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# **The Book-Thief's Heartbeat**

**by Philip Davison**

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by Philip Davison

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With the exception of Captain Saul, all characters in this book are entirely fictitious.

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HELP!

#### THE BOOK-THIEF'S HEARTBEAT

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## SITTING ALONE

This note I am writing in addition to diary entries which have led me, at last, to embark on a course of action.

The first time I considered noting the nature of my existence was eight months ago while sitting in Bewley's Oriental Cafe in Grafton Street. I was reading the newspaper, an item I am well accustomed to. I had once read the Irish Times, front to back, in a crowded lift which had broken down. I did not cause any discomfort; not even a raised eyebrow.

Subsequently, I would not reveal the name of the establishment where this failure and success took place because I did not like referring to inadequacies and I worried about creating unpleasant feelings. All I would reveal was that I had considered that there was no risk of disturbance involved only because I am well versed in handling a newspaper. I know that when folding it one should pay attention to the grain and grade of the paper in question.

As of today, however, I will not yield so easily to shyness. Much depends on my being in Bewley's Cafe tomorrow. Should you see me there it is hoped that I will not be making help signals.

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*Large Coffee and Almond Buns, Please* 2nd May

## LARGE COFFEE AND ALMOND BUNS, PLEASE

Oliver Power was the name written on the brown paper package. The coffee was wrapped the way shoe shops wrap your old shoes if you choose to wear the new pair.

I entered the cafe by the door on the right of the central window display. The door on the left was not yet open.

The smell of roasted coffee and freshly baked buns was on my mind and in the air. It was Friday, 8.30am. In the ground floor cafe the lights were switched on behind those of Harry Clarke's stained glass windows that are not illuminated by the sun. Throughout the rooms elderly clocks preside. They might be a minute slow, but they would never lie.

Bewley's Cafe has the only polished floors that I can walk across with confidence, but then the atmosphere of the place has always reassured me.

I was the first customer of the day at the coffee counter in the front shop.

"Two pounds, medium ground number one - finest Arabian," said the Bewley's man, and slid the brown package over the counter to me.

"Freshly roasted?" I enquired.

I have always wanted to be a specialist. In what, I am not sure.

*2nd May A Table With A View*

## A TABLE WITH A VIEW

A waddling woman with a head-scarf moved past my table and took the chair behind. I had seen her before. It was in a lane. Much too old to be their mother, she had with her that day two small children whom she brought from parked car to parked car.

"Now, what have we here?" she had said. "A Morris Minor. You don't see many of them anymore. What do you think?"

There is a view from the shelf people get left on, even if it is crowded.

"Excuse me," said the waddling woman as she made room for her chair. I apologized and moved as best I could.

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*3rd May In Need of Repair*

## IN NEED OF REPAIR

I was upset to see a red-cushioned seat being removed from the cafe, but I knew it would return because it left a gap which only a red-cushioned seat could fill.

Bewley's is like the dining cars on trains in the black and white pictures - both are places for romantics like me; places where a person can sit privately and watch characters and be sure of witnessing or imagining meetings of great consequence to a few.

This morning, I looked across at the telephone in the far corner of the cafe and again decided that I would not ring Lily. Instead, I would go and watch the taxi man wash his car by the canal or find some such distraction.

On my way out, I paused at the lift. The gate was open, so I stepped in. The carriage, with its stained wood and mirrors, plies quietly between four cafes. I rode up to the top of the building to the 'staff only' floor because I had visited that floor once before. It was a mistake on my part, when I had met Lily in the cafe by accident and panicked when she suggested that we have coffee together.

My journey in the lift today was a present from the past to the future.

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*5th May Breakfast*

## BREAKFAST

From my window, I looked across the bay at Howth Head. There was a bleak morning sky, but not without promise.

The first bus of the day took me the familiar route at a familiar time of the morning - a time not to my distaste. The driver of the bus had a bag of carrots on the dashboard. It was one of the old buses - the rear load ones that used to be painted green. I enjoy a jaunt on the old buses. I do not like smoke in my eyes, but I must sit upstairs on the smokers' deck for the view.

My encounter this morning with a well-meaning conductor has led me to conclude that all busmen love Elvis.

I entered Bewley's at twenty to nine and took my place on a red-cushioned seat.

"Large coffee and almond buns, please." I relaxed with the morning's greeting from the old lady with the blue coat and hat pin. As is customary, she then advised me as to which picture to see - today, she suggested a Western at the Ambassador Cinema - not on the strength of what reviewers have said in the newspapers, but rather on what the head usher has told her in each of the cinemas. She knows all of the ushers by name, and they her.

I admire her direct approach and the fact that she does not care whether the pictures are old or new. To please her, sometimes I have lied, saying that I went to the picture on her recommendation and was magnificently entertained.

The steamy, silver coffee cylinder with pipes reminds me of the old fashioned washing machine in Lily's house - the one that she and I and her sister, Alison, took turns in sitting on for a levity ride. Those who watched laughed loudest.

My eyes were fixed on the cylinder. I swallowed a mouthful of hot coffee and felt it go down to my stomach. What a pity, I thought, that they did not have those washing machines in the Sandford Cinema years ago when I was a child, instead of the saddles on posts which were installed at the front of the auditorium for the double bill cowboy matinees. Then I remembered Alison telling me that when Lily was a little girl she used to sit on bags of potato crisps in order to make them more palatable.

After breakfast, I made my way to the National Gallery and took my post. Today, it was in room IA - the big ones.

I suspect that when alone, a wishful expression betrays the fact that I am a dreamer. Being a compulsive explainer *and* an introvert makes me talk to myself. When I am discontent during the hours I spend on duty, anti-they feelings come to the fore: 'they' being those who took the trams away and who now ignore my point of view. For some time I have been growing more and more discontented.

On my way home, I walked through Trinity College. Under the arch of the main entrance I noticed the pigeons asleep around the ledge where the ceiling lights are. I want to know whether or not they are cleverer pigeons than the ones that sleep rougher. Are they just luckier?

I went home and rummaged in the attic.

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12th May *A Stir*

## A STIR

I walked briskly into Bewley's today. I was on business. My newspaper was smartly folded under my arm. Something was right.

Taking my seat, I said good-morning to the old lady with the blue coat and hat pin and went straight to the motors page. I have been preoccupied with the same page in each morning's newspaper for a week. For the first time in my life I am a hunter sure of getting what I want. I have been systematic in my search for the special, careful to guard a simmering spirit that had been ready to surge. In the event, I was not disappointed.

Today is Monday. The gallery is closed. I had the whole day for business.

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*Didn't Finish My Coffee* 12th May

DIDN'T FINISH MY COFFEE

I left the cafe and made my way to the top of Dawson Street. Like others, I sometimes avoid the lines on the pavement, but recently I have taken to following the course of filled-in corporation trenches, provided that their surface has been restored. (There is no question of walking on the black humpy ones). Today, eyes were ahead.

I caught the number ten going south and sat in the seat nearest the doors. A short, fat conductor in pressed flannels collected my fare. I got off the bus at the bottom of Waterloo Road and walked down Pembroke Lane until I found the place mentioned in the newspaper advertisement. I knocked on the open garage door as I looked in. No one noticed me. It appeared, sounded and smelled like the right place.

I was not long finding what I wanted. In one corner at the back of the garage stood a shabby black motor-car with running-board.

A mechanic emerged from behind indisposed motorcars and ushered me to the old machine. I said little and watched the mechanic, not the car, for I had already made up my mind to purchase.

"Marvellous," I said, almost aloud when he opened each door out in turn. The mechanic finally opened the bonnet and said that the engine was not yet running properly, but that it would be repaired promptly. That wasn't soon enough for me so I told him that I would return this evening to collect the car.

I left the garage and walked down the middle of the lane. I have found a car that has not been made by a manufacturer, but built by an inventor.

I decided to visit my friend, Harry, the man in the signal-box at Sandymount. I knew Harry could make the car go.

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*Caffeine* 12th May

## CAFFEINE

Leaning with both elbows over the gate, I looked up and down the railway tracks. Then, going over to the signalbox, I peered in the window and knocked my 'Harry knock' on the glass. I pointed down the tracks and discreetly did my train mime. Harry confirmed that a train was due by putting on his hat. He then beckoned me inside.

There was a vibration while the train passed through. Harry's feet were firmly planted on the signal-box floor, his toes spread in his boots.

When the train had gone and Harry had opened the gates to allow traffic to cross the tracks and had made signal adjustments, he prepared coffee and gave some to me in his own favourite cup.

"There's always that feeling of anticipation before it passes," I observed as I leaned out of the window and looked up and down the empty tracks again.

"Always," said Harry, gulping down his coffee.

I returned to the garage just before it closed and conducted the sale of the car to myself in a most businesslike manner. I was surprised when the garage owner agreed to the terms.

I directed the manoeuvring of the car from the back of the garage out into the lane. Manual assistance was relied upon. Watched by the garage owner and I, the mechanics pushed the car into a position beside the curb of the narrow footpath. The hand-brake was applied and the keys given to me. The garage was then closed and

everyone, except myself, went home. I sat quietly at the steeringwheel waiting for Harry. I was ready to give way completely to impulse. The fear of disappointment stood ready to fuel the impulse.

For a moment, I thought about the disassociation I can so effectively employ before the loss of something precious - it is the worst kind of detachment and something I desperately want to defeat. I pressed the inoperative accelerator to the floor.

Just then, Harry turned his heavy car into the lane. We attached the black car to his and towed it through the lit streets out along the coast road to Dun Laoghaire where Harry had made arrangements with a friend in the train station to store the car.

Once parked, Harry ran a discerning eye over the shabby machine. I watched, anxious for his approval. I was optimistic because he was wearing his hat. Harry's friend watched, anxious, too, for it looked the sort of old car that deserved a second chance. After a close inspection which lasted some twenty minutes, Harry stood up arching his back.

"Mm," said he in a manner only the experienced dare. He said that he would take the case. His friend was relieved. I was excited.

We drove to my house where we ended the day talking over toasted rasher sandwiches and a pot of hot coffee. Harry took a book of prints down from a shelf and examined the binding and printing. He has never had to ask why a number of prints are marked; he knows that they are personal favourites. Harry is my closest friend.

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*The Percolator* 13th May

## THE PERCOLATOR

This morning in the gallery, I felt ready for action. I could have taken the paintings down off the walls. The question of what to do next had been replaced by a forward movement.

From behind the walls on which the paintings are hung, in the rooms where restoration is done, I borrowed some cloths and a tin of polish. This evening, I took the train to Dun Laoghaire.

Harry's friend was standing on duty near the end of the platform. I walked down towards him. As the train pulled out of the station I imagined what it would be like if the paintings were to trundle through the gallery instead of being hung on the walls, stopping to permit viewing, then continuing on their journey to other galleries in other parts of the world. The two women I have seen in Bewley's and in the gallery, whom I am sure run an orphanage, would, no doubt, complain if the travellers were late and would make it known to the other patrons present that they were singularly unimpressed with Andy Warhol's exhibit and the African masks that had been placed on the mystery train. Under such circumstances, I, in my capacity as overseer, would inform the disgruntled that they did not have to look; they could close their eyes and listen for the departing toot.

Harry arrived at the station shortly after myself and he set to work on the engine while his friend polished every plane and curve of the machine until it shone like the coffee cylinder in the cafe. I have always associated polishing with fire-engines. I recall the night Lily set fire to the chimney, panicked, rang the fire-brigade and when they arrived asked them could they not have sent a smaller tender.

When work on the car was finished, I tapped a front tyre with my foot. If it had been a hedge I would have pulled a leaf off. I felt I needed to do something.

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*Percolation* 14th May

## PERCOLATION

I parked the car along St. Stephen's Green and walked down Grafton Street to the cafe thinking what a fine job Harry had done on the motor.

Breakfast over, I stepped out into the street again. It was raining. I was just in time to catch an umbrella in the face. I made it clear to the woman that I was of the opinion that all short people should have tall umbrellas. The incident gave rise to an impulse. I went back into the cafe and telephoned the gallery to say that I could not attend work this day owing to injury.

I took a notion to visit both doctor and dentist in order to affirm that I am in my prime. A visit to the former has always had an element of chilled fascination because my doctor has bad circulation and no bed-side manner. This I find reassuring.

Both doctor and dentist pronounced me healthy. I was disappointed by their lack of enthusiasm.

By mid-afternoon I found myself coping with a growing desire to return to the gallery. I drove home and for the rest of the day journeyed through my favourite prints and record music.

This evening, I drove my car round Dublin bay, up onto Howth Head where I parked so as to allow myself and the machine a clear view. I could make out Harry's signal-box but could not pinpoint my house. The two tall power station chimneys at the Pigeon House down in the bay drew my attention.

"We've got two rockets now," Harry had said looking out of his signal-box, when the second chimney was built.

I drove down to the Pigeon House for a closer look at the chimneys. The Irish Glass Bottle Company at Ringsend I found to be a curious and pleasant distraction. I wondered if Harry could see the thousands of stored bottles and jars from his signal-box window.

Having investigated my own and Harry's view of the bay, I then wanted to see it all from a distance. The evening light was still strong when I drove back across the city and up to the vantage point on the Dublin mountains. I wondered whether it is nicer to live overlooking the beautiful valley or in it.

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*The Grounds* 15th May

## THE GROUNDS

I dressed in my best clothes while looking in the mirror. I took my time because it was important. I could have worn a six-gun or carried a violin case. It was a good feeling.

At ten o'clock I left the city. For about thirty miles beyond the Phoenix Park there are a number of country mansions with tall windows. Lily lives in one with ivy on the walls. Sunshine has faded the furniture and oriental rugs. In winter, a fire burns in the raised grate in the hall. It is a house with a hot-press large enough to dance in.

Lily's eyes are blue-grey set in bright white. They are her most revealing feature, for she will never tell you what she is searching for in you. You cannot be sure how close she is to offering her total self to you. She is, at times, icy and rude, but this is to be expected of someone who keeps love an absolute secret. Tonight, I decided that I would steal her diary in order to discover how I might make such a woman my lover.

The route to the Penrose house is a familiar one. I have made a practice of announcing to myself the final stretch: left at the crossroads, road bears to the right; right fork past the small church, not that road; hedge on the left, beech trees on the right; straight ahead - the open gates, road veers to the left.

I rolled down my window. Tonight, my senses were alert to the countryside. I slowed as I approached and passed through the gate-posts and over the cattle grid. I switched off the headlights. Through the trees at the top of the avenue I could see the house. I switched off the motor. The last part of the drive was silent running.

I stepped out of the car and walked the remaining hundred yards on the curved incline that leads to the lit open area in front of the house. I had no plan for the next part, but need was courage.

There was no light from Lily's bedroom window. I walked round by the yard. Perhaps I could have her handwriting interpreted if the contents revealed nothing, I thought. What an incredible thing to be doing, I thought as I entered the house and stood in the room where the large pots and Wellington boots are kept.

Mrs. Mulligan, the cook, entered from the kitchen.

"Oliver Power!" she said with a start. "You're very late," she continued, as though I had been expected. "Come in."

I learned that Lily is on a holiday with friends in Donegal. Alison, I was told, is in Dublin. There was to be no show, no showing and no show-down.

Apart from a vague notion of how ridiculous my journey now seems, I had no particular feelings as I turned the car and drove back down the avenue.

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### *Ambulance 17th May*

#### AMBULANCE

It was morning when I drove out onto Sandymount Strand; the time of morning when you wonder is the passer-by out very early or very late.

The petrol tank was almost empty. I slowed, then stopped, but left the engine running. Soon I would push the accelerator to the floor and the car would respond. I know that sometimes it is best to stand still. When lost, I climb a tall tree. In the hours since leaving Lily's house I had fought well that part of me that so ruthlessly sought total self contempt; I had strenuously denied accusations that I had hindered myself, said too little, moved too slowly and that now it was too late for any course of action.

The black car gave all it was worth and sped across the wet sand. Until the petrol ran out it would perform as I deemed. Tall in the saddle at the Sandford Cinema, I had been a peaceful sheriff but, when my hand was forced, no one could stand against me. By taking the car to its speed limit I was sure I would find a reason to slow down. It was a demonstration to prove to myself that I could force my own hand.

Along the strand in the distance there came walking a figure out of newspaper cuttings my uncle Albert had shown me many years before. 'An Ace Flyer' Albert had described him, so proud to know the man. The newspapers referred to him as an 'airman'. On a June day in 1930 Captain Saul had raced over the sand as navigator on the Southern Cross, the first plane to cross the Atlantic east to west. What did he feel on Portmarnock Strand when he and the three other crew members lifted off the ground? If the Captain were to tell you the story you would know by watching his eyes.

What was the old man doing walking the beach? One does not ask so distinguished a man such a question. Captain Saul stood his ground as I approached and stopped the car beside him. Introductions were slight, for Albert, the Captain and I had flown kites in the Dublin mountains when I was a child.

Captain Saul, in good spirits, thumped the fender of the black car and said that he remembered them well. I offered him a lift, thinking as I did how ridiculous an offer it was. But Captain Saul graciously accepted and sat in the passenger seat. His mind is still alert, for the first thing he commented upon was the fuel gauge. I humbly apologized, but was at once put at ease by the presence of so seasoned an expert.

"I might not be able to give you a lift after all," I said, "I don't think we'll make it to the garage."

"There'll be enough," said the old man with a dismissive wave of his hand. He was right.

Driving back across the strand towards the gate near Harry's signal-box, we talked about Albert who is now dead ten years. A few words from Captain Saul evoked memories un-worn. As a child I was never able to tie the string on the fishing jar, nor did I want to know how. Not caring how they worked, I was content to watch the kites and fly with them and see what they saw. But Captain Saul, a resourceful man, rarely resisted a challenge, in my case, to interest me in the working of things.

"Remember that your kite must imitate no other than the bat," he had said, quoting Leonardo Da Vinci, and related the story of how the great artist and inventor felt himself destined to write about the kite because it was in one of his first recollections of his infancy that he recalled a kite flying to him in his cradle and opening his mouth with its tail and striking him several times with its tail inside his lips.

Tracing the memory of one particular day spent flying kites, I realised that it was one of the earliest occasions I could recall myself being an observer moved by what I saw. I have since entertained the thought that being a guardian of paintings bears comparison.

The first morning train would soon pass. Harry had just arrived at his post. It was proper that we call on him. He had heard of the Ace Flyer, but had never met him. I made the introduction feeling how Albert must have felt on such occasions.

Watching them talk, it occurred to me that Captain Saul and Harry could be trusted to construct the travelling galleries I have envisaged. I defy any force to break the aura that surrounds the Captain - the pilot and navigator whose flight log recorded details of seven crashes, engine failures, forced landings, joy rides and aviation history. Did it take all these to make him content?

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19th May *Hospital*

## HOSPITAL

Today, one of the orphanage women I have seen in Bewley's entered my part of the gallery with her sleeves, rolled up, conducting a party of school girls. Perhaps she is going to wash them, I thought, looking at the young girls. My own prod of private humour took me by surprise. Thoughts of Lily did not. They surface, rise like a wave and roll away. There is something of Lily in most girls. I watched the orphanage woman explain things. I was on the girls' side.

At twenty-nine I am by far the youngest attendant in the gallery. I feel at once safe and out of place; a discreet watcher with the detachment and self-sufficiency of a spy. Perhaps that is why I never stand at meeting places, but instead, prefer to watch from a short distance.

The orphanage woman scanned the paintings on the near wall as if they were packets in a supermarket, then took the girls away. I considered how much I enjoy shopping. Only Lily can make me feel at ease in the woman's underwear department.

During the rest of the day images of Captain Saul returned again and again to my mind. Driving home from the gallery I attempted to contemplate a course of action with the clarity attributed to a navigator. I decided to call on Harry and tomorrow bring to the cleaners my best clothes which I had sacked this morning for not being co-operative.

I could not make up my mind whether or not it was cold outside, not that it mattered. Driving over the canal bridge at Baggot Street, I decided it must be, for half of the double door to Parsons Bookshop was closed - a sure sign that it is cold. I was thinking about Leamus, the spy who came in from the cold, when I noticed the parking ticket on my windscreen.

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*Pumped* 22nd May

## PUMPED

Harry's wife, Cherry, has red hair and like many other girls with red hair, always looks as though she has been crying just before you met her. She possesses feminine ways that are alluring; for this, she is to be admired and respected. This I can do - like a gentleman, Lily had said once. Harry loves Cherry and she him. I could love her so easily, too, but if I did, no one would ever know, least of all her.

They have no children, but when it comes to performing uncle duties there is none better than Harry. That is the way he wants it and Cherry seems contented.

"Give them your best and they're not around when you don't want them. It's more exciting for the kids, especially if you time it well and it's less expensive too." That is Harry's view.

I turned my car into the road on which Harry and Cherry live. The road is neither a main thoroughfare or a short-cut. It is almost, but not quite, a cul-de-sac. Behind a low, thick, red brick wall with granite top and ivy they live in part of a Victorian house with steps up to the halldoor, black railings and green window frames. The house, with the adjoining one, stands apart from the others.

On each occasion I turn into that street I am reassured to see the overgrown garden Harry cultivates. Cherry likes having a wild garden, front and back, but sometimes asks Harry why they cannot have a portion planted, weeded and ordered like other gardens. Harry would explain in a serious manner his theory about theirs being the last house built in the area and how the builders had buried the rubble and broken bricks in their garden, thus rendering it incapable of supporting anything other than what grows by itself. He has convinced the people living upstairs and (much to his surprise) the next door neighbour that his deductions are undoubtedly correct.

Cherry, myself and Harry know that Harry has no intention of doing any gardening, but nobody objects because, like most wild gardens with any space, it is a comfortable place in the right weather.

The garden is where Harry does most of his complaining, either to the next door neighbour or to the public at large. For example: one afternoon he spent in contortions amongst the greenery choking on a report in the newspaper of the annual general meeting of the Irish Countrywoman's Association in which members made it known that they were disgusted by the sex, violence and blasphemy contained in some home produced television plays - one member had said: "Sex has always been with us and we can't do anything about that."

Harry wrote a letter to the Irish Times stating that the principal reason he had bought a television set was for the bit of dirt.

Cherry was standing at the hall-door when I pulled the car in to the curb, smacking lightly into the back of Harry's Wolesley.

"Sorry about the car," I said, opening the door.

"That's alright, you got the dent," said Cherry and smiled.

I leaned on the wall looking up at her. I explained that unlike many, I do not have a master servant relationship with my car and admitted that I would, in extreme circumstances, resort to pleading with it. Cherry laughed and invited me into the house.

Cherry sometimes tries very hard to be angry. She calls her husband Harold when trying her hardest, then gives way to a smile.

"Harold isn't back yet."

"Oh dear," I said, thinking how marvellous a lover Cherry must be.

Harry is neither large nor small. He is an agile yet strong man who has little use for stealth or physical strength. His smile is gradual; he laughs suddenly. His apparent attempts to control the laughter gives it its snorty character. He is rarely excitable, but ever willing to instigate a commotion. He is more content than most our age, but he could live without Cherry only if he could search for her.

"Has anyone seen my pilot's glasses?" asked Harry as he entered with the groceries he had forgotten to buy on his way home from work. The lack of response led him to believe that no one had seen his glasses. On that assumption, he did not carry enquiries any further but instead proclaimed that he had apologized to the next door neighbour for being so rude. When Cherry started preparing the tea, I said that I couldn't stay and she said that I always said that.

"Watch it," warned Harry and sat down exhausted on a trunk full of clothes destined for Cherry's shop. He asked me how the car was going and said that he was surprised that I hadn't crashed it yet.

I described two near misses I had had with the same corporation chicane. While the three of us ate we talked first about Willie Winkers, then about Captain Saul and finally about 'The Rabbit Burrow', a house in Leeson Street with dozens of door-bells where Harry and I lived in the 60's.

Before leaving, I enquired after the shop and its stock of old fashion made in other eras. Cherry described how she and Jane, her partner, would try on the clothes with all the trimmings in the evenings after she had closed the shop. Passers-by looking in the window would see that all was motionless in the past. They would not know of the costume fantasy upstairs.

I asked if I might be present on one such evening and Cherry said that I would be welcome to take part. Harry said that he would dress up as he had done before both at home and in the store upstairs in the shop.

In Harry and Cherry's house, and in their company, I feel at ease and can draw strength. But even as I drove away tonight, thoughts of Lily, the woman who had never been mine, came so clearly to haunt me. The thought that it did not have to be that way affected my very breathing. By the time I reached the curb outside my house the visit to my closest friends seemed far away in another time, like the costume fantasy in Cherry's shop. The parking ticket on my windscreen caught my eye again and marked the lowest depths of a sinking

feeling. A fine for not moving in time - the irony was amusing, but just for a moment. I left the ticket where it was.

When I went to open the hall-door I discovered that I had forgotten my key. I looked at the door-bells and elected to ring Mrs. Maguire's. I passionately dislike the woman - a good reason for ringing the bell. While waiting for the door to be opened I tried vaguely to establish why I dislike her. Maybe it is because she always keeps her window-curtains half closed during the day because she is afraid that if she opens them fully, people might think that she has no curtains at all. When Mrs. Maguire opened the door and I saw her tight little mouth and glasses that put me in mind of the 'rare outsize pair of Japanese military binoculars' I had noticed for sale in The Adam Salesrooms on the Green I stopped trying.

I went upstairs and turned the key in my apartment door. Mrs. Shilling, the elderly widow living in the next flat, opened her door and said good evening in a way that suggested she was about to tell a secret. I bade her good evening and asked how she was. She replied that she was well and enquired if I had heard noises in the attic recently. I explained that I had been rummaging through stuff I had stored there and told her not to worry. She said that the only time she worried was at about seven o'clock in the morning when the mail boat docked. (She has a son working in England).

As we said good night, I recalled the first occasion on which I learned her name was Shilling. I did not believe it. I did not believe anyone could be called Shilling. I remembered checking in the telephone directory and being surprised and amused to find a couple of Shillings and then thinking about 'Oliver Power'.

I waited in the kitchen for the kettle to boil. Looking at paint peeling off the ceiling over the cooker, I wondered how large a piece I could pull off in one go.

I made strong coffee and drank it as hot as I could bear whilst standing. (I have a theory that it is possible to bear higher temperatures whilst standing as opposed to sitting). I walked the living room floor without turning on a light. I looked out of the window. I eyed the bookshelves, then reached down a hard-back. I switched on a lamp, sat down on the edge of a low table and began searching for something that preoccupied my mind earlier today. Eventually, I found the paragraphs that described Leamus, the spy who came in from the cold. One piece I read twice:

'A man who lives a part, not to others but alone, is exposed to obvious psychological dangers. In itself, the practice of deception is not particularly exacting; it is a matter of experience, of professional expertise, it is a facility most of us can acquire. But while a confidence trickster, a play-actor or gambler can return from his performance to the ranks of his admirers, the secret agent enjoys no such relief. For him, deception is first a matter of self-defence. He must protect himself not only from without but from within . . .'

I put the book down on the floor, wondering how long its author had been spying on me.

I switched off the light and left the curtains open. I put on a scratched Beatles record. From 45 to 331/3 .

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*The Psychological Aspect* 23rd May

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT

Competition, that is really what living is about, I thought as I stood alone in Room 16 (not my favourite room), and if that is the case, it is natural to have an affinity with gunslingers, gangsters and spies - they win and they lose. They can change the situation. There is none of this uncertainty business - you either have a machine-gun in the violin case or you don't, and if you don't, you bluff and get him later. You just wait around for the opposition to show, then let him have it if he doesn't get the joke.

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24th May *A Visitor*

## A VISITOR

I caught the first train in to Westland Row station and before having breakfast in the cafe, telephoned Harry to find out where I might get the front axle of my car straightened and explained how I had misjudged a curb. Harry smiled to himself. I saw him do it and told him not to be a punk. Advice was duly given.

I cannot remember when the hiccups began, but I had scarcely put down the receiver when I met Jane who was coming up the stairs from the basement cafe. She was on her way to Cherry's shop. I was embarrassed and annoyed at myself. I said that I had not had hiccups for years.

"Silly things, they serve no useful purpose," I exclaimed and Jane smiled. She took me by the arm and walked me to a cushioned seat at the far wall of the cafe and ordered a coffee for me.

As she talked, I began to recover from the mild heart attack I suffer each time I meet a woman I am attracted to. I told her that the basement cafe she had just come from used to be for gentlemen only. She did not believe me so I elaborated - newspapers, shirt sleeves, braces and pipe smoke. The image amused her. I would have told her anything to have kept from being self-conscious. Jane patted me on the back when I hiccuped again. I had not been mothered for a long time and I liked it.

On my way to the gallery I saw a group of men huddled at the corner of an office building in Dawson Street. They were responsible-looking men in suits. Responsible for what, I was not sure. I thought they might be architects or engineers. One was examining closely a crack in the facing blocks of the building. There was an air of integrity about him that suggested he was a visiting don. I am glad that somebody notices cracks in buildings - was the one in Dawson Street going to fall down, that was what I wanted to know. I wanted to ask if they were going to prevent the construction of more mirror glass offices. Trying not to look at one's reflection - at least steal a glance, regardless of motive - is like trying not to answer the telephone. What I don't like is that one cannot see who is looking out. Red Indians believed that if they were photographed their soul was stolen with the image. I feel the same about two-way mirrors.

As I lost sight of the architects, I wondered if any of them could fix a bent axle. I should have asked.

On the train home this evening, a baby stared at me from over its mother's shoulder. I glanced about furtively then stuck my tongue out at the child and laughed my W.C. Fields laugh to myself. Mother noticed. I moved to the next carriage where a woman had a wrestler's grip on a cello case. *A large* machine-gun, I thought, wondering why I felt so pleased. It was because Jane blinked when she smiled at me. There must be a lot of people thinking about people who do not know they are being thought about.

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27th May *Buttons Down The Front Again*

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## BUTTONS DOWN THE FRONT AGAIN

Early morning. I was on my way to visit Cherry and Jane in the shop. I saw something one doesn't often see - normally, it is just there when you wake in the morning - letters being sprayed on a hoarding. 'The Lookalikes' it read when they had finished spraying; it gave a venue, a time and a date. The writing reminded me of the headline copy books I had to fill out in chalk babies; the headlines that made you write too big.

Driving down Harcourt Street, I noticed more Georgian buildings were being knocked down and replaced by structures with Georgian style facades - admirable costumes covering a concrete pigeon palace. The back-drop had fallen in front of the stage set instead of behind.

I approve of costumes. They make you less vulnerable. People dress up for different reasons - to be daring, to be desirable, for deception, for dinner, but not all understand that acting puts you in control and bestows style. Cars are costumes, too.

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*The Injection* 27th May

## THE INJECTION

I parked the car on double yellow lines and walked down Grafton Street daring some off-duty traffic warden to put a ticket on my windscreen. I passed two punk rockers who were looking in the Eblana Bookshop window at a display of cookery books. I thought that the punks were dressed up rather well (it was a miscalculation to have called Harry one, though. I will have to call him something else, particularly in view of the bill I received from the garage for fixing the axle of the car.) In some respects I am more fortunate than those punks. I still have all the Beatles and Rolling Stones records from the time I was their age. You weren't supposed to like both, but I did. I have all The Kinks records, too, and a pair of winklepickers.

I cut through narrower streets that lead to Cherry's shop. Outside, Harry's Wolesley was taking up a lot of parking space.

I entered the shop and went upstairs. Jane was wearing a green silk dress and matching hat with feathers. She carried a hand-bag and gloves. High heeled shoes and the cut of her dress exaggerated her hip movement as she walked passed a mirror to the stair-well and turned. She looked like Betty Grable. Harry, reclined on some halfsquashed cardboard boxes, was in a white cotton suit and was wearing a watch on a chain, a tie-pin and a silver ring. He observed Jane through polished spectacles, looking like a gentleman trader from Casablanca; a man used to rotary fans in the ceilings of cafes, hotels and police stations. Cherry was wrapped in a long raincoat several sizes too big for her. She was even more attractive than usual.

I was warmly welcomed. Immediately, I was offered a hat to wear. I turned the offer down, saying that I put hats along with bicycles and umbrellas as being surreal weapons. On seeing Harry in the white suit, I forgot what I was going to call him; however, I did ask him to supply a quote with his advice on mechanics in future.

At first, I was reluctant to move, but eventually I donned a red and orange striped blazer and declared that I was Harris, one of the Three Men In A Boat (to say nothing of the Dog). I quickly got used to changing style thereafter.

Heroes visited for a short time, then made way for other heroes, everyone a character presented by Harry, Cherry, Jane and myself and for the benefit of the same. We were not confidants, but powerful allies and effective representatives. Like the sheriff in the Westerns at the Sandford Cinema, you could tangle with these characters, but you could not match them. For over an hour we revelled in the potential of it all.

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*It Hurt A Little* 31st May

## IT HURT A LITTLE

We planned a picnic for Saturday. Cherry and Jane were to organise the food. My contribution was to take the day off work. Harry agreed to attend to the geography. We parted company on Friday night refreshed, but my spirits sank when Jane declined an offer of a lift to her house. When I returned to the car I found a parking ticket on my windscreen.

On Saturday morning I was woken by a knock on the door and the sound of Mrs. Shilling's voice. There was a telephone call for me.

In my bare feet and the raincoat which Cherry had given to me the night before, I made my way down stairs and across the cold hall tiles to the telephone where I stood on one foot and picked up the receiver. It was Jane. She was anxious to speak: Harry's Wolesley being the banger that it was, it would be wise if I were to bring my car in case of a breakdown, she suggested. When she asked if she could travel with me my other foot dropped to the tiles.

"Jesus, of course you can," I said, oblivious to my words.

When Jane had rung off I picked up my post from the hall table. There were two white envelopes with windows and a brown one with a harp which I recognized as being two bills and a summons for not paying a fine. I took the stairs three steps at a time and abruptly met Mrs. Shilling at the top. She asked a favour of me: she could not leave the house because she was expecting a telephone call from the son in England, and Golly, her dog, had no dog biscuit for his dinner; would I ever pop down to the supermarket and buy some, taking Golly walkies in the process.

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31st May *Side Effects*

## SIDE EFFECTS

I stepped out into the street, closing the door behind me. I surveyed the neighbourhood then I looked down at the dog that stood a few inches off the ground.

"Come on, Rover," I said sarcastically, and gave the animal a jerk of the lead. I walked down the street with the shuffling dog in tow, sure that my good nature had been taken advantage of.

At the supermarket a sign said: 'No dogs allowed'. I drew Golly's attention to the sign then tied him to a no parking post and entered the supermarket. I wandered along the aisles of tins, packets, fruits, jars and bottles. I stopped to read a label, squeeze a loaf of bread and weigh a bunch of bananas in my hand. Finally, I spotted the dog food rack. I picked up the nearest bag of dog biscuits. 'Number 2' it said on the corner of the bag. If Golly wasn't a number 2 he'd have to lump it. On route to the check-out counter, however, a search of my pockets revealed that I had left my money behind. I stopped to think. I decided to return to the dog food rack. I replaced the bag unceremoniously.

I came out of the supermarket in a huff.

'I've forgotten my money,' I said, addressing Golly, 'you'll just have to eat grass like cows do.' I looked about wondering what to do. 'Why couldn't you eat bananas? I could have stuffed a few bananas in my pocket, but no, a little whipper-snapper like you needs a bloody huge bag of biscuits ... right!'

I walked down one of the aisles with a firm grip on Golly, who was inside my jacket, under my armpit. I talked to the dog out of the side of my mouth.

'Supermarkets make me dizzy. You can see everything and find nothing ... I hope you appreciate this. I'm doing it for you.'

When I had reached the dog food rack I paused and looked around furtively, then, bending down, ripped open a large dog biscuit bag and dumped Golly head first into it and held the top closed. I stood in front of the bag, looking up and down the aisle; several times I glanced down to see the moving bulges - presumably Golly eating the dog biscuit. I smiled at a passing supermarket employee and looked thoughtfully at the opposite racks as if making up my mind about a purchase.

On returning Golly to Mrs. Shilling, I told her that we had eaten out.

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31st May *Taking The Air*

## TAKING THE AIR

Harry led. It was up hill all the way and his car engine was in earnest gear, but Harry was not. He was cruising with Cherry at his side. I followed in my car with Jane. I was wearing my winkle-pickers which have not seen the light of day for years. My chest was on the steering-wheel trying to will Harry's roaring machine up the hills.

So often it is the woman who makes things happen or not happen. She gently, imperceptibly leads. Jane could have been with Harry and Cherry in the Wolesley if she had wanted, but she was sitting with me and that pleased me. Perhaps she felt guilty about turning down my offer of a lift the previous day, for a woman is sensitive to such things. I determined to make no move, other than the slightest flirtation, the familiar kind that earns the title: gentleman. In that familiar position I feel comfortable.

The weather caught the mood. It was bright, warm and breezy. Harry turned down a lane that had long grass in the centre which brushed the underside of the cars. We stopped next to a broken gate. It was an expansive meadow that we had found, the sloping brow of which formed part of the horizon. There were trees and a fast flowing river.

Harry raced me up to the top of the hill with a bottle of wine in his hand and beat me on account of the winklepickers. He then did his on-the-spot morning exercises. Cherry and Jane waited for us to return whereupon Harry was made carry the rug and basket.

Under branches near the river we spread ourselves, ate, drank and yielded to our surroundings. No one believed my description of a primrose pie - something drawn from a wartime recipe book I had found on one of my rummages in the attic.

Harry takes relaxation seriously. He insisted on an elaborate procedure for making coffee. Before leaving to walk by the river with Cherry and Jane, I pledged my support for his noble efforts and said that I would remain within ear-shot in case assistance was needed.

Harry, who was staring into the river, did not reply.

'They're not polaroid,' he said after the pause, 'pilots' glasses aren't polaroid. They're tinted so they can see the different types of clouds.'

'I didn't know that,' I said looking up at the blue sky.

Soon, Cherry and Jane were seated on a sturdy branch overhanging the river, dividing the water's surface with their toes and kicking the sparkles. I leaned against the trunk on the bank, enjoying the moment. Jane's dress was wet and clung to her smooth legs. Cherry's jeans were rolled up to her knees. How young we still are, I thought.

Later, the three of us threw logs and dead branches into the river, naming each as we did so. No one was spared in the fervour of action - customers, relatives, ice doctors, traffic wardens, bosses, bad architects, the orphanage women, old boy-friends, The Lookalikes, Mrs. Shilling (and son), the woman in the Sandford Cinema who used to shine the torch and say 'be quiet', Lily, the Captain, Albert, Cherry, myself, Jane, Harry, Golly too, and more. There was no mercy.

We collapsed on the ground exhausted and elated, having dealt with everyone. Jane was startled by a spider and scrambled over to me for safety. Fortunately, I could not see the animal anywhere. Cherry recalled how Jane had refused to tidy the store in the shop for several days because of a waiting spider. Jane said that it was still in the shop somewhere.

On the way back to meet Harry, I asked Jane if she had ever flown kites. She said that she had.

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### *3rd June Reflexes In Order*

#### REFLEXES IN ORDER

At home in my apartment, I was about to turn on the water for a shower when I saw it - black spider, white tiles.

'Jesus,' I said with a shiver as I stepped back. I decided to go away and come back. Perhaps it would be gone then. It wasn't. I had to do something, for Jane's sake as well as my own. I gave it the 'isn't big enough for both of us' warning and said that I would not stop at breaking a rib. There was no response. I turned on the hot water, but the wall-mounted nozzle would not aim that far up the tiles. I cupped my hands under the spray, planning to throw the gathered water at the wall. It was not an efficient method of gathering water and the proximity of the spider was frightening. I abandoned the attempt, but left the hot water running in order to generate steam to confuse the enemy. In the meantime, I tried transporting water in the same manner from the sink, but lost most of it on the way and what little water did land on or near the thing served only to make it contract and grip tighter. I ran out of the bathroom and into the kitchen, steam following. I took hold of a saucepan and ran back into the bathroom, filled it with water from the sink and emptied it at the wall with great vigour. The spider slid down the tiles rather than fell. It was not over yet. Still armed with the saucepan, I turned off the shower and faced the thing for a showdown. I thought of shouting at it so that it would make a run for the plug hole, but decided that spiders did not respond to noise. Perhaps they don't have ears, I thought. Christ, what a time to think about it. I know that spiders are fast on the draw. I raised the saucepan and advanced slowly.

The spider faked to the left and darted to the right, but not fast enough. I hammered him.

On account of the change in its dimensions, it was difficult to push the body through the grill of the plug hole, but I kept my nerve and went through with the action to the end.

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### *11th June Healthy Appetite*

#### HEALTHY APPETITE

Sunday was a rain puddle day. My windscreen wipers raked backwards and forwards at twice the normal speed. Mrs. Shilling met me on the landing as I was entering my apartment. I was rather wet. She remarked favourably upon the bunch of flowers I held, heads down, limp at my side as though it were a truncheon.

'For some fortunate young lady,' she said and smiled, wishing to nurture the idea.

'Yes,' said I and smiled, knowing that Mrs. Shilling would be pleased.

Later, Mrs Shilling was at first arrested and then alarmed by the smell that wafted from my rooms. She knocked on the door whereupon I lowered the volume of the record player and let her in.

'Are you all right?' was a question I was not entirely prepared for. Flour on my cheek explained the source but not the nature of the smell. The white was accentuated because I had combed back my wet hair 'D.A.' fashion.

'I couldn't be better, Mrs. Shilling,' I said. Her curiosity persisted and I had to explain that the primroses she had seen me with earlier were going to be eaten in pie form.

Would the young lady not prefer the bunch of flowers, she asked, her attention distracted by a strange hum. I said that I would be bringing a bunch of flowers as well as the pie.

Looking at the recipe book, Mrs. Shilling said that it all came back to her - the ration coupons, her husband and the vegetables on, what were flower beds in central London where he had lived during the war.

She looked in the oven at the pie as though it were her own kitchen and jabbed holes in the pastry with a fork. She then traced the hum to the hair-dryer I had put in a wet boot I had taken off.

She asked me where I had got the flowers on a Sunday. I replied that it was a matter between Harry and his neighbour. Mrs. Shilling was delighted. Even at her age she is 'on for a bit of mischief' as she put it. She told me about her Aunt Chasie (Charlotte). Her family is Church of Ireland and once lived just off Marlborough Road. Aunt Chasie used to give the children turkey giblets from dinner and tell them to throw them over the railings into Muckcross Convent School. Everybody liked Aunt Chasie because she was funny.

'It's more of a challenge trespassing when it's raining,' I said, changing the hair-dryer to the other wet boot, 'people look out of windows when it's raining.'

I, too, come from a Protestant line; the mildest, 'nevergo' kind. I told Mrs. Shilling that I have always thought that Protestant girls are better looking. (It has little to do with background. As far as I know, Catholic girls are of the same opinion.) Mrs. Shilling agreed.

It was, however, not the conversation with Mrs. Shilling that was responsible for burning the pastry, but Alison, for after my neighbour had left I became engrossed in a memory of her when she was twelve and Lily was sixteen. It is a scene that will hold a place in my memory mansion for ever for no apparent reason other than its appeal. I shall recount it:

'I like your shirt,' says Lily to me, in her living room. The telephone rings and I watch her shape and movement as she walks out of the room to answer it. Alison enters and goes to the window. She has just combed her hair.

'I'm going to my first dance tonight. I'm so nervous,' she says and smiles. I tell her everything will go well.

Later, Lily says that little sister and her girl friend are trying to dance in the kitchen. Lily and I enter.

'Caught you!' says Lily, like only a big sister can.

'We want to know how to slow dance,' says Alison. 'You show us, go on. You show us with him.'

'I will not!' says Lily.

'Ah please, go on, Lily. Show us with Oliver. You know how. Please.'

'No,' says Lily.

'If they don't dance with you straight away, it's just because they are nervous of dancing with good looking girls,' I say. Alison and her friend reply with coy smiles.

Looking at Alison's lips, Lily says: 'Oh you've put it all over you!' Alison wipes the lip shine on her lower lip,

not sure whether or not to be embarrassed in front of me.

'Just put a little on your lips,' I say. 'How do you think you slow dance?' I ask. She hides her face. 'Well, how do you think?'

'I don't know,' she says in a cute manner.

'It will come naturally,' I say, 'do whatever he does, only more gently.' She smiles bashfully.

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While trying to revamp the primrose pie, I wondered if the spider I had fought and killed was responsible for the rain.

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*How Do You Feel, Mr. P?* 18th June

HOW DO YOU FEEL, Mr. P?

I spent the morning perfecting a reply to a smart comment that had been dealt me the week prior by a person with a magician's smile.

'Pessimists are in for nice surprises,' the man had said. At the time, I was annoyed and knew that I should not have let him away with it, but was unable to respond adequately.

Now, I have the reply: 'Pessimists are people without spirit who do not know how it feels to win against odds.'

In one of the restoration rooms of the gallery, I saw a cat. Whatever is said about black cats did not apply in this instance because the cat had a white waistcoat. I did, however, decide not to leave the primrose pie in the room with the cat. At lunchtime I put the pie under the front seat of the car and went to the butcher's shop to buy some meat for next week. As a rule, I do not make up my mind what to buy until I see the display. I need reassurance for purchases of any size, that is why I tend to read half aloud the notices and advertisements.

In the butcher's shop window there was a sign:

DELICIOUS DUCKLINGS: CLASS A

I entered, determined that the impending public act I was about to undertake would not embarrass me or fail to be effective. The sudden burning confidence I felt was almost sufficient reward from existence. I privately dedicated the gesture to Lily, but also to Jane, Cherry and Alison and all the women I have watched and wanted. They were the inspiration that would deny any falter on my part.

Confronting the butcher, I asked for a Class B duckling, insisting that the less intelligent ones tended to be brawnier. The butcher was not amused. Consequently, I was spurred on and on behalf of the second stream assured the butcher that I knew what I was talking about, having been in a B class at school.

'They do let you paint in a B class, though,' I concluded as the butcher put a large duck on the scales.

This evening, I visited Jane and Cherry in the shop. I had not been seen there for several days and now I sported the primrose pie and a bunch of flowers. I handed both to Cherry immediately, in order to avert the uncomfortable pressure that was against my back; it was like the feeling that while walking down a crowded ramp, feet behind are out to step on your heels. Jane and Cherry were delighted with the present. Instantly, I was relieved.

'Geranthenums, according to Harry,' I said, pointing to the bunch of flowers and added that Harry and the neighbour had nearly come to blows over some sort of accusation involving footprints in the flower-beds. Cherry revealed that on more than one occasion she had had to grapple with Harry to prevent him from clambering over the wall to get at the man and his garden.

I apologized for the slightly burnt pastry on the pie. Jane smiled and thanked me with a kiss on the cheek. Cherry was excited and ran off to find a knife to cut the pie and a vase to put water in for the flowers.

Cherry had the first bite of the pie. She said that it tasted like scented apples. Sticky fingered, the three of us scoffed the entire tart. For me, it was gratifying to watch as well as take part.

When I left the shop I found another parking ticket on my windscreen. Curiously, it reminded me of Lily. While driving home I thought of telephoning her, but decided not to do it tonight. I wondered who else knows her number and how much of a routine it is dialling it and how much better they are on the telephone than me.

I turned down Waterloo Road. Next to it is Wellington Road. There is no Napoleon Road - he lost.

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20th June *I Feel Fine*

I FEEL FINE

I determined that I would take Lily out to dinner. Early in the morning, I telephoned her from the cafe. Alison answered.

I learned that Lily had been home, but had left again to visit her friends in Donegal. I asked Alison how she herself was. Typically, she told me that she was in dire straits having just returned from a holiday in Norway where she had spent all her money. She asked me if I could get her a job in the Dead Zoo for the summer. I reminded her that I work in the National Gallery. She said that working in the gallery would be just as suitable. As though I was unaware of the fact, she pointed out that she is an art student. She said that even if I could not get her the job I was to come out to the house and she would make sure there would be some Bewley's coffee for me. I promised that I would call to her house.

'Even if Lily isn't in?'

'Even if Lily isn't in.'

'Good!'

I remember seeing the twelve year old Alison race down the stairs of her house in her bare feet to answer the telephone. Seated on a chair and holding the receiver with both hands, she traced the underside of the marble hall table with her big toe. I was with Lily at the time. She said that Alison had told her she would do anything for me.

I sat down again at my table in the cafe.

'Large coffee and almond buns, please, Violet.' Violet sought less response than usual, I noticed. She did, however, in addition to the coffee and buns, bring me the toast and marmalade that she always brought in the mornings and would never put on my bill.

I sat back in the cushioned seat, postponing the slide into the morning paper. The patrons were evenly positioned about the room in a way that is, at that time of the day, the natural order of things. I was entertaining the vague notion that on this particular morning the cafe seemed larger than ever before, when I

learned from Violet that the old lady with the blue coat and hat pin would never be in the cafe again.

As I swallowed my first mouthful of coffee, I recalled the old lady bidding me good morning, but I felt that nice old ladies dying did not matter so long, as there were girls like Alison who called the Natural History Museum the - Dead Zoo.

How much time had she spent walking through her

mansion of memories before she died? You spend a lifetime making memories. I recall the places I had travelled to in the 60's; journeys I had wanted to share but always ended up going on alone. I wish Lily had been with me among and underneath green roofs in Copenhagen, or picnicking by the Seine in the pointed park at Pont Neuf in Paris, the morning city; I wish that I had been able to point out to her the man I had seen in Manhattan sweeping the pavement with a stuffed sock on a wooden pole; to have had her with me when I saw The Beatles in a London street; to have shown her doorways like entrances to opera houses and flower dispensing machines outside florist shops in Berlin.

I wonder what has become of the man who dreamed of all the possible situations that would justify the installation of flower dispensing machines.

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27th June *Five O'Clock Shadow*

## FIVE O'CLOCK SHADOW

Left at the crossroads, road bears to the right; right fork past the small church, not that road; hedge on the left, beech trees on the right; straight ahead - the open gates, road veers to the left. As I drove up the avenue to the Penrose house, I remembered changing in the lavatory of an aeroplane in order to attend a party the same night at Lily's invitation:

'Please come if you are back in time,' she had said. I gladly cut short my travels by a week so that I could be at the party. The evening of that party there was no breeze. Music could be heard at the gates. The long avenue had been lit by gas lamps. The house itself was host. French windows and solid doors were open and the light inside sparkled. The party was lavish; the people, young and old, had always been rich or were close friends of the family or both.

I feel comfortable in the presence of wealth of any kind. It holds a fascination for me. Rich people always insist on quality. That evening at the party I was content to wander on the fringe of the gatherings and eat the food and drink the champagne while waiting to meet Lily. Few seemed to bother about the food but that did not deter me from eating. I was in mid-bite when Alison wrapped me in a hug, from behind, then took me by the hand, saying that she would show me to Lily. She led me through the crowd, disregarding my token protest.

Lily was with two young men. I slowed my pace and said that I did not want to disturb her. Alison smiled and told me to wait where I was and went and snatched her sister from under the young men's noses and led her to me. Lily was delighted to see me. It was more than I could have asked for.

Later, I went missing. Alison has told me that she took Lily by the hand and led her to her bedroom. I was curled up on Lily's bed, asleep, my hands between my legs and shoes still on my feet, but protruding over the edge of the bed.

'All the free rooms in the house, but he would only sleep in yours,' said Alison. 'He didn't put his shoes on the covers.'

'He knows I'd kill him if he did,' said Lily.

'He could sleep in my room if he wanted,' replied Alison.

'Don't be silly,' said Lily, sitting on the edge of the bed. She smiled at me and unlaced my shoes. 'He must be very tired,' she whispered, carefully taking off both my shoes. I moved in my sleep.

'O!' said Alison and bit her bottom lip mischievously. Lily went to Alison's room for a quilt. When watching over me by herself, Alison stroked my hair gently once and touched my face.

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I took the curved incline up to the house at speed, wondering what people thought of me. I slowed as I passed the hall door and turned into the yard. The back door to the house was open. Alison and a hoard of dogs came out to meet me. She was wearing a pullover seven sizes too big for her and a checkered shirt belonging to her father, the tail of which was even longer than the pullover. When shirt cuffs do not half cover Alison's hands, she frequently pulls her sleeves over her hands altogether.

'Oh look!' she said, gladdened at the sight of my black car.

I got out of the car, stepping on a white poodle in the process. The dog produced a sharp yelp and an on-going whine. My first reaction was to talk baby-talk to it in order to make amends. The dog growled at me so I changed tactics.

'Go 'way ya little pipe cleaner, ya,' I said through my teeth. The poodle did not understand.

'Dogs think everything you do is deliberate,' said Alison and playfully wrenched the animal's head in every direction, then showed her paint-covered hands to me. 'I didn't think you'd be here so fast. I'm doing some painting - ceiling and doors and things.'

I offered to help.

Alison's mother and father were in the garden. I know that I am always a welcome guest at any time, but when I talk to Mr. Penrose the thought that I should apologise for not having become an architect like Albert is always in the back of my mind. He and Albert had been close friends and both were active preservationists, often ineffectively, but always earnestly defending architecture as though it were their own property under siege. I had worked in Albert's firm of architects for a year and it was this connection that made me a familiar person in the Penrose house. I did not become an architect because I would not have passed the exams.

'We haven't seen you in ages, Oliver,' said Mrs. Penrose, pleasantly surprised. 'I hope you are staying for dinner.'

'He hasn't had coffee yet,' said Alison. Her mother told her to see if Mrs. Mulligan could prepare my favourite dinner and to tell her that she herself would be in to help her presently. Mr. Penrose said that it was a pity that Lily was not there and that she had asked about me before going to Donegal. Mrs. Penrose told me that I should visit more often and expressed her worry that I was not eating properly, at which point Alison led me away, saying that I was going to help her paint her room.

She dressed me in an old rag of a shirt which she dug out of her wardrobe and we set about finishing the job she had started. I painted with a small brush and steady hand the area where the walls and ceiling meet.

"You must be very patient," Alison said. I try.

She ran downstairs to the kitchen for a damp cloth to wipe the spots of non-drip paint off the bedroom carpet. She has an instinct for colour, but there is no logic to her broad brush strokes. Invariably, she would put too much paint on the first stroke and then, to stop it sliding down the wall, would spread it every which way. She would start in at least a dozen places, then join up the explosions of paint.

She took great care making the coffee. She wanted to please me. In her room I had looked at all the things that made it a woman's room - her room. I like the things that make her and Lily sisters and the things that make them different. Distance from something can make it more attractive. You do not have to chase it - it glows in front of you.

Over dinner, Mrs. Penrose said to me, tongue in cheek, that she had told her husband not to say a word about the greenhouse that Harry and I had promised to restore. Alison reprimanded her mother and Mr. Penrose told his wife that she was fortunate that Lily was not present. I smiled at the thought of such a formidable defender.

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19th July *Pay Attention To Appearances*

#### PAY ATTENTION TO APPEARANCES

Harry knows which day is bin-day, but he is rarely on time with the bin at the gate. Cherry never nags him about being too late.

Last bin-day Harry was going fishing and I had taken the day off work to accompany him. When I arrived at the house Harry had just switched on his car engine. The open boot of the Wolesley had its jaws clenched on a full dustbin. I pulled my car in to the opposite curb. Harry's dead-pan face, framed low in the car door window, watched from behind dark sun-glasses and a five o'clock shadow. Harry always goes fishing in dark glasses and with a five o'clock shadow. I cannot recall Cherry going on any of his fishing trips. Only I have accompanied Harry, and only on rare occasions. Sometimes, I, too, need and like to be alone: to have time to think about being with other people in other places at other times.

I gathered the morning newspapers off the back seat and stepped out onto the road in my winkle-pickers. I felt comfortable in them as I walked to the waiting car. I felt that I was complying with and contributing to the style behind Harry's venture. I got into the passenger seat and Harry revved up and moved down the road.

"Won't be a minute," he said and over-took the dustbin lorry at a low speed, paying it no attention. He pulled into the curb about a hundred yards further on, got out of the car, swung the bin out of the boot and crossed the road, holding it as though it were a large soup urn. He put the bin down beside four similar robust containers then got back into the car without once looking at the approaching rubbish harvest. He then rested his chin on his chest. His dustbin was duly emptied.

This course of action he had followed without the slightest change in his expression. This greatly amused me for I know how telling his face can be. I thoroughly enjoyed (as I always do) what was not an exhibition, but Harry's way of solving a problem.

Going around St. Stephen's Green after leaving Cherry at the shop, the car missed a beat. Harry pulled over and stopped in a taxi rank. The car had run out of petrol, not in the wilds, but in the centre of town. Harry quickly decided what should be done.

From the boot he took three feet of hose-pipe and a jerrycan and we set off around the Green. Harry selected the motor and got to work. He took no further glances.

My blood spiralled through my veins and soon, my nerve started to give. I pointed to the petrol cap which rested on the bonnet of the car and told Harry not to forget to replace it once he had finished and said that I was going to buy a newspaper.

Across the road in a newsagents I picked up and put down magazines and watched Harry through the window, enveloped in the thrill of secret, successful conspiracy. What lent more credence to the endeavour was that Harry was prepared to do it on his own.

As we walked briskly back to Harry's car - he had siphoned a lot of petrol - I recalled how, years ago, he and I had gone to the Salvation Army meeting. It was a great night's entertainment until the old people rose and smiled at us and the head man, in a harrowing wail, invited us to 'come to the judgment seat'. Harry and I beat a hasty retreat out through the double doors.

Harry walked along the river bank the way he had walked around St. Stephen's Green looking for a suitable car; the way he always walks: one shoulder slightly higher than the other which leads. I followed, non-fisherman class, with newspapers under my arm and a hip-flask full of brandy in my pocket.

By mid-afternoon it was apparent that Harry is not a great fisherman and is content to do absolutely nothing to improve his skill. Reclined on the bank a dozen yards away from him, I read aloud one of the small advertisements in the back of the New Statesman which I had inadvertently bought while Harry pilfered the petrol:

Vegetarians Against the Nazis

S.A.E. to Box 151

London WC 2

for Red Carrot badges (20p)

and for details.

Harry said that he was sure his neighbour had put the advertisement in the magazine. I swallowed the last of the brandy and wondered was the advertisement spy talk. Harry left his line in the water and joined me on the grass bank and rolled a funny cigarette. Inhaled with the fresh air, it felt better than usual. I remarked favourably on the effect.

'This is the last of it,' said Harry. 'Cherry has hidden the stuff for herself and Jane, and don't worry, I'll steal it back as soon as I can find it.'

'I'll find it,' I said, and I will. Nobody can find a better hiding place than me. I have a sense of place which makes me a victim and a beneficiary of association. Places and music associated with those places haunt me.

After a long silence I spoke again:

'Hey,' I said with growing concern, 'I was on a bus and the driver had a bag of carrots on the dashboard. Do you think he was a spy for the Vegetarians Against the Nazis?'

Harry looked at me with a serious expression, drew on the cigarette, then spoke:

'Yeah, it's very strong, this stuff.'

There was another long silence, then I spoke again:

'Didn't see his badge, though.'

'He wouldn't wear it if he was a spy,' concluded Harry.

I thought about Alison and her painting. It occurred to me that she could paint posters for coming attractions at the travelling gallery. Then I thought about Jane. How nice it would be to be in love with her and she with me for one day or perhaps a week, then to have everything as it was before it happened.

'Yes, we should fix up the Penrose's greenhouse some weekend soon,' said Harry as if by telepathy he had witnessed the image of Jane dissolve into that of Lily.

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19th July *Close Shave*

## CLOSE SHAVE

On our way back through town to Cherry's shop, Harry and I stopped to shoot space invaders in an amusement arcade.

The invaders are moving targets, the missiles white, the sky dark. Fast manoeuvres promote hits and near misses. You must fight a running battle - the invaders come down faster and faster. Leg muscles react to the spontaneous action. Unseen dangers strike and the game is over; drop coins in the slot and the invaders are coming down on you again. Harry and I blasted away.

When we walked out the door of the amusement arcade I was back at school sitting still, willing the hands around the clock-face, not hearing a thing, only feeling the excitement gathering under my ribs. That day, Harry and a taxi waiting after school to take us to see the Rolling Stones arrive at Dublin airport; like shooting the space invaders, it was one of Harry's ideas that require initiative. When followed through, the result is never disappointing.

Having stemmed the invasion for £2.40, we turned up at Cherry's shop an hour late. I was sure something good was coming my way and that I could respond with the right actions and answers. The feeling under my ribs had not faded away.

Jane asked me to help position a slide in her hair. Using the tips of my fingers, I gathered her hair with the slide as carefully as I could. My total concentration was to no avail, however. Jane smiled at me in the mirror and said that men were too gentle with such things. I watched closely her little movements as she gathered her hair and surely pushed the slide into place.

'There,' she said, then decided that she did not like the slide and removed it.

Harry thought that the parking ticket on my windscreen was funny. I was not of the same opinion and said that the bastards who put it on my car were everywhere.

I questioned the alleged offence. Of the thirteen possible parking offences the X was beside number seven

- 'Parking a vehicle in a manner prohibited', but number two drew my attention because the X had been put there first and then scribbled out. It was the human element coming to the fore momentarily. 'Failing to bring an omnibus wholly within roadway markings at a stopping place/stand' was beside the obliterated X. I would have much preferred the latter of the two, or number eleven: 'Parking a vehicle in a disc-parking place without displaying a valid parking disc'. 'Omnibus' is more suggestive, I thought and 'disc-parking' more

musical - do-ronday-ronday bop-bop shuwop.

There was an invitation waiting for me on the hall table when I returned home. It was from Captain Saul inviting me to dinner at the Stephen's Green Club.

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19th July *Sitting Alone Again*

#### SITTING ALONE AGAIN

Holding the envelope by the corner, I paused on the landing, waving it in the air as though it were a piece of hot toast. I wiped my feet on Mrs. Shilling's door-mat contemplating the matter. Dinner at The Club with the old gentleman - what a civilised idea, I thought - how old I must be to think so.

I went downstairs to telephone Jane. Before I dialled the second digit, my mind was panic racing to get away from the thought that she would say no. Perhaps I would be lucky - she might be kind when she says: 'Well, it is 7.30, Oliver.' Perhaps she would not be at home - that was as far as I had got when Jane answered the telephone.

Immediately, I said hello and asked her if she would care to meet me for coffee in Bewley's the following morning - if she was in town early; she was not to come in specially - only if she was working in Cherry's shop that day and had the time to spare. Jane said that it was a lovely idea and that she had not been in Bewley's for breakfast for months. Where would we meet? she asked. I suggested the room on the far left in the Westmoreland Street branch of Bewley's Cafes. Jane said that she would be the first person there in the morning and admitted to being early for most appointments. She asked me if I cared to visit her that evening. I thanked her for the invitation but declined, saying that I might be the first person in the cafe.

When I put down the receiver a court of enquiry was convened. Attorney for the prosecution was quick to examine:

'Motives?' he demanded.

'Good intentions,' replied council for the defence, speaking on behalf of his tongue-tied client. 'My client wants to watch the girl close at hand. He would not take any girl for granted.'

'Why meet her in the Westmoreland Street branch of Bewley's Cafes?' asked the attorney for the prosecution suspiciously. 'Why not the Grafton Street branch?'

'Because it will be a new venture,' replied council for the defence. 'The decor in the Grafton Street branch of Bewley's Oriental Cafes is similar to that of the Westmoreland Street branch and therefore my client can feel that he is in familiar surroundings but that he is looking at them differently.' At this point, council for the defence appealed directly to the justice: 'At such times my client worries about breaching the insulation offered by his chosen branch of the establishment. He is not willing to risk losing the sanctuary that is the Grafton Street branch of Bewley's Oriental Cafes to uncomfortable memories and regrets.'

'Why did he not go to the young lady's rooms when invited?' asked the justice.

'Why didn't you?' asked council for the defence of his client in confidence. 'After all, her body is attractive and her bashful manner serves only to make it more attractive.'

'Soon,' replied the client, 'one evening she will take me home with her.'

Court adjourned leaving council for the defence with much to explain. The client remained seated in the dock, day-dreaming.

I tried to envisage what the following morning would be like. I could only picture the cafe as it appears when closed, when the only things that move are the light and the working parts of the clock. My mind's eye peered through one of the windows of the double door under the word 'cafe' which is carved in the thick glass. I see that the room is empty. The brown curved wooden chairs are standing on the marble-topped tables. My eyes wander over the yellow ochre wall-panels to the oriental paper above. At one end of the room, over the red cushioned couch, light shines through the stained glass of the shallow bay windows. There are two fire-places, Art Nouveau chandeliers made of what seems to be organic metal issuing frosted glass shadows resembling frozen drops, and an oriental jug which sits on the dark stained plinth that is fitted with brass coat-pegs.

How curious it is that sometimes when you remember or anticipate scenes, you see yourself in them like a flashback in the pictures. But such was not the case this time. I could not visualise what way Jane would sit, or where she would sit. I did not know how it would feel to sit with her amongst strangers. What we would talk about I did not know. What would she notice? I wondered.

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I was in the cafe the next morning. I sat on the couch under the bay windows. The last time I was first in the cafe in Grafton Street it was also a Saturday. That day I sat on the couch facing the main entrance through the shop. I remembered that the Probat roaster in the shop-window which normally roasts at about 425F was over temperature and the operator was checking the coffee beans in the dip-stick shovel when I had entered the shop. More than usual, the smell of coffee permeated the building. I had ordered a large coffee and almond buns when other early morning customers came and took their places. It was shortly afterwards that the doors between the shop and the cafe were closed owing to the over-roasting of the coffee beans. Through the glass in the doors I could see

the distinct lines and areas of the shop grow soft until the room looked like what the train stations of Europe once looked like when engulfed in steam and smoke. Two firemen then entered the cafe and everyone was asked to leave by the staff door that leads into Johnston's Court.

In Grafton Street patrons and passers-by gathered as flames cracked the window in front of the Probat roaster then smothered under a barrage of fireman's powder which swirled against the window without a sound. It was a small fire that was dealt with effectively, but for a few minutes a lot was at stake.

While waiting for Jane, I traced the picture of the cafe I had perceived the evening before. Everything seemed so irreplaceable. I wondered why things become unobtainable. I quickly abandoned the quest for the answer and opened my newspaper and began to read, but I could not help looking towards the entrance repeatedly. I must have read the same paragraph a half dozen times.

I could not make up my mind whether or not my hands could be cleaner. The decision to wash them again was a sudden one acted upon promptly (in spite of there being fifteen minutes to the appointed meeting time). I made my way to the toilets in the basement.

The metal figures on the doors drew my attention - the man wore a hat and had a pipe in his mouth. The lady (which, of course, I could only glance at) wore her hair bobbed in 1960's style and she carried a handbag. I was glad to see that this well attired, shapely couple had survived the onslaught of black plastic robots. Sometimes style is reassuring because it seems to be the only constant.

Inside the men's room there was a young man singing - chorus aloud, verses mumbled - and doing what appeared to be the hand jive under the electric dryer. I admired, respected and enjoyed the performance

because I knew that such a man would not allow his performance to be hampered by nervousness, but a voice inside me said: 'I bite my nails if the situation calls for it.' Curiously, what the voice had to say had a calming effect on me.

I caught myself thinking about Lily when Jane entered the cafe and stood for a moment looking for me. I like it when people think Lily and I are together. On occasions I have told her to stand next to me so that everyone could see that she was with me. I am proud of her, but even when with her, I miss her for I know that she will not stay long.

Jane was nervous but disguised it successfully; I was nervous, too. Afterwards, I did not remember much of what we had talked about, but Jane was relaxed when I walked her to Cherry's shop. (I was not).

There had been, however, one point at which panic threatened to rush in from the wings at an early stage in the cafe. Jane did not see where I was sitting and I could not catch her attention before she sat down at another table. I decided, to join her at that table. I had to choose whether to sit beside her on the couch or facing her in the chair opposite. It was a moment of anxious indecision - I prayed she would rescue me without making it seem like a rescue. In the event, it was the Demerara sugar that was to make a timely entrance and decide - a waitress temporarily blocked access to the chair in order to fill the bowl on the table with the 'slow motion' sugar whereupon I took my place beside Jane.

After my meeting with Jane, I walked up Grafton Street as I often do: on the road. I was thinking about Dublin when it was brought to a stand-still on the 7th of November, 1963 when The Beatles came to play in the Adelphi in Abbey Street. My recollections were prompted by the angry drivers who were trying to negotiate the hazard I, as a pedestrian, presented. Standing in Grafton Street on a sunny Saturday you can see how young the population is; you can see the many who know about Beatlemania, but who imagine that The Beatles had always been there before they themselves knew about them. How much of their apparent lack of recognition of the significance of my day is my detachment from their day? I have a recurring notion that the answer is: not much. Mine was the first generation that had more money to spend than our parents. Just how young am I at the moment, I wonder - I am still young enough to accept things lasting a shorter time than they did ten years ago.

I met Alison and her boyfriend on their way into the cafe in Grafton Street. I would have missed them had it not been for Alison going after me and retrieving me from the roadway. She introduced her young man. With alarming ease, I could imagine them making love. I could not take my eyes off Alison. 'She asked me if I would care to come into the cafe with them. I wanted to, but said that I could not because I had to work. She asked how the black car was keeping.

'Harry is crawling around inside the engine making it go faster,' I replied and asked about Lily.

'Still in Donegal,' said Alison contentedly. 'Won't you come and visit again soon?'

Yes, I would, I said. Harry and I would be down to paint the greenhouse.

'Great!' she said, 'I've always wanted to have breakfast in the greenhouse. We can do that when you've finished.'

I smiled - almost laughed - as we parted company for I remembered that in the big cloth bag which she carried would be her toothbrush and soap. When Lily and Alison come to town they select an hotel and go upstairs, have a bath, brush their teeth and freshen up for the evening without consulting anyone.

I was late for work, but I did not mind.

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*Another Table With A View* 19th July

## ANOTHER TABLE WITH A VIEW

That evening, I tore the thin polythene cover off my best clothes and removed the dry cleaner's tag. I dressed and took a taxi to the Stephen's Green Club while it was still light. Instead of getting out at the entrance, I instructed the driver to pull over to the far curb. When the taxi had moved away, stood for a moment looking at the building in order to evaluate and speculate. I knew that the place would not be like Bewley's with its soothing distraction of low-key babble and clatter, but I was confident that I would not be thrown by the club's because I believed the building to be the origin and eventual destination of many adventurers and expeditions and this appealed to me.

The formal bearing adopted by the doorman on seeing me suggested that he knew all the members by name. I pretended not to notice the stuffed stags' heads mounted in the hallway and concentrated on my course.

When I asked for Captain Saul by name he conducted me to the first floor room where coffee and tea were being served to members relaxing behind newspapers. It is a large room with a high ceiling, dark furniture and pale

walls. The large mirror over the fireplace reflects the book cases at the far end of the room and they in turn reflect the furnishings. Captain Saul was comfortably seated in a dark leather armchair trimmed with bright brass studs.

Why had the old man asked me to dine with him? Was it to talk about Albert? Was there something in me that reminded him of the man? If I were still a child he would have taken me to fly kites. Perhaps the black car made the Captain think that there was still hope of interesting me in the working of things.

Downstairs in the dining room the Captain's table was

beside a window. Perhaps that was why, while Captain Saul was ordering dinner, I found myself thinking about the window cleaner I had seen at work in Bewley's. Was the window cleaner a spy, I wondered, and if so, who had he been spying on and on whose behalf?

Soon, Captain Saul and I were talking about Albert, my black car and the working of things. There was a stir in the old man that was inspiring. He still needed to chart courses, negotiate dangers and shoot his own space in-vaders. He was glad to be challenged from the outside. I wanted to respond, but my mind insisted on surveying on tip-toes all that was around me. My eyes came to rest on a face at another table. I remembered the person from somewhere but I could not place him.

As if fate had ordered an immediate answer to my query, the man rose from his table apologising to his company and approached. He walked to our table confidently, confidently interrupted and convened a conversation with Captain Saul during which he negotiated with ease the obstacle provided by the arrival of the dinner. It would have taken a strong will and a steady nerve to have cut him down with accelerated dialogue like that of the black and white gangster pictures, or to have called on him to draw a six-gun.

David Fitzgibbon or Fitzsimon - I could not hear the Captain's introduction. The name did not help me place the person. Fitzsimon (I learned later) is my age or slightly older; a mint condition man with a tailor. He talked to Captain Saul about flight charts for a journey he planned and the aeroplane he would pilot. He talked competent technical talk and the Captain was soon engrossed.

'Bet he doesn't drive an orange Cortina, neither,' I said to myself as I watched.

Fitzsimon's stance caused me to be profoundly un-happy. Where had I seen a man standing in such a way before? ... Amongst people ...

'Of course!' I said almost aloud. 'At Lily's party. He was one of the two standing with Lily on the steps.' It was the occasion when Alison smiled at both and stole her sister away. My thoughts lingered a moment on Alison before being arrested by Captain Saul, who, much to my pleasure, pulled rank and terminated Fitzsimon's patter and out of politeness created a three party conversation.

'I've seen you before,' was Fitzsimon's issued response to the Captain's second introduction to me. 'Where was it?'

'I couldn't say,' I replied.

'Oh yes, at the Penrose house, wasn't it?' Fitzsimon was quite civil in his manner, but I do not like word games.

It transpired that not only did the man know Lily and Alison, but he also knew that Lily was in Donegal. I had a sniper's suspicion that one day I would deal with him.

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Passing through Ranelagh on my way home, I was upset to see that the Sandford Cinema had been partially demolished. The auditorium was exposed to the yellow street light and night rain. The taxi driver said that he had heard a rumour that the building was to be totally demolished, but that a cinema would be built on top of a supermarket on the same site.

'But you know how it is,' said the taxi man, 'you know when you were a kid how workmen would never tell you what they were buildin'.'

If the rumour is true, for me, the Sandford Cinema will remain intact, but always rerunning features that I had seen there.

I spent the remainder of the journey home wondering if Lily was with someone that night.

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*I Didn't Order Black* 1st August

## I DIDN'T ORDER BLACK

I have much to report. Harry still hasn't finished work on my car engine. One evening, I was feeling content sitting in the living room behind the wild garden having shared a bottle of wine with Cherry and Jane. Harry was feeling content, too, until I insisted that he drive me home.

On arrival at the house in Monkstown I caught sight of an intruder climbing to the first floor landing window at the side of the house.

'Are you sure he doesn't live in the place and has just lost his key?' asked Harry.

'Of course I'm sure,' I said, 'that's Mrs. Maguire's landing. Jaysus!' I said when the landing window opened and the dark figure climbed in.

'Let's get him!' said Harry. He opted to go in the back door. He took my door key, quietly got out of the car and tip-toed down the garden path, but had hardly rounded the corner of the house when he came back in a

hurry. He had seen the intruder at close quarters.

'He's a black one!' he whispered to me as I turned the key in the hall door. I froze. 'It doesn't make any difference,' Harry said, answering his own as well as my expression of dismay. 'Let's get him, anyway,' he whispered. I laughed without vocal cords and whispered that I was always embarrassed in the company of black people and that I wished to hell I could remedy it.

'Right,' I said, 'let's get him!'

Harry crept back to his car and returned with the handle of the jack. He went round the side of the house and came back sporting a dustbin lid. Watching him skulk about the bushes outside the house, it occurred to me that Harry's overgrown garden acts as camouflage.

Harry went in from the rear. I entered through the front door and stormed up the stairs to the first floor landing where I met the intruder - not face to face, because I went in for a low tackle. We tumbled about the floor grappling and straining. Mrs. Maguire's crib, which she keeps on permanent display on the landing table, was an early casualty. I caught the black man on the ear with my elbow, but received a kick on the shin and a poke in the ribs in return. Mrs. Maguire came out of her room and let out a shriek. Harry, unable to find the right key, broke the back door window on hearing the noise, entered and advanced up the hall. The intruder, on the retreat, met Harry at the bottom of the stairs. Harry froze with the jack handle poised shoulder level and his eyes peering out over the rim of the dustbin lid. I threw one of the three wise men at the enemy and hit him on the head. Mrs. Maguire fell to her knees and prayed over the devastated crib. The intruder, very shaken, began to mumble and stutter as I descended the stairs with electricity coming out of my finger tips. Mrs. Shilling came galloping down from the second floor and rescued from the clutches of her racist neighbour and his bully friend her adopted son who had just returned from England and having found the doorbell inoperative, had decided, rather than waking others in the house, to scale the wall to the landing window.

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*White* 1st August

## WHITE

I wasn't feeling well the following morning. I telephoned the gallery and said that I would not be at work owing to illness. I then played a record and wandered about the house eating an apple and leaning on door frames. I thought perhaps I might get a cat for consultation. I thought I might sit in Bewley's and watch people come, stay a while and go. As with the paintings in the gallery, there would be the same depth; the same detachment.

I rubbed my ribs and imagined myself being poisoned by Mrs. Shilling or assaulted by Mrs. Maguire. There was no point in apologising again, I decided. It was time to move up in the world and find another apartment to live in. I decided that I would not be adverse to living by the sea as I do at present, providing that I was not asked to get into it. I only want to be rich if I have someone to share my wealth with.

At the bathroom mirror I mimed to the music with my electric razor substituting for a microphone. I thought I did it rather well and consequently declared that there is always one more squirt in the toothpaste tube.

I emptied my pockets, left my watch in my bedroom and went out walking. It was a fresh, bright morning that promised to develop into an ideal day for a person alone and walking in the city.

There was a man cutting a hedge with sharp shears and clenched teeth. I did not like his aggressive attitude. Addressing the gentleman, the voice inside me that reads captions and does the planning said:

'You should be at work, mister.'

I had been walking slowly, unaware that I had been staring in the man's direction for some time. The man paused with the shears opened and glared at me. I stopped, put my hands in my pockets and ignoring the man, examined the hedge in a cursory manner. I then passed a favourable comment upon the greenhouse which stood in one corner of the garden and went on my way.

Next, I called to Albert's firm of architects and talked with someone I once knew as a junior and who was now a partner I did not know. It was all a bit embarrassing and disappointing. I could see but not revel in the scheme of things that was once the attraction of an architect's office. I made slender `S's out of paper clips as we talked.

I went to Bewley's in Grafton Street for breakfast and sat with actors whom I know and have an affinity with and who frequent the cafe whether performing nightly, unemployed, or rehearsing during the day. I was sure of a performance of some kind. It seems actors and spies are much the same. Both give a performance and get closer to people in their disguise.

I took a notion to visit a barman friend of mine whom I meet not more than half a dozen times a year, usually at the hotel bar in which he works. I stepped off the bus and strolled across the hotel car park and into the lounge bar through the foyer. Just like the pictures, my barman friend was polishing the counter. It was a sunny afternoon and the place was almost empty. I sat up on a stool and put my forearms on the counter. I felt at ease talking to someone I meet half a dozen times a year.

By four o'clock I was glad I had beaten up Mrs. Shilling's adopted son - glad that Harry and I had decided to get him. It was just unfortunate that Mrs. Shilling had misunderstood our motives.

When I left the hotel I encountered a policeman standing beside a large, expensive car, issuing a parking ticket.

'Excuse me, what are you doing?' I enquired, indignantly.

'Does this vehicle belong to you?' asked the policeman as though he were a sun-bather who did not wish to be disturbed.

'You sound like Fitzsimon,' I said to the policeman.

'Who's that?' asked the policeman, suspiciously.

I moved on down the pavement muttering that the policeman had no call to talk to me in that fashion; no call to speak to me at all!

At half past five I was sitting in Cherry's shop looking pale. Jane took my temperature by placing her hand on my forehead, then accused me of not eating that day. I touched my forehead then looked at my hand and asked how she could tell.

'See!' said Jane to Cherry. 'He hasn't eaten.'

I explained that I was all bruises and aches but that I was fortunate that the worst blow had been delivered to a floating rib whereupon I demonstrated that the two floating ribs are given to springing and thus are less inclined to break or fracture. Cherry smiled and said that she and Jane would take care of me. Soon, the three of us were in a supermarket shopping for dinner. My health threatened to return on the expedition up and down the aisles. Owing to the company, I was thoroughly enjoying the whole business of being a semi-invalid shopper.

At home in Cherry's house, my two friends prepared an enormous dinner. They fussed over me, nursed me, and made me laugh. At some stage, Harry returned from work and related again how he and I had made the citizen's arrest.

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1st August *Foreign Body*

## FOREIGN BODY

My car was parked outside the house; Harry had, at last, finished the operation. (I had visions of him conducting white lightning into the engine in the same way that Doctor Frankenstein charged his monster.)

I consider engines simply in terms of degrees of going. That night, my car was primed. I, too, was alert, aware of the fresh air surrounding me. Never had I felt so alone with Jane, or closer to her than I did walking out through the gate with her. She had asked me to drive her home. I was sorry that I had not offered before she had asked and yet, I was glad that she had asked.

Jane's apartment is on the first floor of a Georgian house in Fitzwilliam Square.

'Com-mom,' she said quietly to me when I had parked the car. I followed her upstairs not wanting to think ahead in case it would all disappear. Her apartment is decorated with a rare mixture of old furniture in need of restoration and new furniture that is expensive but not showy. Scattered about the living room are carved wooden masks and miniature statues also of wood from Africa and what I call 'natural drums' (drums made of stretched animal skins, tree bark and clay). In one corner stands the branch of a cherry tree, the leaves of which have dried in clusters. The place has an elegance of its own, in spite of it looking as though children have been running out of hand.

I am not one of those people who straighten paintings and examine *everything* in others' houses, but Jane's apartment is such that it would mystify a blind man and it defies the sighted not to touch the contents, even the very walls.

Jane put on a jazz record and went into the kitchen to make coffee while I explored quietly. She was anxious to make me feel at home.

'I've got your number written down,' she said, seeing me at the wall-mounted telephone. 'I rang you last night to see if you wanted to call over,' she said as she came out of the kitchen with a cluttered tray. She smiled. 'But I was told: 'nobody by that name lives here anymore.'

I sniggered as I sat down on a rug.

'I might have to ask Captain Saul to organise a room for me on the top floor of the club.'

Jane knelt close to me and smiled again as she poured me coffee. I pointed to a small table.

'Three legged tables make me nervous. Nothing natural has three legs,' I said and drank my coffee. I took mouthfuls when I did not want them. Jane knew I was nervous so she asked me if I would like to see a late night film or go for a walk. I was taken by her suggestion.

'Yes, but where?' I asked.

'To go for a walk?'

'Yes.'

'Com-mom,' said Jane, 'I'll show you.' After a rummage in a drawer of a writing desk she produced a large key, then led me downstairs and out into the square. 'This is probably the last of the private garden squares,' she said as she opened the railing gate with the key. There were two prostitutes standing a hundred yards or more away. Jane paid them little attention, although one could not but notice them, for any display of bad taste has an element of attraction. Their clothes and make-up were neon set against the sombre architecture.

I looked in their direction a moment longer than Jane, remembering what Bernard, one of my actor friends, had said in Bewley's earlier that day. Bernard had said that he knew one of the waitresses to be a 'pavement hostess' by night. At the time the suggestion was dismissed as being an interesting but fictitious character sketch. Looking at the prostitutes, I rejected the idea completely, yet was more attracted to it.

When I stepped under the railing-hoop that spans the gate I had the distinct feeling of stepping into a special place. Harry's garden came to mind, for although the square is cared for, there are no ranks of flowers, but instead, trees and bushes, an un-metalled path and in the centre, two grass tennis courts without mesh fencing or white lines, only sagging nets. In one corner of the square there stands a small pavilion painted green and in the opposite corner, a drinking fountain.

Perhaps because we were walking, or because it was a private garden in which we walked, or because of the fugitive light and night air, or perhaps because of the way Jane took my arm, I felt a growing confidence. I prayed that this time it would last.

We strolled and talked to each other. It was one of those 'getting to know a person' conversations that, not unlike a crossed telephone line, offers intimacy but preserves detachment.

When we returned to the apartment Jane looked at me as though looking out from underneath a fringe. Only as she took off her clothes did it strike me how well she wore them. Her underclothes were of silk. I smiled when I saw them. She responded with the same smile.

'They're from the shop,' she said, giving me the silk to touch. 'Clothes don't make the rustle sound that they once made.'

'Except for nurses' uniforms,' I said.

Jane smiled.

The apartment was a perfect temperature; she had thought of everything. I hoped that she would make a move to undress me. She did. I lowered her to the bed, my finger tips followed the curves of her body. Her subtle movements reassured me that it was what she wanted to happen. It was so easy and so thrilling, but I have never made love to a woman who did not, for a moment at least, make it such. To lose myself in what makes women at once different and the same, is for me, the most secret of pleasures.

At one of the times when a couple talk in bed Jane made an enquiry.

'What weight are you, Oliver?'

'Haven't a clue.'

'What height are you, then?'

'Don't know that, either, but I was born about the time they changed the direction of the titles on the spines of Penguin Paperbacks.'

Jane hit me with her pillow.

I woke very early, when everything was still. It had been light for less than an hour. In spite of Jane telling me that she is a heavy sleeper, I moved carefully from under her wrist to a seated position. I watched her sleeping for a moment then decided to get up. However, a covert search for my underwear was fruitless. A predicament slightly funny and acutely embarrassing, I thought. I searched again.

'Bloody hell!' I said to last night's Oliver, stretching over Jane and groping under the bed. 'Bloody typical!'

I repositioned the quilt which I had displaced in my efforts, so as to keep her body warm. It was in the folds of the quilt that I found my underwear. I dressed so quietly that the loudest sound I made was the pulling up of my zip.

In the bathroom I looked at the things women keep in bathrooms. I thought of using the tiny razor to shave but decided that it would not be right on the first morning. I thought the same about Jane's toothbrush (I checked â there was just one).

Standing at the toilet and looking in front of me, my eyes followed the pipe up to the water tank then down the chain to the black handle and held it to my mouth.

'One cheeseburger, one milk shake, one French fry!' I said.

In the living-room I looked out of the window down at the square and checked to see that my car was waiting for me. I thought that I should feel like jumping over the tennis nets, but did not feel inclined to do so because I was not satisfied.

Jane said that I looked like John Garfield the way I stood and stared, then moved. I looked at her wrapped in the quilt as though it were someone else's jacket; someone she secretly loved. I did not know how long she had been awake and watching me.

'I knew you weren't untouchable,' she said. 'When I saw you first I thought you were.'

I was anxious, but I tried not to show it. I offered to make breakfast and went straight to the kitchen. I opened the fridge and drank some orange juice from the glass jar then began reconnoitring. I rinsed under the cold tap the cups from the previous night's coffee.

'I'm watching,' said Jane, standing close behind me in a long woollen cardigan which she clasped timidly.

'I'm watching you,' she said, looking over my shoulder.

Soon, she was making breakfast.

'What's the spaghetti doing in here?' she asked when

getting a box of eggs out of the fridge.

'Oh, I put it in there. That's where I keep mine,' I said, disconcerted by her smile. 'If in doubt, put it in the fridge,' I added, decisively.

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*Waitress* 1st August

WAITRESS

It was Saturday morning again. I entered Bewley's by both doors on either side of the central window display. There were two of me - last night's before and that morning's after. I thought I had pulled myself together by the time I had reached the 'opera box' (my description of the raised cashier's counter that makes you reach to pay like short people and children do) but in fact, I had yielded to the half of myself that wanted to hide. Contentment prevailed, but like the after glow of a good book or meeting with a friend, it mellowed and needed to be renewed. I knew that a glimpse of Lily at that moment would have drained the fresh glow away.

The ground floor cafe has two wings off the centre portion, half of which is brighter than the rest when the sun shines through the sky-light and plain stained glass windows which skirt it. The wing nearest the entrance through the shop houses a staircase leading to the basement cafe, still known as the smoking room. I made for the far end of the cafe, round the corner to the other wing where, I imagine, revolutions are planned. There, I relaxed on a couch.

In Bewley's Oriental Cafes you are bound to see someone you would like to be with, someone you are glad that you are not with and someone whom you wish you had something of in you.

'Large coffee and almond buns, please.'

Which waitress was it, I wondered, my concentration sharpened at the thought of penetrating a disguise without being noticed. Which one had two costumes and ran the risk - perhaps enjoyed, perhaps needed - of living in two different worlds, if there is such a thing? In spite of not believing Bernard's assertion, it was fascinating to conduct so private an investigation; one which relied upon the perceptiveness of my own eyes. I wondered whether or not Violet knew anything of the matter. I was sure that if Lily were with me she would have known which waitress it was.

Harry sauntered into the cafe shortly after I arrived. If it had been anyone other than Harry or Cherry approaching it would have been an intrusion, but they understand that they have special access to my sanctuary which they never take for granted.

I beckoned him over.

'Tea or coffee?' asked the waitress as he sat down. He ordered coffee and when the waitress had gone declared, as he usually does, that tea was just for people who did not drink coffee. I am not sure whether this is a profound or meaningless remark. Harry is not sure either.

'Knew it was your day off,' said Harry. 'I was going to call round to your place this morning, but Cherry wouldn't let me.' He smiled, inwardly admiring the thoughtfulness of his lover. 'She said I'd be disturbing you and Jane. I never think of these things.' I could not help smiling, too.

'Knew you'd be here, though,' said Harry, taking a cigarette out of a fresh packet, turning it upside-down, putting it back in the packet and taking another to smoke. Then, turning in his chair to look at other people, gave his usual speech about not seeing what I saw in the place. This speech always amuses me.

Eventually, Harry brought up the subject of children. He was, as he described it, performing uncle duties that day and wanted help because Cherry and Jane were otherwise engaged in running the shop. He never got a proper answer from me as to whether or not I would assist owing to a minor crisis occurring in that there were no almond buns to be seen on any of the tables and the waitress serving us had entered the shop in search of them and had not returned.

'The almond buns didn't arrive,' Violet announced as she passed by.

'What? Hijacked?' I asked. 'On route from Camden Street to Grafton Street? They'll turn up in Italy or some

other E.E.C. country and someone will have made a fortune sending them across a frontier. At this moment they're probably hurtling across Europe in a juggernaut.'

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1st August *Take It A way*

## TAKE IT AWAY

We arranged to meet later at Cherry's shop. I went walking through Gaiety Green, a tatty arcade kept bright by paint and coloured clothes and short leases; a weekend place open seven days a week for weekend people; a department store with dozens of doorways and windows, run by young people after the biggest financial prize - young money.

Almost every shop has its own music; they play the current electric favourites. The buskers' music fills the entrance arch and from the garage at the far end the live rock rumbles through the walls and along the ground. 'Weekend is best!' everything says.

I walked more slowly than usual because it seemed strange to be visiting Jane so soon after being so close to her in the privacy of her bedroom. I stopped at The Bunch of Grapes, a small wine bar and restaurant and had some muesli to eat. I had had breakfast earlier in Jane's apartment, but I am always hungry the morning after making love and I had been too embarrassed to eat all I wanted. In addition, the buns I had anticipated eating in the cafe had gone missing. The apple on top of the muesli was sliced like Sydney Opera House. Because I was not in a hurry, I left eating that part till last.

When I had eaten all I wanted I mingled with the informal parade outside. There were pretty girls every-where; schoolgirls who changed their clothes many times before leaving their houses. How discreetly they look at upper decks of buses to see who looks in their direction. I, for one, do.

At the end of the arcade in the dark and nasty garage the cheap and vicious perform - ruthless, electric dreamers in need of polish. Bad as the group were, I waited a while and felt the charge. For me, music is the perfect distraction.

Painted on one of the walls was: 'The Black Catholics - young, drunk and proud. The Black Catholics - young, punk and loud.'

'There's no romance' said the writing on another wall. Everyone wanted action and they were shouting for it.

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1st August *The Aftertaste*

## THE AFTERTASTE

There were two. One each. Sarah and William by name. Eight and nine respectively. Cherry, forecasting rain, was buttoning coats and telling the children what Harry and his friend were and were not allowed to do. When I entered the shop my ears were still humming from the music.

'... and no roll-your-own cigarettes.'

Jane was serving a customer and Harry was making a bad job of re-dressing the window. The change the previous night had brought made the encounter with my three friends exclusive, but in spite of my fears, my secretive instincts detected no unwanted interference or loss. In fact, I sensed unsolicited approval. Instantly, I was happy.

I had parked the car off Grafton Street in Anne Street or Duke Street, I was not sure which - Dubliners never know which is which. The children insisted on tormenting an alsatian locked up in a Mini which was parked in front of my car. Sarah wanted to know why dogs sat in the driver's seat of their master's car while he was doing a message. I went into a sports shop - another place in which I feel acutely uncomfortable - to buy a Frisbee, leaving Harry to explain about the dogs.

'Dogs don't think: Oh, now that he's gone, I'll go for a drive,' said Harry, not knowing what he would say next. 'No . . . dogs don't really think at all, they just know, about some things and they know that the driver's seat is, where it all happens from, so they sit in it and wait for something to happen.'

At the zoo, I bought ice-cream tubs for Sarah and William while Harry rolled a funny cigarette. Harry was determined to enjoy the outing as much as the children.

He was smoking when we returned with the ice-cream, but there was a problem: it was starting to rain heavily. Of the shelter available in the vicinity Harry opted for the hippo house, the smelliest of the animal houses. I thought it was a splendid idea and said so. Sarah and William agreed for they looked upon it as an exciting challenge.

Later, in the pets corner, I could not find what I called 'the live stock'. Harry and I examined not only each class, but each individual animal and bird with great concentration. Harry swore that once he saw a live chicken standing in the doorway of a flat belonging to the owner of a Chinese restaurant. I said that I remembered the Chinese family that lived in the 'Rabbit-burrow' but confessed to knowing nothing about the chicken.

'They must have kept it very quiet,' I pondered aloud.

Harry asked the keeper in the pets corner where the space monsters were kept and gave an animated description of the invaders.

In the reptile house I asked in a very loud voice:

'Where are they?'

'There's one!' said Sarah, pointing through the glass at a lizard perched on a rock. I took hold of her outstretched finger and fired.

'Let 'em have it!' I shouted.

William and Harry, Sarah and I blasted away, oblivious of the astonished patrons and keeper.

Harry was sure that the tide would be out on Sandymount Strand, so after our visit to the zoo we drove to the strand to fly the Frisbee. I was distressed to find that the authorities had erected bollards at the entrance beside Harry's signal-box to stop vehicles driving onto the beach. I parked badly on the main road and we ran out onto the strand.

The open space lent itself to Harry's antics which involved the four of us in every conceivable variation on catch, run, throw, splash, jump, dodge and chase. We found ourselves at the low tide water's edge when Howth Head disappeared in a dark rain cloud.

'By the way,' said Harry, 'I found my pilot's glasses. They were in my fishing bag.'

'Where are they now,' I asked. There was a pause before he answered.

'They're great for fishing,' he said, looking up at the sky.

Sarah, who was first to notice the rain cloud, asked how many miles it was to the car. Harry looked at the child, then at me, then at the approaching cloud, then back to the seafront.

'Let's make a run for it!' he said, taking Sarah by the hand. Soon, we were racing up the beach. Harry led and without slowing, tried to anticipate the shallowest points in the snake rivers and pools that had been left by the retreating tide.

'We can beat it if we run!' he shouted with such assurance that even I believed that we would reach shelter in time.

On arriving at the bollards we were drenched, but it did not matter because Sarah and William were delighted with themselves. Harry, too, was enjoying the wet until I stopped and turned to him with an open mouth.

'The bastards!' I said. 'They've towed it away!' My black car was gone.

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*A Second Opinion* 1st August

## A SECOND OPINION

Monday. The gallery was closed and Harry was on the late shift. I sat in the cafe watching the two men in maroon suits conduct people to vacant tables. One, at the entrance, would make signals to the other as to how many seats were required. The other, at the far end of the cafe, would signal how many were available.

Harry strolled in and with a rubber wrist action, threw an imaginary Frisbee to the one with four fingers held up in the air, causing instant confusion. Harry then sat down beside me, oblivious of the puzzled expression on the maroon man's face.

'You know them well in here, Oliver, do you think they'd give you an envelope?'

'I can ask,' I replied.

'Good. Not many people here today, are there?'

'There are fewer people in the world on Mondays and Tuesdays.'

'I suppose so. Where's the old lady who likes the James Bond films?' asked Harry, opening his newspaper.

'Gone,' I said, pointing to the ceiling.

'Ohh,' said Harry, thoughtfully, 'maybe that's why

it seems emptier than usual.'

I sneezed, then sneezed again. 'Twice for a cold,' said Harry.

'Rubbish,' I replied, and went to the 'opera box' to ask for an envelope.

When I returned Harry was engrossed in an article at the bottom of a page of his newspaper and had seemingly forgotten about the envelope which I had procured. 'She should have rung me,' he said, pointing to an article about a girl who had committed suicide. I read the headline and smiled weakly, presuming that Harry

was being ironic, but quickly realised that he was being direct. It was one of the rare occasions when Harry's seriousness surprises and affects those close to him.

Another surprise was to follow, for a typed sheet lying on the table and which was now being read from a distance by a stranger at the adjacent table, was Harry's letter resigning his post at the Sandymount signal-box.

Harry glanced at the woman who was reading his letter, but she continued undisturbed. He leaned forward to catch her attention, but still she continued to read. He stared directly at her and eventually she looked at him.

Harry spoke:

'No-no, go ahead, don't mind me - please.'

The woman smiled and blushed, then looked to the letter again.

'Please, go ahead,' said Harry in a matter-of-fact tone, disguising his astonishment at the woman's rudeness.

'No, I insist. 'No-no.

'No, it's mine - please.

'There's another page - let me see - just under that one ... yes - there we are.

'No-no, please - go ahead. 'No-no. I insist!'

The woman turned to her friend red-faced and grinned smugly.

'I bet you smile like that when you stare at people out of the bus window on a rainy day,' said Harry to her, uppishly.

If there is anything that makes Harry a hero it is the apparent contradiction he presents in that he cares about other people, but does not mind making a mess or creating a commotion if it will make him more comfortable.

After leaving the cafe, I reluctantly paid the fine to secure the release of my motor car from the pound. Harry, who could not help feeling in part responsible for the arrest of the vehicle, asked the official in charge to ensure that the money be used to fill the hole in the road at the top of Harcourt Street. The official did not think him amusing. Consequently, Harry changed his request to a demand and got no satisfaction at all. He ran his finger down the glass partition as I slid my money across the counter.

'Look, Oliver, they never clean the place,' he said, showing his dust covered finger to me.

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That evening, I took Jane to the Na Mara Restaurant, a restaurant that occupies what was once the entrance hall and offices of the train station in Dun Laoghaire. A stairway still leads from the rear of the building down onto the platform. Objects that are no longer in use interest me. The disused staircase was probably instrumental in my choosing of the restaurant. Before entering the building I pointed out the old CIE symbol on a junction box and asked Jane if she, like myself, thought that it resembled a flying snail. She was quite taken by my observation.

After a large dinner we went walking on the seafront. The night was clear and the water calm. I insisted that we walk out on the pier.

'A thing that sticks out in the waves' as James Joyce defined a pier,' I said and explained that the purpose in going to the very end was to get rid of my cold. Jane squeezed my arm and smiled.

'One big sneeze out to sea will do it, do you think?' she asked, still smiling.

'Oh yes,' I said, confidently, but before we had reached the lighthouse at the end of the pier my thoughts were of Harry and the change he was about to make.

'Best time to leave is when you are satisfied,' Harry had said in the cafe that morning. He intended going into the clothes business and had asked me to be his partner. He wanted to plan and run a business and take the risks. 'I'm no adult,' he had said.

I sneezed once, but my cold refused to desert me.

Later, Jane got very annoyed with the key to her apartment when, initially, it failed to turn the lock. I was surprised by her irritation and felt the prod of voodoo needles as she vigorously worked the key. I was relieved when eventually the mechanism yielded to a subtle turn of her wrist.

When inside, I sat down on the bed holding Jane's hand. She pulled away.

'No,' she said firmly. Suddenly, she seemed to be concealing upset. 'I don't want you to think you can come round here just any night you feel like it.'

I made ready for fisticuffs.

'Don't be stupid,' she said witheringly.

I rose to my feet looking for the door, but thinking that I should stand resolute, then Jane put her hand on my arm.

'No,' she said softly, 'I want you to stay.' She smiled nervously and kissed me. 'I get angry when I have my period.'

I smiled and kissed her.

'I understand,' I said. 'I get hay fever and that puts me out of commission too.'

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*All The Symptoms* 7th August

## ALL THE SYMPTOMS

The following day I was sitting alone with my thoughts in Room 38, the Spanish School. It occurred to me that nothing lasts yet there I was, preserving the paintings from destruction.

'The point is,' I said to myself, 'painters will always begin again, won't they?'

Presently, a nervous Italian gentleman enquired about the collection of Irish and English watercolours in Room 32, the entrance to which I guarded. I dutifully explained that the water-colours were on view only on Sundays owing to their delicate state, but then surprised the visitor by unlocking the door, turning on a panel

of light-switches and directing him down a flight of stairs to Room 32. The gentleman assured me that he would not stay long and made his way down the stairs and out of sight. I did not follow, but instead, sat down again and leaned back in my chair.

'What a thing to do!' I said to myself, 'taking a chance like that - the fellow could destroy the entire collection in the time it takes to descend the stairs!' Now why had I let the man into Room 32? I certainly didn't know him, in fact, I thought him rather shifty. Was it just for the thrill offered by the risk involved? - like the thrill provided by a piece I once saw in an exhibition of art involving a fully furnished room. The viewer on entering was invited, at his own risk, to sit in a chair and read one of the magazines provided, or take a drink, or smoke a cigarette, or just sit while at the far end of the room a loaded rifle mounted in a rig pointed at his chair, timed to fire its one bullet sometime in the space of twenty years, no one, not even its creator, knowing when that would be.

For a moment, I thought about my fantasy of a travelling gallery - what was that only a desire to put an element of action into my life of watching? The artists who had painted the pictures which hung on the walls were fortunate, for they had already done something with what they had seen.

Soon, the Italian gentleman's footsteps could be heard coming up the stairs. He looked no more satisfied than when he went in, but he smiled politely, said thank you to me and walked briskly away. I went down to Room 32 and found that everything was undisturbed. I dared myself to be disappointed.

When you are alone and do not wish to be, the worst thought imaginable is that there is something to be done and you are not doing it.

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*Ambulance* 12th August

## AMBULANCE

I watched a pork-pie hat pause in front of a Goya painting. The hat was made of black leather or plastic, I could not tell from where I sat, nor could I recall having seen such a hat in Room 38 before. It hovered in front of the painting, catching the light with every slight movement. Its pilot, a man in his early twenties, stood with his hands in his gaberdine pocket and his white shoes apart.

Perhaps he thinks that *Lady in a Black Mantilla* is looking back at him, I thought. The contrast was a refreshing sight. Both portrait and man coped superbly with being observed.

I panicked when I saw Jane crossing the gallery floor coming towards me. My desire for action was to be answered in an unexpected way. I knew by her uncertain walk that there was something wrong. When she was closer I could see that she had been crying. It was a moment I will not forget.

Jane's brother had been involved in a car accident in a mountain tunnel in Northern Italy and had been taken to hospital. She had been given no other details.

Jane kept saying that she had to be with her brother and it would take too long a time to reach him by plane. While trying to calm her, I was called to the telephone. Cherry was ringing to say that Jane would be calling to the gallery to see me.

'She must have run the whole way,' she said when I told her that Jane was already with me.

I was the only one who did not feel helpless and yet I did not know what to do other than to put Jane on the next plane to Italy. I was afraid to say that her brother was not seriously injured in case he was, but I said it anyway. I was willing to say or do anything to comfort her. I offered to make a reservation on the next

available flight to Italy and assured her that in the meantime Cherry would contact the hospital. I had never had to cope with panic in the quiet of the gallery and I wanted to get out. I hastily arranged my absence with a colleague and left with Jane.

We drove to Cherry's shop and discovered that she had anticipated me and telephoned the airline office to book Jane's ticket on the next flight which was, unfortunately, thirty-six hours hence. I then had a far-fetched idea: I knew that Fitzsimon was to make his journey to Morocco via the South of France; perhaps he could take a passenger.

I telephoned the Stephen's Green Club and had Captain Saul paged. The Captain announced himself formally. My enquiries led to disappointment, however, for Fitzsimon had flown two days earlier. There was nothing to be done except wait.

In the car on the way to the airport thirty-four hours later, everything that, to me, makes a woman vulnerable seemed concentrated in Jane. I felt that I could touch her like never before and yet, in a perverse sort of way, I wished that it were Lily I was driving to the airport. My apparent callousness horrified me, but also made me feel human. I would still want to make love to Lily that night even if Jane were watching her brother die.

The intervening affair with Jane I have allowed to evaporate. Everything is as it was before and I am no closer to Lily; I am just more anxious about the length of the interval I seem to have been living all my life.

It was made known to me at the gallery that there was concern about my recent absenteeism. To compensate for the unstabilizing effects of this reprimand, I diligently kept to my routine of visiting the cafe where I puzzled about the waitress who led the double life; where I sat with my actor friends and talked and watched and listened to Violet tell how purses stolen on the premises would turn up empty in the pews of the church in Johnston's Court and about the 'grub spy' who had recently been on the prowl.

I went to Cherry's shop and to the costumes. I looked at pictures I had marked in books and listened to Beatles records. I continued avoiding Mrs. Shilling and her adopted son. I visited Harry and Cherry in their house more often than before. This routine was a source of strength that had not let me down and now I am relying on it completely for sustenance while I seek a way to approach Lily.

I was pleased to hear Alison's voice on the telephone, surprised to learn that she was telephoning from Donegal and stunned by the invitation extended to me:

'Lily asked me to invite you to a party we're having here, Oliver,' she said. 'I've already said you'd come.'

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14th August *Watching The Cardiograph*

## WATCHING THE CARDIOGRAPH

Today, I was witness to the arrest of a book-thief. I was passing the windows of the large bookshop on St. Stephen's Green when I saw three assistants press him into a corner by the door. The young man said nothing; he could not believe what was happening to him. Twice, he struggled desperately like a captive bird, but failed to raise a straightened arm. I pressed my finger tips against the plate glass window until they turned white. Give him a chance, I wanted to shout. Christ, it was all so wrong. The book could have been as important to him as Lily's diary was to me. Perhaps he didn't even know what he had stolen. Either way, I wanted to shout: let him go; let him run. Can't you *see* his heartbeat?

When the police arrived the book-thief tendered no resistance. He sat low in the back seat of the police car. I knew he would have no defence to offer. What would I have said if Lily had caught me with her diary in my hand?

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*Hospital* 31st August

## HOSPITAL

Breakfast is as important to me as it was to Sherlock Holmes. It is the time to weigh the previous day's events as reported in the newspapers; to read the morning's post; to examine a mystery and contemplate a course of action, but on the morning that I was to drive to Donegal I did not buy a newspaper, nor did I look in the letter-box. Meeting Lily was the only thing that I could think about and I was content to have no coherent thoughts on that subject. I crossed the Liffey to the north side of the city just after dawn. The route to Donegal, although I had never travelled it before, was as defined and personal as the avenue which leads to Lily's house. When you are going to see the woman you love the journey is a pleasure. The place name on the sign posts tells you that she is there. In retrospect, the journey proved shorter than I had anticipated. I hardly noticed the changing landscape or the weather. One of the few thoughts I can recollect is of being stopped at traffic-lights in a town where I noticed that pedestrians crossing the street glanced at me through my windscreen to see if I was the sort to run them down should the lights change. At some point on my solo journey I decided to join Harry in his new venture. Never before had I made so important a decision with so little consideration. It was a day for taking risks and I was thriving on it.

When I had reached the edge of a lake that was the margin of my destination, I stopped and sat a while in my car with the window down looking towards the island that was my target. I then stepped out and stood still to absorb the magnificent silence, but just for a moment, for I was close to Lily and did not want to linger.

The island is about one mile long and a half a mile wide. The reach of water between the nearest points of mainland and island is spanned by a power cable in a single stretch from shore to shore. It is the maximum distance E.S.B. poles can be placed apart and the minimum distance required to preserve privacy.

Viewing it from the mainland, the house is partially concealed by vegetation. Built of wood and red bricks, it has a green tin roof with dormer windows. Two steps take you down from the wooden porch to the rough path that leads to the stone pier. I could see no activity from where I stood. I turned to look at the two cars that were parked near my own at the landing. One I knew to be Lily's, but the other, a red, dust-covered sports car with spoked wheels, I did not recognise. I told myself not to be naive; that the car obviously belonged to Lily's man, whoever he was. Now, I had misgivings: it would be a 'small world' party with numerous people I would think I might have been introduced to once and amongst whom Lily, with her man, would be comfortable and I would not.

I caught myself brooding and took myself to task: surely I am old enough not to be so easily upset, I thought. It was while lecturing myself that Alison surprised me from behind. She had been waiting for me in the caretaker's house, she explained. Her presence was welcome.

The caretaker's son, a wild looking man of about twenty-four, brought a long boat with out-board motor from the island and ferried Alison and me to the pier. Alison sat beside me with her finger tips in the water. She was quite unaware of herself and seemed excited and preoccupied. She was very glad that I had come, she said, and she was sure I would enjoy myself. I thought differently. Aside from being dumb-founded by the misfortune that Fitzsimon represented, I was nervous about meeting Lily because the initial encounter with her I was now sure would be the only occasion on which she would pay attention to me.

I found myself distracted by the third silent entity in the boat, the caretaker's son. The manner in which he eyed Alison would have been mistaken by most city people for suspicion, but not by me.

'You have an admirer,' I whispered in Alison's ear.

'O - I don't like him!' she said with great alarm in her voice.

Fitzsimon descended slowly the steps that are cut in the grass bank above the pier, his arms as straight as an Irish dancer's. I was angry. I was disappointed that Lily was not there on the pier to meet me, but most of all, I felt foolish. I wished I were the cowboy who walks into the saloon and orders a sarsaparilla, because in those pictures when the tough guy laughs, the tough guy gets dead.

'The bastard!' I said to myself as Fitzsimon shook my hand saying that he remembered meeting me before. 'He isn't there when you want him, then he turns up in two places at once - just the sort of trick his kind play.' I was on time, but no other guests had yet arrived. What did that make me, I wondered - a friend of the family?

In the time between my arrival and Lily's return from a shopping expedition on the mainland, Fitzsimon was the perfect host - I would gladly have strangled him with piano wire. He apologised for Lily's absence and said that she would be delighted to see me when she returned shortly. He offered me all the comforts of his palatial outpost and served champagne in the shade of the porch, then, leaving me in the company of Alison, excused himself in order to supervise the preparations for the party. Alison did not allow me much time to finish my champagne, but insisted on showing me the entire house.

The first impression of the house interior is that of a spacious dwelling with low wooden ceilings and heavy furniture complimented by a number of passages and alcoves and a narrow staircase which snakes around the back of the drawing-room chimney like pulpit steps. The place could be a fully furnished hunting lodge or a secluded conference centre.

Alison halted her express tour just once in order to ensure that I would get the most comfortable of -the bedrooms that were to be allotted to the over-night guests. This she did directly, leaning over the banister and shouting:

'David, I put Oliver in Dermot's room!'

Whoever Dermot was, I thought, if he turned up at the party he would discover that he was second fiddle. That was gratifying to know.

Lily returned with a hoard of provisions and a man to tune the piano. Fitzsimon met the boat at the pier while I stood watching the distant figures from the porch, patiently waiting for Lily's attention. I fell in love with her again when I saw her look towards the house then leave her company and come walking up the path looking for me. The peacocks that wander the garden scattered in front of her. She was more beautiful than ever. I fell in love with her again when she kissed me and smiled, telling me how happy she was that I was there.

The first guests arrived. It was now almost dark. The night would be mild, ideal for an outdoor party. I watched the blinking headlights among the peculiar cluster of trees that nestles around the boat jetty on the mainland and stands out against the rough bog, heather and rock of Donegal.

The guests were ferried to the island in two boats. Fitzsimon, impeccably dressed in a light suit and Panama hat, met them on the pier, while Lily welcomed them to the house. They came in all sizes and colours. Many had come a long way and expectations were high; they would not be disappointed for the whole shimmering spectacle was so exclusive and out of place. There was a healthy charge of nervous energy in the air, ensuring that anything could happen.

Powerful coloured lights had been strung along the path from the pier to the house and behind the house was a glowing domed tent that would serve as additional sleeping quarters. To one side of the house an open-fronted shed, freshly painted and lit with flaming torches, sheltered an enormous buffet. There were five prudent waiters dressed in black suits and bow ties attending to the guests. It was an extraordinary sight in

such a setting. A bonfire burned on the lawn outside the house and a log fire filled the grate in the drawing-room which was lit by free-standing candelabra. With French windows opened to the night, music sparked, sprang and flowed from the house, diffused in the trees and rolled across the surface of the lake. Fitzsimon's singer friend from New York who sang jazz songs for friends and rock 'n' roll in concert, with astonishing presence sang, and played the baby grand, backed by saxophone, clarinet, guitar, drums and trombone. The full complement of guests amounted to one hundred and forty. The whole party was so ridic-ulous, yet cohesive, that I could not help but admire the brash engineering of the man responsible.

For three quarters of an hour I could not see Lily or Fitzsimon anywhere. I settled down to a modest bout of drinking and continued to play Indian scout. As on other such occasions, it was Alison who rescued me and somehow made it seem as though she was delighted to have found a companion to plot an escape with. People congregated in the drawing-room where the group was performing, on the porch where the drinks were being served, and in knots on the stairs, in the alcoves, at the buffet and in the garden. Alison asked me if I would like to dance with her.

'It's got to be rock 'n' roll music,' I said, then sang out of key: 'if you want to dance with me.'

'Oh,' she said, not the least bit deterred, 'we can wait for them to play one.'

She led the way through the crowd on the porch. I followed with curt nods, smiles and 'excuse mes' and a combination of all three. I noticed how richly dressed many were, but few would have found a role to play upstairs in Cherry's shop for they were unaware that character is responsible for style. There would have been a place perhaps only for Lily and Alison.

At eleven o'clock the party was very much alive. The fruit of Fitzsimon's Moroccan trip could be smelled and was a perk widely appreciated.

I was startled when Fitzsimon interrupted the journey Alison and I were making and insisted on being friendly by introducing me to some of his and Lily's friends. I was distinctly uncomfortable amongst some of the more forward and inquisitive snobs. I tried hard not to be intimidated and as an example of the attitude I wished to cultivate on such occasions, I kept in mind the statue of George Bernard Shaw which stands in the car park that is the forecourt of the gallery. I am accustomed to thinking that the figure, unabashed, adopts a stance that suggests that Mr. Shaw is awaiting the response to his shout of:

'You sir! You can't park there!'

Later, in the drawing-room, Alison and I stood close to the performing group. The music was stunning. It captured the body and replaced breathing with an energy that temporarily offered immunity to anything. I did not realise that it was rock 'n' roll, but Alison was patient with me; she knew I was looking across the room at Lily who was laughing with people I did not know while Fitzsimon, standing beside her, was smiling at her. Lily was conspiring with her friends and she seemed so very happy. When I looked in their direction a second time Lily was making her way across the room to me. I stuck to the floor, panic-stricken. What would I say?

'Here's your sister,' were the only words I could utter as Lily approached.

'Alison, see if you can get some champagne,' she said, 'I want to tell Oliver something - and hurry back!'

I had never sensed Lily more warm and vibrant. It was the first time I had seen her as spirited as her sister.

'I asked you to come earlier than the others, Oliver, so that I could tell you, but I didn't get a chance to talk - I want the three of us to celebrate before anyone else,' - my heart skipped a beat - 'David and I are going to be married.' My heart stopped.

'Congratulations,' was not hard for me to say, it was just that I had nothing to follow it with. I kissed her on the cheek.

Alison returned with three glasses of champagne and put one in my hand. Lily took hold of my arm and squeezed. The music rushed in to fill the hollow that was left in the wake of my insides as they drained away.

I danced the night away with Alison, trying to make Lily fine work of the imagination. I remained oblivious, most especially to the announcement of Lily's engagement. I had had a drink or two and did not care. I let the music wash through me.

Eventually, I left Alison to her bedroom and, not being able to sleep myself, went for a walk around the island, my way lit for the most part by the moon. The music from the house carried for miles across water and land. At the pier people were dancing in the pools of lamplight and swimming in the water that was illuminated by spilled light, but I did not stop to talk, dance or watch. I was glad of having to fight the rocks on the shore for a foot hold.

At four o'clock in the morning I was sitting on the landing because somebody had taken my room, but it did not matter for I could not have slept. At the back of my mind was the thought that Lily might pass by; it might be the last time that I would see her alone and I desperately needed temptation to make me move.

Presently, Alison came out of her room wearing a nightshirt.

'Hello, Oliver!' she whispered. 'I've got to get a drink of water, my mouth is so dry. It's your fault for making me drink so much!' she smiled and bent down beside me. 'What are you doing out here?'

'Insomnia,' I said, with a grim smile, 'and I want to make an early start tomorrow.'

'I don't know what to do about insomnia,' she whispered, 'but if you want to wake up at a certain time in the morning bang your head on the pillow before you

go asleep - if you want to get up at six o'clock bang your

head six times, or seven o'clock, seven times.'

'You little snorkel you,' I said touching her nose with a forefinger.

Lily did not pass by that night.

In the early hours of daylight, I took a small boat from the pier and rowed out onto the lake. I wanted to escape the party debris, the damage, the weariness and dwindled spirits. The pleasant monotony of boating promised a degree of restoration.

As I drifted in the boat I thought about Leamus the spy, his big secret and his disguise. Suddenly, a notion I had of myself clarified - I was a 'sleeping mole' waiting to be put into active service in the field and had been such as far back as I could remember. In school I had always stood at the corner of the yard and watched the cowboys chase the Indians to one end of the enclosure, massacre them, then get chased back up to the other end of the yard by the same Indians, only to massacre them again. In view of this regular pattern I had often wondered why the Indians got recruits at all, and yet, on the one occasion I did join in it was on the Indians' side.

I wondered if spies ever worked for themselves, because at that moment I was spying without a cause. Only now, as thoughts of Alison's responsive sense of humour and sense of touch purged my brain, did I realise

how attentive she had been the previous night - how attentive she had always been, just like a spy working for herself.

What made so impulsive a girl contentedly dance away the night with me, considering the state I was then in? I remembered the first time I had danced with Alison in the kitchen of her house. How well she slow danced now. My heart started to beat again.

When I returned to the pier I met with a rather disorientated guest who, with slit eyes, appeared to be searching the horizon. The young man explained to me that the host and hostess, whom he had not yet met, and a number of friends had taken off on an expeditionary cruise to islands further up the lake - somehow, at the time of boarding, he had managed to mislay the pier. I smiled a thin smile and made my way to the house.

There were no signs of repair or clearance anywhere. The whole place seemed deserted except for a piano tuner who could be heard at work in the drawing-room. It was a pleasant surprise for me to find that Alison was at the piano, picking out random notes.

She asked me if I had eaten breakfast and I answered that I was not hungry. Alison made me breakfast. Most of the guests had left for Dublin where the party would resume in The Bailey pub that evening. Those who remained were either still asleep or had gone with Lily and Fitzsimon so the house and garden, indeed the island and surrounding lake and countryside, were quiet.

In the kitchen Alison bravely broke the silence with sizzling sausages. She asked me if I knew that in Germany sausages were called 'policemen's fingers'. I laughed heartily and declared my appetite.

'Shhh,' said Alison, fighting off a fit of the giggles, 'Dermot is still asleep in the pantry.'

'Who *is* Dermot?' I asked.

'David's friend. He'll be best man.'

I laughed louder than before.

'In the pantry? Good girl!'

With both feet on the chair on which she was sitting, her chin on her knees and her arms around her legs with jumper sleeves pulled over her hands, Alison looked out from under her fringe at me eating my breakfast. When I came to the last sausage she spoke:

'Are they nice?' she asked, scrunching up her nose.

'Don't you like sausages?' I asked. She shook her head vigorously, indicating that she did not. I put my fork down and sighed contentedly. 'I'm full.'

'What about the last one?' Alison protested.

'I couldn't,' I said.

'Yes you can,' said Alison and reached across for my fork, stuck it into the sausage, held it two feet from my mouth and then slowly moved it towards my sealed lips.

'Be-baw be-baw! Open for the ambulance!'

I ate the sausage. I had no choice.

'Mother thinks you still eat prairie sandwiches in your flat in Dublin,' said Alison.

'What the hell are ... ?'

'Sandwiches with fresh air in them.'

I have a sense of humour, but an inability to have fun. That is the way I like it. It is part of being a private person. Only on the rarest of occasions when a gesture or token of some kind is imperative, do the two overlap without my being aware of it. Being alone and at ease with Alison that morning was one such occasion.

She was not content merely to have me describe how we might catch the peacocks - the most unsociable of the previous night's party guests - but insisted on implementing my scheme immediately.

I announced the instructions as I carried them out:

Take one tin of sweet corn

One bottle - methylated spirits

Soak former in the latter

Spread on ground

'Wait 'til you see,' I said. 'They'll eat the stuff then keel over.'

Shortly, not a bird was left standing. In spite of being in love with Lily, I had never felt her reach for me as Alison did that moment on the porch as she stood beside me laughing at the antics in the garden.

However, there was the eternal question of what to do next. Suddenly, all that was left to do was to say goodbye to Lily and Fitzsimon when they returned.

Now, I was anxious to be with Harry and Cherry. Immediately Lily returned, I said my good-bye. I shook hands with Fitzsimon and kissed Lily and Alison and stepped down into the boat, all the time wanting to run.

'We'll see you in Dublin,' said Lily.

'Remember, you have to come and paint mother's greenhouse,' said Alison.

When I switched on the ignition to my car, I let go of Lily for ever.

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18th December *The Adrenalin Injection*

## THE ADRENALIN INJECTION

Hand to hand combat with a traffic warden has changed my life.

The man had just put the parking ticket under my windscreen wiper when I caught sight of the uniform. I decided that I was not having it. The man's ball-point pen was still between his meaty fingers when the attack came. Nothing distinguished this traffic warden from any other, except maybe the brightly coloured tie with a carpet pattern, which I made full use of by pulling hard on it and delivering a crashing blow to the crown of

the lowered head. I then swung a left kick to the shin and directed an uppercut to the warden's right cheek. The warden grabbed me by the chin and pulled. I snapped an arm lock on him but received a smack on the neck which caught me off balance. Down we fell onto the pavement, grappling with each other. We got wedged between the curb stones and wheel of a parked car. The warden struck out again with a brawny fist, but missed target and hit the hub-cup of the car wheel, giving me the advantage. I delivered a series of assorted blows, then promptly got up and walked away while the traffic warden staggered to his feet watched by passers-by.

I felt I was a pioneer like Paul Newman in *Cool Hand Luke*, who wrings the heads off a line of parking meters in the opening scene of the picture. I marched down Grafton Street with the veins standing out of my neck. I entered Bewley's and made straight for the 'revolutionary corner'. Never had I felt such a sense of liberation. It was like asking for the Class B duckling, shooting the space monsters and hammering the black spider all rolled into one. It was as stimulating as siphoning somebody else's petrol tank or making a citizen's arrest.

I became aware of the man sitting opposite me. He was looking at my hands buttering an almond bun. The man's eyeballs were riveted to the action - he was day-dreaming in *my* bun.

'Excuse me,' I said, contemptuously, 'you're not one of these people who stares at other people's food, are you?'

The man went into mild shock.

'You don't *pray* over food, do you?' I asked. 'I bet you turn the colour knob on your television set up full. You're that sort of person.'

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Who saw me beat up the traffic warden, I wondered as I furtively looked round the street corner to see if the gathering had dispersed and it was safe to go to my car. Does anybody spy on the spies? Only other spies do.

I might have to go underground, I thought. I would hide in the roof of the bandstand in Herbert Park, I decided. I would have to organise provisions for a long stay. That would be Harry's job. I began compiling a mental list:

I primus stove

I tooth brush

I pair socks

21bs. Bewley's Number One blend

2 giant boxes corn flakes (too noisy?) 1 radio

milk

eggs 1 dozen of

I went to the telephone in the far corner of the cafe and rang Alison's number. I did not allow it to ring twice and persuade myself that she was not at home and put the receiver down; instead, as it rung, I thought about meeting her on the landing the morning after the party when she came out of the shower wrapped in a towel, smiled, and said that she still had bubbles in her hair.

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*The Big Operation* 18th December

## THE BIG OPERATION

It is of the utmost importance that I be in Bewley's Cafe in Grafton Street tomorrow. Alison will be there tomorrow at my invitation. I do not know if she loves me and I have no idea what she will be like when she is sixty-four. Her elusive nature makes her something I will have to conquer each day, but I hope that I can draw strength from the contents of this, my diary, to win Alison's love. I will certainly try. This time, I will risk everything.

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