation and pity in her voice, as green as grass, as weak as water, or some such remark that only confirmed

my damning view of him.

On such occasions Sorcha would usually be sitting with us in the kitchen swathed in her purple, crystal-beaded smock, smiling quietly while her acrylic-stained hands thoughtfully stroked the side of her long neck in the way she had. If asked for her opinion, she'd say something in neutral compassion like, "Ah, he's not a bad man. He's just a bit out of his depth, I suppose. He's always sound as a gent to me even though he knows, he knows, he knows what the score is." She'd exhale a small laugh and glance at my mother, her co-conspirator, through the steam from her fruit tea.

This was around the beginning of their relationship, my mother's and Sorcha's, a relationship that was not especially kept secret from me, even from the tentative, incipient stage. I had known anyway, the instant I was together with them for the first time, that these women were soulmates and more, that fortune, as Sorcha said, steered their stars to share as much life as humanly possible.

I would make them tea in the evenings after school as they took turns drawing or painting one another in the garage Mum had converted into a studio the autumn she returned to work with students in their foundation year. I sat and listened in to them during their breaks as they discussed everything from the general tedium of landscape painting compared to, say, studies of the human figure, to the importance to oneself as an artist-as-a-human-being open to the influence of both the masculine and feminine impulses, and on to subjects specially close to Sorcha's heart like divination or mind reading. These things I disdained while feigning interest, out of a purposeful sensitivity to the importance of accepting at every level the woman who had made my mother happy.

When it came to my father, Sorcha was right. He wasn't a bad man. There were times when I hated myself for not loving him. But while he lived, I never could. I disliked him the more for being so incorrigibly unlovable. I was a hard, callous child toward my father, driven that way by multiple disappointments with my world, driven at points almost insanely angry by fear of being rejected for what I knew myself to be. At the age of fifteen, reacting against all this, I went through a tight-lipped phase of being a puritanistic, righteous little prig, exemplified by my attitude at the time of the '86 Divorce

Referendum, when I cello-taped into my journal a flyer put out by the “Vote No” lobbyists with a misanthropic little comment I’d scrawled on the back that read something like, “Prevent happiness from coming to those who don’t deserve it!” That says something, I suppose, about how the oppressed can be drawn, through self-hatred, into a general collusion with their oppressors. In this regard, I was lucky in that I soon realised the limited truth of that and better, because such determinations presuppose one is a predestined victim.

It was Sorcha who played a large part in my awakening. She made the effort to befriend me at a stage when I’d become prematurely cynical about my worthiness to be a friend to anyone, and so it took her a long while to make any headway with me. But she persevered, and I think I responded finally because in time I saw that she recognised in me someone who had suffered similarly to herself. Before she taught me to swim, she painted my portrait a couple of times in her flat above a boutique on Wine street, persuading me to model for her through insistent appeals to my vanity. For short periods she’d get me to sit on a high stool opposite her big bay window while the music of Mahler or Handel played from a tiny cassette recorder on the window seat. During extended breaks, she’d make us herbal or fruit teas, over which she’d do all the talking for about the first hour until I was so relaxed that I forgot myself and grew as voluble as she.

From her I learned the possibility of socialism, and also through her learned indirectly that it was the ideals of the left which I had, in my ignorance and lonely self-detestation, temporarily rejected for the very reason that they were so harmonious with my nature, and that what I’d been gravitating around instead was the comforting facade of a conformity as desperate and primitive as it was false and fundamentalist and like my father’s. With an instinctive trust of my deeper understanding, she touched, usually quite casually, on subjects like her own feminism, her lesbianism, and her mistake in marrying young.

She even told me of the abortion that she’d had after an encounter with an Iranian man whose intelligence and humour had attracted her, but whose completely unvanquished chauvinism had ultimately nauseated her. She told stories of her work in the art college with students she instructed in life

drawing, and, with a unique idealism, as I feel now, she set out to teach me, while still pliant, of the drive and energy and spiritual beauty of the young. She confessed her own misspent youth, as she ironically put it, in order, as I suspected even at the time, to sound my own anxieties.

One weekend around this time, Sorcha and my mother took me for lunch to a tearoom they frequented at Drumcliffe not far from the churchyard where with picnic and poetry they sometimes visited the bones of Yeats. Over dessert they officially confirmed that they were seeing each other as a couple. Something like misplaced ego made me want to disguise the shock I felt on being hit by the reality of this, which was about them, and not about me, and the only way I could triumph over this was by my stoutly coming out to them in turn. At this, we all three burst out laughing. They smiled at me and at one another with sympathetic knowing. Then Mum picked up my hand and pressed her lips to my palm, before ordering me another helping of cheesecake.

A fortnight later Sorcha took me out for the first time to Easkey to teach me to swim. Because of her gentleness, her undemanding confidence in me, she succeeded in getting me to overcome my fear of water within a month. After each session in the sea, she would walk me to a tiered concrete embankment that connected the strand with a short esplanade. Here, with water running down our legs, we would drink mint tea out of an old candy-striped Butlins flask while she would tell me about her twenty-four-year-old son, Ruden, who, the following Easter, was coming over on holiday from Surrey where he grew up and now worked and studied.

It was during these times on the concrete steps at Easkey beach that we would sing old musical numbers together, or discuss our schooldays which for the first time I talked about in any way that was humourous; or else we'd lose ourselves in tarot readings through which Sorcha would divine my state of mind. She made great business of calling upon the help of a backup Buddhist pack she called Osho Zen and swore by with what seemed to me a somewhat ambiguous solemnity. Each pack she kept wrapped in silk material which, she said, preserved their energy. The cloth for the regular pack was mauve with a pentacle design picked out in silver thread at its centre, while the Osho Zen pack she kept wrapped in a

frayed vermilion fragment.

At other times after our tutorial, she would press me to put questions to an amethyst crystal which she dangled by a piece of gold chain over her left palm and which to my startled eyes would, in response to my initially ironic queries, either rotate or swing back and forth. Either movement could be taken, according to Sorcha, as a *yes* or *no* depending upon the mood of the gemstone or upon that of the querent, and could be confirmed by first asking a simple question such as *Is grass green?* or *Is the sun blue?* as Sorcha, excited by my amazement, demonstrated over and over.

After one of these sessions, we took ourselves to a thatched pub where Sorcha ordered us one Irish coffee after another. The more she had, the more political her speech became, and soon she was angrily denouncing the pro-life mob as old-fashioned men and fundamentalist women who, she added, were shameless breeders whipping up their men into frightened and insecure jobs.

Her radical arguments didn't very much interest me, but she flattered me sharing her passionate ideas. Because of this, I revealed to her my deepest shame—not anything to do with my sexuality, nor my self-hate, nor the early ostracism I'd suffered at the hands of my peers, but the fact that I entertained fantasies about my father's death: when he would die, how, where, why. Despite her strong social opinions, she said she had nothing direct to say, but hoped I would have no severe future regrets.

"No regrets," she said. "Let me tell you something."

She spoke about her own parents' lives of restriction and disappointment, drawing a parallel with her own life up till quite recently, referring to the emotional dead sea fruit, as she phrased it, that was her first marriage, whose one immeasurable compensation was her son, whom she loved and understood so well. She predicted we would be inseparable once we met, because of our similar temperaments, senses of humour, and intensity. "Ruden loves to swim," she said. "Now you've the knack, you can swim together." She promised how, when Ruden came home, we could stay each and all at her mother's house overlooking Lough Nasool.

A little later, my father had taken early retirement on his forty-ninth birthday and embarked on his lonely world trip,

saying goodbye to my mother and me. That night, Sorcha revealed to me the true extent of her psychical gifts. The long-awaited Ruden was due to come home the following weekend and my mother had thrown an impromptu party at our house for all her women friends. I remember the details of that late afternoon with an intensity that is almost lurid.

We had, Sorcha and I, wandered with our plastic beakers of punch into the twilight garden, and were standing under a copper sycamore strung with small red lights. My mother, tall like Sorcha, could be seen through a window illuminated by a row of a hundred candle flames confiding something to a woman in a white linen suit. I kept my eyes on my mother's mobile features, haloed in the distance, as Sorcha, her huge cupreous eyes reflecting the coloured bulbs strung from the tree to the hedge rows, took a deep mystic breath and, for an impromptu seance to balance my father's subtraction from our lives, pressed my house key into her palm.

At first she halted, but then marvelously excited by her reading from my key, told me of the fruitless but enlightening love I would hold for flesh akin to hers, and of my encounters with death.

The first of these, she said, would involve a friend, whose life seemed, according to her vision, to rush to an early end. The second death was of a stranger whose dead hand would clutch the picture of an adored but abandoning only child who was the spur to his demise.

As an aside, she said, "Remember, there exists a future time when we are all already dead."

Such words should not have been comforting, though—by dint of their powerful fearlessness at the detached reality of death—that is exactly what they were. At that time, I could not bring myself to ask Sorcha if my father's life was soon to end. If she knew, she thought better of saying so.

Earlier that summer, I'd started hanging around with an older bunch of hippie types, who introduced me to dope, and 'shroom brew, and to absinthe which one of them had smuggled over from Prague. They were a harmless gang, eternally wise-cracking, mellow, quite literary, who had going for them the fact that they did not allow their village parochialism to prevent them being genuinely committed thinkers.

I'd fallen in love with one of them, Lar, an older boy with

whom I'd been infatuated for years before I knew him to talk to, or had become part of his set, years even before I fully knew it was men I exclusively desired. I would see him during my lunch breaks from school framed against the big display windows of the shop fronts in the town. Window washing was his job, and he worked one winter on a short-lived community magazine produced through one of those schemes set up by the government to reduce unemployment figures. He was office manager, so-called, and often wrote the magazine's editorial, usually about how crucial it was that cannabis be decriminalised, or exposing a local pub that actively discriminated against travellers. He also contributed some fiction.

One story of his I spotted in an early issue was a tale with "Disappointment" in the title and which, when he was dead, I wished I'd kept. It was about a man, a Walter Mitty-type loner, a pseudo-philosopher who fancied that all his conventional insights into society were the stuff of the purest genius, who could only function, hold his own, in solitude, who went to pieces as soon as he was among strangers. Lar's irony was, as the plot turned out, that everyone in the story was a stranger to him including himself as well as those who were linked to him by blood, or by way of some spent friendship from the distant past of school or the army. It sounded bleak, hopeless, and it was. Yet the tale wasn't without humour as desperate, demanding, and shockingly mordant as Lar himself could become when he was drunk or stoned, or downed, as he regularly seemed to be, by some new crisis. "You're serious," I once told him, "but you send it up."

On that, Lar brought me once to Dublin to a two-bedroom house, overlooking the railway tracks. The house, according to Sorcha, was the reputed venue for occasional gay orgies hosted by the middle-aged owner, Freddie, whose windows Lar said with a wink he'd cleaned once or twice. There was no orgy the evening we arrived. Instead, Freddie, quite nice in a turtleneck Aran sweater and cords, received us in a gentlemanly fashion. His face, tanned from a sunbooth, featured an amazing display of teeth capped while teaching in America. With his arms upraised, he swept us into a room separated from the kitchen by double doors inlaid with coloured glass. The tiny library was lit by revolving hippie lights mounted on the crammed book shelves stacked up three of the walls. Freddie took up a

standing pose next to a tall music center flanked by twin CD towers whose every slot was alphabetically filled.

Lar and Freddie talked about the night life in Dublin. Freddie served us citrus-flavoured vodka brought from the duty-free on his way back from holiday at Sitges. He was conscious over the fledgling chicken I was, but was politely solicitous. After a few minutes, he advised I sit away from the double doors, out of “a desperate draught,” and sit on one of the heaped bean-bag chairs near the gas fire. Whenever our eyes met, we both grew uneasy, and I thought of my father on his lonely worldly trip, and remained silent nursing the shot of vodka in my two hands between my legs.

Weeks later it was Freddie who was my acquaintance when the first death Sorcha had foreseen came to pass. What mystery mixes together men, disattached from the world, when everyone else attached to the world disappears? The night the doctor switched off the life-support machine on Lar—four weeks after he was hit by a Landrover on emerging, stoned, from a pub on Bridge street—the world had come down to Freddie, come up from Dublin, and me sitting in the corridor of the old folks’ home. It was the only institution in the town that at that time had a proper ventilator.

Freddie sat with his long-fingered hands covering the greater part of his carefully tended face. He was full of speculation that Lar had nursed a death wish because of his alternating rage and guilt. Lar could no longer handle the manic-depressive wife he’d married while at college. He had vowed never to leave her or neglect their two young children. The pathos became bathos when Lar had a few on him. He howled about his sexuality, which, Freddie said, his wife knew about and wasn’t, when manic or depressed, bothered in the slightest. As for me, Lar’s death, predicted in Sorcha’s foresight, bothered me mostly with considerations of predestiny and how fundamentally impotent we are in the greater scheme of things.

I had met Ruden by this time. He had shown up while Lar lingered on the life support. Ruden was there with my mother and Sorcha when the news arrived of my dad’s death. Ruden took pains to console me by treating me like an old friend. He was six years older, bigger, athletic like Sorcha, and more experienced in love. He said it had never failed to amaze him,

until recently—when it had come merely to amuse him—how every life, no matter how careful or willful or brilliant or sad like Lar’s or my father’s was doomed by chance which was not the same as Sorcha’s predestination.

Ruden seemed wise. I did not feel uncomfortable or out of my depth with him. He fit right in with my other, even older friends, the stylized hippies, whose intellectualism did not faze me. What Ruden ultimately did for me was open me up for the first time to the absolute acceptance of my impulses.

The summer day we came across the thermal-clad suicide in the lake was almost the first anniversary of our meeting. Earlier that day, Ruden had finally made clear to me that my desiring to continue on with him was “really,” he said, “quite totally a useless lust.” He finally persuaded me he could never really love someone younger, that despite a year’s infrequent but often intense physicality between us, nothing permanent could come from it. “You are at least owed,” Ruden said, “complete honesty in this.” With our intermittent intimacy ended, I hoped to continue our companionship. “People,” Ruden said, “always want to remain friends.”

Swimming out into the lake, rejected and dismissed and disappointed, I felt the cool current pulling me in the direction of my father’s lonely journey into the world. Sorcha had warned, “Remember, there exists a future time when we are all already dead.” When first I heard them, those were fearless words.

Nevertheless, all that summer we continued to swim in the reedy section of Lough Nasool where we had come across the floating dead body of a man, dressed only in his thermals, who had embraced death in the middle of the night after his only daughter had abruptly run off for England with a lover. His child, he had often boasted to anyone in the town who would listen, had taken after him, and her image, as a very young girl, he gripped in his dead hand.

As we continued to swim there, we fed each other chunks of what I told Sorcha was our dead-sea fruit, our dead-sea histories. Eventually I told Ruden I never grieved for my father. I had always toyed with ideas of how and why and when my father might die. In fact, I had always considered him dead, but that, late as it was, late in the summer, and for what it was worth, a dull sympathy had actually begun to form for

him in my heart.

Our last night swimming in Lough Nasool, Ruden confessed, the way someone leaving on a journey will confess, that he secretly despised his mother's intuitive gifts. As a student he had often sneered at her for crossing the psychical and political. I laughed when he told of the embarrassing times she had, entirely unwelcome, earnestly practised her divination on him, and he had run from her table, her crystal ball, her house, her town, and her.

Thus Ruden reminded me how, with her genuine gift for the clairvoyant, Sorcha, his mother, had revealed to me, things about love and death—my key in her right fist, while she held my clenched fist enclosed in her left hand—on that spring evening under the copper sycamore, strung with red lights, in the garden where my mother, on the last night on earth I ever saw my father, could be seen through a window illuminated by a row of a hundred candle flames, confiding something sweet, charming, and, finally, I understood, magical to a woman in a white linen suit.



Last Rites

Place: London, Harrow Road, Kensal Rise Baths

Time: June, a hot Friday

Characters: Irish Labourer, an adolescent immigrant

Cockney, caretaker of the bath

Overseer, an asbestos worker

Trinidadian man, a carpenter

Glossary:

Kensal Rise Tontine and Workingmen's Association: a tontine is an insurance system; historically, an annuity shared by a group whose last surviving member inherits the whole; eg.: the 1967 British film comedy, *The Wrong Box*

Kensal Rise: a vintage London neighborhood; the Pre-Raphaelite painter, J. W. Waterhouse (1849-1917) is buried at Kensal Rise Cemetery

navvy, navvies: an unskilled labourer on canals, railways, public works; from the word, *navigator*

Cockney: a dialectically colorful native of the East End of London; eg.: *My Fair Lady*

dogdem: a bumper car ride at an amusement park

ras, rassman: male Rastafarian, someone from the Carribean

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NEIL JORDAN

LAST RITES

ne white-hot Friday in June at some minutes after five o'clock a young builder's labourer crossed an iron rail way overpass, just off the Harrow Road. The day was faded now and the sky was a curtain of haze, but the city still lay hard-edged and agonisingly bright in the day's undiminished heat. The labourer as he crossed the overpass took note of its regulation shade of green. He saw an old, old negro immigrant standing motionless in the shade of a red-bricked wall. Opposite the wall, in line with the overpass, he saw the Victorian facade of Kensal Rise Baths. Perhaps because of the heat, or because of a combination of the heat and his temperament, these impressions came to him with an unusual clarity; as if he had seen them in a film or in a dream and not in real, waking life. Within the hour he would take his own life. And dying, a cut-throat razor in his hand, his blood mingling with the shower-water into the colour of weak wine he would take with him to whatever vacuum lay beyond, three memories: the memory of a green-painted bridge; of an old, bowed, shadowed negro; of the sheer tiled wall of a cubicle in what had originally been the wash-houses of Kensal Rise Tontine and Workingmen's Association, in what was now Kensal Rise Baths.

The extraordinary sense of nervous anticipation the labourer experienced had long been familiar with him. And, inexplicable. He never questioned it fully. He knew he anticipated something, approaching the baths. He knew that it wasn't quite pleasure. It was something more and less than pleasurable, a feeling of ravishing, private vindication, of exposure, of secret, solipsistic victory. Over what he never asked. But he knew. He knew as he approached the baths to wash off

the dust of a week's labour; that this hour would be the week's high-point. Although during the week he never thought of it, never dwelt on its pleasures — as he did, for instance on his prolonged Saturday morning's rest — when the hour came it was as if the secret thread behind his week's existence was emerging into daylight, was exposing itself to the scrutiny of daylight, his daylight. The way the fauna of the sea-bed are exposed, when the tide goes out.

And so when he crossed the marble step at the door, when he faced the lady behind the glass counter; handing her sevenpence, accepting a ticket from her; waving his hand to refuse towel and soap, gesticulating towards the towel in his duffle-bag, each action was performed with the solemnity of an elaborate ritual, each action was a ring in the circular maze that led to the hidden purpose — the purpose he never elaborated, only felt; in his arm as he waved his hand; in his foot as he crossed the threshold. And when he walked down the corridor; with its white walls, its strange hybrid air; half unemployment exchange, half hospital ward, he was silent. As he took his place on the long oak bench, last in a line of negro, Scottish and Irish navvies his expression preserved the same immobility as theirs, his duffle-bag was kept between his feet and his rough slender hands between his knees and his eyes upon the grey cream wall in front of him. He listened to the rich, public voices of the negroes, knowing the warm colours of even their work-clothes without having to look. He listened to the odd mixture of reticence and resentment in the Irish voices. He felt the tiles beneath his feet, saw the flaking wall before him the hard oak bench beneath him, the grey-haired cockney caretaker emerging every now and then from the shower-hall to call 'Shower!', 'Bath!' and at each call the next man in the queue rising, towel and soap under one arm. So plain, so commonplace, and underneath the secret pulsing — but his face was immobile.

As each man left the queue he shifted one space forward and each time the short, crisp call issued from the cockney he turned his head to stare. And when his turn eventually came to be first in the queue and the cockney called 'Shower!' he padded quietly through the open door. He had a slow walk that seemed a little stiff, perhaps because of the unnatural straightness of his back. He had a thin face, unremarkable

but for a kind of distance in the expression; removed, glazed blue eyes; the kind of inwardness there, of immersion, that is sometimes termed stupidity.

The grey-haired cockney took his ticket from him. He nodded towards an open cubicle. The man walked slowly through the rows of white doors, under the tiled roof to the cubicle signified. It was the seventh door down.

‘Espera me, Quievo!’.

‘Ora, deprisa, ha?’.

He heard splashing water, hissing shower-jets, the smack of palms off wet thighs. Behind each door he knew was a naked man, held timeless and separate under an umbrella of darting water. The fact of the walls, of the similar but totally separate beings behind those walls never ceased to amaze him; quietly to excite him. And the shouts of those who communicated echoed strangely through the long, perfectly regular hall. And he knew that everything would be heightened thus now, raised into the aura of the green light.

He walked through the cubicle door and slid the hatch into place behind him. He took in his surroundings with a slow familiar glance. He knew it all, but he wanted to be a stranger to it, to see it again for the first time, always the first time: the wall, evenly gridded with white tiles, rising to a height of seven feet; the small gap between it and the ceiling; the steam coming through the gap from the cubicle next door; the jutting wall, with the full-length mirror affixed to it; behind it, enclosed by the plastic curtain, the shower. He went straight to the mirror and stood motionless before it. And the first throes of his removal began to come upon him. He looked at himself the way one would examine a flat-handled trowel, gauging its usefulness; or, idly, the way one would examine the cracks on a city pavement. He watched the way his nostrils, caked with cement-dust, dilated with his breathing. He watched the rise of his chest, the buttons of his soiled white work-shirt straining with each rise, each breath. He clenched his teeth and his fingers. Then he undressed, slowly and deliberately, always remaining in full view of the full-length mirror.

After he was unclothed his frail body with its thin ribs, hard biceps and angular shoulders seemed to speak to him, through its frail passive image in the mirror. He listened and watched.

Later it would speak, lying on the floor with open wrists, still retaining its goose-pimples, to the old cockney shower-attendant and the gathered bathers, every memory behind the transfixed eyes quietly intimated, almost revealed, by the body itself. If they had looked hard enough, had eyes keen enough, they would have known that the skin wouldn't have been so white but for a Dublin childhood, bread and margarine, cramped, carbonated air. The feet with the miniature half-moon scar on the right instep would have told, eloquently, of a summer spent on Laytown Strand, of barefoot walks on a hot beach, of sharded glass and poppies of blood on the summer sand. And the bulge of muscle round the right shoulder would have testified to two years hod-carrying, just as the light, nervous lines across the forehead proclaimed the lessons of an acquisitive metropolis, the glazed eyes themselves demonstrating the failure, the lessons not learnt. All the ill-assorted group of bathers did was pull their towels more rigidly about them, noting the body's glaring pubes, imagining the hair (blonde, maybe) and the skin of the girls that first brought them to life; the first kiss and the indolent smudges of lipstick and all the subsequent kisses, never quite recovering the texture of the first. They saw the body and didn't hear the finer details — just heard that it had been born, had grown and suffered much pain and a little joy; that its dissatisfaction had been deep; and they thought of the green bridge and the red-bricked walls and understood —.

He savoured his isolation for several full minutes. He allowed the cold seep fully through him, after the heat of clothes, sunlight. He saw pale, rising goose-pimples on the mirrored flesh before him. When he was young he had been in the habit of leaving his house and walking down to a busy sea-front road and clambering down from the road to the mud-flats below. The tide would never quite reach the wall and there would be stretches of mud and stone and the long sweep of the cement wall with the five-foot high groove running through it where he could sit, and he would look at the stone, the flat mud and the dried cakes of sea-lettuce and see the tide creep over them and wonder at their impassivity, their imperviousness to feeling; their deadness. It seemed to him the ultimate blessing and he would sit so long that when he came to rise his legs, and sometimes his whole body, would

be numb. He stood now till his immobility, his cold, became near-agonising. Then he walked slowly to the shower; pulled aside the plastic curtain and walked inside. The tiles had that dead wetness that he had once noticed in the beach-pebbles. He placed each foot squarely on them and saw a thin cake of soap lying in a puddle of grey water. Both were evidence of the bather here before him and he wondered vaguely what he was like; whether he had a quick, rushed shower or a slow, careful one; whether he in turn had wondered about the bather before him. And he stopped wondering, as idly as he had begun. And he turned on the water.

It came hot. He almost cried with the shock of it; a cry of pale, surprised delight. It was a pet love with him, the sudden heat and the wall of water, drumming on his crown, sealing him magically from the world outside; from the universe outside; the pleasurable biting needles of heat; the ripples of water down his hairless arms; the stalactites gathering at each fingertip; wet hair; the sounds of caught breath and thumping water. He loved the pain, the total self-absorption of it and never wondered why he loved it; as with the rest of the weekly ritual — the trudge through the muted officialdom of the bath corridors into the solitude of the shower cubicle, the total ultimate solitude of the boxed, sealed figure, three feet between it and its fellow; the contradictory joy of the first impact of heat, of the pleasurable pain.

An overseer in an asbestos works who had entered his cubicle black and who had emerged with a white, blotchy, greyish skin-hue divined the reason for the cut wrists. He looked at the tiny coagulation of wrinkles round each eye and knew that here was a surfeit of boredom; not a moody, arbitrary adolescent boredom, but that boredom which is a condition of life itself. He saw the way the mouth was tight and wistful and somehow uncommunicative, even in death, and the odour of his first contact with that boredom came back to him. He smelt again the incongruous fish-and-chip smells, the smells of the discarded sweet-wrappings, the metallic odour of the fun-palace, the sulphurous whiff of the dodgem wheels; the empty, musing, poignant smell of the seaside holiday town, for it was here that he had first met his boredom; here that he had wandered the green carpet of the golf-links, with the stretch of grey sky overhead, asking, what to do with the long

days and hours, turning then towards the burrows and the long grasses and the strand, deciding there's nothing to do, no point in doing, the sea glimmering to the right of him like the dull metal plate the dodgem wheels ran on. Here he had lain in a sand-bunker for hours, his head making a slight indentation in the sand, gazing at the mordant procession of clouds above. Here he had first asked, what's the point, there's only point if it's fun, it's pleasure, if there's more pleasure than pain; then thinking of the pleasure, weighing up the pleasure in his adolescent scales, the pleasure of the greased fish-and-chip bag warming the fingers, of the sweet taken from the wrapper, the discarded wrapper and the fading sweetness, of the white flash of a pubescent girl's legs, the thoughts of touch and caress, the pain of the impossibility of both and his head digging deeper in the sand he had seen the scales tip in favour of pain. Ever so slightly maybe, but if it wins then what's the point. And he had known the sheep-white clouds scudding through the blueness and ever after thought of them as significant of the pre-ponderance of pain; and he looked now at the white scar on the young man's instep and thought of the white clouds and thought of the bobbing girls' skirts and of the fact of pain —.

The first impact had passed; his body temperature had risen and the hot biting needles were now a running, massaging hand. And a silence had descended on him too, after the self-immersed orgy of the driving water. He knew this shower was all things to him, a world to him. Only here could he see this world, hold it in balance, so he listened to what was now the quietness of rain in the cubicle, the hushed, quiet sound of dripping rain and the green rising mist through which things are seen in their true, unnatural clarity. He saw the wet, flapping shower-curtain. There was a bleak rose-pattern on it, the roses faded by years of condensation into green: green roses. He saw the black spaces between the tiles, the plug-hole with its fading, whorling rivulet of water. He saw the exterior dirt washed off himself, the caked cement-dust, the flecks of mud. He saw creases of black round his elbow-joints, a high-water mark round his neck, the more permanent, ingrained dirt. And he listened to the falling water; looked at the green roses and wondered what it would be like to see those things, hear them, doing nothing but see and hear them; nothing but the pure sound, the sheer colour reaching him; to be as passive

as the mud pebble was to that tide. He took the cake of soap then from the grilled tray affixed to the wall and began to rub himself hard. Soon he would be totally, bleakly clean.

There was a dash of paint on his cheek. The negro painter he worked beside had slapped him playfully with his brush. It was disappearing now, under pressure from the soap. And with it went the world, that world, the world he inhabited, the world that left grit under the nails, dust under the eyelids. He scrubbed at the dirt of that world, at the coat of that world, the self that lived in that world, in the silence of the falling water. Soon he would be totally, bleakly clean.

The old cockney took another ticket from another bather he thought he recognised. Must have seen him last week. He crumpled the ticket in his hand, went inside his glass-fronted office and impaled it onto a six-inch nail jammed through a block of wood. He flipped a cigarette from its packet and lit it, wheezing heavily. Long hours spent in the office here, the windows running with condensation, had exaggerated a bronchial condition. He let his eyes scan the seventeen cubicles. He wondered again how many of them, coming every week for seventeen weeks, have visited each of the seventeen showers. None, most likely. Have to go where they're told, don't they. No way they can get into a different box other than the one that's empty, even if they should want to. But what are the chances, a man washing himself ten years here, that he'd do the full round? And the chances that he'd be stuck to the one? He wrinkled his eyes and coughed and rubbed the mist from the window to see more clearly.

White, now. Not the sheer white of the tiles, but a human, flaccid, pink skin-white. He stood upwards, let his arms dangle by his sides, his wrists limp. His short black hair was plastered to his crown like a tight skull-cap. He gazed at the walls of his own cubicle and wondered at the fact that there were sixteen other cubicles around him, identical to this one, which he couldn't see. A man in each, washed by the same water; all in various stages of cleanliness. And he wondered did the form in the next cubicle think of him, his neighbour; as he did. Did he reciprocate his wondering. He thought it somehow appropriate that there should be men naked, washing themselves in adjacent cubicles, each a foreign country to the other. Appropriate to what, he couldn't have said. He

looked round his cubicle and wondered: what's it worth, what does it mean, this cubicle — wondered was any one of the other sixteen gazing at his cubicle and thinking, realizing as he was: nothing. He realized that he would never know.

Nothing. Or almost nothing. He looked down at his body: thin belly, thin arms, a limp member. He knew he had arrived at the point where he would masturbate. He always came to this point in different ways, with different thoughts, by different stages. But when he had reached it, he always realised that the ways had been similar; the ways had been the same way, only the phrasing different. And he began then, taking himself with both hands, caressing himself with a familiar; bleak motion, knowing that afterwards the bleakness would only be intensified after the brief distraction of feeling — in this like everything — observing the while the motion of his belly muscles, glistening under their sheen of running water. And as he felt the mechanical surge of desire run through him he heard the splashing of an anonymous body in the cubicle adjacent. The thought came to him that somebody could be watching him. But no, he thought then, almost disappointed, who could, working at himself harder. He was standing when he felt an exultant muscular thrill run through him, arching his back, straining his calves upwards, each toe pressed passionately against the tiled floor.

The young Trinidadian in the next cubicle squeezed out a sachet of lemon soft shampoo and rubbed it to a lather between two brown palms. Flecks of sawdust — he was an apprentice carpenter — mingled with the snow-white foam. He pressed two handfuls of it under each bicep, ladled it across his chest and belly and rubbed it till the foam seethed and melted to the colour of dull whey, and the water swept him clean again, splashed his body back to its miraculous brown and he slapped each nipple laughingly in turn and thought of a clean body under a crisp shirt, of a night of love under a low red-lit roof, of the thumping symmetry of a reggae band.

There was one intense moment of silence. He was standing, spent, sagging. He heard:

'Hey, you rass, not finished yet?'

'How'd I be finished?'

'Well move that corpse, rassman. Move!'

He watched the seed that had spattered the tiles be swept

by the shower-water; diluting its grey, ultimately vanishing into the fury of current round the plug-hole. And he remembered the curving cement wall of his childhood and the spent tide and the rocks and the dried green stretches of sea-lettuce and because the exhaustion was delicious now and bleak, because he knew there would never be anything but that exhaustion after all the fury of effort, all the expense of passion and shame, he walked through the green-rose curtain and took the cut-throat razor from his pack and went back to the shower to cut his wrists. And dying, he thought of nothing more significant than the way, the way he had come here, of the green bridge and the bowed figure under the brick wall and the facade of the Victorian bath-house, thinking: there is nothing more significant.

Of the dozen or so people who gathered to stare — as people will — none of them thought: ‘Why did he do it?’ All of them, pressed into a still, tight circle, staring at the shiplike body, knew intrinsically. And a middle-aged, fat and possibly simple negro phrased the thought:

‘Every day the Lord send me I think I do that. And every day the Lord send me I drink bottle of wine and forget ’bout doin’ that’.

They took with them three memories: the memory of a thin, almost hairless body with reddened wrists; the memory of a thin, finely-wrought razor whose bright silver was mottled in places with rust; and the memory of a spurting shower-nozzle, an irregular drip of water. And when they emerged to the world of bright afternoon streets they saw the green-painted iron bridge and the red-brick wall and knew it to be in the nature of these, too, that the body should act thus —

KELVIN BELIELE



Kelvin Beliele is a graduate student in literature studying in New Mexico. His poetry and short fiction have appeared in *The James White Review*, *RFD*, *HotShots*, *Honcho*, *Playguy*, and *First Hand*, as well as in the anthologies, *Between the Cracks*, *Happily Ever After*, *Butch Boys*, and *Doing It for Daddy*. His collection of short stories is titled *If the Shoe Fits*.

“My short story, ‘Love’s Sweet Sweet Song,’ treats the beginning of a love affair between two Irish men. Set in Dublin, it is a polemic against ‘The Troubles,’ and a tribute to James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, especially the final ‘Penelope’ section of that novel. Political concerns are very important to these characters and their perception of modern Ireland.”

He and Dennis W. Weber, his lover of thirty years, live in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He is pursuing an M.A. in English Language and Literature at the University of New Mexico, and is employed at the University of New Mexico Art Museum.

LAWRENCE W. CLOAKE



Lawrence W. Cloake is a Dublin writer whose short fiction has appeared in two Canadian anthologies, *Queer View Mirror* and *Quickies: Short Fiction on Gay Male Desire*, as well as in the anthology, *Urban Legends*. He has also written several pieces for the topical journal, *Cadena*, and the poetry review, *Voices*, has featured his poems.

BOB CONDRON



Bob Condron lives and works in Berlin. His writing reflects the influence of American culture on the Irish psyche and the Irish experience. His first novel, *Easy Money*, was published in the U.S. and Canada in 1999. His short stories have appeared in the likes of *Bear Magazine* and anthologies such as *Bar Stories* and *Quickies 2*. He is a trained actor and his work as writer and director for fringe and community theatre has been performed in Ireland, U.K., and U.S. with notable success. He is happily coupled with his Irish partner, Tommy, and is currently at work on new fiction.

PETER PAUL SWEENEY

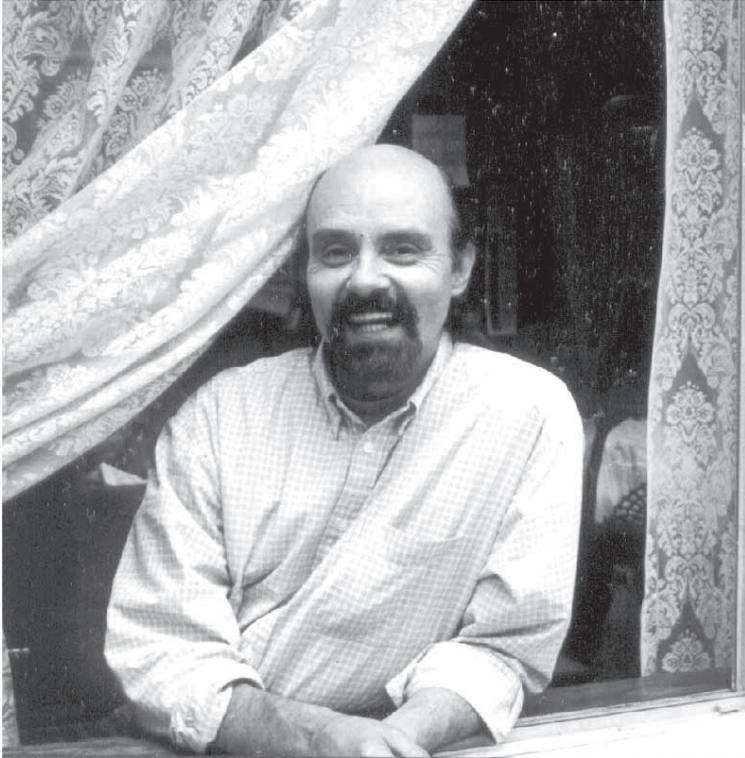


Peter Paul Sweeney is a Dublin law lecturer who also writes short fiction. His stories have been published in *Books Ireland*, *The Dublin Literary Journal*, *The Stinging Fly*, and have been broadcast on national Irish radio, Radio Telefis Eireann, RTÉ 1. He also produces “Open Book,” a regular feature of gay-themed poetry and short fiction broadcast on Dublin Community radio, Anna Livia 103.8 FM. He has won or been shortlisted in national writing competitions in Ireland and the U.K. In 1998, he won third prize in the Martin Healy Short Story competition sponsored by the Sligo Literary Festival. Recently, he was one of a dozen writers selected to participate in the prestigious 16th National Writers’ Workshop sponsored by the National University of Ireland, Galway, and the Arts Council of Ireland.

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JACK FRITSCHER



Jack Fritscher, descended directly from Virginia Claire Day, Mary Pearl Lawler, Mary Lynch, and Honora Anastasia McDonough, is the author of 12 books including his nonfiction memoir of his bicoastal lover, Robert Mapplethorpe, titled *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, which is a companion to his best-selling 1990 novel of the 70's, *Some Dance to Remember*. Recently, he appeared on Channel 4 with Camille Paglia reporting the documentary, *Priapus Unveiled*. He is the magazine editor who, the *Bay Area Reporter* writes, "created gay magazines as we know them, inventing the leather prose style." He virtually created *Drummer*, the third gay magazine founded after Stonewall. In addition

to hundreds of his photographs, more than 400 of his stories have appeared in 30 magazines: *Honcho*, *James White Review*, and *The American Journal of Popular Culture*. In 1998, his third collection of fiction, *Rainbow County and Other Stories* won the U. S. National Small Press Award for Best Erotica from a field of straight, lesbian, and gay fiction and nonfiction. In 1999, his novel, *The Geography of Women: A Romantic Comedy*, was chosen as Finalist for the Independent Publisher Award for Best Fiction in the U.S. His first nonfiction book, *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch's Mouth* in 1971 preceded his first novel, *Leather Blues*, in 1972. In 1994, fifty-five of his photographs, from many magazine covers and photo spreads, were published as *Jack Fritscher's American Men*, Gay Men's Press (GMP), London. He earned his Ph.D. in American Literature from Loyola University, Chicago, in 1968. He is also the recipient of several writing grants, including a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to the Arts. His fourth collection of fiction, *Titanic: Forbidden Stories Hollywood Forgot* was published in 1999. His stories have appeared in *Best Gay Erotica 1997* and *Best Gay Erotica 1998*. Three of his stories are included in three separate Alyson Publishing anthologies for 2000 entitled, *Bar Stories* and *Rough Stuff* and *Friction: Best Gay Erotica, 2000*, Volume 3. Also in 2000, his collection of short fiction, *Sweet Embraceable You: Coffee-House Stories*, will be published months before his new novel, *What They Did to the Kid*. For author biography, visit www.Jack-Fritscher.com

PETER-PAUL HARTNETT



Peter-Paul Hartnett has been dubbed the “enfant terrible of queer writing” since the success of his first novel, *Call Me*. He is the Irish sodomite son of a mother from Dublin and a father from Cork who raised him in an old folks’ home in West London. Clubbing since 1974 at the age of sixteen, with a bashed-up Nikon he bought at a jumble sale for a tenner, Hartnett as auteur, who is both writer and photographer, has documented the nightlife of punks, Goths, New Romantics, and Ecstasy-driven ravers. His club and street photography (*So Dysfunctional*, 1999) has been featured in *The Sunday Times Magazine*, *The Independent*, and *Time Out*, as well as on VH1 and exhibited in London, New York, and Tokyo. He himself achieved queertzine pin-up status on the cover of *Zone* (1999). Quentin Crisp called him “kinky,” even though he has worked alongside children with emotional and behavioural

concerns, the homeless, and young people involved in sex-worker activities, and people with AIDS. In 1995, he ran the notorious drag king club, Naive, at Madame Jo Jo's in Soho. His credits include two novels, *Call Me* (1998) and *I Want to Fuck You* (1998), and a short-fiction collection, *Mmm Yeah* (1999). Hartnett was the first gay author to be asked to do an event at the newly opened Borders in London's Oxford Street. He has recently completed, after six years of work, editing the autobiography of one of the starkest modern emblems of homosexual isolation, the serial killer, Dennis Nilson, found guilty of murdering 12 gay men in London during the 1980s. The book's working title is *Waiting for the Man*. P-P Hartnett lives alone in a little house on a hill in Colne, Lancashire, while planning for the novel he will soon write in Tunisia.

NEIL JORDAN

Born in Sligo, in the West of Ireland, February 25, 1950, Neil Jordan studied history and literature at University College, Dublin. He worked as a labourer in London before founding the Irish Writers Cooperative in 1974. When he was twenty-six, he won the *Guardian* Fiction Prize for his collection of short stories, *Night in Tunisia* (1976), which included the young-labourer-in-London story, "Last Rites." His three novels are *The Past* (1980), *The Dream of a Beast* (1983), and *Sunrise with Sea Monster* (1994). Sean O'Faolin, RTE, reviewed *Night in Tunisia* as "One of the most remarkable stories...in Irish storytelling since, or, indeed, before, Joyce." Richard Rayner, *Time Out*, wrote that *The Past* is "poignant" and "beautifully controlled." Of *The Dream of a Beast*, the *Los Angeles Times* said: "Inspired and surrealistic....An eloquent testimony to the value of listening to the poetry of everyday life." An omnibus, *The Collected Fiction of Neil Jordan*, was published in 1997.

As a young writer, Neil Jordan entered into film in 1980 when Irish director, John Boorman (*Deliverance*), hired him as a script consultant on *Excalibur*. At this time, he directed a documentary about the making of the film.

In 1993, Neil Jordan won the best-writing Oscar® Academy Award® for a "Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen" for *The Crying Game*, which also won The Writer's Guild of America, WGA Screen Award for "Best Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen," as well as the New York Film Critics Circle Award for "Best Screenplay." He was also nominated for an Oscar® as "Best Director" for *The Crying Game*, which earned six Oscar® nominations. In addition to writing and directing, he is also a producer.

His genre-mixing films as writer and director often begin in books. They include, the sexually charged adaptation of the Graham Greene novel, *The End of the Affair* (1999); the thriller, *In Dreams* (1999); the dramatic-comedy of Patrick McCabe's novel, *The Butcher Boy* (1997); his dream-project, the historical epic, *Michael Collins* (1996); his original action-drama-romance, *The Crying Game* (1992); the coming-of-age

drama, *The Miracle* (1991); the comedy thriller, *We're No Angels* (1989); the comedy, *High Spirits* (1988); the romantic thriller set in London, *Mona Lisa* (1986); the adult fairytale, *The Company of Wolves* (1984); and the thriller, *Angel* (1982), which is, coincidentally, also known as *Danny Boy*. As director, he adapted, fought for the casting, and brought to the screen the best-selling Anne Rice novel, *Interview with the Vampire*, also known as *The Vampire Chronicles* (1994).

MICHAEL WYNNE



Michael Wynne was born in Sligo in “Yeats Country,” the northwest of Ireland, in 1971. He is very much a believer in Oscar Wilde’s dictum that “at the beginning God made a world for each separate man, and in that world *which is within us* we should seek to live.” It is his life goal to achieve this level of self-sufficiency largely through his physical and spiritual devotion to the masculine ideal. In 1998, Michael was prize-winner in the inaugural Irish Queer Writers’ Award. Dublin-based, he is a freelance journalist whose fiction has appeared in such anthologies as *Queer View Mirror II*, *Quickies: Short Story Fiction on Gay Male Desire*; and *Quare Fellas*, which was Ireland’s first national anthology devoted to new gay male fiction.

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