A Quantum Bridge Between Right and Left Hemisphere Genius:

A Novel and Exegesis
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Abstract

This practice-led PhD consists of two elements—a novel titled Saoradh and an accompanying exegesis which discusses the processes, techniques, methods and creative pathways utilised when producing the novel. The novel is set in the United States of America and the Republic of Ireland, from the 1920s to the 1950s and follows the paths of characters dealing with profound aspects of the human condition. The exegesis interrogates the practice of creation of the novel through five distinct perspectives; character versus plot, structure, landscape, narration and creative process. The novel’s inception, creation and production is tracked, both in real time and through reflective practice, offering new insights into ways of working for the Creative Writing student and practitioner. The reflection on practice is grounded in a psychological model that is compatible with literary models of textual analysis. Creative practice is in turn embedded in a larger conceptual matrix; the quantum field. As demonstrated by the character of Rory in the novel, the proposition of separation between the functional aspects of the brain’s left hemisphere and the creative possibilities of interplay between the right hemisphere and the quantum field are put forth. The novel is held up for comparison to the works of other authors, to provide alternative approaches however, the focus of the exegesis is always on my own practice of creative writing.
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Declaration by Candidate

I certify that this thesis, entitled 'A Quantum Bridge Between Right and Left Hemisphere Genius: A Novel and Exegesis' submitted for the degree of PhD contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma; to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and is not based on joint research or publications.

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Introduction: Or, Considerations Before Leaving Port

At its core, this project is an exercise in answering epistemological questions. What is my knowledge? What is tacit and what is the new knowledge attained through the process of starting and completing this project? How do I uncover it and extract it? And what is the procedure to integrate that knowledge directly into a creative piece of work, in my case, a novel. Then, finally, how do I articulate that journey? These questions are asked because what is primary and essential is the transcription of the transformation of a purely subjective experience (the act of writing a novel) into an object (the exegesis). This object must clearly explain the subjective experience. The empirical evidence of the subjective experience would itself become the exegesis. The exegesis presents a model for practitioners to employ, whereby the practice of writing supplants theory as a priority.

As Deleuze (1995, p. 161) claimed, things and thoughts advance or grow out from the middle and that’s where you have to get to work, that’s where everything unfolds. Past the midpoint of my life, I was engaged in a dance with something I couldn’t physically see. I drew on ‘knowledge’ acquired in the past, but also be keeping track of what was happening right now so I could predict where I might end up. I describe my initial prediction as a journey whereby I would be sailing on an ephemeral sea, the wind, an infinite backdrop. The sea would be a vast store of knowledge. This ‘data pool’ has many names. In quantum physics, it is often referred to as the quantum field, or ‘zero-point’ field (McTaggart 2001, p. 125), the Void and the Infinite in various spiritual circles (Mellon 2008, pp. 182-98). This field of awareness, memory and knowing (McTaggart 2001, p. 2), is something that spiritual masters have urged people for thousands of years to devote themselves to realizing. Researching the quantum field gave it a physical image in my mind; a library containing all experience and knowledge. It is from this source that the wisdom of the novel’s character Rory is drawn. The phenomenon of the genius Rory demonstrates is put forth fictitiously in the novel then deconstructed in the exegesis.
While 'leap before you look' (Forster 1952, p. 5) is the motto of creativity, this was a stance I could not take. I had to be prepared to catalogue the journey. Therefore, before setting sail on this journey I did an inventory of basic supplies. Nearly a full year before enrolment, I had a series of lengthy conversations with the person who would become the primary supervisor of this project. In those discussions, we freely expressed our aspirations for both the novel and the exegesis. In doing so, I was operating under an assumption that I had a clear destination in mind with landmarks I would take notice of and report on throughout. We were interested in a project which would produce two, distinctly separate, but forever interwoven works. The one on the left would be the novel, in the form of a novel. The novel would consist of a story, but would contain and reveal specific aspects of the human condition that we both found fascinating; materialism versus spirituality, connection with higher realms of consciousness, conditions of friendship, and autonomy versus conformity. The one on the right, the exegesis, would explain how the one on the left came to be.

Having read a number of articles and books on the artefact/exegesis model and having examined some successful submissions, I came to several conclusions, among them that there was no ‘map’ which I could follow in a linear way that would guide me to a destination. I would, to some extent, have to draw the map as I went along. This confusion regarding the artefact/exegesis model is addressed in Chapter One of the exegesis.

Nonetheless, I was left with several choices. I could drown myself in reading theory and criticism then ‘slot’ my novel conveniently into a (pre-selected) pigeon-hole, all the while writing an accompanying exegesis which justified (and highlighted) that I was accomplishing that goal. Following this course seemed abstruse and tedious. For example, studying ‘Post-colonial theory’ exhaustively, then constructing a novel which stuck exclusively to that theory, then writing an exegesis which proved that I had done both, might underscore a point (*I sure did understand my post-colonial theory*) but, in my mind, it could also, accidentally produce a wilfully opaque work. I was
apprehensive about such a narrow focus. My desire was to produce a contribution to knowledge which would benefit the field of Creative Writing as a whole.

A second option would be to write the novel in isolation without regard for the exegesis, then slam together the latter. This method would be to ‘prove’ and in doing so validate, the methods I employed in the creating of the novel. To me, either of these approaches reeked of fraudulence, and that is a word I must focus on before continuing any further.

To undertake a project such as this is to be granted an opportunity which will occur only once in one’s lifetime. What I am specifically referring to in the ‘once in a lifetime’ statement is the opportunity to observe and interrogate one’s creative process for the first time. Having completed the project I am certain that this, the first interrogation will be the most profound, full of indescribable stimulation, joyous insights, moments of unease, anxiety of the ‘I’m freaking out’ variety, and the discovery of a few things I wish I didn’t know. I add that while subsequent investigations may probe deeper, or build on these volumes, the virginity of discovery has ended. My first kiss wasn’t the best ever, but it was without doubt the most thrilling.

Therefore, I had to honour what I was investigating; my own mind. How do I internalize a stimulus; in the form of a colour, a meadow, an emotion? And how does my mind then process that stimulus and somehow transform that personal experience into a sequential series of letters which accurately conveys the precise meaning I intended? To successfully answer these questions in a clear and cogent manner was a daunting task indeed. However, my intention with this thesis was explicit. I was to be honest and authentic out of respect for the uniqueness of this inaugural examination of my writing. I had to find a way to pay attention to a degree I had never done before. First, there is paying attention to the source of creative practice. Where does this story come from, how does it ‘evolve’? Who are the characters? Then, what is it in me (either from acquired knowledge or experiential data) that merges with ‘the story’ and informs the narrative?
Finally, what is going on in and around me while I am transcribing these things onto a keyboard? The awareness of multiple events occurring (either one after another or simultaneously) had to be ‘caught’, understood, recorded accurately, analysed, then processed and translated back onto the page (in the exegesis) in a manner which was articulate enough to be understood and interpreted by a reader who, by nature, would be a total stranger. A connection had to be developed and maintained through the medium of the written word, through two separate ‘books’.

Although ‘a writer’ for years (having been a journalist for a decade and a half and a published novelist), at no point had I ever even considered a meticulous inspection of the hows and the whys of my own writing. It’s just not something that would have occurred to me. It is also an endeavour that I believe the majority of creative artists shy away from, out of a genuine fear of losing their relationship with the muse; that mystical dance which produces creative works. Thus, without the demand for an exegesis, there was myriad knowledge, experiential data and ways of working that I would have continued to take for granted, glossed over or explained with dismissive and ignorant statements like, ‘I dunno, I just write.’

In my second career as a mental health professional, I gained an understanding of unconscious processes. My experience working with psychiatric patients and personal clients in my private practice heightened my own self-awareness and honed my observational skills. This acquired knowledge positioned me advantageously to fish around the unknowns of my own mind and ‘see’ what is happening under its surface.

So, before setting sail, it was imperative (for me) to have a clear idea of how I was going to acquire the data necessary to produce an honest account of the creation of the novel. Like Krauth, ‘As a writer, I was a kind of scientist: I observed, hypothesized, and experimented’ (2006, p. 190). I wanted to place myself in various stances throughout the entire project. Most important was to engage a ‘witness’ to what was happening as I ‘worked’. I don’t want to sound schizophrenic, but for me to provide an authentic
account, I felt that there had to be a second ‘me’ who hovered above the body and the computer; a lookout, sitting in the crow’s nest of the ship, looking down at what was happening. Making myself aware of what was happening then recording those happenings both in real time and reflexively, after a session of writing, was crucial. This witness was however, dynamic. Sometimes it was a ‘parrot on my shoulder’, examining not from above, but from right next to me, other times it was across the bow, looking back at me squarely in the eyes. By engaging this approach, I could work on the novel and the exegesis simultaneously and end up with two pieces of work which interacted with each other, and yet stood alone as well.

In the exegesis, I made every attempt at creating a linear narrative of the creation of the novel, but admit that the writing of the novel did not follow a path which went from point A to point Z. Therefore, the individual chapters of the exegesis do not follow a chronological order per se. However, what the chapters do accomplish is explain what I did.

Thus, I refer back to the opening paragraph of this introduction. Like any voyager to a new land, I needed a sturdy ship, a map, a navigator and a log book. The ship was my own years of experience as a writer. I wasn’t fearful of staring at an open sea; the blank screen. I had sailed before. The map was a work in progress; the creation of character and plot, the development and refining of narrative structure, and experiential data from my life which informed the novel. The map would also, in a more literal sense, take shape in an outline, a three-act structure for the novel. The navigator was my ‘witness’, observing both severe and subtle shifts in the direction of my writing. The log book was a Second Order Journal, in which I detailed nearly everything I did, and a digital recorder which I filled with both shouts of glee and curses of anguish.

The whole point of this undertaking, for me, was to accomplish interwoven goals which would result in a body of work that engaged a reader. It was also critical that I brought knowledge previously unknown to me into the light of day, inspected it closely, then articulated both the
acquisition and recovery of that knowledge (and practice) in a manner which was coherent, accessible and comprehensible. By doing so; by demystifying the process of ‘writing a novel’, what I would end up with was not an academic project which would be read only by examiners then allocated to a shelf, but rather, complete a project which any person interested in writing or the creative arts could engage with and refer to as a guide to further their own practice. The following excerpt from writer David Foster Wallace in an email exchange between himself and writer Dave Eggers, while lengthy, sums up the intention of the project as a whole:

We live today in a world where most of the really important developments in everything from math and physics and astronomy to public policy and psychology and classical music are so extremely abstract and technically complex and context-dependent that it’s next to impossible for the ordinary citizen to feel that they (the developments) have much relevance to her actual life. It might be that one of the really significant problems of today’s culture involves finding ways for educated people to talk meaningfully with one another across the divides of radical specialization…And it’s not just the polymer chemist talking to the semiotician, but people with special expertise acquiring the ability to talk meaningfully to us, meaning everyday shmoes [ordinary people]. Practical example: Think of the thrill of finding a smart, competent IT technician who can also explain what she’s doing in such a way that you feel like you understand what went wrong with your computer and how you might even fix the problem yourself if it comes up again. If you’re like me, you practically drop and hug the ankles of technical specialists like this, when you find them. As of now, of course, they’re rare. Maybe there should be a word; maybe being able to communicate with people outside one’s area of expertise should be taught, and talked about, and considered a requirement for genuine expertise…anyway…it’s interesting as hell. (Wallace 2003)

Only time will tell if what Wallace and Eggers discussed was achieved, but I find comfort in the fact that what follows is honest, accurate
and resolute. It is also the end of what has been the most invigorating undertaking of my life, which challenged me in ways that I never could have predicted, demanding flexibility, adaptability and above all, attention.

When structuring the exegesis, the points of inspection were chosen carefully, for I wanted to highlight what I believed are the two disparate actions which constitute my creative writing practice; skill and craft. Skill is reliant more on cognitive and task-oriented efforts, while craft follows a more intuitive and emotional leadership. In Chapters Two and Three, which focus on Character and Structure, skill is interrogated. In Chapters Four, Five and Six, the inspection homes in on craft; the emotion- and intuition-driven process of writing. Landscape, Narration and Creative Process are scrutinized to articulate the subtleties of creative writing practice. In doing so, a balance between skill and craft is offered, to give a thorough account of the task of writing a novel.

Chapter One of the exegesis, which follows the novel, outlines the methodology employed throughout the process of the creation of both novel and exegesis. The chapter details the techniques and tools employed to take subjective experiences (the activity of writing itself, the creation of character and plotlines, as well as experiential and phenomenological data which directly inform the novel) and transform those subjective experiences into 'objects': the novel and exegesis.

Chapter Two interrogates the novel through character and plot. It explains how the characters and plotlines of the novel were conceived, created, moulded, adapted and transformed both purposely and organically. By organically, I mean the phenomenon of how specific characters or themes took on 'a life of their own' and 'grew'.

Chapter Three investigates structure, meaning how the novel took shape first as an outline, then started ‘becoming’ a novel through writing practice. Chapter Three also investigates and explains the single largest crisis encountered during the creation of the novel; the struggle to interrupt the chronological narrative to insert the character of Rory into the novel.
Chapter Four examines the novel from the perspective of Landscape, thereby re-positioning what is commonly known as ‘setting’. In doing so, additional layers of texture were added to characters, to the story and to the text itself. By re-defining ‘setting’, Landscape became a character of itself, taking on a personality of its own, thus informing and influencing apposite characters in the story.

Chapter Five scrutinizes the ‘telling’ of the story through an examination of narrative techniques employed in the writing of the novel. Three perspectives are introduced, then compared against another work, J.M. Coetzee’s Youth (2000), chosen for its use of many narrators.

Chapter Six explores the interplay between conscious and unconscious processes. In doing so, it asks and answers the question, ‘is there stuff going on in this book that the author wasn’t aware of?’ This is done through juxtaposing an analysis of another work, Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (1962), for comparison and evocation of inference. Juxtaposing a text against the novel serves as a point of entry for a discussion on deeper aspects of the creative process including an interaction with the quantum field.

Finally, conclusions are drawn as to findings contained in the exegesis and this submission’s limitations, and alternative methods of interrogation. There are also suggestions for the application of this methodology not only to the Creative Writing discipline, but to the creative arts as a whole.

I have three additional notes. The novel is written from the perspective of a male-dominated society; the United States of America in the 1930’s to the 1950’s. Further, as the novel is written for an American audience, the spelling and punctuation in the novel follows US English. Finally, the novel immediately follows and although the reader could read this submission in any order, I would suggest that the novel be read first. A revisiting of this introduction after reading the novel will perhaps aid the reader in engaging with the exegesis in the most meaningful manner.
Saoradh; A Novel
Saoradh, (shee-ruhgch)

Gaelic

1. n. liberation. the state of not being in confinement or servitude.
2. n. immunity. exemption from normal penalties or liabilities granted to a special group of people.
Prologue

I shall not insult the reader by attempting to deceive her into believing that what follows is anything more than what is intended. This is not an act of contrition by a man who is seeking absolution, for no penance could be served which would suit the offenses committed. Nor is it a confession grounded in the vain hope of relieving my guilt. It is the truth, or what I know of it, and the start of that truth is the admission that I am a coward. I am a coward in the deepest sense of the word. Cowardice is a trait which has a long history in my family, my gender, my species.

Many were the times when I made conscious choices based on my spinelessness, surrendering my free will to the blind eye of avoidance, going about my business under the self-delusion that I could put what I did or witnessed out of my head, or worse, con my corrupt mind into believing that my actions were those of a good man. At the time, my conviction and dedication told me this served a valid purpose which was, of course, to maintain the perceived comforts of my lifestyle, my position of power, my possessions, my life. In truth, my entire existence has consisted of little more than the pursuit of my own glory, resulting in scant moments of relief and pleasure, but always returning to a state of being where I was encased in a tomb of fear. Alas, that life has been a waste.

I have often asked myself, “What would someone else do if they were in my position?”, and on rare occasions I did seek counsel, only to be told that my course of action is precisely what my confidante would do under the same circumstances. Of course, those occurrences were also blatant acts of manipulation, for I would never have had the courage to ask someone who might point out my many weaknesses, or guide me down the path which was all-too-obvious, the path of that which was right, proper, decent.

So, I propose to make an attempt at doing that which has evaded me all my life: to tell the truth. However, my truth is one of perspective, for my shame will not allow me to write this story in the first person. While I do write about myself, I appear as a character in the narrative. Many of the people in this story are real unto themselves, while others are composites. My cowardice and fear of retribution refuses to allow me to use the names of the individuals involved in my sham of an existence and as such, any similarities regarding name or description are purely coincidental.

At its core, this is the story of a man I knew intermittently; at various stages of his own life. He is a man you may have met, but you would not know of his greatness, for he redefined the word for himself, on his own terms, transcending our
modern conception of it in the process. For reasons I will likely never understand, he kept no secrets from me. He explained his experiences in glorious, vivid detail and yet his existence, magnificent and pure as it was, is so far removed from my own, that in the end, it is something which my feeble mind can only speculate on.

When he disappeared, he left for me his personal journals, some of which I have excerpted verbatim. These excerpts and all references to him appear in italics throughout the book.

I would like to think that he was of the belief that experiencing the privilege of knowing him, and having access to his most private thoughts, would somehow transform me into being more than I am. Upon reflection, all they did was magnify the pointlessness of my own existence.
The Senator entered the ballroom amidst the fanfare necessary for him to make any public appearance. Having just been re-elected, his grandiose persona swelled to a point where those in attendance might have felt they were merely nothing more than annoying decorations, which, in The Senator’s mind, is precisely what they were. He was first-generation Irish, but his heart pumped red, white and blue. The phrase “This country has been very good to my family,” appeared in so many of his speeches, conversations and casual interactions that it became something of a joke among his peers in Congress. Yet, to be fair, it was true.

As a child, his father, The Patriarch, who was born on a farm outside the town of Skibbereen, in West Cork, had steamed out of Cobh, on Cork harbor along with other starving, penniless Irish whose parents were among those lucky enough to have survived the famine of 1847, with the hope of creating a new life in America. Upon leaving Ireland he swore never to return; “on principle”, he liked to say. It was a promise he kept.

At the time, Ireland was little more than a poor, dirty extension of England, run by barons who exploited the Irish by leasing them their own land to farm. The Patriarch had no interest in the politics of his homeland, and if asked, could not answer when Ireland was named a free state or a republic. Unlike his fellow immigrants who became street thugs, bullies, petty criminals and low-level hustlers, The Patriarch masked his own criminality in the guise of a businessman, thereby relieving himself of the necessity to ever raise a fist or pull a knife. Working his way west from where he landed in Boston, he became a foreman in the mines of Montana, where his countrymen risked their lives on a daily basis, mining copper. By the time he was thirty, lacking any formal education, The Patriarch had finagled his way into a position where he alone oversaw U.S. Steel’s entire operation in Butte.

For years, he watched his fellow Irishmen lose arms, legs and lives in ill-executed dynamite excavations, tunnel collapses and amateur planning and execution of dangerous but profitable advances into the earth. The Irish were the backbone of the mining industry in Butte. Men arrived seeking fortunes, but most ended up in one of three possible positions; scrounging up enough savings to pay for their fare back east and then back to the homeland, drinking away their monthly pay or, for the scant few, creating a life for themselves in their new country. The Patriarch never saw himself as “one of them.” He sniggered at the drunks, made light of the deaths and cursed the maimed for their carelessness, always quick with
an explanation which exculpated him of any part in the countless mishaps. In his criticism of his countrymen, he was merciless and brutal. But the “filthy micks” weren’t the only group for which he held disdain. “Chinks” had built the railroad which linked the East with the West, “niggers” were lazy, foul creatures, “guineas” too boastful and flashy for his conservative taste.

For reasons known only to him, he saw himself as somehow superior to his fellow immigrants. In a blatant display of his feelings of entitlement, he seduced and slept with no fewer than one hundred of the local women, acts of hubris which only served to make him all the more well-thought-of in the eyes of his employer. “Collins the Cocksman” was his nickname at US Steel.

Forsaking a full salary for shares in the company, The Patriarch managed to amass a small fortune in stock, which he sold mere months before the Great Stock Market Crash of October 29, 1929. Unlike the thousands who arrived in America with him only to find more misery and suffering, The Patriarch flourished. Re-settling in his adopted hometown of Boston, he was retired at the age of forty, a multi-millionaire at forty three.

Having been savvy enough to marry into the family of the head of Boston’s finest law firm, he was survived by two sons. After ambling through private grammar school in Boston, the eldest, Charles Collins, Jr. found himself at Philips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, to this day one of the most prestigious college preparatory schools in the country. (Few knew that there was a direct connection between Junior’s appearance at the academy and the new seaside summer cottage on Cape Cod which the Dean of Admissions found himself in possession of). The second, Patrick, was coerced into paying what The Patriarch felt were his own dues to his adopted land, by embarking on a career as an officer in the United States Army. Patrick was one of the thousands to die on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. Patrick’s bereaved mother was engulfed by a cloud of gloom from which she never emerged, committing suicide with a deadly concoction of vodka and sleeping pills. But The Patriarch called in a few favors at the newspapers and the editors dutifully printed fraudulent stories about her “tragic death following a long battle with ‘an illness’.”

The Patriarch masked his own grief and guilt over the death of Patrick with a combination of false pride and bourbon. As the gatherings in his cavernous home dwindled, his stories regaling the heroism of his fallen son grew in stature to a point where an imbecile who happened to find himself in The Patriarch’s drawing room on
a Saturday night might well have left the party believing that Patrick had nearly managed to defeat the Third Reich single-handedly.

Maintaining a piercing stare and stiff upper lip, he lived another thirty-two years. In the end, he died alone in his weekend home in Marblehead, leaving a lasting image of having been one of the few Irish immigrants to have fully experienced “The American Dream.” He was a symbol of what was achievable in this great country, and his death was treated with much elaboration. Among the attendees at The Patriarch’s funeral in Boston in 1951 were the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the CEO of US Steel, a former President of the United States and the striking 40-year old figure of Charles Collins, Jr. The Patriarch was eulogized as a “great man of the highest integrity,” a “pillar of the community,” and “the living embodiment of all that was possible in this magnificent land of opportunity.”

Not a word was ever publicly spoken of the myriad infidelities which had ruined so many women’s lives, his bigotry, his violent, temper or his unconscionable swindling, the deceptive business deals which extorted the savings of innocents, padding his own wallet in the process. No, to those who claimed to know him well, he was among the finest of men; a champion, a winner, a man of such strong character and moral fiber that one could only dream of ever replicating the shining example he set.
“Junior” studied the grave of his father long after everyone had paid their respects. Growing up as the son of The Patriarch, with the added burden of carrying his name, had not been an easy task. Then again, it had its advantages. Although a dullard, he was nonetheless provided with the finest education an overbearing father could buy. Following four remarkably mediocre years at Philips Exeter he was granted admission to Harvard, where it was his duty to study the law. The university’s 1928 decision to ban all fraternities only opened the door for a newer and more subtle form of social networking. Thanks solely to his surname, Junior was recruited into the most elite of the secret societies on campus and remained a member throughout his inauspicious academic career. By rubbing shoulders with the sons of some of the richest and most influential men in America, Junior embraced the identity thrust upon him; a personality he had never quite managed to forge on his own.

His saving grace was his natural athletic ability. If it involved a ball, Junior could master the sport within days. First it was baseball, then basketball. Being the best at both at Philips Exeter gained him a notoriety his brain would never have provided him. In baseball, he was the team’s number one starting pitcher and on games between starts he played shortstop. Though tall and lean, he awed his teammates with his grace on the mound, in the field and at the plate. As a pitcher, his languid wind-up ended with a giant stride toward home plate, and as his trailing right arm caught up with the torque his torso created, the ball seemed to explode from his hand as if shot from a cannon. It wasn’t uncommon for him to pitch a seven-inning game and finish with over fifteen strikeouts. Those batters fortunate enough to make contact with his fastball were usually so shocked by their luck, rather than immediately run towards first base they hesitated, creating more than enough time for the infielder to throw them out.

Junior was the pride of the team’s coach, Mr. Lovell, thanks in large part that during Junior’s four years at Phillips Exeter, the team was unbeaten by arch-rivals Andover, with Junior no-hitting Andover twice and shutting them out in his other six starts.

At shortstop, Junior seemed to glide to both his right and left, fielding ground balls and making the throw to first all in one, fluid motion. At a hitter, his liquid stroke sounded like a rifle blast when he made solid contact, which was just about every at-bat. He led the team in batting average, hits, home runs and runs-batted-in every year of his four year career at Exeter. He never played a game for the Junior
Varsity, spending his entire career on the Varsity squad, the last two as one of the team’s co-captains. It was, at the time, an unprecedented career.

In basketball, he flourished as a forward who could dribble the ball like a point-guard. Standing nearly six-feet four-inches tall by his senior year, he was usually being guarded by the opposing team’s center, who would match him in height only. Junior’s ability to slash to the basket was never-before-seen in a player of his height and again, the basketball team’s success came mostly from the broad shoulders and agile body of Charles Collins, Jr. As the saying goes, “The leaf doesn’t fall far from the tree”, and just like his bombastic father, Junior lapped up the attention heaped upon him with relish. As The Patriarch had ensured his enrollment, his athletic prowess ensured his graduation.

On entering at Harvard, however, he consciously drifted away from team sports, focusing on individual endeavors so that he didn’t have to share the spotlight with others. Picking up a club for the first time at the age of sixteen, he was a scratch golfer by his freshman year at the university.

The grace he’d shown on the baseball diamond transferred beautifully onto the tennis court, where he was a nearly unbeatable singles player. He refused to play doubles, saying it bored him. With most players, the university’s tennis coach, Mr. Radley, would have threatened to kick him off the team if he didn’t play both games, but Junior’s talent was so valuable that Radley had two choices; make an example of Junior or lose to Yale, and at Harvard, when losing to Yale is an option, you don’t have any options left.

Despite barely cutting the mustard academically in his freshman year at Harvard, Junior’s athletic achievements brought him the notoriety he sought, and he was quietly recruited into a small, influential group known only as “The Fellowship.” Made up of the sons of some of America’s most influential men, Junior confronted his image of himself as both “an athlete” and as “Charles Collins, Jr.” He came to despise the nickname of his youth. He was now 19-years old, a sophomore in college, and although clueless how to do so, he was a young man desperate to re-invent himself. In “The Fellowship” he entered into a friendship with Kenneth Murphy, the young man who would become his wing-man, best friend, partner-in-crime, closest confidante and ultimately, his most valued advisor. In the years to come, the friendship would be tested to the absolute limit several times, but right from the beginning it was obvious to all that together, these two young men could accomplish anything they set their minds to. And right from the start, they started dreaming big.
Kenneth Murphy was the youngest of five children, born, like The Patriarch decades before him, in the West Cork area of Ireland, but he was shipped off to New York City at the age of five to live with, and eventually be adopted by his widowed aunt, Bridgette Daly. Bridgette was nearly twenty years older than Kenny’s mother, but looked twice that. Her hard life only got more difficult with the death of her husband. The circumstances surrounding the passing of one Conor Daly, was the subject of many discussions in the Irish pubs of New York. Depending on which pub you were in and who was holding court, Kenny’s uncle was either a paid hit-man for the Irish Mafia who ran their rackets out of the Hell’s Kitchen region of the city, a “rum-runner” who made a fortune during the time of Prohibition or an upstanding businessman. The only indisputable fact regarding his death was that he had fought off the effects of three gunshot wounds to the chest, stomach and leg for five days, before expiring at New York Mercy Hospital at the age of fifty-two.

The appearance of the freckled, precocious Kenny had seemed to bring “Bridey”, as his aunt was known, back from her own grave. From the moment she met him at Ellis Island, she knew the youngster was going to be a handful, but a joyful one at that. Looking back at the landmark which had brought glee to millions of immigrants, five-year-old Kenny said to Bridey, “Aye, so that’s the Statue of Liberty, then, is it?”

“Aye, Kenny, that it is.”

“Don’t see what all the feckin’ fuss is about!”

That statement summed Kenneth Michael Murphy up in a nutshell. Nothing appeared to intimidate him. Throughout his life, he would meet every potential obstacle with total determination. His will was unbreakable.

Despite being smaller than the other boys in his grammar school, he never backed down from a fight. In the classroom he was a teacher’s dream, drilling himself relentlessly until he had mastered whatever equation, sentence structure or science problem put in front of him. With the tidy sum of money left behind by her departed husband, Bridey could have afforded to send him to private school but was fearful of both being alone and leaving what little social circle she had in Hell’s Kitchen, so Kenny toiled away at public school until his dogged determination and years of straight “A’s” came to the attention of his Junior High chemistry teacher, Mr. Tillinghast.

Tillinghast was a rare man in those ambitious days of fledgling capitalists; a man with a top-flight education. He had passed over multiple business opportunities
and offers from “the old boy network” to focus his attention on teaching the wild, young Irish of Hell’s Kitchen. Among academics, his reputation was impeccable, so when he contacted the head of The Taft School, in nearby Watertown, Connecticut, Kenny’s admission was a foregone conclusion.

Kenny ploughed through his four-years at The Taft School like a wrecking ball shredding a brick building. His effort was unmatched by any other student, and while he was clearly far from the most naturally-gifted scholars, the sheer force of his will got him to the number two spot in his graduating class, which was exactly one spot lower than what Kenny felt he had earned. Kenny had many reasons for this perceived snub. First, he was mocked by the vast majority of his fellow students who found learning far easier. They made fun of Kenny’s often ink-stained shirts and general shabby appearance. He was short and squat in stature with eyes that wandered and bulged. The center of his face was dominated by a sprawling pug nose. His defensiveness manifested in a quick temper and foul-mouthed remarks. His outbursts were a source of disdain, not just from his peers, but from some of the staff as well.

By ignoring the deep hurt of being ostracized, an eerie darkness took seed deep in his soul and his foul mood was matched only by his constant quest for retribution against anyone who slighted him in the least. He dreaded bedtime, for the blackness of his room only intensified his feelings of loneliness. It would have been easier to stuff his head under his pillow and break down in tears, but to cry would have been to surrender, no, to admit defeat. For Kenny, this was unacceptable. Thus, instead of a classmate, his closest friend was anger.

What drove this silent rage were the constant reminders that he was an outsider. He was not one of them; the upper-class, privileged and elite of American society. The barrage of insults and repudiations he had suffered in Connecticut had left not only painful scars. They also had given birth to a maturing and powerful deviousness.

His final year at The Taft School was unbearable. He was so consumed with his application to Harvard that he chewed his fingernails until they bled, found concentration on studies nearly impossible and shed an alarming amount of weight. So strong was his self-doubt that he was absolutely certain that a rejection letter would leave him with little to live for. He desperately needed to wrestle control from an admissions committee he was convinced would dismiss him without so much as a thought. Lying sleeplessly in his bed, he made a calculated decision to turn his anguish into action.
It was well-known that Kenny’s calculus teacher, Mr. Williamson, was a member in good standing of the Harvard Alumni Association. To all who knew him, Williamson was the consummate scholar; meticulous, thoughtful, patient and highly intelligent. He was married with three grown children and his office was a shrine to his offspring’s accomplishments. His eldest, a daughter, had produced his first grandchild, a boy on whom he doted.

Mr. Williamson also took great pride in his appearance. Although in his fifties, he retained the looks of a much younger man. His custom-tailored shirts accentuated the broadness of his shoulders and the narrowness of his waist. His perfectly-creased trousers surrendered to Italian leather shoes polished with such care that they reflected any light source which they came into contact with. His thick, dark hair was the secret envy of many of his balding colleagues. To all who claimed to know him well, Mr. Williamson was the human form of what The Taft School represented. To Kenny, Williamson served as a constant reminder of what he felt lacking in himself. He studied his teacher like a diamond cutter searching for the tiniest of flaws in a gem.

On an unseasonably mild November afternoon, Williamson sat leisurely in his office, his feet on his desk, a small pile of mid-term exam papers resting in his lap. Unlike many of his colleagues, Williamson, ever the mathematician, enjoyed the task of grading papers. He studied each student’s exam looking not just for correct answers but also for the organisational skills and thought processes which led to each student’s answer. Engrossed as he was in his work, he jerked with surprise when Kenny announced his arrival with a guttural clearing of his throat.

“Oh, hello Kenny,” Williamson said as he removed the papers from his lap and returned his feet to the floor, sitting upright and pulling his chair toward his desk.

“Hello,” Kenny replied without looking at Williamson. Kenny’s eyes scoured a bookcase opposite the teacher. He removed a single, framed photograph from a shelf. It was a picture of Williamson, clad in weekend attire; perfectly pressed khaki shorts, a navy polo shirt and a pink cashmere sweater tied loosely around his neck. In the photo, the teacher thoughtfully crouched before his grandson so he could make eye contact with the child.

“Nice,” Kenny said in a flat whisper. Williamson’s brow furrowed.

“Can I help you, Kenny?” Kenny turned to face the teacher, holding the picture in front of him, tapping his fingernails against the glass of the frame.
“Well now, that’s an interesting question,” Kenny said with a cold face that revealed nothing.

“Why is that?” Kenny turned his back to the teacher, addressing the bookcase, not Williamson. He traced his right index finger along the front edge of a shelf.

“You’ve got quite a nice set-up here, don’t you think? You’re admired by the staff and respected by the students. Good husband, loving father and by the look of things, quite a Granddad as well. Yep, I have to hand it to you, Mr. Williamson.”

Williamson’s squinting eyes relayed the oddness of Kenny’s bizarre materialization in his office. Kenny set the photo he had been holding back in its place and turned toward the teacher.

“I’m just wondering what might happen if people suddenly became aware of your Thursday night visits to the apartment of Mr. Raible’s daughter? I mean, don’t get me wrong, she’s a beautiful young woman, my emphasis being on young.”

Kenny clucked his tongue then continued. “That could get quite messy, don’t you think?” Out of the corner of his eye, Kenny detected a slight tremble in Williamson’s lower lip.

Kenny’s letter of acceptance to Harvard arrived two weeks later. Where he expected to feel waves of relief, an end to the searing tension he’d endured, a sense of accomplishment or at least some air of anticipation, there was only a renewed sensation of gnawing ambition. The full academic scholarship had gained him entry to the kingdom. He would now have to ingratiate himself with the blue-bloods.
A chill washes over Rory as he comes into the world. He is not cold as such, but rather he is aware that the warmth and comfort of his mother’s womb has been replaced by a much less inviting place. Where he had only blissful silence he now is inundated by sounds; the rustle of cotton cloth, the high-pitched tinkling of metal objects, the murmurs of concerned voices.

He feels disorientation. He’s gone from complete weightlessness to a sudden feeling of heaviness. Cast into a world where gravity reigns, there is a constant pull on his body. As he is lifted he feels it, as he’s laid down he feels it, as he lies on his back he observes his own weight pressing him down on the surface of the cot. His tiny body is wrapped in a rough material which irritates his velvety skin, but never once does he cry out in discomfort. In fact, his silence is so uncharacteristic of those who came before him, of what the people charged with his care are used to, that their first instinct is to feel concern. It is so odd for one as delicate as he not to spend every waking moment screaming out with fright, totally confused by the strange new surroundings he has found himself in. Yet he doesn’t. There is only that look; the look that shows he is very much at peace. Those observing him find that look anomalous. In fact, the serenity he exudes brings only anxiety to the nurses and doctors. It’s just not normal.

One day into his existence, he opens his eyes and starts to take in his surroundings. Lights surround him, but they are not the sort of lights which bring warmth and ease, they are harsh, bright, glaring, invasive. Having been immersed in total darkness since he can remember, this new world of light is unpleasant, and he finds it bearable only by squinting, to lessen the pain the light inflicts on him. Then there is the noise. The high-pitched screams of the infants surrounding him, the low-pitched hum emitted from the powerful lights, the voices of the adults who check on him. The sound of their voices crash against the concrete walls and reverberate in waves, pounding against his frail eardrums. And the smells! The noxious, omnipresent odor of sterility which overpowers his tender nose causes more unpleasantness, but rather than dwell on these unending assaults on his senses, he turns back to himself. There is only his breath. Of that, he is in complete control. He places all of his attention on the sensation of breathing in life: A long, slow inhale, a measured, prolonged exhale. Over and over and over again. He senses his own frailty and focuses his efforts on building strength.
Leaning against the bar, Charles was chatting with one of the other members of the Harvard Tennis Team when he felt someone grip his elbow.

“Charles, come here a moment,” said Gordon Standish. “I’d like to introduce you to Kenny Murphy. Kenny, this is Charles.” Kenny had learned quickly at Harvard that getting into “The Fellowship” was crucial. He’d also learned that Gordon Standish was the young man everyone wanted to get close to, as Standish relished his role as leader, networker, host and Big Man on Campus. The lineage of Standish was impeccable as he was a direct descendent of the legendary Pilgrim Miles Standish, a passenger on The Mayflower and the second man to step foot in The New Land when he leapt onto Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620. Kenny had worked for two years to first gain Standish’s confidence, then to be accepted into “The Fellowship.”

His introduction to Charles happened at the first of Standish’s weekly Friday night gatherings in his stylish brownstone apartment in Cambridge, not more than a five-minute walk from the Harvard campus, at what was the start of their junior year. The apartment had been in the Standish family for nearly two centuries and was considered hallowed ground thanks to the honour roll of powerful men who had held court in its drawing room.

Kenny had studied his classmates thoroughly. Standish was a young man who was going places, but he was also frighteningly intelligent. Kenny needed an easier mark. Along with the privileged upbringing and the trust funds that awaited him, Charles Collins also possessed a naivety and softness. He was a plodder; a graceful one, but a plodder nonetheless. He was exactly what Kenny was looking for. Many a partnership had been forged in that room and on that particular Friday night, an alliance was borne between Charles and Kenny which would ultimately seal their fates.

“So, you’re the Charles Collins,” Kenny said with a smirk that immediately brought a sheepish grin to Charles’s face.

“Captain of the unbeaten tennis team; object of every co-ed’s desire.”

“Knock it off”, Charles laughed. “Pardon my own ignorance, but I’m not precisely sure who the Kenny Murphy is.”

“Hah! Touché,” Kenny fired back without so much as a flinch, “I guess you could say I’m one of those guys who just feels lucky to be here. I wake up every morning in a cold sweat, certain that the Dean of Admissions is going to storm into
my room to inform me that he’s very sorry, it’s all been a terrible mistake, but I’ve got to go.”

“Ah, I see,” Charles chuckled. No long, boring lineage of whatever seems to pass for greatness on your side, eh?”

“Well, unless you count my old man scoring the winning goal for Cork in the All-Ireland Final against Tipperary, then no.”

“So, you’re a real Irishman, then? Tell me, what do you make of this fine country?”

“Charles, about all I’ve seen in my fourteen years in what you call this fine country are classrooms, school libraries, cafeterias and the passing of the seasons. You don’t think a mick like me with the map of Ireland stamped on his forehead got into this place on account of me good looks, now do you?”

Looking down at the pumpkin-face of Kenny Murphy, Charles nearly coughed. Throwing a hand on Kenny’s lumpy shoulder, he said, “Come on then, let me get you a drink.”

Over the next three hours Charles and Kenny fell into an easy conversation helped nicely along by the half-bottle of Jameson Irish Whiskey they threw down their throats, compliments of the Standish family bar. Charles was a light drinker, for he never liked the feeling of losing control of his faculties. Kenny, on the other hand, swilled anything that was free of charge as if his life depended on it, and easily out-drunk Charles by a ratio of four to one.

They spoke briefly about American sports (of which Kenny knew next to nothing about) and Irish sport (of which Charles knew next to nothing about), but where they found common ground, and intense passion, was politics. As both of them were studying law, each expressed surprise that their paths hadn’t crossed before. Kenny lapped up Charles’s tales of The Patriarch’s rise to fame and glory and for him, the conversation ended all too soon.

Needing to get up early for a tennis practice, Charles left just after 10pm, thanking Standish for his hospitality and agreeing to come back again the following Friday. Before departing, he and Kenny had made an appointment to meet for lunch on Tuesday. On his walk home, Charles smiled to himself as he recounted the evening. Kenny Murphy, he thought, was both a feisty and savvy character. Kenny was brash and fearless, loud and full of confidence. Maybe a rich trust-fund kid like himself could learn a few things from the aggressive young Irishman.

Kenny stayed late, deftly prodding the by now very drunk Standish for more information on Charles Collins. He knew all about The Patriarch, both his enormous
successes and his shenanigans. What he was looking for were Charles's weaknesses, for without knowing them, Kenny couldn't control the relationship. Three years into his academic career at Harvard, Kenny had finally met the man he knew was going to be his ticket, all right. And he was going to cash that ticket in as often as possible.
He feels stronger. The long periods of peaceful sleep and the never-ending supply of milk have built Rory’s body up to that of a full-term baby. He is aware of the changes that go along with his improved health. The lights are turned on less frequently. The people charged with his care don’t disturb him as often. He knows he will be leaving this place soon.

A man and woman stand over him, looking at him with adoration. He feels their protection showering down on him. He is safe with these people. The woman reaches down and gently slides her hands underneath him, lifting him gracefully to her chest, cradling him in a way that brings safety. His body rocks back and forth in unison with hers as the man observes, smiling.

These people take him away from the lights, the sounds and the smells which bring him so much unease. He travels to a place where there is soothing warmth, pleasing smells.

Here there is peace, calm. There are no loud noises or disturbing vibrations. He experiences a tumbling sensation in his stomach which he instantly recognises as contentment. This is home.

Time passes and he is driven to explore his surroundings. But, what appears to many as childhood curiosity is in fact, to him, the simple confirmation of what he already knows to be true.

He is aware of everything around him and at the same time detached. His ability to walk, speak, read and write comes swiftly, long before what would be expected, but his response to the awe he inspires is a look of astonishment that he would receive praise for such things. He doesn’t understand what the fuss is about. Everything comes to him naturally with little exertion.

A routine rapidly developed between Charles and Kenny. The lunch on Tuesday turned into a daily affair. Friday nights were reserved for “The Fellowship” gatherings at what was referred to between the two of them as, ‘Standish Manor.’ Kenny skilfully found out what classes Charles intended to enroll in for the following
semester and, with a bit of careful maneuvering, found himself seated alongside Charles.

Charles continued to play competitive tennis for Harvard, which Kenny found himself jealous of for two reasons. First, he did not possess an athletic bone in his body but more importantly, the tennis team provided Charles with an opportunity to make friendships that excluded Kenny. This left him feeling powerless and threatened. But Kenny came up with a brilliant scheme.

Charles had made no secret of the fact that he struggled to maintain the solid grade point average he’d managed to set, so whenever Charles was away with the tennis team, Kenny huddled over a table in the library, collating and assembling a streamlined set of notes for Charles to review upon his return. Kenny’s ability to edit up to three days worth of missed lectures, notes and readings into a wonderfully succinct one or two page summary was not only an immense skill, but a life-saver for Charles. After nearly every quiz or exam, Charles turned to Kenny and said, “You saved my ass again,” but he always said it with a smirk or followed the comment with a playful punch to Kenny’s shoulder. Charles was indeed indebted to Kenny, and although each knew it implicitly, neither ever brought it up; Charles, out of fear of showing a chink in his veneer of self-assuredness and Kenny, out of fear of jeopardizing the friendship. The way Kenny always saw it was that he needed Charles a lot more than Charles needed him.

As their junior years came to a close, Charles asked Kenny about his summer plans. Kenny said he wasn’t sure, said he was weighing up his options. When Charles tried to inquire about what, specifically, those options were, Kenny was vague.

“I might do an internship with the Fitzpatrick campaign. You know, get some real-world experience. But I’m also considering staying on over the summer. Professor Grossman offered me a spot on his research team.” Niall Fitzpatrick was a former judge who was making a career change and running for a vacant seat in the state House of Representatives. Morris Grossman was an esteemed academic whose work on the economics of the developing middle class was being met with great interest throughout the Ivy League. Both men did indeed have openings. Neither had ever heard of Kenny Murphy.

In truth, as he had every summer since his first year at The Taft School, Kenny was planning to return to the squalid apartment in Hell’s Kitchen, New York, to spend his days working in the sweltering heat on the docks, and trying to tune out what he felt was the incessant babbling of his Aunt Bridey at night. Bridey’s former
husband was well-respected around the docks and when the workmen learned that Kenny was his nephew they'd taken him in as one of their own. The work was hard, but in the eight week summer break Kenny had always earned more than enough money to survive the entire school year. But Charles had other ideas.

“Listen, we've both exhausted ourselves the past ten months. We've made the Dean's list and we’re staring at one more year of forced diligence before law school. Why don’t you join me at my summer place in Marblehead?” Kenny struggled to control himself as Charles went on.

“It'll be fantastic. I'll teach you how to sail. You need to learn, you know? Maybe see if we can scare up some female companionship at the Remington Yacht Club? Huh? What do you say?” Miraculously, Kenny was able to utter, “Sounds great!”

Even though he had indeed put forth a great effort to balance his schoolwork with his duties to the tennis team, Charles did actually want to show Kenny his appreciation for his loyalty and friendship. Charles Collins, Jr. was becoming a model student and Kenny was largely responsible. But in that moment of invitation, what was going to be just another ordinary summer for Charles was much, much more to Kenny. It was yet another step into the upper echelons of society. “Summer in Marblehead? Are you fucking kidding me?” Kenny thought to himself.

By weaselling his way into The Fellowship, cleverly working Standish and now becoming Charles’s most trusted friend, Kenny Murphy was making it happen for himself. Maybe that cantankerous bastard The Patriarch had been right. Maybe this really was the Land of Opportunity, where the streets were paved with gold for anyone with half a brain and a finely-honed ability to manipulate a relationship or two.
“So, this is it,” Charles said to his companion as he turned the car into the driveway of the Collins family summer home. Kenny stared blankly at the white colonial-style home as they drew closer and closer. He’d seen photographs of the home in the living room of Charles’s off-campus apartment in Cambridge, but in real life, the house seemed bigger, the lawn seemed greener, the sky a deeper and more lustrous shade of blue, the Atlantic Ocean blending more perfectly as a backdrop. No photo could evoke the tingling he felt.

Charles eased the car right up to the vestibule which offered shelter for entry through the front door. The semi-circular driveway was so wide, another car could have pulled up alongside and no one would need worry about banging their door into the other’s vehicle.

“Don’t worry about your suitcase. Leave it. Come on, let’s go in.” Kenny nearly tripped as he stepped around the car. Selecting a long, thin skeleton key from a ring, Charles inserted the key into the gigantic front door and unlocked it, pushing the door open to allow Kenny to enter first. Kenny stepped into the foyer and gawked at sight that spread out before him. An enormous sunken living room lay straight ahead with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the ocean. Rows of books lined the north and south walls. The dark oak wood floor was polished to a near mirror-like shine, while outfitting the room was an assortment of leather couches, chairs, and a leather-topped coffee table. To his right was an enormous dining area which, by counting quickly, he saw could seat ten.

“So, will this do?” Charles’s enquiry echoed off the cathedral ceiling and Kenny nearly jumped out of his skin.

“It’s fantastic!” Kenny couldn’t mask his enthusiasm any longer. “Good God, Charles, this place is unbelievable. Why don’t we quit school and just hang out here for the rest of our days.”

“Don’t think I haven’t thought about it?” Charles said with a mischievous grin. “It’s crossed my mind several times, most often right before I leave, but we don’t have to worry about that right now, we’ve got the whole summer in front of us. Come on, I rang ahead and had Joseph stock up the kitchen. I’m famished. Let’s eat.”

“Who’s Joseph?”

“He’s been my father’s butler for over 20 years, terrific man is Joseph. You’ll meet him later.” Charles led Kenny into the kitchen, which was divided by a rugged-looking counter surrounded by leather-cushioned stools.
“Take a seat. I’ll fix up some lunch.” Charles set about preparing two well-stuffed sandwiches filled with chicken breast, tomatoes and fresh lettuce. He added a thick slice of fresh cheese from a brick which sat on the counter-top and put the sandwiches on separate plates. Kenny thanked him and waited for Charles to finish pouring them each a glass of milk before biting into his sandwich.

“Jeeshush, thish ish good,” Kenny chortled. Charles nodded. The two barely spoke as they ate. The only sound was the pounding of the ocean against the rocky beach just outside the kitchen door.
Despite their lack of experience with a child, to say that his caretakers are astounded by Rory’s exploits would be an understatement. At times his deep, inherent wisdom and unbreakable sense of calm unsettles them. Where they see their neighbors’ children regularly throw tantrums, make demands and seek attention, they experience none of that with Rory. Where other children whined and cried, with Rory there is an innate sense of confidence and remarkable self-reliance. He possesses an ability to entertain himself for hours on end, never pleading nor seeking approval from them. He quite simply seems to know what he is doing at all times, and not in a demonstrative manner, but in a quiet, matter-of-fact way. Time and again they say to one another, “That’s just who he is,” a phrase they have employed to assuage their own bewilderment; their inability to explain the unexplainable.

In Rory, there is a complete lack of any of the tempestuous outbursts so evident in other youngsters. Rory is never impulsive or thoughtless in anything he does. Rather, each of his actions seems to be carefully measured and extremely well thought-out and when each exploit is completed, Rory, totally unaware of an audience, simply nods to himself. His nimble fingers construct exquisitely balanced towers of wooden building blocks he pulls from the box on the living room floor. His body stretches high, but his steady hands place the final block on the top of his tower. Then, rather than swipe at it with his hand to send the blocks tumbling to the floor, Rory thoughtfully deconstructs the tower, block by block, placing each piece back in its box. It appears that the completion of any task logically ends up precisely where he has planned, or where his mind’s eye has envisioned.

Happening upon something of interest, Rory studies it with hypnotic focus. He inspects an object for minutes, sometimes hours, his face blank with concentration. Only his eyes show expression. They narrow as he scrutinizes and widen when he discovers. And then there is that odd head movement. The man is the first to notice it. Rory’s head, always tilting down to the left, leaving the right side of his crown reaching skyward.

When Rory undertakes the task of walking for the first time-months before an infant could be expected to-rather than offer encouragement, the man sits in his chair and watches, first with amusement, then with wonder. Crawling on all fours in the
kitchen, Rory suddenly stops and maneuvers himself into a sitting position in the middle of the floor. That’s when it happens. Without showing any intention, Rory’s chin pulls itself ever-so-slightly down toward his left shoulder. The right side of his neck stretches, automatically, gracefully, and with it, his head slowly rotates, leaving the right side of it cocked upward towards the heavens. He closes his eyes and a warm smile slowly crosses his face. The man’s upper body leans in, he is captivated by what he is witnessing. Moments later, Rory slowly opens his eyes and in one motion, rocks forward, places his hands firmly on the floor, slides his feet squarely under his hips, pushes against the floor and stands perfectly erect. The man’s jaw drops, but he remains silent. Rory begins confidently striding across the floor.

* "OK, you take the wheel, Captain." Charles had steered the Lady Ore from out of the harbor under power, through the jetties and out onto the open sea. Kenny studied his every move with admiration and a tinge of jealousy. Charles’s physical undertakings always looked so graceful and effortless.

"I’m going to kill the engines and haul up the foresail." A mumbled “OK” was Kenny’s nervous reply. Kenny was tentative as he stepped into the cockpit. He gripped the wheel so tightly that the blood drained from his knuckles, leaving them bone-white. Terrified and exhilarated at the same time, he followed Charles’s instructions to the letter.

"Fix your eyes on a point in the distance, watch the compass and try to maintain your line."

Charles had hoisted the mainsail before they slinked out toward open water and with a strong on-shore wind, had made it easy for Kenny by setting the Lady Ore on a course that would leave them parallel with dry land. He knew it was Kenny’s first time on a sailboat and as tempting as it was to have a laugh at his expense, he could see the anxiety on his friend’s face and couldn’t bring himself to frighten him anymore.

The Lady Ore was a marvel. The eleven-meter cruising sloop was hand-crafted from mahogany and cedar, outfitted with solid brass winches and trimmings and built for knitting through the turbulent Atlantic under any conditions. It was sleek, fast, elegant and, most importantly to Kenny, solid. It had a small galley below deck and could sleep four comfortably, but, other than Charles, no member of the Collins family had ever spent the night at sea. In fact, if Charles wasn’t around, The Patriarch would pay two or three of the local boys to sail the boat for him while he
entertained his companions. The Patriarch’s sailing partners ranged from business associates, to the wives of business associates, to the blossoming daughters of business associates. He had no interest in the sea. It was all an elaborate show. For The Patriarch, the Lady Ore was little more than another reminder of how successful he was. Charles’s connection with the Lady Ore was much deeper.

When he was ten years old, the eldest son of the harbormaster had taught him how to sail on a smaller lightning-class sailboat. Charles was hooked from the start. At sea, there were no expectations to live up to. There were no orders being barked at him by his often angry father and there was no pressure to perform. By the time he was 14 he could handle the Lady Ore with the assistance of a couple of hired crew, but he made sure to never be near the boat when The Patriarch had plans to “go for a sail.” He took the Lady Ore out as often as he could, but he never spoke of it with The Patriarch.

As Charles finished hoisting the foresail, Kenny heard a loud snap as the sail filled with wind and instantly, the boat smoothly increased its speed. Startled by the noise, Kenny felt his jangled nerves fray even more.

“How are you doing, Sport?” Charles asked as he eased his way through the tangle of cables on his way back to the cockpit.

“How does it look like I’m doing?” Kenny croaked back. Surrendering control of any kind was foreign to him and such, rather than allow the wind to dictate the direction and speed of the sailboat, Kenny found himself in a wrestling match with the wheel.

“Hey, hey,” Charles soothed, “You’re doing just fine. Just relax and work with the wind. You get her right on course and then you’ll be making full use of the sails.” Reluctantly, Kenny surrendered to the natural forces trying to guide the boat. As he did so, the wind took over. Charles spoke in a low voice.

“Good job. Just keep her right on this course. Steady as she goes.” Charles leaned the small of his back against the side of the cockpit and observed Kenny as a doting father might look on a son.

“See, the trick is to not fight against either the boat or the wind. Go ahead and loosen your grip on the wheel a little.” Kenny let his fingers relax.

“That’s it…that’s it. You’ll find that there’s a very delicate balance here, Kenny. If you let her, she’ll steer herself,” which was true. Charles resisted his urge to take over at the helm. With Kenny, he’d felt a bond stronger than he’d ever had with his younger brother, and wanted to let Kenny figure it out on his own. As they
continued to sail down the coast, he watched Kenny’s entire body settle. The Lady Ore cruised along effortlessly.

“Yep, you’re a full-blooded sea-dog now, old boy,” Charles said without a hint of sarcasm. Kenny glanced at his friend. Seeing the ease in his posture and the confidence in his distant stare, Kenny uncharacteristically let his guard down.

“You know, Charles, I can’t begin to tell you how grateful I am for your invitation to bring me down here this summer. A guy like me? Shit, I’d never dreamed I’d get a chance to take a summer off and really relax, you know?”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know.” Kenny squinted into the distance. “It’s kind of hard for me to put into words. I guess I just feel like I’m always fighting against some enemy I can’t even see. It’s hard to describe.” There was a long pause between the two. “I mean, do you remember one of the first things I said to you when we met at Standish Manor? About how on any given morning I felt like the Dean was going to come to my room and wake me up to say it was all a mistake and he was sorry but I had to go?”

“Yes, of course I remember you saying that.”

“Well, the truth of the matter is I wasn’t really joking. Harvard’s great, don’t get me wrong. I love everything about it. I love feeling like I’m part of something really special; the tradition, the history, everything. Because if I’m part of all that, if I’m part of something special, then, in a way, me being part of something special makes me something special too, sort of by proxy, you know?”

“Yes, I understand what you mean.”

“Well, I really want to believe that, you know?” Kenny stole a quick glance at the compass. “I really want to believe that I’m on solid ground and I’ve got a bright future and all the rest of it. But, see, there’s this other voice in my head that never lets up on me. It’s like this judgmental old bastard who is always shouting at me, and what he says is if I don’t somehow get the best grades in every subject or if I don’t answer every question on every test with absolute pinpoint accuracy, then they’re all going to figure out that actually, I really don’t belong there, and when they figure that out, they’ll send me back to New York, and then all I’ll be just another mick, fresh off the boat, with nothing but a life of misery ahead of me, a nobody, a nothing.”

Charles let the silence hang in the wind. It couldn’t have been easy for Kenny to say that, he thought to himself.
“Kenny, I'll let you in on a little secret. Being Charles Collins, Jr. is no walk in the park either.”

For a moment, Kenny looked at the figure leaning against the cockpit; the tall young man with his arms crossed confidently over his chest, staring into the distance at something only he could see, and in that moment, Kenny understood perfectly what his friend meant. He let out a long sigh and a broad grin crept over his face.
As a young man, Rory is both fascinated with and spellbound by water. He spends countless hours sitting on the shore of the enormous bay for which his hometown is named, watching the sun’s rays perform their sultry dance across its surface. He can sit in perfect stillness, not a muscle in his body moving, as he observes the tiny ripples of the almost-glassy bay reflect and refract the light into countless diamonds, rubies and emeralds. His eyes absorb flashings of brilliant purple, burning white, glowing fuchsia. And as this waltz of perfection is performed an elation fills him so fully that at moments he feels like he might burst.

He experiences the same sensation following a long spell of rain. He walks in the breaking sun to the creek dividing his caretakers’ property. The creek turns into a torrent of rushing water following the previous days’ downpour. From the kitchen window, the woman watches Rory disappear like a ghost into the brambles that line the creek. He’s there one second, invisible the next.

One day, when he is just entering his teens, the woman follows him through the field, toward the creek. The woman walks quietly, so as not to be noticed, but she knows that with Rory she could make as much noise as she wanted and he would pay her no heed. The woman is guided not by a desire to snoop on the boy, rather by a childish curiosity.

Rory delicately parts the branches of the dense underbrush and glides to a small perch; a low-hanging branch of a tree overhanging the creek. The branches whistle as they spring back to attention. His step is light, barely leaving a footprint in the damp earth.

He boosts himself up onto the branch and spins his body slightly so his back faces upstream, and loses himself in the cadence of the rushing water below him, its pulsating flow and mellow hiss in rhythm with his body. He watches undisturbed by the buzzing insects, the cries of the songbirds in adjacent trees. He is only snapped out of his trance when he hears the woman squeal in pain as she is pricked by the thorny bushes Rory so easily navigated. He drops out of the tree and strides toward her, a barely perceptible grin on his face.

“Here, let me help you.”
“I feel like such a fool,” she whispers to the ground as he untangles her. Her experience at the school has shown her that teenagers bristle at the intrusion of adults into their lives, but Rory’s face is full of warmth. He is touched that the woman takes such an interest in his actions. He leads her to a space beneath the tree he was sitting in; a gently-sloping bank of the creek which is bathed in sunshine.

“Look,” he says.

The woman turns her eyes to him, trying to decipher exactly what he’s observing, but his eyes have a glaze over them. She shifts her attention back to the rushing water, scanning it for some sign. The woman’s eyes scour the creek up and down. Nothing.

Then she searches the opposite side of the creek’s bank, combing the trees, shrubs and grass for any hint of activity. Frustrated, but not wanting Rory to know she is, she keeps her stare straight ahead and asks Rory to explain what she’s supposed to be looking at.

“The water; look at what it does when it meets an obstacle. It’s fascinating,” he says in a soft voice. The woman tries her best to follow what Rory is saying. Rory can feel her discomfort. “See that boulder, just there,” Rory says, pointing to a large rock in the center of the creek, about twenty feet downstream from them.

“Yes, I can see it.”

“Watch the water as it approaches the boulder and how it reacts when it finds the rock in its path.”

The woman watches for a few seconds but still isn’t clear what she is supposed to be seeing. Rory continues.

“See…rather than try to overwhelm the boulder, which is much larger and heavier than it, the water merely glides against and around it. It’s beautiful, don’t you think?” Rory’s detection of such simple wonders always amaze the woman. Finally seeing
what he sees, and in doing so, understanding the deeper metaphor Rory is relaying to her, her body slackens. Calm envelops her.

“Yes, Rory”, she sighs. “It’s truly marvelous.”

* 

Happening annually on the last Saturday in August, the Remington Yacht Club’s End of Summer Gala was the social event of the year for the privileged who summered in Marblehead, but saying Elizabeth Brewster was excited would have been a lie. The daughter of the lieutenant governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had endured nearly three months of her mother’s incessant gossiping, complaining and, most hurtful, her criticism. Elizabeth was desperately looking forward to returning to the safety of Vassar College, the finest women’s university in the country, for what would be her final year.

As the only daughter and the youngest of three children, Elizabeth’s childhood had been filled with paradox. While she appreciated the protection she received from her brothers, she had endured a confusing relationship with her parents. Obsessed with work, her father offered only fleeting attention, but at least he was gentle with her. On the other hand, she had grown to severely resent her mother. Mrs. Brewster’s harsh judgments left Elizabeth always feeling as though her best was never good enough. Elizabeth’s attractive features, quick wit and intelligence had made her one of the most popular young women in the Brewster’s social circle, but they were lost on her mother, who was forever finding fault in her. Whether it was her choice of clothing, an exam paper that “could have been better” or a slight fluctuation in her weight, Mrs. Brewster had a way of always making her daughter feel small and incompetent, a matter exacerbated by a life-threatening battle with scarlet fever at the age of eight. Deep within, Elizabeth had always felt frail.

For Elizabeth, life at university, away from her mother’s piercing scrutiny, was like a release from prison. The freedom she experienced on the campus released her long-repressed spirit. She had flourished at Vassar and she was counting the days until her return to the sanctity and beauty of its Hudson Valley campus. The sporadic visits from fellow classmates had been the only thing that had brought her any pleasure over what had been for her, an eternal summer. Yet, she had enough awareness to know that the Gala was her last duty, perhaps forever, to her imperious mother and indifferent father, for after graduation she was
planning on immediately fleeing to Europe to “tramp around” for three months before settling in Paris for at least a year of post-graduate study at The Sorbonne. She dreamed of the life which eluded her, a life that she alone would own and control.

Sitting in front of the vanity mirror beside her bed, she sighed as she traced her full lips with a tracing of lipstick, the finishing touch of a nearly three-hour long preparation regimen. Looking at herself; her thick, black mane pinned up, the plunging neckline of her silk gown, the flawless string of pearls teasingly drawing attention to her bust, she saw a caricature of the woman she believed was behind the mask of beauty. Her plan for the evening was already clear. She would tolerate the banal chit-chat and endless compliments about her appearance in the reception area with assistance from a few glasses of champagne. After hearing how beautiful she was for an hour, she would be seated between her brothers Michael and James at dinner, an arrangement she had already secured thanks to a small bribe she had given the maitre d’ the previous Saturday evening. She would eat with a deft combination of elegance and speed and would kindly excuse herself immediately after dessert, fleeing the premises quietly. With only a week remaining until she left for upstate New York, this would be the last evening she would spend in the clutches of her parents. So, the shorter she could make the evening, the better.

“Darling, come-come,” her mother grated from downstairs.

Reaching into the bottom drawer of her vanity, she shuffled through the assorted stockings and hose, finding the silver hip flask hidden at the bottom. After unscrewing the top of the flask, she placed it as close as she could without letting it touch her painted lips for two strong swallows of whiskey. With another cry from downstairs, a third swallow was mandatory…and with that, she was ready.
Kenny shifted uneasily in the passenger seat as Charles drove toward the Yacht Club. He’d never attended a black-tie affair and the collar of his tuxedo shirt felt so tight he was certain it was cutting off normal blood flow to his brain. Charles had quietly asked Joseph to arrange the purchase of the tuxedo for Kenny. Joseph had missed his guess on Kenny’s neck size by a half-inch, but apart from that, his eye had been spot-on, for the tux fit Kenny quite well, a fact Charles had mentioned at least three times as they prepared to leave the house. Well aware that he looked splendid himself, Charles had downplayed the compliments he had received from both Joseph and Kenny.

“Anything I should know before we get there?” Kenny asked with jittery innocence.

“Kenny, apart from the dress code, the food and the average age, this gathering will be little different from a Friday night at Standish Manor. We’ll have a good time, Sport.”

Kenny wanted to believe it. He’d been looking forward to this night for weeks. The Gala would be his one and only opportunity to make an impression on the people he’d been waiting to meet all summer. He’d enjoyed his stay in Marblehead immensely and thanks to sailing and some tennis tips from Charles, he felt fitter and more relaxed than he could ever remember. However, he had come to Marblehead with the hope of endless introductions to influential people. In his own preoccupation, he completely missed that Charles had gone to the summer house to hole up and recuperate from what had been a truly exhausting scholastic year.

In spite of his disappointment regarding their social calendar, Kenny made no mention of it, nor did he push Charles to do anything more than he wanted to. In fact, showing a new display of restraint, Kenny had let Charles’s wishes dictate the entire summer’s activities (or lack thereof). He had acquiesced, playing a role more suited to a dutiful employee than a best friend.

Two teen-aged boys in red waist-coats opened the car doors for Kenny and Charles and they stepped onto the carpeted stairs leading to the grand entrance of the yacht club. Charles put his hand on Kenny’s elbow and Kenny turned to face him.

“Let’s have some fun tonight,” Charles said with a relaxed smile.

“Aye. These stiffs won’t know what hit ‘em,” Kenny shot back with an impish grin. Charles burst into laughter.

“My friend, when they made you, they broke the mold.”
“Damn right,” Kenny said, but only to himself.
As his mother’s prattling conversation in the Yacht Club’s foyer continued, Michael Brewster could see the tension in his sister’s face build.

“What could she have possibly been thinking when she chose those shoes?” Mrs. Brewster clucked to Mrs. Childress, as the two women’s eyes simultaneously went up and down the figure of Congressman Jordan’s wife.

Carefully sliding his left foot back, Michael gripped Elizabeth’s hand and whispered, “Let’s get you a fresh drink, shall we?” Elizabeth turned away from her mother as Michael excused them both.

“You’re a lifesaver, Michael.”

“Oh, sis, leave her be now. This is the highlight of her year.”

Before Elizabeth got a chance to extend her show of disgust, Michael had sidled up to the bar and ordered a glass of champagne for her and a scotch on the rocks for himself.

“There will come a day when you will miss these wondrous evenings of unsolicited judgment and focused hypocrisy,” he announced.

Stifling a giggle with her right hand Elizabeth’s froze at the emergence of the figure of Charles striding into the reception area.

“Yeah, Elizabeth, one day you’ll be….”

“Who is that?” Elizabeth interrupted. Michael craned his neck to the left and in an instant knew who she was asking about.

“That’s Charles Collins, Jr. Good Harvard man. Fiendishly skilled tennis player. I don’t think he’s been beaten here at the club in over four years.”

“My God.”

“Easy, sis, he’s not on the menu. Need me to wipe your mouth for you?” Elizabeth playfully slapped her brother’s arm.

“Don’t be a brat,” she shot, all the while fixing her stare on Charles. “How in the world is it that I’ve never met him?”

“Well, he keeps a pretty low profile. I haven’t seen him much the past few years and only bumped into him a couple of times over the summer.”

“Then you know him?”

“Well, yes, but only casually. He’s the quiet type. In fact, certain people have been wondering what the story is between him and his little valet.”

“Excuse me?” Elizabeth shot back, startled by her brother’s comment.

“That fellow he’s with. He’s one of his pals from Harvard, but rumors have been circulating.”
“Oh, for goodness’ sake, Michael, you and your idiotic friends make me sick. I know that God has a sense of humor, but he’s certainly not that cruel. Please introduce me.”

“Are you sure?”

“Stop it, you!”

“All right, all right, steady on girl.” Michael lifted his drink from the bar and allowed Elizabeth to slide her arm through his, and guided her through the crowd. Approaching Charles and Kenny, Michael exclaimed, “Collins, if I didn’t know better I’d say you’ve been avoiding me for fear of the hiding you’ll get on the court!”

Charles turned to face Michael, while Kenny nervously shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

“Ah, well if it isn’t my dear friend Mr. Brewster. Why, nothing could be further from the truth. I would never pass up an opportunity to teach you a bit of humility.”

“Please, we must arrange that as I have been growing far too arrogant.”

Elizabeth lightly squeezed Michael’s arm.

“And Charles, allow me to introduce my sister, Elizabeth.” Meeting her eyes, Charles fought not to blush.

“Why, Elizabeth, how lovely to meet you”

“Thank you, Charles.”

“And this is my good friend Kenneth Murphy.”

Kenny awkwardly offered his hand to Elizabeth, who graciously shook it gently. Michael turned to Kenny. “Yes, Mr. Murphy, Michael Brewster, it’s a pleasure.” Michael seamlessly continued, “Say, why don’t you and I get a round of drinks?”

“Yes, marvelous idea,” Kenny replied. As he and Michael strolled toward the bar, Kenny shot a quick glance back, feeling both excitement and a tinge of jealousy.
With the dual agenda of wanting to give his sister a chance to enjoy herself and to satisfy his own curiosity, Michael resolved himself to entertain Kenny at the bar.

“So, you and Charles are classmates, then?”
“Aye, um, I mean yes, we are. At Harvard.”
“And what do you make of our little summer community?”
“Oh, I’ve had a wonderful summer. To be honest, I wish I didn’t have to go back to Cambridge next week. This has been the most fun I’ve had in a long time, to be sure.”

“Is that so? How do you usually spend your summers then?” Kenny thought quickly.

“Well, I usually go to Virginia to spend time on my family’s estate. It’s nothing like the atmosphere here as it’s inland. You know, rolling hills, beautiful meadows; a lovely place to go for a long ride every morning.”

“Oh, so you’re a horseman then?”
“Well, I’m not going to be entering any equestrian competitions in the near future, that’s for certain,” Kenny replied, trying to sound self-effacing, “but I do wholeheartedly enjoy it.” Kenny surprised himself at his ability to concoct this story. Judging by Michael’s reaction, he was both believable and, more importantly, left un questioned.

“Yes, I’ve always admired horsemen. I’ve only been on a horse twice in my life, both times at summer camp in New Hampshire, back when I was a boy.”

“How did you do?” Kenny asked, skillfully maneuvering the conversation away from himself.

“Well, let’s just say I didn’t break my neck.”
Kenny let out a chuckle, then continued his maneuvering.

“And yourself? What are you doing now?”
“Well, I am finished with school, for good I hope. I’m one of the enemy I’m afraid, Yale undergrad and Yale Law.”

“Aah, I see. I’ve been to the campus many times as I went to The Taft School before Harvard.”

“Did you ever consider Yale?”

“I did,” Kenny lied. “But I was hoodwinked into thinking that Harvard was a better school.” Michael chuckled at the clever compliment and clinked his glass against Kenny’s. Kenny was growing more confident. Following on, he asked Michael, “So, what do you do now?”
“I’m working with Congressman Jordan now in Washington.”
“Oh, really?” It took a great deal of effort for Kenny to keep his cool, for with Michael’s statement, his heart started to race.
“Yes, assistant chief of staff, to be precise.”
“How fascinating, Michael. Please, tell me more. I’m very interested.”
Michael’s eyes lit up.
“I’m quite happy to hear that, because unlike some, I think it’s actually quite fascinating work. I started off seven years ago, working on his first campaign between my freshman and sophomore years at Yale. I did summer internships on his staff the next three years and also worked on his re-election campaign, then after I passed the bar exam, his chief of staff asked if I’d like to come on board.”
“Wow, that’s remarkable, Michael.” Kenny could see that Michael was enjoying the attention. Michael continued.
“So, yes, there I was, fresh-faced and off to Washington. I’ve been with him now, full-time for three years and there are some fairly exciting things on the horizon, so I’m very much enjoying the work.”
“I should think so!” Kenny suggested they have a seat in the lounge and talk further and Michael eagerly accepted the invitation.
Across the room, Charles and Elizabeth had quietly moved from the raucous noise of the reception lobby out onto the spacious balcony. Below them, the vast piers of the yacht club were filled with boats tied to the docks in perfect order. Charles was feeling slightly self-conscious, but Elizabeth sensed it and took charge.
“I can’t believe that both of our families are members here and yet we’ve never met. Though, to be fair, I must admit I don’t spend much time here. I’m not much for sailing. What about you?”
“Well, don’t hate me, but I would say that sailing is one of my fondest pleasures.”
“Hmm.” Elizabeth lowered her chin and raised her eyes coyly toward Charles’s face. “Perhaps if I asked nicely you might give me a lesson.”
Startled, Charles coughed involuntarily.
“Oh, how rude of me,” Elizabeth said with a smirk.
“No, no, it’s fine. You just surprised me, that’s all.”
“I didn’t mean to embarrass you. I’ve just been so bored this summer.”
“Really?
“Oh, it’s been unbearable.” Elizabeth shook her head, then caught herself. She looked up at Charles. “It would be nice if I could take at least one memory with me back to Vassar. Charles tightened his leg muscles.

“I would be delighted to take you out for a sail. How about tomorrow afternoon?”

“Are you sure? I don’t mean to impose.”

“No, I would be delighted.”

“Well, that would be lovely.” Elizabeth filled her lungs with fresh sea air, pleased that her certainty of an uneventful evening had been proven so remarkably wrong.
As the sun makes its long journey towards the horizon in the late Irish summer night, Rory crouches in the barn, watching the man who raises him tend to his livestock. The sheep, cows and goats fall silent in their master’s presence. Rory views from the corner of the barn with deep respect and admiration. The animals are soothed by the man’s company and his gentle manner. Rory’s face glows as he watches the interaction between man and animal. He interprets the unspoken language they share. The man has immense gratitude to the animals. They provide for him. In turn, he shows them kindness and respect.

As he gets lost in his work, the man starts to whistle a tune Rory knows by heart. The man whistles it absently as he focuses on his work. Rory listens on as the stone walls, gently pitched roof and straw-covered floor provide perfect acoustics. The song the man plays, with only his breath as an instrument, fills the barn with a series of perfectly spaced sound waves which reverberate around the barn and into Rory’s ears. Then, on one particular note in the chorus of the song, an A-sharp, Rory is overcome as a vibration rings off of all of the walls simultaneously, jarring his entire body. He sits up straight, alert and full of anticipation. It only happens on this particular note. The man repeats the verse of the song and as he reaches the chorus again, Rory leans forward.

Hnmnmnmnm...the vibration hits Rory again and with it an explosion of images race through his mind. He sees light; brilliant pulsating white dots fringed in violet. The man goes about his work without noticing a thing, while Rory is catapulted into a higher dimension from the mighty pulsation of that specific note. Each time the man whistles that note, Rory feels a gentle tremble start at the top of the right side of his head. Then, the quiver rushes straight down through every cell in his body. On that note, Rory feels like a man standing under a waterfall. A millisecond after the note ends Rory senses the vibration exit through his feet. How strange and yet how incredibly pleasant the sensation is. Rory keeps this to himself and remains silent throughout the rest of the man’s stay in the barn. The farmer exits, his work done for the day, never even noticing the boy’s presence.

As soon as the man departs, Rory is on his feet, roaming the barn with purpose. He whistles short, repetitive bursts of the A-sharp and searches for the perfect spot to stand where he can experience the deepest, most resounding vibration. In the
northeast corner of the barn, he stands three feet from the walls and whistles a long, drawn-out note. The sound wave converges on the corner and comes exploding back on him, rocking his body to the core as surge after surge of images flood his mind. Every color in the spectrum fills his consciousness like drops of rain falling from the sky, every spoken language resonates through his body, washing over him like a thundering ocean wave. Each time he whistles the note, the power of the vibration nearly knocks him off his feet, but he whistles the note over and over, astounded by the discovery.

* 

Both Charles and Kenny were quiet on the drive back to the house. Each was engrossed in the thoughts privately swirling in his head and it wasn’t until they’d gone inside, hung up their dinner jackets and removed their bow-ties that they spoke. As Charles relaxed on the couch Kenny poured them each a snifter of brandy and handed one to Charles as he sank deeply into the leather easy chair.

“Quite an evening, eh Sport?” Charles offered.

“Whoa, I’ll say! Spellbinding. I had the time of my life. Did you know that Michael is the assistant chief of staff to Congressman Jordan?”

“No, I didn’t, to be honest. Well, I mean, not until tonight. I’d known that he was doing something in the political realm, but I didn’t know what specifically, or for whom.”

“He’s essentially the Congressman’s right-hand man. He organises his entire schedule, everything from his travel plans to fund-raising gatherings to the agendas for subcommittee meetings.” Kenny’s hands flailed wildly as he spoke.

“Jordan’s very highly thought of and is starting to gather quite a bit of power in the capital. Right now there is talk of him possibly being named to the National Affairs Committee. Congress votes on it this fall and if Jordan gets on the Committee, then he’s a lock to serve numerous terms. And Michael is the one who seems to be orchestrating the whole thing. The guy is connected in some way to almost every arm of the power structure in Washington, from the Senate to the Supreme Court to the Armed Services to the White House. It’s incredible.”

“Wait a second.” Charles now was fully involved. “If Michael does all of that, then what does the man above him do, Jordan’s Chief of Staff?”

“Well, if Michael is to be believed, all he does is chase skirts, service half of the female population of Washington, smoke, drink and sleep late.” Charles and Kenny both burst into wild laughter.

“She’s amazing, Kenny. I mean, you saw how beautiful she is.” Kenny nodded. Charles continued, “Well, she’s got a wit sharper than a straight razor to go with a fierce intellect. She was talking to me about things I have no clue about. Fortunately for me she didn’t catch on,” Charles winked.

“She’s going to be a senior at Vassar this fall. She’s an English literature major. She says she wants to be a writer and I have no doubt she will do whatever she sets her mind to. She’s fantastic.”

“And for reasons that confound me, clearly she is also hopelessly infatuated with you,” Kenny retorted.

They sipped their brandies in confident silence, each lost in his own fantasy.
Rory asks the man if he can use some of the porcelain tiles stored in the barn. The tiles are left-over remnants of the extra bathroom the man built months before.

“Of course”, the man says, not even bothering to ask the boy what he intends to do with them. Neither he nor the woman ever questions Rory about what his intentions are, for there is no need. Trust is the foundation of the home.

Rory strides purposefully to the barn, as he already has a clear picture of the finished product in his mind. He knows exactly what he has to do, and in what order. He gathers the tiles, adhesive and a small paint brush. Smiling all the while, he carefully places his new-found treasures in a wheelbarrow and transfers the pickings back to the house. In his small hands, he carries several stacks of ten tiles up to his room, and sets them on the floor in the corner. When the wheelbarrow is empty, he returns it to the barn then marches back to the house.

He sits on the floor and removes a single tile from one of the piles, studying it; a perfect, three-inch squared piece of white porcelain with a small yellow flower painted on its center. His right index finger traces the outline of the flower, around and around. He reaches for the adhesive, squeezes a small amount from the tube onto the back of the tile, spreads the adhesive around with the paintbrush and pushes the tile onto the base of the wall in front of him. Happy with the placement, he gets to work in earnest.

In the next four hours he has completely tiled the northeast corner of his room, two flawless sides of a right triangle, each wall covered up and down to the ceiling and extending laterally exactly four feet from the “L” of the corner. He stands back, his hands resting on his hips, eyes scouring his completed project.

* 

Having spent the majority of the final week in Marblehead with Elizabeth, Charles was certain he was falling in love. Kenny occupied himself with long conversations and meals with Michael Brewster. A bond was cemented between Kenny and Michael, who, from a distance might appear to have little in common, but up close were nearly identical in their lust for recognition, power and fame.
On their return to the Harvard campus for their senior year, Kenny and Charles struggled to stay focused on their studies as they were desperate for graduation to come, so that each could deepen his individual relationship with the Brewster siblings.

Kenny’s letters to Bridey dwindled into nonexistence as he wrote Michael twice, sometimes three times a week. Somehow, to Kenny’s amazement, Michael found the time to correspond promptly in return. Kenny felt a confident image of himself growing deep inside him with every letter he received back from Michael, as Michael kept him updated with the details of the inner workings of Washington. Congressman Jordan had, in fact, been voted onto the National Affairs Committee and was now part of the most important group of politicians in the free world, which put Michael in a position of immense influence. And while Kenny whiled away the week-long winter school break on the near-deserted campus of Harvard, Charles took Elizabeth to Vermont for a skiing vacation. They glided down the slopes side-by-side all day and each night, they talked for hours in front of the fireplace in their rented cabin.

In the spring, with only four weeks left in the school year, they had their final break. Charles visited Elizabeth at Vassar while Kenny accepted Michael’s invitation to spend a week in Washington. Riding back to Boston on the train, Kenny had no doubts about what he wanted to do with his life.

While in Washington, Kenny had spent virtually every minute with Michael. Michael had arranged for him to receive what the staff called an *insider’s badge* which allowed Kenny to accompany Michael to work and, most thrilling, to attend staff and subcommittee meetings. The atmosphere of the House of Representatives was intoxicating and he drank in the experience like a man dying of thirst. He lunched with Congressman Jordan and Michael every day and marveled at Michael’s ability to thoroughly update Jordan on anything and everything he queried about. Kenny had always thought himself to be of above average intelligence but couldn’t fathom how Michael had the ability to store so much information and recall it the instant the congressman needed it. Michael could quote, verbatim, any conversation either he or Jordan had had during the congressman’s career. He threw facts, figures, numbers, vote counts and percentages around as if he were tossing a tennis ball against a garage door. Kenny was also surprised by the ease at which he appeared to be accepted by Jordan. The research he’d done on the congressman before his trip had suggested that Jordan, like most politicians, was a man always wary of newcomers. But his experience with Jordan proved nothing of
the sort. In fact, Kenny was certain that Jordan had taken an immediate liking to his dry wit and sharp tongue.

"I think highly of someone who has the courage to speak his mind," Jordan had confided in Kenny after Kenny had given his opinion on a controversial bill coming up for review by the Senate.

"Not enough young men these days have the conviction to stand up for what they believe is right. It's a damn shame if you ask me."

During his nights in the nation's capital, Kenny caroused with Michael, visiting the bars of Georgetown, which were always packed with the staff members of various politicians, lobbyists and special-interest groups. Michael was an excellent tour guide as he knew which watering-holes were most lively on any given night. He was also adept at including Kenny in all conversations and Kenny felt his heartbeat quicken every time Michael introduced him to some new and interesting politico.

Being around Michael, Kenny was getting precious training on how to "get things done" in Washington. While Kenny had felt a closeness with Charles, he felt adoration for Michael. They were two of a kind, he and Michael; Kenny saw in Michael a taller, trimmer, more dashing version of himself. He scrutinized and absorbed Michael's every move. He watched Michael nudge Jordan's schedule along, saw how he maneuvered his way in and out of conversations with colleagues and how he kept a mental notebook of who owed him favors. Michael was exactly what Kenny wanted to be. An image of his future emerged; Kenny could be Michael, all he needed was a congressional candidate.

On Friday morning, Kenny was half-heartedly leafing through a magazine in Michael's office when he got the thrill of his life. Putting down the phone receiver, Michael turned to face Kenny and announced that that evening they would be dining alone with the congressman at Jordan's apartment.

"I'm not making any promises, Kenny," was all Michael said when Kenny asked if the dinner was, in fact, some kind of informal job interview. "All I'm going to say is that you seem to have made a good impression on him. Just make sure you have your act together tonight." He winked at Kenny as he said it. Kenny's knuckles turned white as he squeezed the arms of the chair he was sitting in.

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_There are times when he is tempted to join the other boys his age who are discovering girls, alcohol and cigarettes, but in those times Rory turns his attention_
to the mighty voice within him. The voice urges him to invoke self-discipline and concentrate on refining his mind so that it may continue to tap into the vast reservoir of experience and keep him on the path.

He takes a canvas and places it on the easel propped against the wall at the end of his bed. He looks at the blank page staring back at him, so white, so vast, so empty. He removes from his mind of all stray thoughts, and zeroes the entirety of his focus on the moment. There is nothing in the universe except for his slow, measured breathing.

He moves himself to the northeast corner of his room and sits on the floor, the right angle of the tiled walls dividing him perfectly in two. From deep inside him a low hum emerges. A guttural note rises from within and as it reaches his vocal cords, he feels a rapid tremor in his head. When the powerful vibrations make his vision blur, he closes his eyes. The note gains strength and intensity as it erupts from his nostrils and charges into the tiles on the wall, getting bounced back and forth for a millisecond before crashing back on him with force.

The sound waves reverberate in the small space...ooooowahooooo. He tilts his chin towards his left shoulder and feels the vibration rebound back and forth in the right side of his skull. The visions begin to emerge. He sees himself in a forest, stationary, floating, as the forest moves around him. Towering pine trees whistle past his still body, their motion ruffling his shirt. Then, suddenly the forest drops and he is above it, looking down at the verdant blanket below. The treetops swirl clockwise, faster and faster as they collapse into a vast emptiness, and then there is nothing...Emptiness..He hovers.

His eyes blink and he lifts himself from the floor and moves to the easel, grabbing not one, but two brushes, one in each hand and he begins to paint with both hands simultaneously. His right hand makes perfectly straight lines and perfectly round circles. His left hand follows a different course, slashing violently into the paint and onto the paper, making broad, vivid arches, then rat-a-tat dots which squash the delicate hairs of the brush flat. He steals quick glances left and right to observe what his hands are doing but has surrendered the finished product completely. He closes his eyes and allows his hands to do whatever they like. His hands respond to this surrender by seeking direction from the force Rory can not put into words.
Kenny charged through the door of the flat he and Charles had shared for their senior year, eager to tell his best friend the thrilling news of his week in Washington, but what he found when he entered stopped him in his tracks. Charles was lying on the couch with his right hand resting on his forehead and his left hand clasping a nearly empty bottle of whiskey. He was fully dressed, from shirt to shoes, and his necktie, although completely loosened from his collar still dangled oddly. His unshaven face stared at the ceiling, oblivious to Kenny’s arrival.

“Jesus, Charles, what the hell is going on?” Charles’s body jerked and he spilled whiskey on his trousers as he pulled himself up to a half-seated position.

“Shit!” he spouted as he tried in vain to brush the whiskey off of his trousers and onto the hardwood floor. Kenny dropped his suitcases and took off his overcoat. He moved to the couch as Charles clumsily managed to sit upright, giving Kenny room to sit down next to him. Charles remained silent for what seemed like minutes, his eyes glazed over. He brought the palms of his hands to his face and rubbed them vigorously over his cheekbones before sliding his fingers back through his matted hair.

“Sport, to put it bluntly, it appears that I am well and truly fucked.”

Kenny said nothing, waiting for Charles to tell him what his appearance had, to Kenny, already given away. Charles turned to face Kenny.

“Yep, Elizabeth is pregnant. It happened on the ski trip. Shit!” Charles lifted his right foot and slammed it against the coffee table, which went skidding with a loud screech across the living room floor. Kenny maintained his silence.

“I am such an idiot! I can’t believe this is happening. And my poor Elizabeth…”, Charles’s voice cracked and he tilted his shoulders away from his friend, humiliated both by his situation and the fact that he had allowed Kenny to see him in this state. He buried his face in his hands and let out muffled, hushed sobs. The back of his wrinkled shirt shuddered, but he struggled to stifle the sound of his crying. Kenny made no move to console him. “The poor thing. She told me at Vassar the first day I arrived and I was completely useless in trying to soothe her,” Charles mumbled into his hands. Charles wiped his face as he slouched back, resting his forearms on his knees. Averting Kenny’s stare, he focused his attention on the space of floor between his feet. “All I could think was, ’What the hell is my father going to say?’ He’ll disown me, I’m sure of it. And the Brewsters, shit, they’ll have my hide. Elizabeth and I are supposed to be good God-fearing Catholics! Do you understand how serious this is? Fuck, I can’t believe it!” As Charles turned to
face him, Kenny saw the helplessness in Charles’s eyes. Charles’s voice was barely a whisper. “I managed to get through the rest of my visit and we made the best of it. I’d like to think she’s gotten over the initial shock, but I have no idea what to do!” Charles’s massaged his temples. “I crawled into a bottle two days ago and haven’t left the couch since. I can’t remember the last time I ate. Fuck, Kenny, what am I going to do?”

“It’s OK Charles. Let’s just slow things down a bit.” Kenny firmly gripped Charles’s left shoulder with his hand. “Now, this is all we know right now. You’ve both gotten a shock and it’s going to take a little while for it to wear off, but you are not alone in this one. I’m going to help you get through this. I’m going to help the both of you get through this. Do you understand me?” Kenny’s hand felt the tension ease in Charles’s shoulder. Charles lifted his head to face Kenny with a look that conveyed total obedience. Kenny continued with total confidence.

“I’m going to draw you a hot bath and make us something to eat. I’m famished as well. Give me the bottle, now.” Charles reached down and handed the whiskey over to Kenny.

“You sit tight. I’m going to sort this out, one step at a time.” Kenny took the whiskey with him as he walked out of the living room and made his way toward the bathroom to start filling the tub with water.
Rory takes a break from an afternoon of baling hay in the fields. As he sits in the warm afternoon grass, his mind drifts back to the time of his own formal education. He can picture himself sitting attentively in the small farmhouse classroom, years ago. Rory doesn’t envy his school teachers’ prosaic duties. He has great empathy for the banality and frustration of their jobs; trying to get excitable youngsters engaged in learning tedious facts and figures. He has mastered rote learning before he steps foot in a classroom, but, as Irish law dictates, he must nevertheless attend school until the ages of six to fourteen.

He uses his time at school wisely, honing his concentration and focus. While the teacher takes the class through another hour of basic arithmetic, Rory’s eyes are on the blackboard, but his mind is enthralled with finding other perspectives on the ‘given’ laws of addition and subtraction. One alternative he discovers is that two plus two does not always equal four. Rory’s proof is that if a person puts two cubes of ice in one glass and two cubes in another, then leaves the room for twenty minutes, he will return to two very small glasses of water, thus in this instance, two plus two equals two. He does not share this discovery with his teacher simply because he knows that if he does, she will be flustered. He has no interest in embarrassing her in front of his fellow students. His single fascination is in seeing all possible solutions to any one given problem. While he takes nothing any of his teachers say as absolute fact, neither does he ever question them aloud. If they knew this, the teachers would certainly be grateful.

Lost in absolute concentration, he becomes completely present in everything he does. Each individual task that he undertakes throughout the day has his unmitigated attention. When he is tying his shoes, he both observes and feels both the wondrous flexibility and the hidden wisdom in his fingers. As he helps the man who raises him with farming duties, his attention is everywhere; he senses the warmth of the sun on his back, hears the symphony performed by the breeze using the tall grass as its instruments, tastes the ever-so-light salt air on his tongue, feels the power and strength in his feet as they anchor him to the ground.

And in those moments, in his school classroom when alternatives to the irrefutable are discovered, what he notices most of all is that he exerts no effort whatsoever. Instead, he removes all activity from his mind, finding complete silence. In doing so,
an endless flow of words, numbers, images, sensations and symbols swirl about him, passing without filter through his consciousness. He is a drop of water in the stream. In those moments, what he experiences is not exertion, but rather, permission. By never straining for it, the answer he seeks has his consent to find him, and always does.

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The telephone in Elizabeth’s apartment rang incessantly until, more out of annoyance than anything else, she lifted the receiver.

"Hello."

“Elizabeth, it that you? It’s Kenny. Kenny Murphy…Charles’s room-mate.” Elizabeth flinched at Charles’s name, but before she could respond, Kenny carried on.

“Listen, I’m so sorry about what’s happened but I understand the situation and I want you to know that I’m going to help you and Charles get through this.”

“Charles told you?”

“Yes, of course. Anyway, that’s of no import right now. First, I’m calling to tell you that Charles has spoken only to me about this, no one else knows and I’m going to keep it that way. Do you understand?” Kenny waited a few seconds for a reply, but hearing silence, charged on.

“Second, I am letting you know that there is nothing for you to concern yourself with. Now, do you need anything or anyone to immediately assist you in any way?” The steady voice on the other end of the line loosened Elizabeth’s grip on the phone receiver.

“No, I am fine right now. I only have one exam left, that’s tomorrow, and then I’m essentially done. My graduation ceremony is only four weeks away.”

“And what are your plans for those four weeks?”

“Well, before this crisis, I had planned to visit my family then prepare for my trip to Europe.”

“And do you think you are going to be able to visit your family without them catching on to what you are dealing with right now?”

“I’m not really sure,” she said, her voice quivering. Kenny then laid out the details of his plan to get them through the next month.

“Well, that’s not a problem at all. I made the arrangements for there to be an open-ended ticket to Boston waiting for you at the train station. There are four trains daily that will get you here in just over two hours. Pack a suitcase and then call us to let us know which one you’re going to be on and we’ll meet you at the station. We’ll
just lay low here in Cambridge until our graduation ceremony. Charles and I
graduate next Saturday, so we’ll all be together for that.”

“OK, I’m with you so far,” Elizabeth breathed.

“Now, Charles is going to ring your parents personally to tell them that he
wants you here for his graduation and I’m certain they won’t offer any resistance.”

“No, you’re right. They won’t.”

“He’ll then tell them that he’s going to take you to Marblehead for some
sailing and relaxation before your graduation. They’re not going to Marblehead until
mid-June, correct?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Perfect. So, there’s nothing to worry about. If you like, you can stay here in
the apartment with Charles and I or you and Charles can take a short trip up the
coast. Either way, the only thing we need to do right now is get you through
graduation without a hitch.” Elizabeth surprised herself with her willingness to listen
to Kenny’s advice, but her resolve had been shattered by the events of the past few
weeks and any self-confidence had vanished. Kenny’s intervention and action
comforted her like a warm blanket.

Kenny’s phone call explained why Charles had spoken often about him with
such profound admiration. She was grateful to have his guidance. She spoke with
Kenny about her shock and despair, but she agreed to call the apartment tomorrow
after her last exam, when she would let them know which day she would leave
Vassar and on which train she would arrive. Then, with a voice of deep concern she
asked, “How is he?”

“I think all in all, he’s doing fairly well,” Kenny lied. “He’s resting now, but
most importantly, he’s eagerly awaiting your arrival.”

“He was in a pretty bad state when I spoke with him Thursday.”

“Ah, well, don’t you worry Elizabeth. That’s all behind us now. Just get
through the exam and we’ll speak tomorrow.”

“OK, Kenny.”

“Good night, Elizabeth.”

“Thank you...and Kenny?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you for looking after him. You’re a good man.”

“It’s my pleasure.” Elizabeth hung up the phone and took a deep, relaxing
breath.
Kenny, having fed and seen Charles off to bed in a much better state than he found him, treated himself to a snifter of brandy from the liquor cabinet in the living room. The good stuff. He’d earned it.
If asked to be honest about it, Elizabeth and Charles would have admitted that Kenny’s presence during this time was a blessing, for with the news of the pregnancy came a new and unfamiliar feeling of discomfort with each other. Until Elizabeth’s startling discovery, their love affair had been a carefree courtship filled with laughter, warmth and tenderness. Now they were anxious and ill at ease, both on their own and in each other’s company, seemingly engaged in a new and nervous dance.

Two days after Kenny’s phone call, Elizabeth attended their graduation at the weekend, however, wary that she might be recognised she took great pains to distance herself from the ceremony. She watched the outdoor ceremony from the shade of a stand of maple trees, arriving just as the commencement started and leaving immediately after Charles’s and Kenny’s degrees were handed to them.

The three shared a subdued celebratory dinner in the apartment then promptly left for Marblehead the following morning. Charles had wanted to say proper goodbyes to the young men he had come to know and shared such good times with over his four years at Harvard. In fact, Standish had planned an entire weekend of activities, but Charles knew he couldn’t face the inevitable questions which would come out of a final celebration with his friends in “The Fellowship”. “What’s next?” was a question he avoided asking himself.

The mood in the car on the drive to Marblehead was subdued. While Charles pretended to focus on the driving, Elizabeth pretended to partake in small talk with Kenny. Kenny pretended everything was fine.

The veil of gloom lifted only when they pulled into the driveway of the Collins’ summer residence. Earlier in the week Charles, had phoned Joseph to tell him to prepare the house. As always, Joseph obliged to his usual standards of perfection. Once in the house, the leather smell of the living room, the sight of the Atlantic filling the windows and the ocean’s fresh light scent lifted the spirits of all three.

Kenny had been extremely busy in the build-up to graduation, not only with his duties as the protector of Charles and Elizabeth, but also in drawing up an elaborate plan of action to help them negotiate this treacherous situation with secrecy, discretion and confidence. In its essence his proposal was simple, but in its content it was nothing short of genius, for it covered every possible base and left no room for their secret to ever be revealed.

Having kept only the barest of contact with her over the preceding ten months, Kenny had called Bridey who, like the dutiful aunt that she was, put aside
her feelings of neglect and ill-will, and warmly embraced her uncommunicative nephew. The story he told her was that he wanted to treat Charles and his bride-to-be to a visit to his homeland, where they would enjoy a few months of relaxation following what had been an uninterrupted sixteen-year journey of challenging education. Kenny knew Bridey would do anything for him. The loss of her own husband had solidified her lifelong image of herself as a hopeless romantic, and she was instantly eager to assist what she saw as an incredibly noble gesture by Kenny. In doing such a nice thing for his friends, Kenny knew he would be, in her mind, growing into a fine young man.

Bridey had gone to the Western Union office to send a telegram back home to her younger brother Eamonn in Bantry, the small town in West Cork where she had been raised on the family farm. In it, she wrote that their nephew would be arriving with two American guests some time in the next month and that she would be most grateful if he could make all necessary arrangements for them to have a cottage for themselves for a period to be determined later. Her brother, Kenny’s uncle, a man he barely knew, was the embodiment of stoic Irish humility. “Of course this will be arranged. It is no imposition whatsoever” he had promptly wired back.

Although Kenny had given Charles scant details about the caper, Charles had surrendered all decision-making authority to his friend. Kenny had access to Charles’s massive trust fund, where he could acquire all the cash he would need to make the arrangements. Kenny had purchased three first-class tickets for passage on the Queen Mary, the massive luxury liner which would sail them from New York to Ireland. Once in Ireland, they would be safe. The countryside would heal their jangled nerves and, away from America, they would be able to face the next phase of the problem with renewed confidence.

In spite of the frail states of Charles and Elizabeth, Kenny found it extremely hard not to gloat over his scheme, for it was flawless. The governor was up for reelection the coming year, which meant that Elizabeth’s mother and her father, the lieutenant governor, would not be able to visit her over her planned summer in Europe and subsequent year at the Sorbonne. The distance between Charles and his father was such that there was absolutely no need to fret over any inquisition, and Kenny’s uncle in Ireland would surely understand and appreciate the discretion necessary in this delicate matter. Where there had been crisis, Kenny had found a sense of purpose. Where there was panic, Kenny had discovered opportunity.
Rory and his classmates are asked to bring something they have created to school. Rory fully enjoys seeing the pride with which his classmates present their handiwork. He feels joy as the shy girl in the back row shares a dollhouse she has constructed from a wooden milk crate. He marvels at the care exhibited in the hand carving of a bog-wood pipe one of the teenaged boys has made for his father. When asked to show his own piece of work, Rory reaches under his desk and removes a painting, carrying the square canvas with great care to the front of the class. The teacher stands directly opposite him, at the rear of the classroom, the teacher’s left hand resting on his hip as he twirls the arm of his reading spectacles in the corner of his mouth with his right hand.

Rory explains how the painting has three different representations, each one evident depending on the angle at which you view it. The no-nonsense teacher is doubtful, as all he sees from his straight-on point of view is a rather amateur-looking portrait of the countryside; a rolling meadow dotted by sheep and cows in the distance, a stone wall haphazardly cutting its way through the field, a low-lying sun, beaming rays of light downward. The teacher sniffles, unimpressed, then glances to see the children seated on the left side of the class leaning forward in their chair, squinting their eyes to get a better look. The teacher moves to the left of the class and is staggered by the emergence of a completely different painting; this one an abstract explosion of color. When taken as a whole, the splashes reveal an astounding representation of a woman in profile: Her aquiline nose casting a soft, lingering shadow over brilliant light, her luminous auburn hair glowing, almost pulsating with movement.

The teacher moves to the right of the painting, his heart beating ever faster. As he moves, a third painting comes into focus. Stopping at a forty five degree angle, the teacher absorbs the sight of a single, tree-lined country road, barely visible in a misty fog. The road is winding itself away into an endless distance. The teacher immerses himself in the painting, imagining himself walking on the road. He smells the damp air and feels the embrace of the overhanging branches. Tranquility spreads over him and his muscles soften. He stares at the scene, his mouth agape.
The family history of Eamonn Mahoney was inextricably intertwined with the very essence of the nation of Ireland itself. For as long as records had been kept, Mahoneys had farmed the same plot of land on the vast hill overlooking the town of Bantry and the sanctity of Bantry Bay. For hundreds of years, Mahoneys had tilled the land, grown the simplest of crops and had kept a variety of farm animals under their care for use in trade and for sustenance, primarily cows and sheep. For centuries, the Mahoneys and millions of families like them had been little more than glorified slaves to their British masters, for the land of Ireland itself did not belong to the Irish, rather, it was leased to them by British land owners, the actual owners of the deeds to property. Generations of Mahoneys were, quintessentially, the very definition of guests in their own country.

Each month, farmers would form a long line outside the manor of the local land baron, in the Mahoney’s case it was the vast and opulent estate that has been known throughout history as Blackrock, Seafield and ultimately, Bantry House. After suffering the humiliation of trudging into its lavish entrance, the farmers would pay their monthly rent for the land they farmed. Severe penalties awaited those who were either unable to pay, or were late with payment. Over the centuries, countless brokenhearted Irish families were thrown off the land their ancestors had lived on for decades. However, Eamonn’s father and his uncles were to play a large role in changing the entire face of the nation.

On November 28, 1920, under the leadership of local man Tom Barry, Eammon’s father and uncles, along with thirty three other local men led an ambush on the British paramilitary Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary—known less-flatteringly as the Black and Tans, for the uniforms they wore—at Kilmichael, a crossroads twenty miles outside of Bantry. The Black and Tans were, in truth, mercenaries. Hired by the British government, the former soldiers of World War I were paid to keep order in the remote areas of the country. The local men were members of the West Cork Flying Column of the original Irish Republican Army, a small and highly secretive group filled with rage against the British and their heavy-handed ways.

Desperate to do their part in a fight for a free country, on that fateful afternoon the West Cork Flying Column had executed an ambush on the two trucks carrying eighteen Black and Tans back to their headquarters. All of the British troops, save one, were killed in the ambush, while three Irishmen suffered fatal wounds. The success of what would come to be known as “The Ambush” was a
turning point in the history of the Irish War for Independence. Though he was only a child at the time, Eamonn grew up feeling passionately indebted to those patriots and as he grew into a man felt both a sense of pride and a deep obligation to the land, as he was the first Mahoney to actually own the farm his family had occupied for centuries.

Eamonn had watched countless neighbors and members of his own family, including his beloved sister Bridey, flee the quiet yet demanding life of farming in the Irish countryside to pursue opportunities in America, Wales and England, but he was a Bantry man, through and through. He had no interest in chasing dreams of fortune in a foreign land, nor would he have known what do to with a fortune had it been granted him. Everything his heart yearned for he found in the tending of his cattle and sheep, the cutting of peat for the fire, cooking over the open flame beneath the hearth at the north end of the house.

He was the youngest of the three Mahoney children. Bridey had gone to America while Mary, his elder by six years, and Kenny’s mother, had married Philip Murphy and moved to the Murphy farm near Skibbereen, twenty miles away. Eamonn himself had married the former Phyllis O’Sullivan, a teacher at the local school. Together they had lived in peace for the past 17 years, albeit without children, for Phyllis had contracted an infection in her teens which tragically, had left her barren. Yet, theirs was a mutually self-sustaining love and the absence of children did nothing to alter their devotion to each other.

Although his father had removed him from school at the age of thirteen to assist full-time with farming duties, Eamonn had always been a person of remarkable intuition and earthy intelligence. He could predict bad weather days in advance. He knew the exact night each of his cows would give birth months before they calved. So sharp was his insight and so fair was his character than he was called upon often to settle various disputes which, in another time, would have ended in violence, reprisals or lawsuits.

Because of his warm manner, many of the emigrants kept in touch with him via letters, and Eamonn delighted in keeping them informed on the various happenings “back home.” He had reserved a special place in his heart for Bridey, as, being twenty years his senior, she had served more as his mother than his sister, yet in spite of her countless pleas to visit her in New York, Eamonn had graciously declined primarily due to his not wanting to burden a neighbor with the care of his farm in his absence. At the same time, he couldn’t refute the fact that the
news that his nephew Kenneth would be coming to Bantry for an extended stay excited him.

Twenty years earlier, when the government built a new library in town, the man in charge had donated a vast reserve of old books to the citizens, and when few took him up on his offer, Eamonn obtained thousands of books. A room which might have housed a child, had he and Phyllis been so blessed, Eamonn had converted into a marvelous study, lined from floor to ceiling with tomes filled with information. Massive texts stocked with history and philosophy, science and mathematics sat with hundreds of novels telling tales of moral dilemmas and sheer fantasy. It was in this study that Eamonn spent some of the most satisfying hours of his life, reading every night with Phyllis. He awaited the arrival of Kenneth and his friends with an almost childlike anticipation, eager to discover what a Harvard education gave a man and what an Irishman in America might have experienced.
The instant they set foot on the Queen Mary, the long-missing color returned to Elizabeth’s face. She had suffered tremendously under the strain of her secret. In the three days leading up to her own graduation ceremonies she was certain she had reached her breaking point, most due to the added pressure of her mother’s presence.

Leaving Marblehead after a two-week break, the trio had driven to Vassar’s Hudson Valley campus where Elizabeth was forced to return to her apartment and prepare to entertain her mother. Charles and Kenny had rented rooms at a nearby hotel to be near her and offer whatever support they could, but for the most part, Elizabeth had been left on her own to deal with the incessant droning of her mother’s voice, her vicious criticisms of any and all things, including, but not limited to, her father’s obsession with his work, Elizabeth’s inability to mix a proper martini, the dress she planned to wear under her graduation gown and whatever other insipid thoughts which somehow trickled into her blunt mind.

For his part, Charles had been able to offer Elizabeth some respite, taking Mrs. Brewster for a drive and a quiet lunch one afternoon while Kenny kept Elizabeth’s company, all the while soothing her own frayed nerves. Somehow she managed to keep herself together long enough to survive her graduation ceremony and an extravagant luncheon attended by her mother, her late-arriving father, brothers Michael and James and the quiet but reasonably stable Charles. Kenny was genuinely hurt by his exclusion from the luncheon but he treated his wounded pride with the astute rationalization that his attendance would have appeared odd. Besides, the launch of his cunning plan to dupe the Brewsters and save Charles and Elizabeth overpowered the pricking feeling of being excluded from the luncheon. This, he told himself, was the last event he would ever be kept out of. From now on, he was in.

Once aboard the ship, a porter showed Charles and Elizabeth to their quarters and Kenny to his suite, directly across the hall from them. Kenny took a moment to survey the lavishness of his quarters; a magnificent king-sized bed, mahogany desk and chair, a full lounge area complete with a bar and two windows overlooking the starboard side of the ship. However, his eagerness got the better of him and before Charles and Elizabeth had had a chance to settle in, he was knocking on their door, urging them to join him on deck as the Queen Mary left the dock. Elizabeth implored Charles to go with Kenny, she wanted to enjoy a relaxing cup of tea in the room and take a rest. Charles walked over to a sitting Elizabeth
and kissed her gently on the forehead, then left her to herself as he and Kenny made their way up to the observation deck.

As the door closed, Elizabeth let out a deep sigh of relief, followed by a flood of tears. All of the tension she had managed to suppress came pouring out. Her left hand fell from her cheek to her stomach as her palm gently stroked her mid-section through the soft, cotton dress she was wearing. Although nearly three months pregnant, she was just barely beginning to show and was grateful her mother hadn’t noticed her slight weight gain, but the shame she felt about the entire situation was now hitting her full-force.

Charles’s forearms rested solidly on the railing of the ship’s deck, but his wrists limply hung over the side, his hands weightlessly suspended in the air above the turbulent wake of the ship. His shoulders sagged and his head drooped, his eyes staring mindlessly into the sea. He too, was beginning to falter under the unyielding pressure of the circumstances. Kenny disappeared momentarily, only to re-emerge with two tall glasses of scotch. He handed one to Charles. Charles took it but did not toast Kenny before taking a large gulp. He winced as the scotch burned its way down his throat. Kenny sidled up to Charles on the railing and took a small sip from his own drink. Kenny cleared his throat and began to speak in a soft, but steady voice.

“Charles, don’t think that I don’t know this entire matter has left you feeling like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders right now. This is not the way you planned things and this is going to be very hard at times, but I want you to know something.” Kenny hesitated. He chewed his lower lip then continued. “I’ve been facing obstacles my entire life. The last time I was on a ship like this, it was because my parents were sending me away to a place I didn’t know, to live with a woman I’d never met. I remember when I first arrived in America.”

Charles’s eyes brightened.

“I pretended it wasn’t a big deal, but it was. I was scared witless. Bridey was good to me and she made the transition as easy as possible, but kids are cruel little bastards. I would have been happy to stay in the neighborhood, but I had no doubt that The Taft School was where I had to go. I just had to, like it was my one shot at a better life. So I went, and I watched. I watched the way the other boys looked at me, you know, the rich kids. No offense.” Charles smirked. Kenny snorted then turned his gaze away from Charles.

“I remember the way they laughed at me and made fun of me behind my back, thinking I didn’t hear all the shit they said about me, but I heard every fucking
word, my friend. I can’t tell you how many nights I seriously thought about packing up a small bag and making a run for it, you know? Just abandon the place, run back to Hell’s Kitchen and the safety of Bridey’s shitty little apartment. I was so tempted, Charles. But I didn’t, and do you want to know why?” Out of the corner of his eye, Kenny saw Charles nod, ever so slightly.

“Because fuck them, that’s why. Everybody’s always going to have some opinion of you, no matter who you are and no matter what you do, what your name is, or where you come from. All those pricks with their holier-than-thou attitudes always thinking they’re smarter or better. They aren’t. They’re just assholes. Every one of those nights when I thought about making a run for it, just giving up, I told myself, ‘No, you do that now and you’ll start a habit you might never break.’ I just kept saying, ‘If you’ve endured it this long, you can endure another day.’ And I was right.” He turned to face Charles.

“That’s what this is all about, Charles, right now, this entire set of circumstances. It’s not about having a stiff upper lip or pretending it’s not difficult. It feels difficult because it is difficult. But I’m telling you right now, you will get through this.” Kenny placed a hand firmly on the left shoulder of his weary friend and as his face dropped into a most serious look he repeated, “You will get through this. This is nothing more than a test. You’ve endured it so far and you’ve done just fine. All you’ve got to do is endure one more day.”

Charles slowly lifted his glass until it was directly in front of him.

“‘To Kenneth Murphy, the toughest son of a bitch in America.”

“Aye, and in the Republic of Ireland, as well.” They both chuckled as the skyline of New York disappeared on the horizon.
The lull of the ship carving its way through the open Atlantic, the ocean air, the delicious food and the distance they were putting between themselves and America had done wonders for both Charles and Elizabeth. In the course of the four-day voyage to the Irish coast their intimacy and tenderness toward each other had returned as they found themselves constantly in each other's company, laughing, holding hands, feeding each other in bed. Kenny felt no jealousy, as with Charles and Elizabeth now looking after themselves and each other, he was granted a reprieve. He took this precious time to decompress from the rigors of the previous month. He rarely left his suite, passing the time reading, sleeping when he pleased, waking late and enjoying being waited on hand-and-foot. He had porters serve him his meals in his room, called for a masseuse to give him a full massage each afternoon and, in an almost laughable way, fell into the role of the wealthy traveler.

He spent most days in silk pajamas and matching robe. He smoked expensive cigars and drank even more expensive bottles of wine, all to be signed onto Charles's tab. He was happy to leave Charles and Elizabeth on their own, for the more reliant they became on each other, the less demanding they would be on Kenny.

In the privacy of his room, Kenny admitted to himself that Charles didn't have half the fortitude he possessed. He also silently criticized Elizabeth. Her whining and desperation had tested his patience to the limit, but he'd survived it. He chuckled snidely to himself then, running a hand down the leg of his soft pajamas whispered, "Where would they be without me?"

After four days, the Queen Mary had begun her slow approach to the southwest coast of Ireland. One of the ship's crew knocked on Kenny's door to announce that the coast would be in sight in an hour's time. Kenny quickly washed and changed into a dark wool suit. He left his room and knocked on Charles and Elizabeth's door, urging them to join him on deck. They happily obliged. Kenny could see that they were refreshed from the journey. A feeling of excitement and anticipation was replacing the gloom they had been enveloped in for the past month. The trio walked to the observation deck at the fore of the ship as the brilliant mid-day sun sparkingly reflected off the ocean's vast surface.

Slowly, the striking coast began to rise from the sea itself and Elizabeth gasped at the sight of its remarkable contrasts, both wild in its ruggedness and breathtaking in its placidity. She was awed by the creation she was witnessing. The jagged, grey cliffs of the Beara Peninsula stood like menacing sentries, protecting
the soft, luminous rolling hills awash with a color green her eyes had never before seen. As more of the coastline came into view Kenny took over as narrator of the beauty before them.

“Below this first peninsula is Mizen Head, which is the south-western most tip of the country. Just behind is Sheep’s Head, another point of land. Sheep’s Head is only a few miles south of where we’ll be staying.”

Charles wrapped his arms around Elizabeth’s chest from behind, pulling her back close to his chest and resting his chin on her shoulder as he took in the awe-inspiring landscape.

As the *Queen Mary* glided by the first sights of land, Kenny felt a strange sensation in the pit of his stomach; a glowing warmth, a pleasant nausea almost. The wind blew strong in his face, but he doubted its presence was responsible for the tear than ran down his left cheek. In the emergence of this wild landscape before him he experienced something he hadn’t known his entire life; he was home. The feeling unsettled him. He was going to lose his composure and turned away from Charles and Elizabeth for a moment to gather himself. He didn’t want them to ever see him as weak.

“It’s unlike anything I could have imagined,” Charles whispered into Elizabeth’s ear.

“Oh, you’re so right, dear,” Elizabeth cooed. “This is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen.”

“It’s the second most beautiful for me.”

Elizabeth stole a glance at Charles, broke into a gorgeous smile then nuzzled closer to him. Kenny pointed to a headland in the distance.

“And that’s the Old Head of Kinsale,” he announced. “Those cliffs may look handsome from this distance, but they’re over two hundred feet high and it’s a straight drop into the sea from the edge. Once we get around the Old Head, we’ll be turning hard to port and disembarking. Cobh is just a few miles on the other side.”

Hearing Kenny use the word “port” instead of “left” brought a proud smile to Charles’s face as his memory drifted back to their outings on the *Lady Ore*. He knew was in good hands with Kenny.

*Rory is instructed to inform the couple who raise him that the school’s headmaster would like to meet with them. He feels no apprehension. He delivers the message*
as requested and one night after dinner, the couple who raise him make the long walk to the school.

The man and woman say very little on their evening stroll. They are certain Rory has not caused any disturbance at the school, for it is not in his character to be disruptive or disrespectful. Nevertheless, they each feel a small knot in their stomach as they reach the headmaster’s office door. The man knocks on the door. After a few moments, the door swings open, revealing Mr. Doherty, the woman’s own teacher so many years ago. Mr. Doherty appears to be both appreciative of their promptness and nervous about their presence.

He explains to the couple as delicately as he can that any attempts to educate the boy would prove fruitless. The couple are taken aback. The headmaster assures them that it is not due to any problem, as such. The fact of the matter is that the boy’s way of thinking is not in line with what the school can offer. He humbly admits that he has never encountered a youth of Rory’s kind. The couple see the discomfort on the headmaster’s face, as if he’s ashamed of not being able to provide the environment Rory needs.

The man who raises Rory is not surprised by the headmaster’s admission, for, although he would never admit it, he too has felt intimidated at times by Rory’s intelligence.

The headmaster suggests that Rory terminate his education at the local school and seek entrance into Trinity College, Dublin, where the professors would no doubt be better suited to accommodate and nurture his keen mind. The couple thank the headmaster and make their exit. Although they agree with him, on the walk back home they say little to each other. They know sending Rory away is impossible for two reasons; first, their meager income could not support tuition and boarding for Rory. But it’s the second reason which is much more of an obstacle. They both know that neither of them could bear parting with the young man who is so dear to them. It is an incredibly rare act of selfishness on their parts, and the pain and shame it inflicts on them is such that they never speak of the matter again.
Eamonn and Phyllis had delighted in the project of preparing a residence for Kenny and his guests. After receiving the request from Bridey, Eamonn had approached his neighbor and good friend Sean O’Connor about the availability of a small cottage which had served as the former residence of Sean’s grandfather. Sean had told him it hadn’t been lived in since the old man’s death three years ago, but if he and Phyllis wanted to use it, they could, rent-free, provided they tidied the place up.

Upon first sight of the cottage, which rested on the edge of the bay just outside of town, Eamonn’s first thought was that he might have bitten off more than he could chew, for from the outside, the stone building looked run-down and in desperate need of repair. However, once inside his uneasiness subsided. The quaint dwelling had been well-preserved by a sound roof and solid windows and doors. It was a typical stone cottage, hundreds of years old, with a small kitchen and lounge room on the ground floor and two small bedrooms upstairs. It was sparsely decorated, but the furniture was of good quality and all the mattresses needed were some time in the outdoor air. The cottage had been outfitted with a toilet, bath and running water just a few years before the grandfather’s death and had been hooked up to the town’s electricity, so the guests would not suffer a lack of any of the luxuries Eamonn was certain they were accustomed to in America.

While Phyllis spent her days dusting and scrubbing the inside of the cottage from top to bottom, Eamonn had put a fresh coat of whitewash paint on the exterior. He also repainted the small rowboat which sat upturned on the beachhead outside the cottage and outfitted two bicycles in the utility room with new tires, chains and hand-grips. He had trimmed the weeds surrounding the cottage while Phyllis cut back the overgrowth of what had been at one time, a very well-maintained garden. With new sheets, pillowcases and blankets and a full set of crockery, dishware and utensils, the cottage was transformed into a marvelously cozy setting. Upon completion of their joint project, Eamonn wrapped his arm around Phyllis as they stood in the driveway, looking at the end result of their labor.

“Maybe we’d be better off letting them stay on the farm, eh? A bit of time down here would do us no harm at all,” he joked.

“Sure, but can you imagine the Americans up at 4:30 every morning to milk the cows then?”

“Hah,” Eamonn shot back as they both giggled.

In actual fact, farming had been particularly good to Eamonn over the past few years and, with the added advantage of no children to provide for, he had taken
the unlikely step of purchasing a car, the first in his family to do so. Although it was not much to look at, the old car’s engine was sound and it had opened new opportunities for Eamonn and Phyllis to visit friends and family more often. It had also brought him closer to his neighbors, as he had willingly lent it to anyone in need of transport swifter than their horse and cart and, over a very short period of time, it became a sort of community vehicle. Eamonn’s generosity was a godsend to the rustic area. Although most Western countries were rapidly progressing, the poverty and isolation of rural Ireland of the mid-1930’s had kept the locals caught in a time warp. Despite the fact that Ireland was an independent republic, industrial innovations were slow to come to her shores.

As the time of their guest’s arrival neared, Eamonn did his best to clean the car inside and out so as to present it in the best possible condition. On the morning of their arrival, he and Phyllis had gone to the grocer’s to purchase a full supply of fresh staples and by the time the train from Cork had pulled into the station in Bantry, the O’Connor cottage was in perfect order for its guests.
Kenny, Charles and Elizabeth had no time to take in the sights of Cork City, for the train to Bantry from the main station was departing almost immediately upon their arrival from Cobh. Charles had tipped the train’s head porter in Cobh handsomely so the trio's luggage would be in safe hands for the transfer, and as such, they would be able to simply relax and take in the scenery.

For his part, Kenny’s non-stop description of the sights was better than the finest tour guide in Ireland, and Charles was stunned by the enthusiasm of his friend. He’d seen Kenny in virtually every situation he could imagine but this was new, this was an endearing, child-like Kenny he’d never witnessed before.

“Elizabeth, look, there in the distance, that’s the Chetwyn Viaduct. We’ll be going over it and if you look down you should see some farmers on their way to the Bandon Market, where they will auction their cattle and sheep.”

Elizabeth’s ears had welcomed the non-stop description coming from Kenny, as with the wave of calm that had washed over her upon first sight of land, his good-natured voice was like that of a private narrator of her own peaceful dream. She noted everything he pointed out, but in her serene state, the vistas, stations and woods the train clattered through all seemed to appear in slow motion, with her eyes unhurriedly moving from one scene to the next, to the next. In her tranquility, nothing seemed jarring, rather, each new sight melded perfectly, seamlessly with the previous, all in harmony as a never-ending kaleidoscope of beauty and peace.

Charles was also noting all that Kenny pointed out, but his was a mind content more with being entertained than hypnotized. He was wonderfully amused by the charming names of the quiet towns they passed through; Ballinhassig, Innishannon, Dunmanway, Drimoleague. On land less than two hours, the magical and enchanting country had already cast a spell on both of the young lovers.

Durrus Road was the last stop before the end of the line in Bantry, where all remaining passengers on the train would disembark. As the train began its long, slow, run down the hill into Bantry, the vast expanse of Bantry Bay unfolded before them, the town nestled safely in the deepest corner, protected from the harsh winds whipping around the tip of the Beara Peninsula. In the middle of the bay sat the rolling meadows of Whiddey Island, with its identical mounded peaks sloping lazily toward the sky.

The town itself, from the distance they were observing it from, appeared to be created by the steady hands of a toymaker. A large, open square dominated the landscape, where tiny people milled about, conducting the business of a day.
Brilliantly-colored buildings lined each other side-by-side, each with its own distinct, sturdy architecture. The stone town hall lay at the far end of the square, while on an adjacent hill far to their right, the steeple and spire of the town’s church could be seen jutting up over the townscape. With the mid-morning sun laying its warm glow over the town, the entire vision seemed surreal. From their perspective, Bantry appeared more to be moving towards them, rather than them approaching it. Kenny’s narration ended and nothing was heard until the explosive burst of steam from the locomotive jolted each of them out of their trance.
Eamonn couldn’t hold back a quiet laugh as he watched the American triumvirate stepping off the train. Oblivious to the fact that every other passenger was wearing the simple clothes of the Irish farmer, the two men in their perfectly-pressed suits and the woman in her silk dress, long coat and wide-brimmed hat stuck out like sore thumbs as they gawked aimlessly, looking for their host, all the while having no clue as to how out of place they appeared. Taking pleasure in their gaucheness for a few extra seconds, he approached them.

“You must be Kenny, then,” Eamonn announced correctly.

“Aye, and you’d be Eamonn.”

“I am indeed.” Kenny offered his hand which disappeared in Eamonn’s massive grip.

“This is Charles Collins, and this is Miss Elizabeth Brewster.” Charles energetically shook Eamonn’s hand. Elizabeth, still in a bit of a daze, whispered a very soft hello.

“How was the journey?” Eamonn said. Charles and Elizabeth looked at Kenny, as if an understanding had been met that he was the group’s spokesman.

“Oh!” Kenny spat out abruptly. “It was, um, what’s the word? Comfortable. Yes, that’s it. It was a very comfortable journey on the ship, and I’ve been pointing out a few sights on the train ride down from Cork.”

“That’s grand,” said Eamonn. “Well, where are your belongings then? We’ll be getting you down to the cottage straight away.”

Charles looked behind him to see two porters unloading their suitcases and trunks and felt a surge of shameful recognition; not only had they over-packed for the trip, but by the looks of Eamonn their clothing was completely inappropriate for the setting they’d entered. He looked at the farmer.

“I think all I need is the address, and the boys back there will arrange the transport for our belongings.” A grin came across Eamonn’s face as he looked over Charles’s shoulder. He let out a piercing whistle.

“Aye, Jimmy, my friends’ packages go to the old O’Connor cottage!” One of the porters looked at Eamonn and winked his acknowledgement.

“Right you be, Eamonn,” he barked back.

“Now then, you could probably do with a bit of a late breakfast or early lunch, I’d imagine.” Kenny again spoke for the group.

“Yes, I think we’re all famished.”
“Well, let’s get loaded into the car and I’ll run you out to where you’ll be staying then.”

“Oh, yes, I think we’d all very much appreciate that, Eamonn,” Charles offered.

“All right, she’s just over here,” Eamonn said, pointing to the lone car in the town square.

The four walked down the steps of the train station, Charles taking Elizabeth’s hand as she gingerly navigated the stairs in her formal, high-heeled shoes. They moved across the firm dirt square to where the car was parked and Eamonn opened the passenger door for Elizabeth to sit in the front. With a look of shock on her face, she asked, “Do you expect me to drive?” Eamonn looked confused for a moment then laughed out loud.

“We’ve got the steering wheel on the right side over here, Miss Elizabeth. And by that I don’t mean the correct side, that’s just where they put it, so that’s where I sit.”
The sound of the car’s tires grinding against the gravel road alerted Phyllis to their arrival. She stood up from the kitchen table, smoothed the front of her blouse and skirt and walked out into the driveway just as Eamonn pulled the car to a stop in front of the cottage. She walked directly up to Elizabeth first and introduced herself with the self-assured but kind manner which always put people at ease.

Eamonn watched with admiration as the geniality of her introductions made the guests feel right at home. After a bit of small talk, he announced, “Well then, there’s no food out here and these poor folks have already had a full day’s travel, Phyllis. On we go!” She shot him a playful pout then led them into the cottage.

“Oh my goodness!” Elizabeth exclaimed as she walked into the cozy dwelling. “It’s so lovely!”

“Well, it’s not the royal palace, but we thought it would suit you just fine,” Eamonn said in his self-effacing manner.

“It’s absolutely perfect,” Elizabeth said to the ceiling as her eyes roamed the first-floor space with pleasure.

Phyllis had already set the table with five place settings and the smell of cooked ham filled the air, reminding the guests of just how hungry they actually were. In their excitement over arriving in Ireland, they had missed breakfast, and with mid-day approaching they were all ravenous.

“Go ahead, sit down then,” Phyllis said as she started to lay out the sumptuous meal she’d prepared.

“Oh, Phyllis, you must have been cooking all night!”

“No, no, no, dear. This is just a little something I whipped up while Eamonn fetched ye from the station. Now enjoy yourselves.”

All but Charles felt completely comfortable and adjusted to the new setting. Kenny and Eamonn were family. They were going to have plenty to catch up on and lots of exciting and interesting things to share with each other. He could picture Elizabeth forming a cheerful bond. But now, for him, with the excitement of the voyage over, with the thrill of adventure and feeling of being on a carefree escapade disappearing by the second, the true reality of what he had undertaken sank in. He felt an ache of loneliness and a return of the dread he thought had abated. It hit him like a punch in the stomach. The friendly banter filling the kitchen was low, humming background noise. Although maintaining a look of calm, as he picked at his food, he was being terrorized by the shrillness of his own haunting, inner dialogue. “What have you gotten yourself into, you stupid bastard?” his secret tormentor asked. “So,
you think you're ready to bring a child into the world? You're ready to be a husband and a father? What would your father say to you if he knew the truth of this charade you're trying to pull off, you imbecile!"

He managed to eat four or five mouthfuls of food and drink a glass of milk, but he found himself repeatedly mopping his sweating brow with the napkin Phyllis had laid out on his placemat.

When the others had finished, Phyllis, Elizabeth and Kenny leaned their backs against the sturdy rests of the kitchen chairs, while Eamonn leaned over towards Charles and whispered, "Why don't I take you out to stretch your legs a bit from that train ride, eh?" Charles jerked out of his stupor. Faking a sense of self-confidence, he replied, "Ah, yes. That sounds like just the thing for me."

Charles thanked Phyllis for the lovely meal, although his plate remained nearly full. As he got up from his seat, Kenny tried to follow, but with a very subtle tap on Kenny's arm, Eamonn let him know that he should remain where he was. Kenny's eyes met Eamonn's and he understood.

"Come on then, Charles. I'll show you 'round so you can help the rest get their bearings after they've had a chance to let their food settle." Eamonn opened the kitchen door and Charles followed, the cool air soothing his sweating body and pounding heart.
The two of them walked back down the road from which they'd arrived, the gravel crunching underfoot, both men silent, but Eamonn’s silence was more of an inner stillness, while Charles’s mind continued to rampage, obscuring his ability to engage in conversation. As they strolled up the long, steady incline, they heard a low rumble in the distance.

“That’ll be Jimmy and the boys with your things, no doubt,” Eamonn said. Charles glanced at him, a distant look in his face. Eamonn shot his head down the road, jerking his nose upward towards the increasing rumble. Sure enough, the panel truck bearing the logo of Coras Iompair Eireann, the Irish Transport System, meandered shakily down the road. Eamonn guided Charles to the side of the road and as the truck pulled up alongside them, Jimmy stopped and rolled down the window.

“Is Phyllis at the cottage?”

“Aye, Jimmy, she and the other guests will show you where to put the packages. By the way, this is Charles Collins, from America.” Charles gave Jimmy a meek wave. Jimmy touched his right forefinger to the bill of his flat cap.

“Right then, Charles,” Jimmy nodded, putting the truck into first gear without looking at the shifter. Keeping an amused stare on Charles, he said, “Now, keep your eye on this one,” shooting a quick glance at Eamonn. “He’s a sneaky fella.” Seeing the look of confusion on Charles’s face, Jimmy said to Eamonn, “Looks like your man here could use a pint, or perhaps something a bit stronger. Take the edge off that long journey of his.”

“Aye, Jimmy, maybe we’ll see you down at O’Riordan’s for a jar, in a bit.”

“I’ll be gaggin’ for one after I’m done here, boyo.”

“Right you be, then,” Eamonn said, as Jimmy rolled up his window, stepped on the accelerator and continued down the hill towards the cottage. Sensing Charles’s discomfort, Eamonn filled the silence.

“Now that Jimmy, he’s a real gem, so he is. I’ve known him since we were yearlings and his whole childhood you should’ve heard the lad. His mind was filled with grand plans of how he was going to travel the world.” Eamonn waved his hand across the horizon as he spoke. “Our Jimmy, he was destined be a great explorer. He was certain his mere appearance in the lives of the glamorous inhabitants of mysterious ports-of-call would bring joy and delight to all who had the privilege of his introduction. Their lives would be enriched for having known Jimmy, of that he was certain. Then, after years of adventure, he’d return one fine day, wielding grand
tales of faraway lands and he’d have the Bantry boys green with envy as he sang the praises of the pleasures he’d given the exotic olive-skinned beauties the world over. Saw himself as the second coming of Marco Polo, so he did. And look at him now, he’s living his dream. A traveling man, that he is. All the way from Bantry to Cork and back, five days a week.” He shot a glance at Charles and saw his body quiver beneath his jacket.

“T’sall right to laugh at the bastard. That was a feckin’ funny story.” He gave Charles a shove and Charles let his suppressed amusement show.

“So, that’s the way you reward your friend for delivering our baggage, is it?” Charles questioned with a chuckle and a smile. “You poke fun at him?”

Eamonn gave Charles a wistful look.

“Aye, boy, ye’ve got a bit to learn about the Irish.” He paused. Then, breaking into a broad smile, he added, “But I’ve no doubt you’ll be a quick study.”

Charles’s echoing laughter was the only sound heard as the afternoon sun warmed their backs from the fresh chill of the summer wind blowing off the bay. They walked side by side in the middle of the road without concern for no other vehicle would be travelling the remote lane anytime soon.
The end of the cottage road was a four-way crossroads with O’Riordan’s Pub sitting in the pride of place; a must-stop for anyone going into town for afternoon errands, or coming back at day’s end. Eamonn pushed open the front door and led Charles into the pub, pointing to a small corner booth on the left. Eamonn nodded at the man behind the bar, Niall O’Riordan, the owner. Looking their way, Niall simply said, “Eamonn,” and continued to wash the pint glasses he was tending to.

“Sit tight,” Eamonn said to Charles, then meandered to the bar. “How are ye?” Eamonn asked Niall.

“I’m grand, thanks.” Then, looking towards Charles, he added, “That’ll be one of the guests from America, then, won’t it?”

“Aye, he is. And I think a pint of lager and a drop of Jameson’s is just what he’d be needing at the moment. And I’d say the same for meself.”

“I’ll bring ‘em over to ye, then.” Eamonn left a small amount of money on the bar and walked back to the booth.

“Niall is sorting us out,” Eamonn announced to Charles.

“Good. That walk gave me a powerful thirst. The air is so fresh here.”

“Aye, ‘tis. They say that West Cork has the cleanest air in the world.”

Charles looked suspiciously across the booth, then out the window. Eamonn continued, “I’m not pullin’ your leg. It’s because of the way the trade winds blow. You see, our air comes straight north from the South Pole, so it never touches land until it reaches us. That’s why it’s as clean as it is.” Charles looked at Eamonn with suspicion.

“Is that really true?”

“As sure as I’m sitting here.”

“Geez,” Charles said sheepishly. “No wonder.”

Niall approached the booth cradling a tray in his left hand and set a pint and a shot glass of whiskey each in front of Eamonn and Charles, then walked back to the bar. Lifting his pint towards Charles he said, “Now raise your glass.” Charles did as he was told and as Eamonn’s glass met Charles, Eamonn cried, “Slainte!”

“Huh?” Charles asked with a look of bewilderment.

Eamonn laughed at his new friend.

“It’s Irish for ‘good health’. Kind of like the Brits sayin’, ‘Cheers’.”

“Oh, right!” Charles said, a blush of embarrassment deepening the color of his already-flushed cheeks.

“Slainte!” he fired back.
The only other men in the pub, two old-timers sitting at the far end of the eight-stool bar, whipped their heads towards the American. Seeing the alarm in Charles’s face, Eamonn looked over his shoulder at the three and bellowed, “Now relax, boys. He might have been born and reared in America, but he’s one of us, mind. He’s a Collins, from out near Skibbereen.”

The two old-timers beamed and raised their glasses towards Charles, while Niall tossed his bar towel over his shoulder and harkened back, “Aye, fella. Feel free to say whatever ye like in my place here.” Then, after a short pause he added, “And welcome to Ireland, boy!” Charles giggled like a child. Part of his good humor was directed at himself for his own foolish behaviour, but more deeply, Charles felt a returning calm.
After Jimmy had unloaded their belongings, he invited Kenny to join him with the other men enjoying themselves at O’Riordan’s. Kenny jumped at Jimmy’s invitation, giving absolutely no thought to the fact that he was leaving Elizabeth in the company of what was, to her, a complete stranger. His enthusiasm was partially out of excitement but also due to his worry about letting others share Charles’s company without him. No doubt Elizabeth would have appreciated Kenny showing similar concern for her, but Kenny had his own interests at heart. He quickly thanked Phyllis for lunch and bade Elizabeth a swift goodbye before leaping into the passenger seat of Jimmy’s truck.

The sudden absence of both men spooked Elizabeth in a way that surprised her, for clearly Phyllis posed no threat whatsoever, in fact, Phyllis was totally preoccupied tidying up. Still, Elizabeth couldn’t prevent a wave of angst from washing over her, much like Charles had experienced earlier. She felt raw, exposed. Fear overtook her and under the table, she flexed the muscles in her leg. She felt desperately alone.

“What on earth is this all about?” she wondered. Phyllis interrupted by suggesting that she take one of the chairs out into the front garden and sit in the sun for a few minutes while she finished cleaning up the kitchen. Elizabeth did so in a manner which resembled that of a child obeying an order, dragging the chair roughly through the door and digging two parallel lines in the grass with the rear legs of the chair as she slid it a few feet outside the kitchen door, plopping herself down in the chair’s seat, resting her hands on her lap.

She closed her eyes and tried to allow the warmth of the mid-day sun to provide some comfort, but by now her mind was racing. “Here I am, dumped in a completely foreign setting, with a total stranger inside the house, pregnant, unmarried, running away…” her mind churned. She could feel the pounding of her heart in her ears. She clenched her clammy hands into fists. A question raced through her mind. “How in the world am I going to broach the subject of why I’m here with this woman?”

For reasons she couldn’t explain, she felt an obligation to divulge the entire truth to Phyllis. Standing opposite was another voice commanding her to keep her business a secret. Powerful feelings of shame began to manifest in beads of sweat, which started to trickle down her forehead.

The torment was interrupted by the appearance of Phyllis asking, “Can I bring ye a glass of water?” Avoiding eye contact, Elizabeth managed to mumble a
thank you, and then added with a stammer that she was all right at the moment. It would have brought great comfort to Elizabeth to know that Phyllis hadn’t the slightest interest in interrogating her about her appearance in Ireland; the reasons for it, the timing of it, or any other matter at all. For Phyllis was a woman unlike any other Elizabeth had known before. The farmer’s wife was perfectly content to mind her own business. When she finally did emerge with her own chair to join Elizabeth in the garden, she was so quiet that Elizabeth barely noticed. Delicately pushing the few strands of hair which had fallen forward back over her ears and into the tidy bun she wore at the rear of her head, Phyllis said in a mild whisper, “Thanks for bringing such fine weather with ye.” Then, with a contented sigh, she added, “Ahhh, days like these make me forget all of the damp and cold of the winter months, so they do.” Yet, in spite of the graceful ease with which Phyllis carried herself, Elizabeth’s own inner chatter continued. Guilt, embarrassment and an unrelenting fear led her to abruptly blurt out, “So, I’m sure you’re full of questions about us.” Phyllis cleared her throat.

“My dear, Eamonn and I are just glad to see some new faces. I’ve lived my whole life within a twenty five-mile radius of where we’re sitting right now. I’m just grateful for the company.” Elizabeth was dumbstruck by the innocence of Phyllis’s reply, but not having the courage to look at her, she kept her gaze on a tiny cloud passing overhead.

“You’re going to be here for a nice, long visit and we’ll have plenty of time to talk about all sorts of things. I’ve got lots of questions about what it’s like in America and what your schools teach and….oh, don’t worry, we’ll have plenty to talk about. But right now I can’t imagine how tired you must be after that long trip across the sea, so why don’t we just sit here and enjoy the sun.” She added, with a giggle, “Remember, this is Ireland. A fine day like today has to be appreciated, for we may not see that big yellow thing in the sky for another two months!”

Although there wasn’t anything overly humorous in the statement itself, Elizabeth found herself laughing heartily, then, without warning, tears started streaming down both of her cheeks. She struggled to stay in command, but her body trembled and she found herself twisting away from Phyllis to try to hide what she felt was an impending attack of sobbing beyond her ability to control. Phyllis remained silent, allowing Elizabeth to sit in the moment and in doing so, Elizabeth was able to regain her composure that much more quickly. Wiping the tears from her cheeks, but still lacking the nerve to look Phyllis in the eye, she whimpered, “I
think you’re right. I’m much more tired from the journey than I gave myself allowance for.”

“I’m sure that’s it,” said Phyllis. Very delicately, she arose from her chair and looped her hand under Elizabeth’s arm.

“Come on now, love. Let’s get you inside. The boys will be up to no good for a bit, so let’s use that time to get you some peace and quiet for yourself. I’ll get you sorted and leave you to have a nice rest.”

Elizabeth allowed Phyllis to guide her back into the cottage and up the stairs into the room that she would be sharing with Charles. Phyllis took great care in not talking down to Elizabeth. Once they were inside the room, she merely said, “There you go,” waving a hand across the span of the room. Before leaving, she whispered, “If you need anything, just give us a shout.” She eased the door shut and tip-toed back down the stairs in silence.

Elizabeth didn’t bother to undress. She slid easily onto the thick top blanket of the bed, her head sinking into the soft pillow. The wild swings of emotion had exhausted her, but they had also served to grant her a feeling of relief. She’d let out what had been building inside her for how long she had no idea. The release of tension allowed a sense of comfort to take hold. It was so strange to be treated with such tenderness by another woman.

Although she was in a strange country surrounded by people she had barely met, this setting, the little cottage by the sea and, more importantly, the character of her newfound friend allowed her, for the first time in her young life, to feel truly safe. Closing her eyes, the feeling of being protected sank into her very core and lying so contentedly in the velvety comfort of the soft bed, she drifted into a blissful state, as if the most frail, brittle part of her soul was being held by the strong arms of a soothing, loving Presence.

*Rory’s understanding of the natural world brings him endless hours of enjoyment. It is a warm summer’s day when Rory enters the kitchen and opens a cupboard door, carefully removing four perfect teaspoon-sized cubes of sugar. He places the cubes in a handkerchief and meticulously folds the sugar up in a bundle. He strolls out into the garden and lays the handkerchief on the ground, then seats himself.

Unfolding the bundle he removes one cube of sugar and sets it three feet’s distance from a small anthill in front of him. Then he waits.*
The ants emerge in a single-file line and march toward the awaiting cube. Rory’s eyes are full of excitement as he watches the first ant pry a single grain of sugar from the cube, then turn and march back in the opposite direction, the ant’s body brushing against the oncoming tribe. The cube is dismantled, grain by grain, but what enthralls Rory is the silent communication between the ants. As the cube is taken apart, he witnesses the message passed along; when there are but five grains of sugar left, exactly five ants are all that remain of the once-endless stream of on-comers. Then there are four, three, two, and as the final ant clutches the last remaining grain of sugar, Rory nearly cries out with thrill.

He watches the last ant fall in line behind its predecessor and the single trail struts back to its home. He removes another cube and places it on the ground. He watches this demonstration of subtle communication all afternoon.
Over the next week, Kenny took full charge of the entire situation. In the town center, he arranged for three separate bank accounts; one for him, one for Charles, and a joint account for Charles and Elizabeth (all courtesy of Charles’s trust fund, of course). He visited the town square and managed to strike a good deal on a sturdy but inexpensive 2-door Ford which would be perfect to ferry the threesome around. He spent his afternoons getting Charles acquainted with the area and, more importantly, with driving on the opposite side of the road he was accustomed to in America. In fact, they had more than one scare. The first was with one of the many farming tractors which plodded along the narrow roads, another, the source of great humor at the dinner table, was a near-calamitous encounter with a herd of cattle.

He also visited the local shops to purchase items essential to country life in Ireland; rubber, water-proof boots for all three, durable, loose-fitting rain jackets and wool flat-caps for both himself and Charles.

As a very special gift for Charles, he ordered a hand-made walking stick from a local craftsman. When Kenny collected it, the artisan wrapped the walking stick for him and Kenny put it in the trunk of the car. Charles and Kenny set off the next morning for an outing they had planned earlier in the week.

After a drive along the road which perfectly framed the Beara Mountains as a backdrop to Bantry Bay, they reached nearby Glengarriff. Kenny told Charles to pull the car into the Eccles Hotel and park.

There weren’t many cars in the large lot so Charles didn’t have to go through the humiliation of struggling to fit into a tight space as, despite having mastered the big problem of adapting to the poor quality of the roads and oddity of right-hand steering, parallel parking remained a big challenge for him and he avoided it at all cost.

The Eccles Hotel was a landmark in the area. Although the hotel was massive, it was in no way overbearing, as its stone façade blended perfectly with the hillside it was built into, a feat which actually created an optical illusion. In fact, the towering height of the building didn’t become apparent until one was standing directly in front of the hotel itself. It wasn’t clear if this was merely a coincidence or an extremely adept piece of work by a very talented architect. Either way, after exiting the car, they both stopped for a moment, arching their necks backward to stare straight up at the distant peak of the hotel roof, marveling at its remarkable deception, then climbed the stairs of the hotel entrance and walked into the lobby.
Kenny led the way into the parlor where a middle-aged woman greeted them and showed them to a table placed in front of a huge window with a panoramic view. With the restaurant nearly empty, the silence enhanced the setting. A magnificent, flawless sky of the most remarkable shade of blue unfolded forever in front of them, and was interrupted only by the smallest of clouds, as if an artist had purposefully dipped his brush in brilliant white and, with great care, dabbed small, evenly-spaced, three-dimensional dots of the exact same size on his canvas of azure.

They watched as the lightest of winds from the south blew the clouds from left to right through the path of the sun, and in doing so, grey shadows from the clouds moved lazily at a hypnotically un rushed speed across the still, glassy surface of the bay, then up over the rocky coastline, moving on to stroke the strikingly green, fertile rolling hills of Bantry before disappearing behind them, to continue their soundless journey.

The horizon to the right was a stark contrast. The tall, intimidating mountains of the Beara Peninsula oozed a combination of protection and harshness; barren and wild, with jagged edges and peaks. The mountains seemed to have jumped out of the core of the earth to offer their shelter from the merciless attack of the Atlantic winds; like a daunting, broad-shouldered father might stand over a vulnerable child, reminding any threat that it had better think twice before even contemplating an attempt at harming his offspring.

The interruption of the waiter’s arrival to hand them the menu was barely noticed. Their gazes remained fixed on the spectacular vista in front of them. Minutes passed as each was caught in his own thoughts.

After the torment of the first day, Charles had settled comfortably into the rural lifestyle. With Kenny handling all of the daily affairs, he had time to enjoy Elizabeth’s company. As Elizabeth spoke of her fears and the anguish the hardship had inflicted on her, Charles surprised himself in his ability to offer comfort. In doing so, he had renewed his own sense of competence in the relationship. He was proud of himself and felt his fortitude growing by the day.

Meanwhile, inside Kenny’s wild mind, the mill was forever turning. He was playing back the speech he had been rehearsing over and over. He knew that if his delivery was anything less than perfect, Charles might perceive it as the duplicitous proposal it actually was. For his part, Kenny was still clinging to his deluded belief that his sole interest was in his friends’ collective well-being; he had the interest of the young couple at heart and was merely trying to continue to provide a smooth
pathway for them to follow. In reality, it was just another phase of an unfolding, elaborate scheme. His ability to manipulate others was growing, exceeded only by his ability to manipulate himself. Had there been an objective observer present, he would have marveled at the young man’s power to convince himself of his own selflessness and altruism. Sadly, all of these facts lay far outside of Kenny’s own self-awareness, but the facts remained nonetheless. Kenneth Murphy did not lift a finger without some pre-determined expectation, condition or payoff in mind, either immediate or in the future. His calculating ways were being more finely honed by the incredibly complicated situation he was now ‘managing.’

After ordering and enjoying a simple lunch of soup and ham sandwiches, Kenny eyed Charles carefully as his friend eased into the comfort of the wingback restaurant chair.

“You know Charles, I’ve seen a real change in Elizabeth recently. I admire you for supporting her at such an unsettling time,” he said, from a place of absolute truth.

“Well, Kenny, if you hadn’t done such a thorough job of taking charge of everything else I wouldn’t have had any time to comfort her. You’re really just as responsible, if not more so than I am for things going as smoothly as they have. In fact, I can’t believe that we’ve settled in so quickly.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, I guess somewhere in the back of my mind I was preparing myself for some sort of crash, you know? Like a big let-down after the novelty of the journey and settling into the cottage had worn off. Don’t get me wrong, I’ve had my moments of doubt, but I’m shocked that it feels like the opposite is happening.”

Kenny shifted in his chair, listening.

“Elizabeth and Phyllis get along famously, and of course that’s helped me tremendously, but...there’s more to it than that.” Charles looked puzzled, but not ill-at-ease. Kenny waited for Charles to continue. Charles caressed the brushed cloth of the arms of the chair with the palms of his hands.

“In a way, I guess I felt gutless at first, running away from America in the fashion that we did, telling no one the truth about what was happening. But worse than that, I’ve had this nagging feeling that at any moment this whole escapade was going to fall to pieces. The truth is, all of that worrying was pointless. I feel very much at ease here.” Kenny nodded.

“I mean, it’s so nice to wake up without having my entire day planned out for me; having some obligation to meet or some imposed agenda to follow. That’s the
way it’s been my whole life. Charles stopped stroking the chair and gripped each arm tightly. He stared at the tablecloth.

“Whether it was the pressure my father put on me to perform well academically or my teammates needing me to win a game or a tennis match, whatever. I’ve always had this sense that my life was somehow out of my control. Call it encumbrance, a burden, whatever.” He loosened his grip on the chair.

“But being here in Ireland, I don’t know, I just feel really free. It might sound stupid, but it’s all of the little things. I can wake up when I want, eat when I want, pick up a good book from Eammon or help Phyllis and Elizabeth in the garden. The activity doesn’t really matter. What matters is that there’s no schedule. Here, to anyone I’ve met or been introduced to I’m just ‘the American staying at the old O’Connor cottage.’ Do you understand how liberating that is for me?”

“I do, Charles.” Charles pushed his chair back from the table and lazily crossed his legs. He took in a deep breath and let the air fill his chest. As he exhaled, his upper body sank back against the heavily-padded chair. He smirked.

“So here I am, a grown man, a college graduate, a father- and husband-to-be and for the first time in my life I feel like I can handle myself. He leaned forward.

“Kenny,” he whispered, “to be honest with you, I’ve never felt so sure of myself. Who would have thought I would have to flee America to experience freedom? I mean, how ironic is that?” Kenny smiled at his friend. He picked up on Charles’s use of the word ‘ironic’ but he also didn’t miss the opportunity to reinforce the role he had played in making all of this possible.

“My friend, didn’t I tell you I had it under control?” Kenny took over the conversation.

“And I agree with you. There is some irony in what you call ‘running away to experience freedom’, but I told you from the start I knew what I was doing. This was the smartest move we could have made and remember, old boy, we’ve only been here a short time. If you take how good you feel right now, imagine how much more that feeling is going to grow over the coming days, weeks, months. You’ll be ready to take on the world!”

“I wouldn’t go that far, Sport. But, I do feel really happy about things. I can say, without any hesitation, that I truly believe everything’s going to be just fine.”

“You’re damn right, Charles. I couldn’t agree with you more.”

Charles turned his gaze back out the window, the view adding to his serenity. Kenny didn’t disturb him, quietly motioning for the check and paying it.
After a few minutes, Kenny made a motion to get up from his chair. Charles caught Kenny’s movement out of the corner of his eye. For all of his newfound self-assuredness, Charles arose and obediently followed his friend out of the hotel, down the stairs and out the front door. Kenny walked on, but Charles paused for a moment on the landing, letting the light breeze from off the bay whistle in his ears. He inhaled the intoxicatingly fresh air and made his way across the parking lot.
“Give me the keys, I’ll drive,” Kenny said to Charles as they reached the car.

“Sure,” Charles said, casually tossing the keys through the air to Kenny. They drove back towards Bantry, Kenny tapping his fingers on the steering wheel the whole way. Just outside of town was an overlook next to the road which offered yet another marvelous view of the horizon. Kenny swung the car into the lay-by.

“What’s going on?” Charles questioned innocently.

“I’ve got something for you.”

“Really?” Charles asked, his interest piqued. His friend had a seemingly endless reserve of surprises.

“Go over there and take a seat on the bench,” Kenny instructed, pointing to a backless wooden step. Charles consented and in doing so, sat facing away from the car. Kenny circled back to the rear of the car where he unlocked the trunk and removed the wrapped present for Charles, along with two bottles of beer he had also stashed. He stuck one bottle in each of the side pockets of his coat and marched toward his friend. Stepping in front of the seated Charles, Kenny hovered over him and thrust the wrapped gift forward.

“For you, my friend, may it serve you well.” Charles stared at the ornately wrapped gift with its tight layer of kelly-green paper overlapped by an ascending gold ribbon.

“It looks kind of like an Irish candy cane,” he thought silently to himself. At the top of the gift was an elaborately tied red bow, made of silk, he guessed.

“Well, are you going to just stare at it all afternoon or are you going to open it?”

“Sorry, yes, of course,” Charles said with a grin as he took the object into his hands. He carefully untied the bow, pulling once and watching the silk bow unravel in one long strand. He then unwound the gold ribbon and carefully placed it next to the red silk on the ground. Giving Kenny a look that was full of both eagerness and suspicion he finally tore away the green wrapping. What he saw made his eyes bulge.

The stick Kenny had purchased for Charles was much more than a mere cane. This was a hand-crafted piece of art. When Kenny was a child, his own father had had one and Kenny remembered his father telling him the story of the Shillelagh. The stick was made of bog-wood, a material exclusive to Ireland. The wood itself had been culled from a local bog, a millennia-old dried up wetland. The wood was, in all probability, thousands of years old and stronger than steel. The
maker's name was Liam Shaughnessey, who was a builder by trade. Shaughnessey had made these walking sticks for years, not for profit, but more as a hobby. He spent long afternoons trudging through bogs, dredging the hardened earth in search of just the right pieces of wood. On one side, this particular piece was a dark brown, almost black, which was the pressurized wood's natural color. On the other, several very thin coats of paint had produced a look of bleached oak. After finding this specimen, Shaughnessey would have first chiseled then sanded the stick to a perfect smoothness where not a single bump or ridge could be felt, no matter how lightly one ran his hand down the shaft of the stick. But the real beauty of the piece lay in its handle, a rounded knob.

Shaughnessey had left the top of the stick at its original thickness and then carefully rounded the end so that it would fit perfectly into the down-facing palm of a grown man's hand. The thickness of the handle gave insight into how much chiseling and sanding was undertaken to produce the shaft of the stick. Carving away the edges of the knob at a forty-five degree angle, he had left the very top of the stick a rounded crown, which is what made the fit in the palm so comfortable.

Where the shaft met the crown was a remarkable piece of craftsmanship. Shaughnessey had carved out a setting for a silver inlay, which included a hand-painted kelly-green Shamrock, the three-leafed clover symbolic of Ireland, and an inscription. The inlay fit so snugly into the stick, there was no need for glue, nails or any other affixer. After that, the stick received twelve coats of varnish, giving it an indestructible shine.

Charles eyed the stick with the awe of a child at Christmas. He ran his fingertips up and down its smooth surface then repeatedly planted the end firmly in the ground, leaning his weight upon it, only to once again cradle it in his hands. As he rolled the stick clockwise in his hands he inspected the small silver inlay. He pulled it close to his face, squinting to read the elegant etching on the piece of silver. At the top of the shield was a tiny bit of script which read simply, “Shaughnessey.” Inside the artisan had hand-tooled a message: “To my dear friend Charles, From KM.” As Charles studied the shield he found himself struggling to fight back tears.

“Jesus Christ, Kenny. This is incredible. My God, it's gorgeous.” Kenny watched as Charles inspected every inch of the stick.

“Now, if you want, you can call it a walking stick or a cane, but you can also make the leap of calling it by its proper name, a Shillelagh.”
“I’ll call it Helen of Troy if you want,” Charles shot back, in reference to its beauty. He turned his moist eyes to meet Kenny’s.

“Mr. Murphy, I’d like to think that I’ve seen it all from you, but you always find a way to out-do yourself. You never cease to amaze me, my friend. I am deeply touched by this. It’s so perfect that I don’t know whether to use it or to put it in a glass case for display.”

“I think Mr. Shaughnessey might take it as a personal affront if it weren’t used for its original purpose. Enjoy it.”

Charles stood and held the crown of the Shillelagh in his left hand, slowly lowering its tip to meet the ground. He took a few strides away from Kenny, then turned and marched back to him.

“It’s perfect. I don’t know what to say.”

“Well, my friend, it suits you to a tee. You look like a genuine Irish country squire. Now, take a seat for a moment, I want to tell you a bit of history you need to know. Listen closely, because this piece of wood is part of your heritage.” Charles sat back on the bench and gave Kenny his full attention.

“The Shillelagh has been known by many names. Long ago, it was called a bata and was used as an extremely lethal weapon. In the early days of Irish history, your ancestors and mine fought countless battles against marauders of all sorts, using a stick not unlike this one as their primary armament. You have to understand, Charles, that to have one given to you is an honoured tradition in Irish folklore. The handing over of a Shillelagh is also seen as a rite of passage into manhood, and it is a badge of honour for those who carry it. So there you go.” Charles turned his eyes back to the piece of wood. In a voice barely audible, all he could say was, “Wow.”

“No then, this calls for a bit of a celebration, don’t you think?” Kenny asked, producing the bottles of beer from his coat pockets.

“Yes, I guess it most certainly does,” Charles said, smiling.

Kenny opened a beer and handed it to Charles who set it between his legs. Still admiring his gift, he ignored the beer, holding the knob of the stick with both hands and pressing the narrow tip against the stone wall directly in front of the bench. Kenny popped the cap off of his own bottle, took a swig and sat down next to Charles. This was the anxious moment he’d been preparing for; the speech he’d rehearsed and, truth be told, the real reason he’d gone on this excursion with Charles. In a manner so quiet that Charles wouldn’t hear him, he took several slow, deep breaths both to calm himself and clear his mind.
“So, I’ve been thinking about where we are right now, and what I believe the next moves should be, in order to protect both you and Elizabeth.” Charles sprang to attention, his furrowed brow facing Kenny. Kenny maintained his composure, keeping his stare on the view in front of him. He continued in a voice that was rock-steady, devoid of emotion.

“We’ve managed this situation to perfection thus far. Our timing has been spotless, we’ve made the adjustment to life here and we’re settled in. Now we’ve got to address the issues we’ve left behind in America.” A cold chill ran down Charles’s spine.

Having enjoyed the day thus far and even going to the extent of telling Kenny how confident he was feeling, he couldn’t help but feel a knot starting to tighten in his stomach.

“Charles, here’s what I’m thinking and if at any point you believe I’m way off the mark or just plain wrong, please interrupt me and we’ll discuss it until we come up with the plan you think is best.”

“OK.”

“Here’s what I think. Elizabeth should write a series of letters to her family, well, her mother in particular. She should say something about arriving safely in Ireland and enjoying our company, you know, simple things like how nice it is to start her little adventure in the safety of friends, et cetera.”

“I agree. Good thinking.”

“Look, we can play this any way you like. I would suggest that she write about how comforting it’s been having you along with her. She can say that you’ve introduced her to some Irish relatives of yours, whatever you want. The point is, we want to keep things as vague and positive as possible. Are you with me so far?”

Charles nodded then set the Shillelagh next to him and lifted the beer to his lips, taking a long drink from it.

“We’ll need to try two separate angles. First, Elizabeth should write a series of letters on different pieces of paper and put them in different styles of envelopes. I’ve already bought the stationery. In the letters, she should describe what she’s seeing in the places she’s supposed to be visiting…banal stuff like, ‘Big Ben and Westminster Abbey were delightful to see. I really love the architecture of the classic buildings in London.’ You know, irrefutable facts that in no way can be specific to time or date or event. Still with me?”

“Yes, I hear you loud and clear.” Kenny took a deeper breath than normal, for here was the part of the plan he needed to handle with the most skill.
“So, let’s say we pull out a map and she picks, say, six spots she had planned to see and her mother is expecting to hear about. For those six spots, she can write letters exactly like the example I just gave about London, you know, ambiguous stuff about museums and theaters and all of the things that we know we can predict; things that aren’t going to change. I’ll then travel to every spot Elizabeth is supposed to go to and post her letters myself, on dates that would coincide with the schedule she’s given to her mother. Very easy so far, don’t you think?” Charles’s face beamed.

“Yeah, Kenny, sounds good.”

“So, that brings us to the tricky part. If, for any reason, there is a major event that might occur during the time that Elizabeth is supposed to be in a specific place; let’s say a demonstration in Belgium or something like that. I’m just shooting darts at a board here. Anyway, if something like that should happen, we’d have to have a back-up plan and here’s what I propose: I would then forge a letter in Elizabeth’s handwriting making reference to the specific event to let her family know that first—she’s fine, and second—how interesting it was to observe this event from a safe distance, you know, something like that. That way all of the information flow is controlled by us. You see? Her parents are getting regular updates and there will be no reason for them to be suspicious or full of worry.”

“OK, I’m with you.”

“Good. But, In order to lay the groundwork for what’s upcoming, her first letter needs to say something about how desperately in love with you she is and how the two of you are such wonderful traveling companions and, in a slight change in plans, you’ll now be traveling with her throughout Europe all the way up to the time she’s supposed to be at the Sorbonne. You see? Then, sometime in September, a letter will arrive announcing her pregnancy and that she’s decided to stay in Europe to have the child as she doesn’t want to travel, but will return a married woman with a beautiful grandchild to show off.” Charles was fine until the last sentence, at which point his entire body sagged.

“How the hell are we going to pull that off? As soon as they hear about a pregnancy and marriage they’ll be all over us.” But, that’s where Kenny’s savvy shined through.

“No, Charles, they won’t. This is an election year for the governor. The Brewsters are stuck in Massachusetts until after November. At no time can either one of them suddenly leave for two weeks to come to Europe to visit their daughter. Mr. Brewster isn’t going to risk the lieutenant governorship over it. Hell, he’s heir to
the throne now and will no doubt become the new governor in the next election. Like the good career man that he is, he’ll demand that Mrs. Brewster fulfill her obligations as the wife of a candidate during his time of need. Sure, she likes to make everyone think that she’s independent and makes her own decisions but she’s not stupid, Charles. She loves the life Mr. Brewster provides. Her whole life is about those fancy cocktail parties they get invited to and all of the country club outings and everything else. Besides, imagine the fallout if she were to bail out on him and the voters got suspicious? Or worse, if she were to lose the election for the governor? Well, my friend, you know what would happen then. They would destroy her for ruining them. The stakes are too high for her to play doting mother now. And hey, you know Mrs. Brewster. She’s not exactly the self-sacrificing type now, is she?” Charles let out a snort.

“Yeah, you’re right,” he answered. “She might ask a few questions, but at the end of the day, Mrs. Brewster always puts her own interests first.” Charles then took a few moments to take in everything Kenny had said but showed no signs of disagreement. It surely seemed like Kenny had every base covered. He took another long drink from the bottle of beer and thought some more. Kenny was absolutely right. The situation in America regarding Elizabeth’s family in particular, needed to be addressed and he’d come through brilliantly with a flawless plan to do so. After another, final, long drink of the beer he set down the empty bottle and re-gripped the Shillelagh, twisting it tightly in his hands.

“I think it’s the logical thing to do,” Charles said with finality.

Kenny watched his friend replay the speech in his mind, fully absorbing it. Charles twisted the Shillelagh faster and faster.

“It’s pure genius, Kenny! It’s perfect! I mean, we can word it so that Elizabeth makes clear that she didn’t find out about the pregnancy until she was well along and as a result, doesn’t want to risk the baby by traveling back to America. We can do this, Kenny! We can make this work!”

Kenny allowed Charles’s solace take root before bringing up the final item on his agenda.

“So, all that leaves is that you and I agree on how to deliver this to Elizabeth? How do you think we should handle that?”

Charles didn’t say a word for what seemed like an eternity and Kenny was starting to get nervous. Would Charles cave in? Was he going to blow the entire plan out of the water over fear of confronting Elizabeth with this blatant deception? His answer came in a monotonous tone.
“Let me think about that part.”

Kenny would have much preferred Charles to have an immediate answer that tied everything together, but even if Charles chickened out and dumped the whole thing in Kenny’s lap, he could handle that. As the most difficult part was now out of the way, the last thing Kenny wanted was for this most memorable day to end on a down note. He stared at the Shillelagh until Charles turned to catch him looking it.

“What?” Charles asked.

“Well, I just want you to know that by giving you a walking stick I’m not trying to send you a hint about your driving skills here in Ireland.”

At first Charles didn’t get the joke, but when Kenny tossed him the keys, Charles looked back down at the stick and let out a roaring laugh. “You wise-ass son of a bitch.”

Kenny chuckled because he knew that Charles usually only used foul language when he was happy. He moved in close to Charles.

“Everything’s going to be just fine, Charles, I promise.”

“You’re right, Sport.” Sitting side-by-side, gazing out over the bay, Kenny reached over and gave Charles a couple of hard smacks on his right shoulder.

“Yes, everything is going to be just fine,” Kenny whispered to himself.
Charles couldn’t wait to show Elizabeth the gift he’d received from Kenny and Elizabeth couldn’t help but laugh as Charles demonstrated his use of the Shillelagh for her, strolling about the front garden like a country gentleman.

“My darling Charles, Lord of the Manor,” she cried. But her mood changed immediately when Charles showed her the small shield on the staff. Her eyes examined the exquisite detail and the tender message engraved upon it. Like Charles, she too was extremely touched by the sentiment Kenny had expressed.

“God, Kenny really has been so good to us,” she whispered to herself, and in that moment she felt tremendous gratitude and fondness for him. “Where would we be without him?” she sighed.

While the men had been off on their excursion, Elizabeth had prepared a hearty meal of roast lamb with potatoes and gravy, carrots, turnip and peas and had baked a delicious apple tart for dessert. Over the past few weeks, Phyllis had been an adroit cooking teacher and Elizabeth had proven to be an adept student.

The trio thoroughly enjoyed the meal, the men complimenting Elizabeth almost to the point of embarrassment, her flushed cheeks displaying the timidity that she had always consciously worked hard to suppress.

After the table was cleared and Elizabeth and Charles looked to be suitably satisfied, Kenny tried to appear as nonchalant as possible as he introduced what he and Charles both knew would be the topic of the evening. He relaxed his face into his most caring, thoughtful look and cast this look directly at Elizabeth.

“So, Charles and I have given this a great deal of thought and we have a marvelous strategy we’ve developed with great care, in order to protect you.”

Elizabeth shot him a confused look.

“What do you mean?”

Not wanting Elizabeth to panic, he stood up abruptly, walking into the sitting room. He returned in an instant with the thick World Atlas he had borrowed from Eamonn earlier in the week, in preparation for this exact moment.

Flipping it open to the spot he had privately bookmarked, he turned the book upside down and placed it in front of Elizabeth. Lying before her was an exquisitely detailed map of Europe. Kenny didn’t even glance at the atlas, for his stare was fixed on the expressions on Elizabeth’s face, looking for the first sign of an opening to start speaking. Seconds passed. He watched carefully as her furrowed brow smoothed, her squinting eyes softened, the tightness of her lips eased. “Now!” he
thought to himself. He spoke in a soft, measured tone, as if he was rehearsing each word in his head before it emerged from his tongue.

He reminded Elizabeth of those evenings months ago, back in Marblehead, when she had shared with him the exact itinerary she had planned out for her European adventure. Although she couldn’t help feeling sad remembering Marblehead, she brought herself back into the moment, nodding at Kenny, a movement Kenny correctly interpreted as an invitation to continue. Quelling his true feelings of immense tension, he continued in his brazen performance of appearing light-hearted and cheery.

“Well, it’s all really quite straightforward and uncomplicated.”

Kenny deftly reminded her that the bulk of the excursion she had planned in those months before had included a thorough tour of Italy, where she would be visiting all of the famous points of interest. She had also mentioned to her family that, of course, London and Spain would also be explored, but emphasized that she wasn’t going to try to cram too much into the trip, as she wanted to allow the wonder of the landmarks, architecture and culture to fully sink in. She had been quite direct with her mother about the purpose of this trip. This was not some aimless escapade. This was intended to be a voyage whose sole purpose was to refine her and introduce her to new experiences; experiences which would make her wiser and more *interesting*. The absorption of the finer customs of the European elite, combined with her post-graduate work at the exclusive Sorbonne, would result in a return to America as a more sophisticated woman. For Elizabeth to convince her mother she had presented the trip as a scheduled journey. She would transform herself from insulated college graduate to elegant woman of substance. Of course Mrs. Brewster had been worried at first, but the words *cultured* and *urbane* were like a seductive drug. Mrs. Brewster couldn’t help but create an image in her mind of a new, exquisitely debonair daughter, fresh from her year in Europe, sashaying through cocktail parties with an air of royalty about her.

Kenny laid out the strategy with such expertise and detail that Elizabeth was rapt, almost hypnotized by the sound of his voice. Although Elizabeth’s stare shifted periodically from Kenny to the map and back, Kenny’s own eyes remained fixed on every nuance of her facial expressions and body language, adjusting both the tone of his voice and the content of his speech according to the emotion she was showing. Elizabeth nodded with approval and spoke in monosyllabic murmurs of endorsement. Only once did a hint of trepidation come over her and when it did she looked to Charles with a hint of alarm. That was the only moment Kenny took his
eyes off Elizabeth, but in that millisecond of a glance at Charles, what Kenny saw was a look of supreme self-confidence and agreement being mirrored back to her. The corner of Kenny’s mouth curled up.

As the conversation continued, Kenny allowed Charles to add mundane facts and in doing so, orchestrated the conversation to perfection.

All the decisions were made right then and there. Elizabeth would pre-write the letters. Kenny would travel to the various destinations to post them, amending any by forging Elizabeth’s handwriting only when necessary. If that proved a problem, there was always the option of using a typewriter and explaining why it was being used, to allay any suspicion. Charles would manage any and all affairs in Kenny’s absence, allowing Elizabeth to focus on the baby’s health and her own. Both would busy themselves assisting Eamonn and Phyllis in any way they could while they passed the time until Kenny returned. Now that Charles had mastered driving the car on the Irish roads, there were countless outings with Elizabeth the couple could enjoy as the summer came to a close.

An air of supreme satisfaction filled the kitchen as the conversation at the table came to a conclusion. At Charles’s suggestion, a bottle of wine was opened to celebrate the evening’s success and to underline the relief everyone felt.

“Just a tiny sip for me,” Elizabeth said with a smile Kenny hadn’t seen on her in weeks. She tapped her expanding stomach and winked at the men. Both laughed.

Charles poured a small amount of the expensive bottle into a glass and handed it to her, then poured a normal measure each for himself and Kenny. Elizabeth took two minuscule sips from her glass before acknowledging how tired the events of the day had made her.

“Boys, I hate to leave you with a mess, but I’m afraid I’m exhausted. I’ll leave the cleaning up for the morning.” She pushed herself up from her chair and waddled over to Charles, who was lazily leaning back against the kitchen wall, glass in hand. “I’ll see you upstairs, my darling,” she said, kissing him lightly on the cheek.

“Not good enough, my love,” Charles shot back. He stood to embrace her, his right hand wrapping firmly around her waist, his left hand supporting her head. He kissed her deeply, gently twisting her torso to his left. Charles and Elizabeth had always been quite discreet with their displays of affection and this sudden outburst of passion made Kenny uncomfortable.

Feeling totally out of place in the presence of the lovers and secretly overwhelmed with relief, he tip-toed out of the kitchen into the sitting room, taking
the bottle of wine and his glass with him. He heard indecipherable mumbling in voices that almost sounded like Charles and Elizabeth were engaged in some form of baby-talk. Tuning it out, Kenny fell into a daze. He had no idea how much time had elapsed when he emerged from his stupor to see Elizabeth standing over him.

“Are you there, Mr. Murphy?” she asked. Kenny stiffened.

“Of course, Elizabeth!” he exclaimed in a voice that even he recognised was far louder than necessary.

“That delicious meal filled me with such a feeling of contentment, I couldn’t help but drift off, now could I?”

Elizabeth smiled.

“I just wanted to thank you before I went to bed. I’m so relieved after tonight’s talk. It’s important to me that you know I appreciate all you’ve done for us.”

“Now Elizabeth, that’s not necessary.”

“Stop!” Elizabeth eyed him seriously. “You always downplay your efforts. It’s one of your most remarkable traits, but I need you to hear me. There is no way this entire ordeal could have been easy for you, and my own moods haven’t helped matters. I know at times I’ve taken your efforts for granted. I’m ashamed to admit that, but it’s true.” Then she did something that took Kenny completely by surprise. She dropped to her knees in front of him so that they were now eye to eye.

“There have been so many times over the last few months I would have completely gone to pieces were it not for your strength and clear-headed direction. You have held us together Kenny and I will never forget what you’ve done for us as a couple and, for me personally. Thank you, Kenneth Murphy.”

She leaned forward and kissed Kenny lightly on the forehead, a move that totally unnerved him. With that, she rose to her feet, strode towards the stairs and whispered a ‘goodnight’ back at him. Nervously twisting the stem of his wineglass in his right hand he meekly returned the ‘goodnight’.

As soon as Elizabeth’s form disappeared, Kenny aggressively swiped the bottle of wine from off of the side-table next to him, filled his glass to the rim, and gulped it down his throat in three desperate swallows, gasping for breath as the last of it hit his stomach, then refilled the glass and swigged another half-glass. His breathing became labored and he squeezed his left hand into a fist several times. He stood and silently removed a bottle of scotch and a glass from the bookshelf next to him. He jerked the cap off and poured a hefty measure into the glass and slammed it down his throat with the same violence which he’d ingested the wine. As the effects of the alcohol began to take hold, Kenny’s sense of calm returned. “What
was that all about?” he wondered. He poured a more controlled shot into the glass and took a tiny sip, returned the bottle of scotch to the shelf and settled deeply into the stuffed chair.

Meanwhile, Charles enjoyed a moment of playing dutiful, loving, husband-to-be as he took care of the cleaning of the kitchen on his own. He had the entire mess tidied up quickly and emerged from the kitchen to join Kenny in the sitting room, a dish towel casually thrown over his shoulder, his empty wineglass in his hand. Kenny stuffed the glass of scotch into the soft cushion between his legs, hiding it from Charles’s sight.

Charles looked at the bottle of wine on the side-table and laughed.

“Tough day, eh?” he said, without the slightest hint of sarcasm.

“Whew, you can say that again,” Kenny sighed, the exertion of the day coming through in his voice. Charles reached for the bottle of wine, pouring the remains, which was just enough to fill his own glass. He let out a grunt as he folded himself into the chair opposite Kenny.

“Yeah, quite a day, my friend,” Charles said, his voice floating through the room. He took a sip of wine from his glass, stared at its contents then took another lazy sip. The relief in his actions was palpable. The figure Kenny saw sitting across from him was a man without a care in the world, totally at ease, content and full of optimism. Immersed in his own happiness, Charles was oblivious to the tense, edgy figure sharing the room with him.

Kenny observed his friend. The easy smile that covered his face, the brightness in his eyes, the way his forearms rested so calmly on his thighs left words unnecessary. Kenny could literally feel the thanks and gratitude Charles had for him.

Charles lifted himself out of the chair and slid across the room. He stopped in front of Kenny and rested his hand on Kenny’s right shoulder. He gave Kenny’s shoulder a squeeze, then patted it with great warmth. He let his hand rest there for a few additional seconds before he moved up the stairs.

Kenny’s body sagged. He sat in the low light of the room completely alone, feeling an isolation he hadn’t experienced in years. He knew that the activity of the previous weeks had served a purpose he had not shared with anyone, and the end of the hectic schedule meant he was now out of options. He had to face a reunion he had dreaded since he’d first come up with the plan to flee America for Ireland. It had gnawed at his stomach for weeks, but now that the furious pace of settling in had passed, the formulation, explanation and acceptance of his plan had been
executed and Charles and Elizabeth were finally not only reassured but also fully acclimatized, comfortable in their new surroundings and committed to the precise implementation of his plan. He now was left to confront his own demons; deeply confusing feelings he’d been able to mask throughout his life, up to now.

Behind all of the bravado and feigned self-restraint, behind the pugnacious defiance and ferocious effort he threw into everything he did, the terror of confronting his past now stared him in the face. He pulled the hidden glass from between his legs and set it on the side-table. There was no more need for him to put on any air of classiness, or operate under the pretense of control. He was totally alone, a frightened, anxious, frail little boy. He reached over to the bookshelf, grabbed the scotch and began taking long swigs, straight from the bottle.

* 

The man who raises Rory is delighted with the news that his request for Rory to work as the caretaker of Gougane Barra monastery has been approved. The man loads his car with landscaping tools and drives Rory the twenty minutes to the monastery.

Rory steps out of the car and takes in the silent wonder of the setting. The open-air monastery has stood since St. Finbarr and his fellow monks meticulously constructed the circle in the 11th century.

Walking around its four exterior walls, Rory takes no notice of the unruly underbrush which has grown wild over the years, almost concealing the monastery from view. His hands lightly glide over the stones as he saunters around the ruins. There is no concrete, earth, mud or plaster holding the thousands of stones together. They stay together because each one fits perfectly below, astride and on top of its neighbor. No wind or rain penetrates the three-foot thick walls.

Completing his examination of the exterior, he strides up the three steps of the entrance, then down the three on the inside and absorbs the setting. A perfect circle makes up the interior with an altar at its center. The circle is protected by stone walls eight feet high, insulating the sacred place from the intrusion of any noise whatsoever. No whistle of the blowing wind can be heard inside the monastery, no squawk of birds, no bray of sheep. There is only silence. Looking up, Rory studies the passing of a single, snow-white cloud high above.
St. Finbarr and his fellows built this place to meditate on God, and when their work was done, Finbarr himself rode the River Lee down to Cork City, bringing Catholicism to the then-capital, where he became County Cork’s first bishop and later, the city’s patron saint.

Rory inspects the eight arched sleeping cells, spaced evenly around the monastery like numbers on a clock’s face; each cell precisely eight feet deep, five feet high and five feet wide. Perfect. He feels deep respect for the determination and conviction that went with the building of this place. Each stone was cut by hand and laid by hand. He knows it would have taken decades to build this marvel. Something stirs in him as he imagines the purity and strength of the men’s faith; the men who first lived here in this barren dwelling. He sees their shadows, deep in prayer. He hears their whispered meditations.
Kenny had no recollection of how he had gotten himself to bed, but when he cracked one eye open he was mercilessly greeted by the painful stab of a blinding sun streaming in through the bedroom window. He had passed out fully clothed. His entire body was covered in a slimy film of sweat, the sheets were soaked in what he hoped was not more than that, while his head throbbed. He made a circle around his mouth with his tongue and was met with a sensation akin to having a mouth lined with sandpaper. Parched, he managed to drag himself to the bathroom he was sharing with Charles and Elizabeth and, using his hands as a makeshift cup, first rinsed his mouth then slurped handful after handful of water down his scratchy throat.

He took a look at the image staring back at him in the tiny bathroom mirror and barely recognised himself. His always-puffy face was more swollen than usual and seemed afire, burning a bright shade of crimson. His bug-eyes were reduced to thin, bloodshot slits. He felt like death. Embarrassed, he stood and cocked his ear, listening for signs of life from downstairs. Hearing nothing, he was thankful for the solitude. He guessed it was late-morning at best, perhaps even early afternoon, judging by the sun which continued its incessant assault on him through the bathroom window. Either way, Charles and Elizabeth would be out of the cottage, engaged in whatever activity they had planned for the day.

He pulled himself together quickly, for he was desperate for the assurance that there was minimal evidence of his activities of the previous night. After splashing another few handfuls of water on his face and neck and patting himself dry, he re-entered his room. Finding no obvious signs of the bottle of scotch, he dropped to his hands and knees and almost wept with gratitude that it lay on its side under his bed.

Reassured that Charles and Elizabeth would have, in all likelihood, assumed that he was just sleeping in, he began the chore of organising himself. His hangover was bad, but what made his efforts even more difficult was the subtle tug of dread.

Since the trio’s arrival in Ireland, Eamonn had asked Kenny more than once when he would be making the trip to Dunmanway, the town east of Bantry, where Kenny had been born and where the Murphy clan lived. In fact, Eamonn had asked Kenny about visiting his family enough times that Kenny had almost made it a point of avoiding the farmer entirely. The needs of Charles and Elizabeth; getting them settled, comforting them, combined with his taking control of the running of the house had served as the perfect distraction.
The days he’d spent concocting and rehearsing his plan kept his mind pleasantly pre-occupied so he didn’t have to think about that petrifying reunion. But now, with the successful events at the dinner table last night behind him, Kenny was faced with the inescapable. “That’s why I reacted the way I did,” he thought to himself as he stripped his bed and redressed it with fresh sheets.

“Dammit,” he said aloud, startling himself.

Although he had promised Bridey that he would visit the family, in his mind he thought that there might be some way he could avoid the whole situation entirely, but inside, he knew there was no escape now. His stomach churned. “Just ride it out,” his head told him. He lay face-up on the bed, staring at the ceiling for a few minutes before shouting, “Right!” immediately snapping himself out of his self-doubt and jerking himself up on the bed, his feet planted firmly on the wood floor.

As discussed the previous evening, he would be catching the ferry to England from Cobh tomorrow, which meant that he had already managed to delay the homecoming until the last possible moment. He had produced watertight schemes his whole life and he had planned how to manage the visit to his family with efficiency. He felt his calm head return. He would cope just fine and he would control the unavoidable visit on terms which he would dictate. He’d always staved off danger using his clever mind, and his mind would not fail him now, of that he was sure.
Popping her head out from behind her front door, Phyllis greeted Charles and Elizabeth as they exited the car.

"Hiya," she said as she walked towards them. Noticing they were alone, she added innocently, "Where's Mr. Murphy?" Charles glanced at Elizabeth. The question had caught him off-guard.

"Uh...uh well, I imagine he’s exhausted. He’s been going non-stop all week, so we decided to give him the day off," he said jokingly. "Actually, all kidding aside, the poor man has really pushed himself over the past couple of weeks, so my guess is he’s enjoying a well-deserved rest."

"He was snoring away when we walked by his room on the way out the door and I didn’t have the heart to disturb him," Elizabeth added.

Eamonn emerged into the front garden. "Aye, he’s been a busy fella. Good for him. A man deserves a lie-in every now and again," he said, nudging Phyllis.

"Don’t you start with me, you devil," Phyllis playfully shot back, poking her husband in the side gently with her left elbow. "Come along now," she said, urging her guests inside.

The smell of freshly-baked bread filled their home and Elizabeth commented on it. She wondered if Phyllis spent every waking hour in the kitchen. Phyllis poured boiling water into a teapot and set it on the table as the others sat down. Easy small-talk flowed freely as they enjoyed tea and the still-warm scones Phyllis had baked.

"Delicious," Charles said, praising Phyllis as he cut open his second scone to spread butter and honey on it. Phyllis began chatting with Elizabeth about her teaching preparations for the up-coming school year, which Elizabeth listened to with great interest, while Eamonn mentioned to Charles that he had to fetch his herd of cattle from the lower field and move them up to graze in the five-acre quadrant nearer the house.

"Do you mind if I join you?" he asked.

"No, of course not," Eamonn replied. Preoccupied with his own problems, Charles realized he hadn’t actually spent much time with Eamonn, apart from the afternoon of frolic and fun at O’Riordan’s and as Kenny was to be leaving for an extended period, he was eager to forge a closer friendship with the farmer. Privately, Kenny’s impending departure had left Charles feeling quite uncomfortable. Charles was used to having people around him, whether it was Joseph and other servants as a child, or his vast array of friends and teammates through his school
days. But Kenny’s imminent absence was different, and it was leaving Charles with a huge hole to fill.

Kenny had served a monumental role in his life as both friend and confidant. And, throughout their predicament, he had almost been a surrogate father to him, however, his friend was far more gentle and protective than The Patriarch had ever been. The thought of being on his own with Elizabeth spooked him a bit, but he also knew that he needed some regular male companionship. He didn’t feel like he would be using Eamonn per se, but he also knew that with Kenny gone, both Eamonn and Phyllis were going to play very large roles in both of their lives. Neither of the young Americans was an individual whom one could say was good on their own.

“Ladies, we’ll leave you to it,” Eamonn announced and nodded at Charles as he stood from the table. Charles followed suit, giving Elizabeth a peck on the cheek as he rose.

“Ah, those were the days,” Phyllis said playfully, watching the tenderness exchanged between the young couple. Eamonn winked at his wife. Moving towards the door, Eamonn handed Charles a yellow rain-jacket. “You’ll be needing this.” Charles glanced out the door with a look of confusion on his face.

“There isn’t a cloud in the sky, Eamonn.”

“Aye, but there will be.” The men walked out the door and had almost passed the car when Charles caught himself.

“Wait a minute,” he said, opening the trunk of the car to remove the Shillelagh. The instant he pulled it out Eamonn’s eyes lit up.

“Ahhh, now that’s a Shaughnessey if there ever was one.”

“Wow! You could tell that easily?”

“Oh, you can’t miss one of them, Charles. No finer craftsman in the county. How’d you get on to him?”

“Actually, Kenny got it for me.”

“That’s a fine gift, that is.” Eamonn held his hand out and Charles handed the stick to him, knob-end first. Eamonn studied it with a careful stare, running his fingertips down the shaft. He took notice of the shield and the inscription but made no mention of it to Charles. “Yes, sir, now that’s a marvelous bit of work there.”


“I’ll show ye where that came from.”

“Excuse me?”
“That's bog wood. Shaughnessey has free reign on my land to take whatever he finds, and I wouldn't be surprised if that piece came from here.”

“Really?” Charles was trying not to sound like an over-curious child, but was immediately fascinated.

“Aye.” Eamonn handed the *Shillelagh* back to Charles and they walked across the gravel road, into the adjacent field and through an opening in the stone wall that served as a property marker. On the other side of the wall they began a measured descent down a gentle decline through lush, calf-high grass. Beneath them, the sprawling waters of Bantry Bay unveiled themselves. Far in the distance, Charles saw the formation of a blanket of low, grey clouds and smiled to himself. “This farmer was a wily character,” he thought.

At the bottom of the incline, the land leveled out and Eamonn's herd stood before them, grazing on the plentiful grass. Eamonn stopped and took a long, hard look at the herd. Charles guessed he was counting them, making sure all were present.

“Now, have a look over there,” Eamonn said, pointing to the lowest section of the field, about 200 yards away.

The soil was devoid of grass or rock, and was striped with a series of precise, vertical cuts in the soil, moving up at measured intervals. It looked like someone had been carving a vast staircase in the soil.

“What is that?”

“That’s a bog; thousands of years of hard-packed soil, wood, plant-life and whatever else Mother Nature threw in for good measure.”

“And those cuts? They look like steps or something.”

“Aye, that’s from cutting peat.”

“Cutting peat?”

Eamonn chuckled. “Yes, well, I guess you would be needing a bit more of an explanation. You see, long ago that would have been a swamp or a wetland. Now, as time passed, it dried up and everything in it was pressurized and compacted into a very dense kind of soil called peat. For ages, we’ve used a special tool, called a *slean*, which is a bit like a spade, only it cuts the peat into rectangular bricks. We cut it in the summer and leave it to dry out. Then in autumn, we haul it up to store outside the house under cover from rain, and that’s what we use to heat our house.”

“You heat your house with soil?”

“Aye, peat burns hot and slow, like coal. I’ll get you on the business end of the *slean* one of these days and let you have a go at cutting.” Charles was
absolutely thrilled by this bit of local knowledge. He couldn’t wait to get out in the
field and help Eamonn.

“That would be fantastic!” he said. Eamonn’s eyes met Charles’s and the
twinkle returned.

“It’s hard work.”

“I could use it.”

“Well, I’m never one to turn down an offer of assistance, especially when it
comes to that job. You’re on, Mister.” Charles held out his hand and the deal was
struck.

Eamonn let out a loud whistle and, in unison, every eye in the herd
immediately fixed on him.

“Come on!” he shouted. The herd obediently stopped grazing and began a
lazy stroll past Eamonn and Charles, meandering up the hill back in the direction of
the house. Charles followed a half-step behind Eamonn, observing his languid
stride, marveling at this simple man’s command of himself, his animals and the
knowledge he had just imparted. What a remarkable person this farmer was. It was
clear to Charles that although he was the one with the high-priced education and
privileged background, Eamonn possessed a level of intellect Charles had never
even bothered to ponder; a deep-seated wisdom produced from a source he
couldn’t fathom. Half-way up the incline, just as his newly-found adulation began to
ebb, a light, steady drizzle started to fall from the sky.

“Unbelievable,” Charles thought to himself.
It took Kenny most of the afternoon to shake off the effects of his binge, but as his head cleared and his body recovered, he busied himself with the necessary preparations for the following day, a day he both dreaded and anticipated in equal measure.

He pulled a sturdy, navy blue trunk, down from the top of the wardrobe in his room and began the detailed task of packing for his trip. He would be staying in some of the finest hotels in Europe and would be, for the most part, city-bound. As such, he knew there would be no need for him to bring casual clothing. Knowing also that he would be spending a great deal of the trip in Italy, he considered that he might purchase some new attire, depending on what current Italian fashion was dictating.

He mulled over his assortment of suits, shirts, ties, smart-looking pullovers, trousers and shoes and, with the same measured approach he applied to nearly everything he did, began to select his clothing. Three suits, two of dark color, the other a light grey, were carefully placed on a collapsible hanger and laid out on the bed. Next came his shirts, three white dress shirts, two blue ones and two oxfords. Again, he laid them carefully on the bed, as if he were handling fine china rather than everyday garments. Next, he put together specific outfits, laying them one-by-one on the bed, matching a pair of trousers with a shirt, a sweater if necessary and socks. He let the pant legs dangle over the foot of the bed so he could align his shoes with the bottom of each pant leg, then stood back and studied each outfit, his right hand stroking his chin as he imagined what occasion each outfit would be suited for. There would be gallery walks, museum tours, cocktail parties galore (he hoped) and outfits simply for travel; by train, ferry or whatever other mode of transportation tickled his fancy.

The exercise of laying out his clothing and then fastidiously folding, rolling and tucking everything into the trunk in the most precise fashion possible was almost hypnotic for him and as his case began to fill, images flashed through his mind. He could see himself strolling along the Thames, looking every bit the English squire, riding the train to Italy, appearing to all as a man of substance, of intellect and sophistication. In spite of the body he had been given, Kenny knew how to maximize the few features he did have which showed him in his best light.

He always bought his sweaters and polo shirts a size smaller than his actual fit to accentuate his barrel-chest and muscled arms. His sausage-like fingers,
bulbous nose and oversized forehead might be overlooked if he could carry himself in Europe with an air of style and refinement. That’s exactly what he intended to do.

Losing track of time, he was surprised to notice that the daylight was fading.

“Where the hell are Charles and Elizabeth?” he wondered aloud to himself. He finished his duties by pulling out his shoe-care kit. He focused on the task of shining three pairs of shoes, two black, one brown. Satisfied with their glossy sheen, he gently tucked two pairs into chamois shoe-bags, placed them in the trunk, then moved the trunk off the bed and onto the floor. He decided to leave the lid of the trunk open. He wouldn’t close it until just before he left, his belief being that he would minimize the wrinkling his suits would suffer.

For his departure he left out a summer-wool navy suit, white shirt, red- and blue-striped tie, black belt, shoes and socks. He hung the suit on the door of the wardrobe and stood back looking at the evening’s work lying at his feet. For a moment a rush of excitement ran through him as he fantasized about the adventure that lay ahead, but the feeling was fleeting. His stomach churned and he felt himself seized with panic, repeatedly looking out the bedroom window for a sign of the headlights of the car, signaling the return of Charles and Elizabeth. “Where the fuck are they?” he shouted, pacing incessantly to the bedroom door, then turning on his heel and returning to the window, squinting distraughtly again and again. Had something happened? Had there been an accident? Or were they sitting cozily in a restaurant, having a good old laugh at his expense?

His heart raced and his mind quickly followed, shifting without warning to images of the now-unavoidable meeting with his family. Checking his wristwatch, his dark mood deepened as he knew the reunion was just hours away. That long-familiar feeling of being an outcast came crashing down upon him like a boulder. Feeling totally alone and isolated in the cottage, he visualized hazy images of his family, strangers to him, looking out their windows and laughing at his odd features as he knocked on the door of the little white house he could barely remember.

Nearly frantic, he reached to the bureau where the bronze, liquid remnants of last night’s bender sat in the bottle and, repeating his behaviour of the previous night, unscrewed the cap and belted down a large swallow, wincing from the sting of the warm scotch that rushed down his throat and hit his empty stomach with a thud.

“You’re losing your marbles, Murphy,” he muttered, taking a final swig from the bottle, having finally finished it.

The warm glow of the alcohol taking effect brought relief to his panic, but the pain he felt was deeper and sharper than his mind could contain. It moved down to
the pit of his belly and that recurring punch of inadequacy hit him square, causing him to momentarily brace all of his weight on the bureau with his left arm.

“Get it together, man,” he pleaded with himself. He felt like bursting into tears, fighting mightily against his feelings. Just as it felt like those feelings were about to take a stranglehold on him he heard the unmistakable grinding of gravel. Looking once again out the window, he could see the lights of the car approaching and from the light of the room he also caught the reflection of his own face in the window. He was shocked by the sight of the fear in his eyes and the wild mop of hair on his head. He stomped his right foot on the floor with tremendous force, snapping himself out of the pathetic state he’d stumbled into.

He reached over to the dresser and ran a comb through his hair, then checked it again in the window, just as the figures of Charles and Elizabeth were emerging from the car.

“OK, OK. It’s all right, boy. Everything’s fine,” he told himself, and was surprised how much conviction he was able to muster. He actually believed himself.

Kenny descended the stairs just as Charles and Elizabeth entered the house, continuing a light-hearted conversation that had started in the car and their cheery presence immediately lifted Kenny’s mood.

“Looks like you two had a good day out,” he said to the couple.

“Hey, Kenny!” Charles merrily replied. “Boy, did we ever!” Kenny was struck by the almost juvenile manner in which Charles spoke. Charles recounted the events of the day to him with boundless enthusiasm as Elizabeth put a kettle on the stove to boil, collecting cups and saucers and other necessary condiments for them to have a cup of tea and a chat at the kitchen table.

He listened intently to Charles recounting the excitement of their day at the Mahoney farm. He noticed his feelings shifted, and a pang of jealousy flickered through him as Charles spoke of Eamonn in glowing, almost reverential terms. Clearly, Charles had formed a bond with the farmer and as Charles continued to speak, Kenny’s mind wandered, speculating on what effect Charles’s relationship with Eamonn might have on their own friendship upon his return. It disturbed him greatly that the entire atmosphere of the house had shifted so drastically in less than twenty four hours. Last night after dinner, he had full command of everything, and now he was feeling almost unnecessary, dismissed, redundant.

Although he managed to engage in conversation over tea, his heart wasn’t in it and Elizabeth, sensing Kenny’s pre-occupation asked him if everything was
alright. Kenny was quick to dismiss Elizabeth’s concern, telling her that he was merely still a bit tired. The reply from Elizabeth couldn’t have been less soothing.

“Oh, Kenny, don’t fret over us. Eamonn and Phyllis are only down the road and besides, we’ve got planning of our own to do, what with a child to prepare for.”

The emerging competence of the couple actually threatened Kenny’s position of power and he didn’t like the sensation one bit, but hid his true feelings.

“No, no, no, Elizabeth,” he cooed, “I know the two of you will be absolutely fine. I just feel a bit guilty, like I’m leaving you in the lurch.”

Charles interrupted. “That’s ridiculous. You’re the one who is being put out by this entire situation and I feel guilty as hell, imposing on you the way I have. I really want you to spoil yourself while you’re away.” Now that’s what Kenny wanted to hear! He chuckled aloud, promising Charles that he would, adding that he was packed and ready for the trip.

Kenny’s self-confidence shot back up with the repetition of Charles’s thanks. The pair of them was deeply in his debt, and their guilt was just the tonic to go to bed that night feeling satisfied and content. Full of restored certainty, both in himself and in his position, he slept better than he had in weeks.

* In his final year at school, Rory sits in his usual chair as the rambunctious young students file into the classroom. Loudest of them all is Ian Cogan. Rory has always seen the fear that lives behind Ian’s aggression and arrogance, but never comments. Ian normally keeps his distance from Rory, but today he walks toward him and starts to make snide comments, encouraged by the small gang who make up his friends.

“Look at this fella here, now. Just sits there like a bump on log, so he does. Hey! Rory boy! Can ye hear me ya daft bastard!”

Rory looks up at Ian but remains quiet. Motioning to his fellow troublemakers, Ian continues his assault.

“Ya feckin’ eejit! Are ye feckin’ deaf?” Ian swats the side of Rory’s head with the palm of his hand.

Rory stands to face his interrogator, narrowing his eyes, peering deeply into the boy. Rory’s silence makes Ian tremble. Beads of sweat run down his forehead. Ian
closes his fist and thrusts it into Rory's face. Rory is rocked backward. The students freeze. Rory shakes his head, glances once more at his assailant, then lifts his books from his desk and walks out of the classroom.

Upon his arrival at the farmhouse, he is relieved to find it empty. The area around his left eye is swollen and terribly sore. He looks at his face in the mirror and inspects the swollen area softly with his fingers. He stays in his room for hours until Phyllis pleads with him to come down for dinner. Knowing he can't avoid them any longer, he descends to the kitchen.

"Good Lord!" Phyllis shouts, rushing toward him. "What happened?"

"I was punched at school."

"Who did this?" shouts Eamonn.

"Ian Cogan."

Taking Rory's face in her hands, tears well in Phyllis's eyes.

"I'm so sorry," Rory says to her.

"Why are you sorry, Rory?" Phyllis pleads.

"For upsetting you. I knew seeing me like this would hurt you. I'm so sorry." Rory fights back tears.

"I'm going down to the Cogan's right now to sort out that little shite," Eamonn declares.

"No, no please don't do that," Rory says in a whisper. "He's already frightened enough."

"What?" Phyllis moves her hands to hips.

"Don't you see? Only fear makes someone violent. I think he's in horrible pain. It makes me sad to see someone so young in so much pain."
The trio awoke early the next morning, a Sunday. Kenny had selected this particular day to travel for a number of reasons. First, he knew that, like all Irish families, his own kin would dutifully go to morning mass at their local church and therefore wouldn’t be home until at least lunchtime. He wanted to see them all in one visit, so he would not have to return. He felt certain that his long-lost father, mother, brothers and sister would all be predictably home-bound by noon.

He had purchased a train ticket to Cork, where he would then be shuttled to Cobh by the ferry company, but would be getting off in Dunmanway for what he planned was to be a swift and unemotional visit. He’d carefully mapped his strategy. He would insist that he must return to the train station as there were only two trains to Cork on Sundays. He would catch the first, at 11am, which he would exit at the Dunmanway stop. He would then return to the station for the second and final train, which departed Dunmanway at 2.15pm. With travel to and from the Murphy home, he figured that he would be stuck with his family for two hours at most, a period of time he believed was sufficient to both satisfy his own self-righteous sense of duty and, much more importantly, a period of time in which he could be the one in control. He’d assured himself that the telling of his own tales would take up most of the allotted time, so there would be no room for awkward moments full of unnerving sentiment on the part of his family, be they fraudulent or authentic. With his agenda organised in his mind, escape would be easy and he would be on his way to Cork, Cobh and aboard the ferry to England in short order with a minimal amount emotional exertion.

In the scarce moments when he reflected on his life with complete honesty, he felt deeply resentful toward his parents for throwing him on a ship and sending him away, despite the paradox that his parents’ action had been necessary for him to enjoy the highly enviable life he’d lived thus far.

He could admit to himself that, in a truly wicked and perverse way, he almost wished that he was reappearing in their lives as a defeated mess, like some kind of deeply battle-scarred soldier. A return to them in that condition would surely satisfy his need to punish them for their abandonment, casting him away as they did, like some piece of unwanted trash. But fuck that, he had thought, his defiance kicking in like it always did. No, he’d emerge from the Irish ether like a conquering hero, his head held high with pride, oozing a sense of superiority over these simpletons who had been so cruel to him. He would take no small amount of pleasure from rubbing their noses in his success story.
Charles loaded Kenny’s trunk into the rear of the car. It would have been no problem whatsoever for Charles to simply drive Kenny to Dunmanway himself, but Kenny had refused, saying that he’d already purchased the ticket and was looking forward to the train ride. That was a lie. The real truth was that in addition to the hurt and subsequent anger he felt towards his parents, there was also a sense of shame that drove his need to see his family alone. He was terrified of what Charles might make of the poverty he knew his family lived in and was certain that his family’s squalor would reflect badly upon him.

Except for extremely rare moments of shared vulnerability, like the afternoon the previous summer when they were on the Lady Ore, Kenny had always tried to exude toughness. If Charles was to be exposed to Kenny’s real origins of poverty, depravation and suffering, that resilient persona might be questioned by Charles, and for Kenny, that notion was nearly paralyzing. Kenny’s entire existence at the moment was singularly dependent upon Charles seeing him as a fountain of strength. Fortunately, Charles didn’t push the matter very hard, deferring as he always did to Kenny, by agreeing to drop him at the train station in town.

Kenny made one final, detailed scan of his bedroom before descending the stairs, finding Elizabeth waiting for him, a dark brown folder tucked carefully under her left arm. Thrusting it toward him she said, “Here are the letters. I wrote them immediately after dinner Friday night.”

Kenny took the folder from her and, cradling it in his hands, stared at the package for a moment. When he looked up, he saw Elizabeth’s lower lip quivering. He moved toward her, wrapped his arms around her shoulders and, in an act of genuine tenderness, stroked the back of her head with his right hand.

“There, there, Elizabeth,” he whispered into her ear. “Everything is going to be just fine. I need you to look after yourself and the little one while I’m away…and I’m not referring to the baby.” He felt Elizabeth’s body tremble and as he leaned away from her to get a look at her face he could see that, while she was now crying openly, the look in her eyes let him know that the tears he now saw were tears of relief.

“God, I’m such a softie!” Elizabeth said, clumsily wiping her face repeatedly.

“Oh the contrary, Miss Brewster,” Kenny shot back. “You, my dear, are tough as nails.”

He tousled her hair playfully and Elizabeth gave him a smile that let him know his efforts to comfort her had been successful.
“Now, I'll keep you updated via postcards and letters, so you won’t have anything to worry about. You take good care of yourself.”

“I’d say the same to you, but worrying about you would be wasted time. You’re a rock, Kenny.”

“Well, that’s it then. I’m off.” He gave Elizabeth a kiss on the cheek but before he could break away she pulled him closer with all her might, for one final hug.

Breaking their embrace, Kenny marched toward the front door and walked into the mid-morning sunshine. Elizabeth stood in the doorway, leaning against the jamb, her arms gently crossed in front of her.

“Do you have everything?” Charles asked. Making the sign of the cross, as if he were blessing himself, Kenny crowed, “Spectacles, testicles, wallet and watch! Yep, that’s it!”

Choking back laughter from his friend’s performance, Charles looked at Elizabeth and asked if she needed anything from town. Seeing her shake her head from side to side, Charles opened the driver’s-side door and slid into the car. Kenny turned back toward Elizabeth and bowed deeply, exaggerating the gesture by rolling his right hand in front of him as his head dropped. Elizabeth laughed and blew him a kiss. The good-bye over with, Kenny dropped into the passenger seat, Charles turned the key, whipped the car around in a tight u-turn and steered it down the driveway, toward town and the awaiting train.

Both men were silent on the drive into Bantry, but there was no discomfort. Kenny had set another brilliant leg of the plan into motion and Charles was in no doubt that its execution would be sound.

Arriving at the train station, Charles summoned a porter to load Kenny’s single suitcase, even though Kenny could have managed it easily by himself. Kenny kept the folder containing the letters tucked under his left arm and offered his right hand to Charles.

As their hands met, Charles said, “I meant every word I said about you enjoying yourself, Kenny. You have a great time and get back to us safe and sound, OK?”

“I will. I promise.” Charles then reached into his coat pocket and removed a thick wad of bills wrapped in a rubber band, which he slapped into Kenny’s right palm.
“Just in case,” he said with a wink of his right eye. They laughed and embraced, but, being men, broke away from each other quickly. Clearing his throat, Kenny glanced around them rapidly.

“Don’t want any rumors starting, Charles. This is a small town. We need to protect our reputations.” Charles let out an audible snort. His friend always had that priceless way of finding just the right thing to say at the right time.

“So, I’m off then,” Kenny said, ready to make his move toward the train.

“Yes, don’t let me hold you up. Have a safe journey and I look forward to hearing your stories when you get back.”

“Alright, Charles, I’ll write often.” And with that, Kenny turned and climbed the wooden steps to the train’s nearly-barren boarding platform. Watching him leave, Charles felt a deep sadness fill him. Kenny was the most important fixture in his life.

For his part, Kenny was glad that the goodbyes were over. He fought relentlessly to hide any signs of weakness, but these past few days had tested his resolve to no end. Now, there was just one more obstacle to face, and then he would finally be able to really live, in a state of total freedom, for a few weeks.
With only one stop, Durrus Road, before the train would reach Dunmanway, Kenny worked quickly to prepare himself. As the glorious Irish countryside whisked past him, his eyes didn’t notice a thing. He was absorbed in his own thoughts. Not more than twenty minutes after he had boarded the train in Bantry, he found himself stepping onto the simple, open platform that was the Dunmanway train station, distinguishable only by a white wooden sign hanging from a steel pole at the end of the stage with the name of the town painted in plain black lettering. He looked out at the bland town square. Unlike the colorful center of Bantry, with its hodgepodge of varying hues and tones, Dunmanway’s brick and stone buildings were so monotonous that one blended into another. Kenny’s observation of the slump-shouldered, almost defeated gait of the few inhabitants milling about the square only added to both the town’s melancholy and his own.

He reached into his suit-pocket and removed a well-worn envelope. On the outside of the envelope was a set of simple instructions written by Bridey, a sort of map/guide, in case Kenny’s memory of exactly how to reach his childhood home escaped him. Inside the envelope was a separate, smaller sealed envelope containing a letter from Bridey to his mother, which, despite his curiosity, Kenny had respectfully left unopened.

The porter whom Charles had tipped to tote Kenny’s suitcase aboard the train appeared before him, swinging the heavy trunk back and forth with a flick of his left wrist. Clearly, the man was looking for Kenny to place a bit of money in his empty right hand. Kenny reached into his pocket for a few coins and asked the man if he knew how he might be able to reach Dromalorna, the name of the Murphy farm.

“Aye, sir, I’ll have my man over there drive ye there himself,” the porter said, pointing to a middle-aged fellow leaning against a vehicle bearing the emblem of Coras Iompair Eireann. As the porter walked over to the man, Kenny held his place, leaving them to sort the matter out.

His eyes returned to the townscape and he felt deeply relieved that this miserable dump was no longer the place he called home. As his eyes darted about, some familiar places registered in his memory; the grain store in the center of the town and a statue of the town’s founder, but now, seventeen years after he had last laid eyes on it, the place that had been the whole world to him when he was five years old, seemed so suffocating, so small. It struck him with a hint of sorrow that the innocent little boy who had experienced this town as his own vast playground on
the weekends his parents went to the town center was gone forever, and had been replaced by a discerning grown man, capable of seeing the place for what it really was, a decaying settlement full of beaten people for whom life seemed to be a task filled with drudgery.

The sun did nothing to the atmosphere, even the air felt heavy. For a second Kenny contemplated telling the porter to forget the whole thing. He would just wait at the station until the 2.15 arrived, but he was able to suppress the feeling.

“Excuse me, Sir!” the porter shouted. Kenny looked toward the two men, seeing the porter waving him over to the vehicle. Kenny took a deep breath and walked over to the car.

“This is Fergus. He’ll take you up.” Kenny nodded, paused for a moment, then caught himself.

“I’ll need him to bring me back as well, if that can be arranged. I’m taking the 2.15 to Cork.”

The two men exchanged a quick glance and the man called Fergus nodded without saying a word.

“Not a problem, sir. If you’d like, I can keep the case here with me.” Kenny looked at his suitcase, still in the porter’s hand.

“No, that’s alright. I’ve got some things in there I’ll be needing,” Kenny replied, which was, of course, completely false, but he wasn’t about to leave his personal belongings with a total stranger, no matter how helpful the man might appear to be.

“Right you be,” the porter said. The porter opened the door behind the driver and slid the case onto the floor of the car, behind the driver’s seat.

Kenny reached back into his pants pocket and pulled out a bill, not taking notice of the denomination and handed it dismissively to the porter. In his preoccupation with his own thoughts, the look of astonishment on the porter’s face was lost on Kenny.

“Grand, sir. That’s grand. I’ll be here when ye get back and that 2.15 won’t be leavin’ here without ye. Of that, I can guarantee.”

Kenny mumbled something inaudible to the porter then climbed into the passenger seat of the car.

The man named Fergus hopped in next to him, but Kenny kept his eyes fixed straight ahead. He was in no mood for small talk and any inquisition might be met with some hostility, such was the foulness of his mood. “Great,” he thought to himself. “You’ve been here five minutes and you’ve already had enough.” Fergus
seemed to sense Kenny’s frame of mind and didn’t utter a single word the entire drive.

As they reached the border of the town itself, Kenny glanced up the hill to the right and saw the church he had attended as a little boy; alongside it, the school he never attended, having been shipped off to America before he was to start his education. For a moment he wondered what the inside of that little building looked like, but was jerked back as the car turned left, crawling down a pot-hole filled dirt road he recognised instantly as the long entrance to Dromalorna.

The road cut through a sprawling meadow before dipping down into a densely forested area which masked the small creek that flowed through the lowest point of the property, before the road turned back uphill, emerging from the wooded area at a steep incline until the ominous, decrepit tin barn which dominated the landscape of the farm itself was unveiled. A wave of nausea passed over Kenny. The car continued onward, revealing the small, whitewashed stone house of Kenny’s childhood. Sheep grazing in the field to the left of the house stood at attention as if ready to interrogate the driver and passenger as to their intentions.

They were one hundred yards away from the door when Kenny’s worst nightmare came true. A woman dressed in a white blouse and navy skirt burst out the front door, running towards the car shouting, “It’s him! It’s him! My little boy! Oh, my little boy has come home!” A trickle of other adults emerged from the small dwelling, but none showed the enthusiasm of the woman he now vaguely recognised as his mother.

Fergus pulled the car to a halt fifty yards from the house and looked at Kenny with a “What should I do?” look on his face.

“Come back in an hour,” he said, with a look that could have cut through steel. Fergus would be returning in precisely fifty-nine minutes. Kenny managed to wrestle his suitcase out of the car just in time to avoid being tackled by his mother.

“Easy does it, now,” Kenny said to her, keeping the suitcase in his hand to avoid having to return her firm embrace. He patted her back twice with his left hand before extricating himself from her grasp. Looking over her shoulder, he got a shock that almost brought him to his knees. The strong, vibrant man he remembered his father being was now limping towards him, his body hunched over, his thick black hair replaced by a bald dome ringed with wild, white strands that trembled in the light breeze. In seventeen years his father had gone from a powerful 34-year old giant to a decrepit, beaten old man.

“Hello, son,” his father said, offering his hand.
“D-Dad,” Kenny replied, unsure if his stutter came across as a greeting or a question.

“Praise be ta Jaysus!” his mother shouted, stepping back to eye him from head to toe. “What a fine figure of a man you are!” Kenny nervously shifted his weight from one foot to the other, not knowing what exactly he was supposed to do next.

“Come on inside, son,” his father said gently, rescuing him from further uneasiness. As they made their way toward the house, Kenny saw Ian and Dearmahd, his older brothers and Katherine, his sister, who was holding a baby, and another man he didn’t recognise but figured to be John Harrington, the man Bridey had told him was Katherine’s husband. That thought reminded him of the letter.

“Before I forget,” he said, reaching into his pocket, “This is for you, Mother. It’s from Bridey,” and he handed the envelope over to his mother.

“Well aren’t you just the best son a mother could ask for?” his mother replied with a smile that revealed at least three missing teeth. He endured clumsy re-acquaintances with his brothers, but Katherine was keenly aware of the spectacle that her younger brother was being forced to endure and stepped in. Still holding the baby, she snarled, “Now leave the poor man alone, will ye? Let’s get inside and let him have a seat. Come on, all of ye! Back away now!” Kenny allowed Katherine a smile. He remembered how protective his sister had always been of him all those years ago and how little he had appreciated it then. He was deeply grateful to her now.

For an instant, he felt remorseful for making no effort to stay in touch with Katherine, the only one in the family other than his once-robust father whom he’d ever really had any genuine affection for. That feeling evaporated as he stepped through the doorway into the grimy kitchen, decorated tastelessly with drab clutter; old photographs attached to the walls with yellowing tape, a cheap collection of rosary beads. The decorations only served to make the tiny room seem all the more claustrophobic. Seven unmatched chairs squeezed around the small kitchen table, covered by a threadbare cloth. An unpleasant aroma of over-cooked meat filled the room and Kenny slumped into the chair closest to the kitchen door. He hadn’t been in the house ten seconds before his mother asked him the question he knew was coming.

“So, how long are ye stayin’ for, son?”
“Oh. Well, Mother, I’m actually only here for about an hour. I have to catch
the ferry to England this afternoon as I have important business to attend to.”
Silence crashed down on the room.

“An hour?” his mother shot back with exasperation. Kenny leapt to rescue the situation.

“Well, yes. But, that’s just this time. I’m on a business trip, really. But, I have
to come back in a couple of months and of course I’ll be staying on longer then.” His voice was convincing but there wasn’t a word of truth in the content.

“What sorta business are ye in, then, Kenny-boy?” Ian asked with the arrogance that only an under-achieving older brother can own.

“I work as an envoy for United States Steel. We are looking into expanding our operations and I’m investigating some potential contracts in England and on the European Continent.”

“Well, well, well,” his mother gloated. “That’s my Kenny Boy. A man of the world, so you are.”

“It’s really just preliminary work,” Kenny said in a voice attempting humility but designed to avert inquisition. “I’m not the one with final decision-making authority. I’m on sort of a preliminary tour, just to check out the possibilities.” Kenny was aware that he was treading on thin ice, as his lie got thicker. Fortunately for him, no one in the room had a clue what he was talking about.

“Well, it sounds like an important mission,” his father said in a voice that hinted at paternal pride. Ian grunted, but Kenny didn’t take the bait. And, mindful that his main aim was to avoid a cross-examination, he segued effortlessly into a monologue about Bridey, New York and generic information about America and Americans, cleverly de-personalizing the content.

He spoke about skyscrapers, the cost of housing and automobiles. He made no mention of any of his own personal experiences, but rather served as a bearer of arcane facts and much to his satisfaction, the tactic worked. As they drank tea and ate soda bread Kenny held court. The rest simply nodded in acknowledgment or gasped with surprise as he slipped in answers to clever questions like, “Do you know how much a farm like this in America would cost?”

Before he knew it there was the blare of a car horn outside, signaling both the return of Fergus and the time for his escape. The sound of that horn was perhaps the most wonderful sound Kenny had ever heard. He was dizzy with glee, knowing this agonizing affair was over and he could now beat a hasty exit.
Standing up from the table, he shook hands with his brothers and his father, shared a sincere embrace with Katherine, nodded to her husband then cringed in agony as his mother followed directly behind him all the way out to the car, handkerchief at the ready. He tossed his suitcase back to where it had rested on the drive up to the farm and turned back to face the inevitable. Standing before him was the pathetic sight of his now histrionic mother, weeping and wailing uncontrollably. She threw her arms around his neck and this time, with no prop to assist him, he was forced to return the hug.

“I miss ye so much, my Kenny Boy. God only knows how much I miss ye,” she screamed. He felt a controlled rage both towards his mother’s melodramatic performance and his father’s impotence. How could he not intervene and put an end to this absurd nonsense?

“Now, now, Mother, I’ll see you in a month or so. Take it easy, OK?” he said as calmly as he could into her ear. After what seemed forever, she finally released him from her grip and Kenny instantly whipped open the passenger door and jumped into the car. To return the enthusiastic waves and smiles being sent his way, he sighed as he rolled down the window and limply thrust his left hand out of the car. But all the while his right brushed the front of his jacket, in what could only be explained as an effort to wipe both his mother’s embrace and the entire charade of the afternoon from his memory, and while his mouth was stretched to its limit in the shape of an enormous smile of glee, he said ferociously, through teeth gritted so tightly that they might crack, “Fergus, get me the fuck out of here, pronto!”
For the entire jolting ride down the dirt road away from Dromalorna, Kenny tried not to allow the bouncing and shaking of the car to disturb him, but seeing his family again had unlocked emotions he had managed to keep hidden for years. The necktie he was wearing felt like a hangman’s noose around his neck and he reached up, struggling to jerk it loose and unbuttoned the top button of his dress shirt. Fergus drove in silence as Kenny’s eyes stared wearily at the floorboards of the car, his head swaying back and forth with the rocking of the car as if it were on a swivel. He never once glanced back at the farm, nor did he notice when Fergus stopped and made the right turn taking them back onto the main road, where the ride smoothed. He was lost in a fog of confusion and his mind dealt with it by trying to block everything out, but his body betrayed him. He squeezed his hands into fists, only to find them drenched in sweat. Try as he might, he couldn’t rub his palms against his thighs quickly enough to dry the cold clamminess. Feeling the interior of the car suddenly, but steadily becoming smaller and smaller, closing in on him, he shut his eyes as tightly as he could, frightened by the relentless tightness in his chest, the pounding of his heart and the woozy feeling that overtook him.

When they reached the train station, the porter removed Kenny’s suitcase from the vehicle, to stow it on the train, scheduled to arrive in about ten minute’s time. The porter took one look at Kenny’s ashen face and asked, “Are ye alright, sir?”

“Huh?” Kenny asked absently.

“Are ye alright, sir? Ye look a bit pale.”

The only words Kenny could muster were, “Is there a men’s room nearby?”

“Aye sir, right up there on the platform, just past the ticket office, on yer left.”

Kenny staggered away from the vehicle, shuffled up the five steps to the platform and stumbled in the direction of the empty men’s room. He managed to make it to the doorless entrance and grabbed hold of the wood frame of the door jamb to support his trembling legs. Focusing his eyes to adjust to the low light of the bathroom he saw that a long urinal lined the entire wall on the left while two sinks and one toilet stall stood opposite. Rolling his shoulder, he shoved himself inside and moved unsteadily toward the nearest of the two sinks. Feeling the room start to spin, he slammed a hand down on either side of the sink’s edges, unsure whether or not he was about to pass out.

His ribcage felt like it was being squeezed in a vice and although he had no reason to be out of breath, he was huffing and puffing nonetheless, gasping to get
air in and out of his lungs. He started seeing spots of light and he struggled mightily to stay conscious. He wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his suit coat in an agitated manner then experienced the unnerving sensation of a single, ice-cold bead of sweat running down the back of his neck, descending down over the center of his spine, between his shoulder blades, the center of his back and finally dissolving into the waistband of his undershorts. As he forced air in and out of his lungs his heartbeat only quickened, but his legs stopped shaking. Then, without warning, a wave of nausea overwhelmed him. “Oh, shit,” he said aloud to himself, bolting from the sink into the toilet stall, where, his hands squeezing his knees with all his might, he bent over the toilet and began to retch; long, painful heaves which produced nothing but a foul-tasting ooze, which he spat out with a combination of panic and disgust.

His fit might have lasted thirty seconds or five minutes, he couldn’t be sure, as the terror which consumed him also made him lose any sense of time, but when the attack did come to a merciful end, he spat first to clear his mouth, then with a repetitive fury that matched the rage he felt. In the blink of an eye he went from panic to relief only to immediately move straight into a ruthless hammering of self-loathing. He had gone completely to pieces in a fucking train station men’s room over a stupid fucking visit to his family home.

“You worthless shit,” he whispered to himself, shaking his head from side to side, his knuckles now white from the death-grip he had on his knees. “Fucking baby!”

He managed to fully deflect the energy of his anger away from his sudden panic back onto himself and toward the task of pulling himself together. He stormed out of the toilet stall and turned on the sink’s cold water faucet. Letting the water flow over his hands and wrists for a few seconds calmed him considerably, and slowly restored his sense of self-control. He slurped a bit of water to rid himself of that awful taste, sloshing one last mouthful thoroughly around his cheeks before violently spewing it not into the sink, but on the bathroom floor, an act of defiance whose aim was to firmly convince him that this pathetic episode, this unacceptable display of weakness was finished.

An explosion of steam from the braking of the train just outside the men’s room brought him back into the moment. Clearing his throat, he brushed the legs of his trousers with his palms, checked both the tops and soles of his shoes and, seeing that he looked like he had regained his composure, walked out of the men’s room. The porter was standing alone, suitcase in hand, two coaches down from the
ticket office. As he was the only person on the platform, Kenny nearly laughed at the porter’s eager wave. “Like I’m not going to see you, you idiot,” he thought as he made his way toward the buffoon in his silly uniform.

“All OK?” asked the porter as they boarded the train.

“Of course,” Kenny shot back, making a conscious effort to show the porter that he was offended by the question. He collapsed into his comfortable first-class seat on the train and fell into a stupor that lasted for the rest of the day’s travels. The journey from Dunmanway to Cork, the drive to Cobh, the ferry to the English coast and the train ride to London’s Victoria Station passed in one single, foggy blur.

Emerging from the massive structure of Victoria Station, the sudden explosion of lights and sound shook Kenny back to life. All around him were well-dressed men and women, speaking with accents that exuded wealth, class and panache. He breathed in the energizing smells of city life; the strong coffee vapor emanating from the cafés mixing with the exhaust of bustling taxis. He smiled at the myriad billboards circling the area. He stared at giant images advertizing clothing, restaurants and jewelry. Although the giant clock atop the station’s tower indicated it was night-time, darkness had yet to fall. The vitality of the landscape erased his lethargy almost instantly.

“Now, this is more like it,” he said to himself as he took in the electric atmosphere. Raising his arm, he hailed a cab. He was no longer a feeble, useless disgrace; no indeed! He was a healthy young man with a pile of cash at his disposal, alone in one of the most vibrant cities in the world. His heart filled with enthusiasm.

“Brown’s Hotel,” he said to the taxi driver.

“Brown’s Hotel it is,” the cabbie shot back.

*A light drizzle falls from clouds so low-lying that the tops of the foothills are hidden in them, but as the car makes the right-hand turn toward the monastery, Rory sighs peacefully, noticing that the mirror of the chapel on the still lake is as perfect now as it is on a sunny day.*

*The familiar grind of the gravel under the car’s tires fills his ears, finally halting as he pulls the car into his “Caretaker” parking space. Reaching over to the empty passenger seat he lifts his leather working gloves and stuffs them into his jacket. He unlatches the car door, steps out and begins unloading his tools. Pausing for a*
moment to gaze at the monastery, he listens intently to the silence, allowing himself to take in its magnificence. No birds sing. There isn’t even a whisper of a breeze. There is nothing but a feeling of the deepest peace.

Rory feels the stillness of the moment resonate to the very core of his being. As he guides the trimming shears from out of the back seat, the sound of them brushing against the steel of the car door brings him out of his trance, but only momentarily. He leaves the rest of his tools in the trunk of the car and gently closes the rear door, turning once more to gaze at the chapel’s reflection on the lake.

Turning on his heel, a wonderful sensation comes over him as he feels himself almost carried to the small opening of the monastery. Stepping through the arch, he walks toward the center of the circle. He sets his thermos on the first step, then drops into his familiar crouch to begin the delicate task of trimming the thick grass that rises from the ground around the centerpiece.

The rhythm of the shears neatly slicing through the wet grass happens automatically as a feeling of complete unity overwhelms his senses. There is no separation between grass and blade, no disconnection between his fingers and the shears’ handles, no pressure on the balls of the feet which support his weight. In fact, he feels no distance whatsoever between himself, the earth, the stone, the air. Rather, he experiences a tremendous feeling of oneness with the moment, but yet more, for there is no moment at all. Time converges and collapses in on itself and in doing so, ceases to exist.

For reasons unknown to him, his body slowly sinks from the comfortable squat he is in, to a sitting position, his legs folding effortlessly over one another, the cross standing sentry directly above him. Without effort or will, he feels his chin pull itself ever-so-slightly down toward his left shoulder. The right side of his neck stretches, gracefully, and with it, his head slowly rotates, leaving the right side of it cocked upward towards the heavens.

In place of the chill of the cool mist of the morning drizzle, he instead begins to feel the warmth of a light touch on his head, starting on the right side of the crown; a glowing, comforting warmth which slowly, gently begins working its way down over his temple, caressing his ear. The warmth, while never rising to a level of
discomfort, gradually begins to increase in intensity. Rory’s entire body feels weightlessly suspended as if in water, and the shaft of warmth narrows its focus back to the right crown of his head and, with it, a flood of light fills him wholly.

At first a brilliant white, the light morphs to a glorious yellow, a soft pink and finally a quivering pale blue. With it, a unity with all that was, all that is and all that will ever be permeates his mind, and yet a deeper part of his being hovers above him, observing, as if to witness this experience. Although seemingly apart from him, this witness remains attached to him, connected by the tenderest and most delicate of bonds. The witness peers directly into his mind and observes a transmission, a transmission of light, particles and soft waves all at once.

The witness guides the conveyance through layers of subtle sheaths of his being, navigating first through his physical being, then deeper, through intellect and emotion, knowledge, through reason, through existence to a subtle, fragile sheath of pure bliss.

As this happens, Rory feels a taste sweeter than anything he’s ever known fill his mouth and in that moment, he surrenders all; in that moment he becomes One.
Kenny’s euphoria was far from subsiding. Watching the cityscape unfold before his eyes was almost dreamlike. He delighted in a pleasant sensation, as though he was sitting in a cinema and the images of the city of London were being projected, in color, for his eyes only. He felt completely detached from what he was observing, but at the same time knew that he was now also part of it. The depth of the liberation he felt was astounding. It was finally dawning on him just how entangled he had been in everything and everyone around him. He had made no efforts to enjoy himself for months.

Pulling up to the elegant entrance to Brown’s Hotel, Kenny slid quite comfortably into his new existence and the persona that would accompany it; the refined, scholarly man of distinction. He paid the cabbie and nodded to the bellboy that, yes, he could take his suitcase, for he was checking in.

Stepping through the ornate revolving doors of the famous hotel, he puffed out his chest, drew his shoulders back and stepped toward the reception desk with purpose.

“I have a reservation,” he announced to the man standing behind the rich mahogany and marble counter.

“Yes, sir. Your name please?”

“Kenneth Murphy.” Kenny watched as the man’s right index finger meticulously slid down the right page of the open ledger in front of him and waited for a reaction when the man located his name. He wasn’t disappointed.

“Ah, yes, Mr. Murphy. We’ve been expecting you. Your suite is ready.” The man then picked up a tiny bell from the counter and shook it with vigor, producing a high-pitched ring that could only signal the summoning of a lackey. Kenny’s guess was right, as an impeccably-groomed elder gentleman appeared from his right, offering his hand.

“Good evening, Mr. Murphy, my name is Jennings. I will be at your service for the length of your stay. Please, follow me.”

Being renowned as the oldest luxury hotel in London, Kenny had anticipated being treated well. That’s why he’d booked the suite at the famous hotel in the first place. Yet, with his matching white waist-coat, shirt and bow-tie, slicked-back hair, perfectly tailored black tuxedo trousers and brilliantly shined shoes, the sight of this Jennings fellow left Kenny slightly taken aback. He was getting the royal treatment. There was no exchange of money at reception, no passport to show, no documents
to sign, nothing. He was expected. “How nice,” Kenny smugly thought to himself, using great effort to conceal a mischievous grin.

He followed Jennings to the elevator where an attendant took them to the top floor. Jennings silently led Kenny down the hall to the last door on the left. Sliding the key in the door and turning its knob, he began his welcome speech.

“This is the finest suite in the hotel, Mr. Murphy, and our only hope is that it meets your satisfaction.”

Jennings flipped a switch just inside the door and Kenny stepped into an ornate drawing room, replete with chandelier, lounge area, full bar, writing desk and chair. There was a small kitchen in the left corner fronted by a dining table which, counting quickly, Kenny saw could seat six people. Next to the kitchen was a hallway which, Kenny assumed, led to what would be his bedroom.

As Kenny’s eyes wandered around the suite, Jennings’ well-intentioned descriptions of everything from mood lighting to laundry, dining and car services fell on deaf ears. He followed Jennings down the hall, had a look inside the first bathroom then, as they entered the bedroom, stopped and stared at the sheer enormity of the four-poster bed.

“Sir? Mr. Murphy, sir?” Kenny came out of his daze to find Jennings looking at him.

“Sorry, I’ve had a very long journey today.”

Jennings nodded thoughtfully. “Yes, Mr. Murphy. I’m sure you have. My apologies, I’m sorry for prattling on.”

“Please, there is no need for you to apologize. You have done an outstanding job of making me feel right at home.”

“Oh, thank you. How kind of you to say. Now, should you need anything, and I mean anything at all, please just lift the phone and dial three-three and you’ll be connected directly to myself or my associate, Mr. Holdstock. We are both happy to be at your service.”

“Thank you very much, Mr. Jennings.”

“Oh, please, sir. Just Jennings will suffice. Now, would you like me to unpack your suitcase for you, or shall I leave you?”

“Unpack my suitcase? Oh, no, Jennings. That won’t be necessary. However, I wonder if you could do me a favor?”

“Anything, sir.”
Safely ensconced in what would be his home for a few days, Kenny felt the stomach pain of having not eaten a decent meal in two days. “Would it be possible to have a late dinner sent up?”

“But of course, sir. May I recommend the roast beef? It’s our Sunday specialty and I’m quite certain you won’t be disappointed.”

“That will be fine, Jennings.”

“Very well, sir. I'll see to it myself and shall return shortly.”

Before Jennings turned to leave, Kenny started to pull the wad of money from his pocket, but Jennings cut him short. “Now, that won’t be necessary, Mr. Murphy. The hotel takes very good care of me.”

“I insist.”

“Let’s strike a deal, shall we? If you feel my services meet your expectations, then perhaps we can readdress this matter upon your departure. Is that suitable?”

“Yes, Jennings,” Kenny said with a chuckle. “That will be just fine.” With that, Jennings left Kenny on his own.
Kenny spent three days exploring London and the surrounding area. In the city itself, he visited all of the places he had pictured in his mind’s eye and had seen in books he’d studied. To be fair, nothing about the city or its character disappointed. Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament were much larger than he’d imagined, Big Ben more dignified and resolute. St. Paul’s Cathedral managed the balance between majesty and intimacy, while Piccadilly Circus was a frenzy of non-stop activity. He felt thoroughly enriched as he took in the landmarks of the great city.

Adding to his experience was the titillating energy he felt rippling through every street of the city. Although he was Irish by birth, he had grown up an American and as such was familiar with a country whose identity was a work in progress. Victory in World War I had instilled Americans with a sense of invincibility which was quickly followed by an ambition fueled by both aggression and hubris. Having come out of the Great Depression, America was now poised to put its stamp on the twentieth century. England, on the other hand, was a focal point in World History. Its identity had been forged through centuries of evolution and conquest, forging it into the world power it now was. He noticed how unique it was to observe the fact that the English people took pride in being English. Londoners carried themselves with a certain sense of honor and purpose which echoed the dignity and confidence the city itself exuded. It was almost like the people’s personalities were extensions of the city itself.

As he wandered in, through and around the historical landmarks, he purchased a few postcards. Sitting in his hotel suite on the second day, he removed and read Elizabeth’s first letter to her parents, a letter which, Kenny felt, articulated precisely what Elizabeth really would have felt had she actually been here. Separately, on the back of a postcard with a picture of Big Ben, he wrote a brief note to Charles and Elizabeth, announcing that all was well and he hoped that they were getting along fine. He gave both items to Jennings on his way out of the hotel. Jennings assured him they would be posted immediately.

On his third day, he took a train to visit the town of Cambridge and the historic campus of its renowned university. He found himself moved by the timelessness and grandeur of the place; the cobblestone streets, the quaint pubs, the dignity of the architecture. Although the buildings merged with the setting, each one had its own sense of character and strength. But, perhaps of most importance to him personally, Kenny’s body tingled; he was not a tourist, in the classical sense.
He was a graduate of Harvard, the finest university in America, and while Harvard might be a school hundreds of years younger than Cambridge, Harvard was also known throughout the world to be academically on par with its older counterpart. As such, Kenny swelled with pride over the attachment he felt to the celebrated university, unlike the uncouth visitors merely snapping photos of pretty buildings. No, those people were outsiders, uninvited guests getting a peek into a world they would never know. For Kenny, it was totally different. This was a place he felt he was entitled to have a profound connection with for, like those who had attended and graduated from Cambridge, he owned the same feeling of achievement and in doing so, had earned the right to wear a veil of superiority. For that day, Kenny could argue that he was Charles Darwin’s equal, William Makepeace Thackeray’s peer, Sir Isaac Newton’s brother….

The problem was that the feeling didn’t last. By the fourth day, he felt he had seen all there was to see, and was growing restless and even slightly irritable. As he walked through the British Museum in Russell Square, it bothered him greatly that no one took notice of him, the stern-looking, well-dressed young man, staring thoughtfully at the exhibits, his arms crossed in front of his perfectly fitting grey suit, his chin resting thoughtfully in his hand. How could people walk by him and not notice what an impressive young man he was?

At first he rationalized that they, like the tourists in Cambridge, were not smart enough, not well-educated enough to fully appreciate the exhibits they were viewing. If they had no idea what they were looking at, then how, in their ignorance, could they possibly grasp the value of the intelligent specimen scrutinizing the glorious object d’art. It never entered Kenny’s mind that his own preoccupation with his image also eliminated any chance of him actually appreciating the exhibits, either. Nevertheless, for a few hours, his fixations occupied his mind enough to keep his growing feelings of discontent at bay, but by late afternoon he was quite dejected and resigned himself to simply go back to the hotel and maybe have a drink before dinner.

He entered the now-familiar lobby and turned right, walking into the grandly-designed lounge, with its oak-paneled walls lined with first-edition books, the soft leather chairs that could swallow you up in comfort, the rainbow of color shooting out from lights’ effect on the pristine crystal glasses lining the shelves behind the bar. The bar was elegant and cozy at the same time. It also appeared to be empty, so Kenny sat himself at a table in the corner immediately to his left. As his body sank into the chair, he allowed his well-worn legs to fully stretch out under the table.
He unbuttoned his suit jacket, leaned back in the soothing, comfortable chair and breathed a sigh of resignation.

“What may I get for you, Mr. Murphy?” asked a waiter he’d never seen before. He loved that about this hotel. Everyone knew his name and treated him like a dignitary.

“I will have a glass of your finest scotch, with three cubes of ice in a separate glass.”

“Very well, sir.”

The waiter stepped to the bar and passed on Kenny’s order to the bartender, returning swiftly. With great precision and care, the waiter placed two leather coasters on the table in front of Kenny then delicately transferred the glasses to the table.

“Thank you,” Kenny said, with a genuine smile on his face.

The waiter returned the smile, then glided back to the bar.

Kenny took a small sip from the glass then carefully added one ice cube, before casting his gaze toward the book-lined wall immediately to his left, a look of deep contemplation overtaking his face. He was neither happy nor sad, just lost in a daydream of no particular content.

He was brought back to attention by the unmistakable sound of a woman clearing her throat. He looked slightly to his right and was startled by the sight of a stunning young woman sitting alone at the table furthest from him. Although she had to be at least thirty feet away from him, Kenny was spellbound by her beauty. She wore an elegant light blue dress whose long sleeves hid exquisitely-shaped shoulders. A matching light blue day cap, tied under her chin, sat perfectly atop a luscious pile of black curls, loosely pinned up at various points around her head to frame the most beautiful face he had ever laid eyes on. Her perfectly-rounded forehead bore not one wrinkle, her dark eyebrows only accentuated the emerald-sheen of her eyes. A long, thin nose served as an arrow pointing to her thick, soft lips, which in turn gave way to a delicate chin and long, smooth neck. He was instantly rapt, and rather than feeling self-conscious or awkward, he completely shocked himself when he lifted his glass towards her, offering her a distant toast.

The woman smiled demurely, lifting a well-manicured hand to cover a girlish grin.

Kenny felt a sudden poise come over him as he motioned for the waiter, telling him to ask the woman if she would like to join him. He watched with glee as the waiter followed through and felt a rush of excitement as she took the waiter’s
hand and began walking towards him. Kenny stood as the woman and the waiter reached the table.

"Mr. Murphy, I would like to introduce Miss Rhys-Meyers," the waiter announced.

The woman offered her hand, which Kenny took, bending slightly, then deftly lifted the hand and placed a delicate kiss on it.

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Miss Rhys-Meyers," he said with astounding confidence.

Batting her long, curled eyelashes, she looked him in the eye and whispered, "Please, call me Penelope."

* 

With his tall, lean frame, angular features and gentle, easy manner, Rory is the object of attention of nearly every unmarried young woman in the town. He is a sharp contrast to the other boys his age, who are, as a whole, loud, boisterous and full of bluster. Where they are rough and gregarious, Rory is always friendly and warm, traits which make him all the more affecting. Yet, even when speaking with him face-to-face, his brilliant eyes full of attention, there is still a subtle elusiveness about him. He gives his awareness to all he encounters, but leaves the engaged wondering uncomfortably if there wasn't someplace else he'd rather be. And there is. Rory prefers the quiet introspection he feels in solitude. Where most young men his age acquire their identity by cavorting in packs, Rory prefers to be alone. He’s happiest when attending to his duties without the distraction of human companionship.

He knows that this characteristic can be off-putting, but at the same time, he purposely keeps to himself, for he treasures his own private world more than anything else. It is, to him, both sinful and an act of betrayal to partake in the small talk and gossip seemingly essential in the embryonic stages of a friendship. By tapping into and communing with the higher realms of consciousness he explores while painting, working outdoors or sitting in silence, Rory is filled with an ecstasy he believes would be impossible to experience in the company of another. His visions provide him with all he needs. In his self-enforced isolation there is liberation, for he is freed from the self-consciousness and need for approval so much a part of his fellows’ lives. He inhabits his own awareness completely.
Rory acknowledges that he can appear to be detached, even aloof. But he is equally aware that he knows things they don’t, and never will. So busy are people with their concerns and fears that they are blind to the grace of water’s movement, of both Nature’s restraint and her offerings. He privately sees no need to point these facts out, and doubts a listener would comprehend his discoveries, He is connected to everything around him, all creatures and the essence of life itself, and as such, is not in search of intimacy with another, for he already has it. He can speak to the livestock, the field, the soil itself and all understand.

The young women of the town try their best to gain favor with him. He experiences every attempt at seduction, every overt effort to get his attention for what it is, and he graciously extricates himself from these situations at the soonest, most respectful opportunity, with the easy gracefulness that he applies to his every action.

Sinead Harrington, the young woman everyone agrees is the most desirable in all of West Cork, finds herself infatuated with Rory. Her arresting physical beauty is only matched by her good humor. A stroll through the town square always turns heads, brings smiles and produces both blushes and giggles from her numerous admirers.

She makes certain that she is in the square every Friday when Rory makes his weekly trip to town, and goes out of her way to bump into him. Rory finds her endeavors harmless and amusing at first but, as her desperation grows, Rory feels both an obligation to be honest with her and a need to protect her from her own emotions.
With his single-minded focus on achievement and climbing the social ladder, Kenny had absolutely no experience whatsoever with the opposite sex. He had never been on a proper date, had never even asked a woman out. He’d never danced with a woman, let alone shared a kiss or physical intimacy. Sure, he had read romantic novels and even believed, somewhere in the back of his mind, that there might be something to the starry-eyed adage “Love at First Sight.” He’d seen it with Charles and Elizabeth.

This chance meeting with the alluring, green-eyed stranger evoked that precise feeling as he listened to Penelope with total concentration. Every word that flowed from the woman’s enticing lips was absorbed as if it were the most important piece of information he’d ever been granted the privilege of being an audience to. Her accent was that of an aristocrat, and the content of her sentences held him silent. As they sipped their drinks, Kenny totally relaxed. Miss Penelope Rhys-Meyers seemed extremely adept at putting Kenny at ease, and he welcomed the warm feeling overcoming him.

For the first time in as long as he could remember, he felt no need to dominate the situation or the conversation. He was certain that he could listen to the glorious English accent flowing from her mouth for hours and feel totally content.

According to Penelope, she was the English daughter of a land baron who owned vast amounts of land in Wales. She had attended boarding school at the prestigious all-girls Roedean School and had received her undergraduate degree in English at Lincoln College at the University of Oxford. Discontented by the thought of spending the summer in remote Wales, she was staying in London with a friend of hers from university, content to while away the glorious English summer with nothing more to do than ponder what her next move might be.

As he took in this information, Kenny couldn’t help but conjure up fantasies about the busty, sensual woman. While he listened, his mind told him, “She’s sexy, intelligent and wealthy. What a great catch she would be!”

Using an amalgamation of the story he had concocted for Elizabeth to tell her family and the lies he had told his own family, Kenny presented himself as an up-and-comer in the United States steel industry who, after closing an enormously profitable deal for his employer, had been given a summer holiday in Europe as a reward. Upon hearing this, Penelope giggled with, what Kenny interpreted as a great deal of innuendo, “Well, isn’t that something? Here we are, two single adventurers, all on our own with no one to share our adventures with!”
Kenny couldn’t suppress an impish giggle and Penelope only added sexual tension to the moment by resting her hand on the forearm of his suit coat.

Noticing the merriment of the two strangers, the waiter served a second round of drinks without being prompted, filling Kenny with delight, as he knew that the waiter’s action would enable him to extend this joyful chance meeting.

The charm Kenny so skillfully used to ingratiate himself to men seemed to be working just as well on Penelope. She laughed at his self-effacing jokes about learning to sail, his stories of chicanery at Harvard and his vocal and physical impressions of his non-existent boss. Armed with the courage of a bit of alcohol, he began to formulate an invitation for Penelope to join him for dinner. In a moment of silence in the conversation, Kenny curled his toes in his shoes, an act of summoning the last bit of bravery necessary for him to ask.

Lifting his glass from the table and holding it askance, in a premeditated act of trying to look as casual as possible, he said, “Penelope, I don’t mean to impose, but the truth of the matter is I am tired of dining every night with only my own thoughts as company. Would you do the honor of joining me for dinner?”

Before she could reply, he lightened the atmosphere by adding, “My poor valet here at the hotel must think I don’t have a single friend in London, which, to be honest, is actually quite true.” Trying to remain cool, Kenny braced himself for certain rejection.

Penelope shocked him. “Well, Kenneth, we can’t have that. I would be delighted.”

“Fantastic!” Kenny belted out in a voice that was clearly disproportionate to the acceptance of a simple dinner invitation, but given the fact that they’d both had a couple of drinks, Penelope seemingly found Kenny’s enthusiasm all the more endearing.

They finished their drinks and Kenny excused himself to go to the bar, where he instructed the barman to ring Jennings and have him meet the couple in his suite. He returned to the table and offered his hand to Penelope, which she accepted and then, quite subtly, slipped her hand up the sleeve of Kenny’s suit coat, holding his elbow as he escorted her to the elevator.

“Good evening, Mr. Murphy,” the elevator operator said as they entered. Kenny nodded towards the employee in a haughty manner, as he led the beautiful Penelope into the elevator. The ride to the top floor was filled with silence, but surprisingly, Kenny didn’t feel at all nervous. Allowing Penelope to exit the elevator first, Kenny motioned down the hall towards the door of his suite.
Just as Kenny was about to insert the key into the lock, the door swung open, revealing the ever-reliant Jennings, ready and waiting for them. Seeing the startled look on Kenny’s face, Jennings took care to introduce himself. Kenny nodded his appreciation to the valet. Jennings then led Penelope into the sitting area, where he had already poured a glass of scotch for Kenny and a gin and tonic for Penelope.

“Now,” Jennings began, “If you have no objection Mr. Murphy, I have taken the liberty of making the arrangements for dinner, where tonight, with your permission, I will serve you myself. You will enjoy a variety of culinary delights which will culminate in the tenderest and most succulent roast lamb you have ever had the pleasure of tasting. If you have room for dessert, I will prepare it for you at the table. All you need to do is approve.”

“Well, Penelope, how does that sound to you?” Kenny asked, swollen with newfound arrogance.

“Why, that sounds absolutely marvelous.”

“You hear that, Jennings? Absolutely marvelous!” Kenny felt a slight blush as he knew he was overdoing it a bit.

Ever the embodiment of restraint, Jennings pretended to take no notice, remarking casually, “I’m so pleased that you approve Mr. Murphy.” Then, in a skillful display, Jennings added, “And please forgive me Mr. Murphy if I was presumptuous in making the arrangements without consulting you first.”

Kenny seized the opportunity for redemption Jennings had so expertly presented.

“Jennings, you know that I trust your judgment completely. On behalf of Penelope I thank you for your always proficient assistance.”

“It’s my pleasure, Mr. Murphy.”

Kenny stole a glance at Penelope and could see by the look of admiration in her eye that she was impressed with the exchange he’d had with Jennings. He, Kenny Murphy was winning her over; this exquisite, polished specimen of femininity, and he couldn’t remember ever being happier than he was at that moment.
Jennings truly out-did himself both in his service and presentation of the meal. He timed the arrival of each course of the dinner with precision and, as promised, the main course was nothing short of divine. Yet, what Kenny admired most was that Jennings’ presence in no way detracted from the intimacy of the affair, and Penelope’s comments let Kenny know that she was impressed, which only bolstered his confidence. When Jennings asked if they would like dessert, Kenny deferred to Penelope, but Jennings could tell by the look in Penelope’s eyes that she couldn’t eat another bite.

“No, of course you don’t want dessert. How silly of me to ask,” the valet remarked. Kenny thanked him profusely.

“Please, Mr. Murphy, the pleasure is mine. Now, why don’t the two of you retire to the lounge and I will see to it that I make a swift exit. Ring me if there’s anything more you need.”

“Thank you,” Kenny repeated as he got up from his chair and moved around the table to pull Penelope’s chair back for her. He guided her back into the lounge and asked her if she would join him in having a snifter of brandy.

“That would be lovely,” Penelope said as she neatly smoothed the back of her skirt before taking a seat on the couch.

Kenny removed two snifter glasses from the bar and poured small measures from the ornate crystal decanter, replaced the top and made his way across the lounge to join Penelope on the couch. He handed her one of the glasses and offered a toast. As the snifters lightly touched each other, the tiniest of sounds rang out.

“What an evening,” Penelope hushed, warming the brandy by holding the snifter between her fingers, her palm cradling the glass.

“Indeed, and the food wasn’t half-bad either!” Kenny continued to surprise himself with the ease in which he was handling this situation. Where had this suave gentleman been all his life? Penelope laughed and touched his arm lightly.

“To think, there I was, content to enjoy an afternoon drink. Kenneth Murphy, you certainly know how to make an impression, I dare say.”

Kenny looked into Penelope’s eyes. “To be honest, I never dreamed you’d agree to dine with me. I think my preparation for your politely declining my invitation was the only thing that gave me the courage to ask you in the first place,” Kenny said, a look of sincerity on his face.

“Oh, Kenny. You are such a dear.”
Kenny balked, not knowing what to do. Should he lean over and kiss her? Should he not? His mind whacked those two propositions back and forth like a tennis ball, as Penelope held his gaze, showing no signs of discomfort.

“Penelope, I don’t want to ruin a perfect day by doing something stupid. The truth is, I would really like to kiss you, but I would hate to give you the wrong impression.”

“Well, then,” Penelope countered, “Why don’t you just start with a peck on the cheek, that way you will have kissed me, but not have to suffer any remorse from the belief that you behaved like a beast.” Her reply couldn’t have been more perfect.

Although he hesitated for an instant, Kenny did lean over and lightly kissed Penelope’s left cheek, breathing in the intoxicating scent of her perfume. His heart was beating a mile a minute, but he somehow knew that pushing this refined woman any further would spoil any chance he might have of spending more time with her.

“There, now that’s out of the way, we can get back to our fascinating conversation,” Penelope giggled, only now with just a bit of added color to her already pink cheeks.

As they sipped their drinks, Penelope entertained Kenny with stories of life at Oxford. She impressed upon him how fortunate she felt. She was a rarity of the time, a well-educated woman, and was grateful for the limitless possibilities that lie before her. However, she made a point of telling Kenny that following her summer of relaxation in London, she was most certainly going to enjoy a year away from academia.

Kenny was impressed that she not only wanted to gain some life experience, but also desired to put some distance between herself her father’s heavy hand. As a land baron, Penelope’s father was not used to being told anything but, “Yes, sir,” and he had not been pleased when she told him she was going to summer in London, instead of the family estate in Wales. Kenny listened excitedly as Penelope spoke with conviction about a new day dawning for British women. It was clear to him that she was determined to stake a profound claim of independence and that had to start with standing up to her father. Although completely smitten, he admired the character of the woman seated next to him. Surely she could have taken a much easier path and retreated from the world, content to live out a life of luxury courtesy of her father’s vast wealth. Hell, that’s what he would have done. But no, this was a new breed of woman; independent, educated, resourceful and ambitious.
“So, where do you think you’ll end up? What would you like to do?” he asked.

“Knowing I won’t be locked away behind the gates of the family estate is assurance enough for me, at this point in time.”

She squinted for a moment. “Here is what I believe; if one puts oneself in the right place at the right time, then all will work out as planned. Destiny is not something one creates, it is something one must allow to unfold.” A slight smile appeared in the left corner of her mouth as she released her stare on Kenny and reclined back into the comfort of the couch.

“Wow! Are you sure you didn’t major in philosophy?” asked a dumbstruck Kenny. Penelope said not a word, content to let her words hang in the air as she lightly swirled her snifter.
“Charles, you plead with me not to complain, but for Christ’s sake, what am I supposed to do?” Charles leaned against the kitchen wall and sunk his hands into his trouser pockets.

“I mean, you leave here every morning before I’m even awake, and you’re out with Eamonn all day! It’s not fair, Charles. Look at me!” she shrieked.

Charles lifted his gaze from the floor to his rumpled bride-to-be. Elizabeth’s hair was frazzled and her skirt was covered in the residue of the meal she had prepared.

“Come on, darling. What do you want from me?” he pleaded in a tone that only irritated Elizabeth further.

“Don’t give me that shit,” she hissed.

Charles winced. He’d never heard her swear before, and hearing it now only heightened his humiliation.

Elizabeth shuffled forward, shaking her finger at him.

“You go out and play in the fields like some fucking little boy on a vacation from school. You leave me here to fend for myself and you never bother to ask how I’m doing because you’re terrified of me telling you the truth.” She put her hands squarely on her hips and jerked her chin up at his face. “You know what, Charles? You’re hopeless.”

In a flash, Charles saw her as she really was; both a wounded child and a vicious beast. Half of him wanted to cradle her in his arms and half of him wanted to slap her senseless, but the whole of him knew she was right. He clenched his fists in his pockets.

“Look at you! You’re pathetic. Ever since Kenny left, it’s like I don’t even matter. You’re perfectly content to while away the time while I have to sit in this cottage and watch myself get fat. I didn’t sign on for this.”

Charles wriggled. “I’ll tell you what, darling. How about tomorrow we go for a drive? I’ll take you away from here. We’ll go to Glengariff for lunch. How does that sound?”

“Pffft,” Elizabeth spewed. “It’s going to take a whole lot more than a drive through the countryside for you to redeem yourself with me. You need to get your act together, Charles. We’re going to have a child soon.”

Charles shivered at the word child. He might be rich and he might be book smart, but the thought of being a father and husband terrified him more than anything he had ever known.
Kenny walked Penelope down to the hotel entrance and hailed her a cab, reaching in his pocket to remove a thick wad of bills. As she got into the taxi, he reminded her, “10 a.m. tomorrow.”

“10 a.m. tomorrow,” she repeated back. “I look forward to it. And thank you, Kenny. Thank You for a most wonderful evening.”

“Goodnight, Penelope,” Kenny said, closing the door of the taxi. He stood at the curb, his hands twirling in his pockets as he watched the cab disappear down the street until it turned left. The instant the taxi’s lights were out of sight he removed his right fist from his pants pocket and punched the sky repeatedly, his pent-up exuberance now free to erupt from his heart and soul. This had been, by far, the best day of his life. He sauntered back into the hotel, making no effort to subdue the smug grin which spread across his face. Reaching the elevator, he couldn’t restrain himself from saying to the elevator operator, “Now, what did you think of that, my friend?”

The man whistled lightly. “What is there to say?” was the man’s modest reply.

When Kenny stepped into the suite, his nose twitched. As the door closed behind him, he stood up as rigidly as a pole, lifting both of hands straight out, shoulder high and then tilted his head back. He inhaled as deeply as he could, filling his lungs with the remnants of the his new companion’s lavender scent. Breathing in and out, his mind wandered to scenes of courtship and tender romance; strolls along the river, gondola rides on canals, long, soft kisses by the sea as an enormous sun set over the ocean. He was overcome with sheer elation. Sadly, the feeling didn’t last. Bit by bit, his ecstasy was whittled down, to be replaced by a creeping pensiveness. No one had seen him in his moment of glory. Oh, how he wished Charles had been on hand to witness the charming manner in which he had handled himself! How redeeming it would have been to perform this act in front of all of those self-important, fucking blue-bloods at The Taft School and Harvard. What would they have thought of him now?

“Poor kid from Ireland? My ass!” Kenny shouted as he made his way to the bar to savor another cognac, this one not needing to be a gentleman’s measure.

He took a mighty swallow and began pacing incessantly. Back and forth across the lounge he walked, replaying every event of the evening. Sure, it was only a kiss on the cheek, but a conquest was most definitely on the cards: And not some drunk co-ed or some high-society slut who was working her way through the men at
the local country club. No, sir. This was “Miss Penelope Rhys-Meyers”, daughter of
the esteemed Sir William Rhys-Meyers, lord of half of Wales.

The lack of an audience tortured Kenny, but he could endure it. He had a
ticket to sail to Italy in two day’s time. Purchasing an additional one for his new
comppanion would prove no problem at all, of that he was sure.

“Now, about tomorrow?” he said aloud to himself, then instantly thought of
Jennings.

Jennings appeared in the suite promptly after receiving his summons. No
longer able to contain his excitement, Kenny began to babble like man who had
recently drunk a gallon of coffee.

“So, what did you think? I have to plan a day out for us tomorrow. What
should we do? Maybe a river cruise? Can the hotel car take us out into the
country?”

Jennings listened intently, his indefatigable poise intact, as the young
American prattled on.

“What about taking the train to the seaside? A matinee in the West End?”
After Kenny had nearly exhausted himself with his blathering, Jennings smoothly
interceded.

“I would never dream of referring to myself as an expert on affairs of the
heart, but I believe I can arrange a day out that both of you will remember for years
to come.”

“Oh Jennings, could you?” Kenny pleaded, wringing his hands. “So? What
do you have in mind?” He tapped his foot.

“What time is your lovely companion meeting you?” Jennings asked.

“10 o’clock tomorrow morning.”

“Well then, Mr. Murphy, you just leave it with me.”

Kenny couldn’t hide his disappointment, deflated like a young child who
woke the morning before Christmas Day, only to be struck down by the realization
that another day’s wait was necessary.

“All right then, Jennings,” he mumbled. “I guess I’ll meet you in the lobby
when Miss Rhys-Meyers arrives at 10am.” He caught himself and added, “Thank
you so much for all of your assistance. I don’t know what I would do here without
you.”

“My pleasure, Mr. Murphy. I shall now make my retirement for the evening.
Should you need anything tonight, just ring the front desk. Barring that, I will see you
at 10am.”
“That's great, Jennings. And again, thank you.”

“Good night, Mr. Murphy,” Jennings said, the hint of a smile showing on the left of his mouth.

“Good night, Jennings.”

With that, Kenny was left on his own. He undressed and slipped into a comfortable pair of silk pajamas, but knew in his heart that he would get very little sleep.
Knowing that Kenny would be waiting for her much earlier than the agreed upon time, Penelope walked through the doors of the hotel at 9:15 a.m. and made her way straight to the ladies bathroom. She wanted time to check her appearance, from top to bottom. She primped and powdered, played with and teased her thick hair, adjusted her skirt, bra, blouse and hat and after thirty minutes, was certain she looked as good as possible, which was very good indeed.

As predicted, Kenny was waiting in the lobby, pretending to read the morning paper. In reality, he was trying to quiet the swarm of butterflies in his stomach. After tossing and turning all night, he had forgone breakfast as he was far too eager to even think of eating anything. He was certain that if he had ordered breakfast, it would have come right back up.

Penelope approached and as she reached Kenny she proclaimed, “Why it’s so nice for a gentleman to be waiting for a lady.” Kenny dropped his paper and stared at the loveliness standing before him. He had a hard time standing up, so weak were his knees, but he managed to thrust himself out of the soft leather chair he’d been sitting in, taking Penelope’s right hand and lightly kissing it.

“You look so….” Kenny stammered, desperately searching for the right adjective, but not finding it.

Seeing how on edge he was, Penelope calmly interceded. And you look quite distinguished, it must be said,” she replied.

Kenny had chosen his finest day suit, which he matched with a pale blue shirt, a yellow paisley tie and his polished brown lace-ups.

He glanced at the clock behind the reception desk, and seeing that Jennings was still fifteen minutes away from making his entrance, Kenny suggested they enjoy a cup of tea. Penelope agreed and they glided into the lounge where, after being served, Kenny struggled to control his trembling hands as he reached for a lump of sugar and the small milk jug. His anxiety was not lost on Penelope, but she made no mention of it. Instead, she broke the tension and eased Kenny’s nerves with a monologue about her morning and the beautiful weather that awaited them this day. By the time Jennings arrived, Kenny was almost relaxed.

“Good morning Miss Rhys-Meyers. Good morning Mr. Murphy.”

“Good morning Jennings,” Penelope and Kenny replied, nearly in unison and while Kenny blushed, Penelope delicately covered her mouth.

“Now, everything is in order for you to have a most enjoyable day. A car is in front of the hotel for you. I have given the driver instructions to whisk you off to
Richmond Park, where a horse and carriage lies in wait. It’s a splendid day for a tour of the park in all of its natural beauty. A picnic lunch will await you under a large oak tree in the center of the park on a lovely hill overlooking acres of greenery. Upon finishing lunch, at your leisure, the horse and carriage will circle the remainder of the park and bring you back to the car. I anticipate a lovely outing and upon your return, I will serve a delicious dinner, featuring milk-fed veal as the main course. I dare say you both should enjoy yourselves thoroughly.” Kenny was flabbergasted. How was Jennings able to arrange such an elaborate outing on such short notice?

“I don’t know what to say, Jennings,” he offered. “You continue to astound me with your proficiency. I appreciate your efforts.” Jennings downplayed Kenny’s compliment, noting that the car was waiting. As soon as they finished their tea they should be on their way. Jennings departed without fanfare leaving Kenny and Penelope to exit the hotel at their leisure.

Kenny shot a glance at Penelope, desperate to find a clue as to what might be going through her mind. Penelope recognised the look and daintily said, “Well, I believe we are going to have a most memorable day.”

“I couldn’t agree with you more.” They both held a straight face before breaking into a fit of laughter.

They finished their tea and Kenny clumsily rushed to pull the chair back for Penelope as she got up from the table. As they walked out of the lounge, Penelope lightly looped her hand around the inside of Kenny’s elbow. It had to be said that the smattering of businessmen reading the newspaper in the hotel lobby couldn’t help but stare at the raving beauty gliding towards the hotel’s front door. Kenny puffed out his chest and gave each of the gawking men a smug grin.

“Yes,” he thought to himself. “This is what it’s all about,” for nothing, nothing in the world brought Kenny more satisfaction than other people openly showing him signs of jealousy.
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As Jennings had guaranteed, the car was waiting directly in front of the hotel's entrance and the driver was standing outside the car awaiting the arrival of his passengers. He opened the door for Penelope who slid into the back seat, but did not slide all the way over to the other side and Kenny was thrilled that she snuggled up to him when he got in the car. He was of two minds. Part of him refused to believe that this was actually happening, while the child inside him was jumping for joy.

Penelope acted as a playful tour guide as the driver maneuvered the car through Westminster, Kensington and Chiswick, but as they made an easy left turn onto the road to Richmond it was as if they had entered another world. In a span of no more of half a mile they went from bustling cityscape to lush countryside. Elm trees towered over the side of the road and in their absence, vast tracts of rolling vistas and elegant estates were revealed. It was a step back in time, as the houses were either Georgian or Victorian.

Penelope leaned against Kenny, looking out his window and was quick to point out different architectural features on the houses they passed. Such was Kenny’s state of bliss, that what was actually a forty-five minute drive seemed to pass in seconds. This woman was everything a man could hope for; beautiful, intelligent, well-read and good humored, with a lively demeanor and most importantly to Kenny, completely enamored of him. That was the best part. She had a way of making him feel like he was the most important person in the world to her, and he soaked it up.

As they reached the entrance to Richmond Park the driver slowed to a crawl, gently guiding the car over the gravel road that ran through the north edge of the gigantic tract. Hundreds of acres of rolling green meadow and oak forest lay to their left. Penelope couldn't suppress a squeal of delight as a herd of wild deer sauntered lazily away just out of window's reach.

“I’d forgotten just how beautiful it is out here. I haven’t been here since I was a child,” she said. “It’s much more peaceful than the family estate. I often forget what a wonderful city London is. Can you believe that just a few miles away, millions of people are laboring away, while the glory of this place lies unspoiled?”

Kenny’s eyes were also filled with wonder, but such was his state of mind all he could offer in reply was, “Yes, it's hard to believe.”

The driver slowed to a stop, and the couple turned their gaze to the front window where, as promised, a horse and carriage awaited them.
“Oh, this is so wonderful!” cried Penelope.

Despite his own excitement, Kenny awaited the driver to open the door. As the door opened Kenny was first to get out, offering his hand to Penelope.

“I shall await your return in this very spot,” said the driver in a most professional manner.

“Thank you very much. We’ll see you in a while,” Kenny shot back, guiding Penelope toward the awaiting carriage.

The late-morning sun shone brightly, adding a brilliant hue to the green meadow, but a light breeze made for perfect weather for a day out in the park. The carriage driver warmly welcomed the couple and assisted Penelope up into the black, open-top carriage. Kenny followed like a hungry dog chasing its owner.

“Now, just sit back and enjoy the view. I’ll be taking you to my favorite spot in the park. I have all of the trimmings for a glorious picnic lunch for you up here in front,” the driver remarked before gliding up into his seat. He let out a clicking sound with his tongue and with that, the horse pulling the carriage began his work.

To his credit, the driver of the carriage didn’t say much as he steered the horse through the park. Kenny was grateful, for the last thing he wanted was the blathering of a stranger to spoil the delight he was feeling. Less than a half mile into their journey, Kenny took a deep breath and made the bold move of placing a hand on Penelope’s. She turned her hand over so that Kenny could press his palm against hers, their fingers interlocking. A half-hour later the carriage driver pulled the horse to a stop and pointed to a lone, gigantic oak tree standing about one hundred yards off the road to their left.

“That’s the spot. Lovely, isn’t it?” asked the driver.

“Perfect,” Kenny replied. He didn’t wait for the carriage driver to open the door and assist him down the step onto the road, he threw the door open and in a rare show of something resembling athleticism, leapt to the ground in a smooth, almost gallant manner. He immediately turned to take Penelope’s hand as she carefully negotiated the two rickety steps down.

“Now, I’ll carry the basket out, then leave you two alone,” the carriage driver said with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. “I’ll be off to the stable to feed the horse and will be back in a couple of hours. Does that suit?”

Kenny glanced at Penelope, squeezed her hand a bit and said, “Yes, that will be fine.”

There was no way Kenny was going to release his grip on Penelope and they held hands as they strolled through the meadow toward the oak tree. Upon
reaching it, the driver set down the basket, flipped up the right lid and pulled out a red and white checkered blanket. With great fanfare snapped in open and laid it down on the grass, in the large area of shade provided by the oak tree.

“Now, I shall leave you to enjoy your lunch,” he said, turning on his heel and making a brisk exit.

Neither Kenny nor Penelope said a word to him as he made his way back to the carriage. Kenny finally released his grip on Penelope and placed his hands on his hips, turning a full circle to take in the beauty, quiet and serenity of the spot Jennings had so expertly chosen. He closed his eyes for a few seconds and drew a deep breath, soaking up the clean air of the park, before turning his eyes toward Penelope.

“Well let’s see what our good friend Jennings has ordered for us, shall we?”

“Oh yes,” Penelope replied. Placing her right hand lightly on her stomach she said, “I’m actually quite hungry, let’s have a look.”
As Kenny opened the picnic basket he was aghast with what Jennings had arranged. Inside it were a small tin of caviar so rare that it simply melted in their mouths, a small roasted pheasant, perfectly round and tender red potatoes, long quarters of fresh carrots and the most flavorful peas imaginable. For dessert, Jennings had selected a fresh assortment of wild berries along with the traditional English after-dinner fare of a variety of cheeses and biscuits. Accompanying the food were a bottle of a French wine whose name neither could pronounce, but with its gentle taste was the perfect partner of the food.

In taking yet another leap, Kenny, mid-way through the main course, made the bold move of hand-feeding Penelope, something she first reacted to with astonishment, then, as Kenny persisted, she accepted with a coy smile. Kenny felt a rush of blood as his excitement about what might lay ahead in the evening heightened.

They chatted and laughed about casual things at first; the weather, the interior design of Brown’s Hotel, then moved on to subjects they had more passion about; politics in particular. Penelope surprised Kenny with her conviction about the emergence of a new and more powerful woman’s place in the English establishment. Kenny let loose with his own feelings about the political climate in America, his concerns about Germany’s military strength and what he thought was the way forward for his adopted homeland.

When Penelope spoke, Kenny never interrupted, disagreed or offered an alternate opinion of any kind. It was a skill he had honed in his years at The Taft School and Harvard. He had always been aware of how flattered people were when they felt like someone was really listening to what they had to say and showing a genuine interest. Kenny’s training in school was paying big dividends as he could tell that his focus made Penelope feel like the most important person in the world which was, of course, his intention. Although Kenny had genuine feelings for a woman for the first time in his life, he also used every trick he could think of to make Penelope more attracted to him.

He told a funny, but very clean joke about a priest and a spinster and spoke nostalgically about his days sailing the Lady Ore, but he couldn’t stop himself from lying about his wheelings and dealings in Europe and the amazing job he had. He desperately wanted to be truthful with her, but at the same time he just couldn’t stop himself from the need to sound important.
In the shade of the oak tree they were completely absorbed in each other, oblivious to the world. As the last of the berries was eaten, Kenny suggested they go back to the meeting place and enjoy the carriage ride to the awaiting car and driver. It was a tough moment for Kenny, for while he didn’t want the moment to end, he also felt rushed and anxious. A part of him felt this all could end at any moment, so he’d better keep the momentum of the day going. He was already loaded with anticipation of what might happen back at the hotel.

Thankfully, Penelope agreed and said that she was actually looking forward to a bit of a stroll after such a filling meal, so they made their way back to the awaiting carriage driver and Kenny told him they were going to go for a short walk and would be back promptly. The carriage driver told Kenny to take his time. As they walked through the park, Penelope again looped her left arm through Kenny’s elbow, and pulled herself close to him. They were interlocked as they strolled through one of the most peaceful spots in all of London. Little was said, but after about fifteen minutes Kenny suggested they return to the carriage and Penelope agreed. She admitted the wine had made her a bit tipsy and she was looking forward to reclining into the plush leather interior of the carriage. Kenny also was a bit light-headed but his giddiness was more due to nervous anticipation.

Penelope thanked Kenny countless times on the way back to the car and they held hands the entire drive back to the hotel, Kenny leaning over a few times to say, “The pleasure was all mine” and “You’ve made my entire trip to Europe a sacred memory in just one afternoon”, in the gentlest of whispers. He then leaned back to look for a reaction from his new love. Penelope was demure but smiled after each of Kenny’s comments.
Driving toward Glengariff, Charles tried to block out how upset Elizabeth seemed. Because of her distress over what pregnancy was doing to her body, Elizabeth had expended a great deal of effort getting ready for their day out. She had curled her hair and fixed it so that it was pulled back to show off her made-up face, then left to flow down over her shoulders. She had lacquered her nails, selected a striking navy dress which minimized her bulge and donned a new pair of stockings. She’d painfully jammed her swollen feet into a navy-and-white pair of pumps to match the dress. All she really wanted was for Charles to notice. Swimming in his anxious thoughts, Elizabeth’s efforts were completely lost on him. His feelings had shifted from love to fear. He was frightened and twitchy around her and the knowledge of that sickened him.

They drove in near silence, with Elizabeth having to pry words out of Charles. She gave up two miles into the drive and by the time they reached the Eccles Hotel parking lot, she was at the end of her rope.

"Forget it!" she snapped at Charles as he tried to open the car door for her.

“What's the matter?” Charles pleaded.

Elizabeth lifted the back of a finger to wipe away the moisture building in her eye. She filled her lungs and exhaled deeply.

“Darling, please, let’s just enjoy a nice lunch. The view is beautiful from the restaurant. I promise, you’ll really like this place.” Elizabeth twisted the car’s rear-view mirror so that she could inspect herself. Although furious, she knew a return to the cottage would solve nothing.

Charles took Elizabeth’s hand as she pushed herself out of the car. Despite how miserable she felt, Elizabeth held his hand all the way to the front door of the restaurant.

The woman at the counter remembered Charles from his lunch with Kenny earlier in the summer and said, “Come here to me. I’ve got yer table waitin’ for ye.” Elizabeth looked at Charles. As he raised an eyebrow to her, she couldn’t help but giggle.

* * *

The rolling journey in the back of the car and the after-effects of the wine left both Kenny and Penelope feeling a bit weary upon their arrival back at the hotel. Kenny opened the door to the suite and let Penelope enter first. As she glided into the sitting room, she said, “Oh Kenny, I’m afraid all of that fresh air has made me a bit tired. Would it be alright with you if I had a bit of a rest?”
Kenny’s heart skipped a beat. “What does she mean by that?” he thought to himself. “Does she want me to join her in bed?” He regained his composure before Penelope turned to face him.

“Of course you can have a rest, my dear. It’s only five o’clock and I’m sure Jennings is aware of the enormous lunch we’ve had. You go ahead and rest. I’ll give him a call and tell him to delay dinner until eight. Does that suit you?”

“Sounds perfect, darling,” was the reply, and again, for about the fifteenth time that day Kenny felt the butterflies in his stomach fluttering away. But his anticipation of the first romantic interlude of his life was quickly squashed when Penelope lay down on the big sofa in the sitting room. At first, that familiar feeling of rejection came over him, followed by a jolt of anger. However, he pushed those feelings down. “The day is still young,” he told himself in silence. “You’ll have your opportunity after dinner.” Reassured, Kenny went to the bedroom, quietly rang Jennings to make the arrangements for dinner in the suite at eight, and then was content to sit in the chair opposite the couch and watch his new love sleep. The nostrils of her perfect nose fairly twitched as she fell into a rhythmic and deep slumber.

Observing her made Kenny’s head spin. She was flawless. And he became aware of a feeling that he had never before experienced. This was not some childish crush. This was not lust. This was not infatuation. No. Kenny was convinced that this is what the emotion of love felt like. He had neither felt nor witnessed it within his own family. In fact, his first real exposure to true, romantic love had been with what he’d seen unfold in the hours, days and months he’d spent with Charles and Elizabeth. He’d also seen a different, but no less potent, example in the playful exchanges between Eamonn and Phyllis.

“So this is what it feels like,” he thought. Kenny couldn’t suppress a smug grin from spreading over his face. He leaned back in the chair a bit, stretched his arms out to the side and placed his hands behind his head. Although his gaze never left Penelope’s face, his mind drifted off into fantasies of what the summer months held for him and the beautiful creature before him. The conversation in his head was both reassuring and convincing. Surely she would accompany him on his European tour. They would stay in the finest hotels, take in the most memorable and dramatic sights but, lest he forget, as hard as he would find it, he would have to dismiss himself for a few hours in every city for the phony meeting he would have to conjure up to keep his ruse going. But that would be dealt with later.
His posture didn’t move an inch until Penelope began to stir, slowly awakening from her nap. He could see that she was a bit disorientated, but got a thrill when she smiled as their eyes met.

“Hmmmmm,” she lightly moaned as she squeezed the couch pillow tightly in her arms. “How long was I asleep?”

“Only a little over an hour,” Kenny replied in a voice that seemed about an octave higher than normal. He put his right fist to his mouth and cleared his throat.

“What time is it?” Penelope asked.

“It’s only six o’clock. Dinner’s not for another couple of hours so just relax my darling.”

Penelope moaned again and Kenny got out of the chair and made his way towards her, squeezing next to her on the sofa. Kenny sat sideways, put his right arm on the top of the couch and leaned back just enough so that his ribcage rested gently against Penelope’s stomach. He stroked and ran his fingers through her shimmering hair. Penelope closed her eyes and smiled.

“That feels so nice, Kenny. It's lovely to be here with you.”

“Oh Penelope, it’s so much more.”

They quietly sat together, Penelope drifting in and out, Kenny lost in a dream-like state as his eyes moved back and forth, up and down Penelope’s body, his fingers continuing to run through the strands of her hair. Finally, Penelope rolled her shoulders slightly so she could look Kenny in the eye.

“Well, I need to freshen up a bit,” she said, holding his stare. “Would it be alright with you if I used the washroom?” Kenny laughed out loud.

“Of course it’s alright, sweetheart. Go ahead, you know where it is. I’m going to fix myself a drink and enjoy the view out the front window.”

“Alright then, you do that and I’ll join you in a few minutes. I just need to splash a bit of water on my face and fix my hair.”

Kenny chuckled. “You do that. Take your time. I’ll be here.” He stood up so that she could swing her legs down onto the floor and get off of the couch. As she rose, Kenny kissed her lightly on the forehead. “I’ll be right here,” he repeated in a whisper.

Penelope sashayed out of the sitting room and disappeared down the hall. Kenny went across the room to the bar, poured a full measure of gin into a tall glass, added a bit of tonic and tossed in a few cubes of ice, then made his way to the gigantic window. As he looked out over the River Thames, he held his drink
against his chest and sighed deeply, giving the feeling of joy permission to engulf him. Although just a very young man, he had never before felt so content.
Kenny was jolted out of his daydream by the hands of Penelope wrapping around his waist from behind. He turned to face her. She was glowing. She had completely re-done the make-up on her face and had pulled her hair back using a clip laced with pearls. She looked all the more beautiful to him and he found himself incapable of speaking. Penelope broke the silence. “Well, aren’t you going to offer me a drink?”

“Hah ha ha ha,” Kenny stammered. “Why of course. What would you like?”
“What are you drinking?”
“Gin and tonic.”
“I’ll have one of those, please.”

“Of course. Coming right up, enjoy the view.” Kenny made his way back to the bar, re-filled his own drink then began preparing Penelope’s. He was tempted to pour her as big a measure as his own but caught himself and made her a drink he thought was suitable for a lady. He added a slice of lemon and returned to the window, handing the drink to her.

“There you go.”

“Oh, why thank you,” Penelope replied, taking the glass from Kenny then raising it to her lips and taking a small sip. She smiled, squinted ever so slightly and said, “Ah, that’s perfect.”

Kenny smiled back at her, but really, he was smiling at himself. The queasy feelings he’d wrestled with all day dissolved. He felt like the most confident man in the world. They stood, side-by-side, and looked out the window. Penelope pointed out a few noteworthy buildings on both the north and south of the river. They watched the sun ease its way westward on the horizon and were only interrupted by a familiar, gentle knock of Jennings at the front door.

“Good evening sir,” Jennings said, then looking at Penelope, “And to you too, Miss Rhys-Meyers.”

“Good evening, Jennings,” Penelope replied, letting out a light giggle. She swiftly returned her gaze to the landscape out the window and stood straight and unwavering.

“Everything is in order sir, so you may take your seats at the table and I will serve you dinner,” Jennings announced to Kenny.

“Thank you Jennings. Come darling, our dinner is ready.”

“Oh, splendid!” Penelope cried as she made her way to the table.
Kenny pulled out her chair, the last seat before the head of the table. He tucked the chair in behind her and took his own seat at the head of the table, a vantage point perfect for witnessing Jennings wheeling in an elegant cart filled with covered silver serving dishes.

Jennings first set the table, then lit a single candle and placed it in the middle of the table so as not to interfere with the couple’s line of sight to each other. He served each course with grace and grandeur, announcing the contents and preparation of each and every item of food placed before them. Immediately after serving the main course, veal with a potato compote and crisp asparagus tips, he opened a bottle of Bourgogne and poured a small amount into Kenny’s glass for his inspection. Kenny made quite a show of the affair. He swirled the wine around in his glass before sniffing its aroma and finally poured a bit into his mouth. He swallowed and smiled, nodding to Jennings with approval. Penelope thought he was playing around, but Kenny was genuinely trying to appear sophisticated. Jennings left the room and the couple dined in near silence, their only comments being about how delicious a meal Jennings had prepared.

Jennings re-emerged at the exact moment they finished their main course and Kenny wondered to himself, how the hell does he do that?

After clearing their plates, Jennings lifted the lid of the last remaining dish. He slid a hand underneath an elegant silver and glass tray and displayed an assortment of cakes, crumbles, biscuits and chocolate. Penelope asked for a small slice of white cake, while Kenny had a warmed square of rhubarb crumble. Jennings poured tea for both of them, and again, left the room.

They shared their desserts, feeding each other in a way that was both romantic and sensual. Kenny was highly aroused and sensed that Penelope shared the feeling. As they sipped their tea quietly, Kenny reached over and took Penelope’s hand in his own. He stroked the top of her hand with his thumb. He felt quite confident that tonight was going to be one he would remember for the rest of his life. He was a virgin, but was certain that was going to change.

With the meal finished, Jennings returned one final time to clear the table and re-set it for breakfast. As he rose to assist Penelope out of her chair and back into the sitting room, it was not lost on Kenny that the butler had placed two settings on the table, instead of the usual single setting for himself, and he couldn’t help but smirk.

"Now," Jennings announced, "If there’s nothing more I can do for you, I shall make my retirement for the evening."
Kenny looked at Penelope and seeing no resistance in her eyes said to the butler, “Yes, that will be fine.”

Kenny secretly wanted to pull Jennings aside for a moment and express his gratitude for the butler’s efforts in arranging such a perfect day, but his eagerness to be with Penelope got the better of him. As the butler opened the door, all Kenny could muster was a weak sounding, “thank you for everything.”

“The pleasure was mine. Enjoy your evening and goodnight.”

“Goodnight Jennings,” the couple said in unison. Jennings turned on his heel and made a swift but graceful exit.
While Penelope seemed quite at ease, relaxing on the couch and sipping tea, Kenny was a bundle of nerves, for now the moment of truth had arrived. His mind was full of non-stop chatter as he debated himself over if he should ask Penelope to spend the night with him and if so, how should he go about asking her? It felt, to him, as though there was a committee in his head discussing the matter as a group, with one side urging assertion and the other taking a ‘let’s wait and see’ approach. This chatter was paralyzing him. Back and forth he went. On the one hand, he needed to maintain the ruse; he believed the image of him being a man of the world was vital for him to have any chance of ending the evening on a most memorable note and a man of the world would not start babbling like a nervous schoolboy. Despite that, if he were to be honest, a nervous schoolboy would have better described him.

Why was it so difficult for him to simply be honest with this woman? He pondered that thought deeply as he turned his back to Penelope to fix himself a drink, making sure she couldn’t see the ghastly amount of gin he was pouring into his empty glass. The only answers he could come up with were, “if you tell her the truth, the real story about what you’re doing here and who you really are, she’ll bolt for the door and you’ll never see her again,” and “if she knows the whole truth, even if she stays she will have lost all respect for you, and again, will leave as soon as possible.” He had painted himself into an inescapable corner. No matter how strong his desire was to come clean with her, his fear of losing her won out and he would continue his deception.

He took a gigantic swallow of his drink, winced, and turned to face her. As he moved toward his chair opposite Penelope he stated, in a confident, booming voice, “Well darling, that was certainly a day to remember!”

Her reply shocked him.

“Yes it was my dearest, but the day hasn’t ended yet.” She said it with an almost fiendish grin on her face and Kenny was exceedingly grateful that he was seated, for had he not been, surely his knees would have buckled and he would have fallen to the floor. His reply was to take another sip of his drink.

“Good God!” he thought. What is that supposed to mean?” He stared into his drink, unable to make eye contact with Penelope. It was she who broke the silence. “What’s the matter Kenny?” she asked with a voice of true concern. This was it. Kenny now had an opportunity to tell her everything. Maybe she would understand why he felt the need to concoct such a hare-brained story. Maybe she
would find it adorable, endearing, or at the very least, funny. But no, he commanded. There was no turning back now. The gin was doing its job and he felt self-assurance elbowing its way to the front. He looked straight into her eyes.

“How could anything possibly be the matter, my love? Today has been one that I shall cherish forever, I just wish I could relive it over and over,” he said, as a smile began creeping across his face.

“How’s to say you can’t?” Penelope fired back, seductively tracing the handle of her teacup.

“Yes! Who is to say I can’t? I’ll tell you who. No one!” he announced, gaining poise with every word. He was on a roll now. “There is no reason why we shouldn’t travel Europe together. It will be fantastic. I have only a meeting or two in each city I’m visiting. It will be the time of our lives!”

Penelope giggled in a way that Kenny ascertained to be an act of compliance. He had closed the deal. She really was falling for him and this was definitely going to be not only a night to remember, but also the start of something that would surely lead to a serious relationship. He could almost picture her on his arm as he triumphantly returned to Ireland, his mission accomplished with perfection and a striking beauty on his arm to boot.

Penelope tried to hide a yawn. Kenny seized the moment.

“You must be exhausted, darling. Why don’t you take a bath and join me in the bedroom. I have some papers to look over, so you can take your time.” Kenny startled himself with his forwardness, but he most definitely liked this version of himself. The confidence was intoxicating and by the look on Penelope’s face, he guessed that his confidence was also an aphrodisiac, for she didn’t hesitate in her reply.

“Oh, that sounds perfect.” Kenny polished off his drink in a split-second and vaulted out of his chair, offering his hand. She took it and arose to meet his awaiting lips. They kissed deeply and, not being able to tolerate any more waiting, Kenny broke the embrace, bent over to loop his right arm under Penelope’s knees and lifted her off the floor, carrying her into the bedroom like a groom carrying his bride over the threshold. Penelope laughed every step of the way, that adorable girlish laugh that Kenny found irresistible.
Kenny shifted from one position to another in the bed. He could hear the water Penelope was splashing over herself only a few feet away, behind the closed bathroom door. He had changed into his finest set of silk pajamas. Actually, they weren’t his; they were given to him by Charles, who had received them from the Patriarch on his fifteenth birthday. They were jet black with thin, vertical gold stripes two inches apart. On the shirt, covering the spot where his heart pounded incessantly lay the Collins’ family crest, a gaudy piece of embroidery and a complete fabrication which had emerged from the Patriarch’s grandiose mind. In reality, there was an Irish family crest for people of the surname Collins, but it bore no resemblance to the ostentatious shield the Patriarch had dreamed up.

Kenny had scattered a few pieces of paper over the bed, for effect only. He was busy fidgeting and unsuccessfully trying to calm himself down. Hearing Penelope humming to herself in the bathtub, he scampered out of the bedroom and poured himself a glass of water. He slammed down half of it immediately and hurried back to the bed, setting the glass on the nightstand next to him. After what seemed like eternity, he heard the water draining from the tub.

“She’s getting out of the tub and is drying herself off,” he thought. He was forced to endure a few more minutes of torture as he heard Penelope shuffle through her purse, no doubt looking for some cream or lotion to rub into her flawless skin. She finally emerged.

Most of her hair was pulled up, but the few strands which fell over on each side only added to her sexiness. She wore nothing but a bath towel. Kenny felt a surge of blood rush to his head and was certain his face was bright red, not with embarrassment, but pure, unadulterated desire. Never had he witnessed anything so alluring. In fact, his only encounter with a disrobed female figure was the disturbing and, unfortunately for him, unshakable image of Bridey, whom he had caught getting dressed when he was seven years old. He struggled to breathe normally.

“Hello dearest,” Penelope said as she placed her left hand on her hip and shifted her pelvis out and to the right, a move which brought Kenny to full arousal. “My God!” was all he could say.

Her silhouette in the dimly lit bedroom pulsated and his eyes surveyed her figure like a starving man staring into a butcher’s window.

Still wrapped only in the towel, Penelope slid into the bed and under the covers. Kenny lost all control. He brusquely kissed her forehead, her nose, her
cheeks, her chin, her neck. His hands slid under her shoulders and he pulled her
closer to him. Their lips met and Kenny thrust his tongue into her mouth. Penelope
twirled her tongue around his and as she did so, he could hear her breathing
quicken.

“Oh, my beautiful angel,” he murmured as his hands continued their
exploration of her body. Penelope freed her own hands and began unbuttoning
Kenny’s pajama shirt.

As she got to the last button Kenny sat up, ripping at the shirt and popping
the button off in the process. Looking down at her, he studied her face. He traced
the outline of it with his right hand, from her hairline to her collarbone. As he
caressed her he repeated, “My beautiful angel.”

Penelope pulled him on top of her and they began to move against each
other, the towel slipping off her body. Kenny reached down and clumsily removed
his pajama bottoms. He felt his thighs meet the softness of hers and as their chests
met, the moist heat of her panting soaked the back of his neck.

Later in life, Kenny would have loved to have said that his first sexual
encounter was an endless night of passion; hours of fervor and delight ending at
dawn with both parties totally exhausted and blissfully satisfied…but that would
have been a lie. In truth, it was over in seconds. Kenny lost control of his physical
being and exploded almost the instant he entered her. Having no previous
experience he thought that was what making love was all about. Losing his virginity
in that moment, he presently laid on top of Penelope like a stone, heavy and
unmoving. His face disappeared into the pillow next to her and he mumbled, “Oh my
love, that was unbelievable.” Less than one minute later, he was fast asleep.

* 

Sinead Harrington spends extra time in front of the mirror on the day she is going to
meet Rory. He has sent her a note, asking her to join him by the shore of the bay so
that they may speak in private, away from the crowd in the town square. She has
been anxious all week about this meeting.

Despite the constant stream of compliments she receives from an endless line of
male suitors and envious women, inside, she has never quite believed that she is as
beautiful as the world claims. A courtship with Rory would end the voices of doubt
which taunt her. A marriage to the most sought-after man in the town would silence
them forever.
She sees herself in a bridal dress, a bouquet of white lilies in her hand as she glides up the steps of the church. She is filled with warmth.

She smiles at her image in the mirror, the image brushing its long, brown locks. She giggles out loud as the scent of the rosewater she dabs on her neck drifts up through to her nose. She stands in front of the vanity mirror and gives herself one last review. Satisfied with the sight of seeing Rory’s delighted wife in her reflection, she places a lace shawl over her bare shoulders and makes her way toward the door.

Rory is leaning against a large boulder, watching the small waves lap the shore of the bay when Sinead emerges into his view. She moves like the water, gliding toward him effortlessly, her face beaming with promise. Her exquisite features; the dancing eyes, her sharp jaw line and long neck leave no doubt that she is the most magnificent woman he will ever lay eyes on. Yet, he also knows that Providence dictates what he must say to her. This decision has not been easy, but it is not a decision he has agonized over. He has searched himself and accepted the answers he has received.

Sinead’s eyes light up and she breaks into a smile as her gaze meets Rory’s. Rory smiles back.

“Hello, Rory. I’ve been looking forward to seeing you.”

“Hello, Sinead. You look wonderful.”

Sinead blushes.

“Why, thank you.” She looks up at him and adds shyly, “I didn’t think you’d notice.”

“How could I not?” Rory holds his smile, but his reserved demeanor is unchanged.

“So, what’s with all of the cloak and dagger, then?” she smirks, tossing her head in the direction of the distant mob in the square.
Rory gazes at her for several seconds.

“Sinead, I have a duty to be honest with you.”

Sinead’s smile disappears.

“What do you mean?”

“I know that you have feelings for me that would make me the envy of any man.”

Sinead casts her glance down toward her feet.

“A life spent with a beautiful, caring wife, a life spent rearing children and watching them grow is no doubt a full life indeed... for some. But Sinead, that life is not my destiny.”

Sinead’s stomach tumbles.

“Who do you think you are, Rory? “You’re damn right. I can have any man I choose! I have men lining up to offer their hand in marriage to me!”

“And that is why I’m here today, Sinead. If life with a man who will give you all of himself is what you seek, then you should accept an offer from one of these men. Choose wisely, and only love one who will love you equally in return.”

“You are a right bastard, Rory! God damn you!”

Rory does not intervene, for he knows no act or gesture will bring her relief. He can feel her sadness and it hurts him.

“Sinead, I’m certain that you think I’m selfish. I also understand your anger. But, all I can do is try my best to explain. I do so knowing that my explanation will be inadequate.”

Sinead’s tears give way to indignation. Her arms fold over one another, crossing against her chest.
“Explain away, then.”

Rory makes no motion toward her. He stands firmly and draws a deep breath. He must tell her.

“Yes, you have a right to know. I was orphaned as a child, abandoned by those who brought me into the world. Of this I am certain.”

Sinead’s cold look shifts as Rory continues.

“Being dealt that hand, I have had to be very careful. I have had to make choices. I could choose to see myself as a victim of an unfortunate circumstance and stay in that wounded stance quite comfortably, forever blaming my misfortunes on uncaring, unloving parents. Or I could choose to see this as the ultimate liberation.”

Sinead’s anger returns. “Cop onto yourself, Rory. What in hell are you on about?”

Rory pauses for a moment. His eyes glaze over as his stare moves toward the placid surface of the bay.

“Sinead, there is only Truth.”

Rory raises a hand to his chin and squeezes. He is uncomfortable for the first time in his life. He drops his hand and continues.

“Inescapably aligned with Truth are consequences. I fully understand that. I don’t believe it’s fair, but fairness is not the matter.”

Rory slides his hands into his pants’ pockets.

“In Truth, were I to enter a life with you, there is no doubt that you would do everything in your power to make me a happy man. You would forego your own pleasure in an effort to please me. You would enjoy this for some time, but you would grow to resent me, for I am unable to give you what you think you need.”
“Oh? And what’s that then?”

Rory removes his hands and shakes his head, looking at the pebbles on the shore of the bay.

“This misunderstood word; ‘happiness’.”

He senses that Sinead doesn’t understand.

“Sinead, my happiness isn’t dependent on another. Happiness of itself is a fleeting emotion, unsustainable. Truth is not fleeting. Truth is absolute. It is unflinching. Like this boulder.” Rory motions back to the rock. “Because of this, I tell you that I cannot and I will not impose myself on another person.” Rory stares into her. “My responsibility to myself makes others feel unwanted. But, that is not the issue. Making others feel unwanted in not the issue!” Rory repeats.

“Then God damn it, what is the issue?”

“Were I to marry you, I would be untruthful, not just to myself, but to you as well. I would be denying you what you need. The man I am, the man you now love, is the same man you would come to despise.”

Sinead wipes her eyes with the back of her hand.

“I would also be denying myself the opportunity to explore all that the world has to offer in this life.”

“What?” Sinead sniffs. “You’re saying you want to live the life of Riley, then? Don’t want to be tied down by one woman?”

“No, Sinead, that’s not what I’m saying at all. I am saying that I believe there is much more in this life for me than living here in Bantry and raising a family of my own.”

“Oh God, Rory, yes! Let’s run away from here. I would love to travel!”
Rory wishes he could acquiesce. He could relent. He could perhaps convince himself that he could make it work. But he knows this is impossible.

“Sinead, this is not a decision I have made with little thought. I have searched myself. At times, I wish that I could bend, could somehow ignore this voice inside me that knows Truth, but I can’t. It is cruel that speaking truthfully harms another.”

Rory’s wet eyes move back to Sinead.

“What can I say to make you change your mind, Rory? Please! There must be something?”

Rory shakes his head.

“Were I not to follow my own path, I would inflict a lifetime of heartache on you, and I will not do that. I will not! I refuse to lie to another in order to avoid unpleasantness. Unpleasantness passes, a lie sits outside us, forever. It can never be retracted. A word, any word that is spoken no longer belongs to the speaker. I don’t expect you to accept what I say, but I do believe that it is proper for me to tell you this.”

“So what, you’re doing me a big favor, then? Is that it?”

Rory holds her stare.

“Not immediately, no. You feel hurt because I have hurt you, and for that I am sorry. I am not going to tell you that this is fair Sinead, but I will tell you it is Right. I must tell you the truth.”

Sinead’s eyes grow cold.

Rory speaks to them.

“Emotions can be deceptive, so I ask you, would you rather be with me or with a man who will give you all of himself?”

Sinead has no answer.
“That is why you must choose wisely, Sinead. We are led to believe that committing ourselves to a husband or a wife is a duty, and it may well be. But, to commit oneself to another is the most important decision one can ever make. I understand how serious the matter is. To give oneself to another is almighty. It is out of respect that I make this choice.”

Rory knows that Sinead may hate him for his honesty, yet she can not dispute what he has said. He stands in front of her, taking in the sadness on her face. He feels a quiet pang of guilt, but only for a moment.

Sinead tightens her shawl.

“Rory?”

“Yes.”

“I never want to see you again.”
Kenny awoke in a state of confusion. He hadn’t had a nightmare or any other disturbance, but was baffled for the first few moments of consciousness. Then he remembered the events of the previous night. Oh, how wonderful that was, without a doubt, the best day of his life. “But wait a second,” he thought. “It’s still dark outside.” He turned to kiss Penelope and maybe enjoy a bit more. In the darkness he struggled to get his eyes to focus, so he reached over to feel the warmth of her body…only to find the space next to him vacant. He patted the empty space with both hands, searching for his lover.

“What the hell?” The sound of his own voice startled him. He sprang from the bed and searched the carpeted floor for his pajama bottoms. As he crawled around, his fears were allayed when he saw a thin strip of light coming from under the bathroom door.

“Whew! So that’s why you woke up,” he told himself. “She accidentally woke you up when she got up to use the bathroom.” As he slithered back into the bed, he had to laugh at himself. Resting the back of his head in his hands, calm returned, as he stared at a ceiling he couldn’t see.

He replayed his first sexual experience over and over in his head; the image of Penelope in the bath towel, the taste of her neck, the glorious feeling of their bodies joining. He lost track of time as he daydreamed, but the silence of the room brought him back. He looked in the direction of the bathroom but could hear nothing. Was she alright?

He got up. The shaft of light served as a beacon for him and he moved toward it, feeling his way around the bed. When he reached the door, he put his right ear up against it, listening intently. More silence. He wasn’t sure if he should knock on the door or not. If he did and she didn’t want to be disturbed, she might be angry with him. If he didn’t and something was wrong, he would find it hard to forgive himself. He manipulated his curiosity into nobility and tapped lightly on the door with his fingertips, whispering, “Is everything alright, my love?” There was no reply.

He rapped harder, using his knuckles and repeated his question, only louder; still not a sound. Worried, he aimlessly slid his left hand over the door, searching for the doorknob. He found it and was surprised that the door opened. The door wasn’t locked. He shut it and knocked again but there still was no reply.
“Enough is enough,” he said to himself to strengthen his resolve. He thrust the door open, only to find the bathroom empty. He stood in the doorway, totally perplexed.

“How odd,” his mind said to him as his eyebrows pinched. The light from the bathroom illuminated the bedroom enough for him to find the lamp on the nightstand. The instant the light came on he wished he had stayed asleep. Penelope’s clothes were gone, her purse was gone, her shoes were gone. Except for the damp bath towel laying on the floor next to the bed, there was nothing to even suggest that she had been there with him earlier in the night. Kenny turned and marched down the hall into the main room of the suite…again, not a trace of her.

“What the hell?” he said aloud. Had she been embarrassed about letting things go so far on only their second meeting? That had to be it. Poor girl, he thought. “She thinks I’m going to judge her, call her a floozy or something.” As sad as her leaving so suddenly made him, he couldn’t help but chuckle to himself. He thought the world of her. When they met tomorrow he would straighten things out and make sure that she knew just how special he thought she was and how strong his feelings were. That would most certainly quell any insecurities she might have about her own actions earlier in the night. She wasn’t a harlot. She was the tenderest, most graceful, loving woman he had ever known. To him, she was perfection.

He took a glass from the bar and poured himself some water from the porcelain jug that sat on top of the marble counter. Still grinning, he walked back to the bedroom. Seeing his fine suit, shirt and tie strewn about the room, he opened the closet door and reached for two wooden hangers. He picked his shirt up from off the floor, placed it on a hanger and hung it back in the closet. He bent down and picked up his suit jacket and tossed it on the bed then lifted his trousers. As he folded them over the hanger a single coin fell out of one of the pockets and onto the floor. He bent over to pick it up when it hit him.

“Shit!” he said aloud as his hand reached inside the empty left pocket of his trousers. A wave of panic overcame him as he squeezed the right pocket. He thrust his hand inside, only to find that pocket empty too. He felt weightless, as if all of the life had been snatched from his body.

“Fuck!” He stomped his foot on the floor. Kenny Murphy had been scammed. “Oh, fuuuuuuck!” Kenny shouted as emotion flooded his mind like a river breaking over its banks. First there was the hurt that charged through him with devastating
results. Feeling dizzy, he sat on the edge of the bed. He stared at the floor as the
second wave hit him and buried his face in his hands. As his shame displaced the
hurt, he began to sob. He cried harder and more desperately than he had ever cried
before. Tears soaked his hands and the clear mucus from his nose ran down his
arm. He held a trembling hand in front of his face and observed it as if it were a
foreign object.

All of the shit, the rejection he’d managed to bottle up his entire young life
came pouring out of him in a violent, aching sea of despair. Images of being
shipped off to a strange country when he was young and weak played like a motion
picture in his mind. All of the rich kids who made fun of him at The Taft School, all of
the taunting he’d endured and swallowed surged to the surface and with them came
more tears and despondence. When there was nothing left in him, when he’d cried
himself dry, his entire body sagged and fell back on the bed. Out of nowhere, he
flinched, and in an instant his defiance came back full-force. He jerked up.

“That fucking bitch!” he shouted, punching his fist against his palm. He
turned and attacked a pillow, screaming. When he ran out of stamina he collapsed
face-down on the bed. Exhausted, the haunting, crippling voice of self-loathing
began and it attacked his mind with claws and fangs bared. He hated himself for
what he had allowed to happen.

“You fucking idiot!” he muttered into the bed. “You are one stupid fucking
bastard. You just had to flash that wad of cash everywhere you went, didn’t you?
Well, what a fine fucking job you’ve done this time, Murphy.”

The only thing that snapped him out of the mental beating he was giving
himself was giving him was a jolt of terror. Did she get it all? He bolted out of the
bed, whipped open the closet door, reached for his suitcase and threw the lid open.
He scrounged around the inside edges with both hands. For a moment, his heart
stopped racing. She hadn’t gotten to the envelope which contained the second
stash of money Charles had given him, just in case.

“Well, if this isn’t a fucking emergency, I don’t know what is,” he mumbled.
He looked at the clock on the nightstand on his side of the bed. It was five o’clock in
the morning. The trains would be running in an hour.

“Fuck this place,” he muttered with venom. He threw his clothes into his
suitcase except for a pair of grey wool pants, an undershirt, a sweater and a pair of
socks and shoes. He drew a bath. In an effort to cleanse himself of the entire
debacle, this total humiliation, he scrubbed every inch of his body until his skin
turned pink.
He dressed quickly, grabbed his suitcase and stuffed the envelope full of money into his right pants pocket. There was no need to double-check the room to make sure he had everything. Penelope, or whatever her real name was, had robbed him of more than he could purchase. Exiting the room, he clamored down the stairs and made his way toward the registration counter where a far-too-jovial character awaited him.

“Ah, Mr. Murphy! We’re up early this morning. How can I help you?” the man asked.

“Checking out.” The receptionist looked at him, puzzled.

“But, Mr. Murphy, you’re not scheduled to check out until…”

“Look, Dammit!” Kenny flared, “Just give me my fucking bill, OK?”

The receptionist was taken aback by Kenny’s outburst. With flushed cheeks and trembling fingers, he did the best he could to tally up Kenny’s account as quickly as possible. Kenny tapped his fingers incessantly on the counter, an anxious act which did not help the receptionist in the least. When the bill was handed to him, Kenny didn’t bother with looking at the list of items. His eyes went straight to the total. He reached into his pocket, pulled out the envelope and slapped a fistful of money onto the counter. He didn’t wait for a receipt, didn’t offer thanks or say goodbye. He turned and made a swift exit.

Once on the street, a thought occurred to him: He hadn’t left a tip for Jennings. But anger and a morbid and warped sense of vengeance got the better of him.

“Fuck Jennings,” he whispered to himself. “He was probably in on it”, he conspired. In his fury, Kenny could picture Penelope and Jennings splitting up the money of the dumb bastard who’d fallen into their trap. Half of the thousand, or whatever it was in his pocket that she’d stolen was a hell of a lot more than Kenny or any other guest would ever dream of tipping.

“Fuck Jennings,” he repeated, then added for good measure, “and fuck the Brown Hotel and fuck London!”

That sentiment resonated not only for only what was to be the longest summer of his life, but it also set the tone for the rest of his time on Earth. Yet with Kenny it was never simple. In his twisted sense of logic, he would use his anger as fuel; both to climb the social and professional ladder and to steamroll anyone or anything that got in his way.

The door he had allowed Penelope to enter, the access he had given her to that vulnerable part of himself was slammed shut, forever. Righteous indignation
would be his weapon and his motivator. He promised himself that he would take revenge by succeeding in everything he attempted, by staying away from women and by doing whatever was necessary to get what he felt he deserved. “Fuck ‘em all,” became his mantra. He would have his day in the sun, of that he was sure.

However, that would have to wait, for now. He had responsibilities to take care of. He did everything he had promised Charles and Elizabeth, traveling around Europe, mailing phony letters. But for him, the bitterness never went away. He was destined to become a judgmental cynic. It started in earnest that summer.

With their passionate speech accentuated by hand gestures, he falsely deduced that Rome was full of jerks; the aroma of life in a city built on canals led him to conclude that Venice smelled like a garbage dump. The tradition to the old ways in Seville helped him form the opinion that the place was a shit-hole. And so it went.
Charles grunted with exertion as he pounded the *slean* into the peat. It was another brilliant summer day, the finest summer in years according to Eamonn, and Charles relished the hard, physical work he’d done all season. As solitude had always left him feeling restless, Charles had latched onto Eamonn, but Eamonn was more than happy to have an extra hand working with him and he enjoyed the American’s company.

Charles had become quite adept at cutting peat, and the slow, rhythmic pace of the work quieted his nerves and helped make the days fly by. As the sun warmed his shirtless back, he entered a trance-like state; pound the *slean* into the earth, step on its corner, peel the tool away from the ledge, lift it and throw the perfect brick of peat onto the pile, over and over.

Eamonn was busy mending a wire fence one of his cows had broken through and he stopped every now and then to check on Charles, who was three hundred yards away. Eamonn couldn’t help but smirk at the way Charles, the erudite young man of wealth and substance, took so much pleasure in something so simple. Eamonn himself had learned that lesson from his father. It was the small things you did with your own hands or with your own mind that culminated over time to produce a life well-lived. Oh, he enjoyed the vast number of books in the quiet of his home, but nothing could beat the act of creating something, building something or working the land. He was more than happy to share his vast knowledge of both farming and the natural world with Charles. Eamonn could see that the young American had lapped up every drop of wisdom Eamonn had dispensed. Eamonn also saw the deep disquiet in Charles. He knew the young man was struggling to cope with his burden, but Eamonn kept his advice and opinions to himself. If Charles wanted to talk, it was up to him to make the first move.

Over the summer, Charles had learned about and undertaken tasks he’d never dreamt of doing; milking cows, manning a horse-drawn plow as it navigated a vast field of unplanted soil, building a stone wall. All of it had made him not only fitter than any tennis season ever could, but it also gave him a relationship with the earth he’d never experienced. Growing up privileged, Charles had missed out on these simple pleasures and he couldn’t help but wonder if his father’s substantial array of servants; gardeners, carpenters, painters and the like, knew something he didn’t.

“Charles!” Eamonn shouted.

Charles stabbed the *slean* into the ground and turned to face Eamonn. Eamonn drew his hand across his throat, his signal to Charles that it was quitting
time. He added a mime of rubbing his stomach and motioning with his hand to his mouth. Charles laughed in the distance. He too was famished. Charles grabbed his shirt from off the ground and used the tail to wipe his brow then put the shirt on, buttoned it and walked toward Eamonn, clutching the slean in his right hand.

Charles and Eamonn were going to Eamonn’s house for dinner where the women had been busy in the gorgeous flower garden in the morning and making a feast all afternoon. It was a long walk over Eamonn’s rolling land to get back to the farmhouse, but neither man said a word the entire journey. They had grown comfortable with each other and the combination of fresh air, sunshine and hard work left them spent and ready for a hearty meal.

While Charles had found comfort in Eamonn’s company, Elizabeth felt weary and isolated. Her days with Phyllis were wonderful, but the woman had her own house to tend to and in spite of her best efforts and badgering, she surrendered to the fact that Charles couldn’t provide her with the repose she craved. She loved Charles dearly, but she had also witnessed him fail her terribly. Her loneliness intensified. She felt trapped. The only thing that got her through the summer was the light-heartedness, gentle manner and easy presence of Phyllis.

Elizabeth had never been in the company of a woman so comfortable in her own skin that there was no need to put on any front. This was a completely new experience. Elizabeth’s own life had been full of women, from her mother to her schoolmates. Those women’s only vehicle for conducting a conversation was gossiping, criticizing or judging others. It was a deep-seated flaw her mother had honed to a razor-sharp edge and she hated it more than anything. She disclosed this fact to Phyllis many times, how she detested the way her mother and her friends talked about other people, but every time Phyllis’ response was the same, silence. Phyllis listened to the young woman pour her heart out to her, always attentive. However, Phyllis never offered any advice or drew any conclusions and that was just what Elizabeth needed, someone to really listen to her. Phyllis could tell that this poor girl had a great deal of anger she’d swallowed and was content to just be there while Elizabeth vented.

She heard all about the way Elizabeth’s mother drove her to excel in school, insisted that she wear her hair a certain way, picked out her clothes for her at the boutiques they shopped in and ordered her around in a manner better suited to a pet than a daughter. She also heard her speak of Charles in a way that Irish women didn’t talk about their men. But, Phyllis could also see a certain sadness that followed Elizabeth around like a shadow. She refrained from commenting on it. The
young woman had so much to face, what with a child on the way and a man who was in over his head, not to mention a return to her homeland where untold humiliation and judgment awaited her. No, Phyllis would keep her thoughts to herself.

She liked how straight-forward Elizabeth was and it made her feel good that the young woman was comfortable enough to pour her heart out to her. She was not immune to the young woman's predicament and privately worried about her. In the end she followed her own counsel. Phyllis firmly believed that it was best to leave it to a person to figure things out on their own.

The men burst through the kitchen door and were so overwhelmed by the array of wonderful smells that their stomachs growled with anticipation. There was freshly-baked bread, a roast, fresh vegetables and a rhubarb pie awaiting them. While the women slowly enjoyed their meal, the men inhaled the food like starved castaways, but this was the way it had been all summer; a rich meal enjoyed in silence as a reward for the efforts of the day.
With the summer drawing to a close, Charles and Elizabeth were expecting Kenny any day. The details of his travels would be a welcome distraction from the tension which had forced its way into their relationship. Hearing his boastful voice would also take their minds off the impending birth of their child. While the arrival and settling in to country life in Ireland had been magical, reality was catching up. They needed to get married before the child’s birth and they needed to decide exactly how they were going to break the news to their respective families. If they were honest, both of them would admit that they were terrified of it all, but they hid it from each other.

It was odd that until Kenny’s departure they had been so open about everything, and now, at this crucial moment in their lives when the truth would bring both relief and shared closeness, they both strayed from it, insisting that everything was “fine”. Elizabeth’s courage had saved them both. She kept her anxieties at bay on her own and left Charles to continue to distract himself with manual labor, but their relationship had unraveled. Where there was intimacy and shared honesty, now there was a cautious dance in each other’s presence.

They had become so dependent on Kenny that facing matters on their own would have crippled both of them. The anticipation of his return was palpable.

For his part, Kenny was relieved that his summer of torment was drawing to a close. The travesty in London followed by the forced solitude of traveling alone had been painful. He was eager to be reunited with his friends.

He would never tell them about what happened in London. He had spent the last couple of nights playing his speech to Charles and Elizabeth over and over in his head. He would tell them how wonderful England and the Continent had been, and how, in spite of the duties he needed to perform for the young couple, he managed to squeeze in a bit of enjoyment. Yes, the sight of Charles and Elizabeth and, more importantly, their need for his presence, would straighten him right out. He would wear the masks of martyr and savior to strengthen his deflated confidence.

As he stepped off the ferry and back onto Irish soil, his demeanor improved and his anticipation built. He felt as light as a feather as the train to Bantry rolled through the Irish countryside. He would return as the conquering hero in their eyes and their gratitude and adoration would heal him. Although entirely unaware of it at the time, Kenny was a man who was unable to feel good about himself unless someone, anyone, was praising him.
Elizabeth was the first to hear the rumble of the train company’s truck making its way up the dirt road.

“Charles!” she shouted, “It’s him. He’s here!” Charles wiped the shaving foam from his face, toweled off and rushed down the stairs and out the door to the front yard, where Elizabeth was waving to the truck. He didn’t say a word, but inside he was bursting. The return of his friend, Kenny’s mere presence in the cottage, would relax the pressure he and Elizabeth had been enduring.

“Good old Kenny,” Charles thought to himself as the truck pulled up. Kenny leaped out of the passenger door and landed flat-footed on the ground, waving his hat to his friends. Elizabeth waddled toward him. The enormity of her belly was making walking difficult, but as she reached Kenny she threw her arms around his neck and warmly kissed his cheek.

“It’s so good to see you,” she breathed into his ear. Kenny lightened the moment.

“My, oh, my,” he replied with an impish grin, eyeing Elizabeth’s stomach. “Look how we’ve grown.”

Elizabeth playfully punched him in the arm.

“And how’s the big fella’?” Kenny asked, poking his nose in the direction of Charles.

“All the better for seeing you, you son of a gun,” Charles said, his face aglow.

Kenny approached him and offered his hand. Charles pushed Kenny’s hand aside and hugged him. “Welcome back, my friend. You were missed,” Charles whispered.

Charles could feel a tear starting to develop in his left eye and let Kenny go before he suffered the embarrassment of crying in front of his friend.

Leaving the driver to tend to Kenny’s luggage, Elizabeth led them inside. Upon stepping through the front door, Kenny paused to breathe in the snug comfort of the cottage.

“Is that a freshly-baked cake I smell?”

Elizabeth turned away from Kenny to hide a blush.

“It is indeed,” Charles announced. “My Elizabeth has evolved into the finest cook in West Cork.” He patted his stomach for emphasis.

“Is that so?”

“Stop it, Charles!” Elizabeth pleaded, the compliment making her uncomfortable. “You boys sit down and I’ll make tea.”
Kenny took off his suit jacket and laid it over the back of his chair. He let out a huge sigh as he planted himself at the table. Elizabeth filled the teapot and joined them.

“Well now, where should I begin?” he playfully began. “I can tell you that travel is overrated as a means of relaxation.”

Charles raised an eyebrow. “I mean to say that I’m sure it’s fine and dandy for some, but for me, I’ll take the company of good friends over staring at ancient ruins or marching around museums!” Kenny was consciously controlling. He wanted to appease their curiosity, but at the same time he needed to reclaim the friendship, so he laid it on thick.

“Each place I went, I couldn’t help but think how much better the experience would have been if I’d had you two with me. Elizabeth, one day I will take you to Rome and we will tour the Colosseum. No photograph can do the structure justice.”

Turning to Charles he continued.

“And you, my friend, will wear out the Shillelagh as we trek through the glorious peaks and meadows of the Italian Alps. We’ll go in the summertime.”

Seeing their bodies lean slightly forward as he continued his recounting of the trip, Kenny’s own frame sank comfortably into his chair as the disquieting solitude he’d endured melted away.

It was early September, but the sun still shone until well past nine o’clock. At dusk, Charles decided that the men should switch from tea to brandy and after a couple of rather large glasses, Kenny started to fade. The physical and emotional exhaustion of the trip had caught up with him and what he needed more than anything was a few nights of good sleep in the comfort of the cottage. As he bid goodnight to Charles and Elizabeth and lay in bed he reflected on his time away. He was able to convince himself that in spite of the horrendous experience in London all in all, the trip had been a remarkable success. He had delivered on every promise. Elizabeth’s parents would surely be completely fooled thanks to his plan. Smiling to himself, he drifted off. In the warm light of the sitting room, Elizabeth and Charles spoke quietly to each other.

“So, what do you think really happened?” Elizabeth asked.

“To be honest with you darling, I have absolutely no idea, but what I am sure of is that whatever did happen, you and I will never hear about it from him.”

“Why do you suppose that is?”

“You haven’t figured that out?” Charles questioned, furrowing his brow.

“I guess not.”
“More so than anyone I’ve ever met, Kenny knows how to keep a secret. It’s one of the most infuriating things about him. It’s also the reason he is my best friend.”

Elizabeth looked confused by the remark but as Charles jerked his head toward the bulge in her stomach, she finally understood and they both broke out laughing. She lifted herself from her seat and plopped down in Charles’s lap. Nuzzling his neck, she whispered, “Everything really is going to be OK, isn’t it?” The remark was much more a statement than a question.

“Of course it is, my love.” They both knew that Kenny’s reappearance would make sure of that. Their arms cradled each other on the sofa well into the night.
Kenny was uncomfortable with the bonds that had formed while he was away but stubbornly refused to show it. When Charles left him to go work with Eamonn he felt a gnawing pain in his stomach, and when Phyllis and Elizabeth spoke quietly in the kitchen he made sure to turn his ear, suspicious that they might be talking about him which, of course, they weren’t. It irritated him that his friends had been able to carry on just fine in his absence. Kenny would have been much more satisfied if he’d come home and they were at their wits’ end, desperate for his help. His preoccupation with himself left him blind to the fact of just how precarious Charles and Elizabeth’s relationship had become.

To keep himself busy, Kenny continued his own work. Before leaving for Europe, he had left a stack of pre-written letters to Michael Brewster at the post office in town. He had also given the woman behind the counter a substantial fee to make certain that she mailed each letter exactly one week apart and she had followed his instructions perfectly.

Upon his return, Kenny was elated to find several letters from Michael. Michael’s storytelling thrilled him to no end and Kenny found his tales from the nation’s capital so entertaining that he read each letter again and again. Elizabeth’s brother’s power was growing. He was invited to all of the right meetings, parties, seminars and dinners. Kenny would read one of the letters four or five times then spend hours daydreaming about the event Michael had shared, only instead of Michael being at the party, he inserted himself.

Michael wrote that he had recently received a promotion from Congressman Jordan. He was now Jordan’s Chief of Staff. With his new title, he now had the inside track on everything going on in Washington. Kenny digested and absorbed the updates on the inner workings of the government. Through Michael he learned what bills were being debated, which Congressmen were worried about re-election, who in the Senate was gaining power and who was losing it. He also delighted in Michael’s reports of outrageous debauchery involving some of the most influential people in the nation.

Kenny could see the similarities between himself and Michael. Michael was a schemer; the puppet master of all those around him. At parties, he would have one drink, a whiskey on the rocks, and then re-fill the drink all night with apple juice. It looked like he was drinking as much alcohol as everyone else, but his senses were razor-sharp so remembered everything. Through Michael, Kenny got to know all about Congressman Jordan’s penchant for young women, Senator Haskin’s
penchant for young boys and a Supreme Court judge who was having a passionate affair with his wife’s sister.

Michael’s creed was a vicious distortion of Sir Francis Bacon’s famous phrase, “Knowledge Is Power.” It wasn’t about figuring out the voting tendencies of Jordan’s constituency or mapping out campaign strategies. No, it was about gaining knowledge about others then using it against them, when the time was right. The more you knew about people’s weaknesses, the more power you had over them. Of course, the people in Michael’s orbit had no idea how much he knew about their private lives, nor would they ever, unless of course he needed a favor. And instead of looking down on Michael for the markers he collected and his fiendish behaviour, Kenny admired him. Michael’s tales of emotional blackmail entertained Kenny to no end.

Reading Michael’s letters was also a form of research for Kenny. Hunched over the small desk in the sitting room, Kenny thoughtfully calculated and wrote down the moves that made up his master plan. He would let his mind wander to wherever it wanted to go, then as he got a clear picture of his future he would fill notebooks about exactly what events he needed to plot and control. Every move he would make when he returned to America with Charles and Elizabeth was being carefully planned. He knew neither of them had the ability to think further ahead than the day they were living.

Having no interest in the manual labor Charles so enjoyed, Kenny spent most of the remaining summer and early autumn in the cottage, filling his notebooks with passages and plots, diagrams of connections made and connections necessary. Although both Charles and Elizabeth were curious about how their friend filled his days, neither made any mention of his immersion in his “work”. While enjoying a particularly fruitful autumn afternoon session of thinking, planning and writing in his room, he was startled by a loud crash coming from downstairs. Annoyed by the intrusion, he descended into the living area to be greeted by total silence.

“Strange,” he thought to himself. He was certain he’d heard a noise of some sort. He looked around the living room but found nothing out of order. The books were all shelved, the floor was clean. Feeling chafed that his thoughts had been interrupted by this mysterious nuisance, he stomped into the kitchen. A flash of horror shot through him when he saw the kitchen door was wide door open, and on the floor, the swollen legs of Elizabeth were sticking halfway into the cottage.
“Oh, shit!” he cried, rushing around the dining table only to be greeted by an even more terrifying sight. While her feet were lying sideways over the threshold of the door, Elizabeth’s body was severely twisted. Her shoulders turned one way, her legs another and her bulge looked as though it were trying to slide off her body as it sloped frighteningly to the left. Kenny straddled her and bent over to take her head in his hands. He lifted her face towards his, but when he saw the pool of blood underneath Elizabeth’s head he nearly fainted.

“Oh god, oh god, oh god,” he stammered as he lay her back down on the ground. He tilted his ear to check her breathing. It was shallow and weak, but nevertheless, she was breathing. He lightly slapped her cheeks, trying to awaken her but it was no use.

Realizing he wasn’t going to be able to revive her, he sprinted down the driveway, jumped the fence and continued running, over the adjacent meadow in a straight line toward Eamonn and Phyllis’s farm.
Charles’s shoes echoed through the hallway outside the hospital’s archaic operating room as he paced back and forth in front of its swinging doors. Kenny, Eamonn and Phyllis sat on the chairs in the hall. Kenny fidgeted with his wristwatch, Phyllis held Eamonn’s hand. No one spoke. Charles had never been so afraid. He had been working away in the fields when the sight of Kenny tearing towards him, screaming at the top of his lungs, had made his blood run cold. The blur of racing to the cottage in Eamonn’s car, seeing Elizabeth lying on the ground, holding her bleeding head in his hands and supporting her torso in his lap on the ride to the hospital and feeling so helpless about the entire situation had left him completely shaken. One of the doctors had offered him a sedative but Charles was so stunned he didn’t even acknowledge the doctor’s presence.

Kenny tried to speak with him but Charles blinked absently, lost. The blood from Elizabeth’s head wound was still wet on his grey trousers and his thighs stuck to the light fabric as he paced. Hours had drifted past in a vague mist of foreboding. He had no idea how long Elizabeth had been in the operating room. A surgeon suddenly swung the door open. He spun around to face the doctor as the other three rose from their chairs. The look on the surgeon’s face offered no comfort. Kenny stepped to Charles’s side.

“Mr. Collins?”

“Yes,” Charles coughed.

“I’m Doctor O’Sullivan. I’m afraid we need to have a very serious talk.”

Charles knees started to give way and Kenny gripped his friend’s shoulders with both hands.

“Perhaps we should speak in private,” Dr. O’Sullivan said with a hint of apprehension. Kenny looked at Charles.

“Would you like me to come with you, Charles?”

“Yes, please Kenny,” Charles mumbled.

Eamonn stood to look Charles in the eye, but the battered young man averted his gaze. He sat back down with Phyllis, who hugged his arm.

Dr. O’Sullivan showed Kenny and Charles into a bland office just down the hall. The doctor didn’t sit down, a move Kenny interpreted as being the harbinger of some very bad news. O’Sullivan focused solely on Charles.

“Mr. Collins, your wife has suffered a great deal of blood loss and is in very serious condition.”

“What’s happened?”
“It appears that she had a fainting spell which could be due to nothing more than hunger or could be a symptom of a more severe condition. We won’t know the exact cause unless she regains consciousness however, that’s not the immediate problem.”

“What do you mean?”

“As I said, her condition is serious at the moment, but she is stabilized. Our concern at the moment is the twins.”

The blood drained from Charles’s face and Kenny felt his own knees tremble. Overwhelmed, Charles could only spit out, “Twins?”

The doctor could see that Charles had no idea Elizabeth was carrying not one, but two infants. Clearing his throat, his demeanor shifted.

“Mr. Collins, at any time during her pregnancy, did your wife see a doctor?”

Oblivious to the doctor’s use of the term wife, Charles kneaded his forehead with his shaking right hand. He was unable to answer the surgeon’s question.

Kenny intervened.

“Elizabeth…she uh, she was adamant about not seeing a doctor. She had scarlet fever when she was a child. Since then she’s had a, well, aversion to doctors.”

While O’Sullivan understood, the look on his face spelled disapproval.

“That’s all very well, but putting that unpleasant episode aside, she still should have been under regular care. She was pregnant, Mr. Collins.”

“Hey! Watch yourself, pal,” Kenny warned.

O’Sullivan paused to collect himself and refocused on the matter at hand.

“I’m sorry,” he offered, now addressing both of them. “Regardless, it doesn’t change the predicament we’re in right now.” Eyeing Charles suspiciously, he continued with caution. “You see, Mr. Collins, when your wife fainted, she fell quite violently. The impact of the fall not only caused the injury to her head, but it also caused her womb to perforate. She’s suffered massive internal bleeding.

“Oh, God,” Charles moaned, shaking his head in disbelief.

“The bleeding you’ve seen is only a portion of her total blood loss. With the injuries she’s sustained, there is little chance of the babies surviving unless we operate immediately and remove them. We’ll then do our best to attend to your wife’s internal injuries.” O’Sullivan folded his hands across his chest giving Charles a moment to fully grasp the situation.

Taking a quick look at Charles sagging posture, Kenny stepped forward to confront the doctor.
“OK, Doctor, so what is the decision you need?” The surgeon looked puzzled for a moment at the intrusion, but saw that Kenny was the person who would be acting as medical proxy.

“The decision I need is for whether or not we operate. If we don’t, there is a very good chance that all three, the unborn twins and Mr. Collins’ wife, will not survive the next twenty-four hours. The babies are using Mrs. Collins as a sort of life-support system which, in her weakened condition, is not sustainable. In essence, their need for oxygen is suffocating her.”

Kenny nodded acknowledgment but sensed there was more to be told.

“But operating on her is extremely risky,” he said.

“That is correct,” O’Sullivan confirmed. Charles let out a deep sigh. O’Sullivan took it as a cue that Charles was beginning to get his head around what was going on. The doctor directed his next comment toward him.

“You see, our hope is that she is strong enough to survive the operation but right now, there is no way of predicting whether or not she is. As I said, she has lost a great deal of blood. There is a chance she might not survive the operation, but at the moment it is our best chance of saving at least the unborn twins and our only hope of saving her. Mr. Collins, I need your consent.”

The more the doctor spoke, the more Charles’s resolve weakened. He simply couldn’t believe what the doctor was saying to him. Kenny looked at him for a few seconds, then leaned in to whisper to the O’Sullivan.

“Give us a minute, would you doctor?”

“Yes, of course.” O’Sullivan quietly left the office.

Kenny sat down in the chair next to Charles, but said nothing.
When Charles finally turned to him, the expressionless face told Kenny he was nowhere near capable of making a decision.

“Charles, I am so sorry that we’re faced with these circumstances. It’s absurd for these doctors to think that you are remotely capable of making a rational decision at a time like this.”

Charles nodded his compliance. Placing a hand on Charles’s blood-soaked thigh, Kenny continued. “Regardless, Dr. O’Sullivan has done his best to explain what we’re facing. Now, if you want my opinion on this, I will give it to you. If not, I will let you make up your own mind without any interference. In the end, it’s all up to you.”

Charles stared at Kenny for a few seconds, before collapsing into his friend’s chest. Kenny rested a hand on the back of Charles’s head and let him cry.

“I don’t know what to do…”

“Shhh, it’s going to be alright, Charles,” Kenny soothed. “Just let it all out.”

Kenny knew what Charles was thinking. He should have been at home when Elizabeth fainted. Elizabeth should never have been pregnant in the first place. But most painful, Charles’s wailing signaled his frustration over not being able to steel himself at this critical moment.

For all of the empathy and understanding he was showing Charles in the moment, the pragmatism so abundant in Kenny finally won out. He grabbed his friend by his shoulders and forced Charles to look him in the eye. Charles’s soaked face was swollen, his cheeks were bright red and clear mucous streamed from both of his nostrils.

In a voice that was compassionate but stern, Kenny said, “Look, we’ve got to figure this out and we’ve got to do it now. Are you ready to do that, Charles?” Charles bobbed his head.

“OK, so what do we tell the surgeon?” Kenny asked.

“I think we need to tell him to operate, don’t you?”

“Yes, Charles. Yes, I do”

“OK, then that’s what we’ll do,” Charles said with a sigh.

Kenny got up and went out into the hall to summon Dr. O’Sullivan. He brought the surgeon back into the office where Charles mumbled his consent to perform the operation. O’Sullivan’s eyes relayed agreement, a gesture that brought relief. He quickly exited.
Charles returned his gaze to the floor for a few minutes, then stood to gather himself. "Let's go inform Eamonn and Phyllis. I'm sure they are worried sick."

Kenny concurred. He helped Charles out of the office and into the hall. Seeing them emerge, Eamonn and Phyllis stood, Phyllis still clutching her husband's arm.

When Charles explained the situation to them, Phyllis broke down and leaned against Eamonn for support. Eamonn could only say, "I'm so sorry, Charles."

The wait was interminable. Every twenty minutes or so, the operating room door would swing open and the four of them collectively stiffened, but it was always a nurse hurriedly rushing out then scurrying back in. Despite Charles's pleas, each one ignored him. Kenny figured that this was standard procedure. It seemed to him that the nurses were under strict orders to never say anything to the patient's loved ones. That task was reserved exclusively for the surgeon in charge. While the insight served Kenny well, it did nothing to alleviate Charles's suffering.

"Charles," Kenny said, getting his friend's attention. "Pacing up and down this hall isn't going to make the wait any easier. You look completely worn out. Why don't I take you downstairs for a hot drink?" Then, glancing at Eamonn and Phyllis, he added, "You'll come get us if Dr. O'Sullivan comes out, won't you?"

The question came out more like a demand, but Eamonn took the circumstances into account and politely replied, "Of course, Kenny."

"Come on, Charles. Let's go."

Kenny led Charles down two flights of stairs and into a large, empty waiting area. He sat Charles down.

"I'll fix us up. You wait here. I'll be right back." Charles complied, sagging into the chair like a well-worn cushion.

While Charles had been reeling, Kenny had spent the hours during the operation trying to figure out a solution to every possible situation awaiting them. Convinced that he had a plan no matter what scenario they ended up in, he was overcome by a tidal wave of mental exhaustion and, once out of Charles's view, he took a moment to lean against a wall and take a few deep breaths. He rubbed his eyes for several seconds. Being Charles's crutch was taxing, and he needed the coffee much more than Charles.

Kenny returned with the hot drinks, as promised. Charles took a cup from him but Kenny could see that its contents held little interest for his shattered friend. With his mind now freed from tirelessly problem-solving, Kenny started to feel
genuine sadness for Charles. He struggled to maintain his poise. He curled his toes up in his shoes to control his emotions. He cleared his throat then spoke.

“Charles, I’ve never lied to you and I’m not going to give you the soft touch now. This is a horrific situation. I’m not going to say, ‘Don’t worry, it will all be fine’, because maybe it won’t be. But no matter what happens, I am here and I will support you through whatever we have to face. Do you understand?” Kenny said this while staring straight ahead at the wall twenty feet away. Looking at the wreck Charles had become would have been too difficult.

“I appreciate that greatly, Kenny. The last thing I need is to build up false hope or deny what’s happening right now.” He turned to face Kenny but spoke to the side of his friend’s face. “Trust me when I say that your being here is the only thing that makes it bearable.” Charles paused.

Kenny managed to keep a blank face. Charles’s statement was proof that he, Kenneth Murphy, was both a very good friend and an uncommonly decent man.
As they sipped their coffee, Kenny tried to lighten the mood. He pointed out the woman in the sweater whose hair looked like a hornet’s nest, the young boy whose screaming sounded like a dog in heat and the nurse whose nervous tic earned her a nickname from Kenny; ‘Blinky.’ Charles had nearly forgotten the crisis he was at the center of when Eamonn charged into the room. The farmer’s anxiousness switched to timidity when he found the two of them.

“Dr. O’Sullivan is waiting for you upstairs.” Kenny saw instantly that Charles’s pensiveness had returned with a vengeance. He squeezed his friend’s shoulder and said, “OK, let’s go see what he has to say.”

The three men climbed the stairs in silence. When they reached the office door, Kenny opened it, allowed Charles to enter then followed him in, quickly closing the door behind him. Excluding Eamonn from the room, Kenny was like an animal marking its territory. Dr. O’Sullivan immediately stood, moving around the empty desk to address Charles.

“Please, take a seat,” the doctor offered, but Charles insisted on standing. Kenny could feel the pounding of his own heart in his ears and was certain Charles’s condition was worse.

“Right,” began O’Sullivan in his thick West Cork accent, “Here is where we are….“ Charles drew a deep breath. “Your wife is still unconscious but she is breathing without assistance.” Charles unclenched his fists. Kenny rolled his eyes with relief. “She is a very strong woman, Mr. Collins.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

“We are making sure that she is as comfortable as possible and we have attended to her head wound. It’s important that we give her time to replenish the blood she lost, so I’m not overly concerned about her remaining unconscious for the immediate future, however, we won’t know for certain the extent of damage she may have suffered from the fall until she is stable enough for us to run some tests.” Charles’s stomach tightened.

“Now, some tests we can run when her breathing and pulse are stronger, but others are dependent on her coming out of the coma.”

“You mean, there’s a chance she’ll never wake up?” Charles asked, already preparing himself for the worst.

O’Sullivan was matter-of-fact. “There is that chance, yes. But I believe that the next twenty four hours will be the most crucial. It is our hope that she will awaken soon and at that point we will be able to examine her and ask some
questions which will help us evaluate her with greater precision." Seeing the terror on Charles's face, O'Sullivan lowered his voice. "Mr. Collins, I am not one to promise anything in situations such as this, but the truth is that this is good news. Your wife has never stopped breathing and she has survived both a severe trauma and a very risky operation. I would like to believe that the opportunity for the worst that could happen has passed. As I said, she is a very strong woman." Charles's eyes moistened, but O'Sullivan continued his briefing.

"Now, because your wife never stopped breathing, the babies were at no point starved of oxygen. However, they are dangerously premature births. I would guess that your wife wasn't expecting for at least another four weeks. We were able to deliver the twins by way of incision through Mrs. Collins’s mid-section. Mr. Collins, you are the father of two boys. They are healthy, but are extremely fragile."

Charles's nervously fiddled with the legs of his trousers.

"As with your wife, there is no immediate cause for alarm, but the twins are going to need a fair bit of time here in the hospital to gain some strength before we will allow them to leave."

Charles reached down and gripped the back of a chair.

Kenny saw that in his concern over Elizabeth's well-being, Charles had all but forgotten about the twins. Charles bit his lower lip tentatively. The shock that had crushed him when Kenny had first appeared in the field earlier in the day was creeping back only to be replaced by a new cloud of gloom. Kenny again took it upon himself to deal with Dr. O'Sullivan.

"Doctor, it is clear to us that you have done the very best you can and for that we are extremely grateful. This has been a terrifying day for Mr. Collins, so I know you will understand his state. I am going to look after him myself and allow you to focus on getting Elizabeth and the babies well. Please thank your entire team for him. You must all be very tired."

"You're most welcome."

"I will be available to you at any time and will accompany Mr. Collins to any subsequent briefings. My only request is that you update us on a regular basis, no matter how little you have to report." The doctor nodded consent.

"Of course. I will see to it that you are updated on an hourly basis."

"Thanks again, doctor," Kenny said, offering his hand. O'Sullivan shook it then held his hand out to Charles. Charles wiped his clammy right palm on the back of his trousers and shook the doctor's hand.
"Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to check on your wife," O'Sullivan said. "If you would like to see your boys, I will have someone accompany you to the nursery. You won't be able to handle them as they are both under 'round-the-clock observation and are receiving medical attention, but you can look at them through the window and if you ask, one of the members of our pediatric staff can hold them up so you can have a good look at your sons."

Kenny curtly answered. "We appreciate that. Could you give us a few minutes alone? We'll inform one of the nurses when Charles is ready to see the boys."

Taken aback by the abruptness of Kenny, O'Sullivan answered, "Very well, I shall speak with you shortly." O'Sullivan exited the office.

Kenny eased Charles into the chair he'd been leaning against for support and pulled a chair out from behind the desk so he could face his friend directly.
Knowing Charles was near his breaking point, Kenny laid out an audacious plan with no more sentiment than he would show while ordering lunch. Kenny’s measured lack of emotion made Charles both angry and jealous. While he couldn’t believe what he was hearing, at the same time he wished that he could approach this situation with the same detachment Kenny displayed. It was as though Kenny was completely immune to the turbulence Charles was desperately trying to negotiate. Kenny had trained himself with utmost discipline, not to show emotion in times of chaos. He had kept the promise he’d made to himself in London. His self-control was remarkable and Charles was astonished by Kenny’s ability to switch off.

Of the many different outcomes he had projected during Elizabeth’s long surgery, the one they now faced was the one Kenny knew would cause Charles the most pain. In some ways, death would have been easier; Elizabeth’s, a child’s or all three, but this plan would require fortitude much stronger than overcoming mere grief. It demanded a resolve as strong as iron. The plan was outrageous, but at the same time, made perfect sense to Kenny.

Although immersed in his own work much of the time, Kenny had, in fact, kept a discerning eye on his two friends since his return. From this close scrutiny, he had drawn the accurate conclusion that neither of them was prepared for the birth of one child, let alone two. They were, in many ways, still children themselves. Growing up wealthy and privileged may have made Charles’s life simpler, but it left him grossly ill-prepared for crisis. Charles’s ineptness had also put far too much strain on Elizabeth. As such, Kenny believed, something drastic would have to be done. In his warped perception of the circumstances, Kenny convinced himself that what he was suggesting was in the best interest of all parties. Charles didn’t see it that way…at least at first.

“Look, Elizabeth will never know, nor will she ever need to,” Kenny said in a voice just short of pleading. Charles shook his sweaty head. He struggled to come to grips with Kenny’s suggestion, not because of its audacity, but because of what it demanded of him. He would have no choice but to live the rest of his life in a web of lies and deception.

Kenny was certain Elizabeth would awaken. His proposal, in all its horror, was simply this: He would see that Charles stood guard over her until she regained consciousness. When she awoke, Charles was to appear at first relieved, which of course he would be. However, it was also essential that he act delighted when he announced to Elizabeth that she had delivered a baby boy. The second child would
be offered to Eamonn and Phyllis, to raise as their own. The Irish couple would receive no interference from any of them, Charles, Elizabeth or Kenny. The child would be theirs. In the implausible event that Eamonn and Phyllis refused, Kenny would simply make arrangements for the second child to be taken into, what the Irish called, “care”. This was a nice way of saying the infant would be sent to an orphanage or a convent and, with Ireland full of already-large families, await a highly unlikely adoption. Kenny didn’t allow Charles to dwell on the second option for he was convinced that he could persuade Eamonn and Phyllis, regardless of how preposterous the proposal might seem. And it was preposterous, Charles thought. However, it was also the easiest way out for him. While he may have been a dullard, Charles was no fool. He knew that there was no way his and Elizabeth’s shaky relationship would survive twins.

With Kenny’s assortment of wild gesticulations, enthusiasm, and expressions of certainty, the strategy started to sound feasible. Yes, it was absurd and yes it was hideous but Charles was coming to believe he had no other options. Kenny pounded that fact home.

“What else can we do?” Kenny had asked several times over. Kenny watched Charles closely, looking for any sign of agreement but knowing that a hint of resignation was all that was necessary for him to surrender.

Charles began several sentences with, “But what if…”, only to run out of steam before he could come up with an alternative. In his mind and in his heart, Charles knew that Kenny’s plan was as disgusting as it was deceitful; it was ghastly and unthinkable, and in fact it was just plain wrong. But the only thing more powerful than his revulsion was his cowardice. He was in no fit state to make a decision as far-reaching as this, and yet he knew a decision was what was required of him. In his debility, Charles came to the conclusion that this, Kenny’s devious but shrewd stratagem was, in fact, his only option. His shoulders sagged and he sighed deeply.

“That’s it!” Kenny’s mind said. “I’ve got him.”

* 

The couple who raise him discuss Rory’s future with great frequency. In the explosion of industry which is overtaking the Western world, his potential is limitless. They wrestle with their own wishes to keep him with them and the guilt they feel about standing in his way.
The man brings up the subject with Rory as they work the field, compiling stacks of hay from the dried, cut grass.

“Have you given much thought to your future?” he asks awkwardly. Rory has seen this conversation coming for many months. He answers with respect, but without condescension.

“I expect that you would like for me to become a man of industry?” Rory asks.

“Ha!” the man sneers, knowing that Rory has seen through his attempt at casual interrogation.

“Well, in fact, no. I don’t want you to be anything other than what you desire. It’s just that I would feel horrible if my own hopes of having you here prevented you from doing what you want.”

“What would you have me do? Should I study at university? Perhaps become a man of medicine or the law?”

“Rory, I only want you to be happy. My reason for bringing this up is to let you know that whatever it is you want to do, I will not stand in your way.”

Rory looks at the man’s prematurely wrinkled face, a face pounded by Irish weather.

“I’ve given quite a bit of thought to that riddle.”

The man’s face twists into a look of confusion.

“You have?”

“Of course.”

“And what answers have you found?”

Rory drops the point of his shovel into the earth, then leans hard on its edge with his right foot, driving the shovel in deeply. He places both of his hands on the end of the
shovel’s handle as his chest moves forward to rest against his fists. His pose is one of comfort and ease.

“Well, it is perhaps the greatest puzzle of this life. A man has so many options, but seldom makes a choice. Instead, he allows circumstances to dictate his life to him. He lives his years totally unaware that the life he lives is not the life of his choosing, but rather, the life he has allowed to choose him.”

The man nods thoughtfully.

“I believe that is true, Rory.”

“So, the questions for me are many, but the answer is clear. Do I want to choose my life, or do I want it chosen for me? Do I want to construct a life that is dependent on others, or do I want true independence? Do I want to exhaust myself in pursuit of wealth, or glory? Or do I want to experience each second of existence in its totality?”

Rory’s gaze drifts to the horizon, as he allows the man to absorb what he has said. His eyes move back towards the man.

The man is touched by the wisdom Rory has shared with him.

“You see, a man can have it one way or the other, but he can’t have both. It is a very serious matter indeed, one that has no room for ambiguity.”

The man makes one more attempt to guide Rory, so that he can rest knowing he has fulfilled his obligation as caretaker. He takes a wide stance and crosses his arms over his chest.

“Rory, with all that you are, with your depth of skill and talent, I have no doubt that you could be anything you desire.”

Rory nods, a look of contentment washing over his face.

“What if I already am?”
“Eamonn, Rory…dinner!” Phyllis sang out from the doorstep of the farmhouse. Dinner had always been at the same time so, having finished their work in the fields, the two were already making their way toward the house. Indulging Phyllis in her need to announce the meal was an innocent, private joke shared between them.

In this, the summer of his sixteenth year, Rory had grown noticeably, both up and out. He stood nearly five inches taller than Eamonn and was frighteningly strong. He had just finished what was, for him, the interminably long process of his primary and secondary education. He stayed in school not because he was learning anything, but rather out of a noble sense of duty to the loving couple who had raised him. Neither Eamonn nor Phyllis had gotten the chance to go to secondary school as both were removed from school at an early age to help out on their family’s respective farm. That being the case, Rory’s completion of his exams was a source of immense pride for the couple.

In Rory’s mind, Eamonn and Phyllis were just what he thought; The Loving Couple Who Raised Me, for he intuitively knew that they were not his parents. Yes, he looked nothing like either of them, but for Rory, knowledge had never been grounded in what the eye could see, what the book stated or what the speaker was saying. There were things in this world that Rory just knew. For Eamonn and Phyllis, Rory’s wealth of knowledge and the instinct he possessed were a source of pride, amazement, hilarity and, in rare cases, fear.

The decision about whether or not to adopt him was not easy for them as on the one hand, they knew that they were never going to have a child of their own but on the other, they had multiple opportunities to adopt a child, yet hadn’t. Still, in spite of the disturbingly odd circumstances in which Rory became part of their lives, there wasn’t a day that went by when they weren’t grateful to the young American couple and their friend Kenny.

Rory had started walking at six months and could hold a conversation when he was barely a year old. He startled them at the age of eighteen months when he marched across the sitting room, picked up one of the many books lying on the coffee table, sat down on the floor and started reading it. In spite of his remarkable gifts, he had never once used his brilliance to upstage or intimidate either of them, or anyone else. In fact, quite the opposite was true, for Rory’s demeanor was his greatest asset. He didn’t get upset, never raised his voice, never once talked back or defied either of them. There was an inherent calm that resided deep within him.
He never appeared rattled in any way. He just seemed to fully accept whatever circumstance he was in as it was, suspending both judgment and opinion.

He was also ruled by a strange obsession with Truth. All boys told lies, big ones and little ones, but not Rory. He was always patient when faced with an obstacle or problem. Rory seemed to examine an issue from multiple perspectives, but never acted until he was completely comfortable with his solution. He didn’t swear or show any signs of having a temper. Eamonn and Phyllis marveled at his patience and soft nature. He was, to them, the perfect boy. But that didn’t mean he wasn’t capable of frightening them.

Eamonn often recalled the time when Rory was only eight, and they were working, cutting grass to be dried into hay in the furthest corner of the property. Eamonn had stopped to rest for a minute when he noticed Rory had disappeared from his flank. Hay was always cut with a scythe and because of the wide, swinging motion of the razor-sharp tool, when working as a team, Rory would follow Eamonn, two steps behind and to his right, no closer. On this day, Rory had vanished without warning. Eamonn called out to him. Rory’s head emerged just over the swaying blades of long grass. He had been sitting in the tall grass that butted against the stone wall that served as the boundary for Eamonn’s property. Eamonn walked toward Rory as the young boy crouched. When Eamonn reached him he found the boy staring intently at a row of tall, spiky flax plants which ran along his property boundary.

“What are you doing, Rory?” Eamonn had asked.
“I’m looking at these plants, Da. They’re out of place.”
Confused, Eamonn asked, “Out of place?”
“Yes, Da, completely out of place. In fact, these plants don’t belong here,” Rory said with a nod of certitude.

As wise as Eamonn was, Rory said many things that didn’t make sense to him, so Eamonn didn’t think much of it at the time, but later in the evening, his own curiosity got the better of him. He pulled a dust-covered book from one of the many shelves in the study. *Flora of Ireland* was printed in gold lettering on the cover of the book. Eamonn cradled the book in his left hand as he scanned the table of contents. He saw that *Flax* was listed. Thumbing through the pages he found the entry about the plant: “Indigenous to milder climates, Flax was imported from the Mediterranean early in the nineteenth century to supplement the income of beet farmers. The plant can grow to a height of over six feet. It has many uses including…” Stunned, Eamonn’s eyes drifted away from the book, which he held limply in his hand. He
didn’t dare confront the boy as to how he knew about the plant for he had no desire
to ever appear heavy-handed with his adopted son. Yet at the same time, Rory’s
aptitude was unsettling and, although he would never admit it, the boy’s remarkable
intellect intimidated the humble farmer.
“Goddammit, Roy! How many times do I have to tell you not to throw your bicycle down in the middle of the garage?” Elizabeth shouted as she stormed into the sprawling entrance of the family home. Her sixteen-year old son was not about to answer her. She had been out with her regular group of friends for a four-hour lunch that had, as usual, consisted of the consumption of little food and much liquor.

Roy had heard from a friend that the waiters in town had a name for his mother’s group, The Miserable Wives of Politicians, Incorporated. Roy snickered when he heard this. He loved getting under his mother’s skin. For him, causing grief to his mother gave him a sense that their maladjusted relationship retained a sense of balance. She took out all of her frustrations on him, he mocked her behind her back.

If asked by someone she needed to make an impression on, Elizabeth would extol the virtues of her only child. “He is a smart, talented and very mature young man,” she would say to anyone who listened. But to her closest friends, Roy was a touchy topic.

“That kid, he’s just like his poor excuse of a father!” she would spit at her lunching friends. Most of the wives had tales of woe regarding their offspring, but Elizabeth was especially merciless.

“Just two more years and he’ll be out of my hair. I know that’s a terrible thing for a mother to say, but my God, what that little monster has put me through!”

In her heart she had felt a vicious resentment toward the boy almost since he was born. Roy was the reason she was in a marriage that had lost its fire before it began. Roy was the reason her body had been, in her words, disfigured by the surgery she had to undergo to birth him. It was his fault she drank too much. According to her, he was also the reason she smoked so heavily. The once fair and delicate Elizabeth was aging at an alarming rate thanks to the drink, the cigarettes and the lonely, sleepless existence she endured in Massachusetts, while her husband served his constituency in Washington.

Charles had wanted them all together in the nation’s capital, but Elizabeth had been firm about remaining in Massachusetts. She had her friends and family nearby. Plus, she was not going to trade their sprawling mansion for an apartment in Georgetown. And, lastly, she was not going to waste her days lost in the circle of endless gossiping with the other unhappy wives, totally unaware of the irony that that was exactly what her life had ended up consisting of.
Thanks to the seriousness with which he took his job, Charles was blissfully ignorant of his wife’s agony and his son’s frustration and disillusionment. Since Congressman Jordan’s sudden death by a massive heart attack eight years before, Charles had served the citizens of Massachusetts in the United States Senate for one successful seven-year term and was just starting his second. His dramatic come-from-behind victory in the emergency election after Jordan’s death was a shock to all associated with the American political scene. To the old guard, he was a painfully young and inexperienced son of a multi-millionaire who had, in their minds, never done an honest day’s work in his life.

The fact that the Patriarch, with guidance from Kenny, had spent a substantial amount of his fortune bribing trade unions, newspaper and radio station owners and local politicians to loudly endorse his son never entered Charles’s mind. As he was with regards to the state of his wife, Charles was quite happy to remain oblivious of the obtrusive facts which, if looked at in sum, revealed a complete sham of a life.

Without the guidance of a father, Roy had been forced to make things up as he went along. He was extremely clever, as his mother proclaimed, but he was forever using his cleverness to find shortcuts; cheating on exams in school, sweet-talking teachers and his parents’ friends and manipulating his mother.

His unrelenting persistence drove Elizabeth to a stance whereby succumbing to his requests was the much more favorable route than going nose to nose with him. She gave him money, let him come and go as he pleased and never bothered with a curfew. For her, if he was out of the house it meant, first and foremost, he wasn’t in her hair and she could enjoy some peace.

Roy had always been highly energetic but, tragically, his high level of energy had been misinterpreted. Roy wasn’t easily distracted. He could focus on something which he was interested in with the intensity of a scientist. The problem was simply that he was so smart that he was easily bored; a problem which caused him enormous difficulty at school.

He could take one look at the semester’s syllabus, study the textbook and in a week know all he needed to know to pass any examination the teacher could throw at him. As a result, he lamented the long, droll monologues by the not-so-clever teachers to the point that he would cause a disturbance just to relieve his boredom. Throwing erasers at the blackboard, drumming out rhythms on his chair, shouting out corrections to the teachers’ lessons, they were all part of a repertoire that made him a frequent visitor to the principal’s office and an endless source of
aggravation for Elizabeth. She had wanted to send him to boarding school when he was eight but Roy made such a fuss about it, she capitulated and in doing so was, in her own words, stuck with him.

Yet, despite his outward conduct, Roy wasn’t inherently a bad kid. His parents were blind to the role they played in his downward spiral that saw him go from honor-roll student to troubled adolescent. Lost in their own personal struggles, neither Charles nor Elizabeth could see that a young man who was rejected by his mother, had an absentee father, and had only an endless line of faceless servants who wandered in and out of his life as confidants, was guaranteed to have problems. Roy was a young man with no grounding, no stability in his life. The results were devastating. His lonely, friendless existence left him confused about himself. Why did his parents even have a son if all their actions only made him feel worthless?
Kenny’s life was going better than he could have hoped; better than any of the fantasies he had concocted back in the little cottage. He was a hero to Charles for having stood by him. He’d solved the biggest problem of his life all those years ago. His reward was to remain Charles’s right-hand man upon their return. It was a position that had brought him a comfortable income, respect and most importantly, power. Kenny had managed Charles’s career with a deft touch. Through Michael Brewster, Kenny had gotten Charles and himself positions on Congressman Jordan’s staff. They were only aides, but Kenny’s tenacity and thoroughness caught the attention of nearly everyone associated with Congress.

Many staff members and politicians who took Kenny aside for a drink, told him, “Murphy, you’ve got to slow down, my friend. You’re making me look bad.”

Kenny laughed these comments off in the presence of the person speaking, but quietly took pride in the light-hearted reprimands. They were proof that he was somebody. But, to counter his colleagues’ insecurities and to raise the profile of his meal ticket, Kenny was always quick to orchestrate a scenario whereby Charles received credit and praise for things he hadn’t actually done. Kenny was endlessly bragging to anyone who would listen about Charles’s merit. He made a point of sliding Charles’s name into any idle conversation he had around Washington. The proclamation was always the same.

“You can say what you want about Jordan, Brewster, hey even me, but I’ll tell you something…Charles Collins is the real brains in the operation. The guy’s unstoppable. Keep an eye on him. He’s a comer.”

When Jordan collapsed in a heap that fateful Friday in April, Kenny stood by and watched Michael phone for an ambulance and another aide try to resuscitate the swollen, crimson-faced senator. Kenny was preoccupied. He was already seeing Jordan’s misfortune as Charles’s gain.

While most of Washington was stunned by the results of the emergency election in Massachusetts, Kenny had never let doubt enter his mind. He’d seen to it that Charles would get elected just like he’d seen that the problem of the twins was taken care of. In the same way he had bribed the hapless clerk at the Registry of Births in Ireland to give him a blank certificate-on which he’d shrewdly written the name “Rory”, because it so closely resembled the legitimate “Roy”-he’d helped the Patriarch spread his money around to the right people, guaranteeing Charles’s victory. A victory for Charles was an even bigger victory for Kenny.
He was Charles’s chief advisor in Washington and Kenny loved every aspect of the job, but first and foremost, he loved the clout that came with it. Kenny took great pleasure in throwing his weight around and he was regarded by most of his peers as a cold-blooded, merciless negotiator who never forgot anyone who owed him a favor. In Washington, that description was in reality, a very high compliment indeed. Kenny kept a running tab on which senators owed him for having gotten Charles’s vote on a bill they had introduced to the Senate. The list was long and Kenny relished having these men of power in his pocket.

Kenny had also watched with an interested eye, the change in his own relationship with Elizabeth, as Charles’s marriage disintegrated into a barrage of angry, drunken phone calls from Massachusetts in the middle of the night. The routine was always the same. Elizabeth would first ring Charles, berating him for his neglect and, when that failed, taunting him about his manhood. Then she would inevitably ring Kenny in tears and blubber incoherently down the line. To his credit, he always listened to Elizabeth and gave her hours of his time, but again, this was an investment. Kenny knew that there was no way that any congressman could sustain his career as a divorcee. For a Catholic congressman, divorce was a death sentence.

In order to keep Charles in tow, he had to suffer the frequent phone calls and serve as the middle man in their endless arguments. Each day after a phone call from Elizabeth came the long, repetitive conversation with Charles about the verbal assault he’d endured the night before, the sorry state of his marriage, the concern about Elizabeth’s drinking and the burden of guilt Charles felt. Kenny never failed to listen intently, no matter how many times he heard the same speech from Charles. For Kenny, it was a small price to pay for the status he enjoyed. He told himself this repeatedly.

Kenny’s vigilance was only matched by his stamina. Throughout the entirety of Charles’s first seven-year term, Kenny had refused to take any vacation. In fact, he had not taken a break of any kind in nearly a decade, and he had no intention of taking one any time soon. There was always work to be done. As such, he hadn’t actually seen Elizabeth’s physical decline and he was happily absent in Charles’s son’s life.

Kenny was tough, of that there was no doubt, but there was no way he could have handled young Roy calling him ‘Uncle Kenny’. He wouldn’t have been able to bear it. Not after what he had done.
From the back seat of the taxi, Kenny looked at the piece of paper in his hands, re-checking the address written on it.

“I guess this is the place,” he said to the driver as he reached into the breast pocket of his winter coat, removing his wallet.

He paid the fare and stepped out onto the street of a part of Washington he’d never ventured into. All around him the air was filled with tension, as if something dramatic could happen at any moment. Just down the block, a group of young black men huddled around a fire burning brightly in a trash can. He couldn’t make out the topic of their conversation but the frequent, menacing glances of the men sent shivers down his spine. There was no doubt they were wondering what a white man dressed like him was doing in their neighborhood.

The other side of the street was lined with dive bars and pawn shops with weather-beaten facades and sun-bleached signs. Martelli’s Tavern was the place he’d been instructed to meet the voice on the telephone. Stealing another glance at the threatening men around the fire, he had a moment of doubt about this meeting, but overcame it. He’d built his career; in fact he’d structured his entire life around questionable decisions and shady deals. What was one more? Plus, if nothing else, it was a free lunch.

Despite Kenny’s high-end lifestyle, he was an expert at making certain that his ways didn’t affect his own pocketbook. Having endured an impoverished youth, he was extremely tight-fisted, to say the least. His colleagues nicknamed him ‘Penny Murphy’, for they were sure he’d never spent a cent of his own money. One common joke which floated around the halls of Congress was; “If you go out on the town with Kenny Murphy, be sure to bring along a crowbar, to help him get out his wallet.”

Sucking some courage out of the air, he inhaled deeply through his nostrils, flipped up the collar on his coat and marched toward the entrance of the bar. As he opened the door to the tavern a plume of smoke was sucked out, washing over him like weightless surf. He blinked his eyes, trying to adjust his sight to the fog he found himself peering through.

Although it was midday, the bar was packed. Men in various states of disrepair and inebriation sat elbow to elbow around the semi-circular bar, mumbling to each other and, in some cases, to themselves. Kenny found an open spot at the far end of the bar facing the door he’d just come through. Seeing Kenny, in his
cashmere top coat, three-piece suit and expensive shoes, the bartender raised an eye as he made his way toward him.

“What’ll it be, pal?” the bartender asked in the gruff, tired way that only the enabler of alcoholics can.

“Uhhh, scotch and water…please,” Kenny stammered back, feeling more out of place with each passing moment.

He checked his watch; half-past one. That was the time the voice on the phone had told him to be in the bar. His urge to scan the room in an effort to identify the mysterious stranger who arranged this meeting was strong. To distract himself, Kenny tapped out a nervous rhythm on the railing of the bar with his thick fingers. The bartender came back with his drink and Kenny flipped two dollar bills on the counter.

“Thanks,” said the bemused barkeep, rubbing the bills against each other with the thumb and middle finger of his right hand. “Big spender,” he muttered as he walked away. The drink was only seventy-five cents, but the last thing Kenny wanted to do was ask the price and draw the ire of both proprietor and patron.

Just as he raised the drink to his lips, a chalky voice whispered in his left ear, “You Murphy?” Kenny nearly spat out his drink, but didn’t. He turned to face the stranger.

“Yes,” he said, fidgeting on his barstool.

“Back here,” the man said, gesturing with his thumb toward a thick curtain hanging across a doorway at the back of the tavern. The man waited for Kenny to lead the way. Kenny felt his hands start to shake as he made his way toward the curtain, unsure of exactly whom, or what, was behind it. The man who’d startled him wasn’t the owner of the voice he’d spoken with.

He stepped through the curtain and into a small room which held a single table, four chairs and three walls covered in black and white photos of various stars from the days of silent films.

“Take a seat,” the man told him, pointing a crooked finger at the empty chairs surrounding the round table. Kenny trundled to the table, and nervously dragged a chair out, the loud scrape of the legs on the bare cement floor adding to his jumpiness.

The man then walked over to the single door at the back of the room, knocked twice and opened it, revealing two more men. The first was a monster in human form. The gigantic figure barely squeezed through the door opening. He kept his hands suspiciously in the pockets of his coat. The second man was rail-thin,
about the same height as Kenny. Kenny knew instantly that this was the man he’d
spoken to on the phone. Kenny rose out of his chair as the thin man made his way
toward him, offering his hand.

“Thanks for coming,” he said. Kenny shook the man’s hand.

“My pleasure.” The thin man motioned for the third man to leave. As the thin
man took a seat opposite Kenny, the behemoth stood sentry, blocking the doorway
with his massive frame.

Kenny’s chaperone exited through the curtain, leaving the two men to talk in
semi-privacy. Kenny could feel a single bead of sweat running down the back of his
neck but ignored the impulse to reach back and wipe it away, out of fear of revealing
the level of his discomfort. Thankfully for him, the thin man wasted no time.

“I will be as clear and concise as I can,” he rasped. “As events have shown
us, the Germans, the Japanese and the Russians have put our country in a position
where it is mandatory for us to strengthen our national defense. We’re entering a
new world order and if we don’t beef up our forces, this country will be at risk. That
puts your boy Collins in a unique position right now.”

Kenny showed no signs of confusion. The man continued his pitch.

“I represent a particular company which is on the cutting edge of weaponry
research, development and production. Now, the thing is, the National Defense Bill
which has been put forth by a good friend of ours, the Senator from California, is a
few votes shy of getting passed. As you know, the formal vote will happen next
week. I’m here to discuss exactly what it would take for the good Senator from
Massachusetts to get on our team.”

So, Kenny thought, all of the theatrics for what is, in simple terms, a *bribe*.
However, Kenny’s never-ending quest for power was what had gotten him to agree
to the meeting in the first place, so if this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, then
Kenny wanted to play his hand with precision.

“I’m sorry, Mr....” letting his voice trail off.

“You can just call me Mister.” the thin man retorted, full of composure.

Kenny glanced up at the huge figure blocking the doorway and decided to
change his tactics. In an effort to appear deep in thought, he stroked his chin. After
a few seconds he leaned in close to the thin man, hoping to look conspiratorial.

“Well, now, that’s quite a predicament,” Kenny whispered.

“Why is that?” Kenny couldn’t help but utter a sigh of arrogance and
condescension.
“Surely a man as well-read as yourself knows that Senator Collins is a Democrat, not a Republican. How would it look if a man who has been quite vocal about the need for sustaining global peace suddenly acts in a manner which suggests military aggression? You do know that he lost his brother in the war, don’t you?” Kenny was being smug but he was of the belief that this man and his people needed him and Charles much more than he and Charles needed them. The thin man didn’t see it that way.

“Well, yes, I’m aware of not only the senator’s career, but also his personal life.” The tone of the second part of the sentence wiped the grin right off Kenny’s face, as the thin man was clearly a dangerous character. He was there to get a result and wasn’t about to be toyed with.

The tide had turned. Glancing again at the giant blocking the doorway, Kenny suddenly felt very frightened. He cleared his throat and sat back in his chair. For perhaps the first time in his life, he was unsure about what to do. Uncertainty was something he’d never been very familiar with and its sudden presence left him momentarily frozen. What did this mysterious character know? Kenny would have liked to ask the thin man if it were possible for him to take a day to think it over, but judging by the look of him, he knew that wasn’t an option. He wondered what might happen if he flatly refused, saying that despite the fact that Senator Collins is a devout patriot, he is also a man of impeccable character and would never even consider entertaining such an outrageous and corrupt proposal. No. He knew that such a response would land him a private audience with the giant; a rendezvous which would undoubtedly leave Kenny in a hospital bed, or worse. In fact, a refusal of the proposition and would likely leave Charles—and anyone dear to him—at serious personal risk. He resigned himself to the fact that he was screwed. And in that moment, missed options raced through his mind. What if he’d hung up on the man when he rang? What if he had told him from the outset that he wasn’t interested in any “proposition” the man was offering? What if? What if? What if?

He swallowed hard, purging the doubt from his mind. He sneered and his heart filled with menace. He leaned in.

“OK, buddy, you want to do business, I’ll do business,” he flared. “But I have conditions and they are non-negotiable.”

The thin man’s rigid posture relaxed into that of a man who knows he is the victor.

“First, I can guarantee the outcome you seek.” Upon saying this, Kenny thought he saw a perceptible twinkle in the thin man’s eyes, but all that did was
steel his resolve. He continued. “However, when I leave this place, I never want to see or hear from you or any of your associates, ever again. That goes double for the senator and his family as well.” The thin man rested his hands on the table.

“Also, I want a guarantee that neither you nor anyone from your organisation will have any record of this meeting, its conclusions or occurrence. This meeting never happened.”

“You have my word,” said the thin man with a conviction that, as far as Kenny could tell, was genuine.

“And finally,” Kenny paused to draw a breath, “I want fifty thousand dollars in cash.” Kenny had plucked this number out of the air for the simple reason that its absurdity would most certainly bring an immediate end to this unsettling negotiation and he could get the hell out of there in one piece. Much to his amazement, the thin man didn’t bat an eye. He snapped his fingers and the giant exited the room for a few seconds, only to return bearing a briefcase. Kenny’s heart sank.

“Fuck,” he muttered.
Rory drops the shovel he is using to help irrigate the field at the lowest point of the man’s property. He feels a deep and acute shift in the atmosphere around him. The sun still shines, the gentle breeze still blows, but he knows something has happened. He throws the shovel over his left shoulder and begins a slow march uphill to the farmhouse, guided by his instincts. His step is heavier than usual as he makes his way through the field.

He is not at all surprised to see the priest waiting for him at the front door. The priest nervously twirls the brim of his removed hat. Rory nods to the priest as he comes face to face with him.

“Father.”

“Hello, Rory. I’m so sorry that this isn’t a social call.”

Thanks to years of practice, the priest is usually quite at ease in situations such as this, but he has always been jumpy in Rory’s presence. He is unable to look Rory in the eye as he speaks to him. Rory wraps both of his hands around the priest’s extended hand.

“It’s alright, Father. Please, come in.”

Rory enters the kitchen and pours both of them a glass of water. He turns and faces the priest, who has seated himself at the kitchen table. The priest is still using his hat as a tool of distraction for his anxious fingers. Rory sets a glass of water in front of the priest and eases into the chair opposite. The priest is unnerved by Rory’s lack of concern, lack of emotion. He is at his most comfortable when consoling the overwhelmed; he doesn’t do so well with the serene. Rory calmly awaits the priest’s announcement that the man and woman are dead; side-swiped by a speeding truck. The driver failing to notice the Stop sign.

Three miles west of town.

A cannon ball meets a canary.
“Thank you for making the journey out to tell me, Father. I am most grateful,” Rory says, his eyes a sea of stillness. Stunned, the priest has no words to offer. For a moment, the man of the cloth wonders what his purpose is.

Rory senses his elder’s discomfort and rests his right hand on the priest’s forearm.

“It must be very difficult for you to deliver this news.”

“My son, I’m afraid it is a very big part of my work.”

“I don’t envy those in your profession, Father.”

Truly disturbed by the young man’s reaction to what would appear to be devastating news, the priest is eager to beat a hasty retreat. Rory sees this and facilitates the priest’s departure. Rising to his feet, he looks warmly into the priest’s eyes.

“Father, I will be certain to come to the church should I be in need of consolation and I know you will provide it for me. Once again, my deepest thanks for your concern.” He walks to the door, opening it for the shaken reverend.

Rory dutifully makes the necessary arrangements and arrives at the church for the funeral service. The couple’s passing brings the entire town to a standstill. For the rural Irish townspeople, normally so adept at dealing with death, having been conditioned through centuries of suffering and heartbreak, this loss seems to be more than they can bear. The church is filled to capacity. The priest speaks of the couple’s unwavering generosity and thoughtfulness, only intensifying the community’s feelings of grief, of deep loss. Both men and women wipe their eyes as the sermon is delivered. Rory sits in the front row, absorbing every word, with a feeling of warm reminiscence filling his spirit. He is thankful to have been raised by such caring, loving people. He is filled with appreciation, and his gentle face breaks into a smile as he pictures the man and woman, holding hands as they always did.

Rory is the last to leave the church when the service is over. He walks out onto the steps of the church where the congregation has assembled to continue their bereavement as a community. They believe that there is strength in numbers. The man’s best friend and neighbor, Mr. Daly, approaches Rory.
“My dear boy, ‘tis an awful tragedy,” the weathered farmer sobs, unable to contain his anguish. Mrs. Daly, standing at her husband’s side, buries her head in the farmer’s shoulder.

“I wonder,” says Rory, his voice steady and calm.

“How can you say that?” the farmer demands.

Rory’s eyes hone in and a subtle, luminous glow washes over his face. Rory’s eyes then rise from the farmer, resting on the image of the cross which sits atop the steeple of the church. He speaks in a soft whisper.

“I can’t think of anything they would have preferred. They died together, at the same moment in time. They will be together through the ages, joined as they were in this life. Neither will have to endure the loneliness they would have surely felt had one passed before the other.”

Rory pauses.

Mr. Daly rocks back and forth on the balls and heels of his feet. Rory’s eyes come back down from the church to meet him. Rory continues:

“They will never feel haunted by an argument they had. They will never feel guilty about a time when they raised their voices at one another. There will be no pain, no regret, no mourning. They were united as one for the better part of their time here, and now they will never be separated. I, for one, am delighted for them.”

The farmer is awestruck by the young man’s perspective, and after a few moments, he nods his head to Rory, a trace of a glint in his eye.

Rory walks down the steps, the parishioners making way for him. He moves to the dirt road in front of the church, where the coffins lie on the back of an open carriage, the two horses bobbing their heads in sync. He kisses his right hand and places it on the first coffin, then repeats the gesture for the second. He breathes deeply and turns to begin the walk away from town, towards the farm. He is now alone.
The threat from the Vice President of the United States, the leader of the Senate, hit Charles like a pail of ice water. Summoned to the White House for the first time in his twelve years as a senator, Charles's head was still spinning thirty minutes after the meeting. He made the long walk back to his office avert his gaze from anyone he encountered. He brushed past his secretary, closed the door to his office behind him and went straight to the oak-paneled bar in the corner of the room.

Out of breath and feeling the cling of his starched dress shirt against his sweating body, he jerked the top off of an unopened bottle of bourbon and dumped a drink into a glass. He downed it in one gulp and flapped his stinging tongue. He wiped his face with a handkerchief. Kenny had taken liberties many times throughout his years of service to Charles, and he had earned every one of them, but this was hard for even Charles to believe.

According to the Vice President, there was about to be an emergency meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to discuss and, in all likelihood, investigate certain voting irregularities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Due to the severity of the situation, the Vice President had been as vague as he possibly could be about specifics. He was distant and calculated in his meeting with Charles, feeding him only what the Senator from Massachusetts needed to know, just in case the entire matter blew up, leaving him and his boss, the President, vulnerable to being expelled from Washington. But in spite of his nebulous words, he left no doubt about what he expected Charles to do in order to avoid a professional, personal and perhaps even national crisis.

Apart from the justices of the Supreme Court, no group took their work more seriously than The Joint Chiefs. They were a group not to be trifled with. The Vice President had been given an ultimatum by them and he had no intentions of going toe-to-toe. Action needed to be taken swiftly and quietly or the entire Congress would feel their wrath. Charles's entire future now came down to this one critical decision, and what upset him most was that he could not, under any circumstances, include Kenny in the discussion or decision-making process. He was on his own on this one.

The years in Washington had done a fine job of sanding away Charles's innocence, and by spending so much of his life with Kenny, many of his friend's traits had been absorbed by him. Where there had been an attractively naïve persona, there was now a hard and, when need be, cruel exterior. Whenever he felt threatened, he had learned to defend himself by going on the attack. As his time in
Washington lengthened, his rigid, no-nonsense approach kept people at arms length, suspicious and wary, regardless of whether they were allies or enemies. Still, the inescapable showdown with his best friend left him weary and restless.

He poured another drink, walked across his office and sank into the brown leather sofa against the wall, staring out the window at the capitol's architectural representation of integrity and wisdom, the Washington Monument. Taking half of the drink in another swallow, his trembling hands finally settled. The alcohol did its best to help him slow down any ancillary thoughts and focus on the matter at hand. The action necessary was simple, but the thought of its ramifications made him shudder. To fend off his panic, he repeatedly told himself that everything was going to be fine.

He wanted to bring Michael Brewster in to discuss exactly how the news should be broken to Kenny, but the Vice President had, quite vocally, demanded that in order for there to be no collateral damage, this was a matter he had to attend to personally, telling no one about it. He was to get rid of Kenny as quietly as possible, put him on the next ship, train or plane out of Washington if necessary, and come up with some form of cover story which would explain Kenny's abrupt departure. It was almost farcical, in a demented way.

Charles had spent his entire adult life letting Kenny's scheming mind make every important choice. Kenny had been the mastermind of every deception, lie and scam, and now he, Charles himself, after years of surrendering personal responsibility, would have to do the same. The chickens had come home to roost all right, but all they brought with them was a feeling of dread.

He brooded for over an hour, refusing all phone calls and telling his secretary not to allow anyone in, no matter who it was. He desperately wanted to ring the Elizabeth he had met that summer in Marblehead, the woman who had cheered him up and boosted his confidence when he had moments of self-doubt. His heart told him that woman was a ghost to him and he knew it was his fault. The utter isolation he felt made him shudder.

He tried desperately to recall the precise moment in his life where he relinquished all self-will, parting ways with his own judgment and in doing so, setting the dominoes in place for a future filled with futility and pointlessness. Because he'd done such a thorough job of misleading himself over the years, try as he might, he couldn't remember. He was now alone, a realization that crushed him. Setting his empty glass on the side table, his hands rose up to meet his face as he whimpered
quietly, the tears falling through his fingers, leaving perfect star-shaped stains as they fell, drop by drop, onto the leather couch.
Kenny had a spring in his step as he breezed into the private club he had urged Charles to purchase memberships for. He thought to himself how nice it was going to be to have a quiet drink and a meal with his friend. They had stopped getting together socially for too long, and the spur-of-the-moment invitation, offered to him by Charles's secretary over the phone, was just the thing he needed. He’d been logging insane hours, preparing speeches and going over constituency data, all the while balancing his immense day-to-day workload.

“Yes,” he thought, “This will be good.”

He entered the bar, nodding to Leroy, who, as always, manned his post behind the bar. Kenny couldn’t help but think that although decades had passed since slavery was abolished, he still didn’t know one black man who didn’t make his living in servitude to the white master. The sight of Charles rising from his chair to greet him banished any further thoughts of compassion for the oppressed. He was thrilled to be in his friend’s private company and was eager to enjoy the evening.

His gaiety slammed to a stop the instant he sat down. Charles had a look on his face Kenny had never seen, and he’d seen Charles in every emotional state imaginable.

“Kenny,” Charles said in bland acknowledgment, not offering his hand, but instead sitting back down and reaching for his drink.

“Good evening, Senator.” Kenny hadn’t called him by his proper name in years. It was always, ‘Senator’. A curtain of portent was drawn across the table and Kenny was pretty certain it wasn’t a family matter that had brought out the intimidating presence he witnessed opposite him.

“Get a drink,” Charles commanded in a hushed tone.

“Certainly,” Kenny obediently replied, waving Leroy over and asking for a vodka on the rocks. Kenny watched the barman walk away and he wrestled with the ominous feeling he was getting from Charles. He wanted to defuse the atmosphere, but couldn’t think of anything better than appealing to Charles’s sense of humor. Turning his attention back to Charles he started a joke.

“So, did you hear about-“

“No small talk,” Charles interrupted.

Taken aback, Kenny shifted in his seat. “Um, OK boss. What’s the matter?”

Charles took a small sip of his drink, wincing ever-so-slightly before bringing the hammer down on Kenny.
"I’ll be brief. The matter is...you’re out." Charles’s words had a perceptible slur and Kenny shook his head with bewilderment, unsure if he’d heard Charles correctly.

Maybe his friend was just drunk. As he tried to make sense of what he thought his friend had said, Leroy returned with his drink. Kenny snatched it from the bartender’s tray and gulped it down, nearly losing his grip on the glass as he set it down on the table. His cheeks puffed out as he exhaled.

“Am I hearing things?” he asked, trying to get his bearings.

“No, I’m afraid you’re not,” Charles replied, steel-eyed. Kenny’s disorientation quickly gave way to indignation.

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

Charles showed no change in demeanor.

“What I’m talking about is the reaming I got at the White House today. What I’m talking about is the fact that I could be brought up on federal racketeering charges in front of the Joint Chiefs of fucking Staff. What I’m talking about is how my so-called best friend thought he could rig a fucking vote in the United States fucking Senate!” Charles’s clenched jaw flexed.

“The Vice President has my balls in a vice and he’s squeezing hard, thanks to you, you ignorant bastard,” Charles hissed through gritted teeth.

“Oh, come on, Charles. Don’t be a Boy Scout. This is Washington, D.C. This is politics for god sakes.” Seeing Charles lean toward him with hatred in his heart, Kenny instantly wished he could take his last statements back.

“You fucking prick. Don’t you dare insult me. What the fuck were you thinking? Did you honestly believe you could con me on the California Defense Bill and get away with it?” Charles caught his own rising voice and paused to take a breath.

“Did you think you could make me commit fucking treason and then just skip on down the lane? What the fuck is the matter with you?”

Kenny was on the back foot and struggling not to topple over.

“Jesus Christ, Charles. Is that what this is about? That vote was over five years ago. Why the hell is the White House even talking to you about that?”

“Because, you idiot, someone at the Department of Justice is trying to get a promotion and did a little digging. The entire legislative branch of the United States Government could be brought to its knees if news of this fucking fiasco ever gets out. Do you have any idea how serious this is?”

Realizing any attempt to defend himself was useless, Kenny surrendered.
“I do now.”
 Seeing the capitulation in Kenny’s face, Charles’s anger receded.
 “So, here is what you’re going to do. You’re going to sit here, have another
drink, have a steak dinner, shit, try everything on the menu. I don’t care. When
you’re finished, you’re going to have Leroy put it on my bill. Then, you’re going to go
back to your office and load up whatever you can take by hand. After that, you’re
going to leave Washington, for good. You’re not welcome here anymore.”
 Hearing this, Kenny couldn’t help but make one last plea.
 “Charles, I’ll talk to the Vice President myself. I’ll-“
 “It’s fucking done!”
 Charles touched a napkin to the corner of his mouth and again lowered his
voice.
 “I’m sorry, but it’s done. Do you understand?” Kenny’s hands lay palms-
down on the arms of his seat. He looked like a man awaiting execution via the
electric chair.
 “Kenny!” Charles snapped.
 Kenny’s vacant stare gave him away. He understood…completely.
 “OK, so that’s it.”
 And Charles got up from the table. He strode purposefully away from the
table. He snatched his coat off the hanger in the parlor closet and threw it on. He
shoved both doors of the club’s entrance open, feeling the cold rush of the early
spring air hit him. He turned left and began marching down the sidewalk. A few
steps in, he broke into a jog. His pace increased until he was sprinting away from
the place of his final meeting with Kenny Murphy.
 He ran for six full blocks before his lungs made his stop. He bent over,
gripping his knees with his hands as he gasped for breath. Then, without warning, a
swell of vomit erupted from his mouth, splattering the sidewalk, its steam rising in
the night air.
"You alright, Mr. Murphy?" Leroy asked.

Kenny hadn’t move a muscle in almost half an hour. The bartender’s question shook him from his delirium. He looked up at the barman with glassy, vacant eyes.

"I said, ‘Are you alright, Mr. Murphy’?"

Kenny shifted in his chair and cleared his throat.

"Yes, yes of course, Leroy. Thanks for asking." Out of the blue, Kenny felt moved by the bartender’s concern and found himself fighting back tears. He cleared his throat again, righting himself, and asked for another vodka.

"Yes sir."

Kenny couldn’t stop replaying his encounter with Charles. As always, he found himself wrestling with the truth. He kept trying to convince himself that it was all some sort of bizarre misunderstanding, a dream; that the argument hadn’t happened, that he was still in Charles’s trust. But as Leroy returned with his drink, he allowed reality to crack open the door of his denial.

He nursed the vodka for twenty minutes, struggling to come to terms with his fate. He did so only by shifting all of the blame to the Department of Justice and those nosy pricks from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"If only those assholes understood that sometimes you had to do whatever was necessary, to get things done in politics," he rationalized.

Finding a way to justify his own corruption softened the blow of what had transpired earlier, but not very much. He finished his drink and instructed Leroy to put it on Senator Collins’ tab, then got up to leave.

"Senator Collins," he murmured, then snorted in disgust.

As he reached the doors of the club, he turned around to take in the magnificence of the club’s décor, one final time. He would grieve for the rich, mahogany walls, the lush carpet and elegant lighting. He’d fought all of his life to be a member of a place like this, and now it was all over.

He couldn’t bear the thought of walking back to the office, so he hailed a cab. During the ride he resolved to get this over and done with as quickly as possible. When he reached the halls of the Senate, he paid his fare and stepped out onto the sidewalk, shoulders back, chin thrust defiantly forward. He took the steps two at a time and showed the security guard his identification, then strode toward the elevators, blocking out the wave of sorrow that was cresting in his head.
He exited the elevator at the third floor and marched down the long hall toward his office. His footsteps hit the oak flooring with resolute force, the “clomp, clomp” echoing off the snow-white walls.

He jammed the key in the lock of his office door and turned the knob. Stepping inside, he flicked his hand over the light switch on the wall as the office emerged from darkness. He surveyed the walls, the framed pictures of himself and Charles with various dignitaries from foreign countries, two former Presidents of the United States and the current one. He lifted one off the wall, a photo of himself, Charles and the current Vice-President in the Rose Garden of the White House. His finger traced the outline of the frame. A rage filled him and he hurled the picture to the floor, then kicked the broken glass with one swing of his foot.

Turning away from the mess, he sauntered around the room concentrating on not looking at any of the other photos. He let his hand caress the top edges of the file cabinets, the contents of which served as physical proof of his entire adulthood’s existence. He stopped at the window, rested his hands on his hips and surveyed the lit-up landscape one last time, absorbing the quiet, stoic beauty of Capitol Hill at night. Car headlights dotted the avenues beneath him. His mind drifted.

Taking in a deep breath, he swiveled around. What lay before him rocked him to his core. Behind the desk, lying across the arms of his desk chair was the object which had solidified his and Charles’s friendship all those years ago. Looking like it had been tossed aside as casually as their relationship, their friendship, their brotherhood, the shillelagh Kenny had gotten for Charles stared back at him, a sparkle from the overhead light reflecting off the small, silver shield. A shooting pain pressed mercilessly into his chest. Kenny fell to his knees.
Mr. Daly sees Rory's silhouette in the distance; Rory's tall figure digging a trench in the land, to drain off the rainwater that has soaked a furrow in the field. His eyes remain fixed on Rory as his feet try to decide whether or not to approach. He has cursed himself over the past months about not visiting the grieving young man. His right foot makes a move forward and he finds himself meandering through his own field. He slides himself over the boundary stone wall and makes his way onto the property that now belongs to Rory. He pulls on the bill of his flat cap in an effort to steel himself for this encounter.

Rory pits the soil's crust with the shovel, and leaves it sticking in the ground as he stands erect to greet his visitor.

“How are we?” Mr. Daly says tentatively.

“Era grand. ‘Tis a fine day, isn’t it?”

“Aye. ‘Tis.”

“How are you and the missus?” Rory leans his weight onto the shovel's handle.

“Gettin’ on.”

Rory feels the old farmer's apprehension.

“I see with all this rain that you're spreading meal for your cows. The grass is desperate.”

“Aye, Rory. A few more days of this and we'd all be travelling by boat.”

Rory smiles.

Mr. Daly clears his throat.

“Son, I've been meaning to come 'round, but with all this rain I've been at it from dawn till dusk.”
“I understand, Mr. Daly. This rain makes a hard job harder.”

“So it does.”

Rory pushes himself away from the shovel and stands tall. He will save the kind farmer from any more discomfort.

“It must be a burden for you to feel as though you have to check in on me. I appreciate it. I’m also grateful to you and your wife for letting me get on with things. You’ve always been very kind to me.”

“No bother, Rory. Are ye OK?”

Rory fixes his eyes on the meadow behind Mr. Daly.

“I miss them, Mr. Daly. I can’t lie to you about that. Everything in this life is impermanent. It’s a very sad reality. However, I am beholden to them for eternity. They gave me more than a child could ask for.”

“Aye, you’ll never meet a kinder pair than our Phyllis and Eamonn.”

Rory nods, still gazing at the meadow. He scans the stand of trees that crest the distant hill.

Mr. Daly stuffs his hands into his coat pocket, making fists, summoning courage.

“Rory, the missus and me…we’re wondering when it might be a good time to have you over for dinner.”

Rory’s eyes move back to the farmer.

“I appreciate that, but I’m doing what I must.”

“We just worry, is all.”
Rory holds up his hand.

“Mr. Daly, there is no need for you to concern yourself with me. I know what I have
to do. You and your wife were always kind to Phyllis and Eamonn and to me as well.
I know I make you uneasy, but I will explain myself, if you like.”

The farmer clears his throat.

“Go on then, Son.”

Rory fills his chest with air.

“There is so much misery around us, Mr. Daly. It is so common to view life through a
lens of deficiency. That’s what most of us do. We spend our time caught up in
thoughts about what we don’t have, or what we’ve had and lost, never reflecting on
the abundance all around us. We are surrounded by plenty. My own existence is
proof of that.”

Mr. Daly pulls his hands from his coat and crosses them over his chest.

“I know that I was orphaned. I was certain from the moment I came to this farm. But
who am I to judge whether that, of itself, was good or bad? I was orphaned, but that
led me to be raised by people who honestly loved me, who gave of themselves.
Phyllis and Eamonn made my existence here filled with joy. Because of them, I’ve
been able to build a life based on one principle, that I would listen to and obey only
my own inner Truth.”

Mr. Daly nods.

“They provided me with safety, Mr. Daly: Safety, protection and, perhaps most
importantly, freedom. Because of that liberty, I have had the opportunity to explore
the deepest depths of my own existence. I’ve discovered many things which directly
contradict what I know many believe.”

The farmer’s eyes widen.
“Such as?”

“First, I have no need for dozens of friends or companions to affirm me, for I know the wondrous joy of listening to my own soul. My existence is not and will not be derived from the physical appearance of my wife, the scholastic achievements of my children, the size of my house or its contents, or for that matter, how others perceive me at all. I refuse to let others opinions or outside influences dictate my life to me in any way.” Rory pauses for a moment. His hands squeeze the ends of the shovel.

“What I believe most deeply is that there is only Truth. My sole task in this life is to quiet myself from the incessant distractions which hound our everyday existence, so that Truth can be the voice that guides my thoughts and actions. By doing this, my emotions are never either an asset or a liability. They simply are. I can feel frustration or sadness about circumstances, but to me, to do that would be to hide from reality. Feelings are just that. Feelings. And with time, they merge and dissolve. My duty is to endure the difficult times and to allow Truth to guide me.”

Mr. Daly has questions, but lets Rory continue.

“I hear people in town and I read books where characters are always speaking of this elusive emotion they call “happiness”, but what do we know of happiness? What does a man or woman in today’s world know of contentment? Very little, indeed. Recent events make that clear, don’t they?”

“You mean the War?”

“Aye, exactly. We kill each other and rob each other of our inalienable right for freedom, true freedom. And the primary reason is that society is forever changing the rules.” Rory shakes his head. “The rules,” he repeats wistfully. “These rules govern the man’s soul. Hence, his identity is inextricably tied to what others say about him. I am free from that enslavement. That doesn’t mean I don’t want your companionship.”

Mr. Daly smiles as his arms uncross and drop to his sides.
“But, if my choice is the company of others or absolute freedom, I will choose freedom. I will explore the limitless possibilities of my Self. I must add that my Self will endure undeterred. I will listen only to It. The laws of our human world protect masses who have lost the ability to see what is Right. If all of us had our faculties, there would be no need for law, because each man and woman trying to live his or her own Truth would make all laws obsolete. Order would be restored without force or imposition; without violence or suffering. It would occur through a beautifully natural, organic process.”

The farmer shrugs his shoulders. He can not dispute what Rory has said.
The overnight bus ride to New York passed like a forgettable dream. Kenny laid his head against a window of the bus as the miles of dark interstate emptiness rushed by him, devoid of any detail. The pale orange glow of daybreak started to light the New York skyline as the bus pulled into the Port Authority. Kenny stepped off the bus and had a porter collect his steamer trunk of belongings. It was lost on Kenny that nearly five decades of non-stop, exhausting effort and absolute focus fit so easily into a single piece of luggage.

He had the porter wheel the trunk to the taxi stand and gave the man a five-dollar bill. Smiling, the porter waited for a taxi to pull up so he could lift the trunk into the rear of the car. Kenny opened the rear door and slid into the backseat.

"Where will it be?" the cab driver asked.

"Hell's Kitchen."

Kenny witnessed the sights of the great city coming to life, emerging from darkness to begin another day of frenetic activity. The fish mongers prepared their stalls while shop owners swept the sidewalk outside their places of business. Every few blocks they were stopped by businessmen in suits scampering across the street, on their way to an early start.

As the taxi arrived outside the old apartment building, he reached into the front seat to flip the driver his fare and stepped out onto the curb. Looking up at the dreary building, the lines of washed clothes hanging out of the windows and the disgusting smell of rotting garbage cemented his feelings of complete and utter defeat.

He lugged the steamer trunk up the stairs and paced in front of the door, too full of shame to knock. Summoning a last ounce of courage, he finally rapped his knuckles against the door’s flecking paint. He heard the shuffling of feet inside and then a weak, crackling voice.

"Who is it?"

"It’s me, Bridey. Kenny."

"Oh my goodness!" came the response, followed by the clicking of locks being unbolted.

The sight of his stooped, wrinkled aunt surprised him at first, then gave way to shame. He hadn’t seen her in nearly fifteen years and hadn’t written in another ten. The years in between had not been kind to Bridey. Her skins sagged and there was an almost translucent paleness to her skin.
“My dear boy! Look at you! What a sight for sore, tired eyes!” she exclaimed, seeing her nephew in his tailored coat and fedora. “Come in, come in!” Kenny gave her a peck on the cheek as he entered the apartment, overcome by the stale odor of a dwelling that appeared to have become more like a prison cell. He dragged the steamer trunk inside the door jamb and shifted it against the wall with his right foot.

“Come here to me. I’ll put the kettle on,” Bridey said as she ambled out of the room, muttering about her appearance and running her fingers through her straw-like hair.

Kenny threw his coat on the patched-up couch and hung his hat on the doorknob. He paused for a moment to reconnect this apartment to the one that had been his childhood home and couldn’t escape the feeling of how small it had become. He vigorously rubbed the flesh of his face.

He walked into the tiny kitchen where Bridey had already set down cups and saucers, small plates for biscuits and a tray of butter. He noticed she had set out the ‘special china’, cheap white porcelain imitations with household pets painted on them. He sat in front of the cup with a puppy, leaving the kitten for Bridey. She poured hot water into the teapot, set it down on the table between them and lowered her creaking body into a chair.

“This is some surprise altogether,” she said, her distinctive West Cork accent having been unaffected by over half a century in New York. “Are ye here on business then?”

“I’m afraid not, Bridey.”

His aunt gave him a concerned look. Kenny had debated exactly what he should tell her, but decided that after all she’d been through, all she’d done for him and how little she had gotten in return, the least he could do was tell her the entire truth. And so he did.

In recollections where he was quite obviously the perpetrator, Bridey preferred to see him as the victim and as such, she was an empathetic listener. Like the loyal, doting Irish mother figure she was, she did her best to spread the blame around. Kenny surprised himself by not shedding a tear for the entire monologue. He also surprised himself with his brutal honesty, sharing each ignoble story with total candor.

He spoke in a reverent, loving way of his early friendship with Charles and later Elizabeth. When he admitted that he owed everything to the man who had ultimately fired him and left him in the predicament he was currently in, Bridey stood
by Kenny, and believed that surely Charles should have found a way to forgive him. She went on to praise him for the years of hard work which had gotten him out of his working-class upbringing. He had come to America with nothing and had made something of himself, she said. But when he got to the more unsavory parts of his life story, Bridey stiffened.

Kenny told her how he had used Bridey’s family connections to gain control over the couple in Ireland. He explained how his scheming in Ireland had left Charles with a son he would never see again and Elizabeth would never know even existed. Bridey’s modesty restrained her for scolding him over such a heinous offense, despite the fact that it went against everything her devout Irish Catholic world view stood for. She was able to comfort herself for her lack of reprimanding him. It was a despicable act, but her upbringing had taught her that Kenny would have much to answer for when Judgment Day came, and that was between himself and God.

Kenny then rattled off the long list of deceptions he’d been involved with in Washington, from conspiring with the Patriarch to get Charles elected, then going on to using his status as Charles’s lead advisor to influence a number of votes in the Senate. Those scandals wounded the ‘American’ part of her, for they went against everything the nation supposedly stood for; a democratic government ‘of the people, by the people and for the people.’ Nevertheless, she was his adopted mother, so a large part of her absolved him and having lived her own life in the constant grip of poverty and strife, she found ways to understand why he did all the things he had done.

When Kenny had finished his long confession, he was drained. Bridey made another pot of tea. She set the teapot down and rested her back against her chair. She sighed audibly, before asking Kenny the unanswerable question.

“So, what do you do now?”
Charles went through hell. He felt torn in so many different directions. He knew that Kenny’s absence would leave a hole in his life but never thought it would be so cavernous. Days went by where it took all of his effort just to get out of bed. There were whispers throughout the halls of Congress about Kenny’s sudden departure. No one actually believed that Kenny Murphy would quit his job due to ‘a family matter’. In fact, not one of his colleagues or associates had ever heard him say a word about any member of his family at all. Most people in Washington were of the belief that Kenny hadn’t been born, he’d been manufactured, a complimentary reference to his stamina and tireless work ethic.

After suffering in isolation for a week, Charles finally picked up the phone and called Elizabeth. He made sure to wait until afternoon, for he wanted to speak with her when she was likely to be most approachable, and that window of opportunity was small. Mornings were no good because she rarely went to sleep before 3am, and after 2pm, in all likelihood, she would be well into a drink. The phone rang five times and Charles was just about to hang up when he heard Elizabeth pick up.

"Hello?"

"Hi," he said meekly, sadly aware that he no longer knew how to open a conversation with his own wife.

"Oh. Hello Charles," she said curtly.

"Darling, I’m so sorry," Charles breathed tightly into the receiver.

“What are you sorry for?"

“For everything. Good Lord, I’ve made such a mess.”

Charles’s words made Elizabeth bite her lip. The unyielding, hardened senator he’d become had banished her memories of the sweet, innocent young man she’d fallen in love with. As the years dragged on, she had been let down countless times. She gripped the telephone receiver with both hands.

“What’s happened?"

“Oh, Elizabeth…” Charles’s voice trailed off and she could hear muffled sobs over the receiver of the phone.

“Take your time, Charles.”

He struggled to catch his breath, finally inhaling and exhaling deeply.

“I just feel so lost. I’ve let so many people down. I’ve allowed my work in Washington to destroy what we had. I’m no good as a father or a husband…or a friend.”
Elizabeth had softened until she heard the word friend. She had a sneaking suspicion that somehow, Charles's misery was linked to Kenny. Everything else in his life was.

“Has something happened to Kenny?”

“Yes, and no.” Charles fell silent for a few seconds.

“Charles, what is it?”

“I found out that he accepted a bribe a few years back and the powers that be were going to investigate. I mean, damn, Elizabeth, it was either him or me.”

Elizabeth couldn’t help but think how pitiful Charles sounded, pleading and rationalizing like their 19-year old son. She wanted to respect her husband at a time of need, but he was making it difficult.

“So, you’ve fired him?”

“I had no choice, Elizabeth. The Vice President was going to throw me to the wolves.”

“Charles, you can’t tell me that this came as a huge surprise to you. How long have you known Kenny? I mean, come on!”

“I know you’re right, darling. I just never guessed it would come to this.”

“So what are you saying now? You want to give up, resign your seat and come back to Massachusetts and hide in a hole?”

“No,” Charles lied.

“Charles, I will love Kenny until the day he dies, but that doesn’t mean I approve of everything he’s done. He’s a grown man. Kenny made his bed, it’s as simple as that, and the sooner you see things that way, the better.” She wasn’t sure but she thought she heard Charles laughing.

“God, what’s wrong with me?” He chuckled.

“Not much, except that you are always so busy focusing on the future that you are totally blind to the obvious.”

“You’re so right, darling. I’m tired of being that way. It’s exhausting. I am going to come up this weekend.” He hesitated, as if he were asking her on a first date.

“Will you meet me in Marblehead, Elizabeth? I need you.”

Elizabeth nervously tugged on her hair. He’d neglected her so long, but how would she feel if she denied him a chance to redeem himself?

“OK, Charles. I will drive down Saturday afternoon. Roy isn’t coming home from Harvard this weekend, so we will have some time alone. I also have some things to say to you.”
“Oh, fantastic! I can’t wait to see you, darling.”

“Goodbye Charles.”

Elizabeth went to sleep that night sober. While she was anxious about a showdown with Charles, she was also determined to put an end to the sham they had been living for years. If Charles wanted to be in this marriage, then he was going to have to make it a priority.

Charles had trouble sleeping. He felt certain that a weekend of romance would not only abate his feelings about Kenny’s exodus, but would also rekindle his failing marriage. He was excited by the way Elizabeth had cleared his mind. He was sure he was still in love with her, and in his guilelessness, he also believed that he still had a chance.
Rory knows that tonight he will be having company, so he prepares a baked ham. He roasts carrots, potatoes and parsnips, sprinkling in bits of fresh oregano, thyme and rosemary he has grown in his garden. The rumble of the car’s tires on the gravel road announces his guest’s arrival. He walks out the kitchen door and rests his tall, lean frame against the outside wall, a gentle smile spreading over his face.

The car pulls to a stop in the driveway and he watches the small, round man roll out of the passenger side of the vehicle. The man cautiously approaches, offering his hand.

“I’m sorry to intrude on you. My name is Kenneth Murphy.”

Rory takes the man’s plump hand in his, squeezing a warm welcome.

“I’ve been expecting you,” Rory says to a startled Kenny.

“How?” Rory sees Kenny’s face flush.

“Aye, don’t concern yourself with that, sir. Please, come in.”

Rory holds the door for his visitor.

Kenny’s apprehension dissolves as he re-experiences the coziness of the interior, the house virtually unchanged in the nineteen years since he last set foot in it as a guest of Phyllis and Eamonn. The smells of baked ham and roasted vegetables compete with each other and the aromas trigger his memories of those magical Irish summer evenings long ago. The scents wafting from the kitchen also intensify the melancholy he finds himself inescapably wrestling with.

Rory watches Kenny’s face in silent empathy. He takes the visitor’s coat and hangs it in the closet, then gestures for him to sit at the table.

Kenny has spent many years avoiding this moment, and now that it has arrived, his discomfort is noticeable.
"I hope you’re hungry, Mr. Murphy," Rory says, soothing Kenny’s apprehension. "I’ve prepared a rather large meal."

Relieved, Kenny laughs.

"I’m famished."

"Wonderful."

As they eat, Kenny nervously babbles compliments to Rory on his cooking. His mind is racing, for he is completely uncertain as to how Rory will take his news.

“How do you make these potatoes?” Kenny says.

“I heat them very slowly at first. Then, just before the insides are soft, I turn up the heat. It puts a nice crust on them, don’t you think?”

“Yes, they’re fantastic!”

Kenny finishes his plate then fills it again. Rory thoughtfully chews each mouthful slowly, savoring every bite.

“Ah, yes," Rory hums. “And what gives the corn such strong flavor is that it’s also roasted, not boiled. Boiling vegetables removes almost all of the taste, not to mention the nutrients.”

Kenny nods, as though some deep wisdom has just been passed on. Rory chuckles to himself. Kenny can’t help but think how odd it is that being in the presence of this young man puts him at such ease.

After they finish the meal, Rory announces that because there is a storm coming tonight, he must herd the cows and move them into the large barn adjacent to the house. He invites Kenny to join him.

Kenny notes that he’s not dressed for herding cows, but is startled when Rory tells him that there are clothes in the spare bedroom which he can use. Unsure of what
to do, Kenny decides to accept Rory’s invitation and excuses himself to change. He emerges a few minutes later in a pair of wool trousers and a cotton work shirt.

“Come with me,” Rory says. “I have a spare pair of rubber boots for you to wear.” Kenny follows Rory to the closet where his coat is stored and watches Rory remove a brand-new pair of olive-green boots from a box marked, ‘Size 9’. He slides them on.

“Wow, they fit perfectly!” As he shifts his weight back and forth, testing the soles. “And they are a lot more comfortable than they look.”

Rory grins at Kenny and guides him out the door.

They walk the south field in a comfortable silence, as Kenny admires the endless horizon of rolling hills with an eye he never possessed in his youth. What a marvelous feat of nature they are, imposing and inviting at the same time.

“I’d forgotten how fresh the air is, Rory.”

“The freshest on God’s earth, I’d venture to guess.” Then, after a pause, Rory says, “for an American, I could swear I detect just a hint of a West Cork accent in you.”

Kenny feels himself blushing.

“Yes, Rory. That is true. I guess you can take the boy out of West Cork, but you can’t take the West Cork out of the boy, eh?”

Rory smiles in agreement. Looking at the cloudless sky, Kenny can’t help but ask him about his claim that there is a storm on the way.

Rory shrugs, but doesn’t elaborate.

As they reach the cows, Rory raises his hand and politely whispers instructions for Kenny to sit quietly on a square boulder, thirty yards to their left. Although they appear to be lazily enjoying the thick grass, Rory tells Kenny that the cows spook easily in the presence of strangers. Kenny nods his assent and meanders off to the
boulder. Seating himself comfortably, he observes the young man skillfully collect the large herd into a tight group then begins marching them up the field. As the herd passes, Kenny falls in step with Rory. After a few strides, Rory interrupts the silence.

“So, have you come to tell me about my parents?”

Kenny coughs. “Excuse me?”

Rory stops and faces Kenny.

“Everything is perfectly alright, in this moment, Mr. Murphy. You have nothing to fear. I have known for as long as I can remember that the man and woman who raised me were not my parents. Yet they raised me as if I were their own. Quite a beautiful sacrifice, don’t you think?”

“Sacrifice” is not a word Kenny has much familiarity with, but he does his best to show agreement with Rory’s statement. Steadying himself, he looks at the fine young man in front of him and begins to speak.

Rory smiles and nods as Kenny recounts the details of his coming to being. Never once does Rory show even a hint of anger or resentment. He absorbs the information Kenny offers without interruption. When Kenny is finished, Rory pauses for a moment, his eyes unblinking, his posture straight and grounded.

“You have traveled a great distance to tell me this. I am sorry you have had to bear this burden for so many years. I can see that it has been very difficult and troublesome. I am indebted to you. I hope that you can at last enjoy some peace.”

Kenny’s eyes widen. Rory’s response to his confession is the last thing he expects to hear.

Without another word, Rory turns and glides through the field. He settles the cows in the barn. Kenny watches from behind as the young man handles the animals with tenderness; urging them into their holding pen with a lilting, caring command.
They return to the house, where Rory prepares a pot of tea. They sip from their cups and share easy stories well into the night. Kenny doesn’t notice the driving rain until a sudden burst of thunder startles him. Instantly recalling Rory’s premonition he addresses the young man with a puzzled face.

“How did you know?”

Rory sees the multiple implications of this question; the storm, his conception, Kenny’s solution, his abandonment.

“It really doesn’t matter now, does it?” Rory gives Kenny a wink, the glow of the fire reflecting off his wind-whipped cheeks. Kenny sighs, looking into the hypnotic orange flames dancing in the fireplace.

“No, Rory. If you say so, then I guess it really doesn’t.”
The distant barking of a dog awakens Kenny from his slumber. He realizes that he slept through the night in the sitting-room chair. He studies himself for a moment then leaps to his feet, barely recognizing himself, still attired in the borrowed clothes. The steady rain has given way to a sun-filled sky, dotted intermittently by magnificent puffy white clouds. He holds his hands high above his head and groans with pleasure as he stretches his back. He has slept well.

Enjoying the feeling of being so refreshed, he shuffles into the kitchen. An envelope rests on the table, and he instinctively knows it is addressed to him. He moves to the table and lifts the small packet, running his right index finger under the edge. He pulls out the letter.

Dear Mr. Murphy,

I thank you once again for coming to see me. As you know, I have spent my entire life here on this beautiful piece of land. Now the time has come for me to make a journey of my own. I know not where the road will take me, but I promise to return. In the meantime, it would please me to no end if you would stay here, as my guest. You will find the life here most comforting to the senses. Mr. Daly, Eamonn’s best friend and neighbor in this life, will take care of the animals in my absence, so you can rest well, and I shall see you again, upon my homecoming.

Rory

The kitchen door flies open and Kenny bolts down the driveway, his heart pounding, the letter flapping in his right hand. He steers a direct course for the small white farmhouse in the distance. Sweat pours down his face as his churning legs struggle to support his ample upper body. He is gasping for breath as he approaches the house and stutters to a stop on the lawn in front of the house. He bends at the waist, resting his hands on his knees, struggling to get air into his lungs. For how long he strains to recover his breath, he does not know, but when he straightens up, he finds himself face-to-face with Mr. Daly.

“Are ye alright, man?” asks the farmer.

Kenny searches for words. “He…,” Kenny pants, waving the piece of paper.
The farmer motions with his hand and leads Kenny into his house. He pours Kenny a glass of water and hands it to him.

“Now just slow down. Easy, easy. Drink this.”

Kenny gulps and sighs noisily as he finishes the water. He draws a deep inhale and addresses the farmer.

“My name is Kenneth Murphy. I am a nephew of Eamonn, may God rest his soul. I arrived last night to visit Rory. When I woke up this morning, I found this waiting for me.” Kenny hands Mr. Daly the letter.

The farmer’s eyes scan the words, his face glowing.

“Hmph,” is the farmer’s satisfied response.

Kenny is indignant.

“What do you mean, ‘Hmph’,” he mocks.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Murphy. That’s just Rory.”

“Huh?”

“What I mean to say is, it doesn’t surprise me in the least.”

“Why is that?” Kenny questions, unaware of the concern his tone of voice conveys.

Mr. Daly smirks.

“Why don’t we pull up a chair, eh?”

Kenny seats himself at the kitchen table, never taking his anxious stare off of the farmer.
“You see, Mr. Murphy, I’ve known that boy all his life. I’ve watched him do things that defy explanation. I also know that there are some things on God’s earth that should go unquestioned, and Rory’s one of them. The only conclusion I’ve come to is that while he’s part of our world, he’s not of it.”

Kenny stares vacantly at the farmer.

The farmer smiles, then says, “He’s Saoradh.”

“Saoradh?”

“It’s an Irish word. And it’s Rory.”
Epilogue

Charles tried to repair his broken marriage, but the wounds he had inflicted and the damage that had been done was too deep to overcome.

He served six seven-year terms in the Senate, before a state dinner was held at the White House, in tribute to his decades of service. He was lauded for his efforts, and forgotten by his fellows the morning after the affair. Elizabeth attended, then went back to her life.

Elizabeth opened an art gallery in Boston, of which she was both manager and curator. Her eye for new artists was uncanny and she delighted in bringing unknown geniuses into the awareness of the discerning art world of the Northeast. She amassed a fortune over the years, her greatest discovery being an anonymous Irish artist thought by many experts to be the most skilled painter the world had ever known.

Roy spent the entire decade of the 1960’s gathering a fortune of his own, dealing not in art, but in contraband. The increasing popularity of recreational drugs, combined with his incredible mind for organisation enabled him to construct an entire network, catering to the myriad university and college campuses spread out across New England. Such was his cunning that no one ever suspected him, the son of a senator, of being involved with a dangerous group of hustlers, con men and ne’er to wells. Always foresighted, he cashed out at the end of the decade, purchased an enormous yacht and enjoyed a life of leisure, cruising mostly around the Caribbean, playing golf with rich expatriates by day and frolicking with a never-ending supply of naïve young women by night.

Upon leaving the Senate, Charles retired to the family home in Marblehead, where he followed in his father’s footsteps, living as a shut-in. His body and mind beaten, he spent his days in forced solitude and morbid reflection, turning down whatever infrequent dinner invitations found him.

As for me, I still await Rory’s return, and each time there is a knock on the farmhouse door, my heart skips a beat, hoping that I might find his gentle face staring back at me when I reach the entrance. I still struggle to understand how he could entrust me with his home, the place of his youth, his most valued possession. I’m sure there is a lesson in there he is trying to teach me. I never tired of Mr. Daly’s recollections of the countless unfathomable exploits and accomplishments of Rory’s young life.
Some days I give thanks for the peace of the quiet life I have now, away from the rigors of unending competition with my fellow man, the world and myself. But those days are few and far between.

From my years in Washington, I amassed a small fortune and could buy anything I choose. Yet, the ability to purchase material goods brings me no relief from the pain that both lives inside me, and follows me everywhere, like a ghost.

Most of my time is spent sitting in the garden which Phyllis had nurtured and pruned with such care. I see my lost friends in every spring bloom, and I ache.

I ponder a life spent struggling to prove my existence mattered, a life constantly in motion and I find my worst fear is realized. I am shunned, irrelevant. I stare out over the haunting waters of Bantry Bay and my heart turns grey with regret, as I imagine what might have been.
Chapter 1-Methodology or Pre-Sailing Considerations

We do not assume that because works have been composed without apparent critical labour, no critical labour has been done—T.S. Eliot

1.1-Introduction

In this chapter, I define what practice-led research is in the context of this submission for the purpose of informing the reader what goals are set. Using Maslow’s Conscious-Competence Model, I define tacit knowledge and by introducing a Second Order Journal and Reflective Practice, I explain how I gathered, interpreted and analysed ‘data’ which informs (and in many cases becomes) both the novel and the exegesis.

1.2-Finding a Net to Collect Data

I state from the outset that the fundamental purpose of this research project was to make tacit knowledge explicit. To do so, it was imperative that I have tools which would allow me to investigate the process of conceptualizing, structuring and writing a novel in a manner which honoured the sanctity of a virginal interrogation of my creative process. Therefore, before ‘pulling up anchor’, I believed it was essential to formulate a strict methodology to be adhered to in order to compile data. I found the literature on ‘practice-led research’ to be at times quite clear and easily interpreted. Haseman (2007, p. 3) quoting Carole Gray, defines ‘practice-led research as being initiated in practice… [and] carried out through practice’. I acknowledge both the debate within the field and the struggle across disciplines to define what ‘practice-led research’ is (Brien, 2004; Hecq & Banagan 2010). Further study of literature produced confounding results. I discovered a wide variety of terminology and jargon, but had to connect dots as to what practitioners were saying to each other and, ultimately, to me. Thus, there were moments when I believed I understood the ‘how’ of practice-led research, only to find a new and unfamiliar term was put forth. For instance, what Armstrong calls
‘ecosophical praxis’ (Smith & Dean 2009, p.191) appeared to me to be used to collect and examine the same type of data Brewster was looking for while ‘fossicking’ (Smith & Dean 2009, pp. 119). For each practitioner encountered, there appeared to be a specific, individual vocabulary. From the start, confusion reigned, however I was assured that this anxiety is common amongst candidates pursuing higher degrees in Creative Writing (Brien 2004).

For this project, the term ‘practice-led research’ refers to the recording of what was happening throughout the journey, from the time one year before enrolment through to the submission of the completed thesis, for the specific purpose of uncovering, examining, processing and then articulating categorical aspects of the process of writing a novel. Sullivan (2009 p. 28) argues that artists themselves have the capacity to explore and explain complex theoretical issues that can have significance across broad areas of knowledge. What was vital was to possess a way of working which met what Haseman and Mafe (2009 p. 273) claim to be the needs of both the artist/researcher and the expectations of the research industry. I would be collecting data related to specific, pre-destined aspects of creation; the formulation of character and plot, the way in which the novel was structured, what experiences and observations shaped and informed the novel, and what narrative approaches were being used to tell the story. The ‘practice’ of research would be chronicled, as would the ‘practice of practice’, which is to say the act of writing itself. This second notion would be examined both in real time, but more intently in reflective practice. What I refer to as ‘real-time examination’ is not the same as what Epstein (1999 p. 836) refers to as multi-tasking. It is, rather what Johns (2004 p. 12) defines as mindfulness; a conscious exclusion of other elements of life, apart from that which is being attended to. After a session of writing I would review and examine ‘what happened’. In this, I would be employing reflexive practice. This would be what Fook (2002 p. 43) understood to be a stance of being able to locate oneself in the picture, to appreciate how one’s own self influences actions. I add here that the vital role played by what has been labelled a ‘trusted other’
to examine [progress] (Bolton 2010, p.14). In my case, the trusted other was others; my primary and secondary supervisors.

My mission was to collect data. Without a deliberate and thorough accumulation of material gathered in the process of the creation of the novel, I would miss any opportunity to observe my practice and would, in the end, be left to analyse only the completed text of the novel, as my single source of data. Thus, I adhered to what Gray set out as the two aspects for practice-led research: ‘[Where] questions, problems, [and] challenges are formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice’ (Gray 1996, p. 3). As Schon reported: ‘our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff which we are dealing with’ (Schon 1995, p. 28). Schon believed our knowing is in our action. For me, countless tasks I perform throughout any given day are examples of this ‘knowing in action’. When I tie my shoes, I don’t flash back to myself as a four year-old and replay the instructions my father gave me; I simply tie my shoes. As Schon goes on to say; ‘similarly, the workaday life of the practitioner reveals, in its judgment and skills, a pattern of tacit knowing-in-action’ (Schon 1995, p. 29). What Schon’s statement meant for me was that my knowing and my action are largely unified and inseparable. As such, they are unexamined. Therefore, if I didn’t make myself aware of what I was doing, I would act precisely as I do when I tie my shoes, disregarding acquired, experiential and tacit knowledge. If I did that, I would miss the point of this undertaking.

1.3-Defining Knowledge

In this section I define different types of ‘knowledge’. To articulate this, I employ the original four-step Conscious-Competence Model (Maslow 1970), then add the proposed fifth step (Baume, 2004).

For discussion of this model, I use my ability to tie my own shoes as an example. The example is not literal, but serves to define the various stages of learning I was inspecting.
Stage 1-Unconscious Incompetence

Until the time I was four years old, I could neither tie my own shoes, nor understand that I could not. Thus, I had no knowledge of my lack of knowledge.

Stage 2-Conscious Incompetence

At age four, I noticed my father tying his own shoes. I recognised I could not do this, but it had yet to be addressed. Thus I had knowledge of my lack of knowledge.

Stage 3-Conscious Competence

One day my father taught me how to tie my own shoes. Through intense concentration I could now accomplish the task. Thus I had knowledge and was aware of that knowledge.

Stage 4-Unconscious Competence

Today, at age forty six, I don’t consciously think when I tie my shoes. It is now automatic, second-nature if you will.

Stage 5-Adding to the Conscious Competence Model

David Baume added a possible fifth stage which he called reflective competence. By this, Baume suggests ‘looking at [his] unconscious from the outside, digging to find…[knowledge] that informs what [he] does’ (Baume 2004, pp. 15, 22).

This fifth stage is precisely what I set out to do with my own practice of writing. I would be inspecting both my writing and my practice of writing to explain it to a reader in this exegesis, because as an experienced journalist and novelist, writing as a discipline, for me is experienced at both stages three and four; Conscious Competence and Unconscious Competence. Before enrolment, I wrote, sometimes with a great deal of concentration, other times exercising very little effort. What is noteworthy is that at no point did I ever think about what happens when I wrote. Therefore, by employing
Baume’s fifth stage to my work for this project, as a way of collecting data for examination and interpretation, I would discover new knowledge due to my previously ‘taking writing for granted’. Following on, my task would then be to articulate those findings. To do so, I would need to ‘catch’ the data, using a ‘witness’. In sum, I would be fishing for knowledge I didn’t know I had. My goal was to interrogate my own process in a manner which would answer questions about how this novel came to be. Some examples of questions my witness would be asking are: ‘How did you come up with this?’ ‘Where does this character’s behaviour come from?’, ‘Why did he do this?’ and ‘Why didn’t he do that?’ Denzin observed that ‘writers create their own situated, inscribed versions of the realities they describe’ (Denzin 1994, p. 505). For me, what Denzin means is that I experience a specific stimulus, but through my own interpretation, my written explanation of the experience is ‘filtered’ through the act of transcribing the experience through the written word. The experience itself is changed through the act of writing about it. My Second Order Journal, which examined the decision-making process tied directly to writing, sought to answer questions such as, ‘How did that sunrise you witnessed turn into a paragraph of writing?’ in a linear, concise manner. I later learned that this type of questioning, for writers reading other’s and one’s own works, during the act of reading, was proposed by Percy Lubbock (1921, p.24).

1.4-Defining the ‘Net’ Used for Data Collection

For this project, I used voice recordings during the practice of writing to collect data in real time, and invoked journaling as reflective practice. To avoid falling into the trap of my journaling and reflective practice collapsing into self-indulgent narcissism, I kept two separate journals. A personal journal was used to express feelings common not only with trying to produce a novel, but also everyday observations. This personal journal was, admittedly, quite egoistical in form. However, by employing what Bourke & Neilsen (2004) labeled a Second Order Journal, a journal in which I logged only the practice, attempts and results of writing, I was able to separate content and practice. In this journal I engaged in critical thinking about two
separate entities. The first was how events; cognitive, experiential and phenomenological, and how my interpretation of those events were explicitly informing the content of the novel itself. The second was my observations of the process of writing. By separating the two journals from each other, I was able to express myself cathartically in one. The Second Order Journal was where all experiential data was ‘harvested’. Past experiences or new information I was acquiring to inform the novel were articulated as were observations of my writing practice. It was from the Second Order Journal that the exegesis would emerge. In the Second Order Journal I would collect usable data; events, experiences, insights and processes which could be extrapolated, interpreted, analyzed and most importantly, articulated back as processed data, thereby becoming the exegesis itself.

The Second Order Journal was where I was ‘the fisherman and the fish’, searching my own unconscious to retrieve tacit knowledge, interpret it objectively and articulate it succinctly. According to Brown & Sorensen, the value of the research is in the knowledge embedded in the practice (Smith & Dean 2009, pp. 153-169). All of the insights the reader takes from this exegesis as to how the novel came to be originated as full sentences, diagrams, sketches, phrases and full pages of notes, meticulously sequestered within the jacket of the Second Order Journal.

1.5-Caveats to Technique

An unwelcome intruder to self-observation is the ‘experimenter effect’, where our beliefs, desires and expectations can influence, often unconsciously, how we observe and interpret things (Mussachia 1996, pp. 33-35). In observing oneself, there is no option for a double-blind study as the subject is observing the object and there is no physical separation between the two (Sheldrake 1998). However, having undergone a process of behavioural change, and having written a Masters thesis which involved formulating a hypothesis, developing experiments and interventions and most importantly, observation and analysis of the elf using the framework of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, I had a point of reference that was both physical and
experiential. The Masters project involved addressing an existing behaviour in my life that I wanted to address, (the use of profanity) interrogating its origins and current manifestation, and drawing up a plan to reduce the behaviour over a period of ninety days (Banagan 2006). In addition, my long career in journalism and my later work as a registered psychotherapist had put me in a unique position to ‘bear witness’; to myself, others and the environment I am in. This tactic is defined as the ability to ‘self-observe [and] to recognise what is happening’ (Young et al. 2003, p. 89).

1.6-Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the methodology employed throughout the writing of this thesis. By utilising reflective practice, I achieved two, separate aims. The first aim was to unearth information that had been stored unconsciously, connect with it, extract it, examine it and articulate that process as to how this information informs the novel. The second aim was to actively, mindfully observe myself both during and immediately after a session of writing practice and to document any insights which occurred in the time between writing sessions. By tracking my progress, examining obstacles, acknowledging and analyzing the process of writing, and interpreting experiences which were informing the novel, I became, as Eliot (1932) said, engaged in critical labor during a creative undertaking.
Chapter 2—‘Fishing’ for Character With Plot as the Bait

Fiction begins with a spark in the writer’s mind—Amanda Boulter

2.1-Introduction

In this chapter I reveal how I came to discover, create, refine and wrestle with both plot and characters, as entities. The metamorphoses of both (plot and character) are at times interwoven and at other times, stand-alone items. The purpose is to highlight specific, individual moments in time where substantial discoveries were made and to detail those findings.

Drawing on specific texts, I reveal aspects of other authors’ characters and plotlines that I found both enlightening and useful as starting points. In doing so, I relay how other authors works influenced character and plot of the novel, borrowing from Ricoeur’s proposition that reading mediates experience (Ricoeur 1988, p. 101). This process is discussed and interpreted. I inspect how the works of others affect and interact with me in such (a) way(s) as to directly impact and inform the novel. However, I align myself with Zola (1880) where a line is drawn at the point where others’ text end and [my own] personal experience is harvested to create character and plot. To illustrate this point, I detail the process of how my perceptions were changed regarding who would be the protagonist. In this, the description of the construction of Kenny Murphy is revealed, as are the tools and techniques employed which created him. I also highlight where his character departs from a similar character, Patricia Highsmith’s Tom Ripley (1955).

2.2-Origins

The initial seed of the novel came from a desire I had; to ‘write a book about a noble character’; a character who was ‘possessing, characterized by, or rising from superiority of mind, or of ideals or morals’ (Macquarie, 2003, p. 1298). This desire stemmed largely from the bulk of reading I was enjoying at the time, in 2007, which consisted of a variety of fiction and non-fiction accounts whose central theme was individuality. At the same time, I had studied Eastern philosophy for six years. Ricoeur suggests that reading
mediates experience (Ricoeur 1988, p. 101). To expand on this, reading itself is not objective, or merely subjective, but inter-subjective. Kearney (2004) proclaimed that the point for Ricoeur was that there is a surplus of meaning (Ricoeur 1988, p. 62). The reading I was undertaking was reading with a purpose; to think not specifically about the text itself, but the mind of the author who had written the text. While reading for intention, I was engaged in what Boulter terms ‘attempting to work out what this [author’s] conscious mind was trying to say’ (Boulter 2007, p. 20). Through this method of reading, I engaged with specific protagonists from two authors, which I used as reference points. I wanted to create a character who possessed the single-mindedness of purpose of the architect Howard Roarke in Ayn Rand’s The Fountainhead (1943), but also contained an intensely spiritual aspect much like Larry Darrell in W. Somerset Maugham’s The Razor’s Edge (1944). As those two works of fiction are referred to later, I offer brief character sketches and plot synopses.

In The Fountainhead, Rand tells the story of Roarke’s fight against society, his attachment to integrity and the mediocrity which both surrounds and fails to deter him. The characters of newspaperman Ellsworth Toohey and former classmate Peter Keating serve as mirror characters to Roarke’s nobility. Toohey is a behind-the-scenes schemer, while Keating is an easily manipulated instrument. The Razor’s Edge positions Darrell’s spiritual journey against Isabel’s search for love and Elliot’s desperate quest for acknowledgement by the aristocracy. While these mentioned novels would play major roles, the initial source of inspiration was from a non-fiction source.

Re-reading Jon Krakauer’s Into The Wild (1996), the posthumous biography of the doomed idealist Chris McCandless, gave my idea a more concrete foundation. McCandless was a real person, not the fictitious creation of an author. In re-reading his story, I bore witness to emotional and intellectual traits: the unmitigated exercise of free will, rejection of material wealth and conformity and the purity of creating a personal destiny outside of the societal norm. These three specific traits were attractive aspects of
McCandless’s make-up. I also interpreted how these emotional and intellectual traits (through Krakauer’s narrative voice) turned into action(s), and in doing so, set him on a specific course. In scrutinizing McCandless’s thoughts, feelings and actions, I could visualize traits my own character could possess. Perhaps even more importantly, in doing so, I could theorise plotlines, meaning what Cuddon defined as ‘the plan, design, scheme, or pattern of events in a…work of fiction; and, further, the organisation of incident or character in such a way as to induce curiosity and suspense in the…reader’ (Cuddon 1997, p. 676). Through development of intriguing characters, I could conceive sustainable plotlines.

There are unique aspects of McCandless’s history which I saw as potential plotlines. Although from an affluent family, immediately after receiving his undergraduate degree, McCandless chose to forego a future of ‘making money’ and embarked on a quest of self-exploration. He donated his trust fund to charity and burned his remaining twenty-five dollars of cash in a private ceremony, then set out into the Alaskan wilderness on an intensely personal journey into himself. In reflecting on the proposition laid out by Ricoeur, what was being read was having a profound effect (Ricoeur 1991, p. 24). In fact, what I was reading about would become what I would write about. Upon finishing Into The Wild, I made the following journal entry:

[Twelve years after first reading the first edition, I can’t believe how different my experience of this book is. The story, its message and personal insights hold so much more meaning for me today, as a 44-year old psychotherapist than it did then, as an arrogant, smug 32-year old television executive. “The Search For Absolute Truth”. Fascinating. Pursue this], 27 July, 2008.

Looking at this journal entry a little closer is interesting. Nothing in Krakauer’s writing had changed. The words he wrote and published (and I read) in 1996 were identical to the words I read in 2008. What had changed was my role as what Chatman termed ‘creative conspirator’ (Chatman 1978, pp. 45-46), meaning that because my purpose for reading had changed, I
was interpreting an identical text in a much different way than I had previously. The discovery is simple, but significant. The way I read, meaning a shift in what I was looking for, completely altered my experience of the book. I highlight this now, but the interaction between writer and reader is discussed in more detail in Chapters Three and Five.

2.3-A Theme Surfaces, But is Eaten By Character

As a result of my purposeful reading, a plotline, or as Rand stated ‘plot/theme’ (Rand 2000, p. 36) was emerging; The Individual Against Society. It is important to note that while this theme is in no way ‘new’, how it was to be represented was emerging into awareness. I was not pursuing what Booker labeled ‘a hero confronting [another]’ (Booker 2004, p. 21). Rather, the pursuit of a quality (Booth 1961), or ‘way of living’ was at the forefront. Although a theme, I was already thinking about attempting to allow the message of the individual against society to be led by the actions of the characters and the scenes they acted out to convey the message, thereby avoiding talking about the subject (the individual against society) itself. Like the mentioned authors’ representations of Roarke, Darrell and McCandless, my (the author’s) appearance couldn’t substitute for the ‘artistic presentation of the subject’ (Beach 2003, p. 468). To simplify, I didn’t want to hit the reader over the head with a message or for me, even worse; dogma. Thus, from the start, I was focused on character(s) in favor of plot. What drew me even closer to this theme (the individual against society) was a writing by Gilbert Murray:

Persons…should be very careful of how they deal with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for riches, nothing for comfort or praise or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he believes to be right. He is a very dangerous and uncomfortable enemy, because his body, which you can always conquer, gives you so little purchase on his soul (Murray 2007, p. 154).

Intrigued, my immediate question was, “How do I ‘find’ this character?” As an entry point, I turned to the profession I was engaged in. As a
psychotherapist in private practice in Singapore, my work was grounded in the theory of Carl Gustav Jung. I was seeking a character who was, in Jung’s words, ‘Individuated’. By individuated I mean to become a single, homogeneous being and, insofar as ‘individuality’ embraces our innermost, last and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self, (Jung 1927). What I had was an idealised character in the abstract. What I needed was a tool to create him.

2.4-Casting a Line

To get some traits of a character who meets Jung’s criteria for ‘Individuation’ on paper, I employed the use of a very simple diagram Jung developed which focused on the four aspects of the self (Fig. 1.1).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fig1.1}
\caption{Fig. 1.1}
\end{figure}

In this example, Jung’s four distinct aspects of experiencing life are easily interpreted. Starting at the top, Intuition is a ‘higher realm’ of consciousness, the source of insights and creativity. Additionally, it was believed by Jung (1931, p. 275) that this realm of the psyche was where **wholeness and conscious realization of the Self** resided. In other words, it is the place where consciousness observes itself. (This realm would be of paramount importance to me personally, as I witnessed and interrogated my own process of writing the novel).

Moving clockwise, Thinking is the realm of intellectual thought and examination, Sensing is our ability to see, touch, feel smell and taste and Feeling is the source of the entirety of our emotions. Playing with this
diagram as a tool to create characters, it became clear that it was deficient for one simple reason. My noble characters weren’t doing much. They thought, ate, strolled, smiled thoughtfully and made profound statements. What was missing was tension in the form of conflict. This inertia was due to the fact that my noble characters lacked a ‘Dark Side’ or ‘Shadow’ (Harding 1971, p. 83). As Harding wrote of Jung’s devious aspect of the self; it is the place where jealousy, dishonesty and need to dominate others resides (Harding 1971, p. 234). Without some form of conflict, a sustainable story couldn’t possibly emerge. But where would this conflict come from?

An entry from my journal on 17 August, 2008 illustrates a resolution:

[In order to come to the conclusion that he needs only himself, he must have some interaction with others as a point of reference.]

Until this realization, I naïvely believed that I could construct a story where the character was an ‘island’. If I stayed on this course, he would be what Forster referred to as a ‘flat’ character (Forster 1927, p. 73), where a single sentence would describe him. What was needed were other traits and people around him so as to add curves toward the round (Forster 1927, p. 73-75), meaning to add depth to him. Characters around the noble character would provide what Booker defined as different psychological imbalances which served to highlight the noble character’s sense of wholeness (Booker 2004, p. 558). Realizing the necessity of complementary characters and the instrumental role they would play, for their actions would stand in contrast to the noble character, I began to experiment with a hybrid of Jung’s original model. This is the model I have used with patients/clients in my work as a psychotherapist (Fig 1.2).
In my work as a psychotherapist, most effort has been spent on introducing patients/clients to the existence of their own Critic. The Critic is an external voice (usually a parent or significant authority figure from childhood) which has been internalized and used in two different and distinct ways. First, it is the filter through which outside information passes and second, it is the source of our incessant inner chatter. By this I mean the subtle dialogue that takes place inside one’s own head, in an individual’s experience of the world, whereby deficiencies are highlighted and used to self-attack, although this self-attack is always very subtle. To give an example I offer the following brief illustration. The fictional patient’s name is Jim.

Jim encounters people in his workplace who have ‘more’ than he has. In moments of everyday observation, The Critic will leap in and ‘Intellectualise’ the experience, creating an outer dialogue. Two examples of outward statements which emerge from Jim’s Critic are ‘She got lucky when she got that promotion’ and ‘He got that promotion because his father knows
the boss’. However, lying under the outward expression is a more deceptive *inner* dialogue, grounded in feelings of deficiency. While Jim says outwardly, ‘She got lucky’, the inner dialogue driving the outward statement is, ‘I’m not smart enough to get the same promotion’. In the same manner, while Jim might say outwardly, ‘He got that promotion because his father knows the boss’, the inner dialogue is, ‘I’m a nobody’. I wanted to create this type of inner tension in the characters of the novel, excluding the noble character.

2.5-Comparison as Data

Needing to feel as though I was making progress, with trepidation I set the noble character aside for the time being, and started playing with Fig. 1.2 as a model to deconstruct the noble character’s ‘mirror’, a foil, essential to highlight and contrast the noble character’s actions, beliefs and thought process(es). This is illustrated expertly by Ayn Rand in the form of Peter Keating in *The Fountainhead* (1943). Keating is what Rand labels a ‘second hander’, someone incapable of original thought, forever reliant on others to sustain him. Keating’s existence is vital to the story as without him, the reader has no point of reference for Roarke’s nobility. Keating’s spinelessness highlights Roarke’s courage. Keating’s willingness to conform accentuates Roarke’s battle to protect his individuality and autonomy. My aim was to experiment with inner and outer conflict to gain entry to a personality who would offset the purity of my ‘noble character’.

Taking the diagram (Fig 1.2) out of my psychotherapeutic work and incorporating it as a tool for interrogation in my writing practice I was able to perform detailed analyses and investigations of protagonists from literature and film, to start looking at a mirror character’s traits. This was a great help in measuring how this model would (or would not) work in the creation of my own characters. I transcribe here the efforts of one such experiment.

Patricia Highsmith introduced us to the formidable persona of Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955). Just the title of the novel suggests an author aware of the finest detail, for I was seduced by the word ‘talented’ with its benevolent implications of giftedness and skill. Only when immersed
in the novel are the malevolence and devious nature of Ripley’s ‘talents’ revealed; manipulation, lying, deception, obsession and the ability to commit and justify murder. The author evokes what Harold Bloom labels ‘terrified sympathy’ for Ripley (Bloom 1998, p. 517). Highsmith successfully engages with the reader’s Dark Side (Jung 1927), which is that hidden part of the reader’s self where his own self-interest resides. Bloom (1988, pp. 516-518) points out that our Dark Side identifies with Ripley. In engaging it, Highsmith lures the reader into rooting for Ripley despite his insidious acts.

Highsmith’s physical description of Ripley is delivered through Ripley’s own voice on the page. It is harsh and degrading, using others as a comparison. In Chapter Seven, shortly after his arrival in Italy, Ripley purchases a bathing suit to search for Dickie, Mr. Greenleaf’s son, on the beach. The locals, and Dickie himself are presented as tanned and fit. Ripley immediately compares himself:

Tom put on his own shoes again and walked across the road to the post office (in his bathing suit), intending to leave his clothes with his suitcases, but the post office door was locked...Some bronzed adolescent Italian boys sitting on wooden benches at the edge of the pavement inspected him thoroughly as he walked by. He felt mortified at the big brown shoes on his feet and at his ghost-white skin. He had not been to the beach all summer...Dickie was looking him over, not entirely with approval, Tom felt (Highsmith 1955, p. 40).

Using the diagram (Fig 1.2) to investigate Ripley, I found this punitive self-judgment indicative of his Critic using outside stimulus to form an opinion of himself about himself. His observation of his own paleness triggers his (negative) Emotional state. He possesses feelings of inadequacy which say, ‘I’m different’. Simultaneously, his Intellect leaps to the conclusion, ‘because I’m different, there’s something wrong with me’. Ripley also concludes that Dickie’s ‘looking him over’ results in disapproval. This reinforces and confirms Ripley’s unconscious core belief, which is, ‘I’m not good enough’.

Exercises such as the one above proved fruitful, but only in the area of character development. By deconstructing characters of other authors, I
was beginning to construct one of my own. The analyses worked in uncovering the inner feelings of deficiency necessary to sustain the traits which would ultimately (over time) become the character of Kenny, in the novel Saoradh. However, these same exercises were completely unsuccessful in the other crucial area; the development of plot/theme or plotline. Highsmith’s Ripley kills Dickie and assumes his identity, which was not an avenue I wanted my ‘foil’ to pursue. Rand’s Keating nervously stands in the background. I wanted my ‘mirror character’ to be assertive, but not to the point of being a sociopath. Thus, with a plot/theme in place what I now found myself searching for was a story, what Forster labeled ‘a narrative of events’ (Forster 1927, p. 44).

My journal reflects the wandering nature of this search in an entry from 11 September, 2008:

[I’ve critically observed others’ work, searching for insights, flaws and options. Turning this back on myself, I’ve outlined a conflict based on a theme: ‘The Individual Against Society’. I then recall characters in movies, books, etc. and start asking questions. ‘What if he did this?’ ‘What if his motivations were different?’ ‘How could that have been more suspenseful, funny, tragic, ironic?’ Choosing one, I go inside myself, imagine, and answer the ‘what if?’]

In this work I was performing experiments in the ‘ethical laboratory’ of Ricoeur (1988, p. 215), doing what Boulter articulated as exploring alternatives and creating varying scenarios for existing characters (Boulter 2007, p. 25). I was exposing myself to and extracting possibilities. Taking the results of these explorations one step further, I narrowed its focus and began to work on my own characters. I set aside time each weekday evening to map a ‘story’; the action and events themselves (Abbott 2002, p. 16), to test how alternative outcomes might be achieved. As I had done with my previous novel, I began with a diagram, whereby each character was not a person, but an occupation or title, much like a Human Resources department of a corporation might have in the form of a flow chart. Each character was a
word encircled in a square, with arrows pointing to other characters. Written on the line of each arrow was an event, conflict, relationship or plotline. I began to observe a recurring theme emerging from these exercises; *scandal*, as defined as ‘a circumstance or action that offends propriety or established moral conceptions or disgraces those associated with it’ (Macquarie, 2003, p.1684).

### 2.6-Diving In

At this point, I thought it crucial to formulate a hypothesis which would serve as a starting point to ‘test’ my findings, for I had answered the following questions:

1. What is it (the story) about? A questionable, if not wasted life.
2. What is the plot? A progression of events where misguided action is highlighted by the presence of a fully autonomous man, (my neglected ‘noble character’).
3. What is the theme? The individual against society with scandal in the foreground, Journal entry, 29 September, 2008.

Thus, my hypothesis was: ‘I can write a five-thousand word story using the characters and plotlines I have developed, investigating its creation in real-time during its construction, and through reflection upon completion, then determine the sustainability of the story for further development.’

Going back to my index cards with the characters listed as *occupations* or *titles* and the arrows connecting them filled with *conflict* and *relationships*, I set about the task of writing. The story/test I would be writing and interrogating consisted of a married Prime Minister of a small country whose illicit affair with a woman had produced a lovechild. This child was born with a remarkable gift; he was a prodigy, capable of producing never-before-seen works of art, through an ambidextrous style of painting. The main arcs of tension were between the Prime Minister and his co-conspirator (his Chief of Staff) and the Prime Minister and his wife. Much more interesting to me though, was the tension within the Prime Minister himself.
On one hand, he needed to keep his affair a secret, on the other he had an overwhelming desire to include himself in his lovechild’s genius and thus take credit by proxy. At the opposite end was the child, who was experienced at first as an ‘oddity’, for both his physical gift but also for his unique perspective on events. As he moves into adulthood, the curiosity wanes. He is met with suspicion and ridicule, ultimately ending up marginalised and alienated from society. Despite what is happening outside him, how he is perceived by others and the mocking he receives, he remains faithful to his Self and his gift, discounting the opinions of others, including teachers, an evil psychiatrist and, on a larger scale, society.

Examining the finished work, I was of the belief that it contained the raw material necessary to move the story forward. I had five characters; the Prime Minister, the Chief of Staff, the Wife, the Prime Minister’s Mistress and the Child/Savant. I also had a tripartite theme involving scandal; at the level of politics, at the level of friendship and within a marriage. Concurrently, analysis revealed useful arcs of tension in the relationships (Prime Minister-Chief of Staff, Prime Minister-Wife, Savant-Society) which could be explored and expanded to create a suspenseful flow for the narrative.

While Three-Act structure will be detailed further in Chapter Three, for now, armed with the information I had, I set about charting a course to navigate ‘Act One’ of a novel.

[Your immediate task is building up the creation of the triangular relationship between the Prime Minister, the Chief of Staff and The Wife. Leave the Savant alone for now, as your knowledge of Eastern philosophy will guide you through his creation], Journal entry, 7, October 2008.

This journal entry requires examination and explanation, for there is much in it. I highlight the first sentence to point out that I had zeroed in on the triangular relationship and not any of the above mentioned binary relationships. This is what Forster termed ‘interdependency’ (Forster 1927, p. 71). I held the belief that this interdependency lent itself to more opportunities
to create tension, thereby (hopefully) drawing the reader deeper into the story. I independently highlight the second sentence of the journal entry for the purpose of revealing what was an unconscious ‘faith’ in acquired knowledge. I could leave the ‘noble character’ alone for now, believing that my understanding of Eastern philosophy would ‘lead him to me’, rather than me having to search for him. I also highlight the entire journal entry to point out that there was a dialogue beginning, using the second person, whereby my own Higher Self as such, was ‘speaking’ to the Self who was anxious.

However, I had tricked myself into thinking that I was further along in the process than I actually was. While the triangular relationship was critical, I had done minimal work in refining the characters themselves. I needed to take a step back, look at the project as a whole, and organise my method of approach, so as to move forward in such a way that I could ‘measure’ progress and halt myself before running too far down a dead-end.

Although my initial intention was to have the Prime Minister as the focal point of the narrative, it quickly became apparent that the Chief of Staff would become the main character, for he revealed himself as a much more interesting protagonist, full of contradictions and self-serving purpose. Before moving on to his development, I acknowledge that I had, in the abstract, the characters who would become Charles (The Prime Minister), Elizabeth (The Prime Minister’s Wife) and Rory (The Savant). I discuss Narrative in Chapter Five, but I point out here that were the story to be told through the eyes of Charles, Elizabeth or Rory, rather than through the eyes of Kenny, I would have ended up with a completely different novel.

Reverting back to Rand’s The Fountainhead, I studied the method of function—meaning the actions and the motivations for actions—of the character Ellsworth Toohey. In the novel, his presence is sinister, much like Highsmith’s Ripley. The key difference is that while Ripley’s actions are overt, meaning emotionally impulsive and more moment-by-moment in nature, with no ‘grand scheme’, Toohey’s actions are thoroughly
premeditated and calculated, making him more manipulative and duplicitous. Throughout the novel, Toohey orchestrates the fate of Peter Keating, but remains in the background until a confrontation late in the story. Out of this reading and study, an archetype emerged which I could use to heighten the growing presence of my own Chief of Staff; the puppet master. In The Razor’s Edge, Maugham, with a deft touch, subtly employs a female character, Isabel, the rejected lover of Larry Darrell, to fill the same role. I note here that while my own project was to be dominated by male characters, I will be addressing the female aspect of narrative character in Chapters Four and Six. I should also note at this point that I had a growing concern whereby I was confusing ‘actions’ with ‘plotline’. I had tried to differentiate the multiple aspects of creating a novel through incorporating a linear, step-by-step method, but admit that my efforts were at times non-sequential and at others, most haphazard. To present the work completed at this stage to be horometrical would be an artificial representation of my process.

However, in reflective exercises and through speaking into a digital recorder, I could visualize the Chief of Staff character as a hybrid; a merging of Toohey, Ripley and Isabel, whereby I was borrowing aspects of these characters to create one of my own. Incorporating the proposition of Ricoeur whereby reading mediates experience (Ricoeur 1988, p. 101), I believed it most important, at this critical point in the development of the novel, that I formulate a strict method of practice by which I could separate personal feelings from usable data. Other authors’ work had influenced my protagonist’s creation. Now I needed to make him my own.
2.7-Fishing Within

As a start, I would investigate two ‘databases’ to harvest events, facts and conflict: First, my own family’s immigrant history, and second, my own experiential history, as a child of immigrants. But, I would scour these ‘databases’ for plotline only. My reasons for this were clear. Primarily, my experiential history with Ireland and my Irish family, friends and distant relatives was full of interesting tales and tension. However I did not want to misrepresent either myself or a family member. Ireland and ‘Irishness’ are inspected in Chapter Four.

Separately, my psychotherapeutic model (Fig 1.2) would be incorporated as the tool for construction of the characters. This included their interpretation(s) of outside stimuli through the filter of the Critic, leading to the formulation of their opinion(s), their physical and emotional make-up and their method of function, meaning, how they behaved or acted in various circumstances. By using my psychotherapeutic model, I believed I could develop characters whose actions would reflect their ‘inner dialogue’ in a cohesive manner, so as to avoid the pitfall of later having to deal with, for example, a protagonist who does something completely out of character, thereby interrupting the reader’s suspension of disbelief.

By identifying the two (plotline and character), as separate entities unto themselves, my intention was to free up time and space to work on each individually, in isolation from one another. As a side benefit, I wanted to alleviate some anxiety which was beginning to emerge over the magnitude of this project as a whole. By separating plotline and character, I could ‘treat’ my anxiety by demonstrating physical progress (to myself) on each aspect in a linear way. I was fearful of getting lost or drifting too far down what might be a dead end. Despite my best efforts to separate the two, I found it impossible. As Henry James (1884) wrote:

When one says picture, one says of character, when one says novel, one says of incident, and the terms may be transposed. What is
character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is a...novel that is not of character? (James 1884, Issue 4).

This overlap of character and plot would be a source of enduring confusion. I could not separate the two. To break the deadlock, I left physical traits and personality aside for the moment. I began with the history of the Chief of Staff character. I used examples of fellow Irishmen as a point of reference. Recording this in my Second Order Journal, data, or ‘fish that were caught’ included:

[He is born in Dunmanway, in West Cork, Ireland, and ‘shipped off’ to America as a child. He lives in New York, with his guardian, his mother’s sister, who has emigrated], Journal entry, October 20 2008.

Taking the event (being sent to America) and the result (living with his aunt), I could then process both through my work on plotline, then feed the material into my psychotherapeutic model to inspect the consequences, which would form a worldview of this character. In other words, I would be getting an answer to two questions: first, ‘how do these events influence or guide the plot? and second, ‘how do these facts affect him personally?’

Going back to the journal, I could answer the first question simply. It was easy to envision a ‘Rags to Riches’ plot forming out of the event and the result, but this seemed too obvious, formulaic and, to be honest, boring. I didn’t want the character to undergo a transformation from ‘Ugly Duckling’ to ‘Swan’. I had the initial plotline that I had set alongside the ‘noble character’ which was ‘The Individual Against Society’. I came to conclude that the same plotline, or plot/theme could work for both the Chief of Staff and the ‘noble character’. This was the inception of what ultimately became the dual narrative of Saoradh. This moment is addressed in greater detail in Chapter Three. Despite my excitement, I would have to let that sit and re-examine ‘plot’ after reverting back to my index cards, working further on the
‘circumstances’ of the other characters, and developing more arcs of tension between characters as they took shape. For the time being, I moved forward with the Chief of Staff’s personality, as the ‘damage’ he had accumulated from his childhood would be the start of a series of events put in motion by him.

2.8-Kenny as ‘Fish Out of Water’

The answer to the second question, “How do these facts affect him personally?” was also quite straightforward, inasmuch as the answer was, “deeply”. Due to his being ‘ shipped off’, the character’s Critic quickly becomes the loudest voice in his head, due to the perception of being rejected by his family of origin and authentic feelings of abandonment, leading to a view of himself as being what Young termed defective (Young et al. 2003, p. 13). In much the same way that Tom Ripley, who is an orphan, was shaped by the death of his parents, the Chief of Staff character would also be quick to develop far-reaching beliefs about the world, which Jeffery Young (2003) termed Schemas. Due to his being ‘rejected’ by his own family of origin (being ‘ shipped off’), his Critic would form opinions which became accepted as fact. Therefore, he would arrive at a number of conclusions, among them, that the world was unsafe and threatening, that getting attached to people was dangerous and that protecting himself from further rejection would always be his primary goal; again, these beliefs are grounded in his feelings of rejection. He would be a ‘survivor’, but his existence would be one of suffering. His mannerism and world view would come from a place of self-absorption, rigidity and an inability to forge relationships without an agenda. His definition of himself would come from external sources. He would be a ‘fish out of water’, but a rather dangerous fish at that.

Moving further into his development, I assigned Physical and Intellectual traits to the character, the ‘South’ and ‘East’ points from Fig. 1.2.

[He is stout and pugnacious, with bulging eyes and a large, protruding forehead. He always appears unkempt. He is extremely clever, but a tireless worker nonetheless, always exerting more effort than]
necessary…incessantly ‘busy’…cunning…eager to please but always
with an agenda and an expected payoff], Journal entry, 22 October,
2008.

By this time, I felt I had a tangible (both in my mind’s eye and on
paper) manifestation of the character who became Kenny Murphy. Kenny the
puppet master would be what Booker referred to as a character who defies
‘the archetypal rules by (being) a wholly egocentric, pasteboard hero going
through the pattern of an ascent from Rags to Riches without any of the
essential qualities which could allow him to reach a successful resolution’
(Booker 2004, p. 282). To elaborate, Kenny’s early childhood trauma would
haunt him all his days. He would be a protagonist who is always busy, but
never satisfied, his emotional life would be full of ‘holes’. And, he would be a
perennial ‘schemer’.

With a clear representation of Kenny’s psychological make-up and
physical presence now clearly shaped, I could explore aspects of Kenny in
my journal and in short narratives on the computer, to refine specific traits,
tics and actions/reactions. Through this refining, I determined that his
outward actions would be demonstrated with supreme confidence. However,
under the façade of certainty lay an air of desperation, deficiency and
vulnerability.

[He is poor…has grown up poor, is an ‘outsider’. His mission in life is
to ingratiate himself into the aristocracy. He will spare nothing and no
one in his path…He seeks opportunity through others’ misfortune,
difficulty or crisis], Journal Entry, 22 October, 2008.

It is important to note that the last sentence of this journal entry
morphed almost directly onto the page. In Chapter Nineteen, reflecting on
how he has ‘handled’ the circumstances surrounding the need to hide
Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the narrative reads:
Where there had been crisis, Kenny had found a sense of purpose. Where there was panic, Kenny had discovered opportunity (p. 51).

Examinations such as these throughout this exegesis highlight the journey and transformation that occurred; from abstract thought, inspiration and action, to refinement and transfer from the Second Order Journal directly into the novel. It is also important to note the presence of the second sentence of the journal entry, ‘His mission in life is to ingratiate himself into the aristocracy’. Upon closer inspection, this sentence reveals a great deal. Taking the totality of my work on the creation of Kenny, then comparing the data to Tom Ripley, Isabel and Ellsworth Toohey I made an illuminating, albeit accidental discovery. All of these characters are very similar, up to a critical point.

2.9-Ripley Swims Away

Kenny shares similar patterns of interpretation of stimulus with all three compared characters in the use of his intellect. Like Ripley, Isabel and Toohey, Kenny’s perceived inadequacy morphs his intelligence into cunning. His Intellect asks the question, ‘what can I get out of this situation?’ In much the same way as Kenny sees Charles as an ‘easy mark’ and a vehicle for him to use for the purpose of ascending the ladder of society, Ripley also sees the wealthy Dickie as a vehicle to be used, but Ripley’s vehicle must be destroyed and absorbed, for him to have a better life. Thus, it is at the point where Kenny turns his intellectual interpretation into action where his method of function remains linked with Isabel and Toohey, but where his and Ripley’s paths diverge.

Kenny’s Intellect makes the decision to ride Charles’s coat tails, through manipulation and ingratiation. At a deeply personal level, Kenny knows that it is impossible for him to improve his social status on his own merit. This is a secret he will never share with anyone. Therefore, Charles becomes the ‘object’ Kenny employs to achieve his goal. Kenny cannot thrive without Charles. Charles is essential to Kenny’s ascension, therefore
Kenny continually ingratiates himself to Charles, protects Charles from harm and develops schemes which help Charles navigate circumstances which are beyond him to rectify on his own. Kenny’s ‘talent’ is (through manipulation and control) making himself *indispensable* to Charles. I do point our here that Kenny’s ability to control exists in ratio to Charles’s willingness to forfeit his own manhood.

Ripley’s Intellect also recognises a target, in the form of Dickie. However, unlike Kenny (and Isabel and Toohey), who operate with restrained emotion, the Emotional aspect of Ripley’s Self, *overrides* his Intellect. These emotions rule his *actions* which lead to neediness and obsession with Dickie. Like Kenny with Charles, Ripley sees Dickie as an ‘object’ but the objectification follows a much different path. Ripley successfully ingratiates and gains acceptance, but then his neediness leads to obsession, his obsession leads to rejection (by Dickie) and the rejection leads to his uncontrollable need to destroy Dickie. At this point, in Ripley’s vulnerable state, rational behaviour is lost. His only option is to kill Dickie and assume his identity. He first reveals his fantasy in Chapter Twelve:

Tom stared at Dickie’s closed eyelids. A crazy emotion of hate, of affection, of impatience and frustration was swelling in him, hampering his breathing. He wanted to kill Dickie. It was not the first time he had thought of it. Before, once or twice or three times, it had been an impulse caused by anger or disappointment, an impulse that vanished immediately and left him with a feeling of shame...He had failed with Dickie, in every way. He hated Dickie, because, however he looked at what had happened, his failing had not been his own fault, not due to anything he had done, but due to Dickie’s inhuman stubbornness...If he killed him on this trip, Tom thought, he could simply say that some accident had happened. He could-He had just thought of something brilliant: he could become Dickie Greenleaf himself (Highsmith 1955, p. 87).

By observing all of the examined characters from this perspective, the others’ point of departure from Ripley is *action*. The agendas of Kenny, Isabel, Toohey, and Ripley are all similar. Each aspires to be ‘more than what they are’ and to ‘right a perceived wrong’. Each must formulate a
scheme. It is in the acting out of that scheme where their paths go separate ways.

2.10-Conclusion

In this chapter I have illustrated the techniques I employed from inception, or initial seed, through to the development of plotline and character. I have illustrated how and where initial plotlines led me to character and vice versa. In highlighting the influence of other authors’ work(s) as points of reference and guides, I have investigated and articulated the effect of reading others’ work(s) of fiction and non-fiction has informed my writing. I have detailed the transformation of the character who initially was supportive, but emerged to become the protagonist of the novel. I have recounted that process and provided analysis of how he was created.

By focusing on character development and by integrating a model from my psychotherapeutic work, I have highlighted how I was able to create a worldview for the protagonist by deconstructing characters from other authors’ work(s). Drawing on previously uninspected, experiential data from my own life, and integrating that with my therapeutic model, allowed me to conceive a psychological point of view which would ensure that the actions of the protagonist would be consistent with his psychological profile. I have also demonstrated where his behaviour is consistent with other referenced characters, and where, exactly, it diverges from them. I now move on to discuss structure.
Chapter 3-Structure or, ‘Charting a Course’

Without good structure, a good idea is nothing— Linda Aronson

3.1-Introduction

In this chapter I interrogate and describe the process of creating the structure of the novel. In doing so, I will reveal the ‘map’ which was created to serve as the navigation guide for the task of writing the first draft of the novel. To accomplish this, I will answer the following four questions.

1-What decisions were made before the first word was written?

2-What tools were employed to guide the first draft?

3-How did I discover and dissect the most significant problem with the first draft and how was the matter resolved?

4-How did I resolve on-going tension regarding the character of Rory?

3.2-Pre-Draft Considerations; Checking the Sails

In this section I will reflect briefly on the effect the writing of my first novel, *Mozart’s Ghost* (McCarthy 2004), had on the accompanying novel, thereby uncovering specific decisions that were made by me before a word of text for *Saoradh* was written. In doing so, I highlight how these decisions set a course of events in motion and discuss the ‘goals’ I had for this work. In sum, I will describe how the novel was formulated in steps, then begun in earnest.

As Booth claimed, ‘we (readers) usually find our emotional and intellectual reactions to him (the narrator) as a character affecting our reactions to the events related’ (Booth 1961, p. 273). This notion of ‘narrator as character’ was intriguing to me, for my previous novel, *Mozart’s Ghost* (2004), was a very straightforward project written in a simple, third-person narrative using past tense. *Mozart’s Ghost* is a descriptive story reported by the narrator, and as such, there is little room for interpretation, guessing or engagement by the reader in an active way. As stated in the previous chapter, my aim with *Saoradh* was to create a text which would interact with
the reader’s own experiential self, evoking personal memories and strong reaction(s) to the characters and their actions. This notion was grounded in my work as a psychotherapist where, during therapy, incidents of transference can dictate a session. I highlight that in the phenomenon of transference, patients project feelings about others onto the therapist (Burton et al. 2006, p. 644). An example is a man who has difficulty with authority figures. Upon entering therapy, he will test, prod over even seek to provoke the therapist. This is both a subtle and powerful phenomenon within the patient-therapist relationship. In switching roles, I was eager to see if I, as author, could evoke emotional reactions from the authority figure, the reader. With emotional content and moral dilemmas built into the outline (discussed later in this chapter) of Saoradh, I was interested in challenging myself to engage in various practices to produce a work whereby the reader was an active participant, meaning that each reader would experience the novel with her own personal history as a given, and based on that background would experience the novel in a personal and unique way. I discuss this with focus in sections 3.8 and in Chapter Five, ‘Narrative’.

3.3-Title

Before writing, I selected the saoradh, in honour of my Irish heritage. It is a Gaelic (Irish) word. Of itself, this invokes two questions. Firstly, ‘How is this word pronounced?’ and secondly, ‘What does the word mean?’ I point these out for they are the immediate inquiries made by all four of the individuals who read the first draft of the novel. Like many Gaelic words, saoradh has several interpretations. As stated at the start of the novel, in English it can mean:

1. liberation. the state of not being in confinement or servitude.

2. immunity. exemption from normal penalties or liabilities granted to a special group of people (Macquarie, 2003, pp. 1098, 950).

The title selection would dictate the ‘how’ of structure from the start, for it was ‘the germ of an idea’ (Highsmith 1983, pp. 3-13), a starting point for
a much bigger notion I had; 'I would not reveal the title of the novel as a word in the text until the end of the book.' To this notion, I was, in essence, starting with a prospect of 'bookending' the title. What I am inferring is what Forster proposed as a novel's two forces; human beings and a bundle of things not human beings, and it is the novelist's business to adjust these two forces and conciliate their claims (Forster 1927, p. 101). The plotlines and the characters' actions within those plotlines would move the novel forward, but one of the 'things' *not human*, the word *saoradh*, would be a device which would be suspended until the novel's penultimate moment, and then inserted in a way which made both logical sense and brought about a meaningful conclusion. Thus, from the start, the title of the novel itself could possibly be an agent to create mystery and maintain suspense. Only the reader can decide that. However, my job was to figure out what would happen 'between the bookends?'

3.4-Three Acts as Basic Structure

Reverting back to my index cards which had each character's name and contained plotlines as arrows connecting them (as discussed in Chapter Two) and with the characters' traits, physical appearances and methods of function clear in my mind and on paper, I could move forward with the construction of the story in outline form, in much the same way that a playwright would map out a performance; in three acts. I discuss why I chose this methodology later in this chapter.

A journal entry details my hypothesis to put the wheels of actual writing in motion:

[I can construct an outline of this novel, link characters and plotlines to events, and complete a first draft where the skeleton of the novel will be in place. That's all you need for now, a skeleton. The rest will come], Journal entry, 25 October, 2008.

I then had my index cards on one side of the keyboard and typed the following outline, which is the 'original novel' in outline form.
Working Outline

ACT 1

I. Introduction by narrator

II. Introduction of Collins family, beginning with the history of the life of “The Patriarch”

III. Introduction of “Junior”, Charles Collins eldest son and the first of the books four main characters

IV. Introduction and history of Kenny Murphy, “Junior’s” eventual head of staff and closest advisor

V. Development of the bond between “Junior” and Kenny as they leave university to enter the “Halls of Power”

VI. “Junior’s” courtship of and marriage to Elizabeth Brewster

VII. “Junior” and Kenny’s plan takes shape and is put into action

VIII. The problem regarding Elizabeth’s pregnancy is discovered and “solved” thanks to a scheme hatched by Kenny

IX. The issue of the birth of “The Twins” is dealt with by Kenny as “Junior” focuses on his political career

ACT 2

X. The dual narratives of Rory, the twin sent to Ireland, and Teddy, the twin who is being raised as “the next Collins” unfolds, revealing topics of differentiation, environment, the “Higher Self” versus the “Material World.”

XI. Kenny’s slow decline into disgrace

ACT 3

XII Rory’s evolution and moment of “Transcendence” and its implications

XIII Teddy’s slide into hubris


Although this outline would be deviated from substantially, its inception and creation proved to be an advantageous tool as a point of reference for me. I kept the outline next to the keyboard during the writing of the first draft, and its presence helped guide me with the movement of plot. I
was able to keep track of where I was (within the outline) and, perhaps most importantly, it provided me with an overall focus, meaning that before I had written a word of text, I had a clear idea of what I wanted to achieve. As Highsmith points out; ‘to write a book…means to acquire a certain momentum and drive and conviction which will last until the book is completed’, (Highsmith 1983, p. 15). For the physical and emotional investment I was making, sustaining momentum and ‘having a clear plan’ were mutually inclusive.

3.5-The Function of Each Act

In the next three sub-sections I detail what intentions I had for each act, and describe how the ‘unfolding’ of the novel carried me away from rigidly adhering to the original outline.

3.5.1-Act One

Initially, I had put too much into Act One, as evidenced by the final draft. Act One, in a traditional context, would serve two purposes. Firstly, it would function as the ‘set-up’, whereby the various main characters would be introduced and secondly, an initial plot-line would be put in place (Field 1979 pp. 8-9). This amounted to introducing Charles, Kenny and Elizabeth, Rory and Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Although my initial outline called for Act One to carry all the way through to Elizabeth’s delivery of the twins, upon the start of the writing process, it was clear that the climax of Act One was Elizabeth’s pregnancy. That event set the wheels in motion for Act Two.

3.5.2-Act Two

Confrontation is the key to a second act (Field 1979, p. 11). In Act Two, multiple confrontations occur. The trio is confronted with a strange land, Ireland, as a hiding place. Here, the relationship between Charles and Elizabeth shows cracks in its foundations, and Kenny is taken advantage of by Penelope in London. These are sub-plots, or what Forster called fragments of plots, which lead the story forward outside of the main plot (Forster 1927, p. 96). The climax of Act Two is Elizabeth’s accident and the
birth of the Twins, whose names I changed from Rory and Teddy (as the original outline indicated) to Rory and Roy.

3.5.3-Act Three

In looking at the original outline, and comparing it to the first draft, I saw just how far I had drifted away from the intentions I had laid out at the start. This is not to say that drifting away was bad, for in retrospect, I saw the enormous deficiency of the original outline. I point this out for the sake of acknowledgment.

Act Three was to serve as both the climax of the novel and its resolution (Field 1979, p. 11). Plot point two is Kenny’s firing at the hands of Charles, which sets in course a path toward a conclusion to the story. The original outline ends with Kenny’s decline into disgrace. The completed first draft did not end here. Upon reaching the point where Kenny is fired by Charles, a resolution to the story was moved forward, whereby Kenny returns to Ireland to seek out Rory. I mention this here to highlight another specific point where I deviated from the original outline and took the work elsewhere.

3.6-Outline as Map; Anchors Aweigh!

In this section, I place my three-act technique in line with the ‘way’ I write, meaning a visual picture painted with words. I also dissect and explain the phenomenon of writing itself, through the integration of my psychotherapeutic model. (Fig. 1.2)

At first glance, an outline would be suited better to a script for a visual performance, be it on screen or stage. However, Gerard found it a technique to be encouraged (Gerard 2000, p. 113) because in my previous career in television, I found this methodology to be advantageous and as a result, reassuring. My training as a writer originated in a visual medium; namely, television journalism. In that career, where writing every day was an instilled discipline, I was required to write in a style which would enhance the visual images overlaying the narrated script. The script I wrote would be read and
recorded as a voice-over, then laid under the moving pictures selected to accompany the script.

Later, as a documentarian, I utilised a three-act methodology to build suspense (for the viewer) in the narrative of the real lives of the people I was filming. But, because these were pieces of journalism, there was no room for creative interpretation, meaning that I could not present them in a way that was inauthentic. This is not the case in a written work of fiction. As author, I had creative license to write whatever I wanted, but even though a novel is an organic event, something that grows, morphs and takes on a life of its own, I knew it could not flourish without properly prepared ground (Gerard 2000, p. 171). I will expand on this in the next section, but it is also useful to note that Aronson proposed that parallel storytelling relies on a three-act structure (Aronson 2001, p. 52). The dual-narrative I would ultimately be employing would be assisted by structuring the novel as three acts.

Armed with my outline as a guide, I was of the belief that I could rely on it to see me through to completion of a first draft. As stated in the previous section, I deviated significantly from the original outline however, the physical presence of the outline was of huge import to get the story moving.

I was comfortable starting off the first chapter and following the outline in a manner whereby the narrative was connecting the dots, linking the events in the outline, one after another. Working in this manner, I settled into a rhythm and the words flowed onto the page with very little effort. I now apply my own psychotherapeutic model (Fig. 1.2) for the purpose of illustrating what was happening within me.

My Higher Self, the source of creativity and intuition, was engaged in cognitive function. Following the outline as a guide, I typed ‘what came to me’, sentences and paragraphs which emerged to connect the dots. During this activity, my Child was ‘at play’, given total permission by my Critic and my Adult to explore and develop the story at its own pace. The first draft would be written entirely from the Child Ego State, whereby my own Curious and Playful Child drummed away on the keyboard. It is important to point out
that ‘Stage Two’, a critical analysis and revision of the first draft, would not be viewed through the Critic, it would be done from the rational Adult, where logic resides and where thoughtful support for the Child is offered. To clarify, the difference between the inner dialogues (Critic-Child v. Adult-Child) would be as follows. If my Critic were to examine the first draft, the draft would be scrutinized through a lens of deficiency. Upon finding a sentence I knew needed revision, my Critic would say, ‘This is garbage.’ That would eventually lead to an inner terrorization of my Child which would end up with the Critic winning by saying, ‘Just give up, you’re no good.’

The Adult is the Ego State which examined the first draft. It speaks logically and rationally, soothing the Child. Instead of saying, ‘This is garbage’, the Adult says, ‘I see what you’re trying to do here. This could use better clarification. Let’s try this…. ’ Then, my Intellect would engage with my Higher Self to supervise the formulation of words which more clearly articulated the situation, description or emotion, to name a few, that each sentence was trying to convey.

3.7-Writing Visually

I have discussed at length the experience of writing without effort with my primary supervisor, himself a psychologist. What I have recounted to him is an experiential phenomenon I can describe only as the act of ‘transcribing the movie that is playing in my head’. This manner of writing was explained lucidly by the American paleontologist George G. Simpson, who said that he composed his writing visually —by thinking visually, then translating his ‘visions’ into words. Simpson said, ‘I visualize at least as much as I verbalize, perhaps more. Even in abstract theory I often visualize first & then describe in words what I saw mentally’ (in Laporte 1995, pp. 223-224). So, I was cruising along. I had it all worked out. Or so I thought.

3.8-The ‘Slippery’ Rory

In this section I discuss and dissect the biggest problem I encountered in the writing of the first draft and detail how I came to a resolution.
The advantage of employing and referring to the original outline for the first draft was that the words spilled onto the page. At no time did I agonize over ‘the right word’ or critically review what was on the page. My intention was to allow the first draft to emerge as an expansion of the outline and a connecting of the points on the outline. I would revisit the work as a whole upon completion of the first draft, the ‘skeleton’. Working in this manner, I gave little conscious thought to layout or structure per se. I didn’t even bother to indent paragraphs or dialogue.

I was moving along using a chronological narrative for all characters and plotlines when a serious problem burst into the forefront. I was sixty thousand words into the novel and Rory had yet to be introduced into the story. A chronological narrative had brought me to the time of his birth. Unconsciously, I painted myself into a corner. In sticking so closely to the original outline, in other words, by using only one methodology, vertical thinking had taken over and in doing so had short-circuited original thinking without my realizing it (Aronson 2000, p. 39). A three-act structure did not, in fact, lend itself to the necessary introduction of Rory. I ruminated on this problem for a few days, confused and worried about this predicament.

I was able to break my inertia and ultimately made attempts to resolve the issue. I formulated a series of options and hypothesis in my journal and tested them. One such effort follows:

[Rory can emerge earlier in the book by using a second-person narrative], Journal Entry, 30 June, 2009.

I performed several experiments with this tactic. One translation from my Second Order Journal, dated 3 July, 2009 reads:

[You know things they don’t, and never will. You feel no need to point this out to them, for that goes against what you know to be Right. Arrogance is just another way to express ignorance and you see too many examples of that. So you detach yourself from opinion and embrace higher emotions, compassion, empathy, tolerance.]
Although Jay McInerney achieved critical acclaim for his novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) which was written entirely in the second person, I quickly exhausted my capabilities to portray Rory using this voice, as despite there being much to tell about him, without incidents of conflict I simply couldn’t sustain it. In addition, despite the above journal quote denouncing arrogance, this second person narrative oozes pretention and I can’t help but cringe every time I read it. The hypothesis had failed in expectation and execution. In detaching from the second person narrative and inspecting it from my Adult Ego State, (Fig. 1.2) I knew both Intellectually and Emotionally that it wasn’t ‘right’. Intellectually, I came to the conclusion that the second person narrative was pretentious, therefore was inadequate to convey both the literal meaning (in text) and the nobility and humility (the ‘feel’) necessary for the character of Rory. Emotionally, I sensed a negative response from my own body when I read it. However, this exercise was extremely useful research, as the act of trying and failing forced me to explore other options and possibilities. I highlight that this period was uncomfortable, although it served as incredibly valuable data for this section. Goodall noted that ‘improvisation is a fascinating activity of itself for it leads one to come out with ideas and connections quite outside their normal pattern of thinking’ (in Smith & Dean 2009, p. 203). I expand on this in detail in section 3.8.1.

The undercurrent of anxiety that I felt trying to ‘find a voice for Rory’ was the only time during the writing where I felt any sense of crisis, but as a tutor had said to me months before, it was a lesson in ‘tolerating ambiguity.’ My task at this point was to turn the frustration of formulating a hypothesis, testing that hypothesis and being completely dissatisfied with the results, and not allow the subsequent negative emotions affect my effort or determination. Obviously, the real task was to turn the failure(s) into useful data that would lead me to a resolution.

Keeping the dilemma in the back of my mind, for the next week I continued on with the central story of Kenny, Charles and Elizabeth. Eight nights after the above journal entry, I was lying in bed, reading Sebastian Junger’s *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea* (1997),
when a flash of inspiration overtook me. In his book, Junger recreates ‘imagined’ dialogues between members of the crew of the doomed Andrea Gail, a fishing craft which was overwhelmed by the storm. Neither the boat nor the crew were ever found; all that was recovered were a few fishing remnants with the initials ‘AG’. As a result, in these dialogues, Junger employs the present tense which, while ‘imagined’ and manufactured by the author, works with stunning clarity. I climbed out of bed and wrote a few paragraphs similar to the failed experiment in the second person, only this time I used the third person present tense. I had discovered a workable solution.

I wrote a few scenes involving Rory’s inner world and inner life using this technique, but found it impossible to jump from the chronological and, at times, tension-filled scenes involving Kenny, Charles and Elizabeth to the calm, ethereal existence of Rory, so I left his character in outline form, on an index card, with a few, critical scenes stored as a separate document, and moved on to the end of the chronological narrative involving Kenny’s demise. It was only when the chronological narrative was finished as a first draft, that I could then get myself in a separate ‘space’ to write the Rory narrative.

As days went on, it was imperative that I be in a particular mindset when writing the character of Rory. To assist me, I had to physically put myself through a routine which involved doing a series of yoga poses followed by a short meditation, all done in dim light at night, with relaxing music playing softly in the background. In going through this routine, I could feel an engagement with an inner quiet, and that engagement led to the creation of the softer tone of the narrative necessary to express Rory. These ‘inserts’ were played with and analyzed to a much greater extent than the rest of the novel’s first draft, for I felt a need to capture the contrasting tone right from the start, meaning that my intention was to have the narrative of Rory serve as a mirror to Kenny’s story, his behaviour and interpretation of events. Rory is a combination of Jung’s ‘Wise Old Man’ and ‘Anima’ (the female aspect of the male psyche). He is a male figure who represents the state of complete maturity (Booker 2004, p. 298), counterbalancing Kenny’s
Dark Alter Ego (p. 306). Finally, as a matter of presentation on the page and to set the ‘Rory narrative’ apart from the ‘main story’, I made the decision to place these ‘inserts’ in italics on the written page.

3.8.1-Critical Analysis of ‘The Crisis’; A Debriefing

Goodall reported that ‘research in the context of the creative arts can actually serve to calibrate awareness of the psychological displacements required to keep the work alive and manage its energies’ (in Smith & Dean 2009, p. 207). In order to extract knowledge from my efforts and with a desire to fully understand how I had averted disaster, as soon as I finished the last insert, Chapter Sixty Five, I conducted an analysis of the moment of inspiration where I discovered the way that Rory could work. I could then see a linear, cognitive process which involved four elements. First was the action of reading Junger’s book, second was identification of a workable solution, third was visualization of how Junger’s method could be integrated and fourth was the action of experimenting, through testing. The act of reading Junger’s book triggered an intuitive process. The linear transcription of that process breaks down what I would have previously referred to as a ‘hunch’. The word ‘hunch’ dismisses the real cognitive processes at work; cognitive processes which ultimately healed what could have been a crippling misjudgment on my part and saved me from imminent frustration. The practice of testing alternate methods ultimately led me to a solution. In this instance, the discomfort of trying and failing, by way of unsuccessfully testing alternative hypotheses, was essential to reaching the answer.

However, I needed to test my findings further by comparing them to what current literature has to say, for I was fascinated with the cognitive processes at work in resolving this crisis. I also believed that finding a truthful answer to the resolution of this crisis would be a vital element of this exegesis.

Thrash and Maruskin, et al (2010) have discovered a tripartite model with the aim of separating ‘inspiration’ from ‘creativity’ and as such, can view inspiration as its own entity. They delve deeper into work done by Thrash
and Elliot (2003 pp. 469-487) on the usage of inspiration across disciplines and domains. Thrash and Elliot concluded that three core characteristics define the state of inspiration: transcendence, evocation and approach motivation (Thrash & Elliot 2003, p. 485). Thus, to define each term in the context of investigating my crisis; transcendence was the willingness on my part to think outside parameters I was working in. Evocation was the deliberate action of calling on alternative methods of writing as possible solutions. My approach motivation was self-evident and the overriding objective; I was on a quest to resolve the crisis I had created, and was therefore willing to employ whatever methods were necessary.

I then interpreted Thrash and Maruskin’s work, to gain some insight into precisely ‘how’ I had solved my own issue with the narrative of Rory. They state that one is inspired when one becomes aware of possibilities that transcend the ordinary or mundane. This awareness is vivid, as reflected in vision metaphors, such as ‘illumination’ and ‘seeing’ what one had not seen before (Thrash & Maruskin et al. 2010, p. 470).

This explanation read like a very accurate account of what I had experienced, but in reviewing my journal for signs of pre-existing notes about Rory, I refer back to something alluded to in Chapter Two:

I came to conclude that the same plotline, or plot/theme could work for both the Chief of Staff and the ‘noble character’. This was the inception of what ultimately became the dual narrative of Saoradh (p.260).

The reason I highlight Thrash, Maruskin, et al. is that I am writing this section months after writing Chapters One and Two of this exegesis. I reintroduce those two sentences from Chapter Two to reveal the fact that unconsciously, I already had a plan for the multiple voices of the narrative, concocted in July 2008, although it wasn’t revisited until the crisis a year later, and even then it was overlooked. It is only through meticulously examining the novel in this exegesis that I have arrived at an answer that I am comfortable with. That answer is that I had already prepared myself for
some difficulty with Rory, but as Thrash and Maruskin et al. later illuminated for me, I had ‘seen’ a solution that existed in my unconscious (Thrash & Maruskin et al. 2010, pp.469-487). The crisis itself was necessary for me to ‘see what I had not seen before’. Goleman highlighted that the unconscious mind is far more suited to a creative insight than the conscious mind (Goleman et al. 1993, p. 20). In other words, no amount of perspiration would have solved my dilemma.

This section is the strongest argument I can make for the exegesis as a necessary entity unto itself in this thesis, for it demanded that I analyze with great purpose and intention, the ‘how’ of my creative process. Relaying successes and moments of discovery is not particular demanding. However, thoroughly understanding the distinct and separate steps experienced in encountering and dealing with a crisis, then detailing the cognitive and experiential thoughts and actions necessary to overcome that crisis in writing is inexpressibly valuable to me. Through this specific examination, I have a case study which consists of an occurrence I would have, in the past, pigeon-holed with the (incorrect) term ‘writer’s block’. I cannot (nor will I) minimize the crisis concerning Rory with dismissive (and ignorant) statements like, ‘It just came to me.’ The resolution of the crisis was not brought about by dancing with the muse. It didn’t ‘zap me’ in a moment of insight. It is only through conducting a thorough investigation that I now fully comprehend the subtle workings, shifts, cognitions and actions necessary to arrive at a conclusion. They are:

1-Original experimentation had prepared me for difficulty with Rory.

2-That data was stored consciously in my Second Order Journal and was also ‘stored’ in my unconscious.

3-I had an original plan (the outline) which worked in theory, but led to a crisis in action.

4-The crisis demanded abstract thinking.

5-Abstract thinking broke my pattern of linear thinking and writing.
6-Breaking my pattern of thinking broke my pattern of working, leading me to experiment with alternatives.

7-Failed attempts ultimately led me back to my original (and stored, unconscious) plan, residing all along in the Second Order Journal.

8-The original plan (dual narrative) was integrated, successfully resolving said crisis.

9-The exegesis revealed, examined and articulated this process.

I cannot overstate the power of working through this section as an educational tool. By closely examining my process, I have uncovered mistakes in methodology which will serve me well in all future endeavors in writing.

I now move on to discuss in greater detail, the broader difficulties I had with Rory, not in insertion, but as a character.

3.9-Rory Examined… ‘The One That Got Away, Nearly’

In this section I examine the creation of Rory and what informs him. I also propose that my own personal difficulty with him has a direct link with a much larger issue in society.

As will be detailed in Chapter Four, the physical setting of West Cork gave permission for the mystical Rory to emerge from a place deep within me thanks in large part to the connection with the landscape. In this ‘space’, I felt a form of ‘access’ to a very quiet place within myself where Rory took shape and then transferred to the page. Economist Hazel Henderson articulates this state of being in an interview with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996):

There’s a very harmonious continuum of what Zen Buddhists call attachment-detachment. And you should always be in the state where you’re both. There’s a yin/yang continuum, which [she claims] we can’t understand in Western logic, and it says that there’s a constant dance and continuum between attachment and detachment, between
the long view, the infinite view, and the incarnated view where we have to learn about limitedness, and finitude, and action (Czikszentmihalyi 1996, p. 305).

If I have had moments of this state of being, they occurred the entire time I was in Ireland (June-October, 2009). While there, I completed the first, but also really discovered Rory. I was given permission, by both my own psyche and my primary supervisor, to fully explore what could emerge from that sacred space. It is from that space that Rory’s engagement with the ether was informed, as in Chapter Fourteen:

As he refines his mind, he becomes completely present in everything he does. Each individual task that he undertakes throughout the day has his unmitigated attention. When he is tying his shoes, he both observes and feels both the wondrous flexibility and the hidden wisdom in his fingers. As he helps the man who raises him with farming duties, his attention is on every stimulus; the warmth of the sun on his back, the zephyr of breeze gently playing a symphony with the acres of tall grass around him, the ever-so-light taste of salt air on his tongue, the strength in his feet as they anchor him to the ground.

And in those moments in his school classroom when alternatives to the irrefutable are discovered, what he notices most of all is that he exerts no effort whatsoever. Instead, he removes all activity from his mind, finding complete silence. In doing so, an endless stream of data; words, numbers, images and symbols swirl about him, passing without filter through his consciousness. In those moments, what he experiences is not exertion, but rather, permission. By never straining for it, the answer he seeks has his consent to find him, and always does (pp. 46-47).

This passage emerges as a hybrid, or combination of both journals. I was physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually content, but only by scrutinizing that state of well-being in the Second Order Journal was I able to take it from the unknown to the known and consciously make sense of it, in an investigative, analytical and, most crucial, translatable way. Again, what I, the writer was feeling, directly translated into the novel.
As stated in Chapter Two, I relied on my own knowledge and study of Eastern philosophy as a foundation, in order to bring Rory to life. Rory experiences life in a state of connectedness with everything around him. He is devoid of the ‘inner chatter’ most of humanity (and Kenny, Charles and Elizabeth) must contend with. His life is lived in a state that Zen Buddhism terms Sunyata which, translated literally means, emptiness. The English translation does not do the term justice, which is why writers on Zen Buddhism rarely deviate from the term Sunyata: ‘Sunyata is not a negative term, as might be suggested. It is a positive concept with a definite connotation’ (Suzuki 1956, p. 262).

In Advaita Vedanta, the term Brahman means One. This is the state of total unity; the state where all subject/object distinctions are obliterated (Deutsch 1969, p.2). This Eastern description is similar to the state that Western culture is referring to when speaking of Heidegger’s theory of Dasein, or non-dualistic human being (Craig 2002). Wilber describes this as a state where ‘what you are looking out of is what you are looking at. There’s no separation or fragmentation between subject and object, there is just the ongoing stream of experience, perfectly clear and luminous and open. What I am is everything that is arising’ (Wilber 1991, pp. 101-102).

The nurturing Rory receives from Phyllis and Eamonn in his upbringing allows this Higher Self (Fig. 1.2) to be his primary state of being. He experiences no inner conflict, and enjoys a harmonious relationship with all around him. His ‘lack of attention to outcomes’, as Buddhists would say, allows him to experience all information from any number of perspectives. An insight into Rory’s knowledge of these tenets of inner contentment is illustrated in Chapter Fifty Five:

“Well, it is perhaps the greatest puzzle of this life. A man has so many options, but seldom makes a choice. Instead, he allows circumstances to dictate his life to him. He lives his years totally unaware that the life he lives is not the life of his choosing, but rather, the life he has allowed to choose him.” The man nods thoughtfully.
“I believe that is true, Rory.”

“So, the questions for me are many, but the answer is clear. Do I want to choose my life, or do I want it chosen for me? Do I want to construct a life that is dependent on others, or do I want true independence? Do I want to exhaust myself in pursuit of wealth, or glory? Or do I want to experience each second of existence in its totality?” Rory’s gaze drifts to the horizon, as he allows the man to absorb what he has said. His eyes drift back towards the man. The man is touched by the wisdom Rory has shared with him.

“You see, a man can have it one way or the other, but he can’t have both. It is a very serious matter indeed, one that has no room for ambiguity.” The man makes one more attempt to guide Rory, so that he can rest knowing he has fulfilled his obligation as caretaker.

“Rory, with all that you are, with your depth of skill and talent, I have no doubt that you could be anything you desire.” Rory nods lovingly and a placid look of contentment materializes.

“What if I already am?” (p. 192).

Although I was able to bring the overall story to a conclusion, I still felt uneasy with Rory as a character. This disquiet has been mostly to do with the tightrope I walked with him. In my rigidity to make him noble, autonomous and individuated, his lack of conflict left me concerned that there might be a ‘blandness’ to him. This was a point of contention in supervision, where there was a plea for ‘more’ of Rory, which I initially interpreted as the number of times he appeared on the page. Subsequent meetings and clarification revealed that what was wanted was for him to be more ‘human’. I took issue with this, as to have him transgress to engage sexual antics, seek a fortune or even break down in tears somehow diminished both his mystery and his authenticity in my eyes.

Part of my unease was grounded in the fact that I struggled to find a parallel for Rory; meaning another character in a work I enjoyed. I reintroduce characters from Ayn Rand’s The Fountainhead and The Razor's
Edge by Somerset Maugham for comparison. Although Rory was to reflect
the traits of Rand’s Howard Roarke and Maugham’s Larry Darrell, Rory was
purposely missing something they weren’t; a quest. Although representing
‘higher aspects’ and aspirations of mankind, both characters’ humanity got in
the way of them being inherently Divine. (Rand herself was a fervent atheist).
Roarke’s quest is to satisfy a drive which originates in his Ego, his own vision
of himself, and that is, to be an architect. Although he is a creator, he is
nevertheless reliant on other men to grant him contracts and his drive
originates in an abstract quest for (deeply) personal glory. He makes
pronouncements that he cares not what other men think of him, but at some
level is dependent. An example is that he must rely on contracts from others
to provide him with work. Maugham’s Darrell is on a quest of a different sort;
a quest for Enlightenment. He undergoes an arduous spiritual journey, has to
suffer with letting go of material aspects and, although he emerges
‘enlightened’, succumbs to many worldly foibles. He strips away the material
of his Ego, yet decides in the end to return to America and become a taxi
driver. Both characters engage in dramatic and passionate romances,
struggle with poverty and endure what I will call, for the sake of getting to the
point, ‘the trials and tribulations of adulthood’. I admire both authors
immensely and have extensively read their work, however, the path Roarke
and Darrell travelled was not one I was comfortable with for Rory.

Also, I was of the belief that in a subtle way, Rory’s twin, Roy, while
appearing only briefly in the novel, contains many of the ‘darker’ aspects of a
young man. He harangues his mother, Elizabeth, and schemes his way to
material success through dealing drugs, as revealed in the Epilogue. This
was a way to eliminate Rory from being part of the ‘drama’.

An agreeable solution was reached when, in the third draft, I inserted
the scene where Rory comes home from school with a black eye. I was able
to have him suffer a hardship, but I approached it from Rory’s perspective
regarding his interpretation of the event itself, which comes through as
concern, not about himself, but about how Phyllis and his assailant feel/felt.
This appears at the end of Chapter Thirty Two:
'Good Lord!' Phyllis shouts, rushing toward him. "What happened?"
"I was punched at school."
"Who did this?" shouts Eamonn.
"Ian Cogan."
Taking Rory's face in her hands, tears well in Phyllis's eyes.
"I'm so sorry," Rory says to her.
"Why are you sorry, Rory?" Phyllis pleads.
"For upsetting you. I knew seeing me like this would hurt you. I'm so sorry." Rory is fighting back tears.
"I'm going down to the Cogan's right now to sort out that little shite," Eamonn declares.
"No, no please don't do that," Rory whispers. "He's already frightened enough."
"What?" Phyllis moves her hands to hips.
"Don't you see? Only a boy who is terrified could resort to violence. I think he's in horrible pain. It makes me sad to see someone so young in so much pain" (p. 107).

I was able to inject some emotional content into Rory's persona, in the form of a reaction to an event, but I manoeuvred the perspective away from Rory's Ego (his concern about himself) so that those feelings were expressed by demonstrating compassion for others. I was satisfied with the result, as I had brought about and imbued some expression of emotion in Rory. However, the subtle tension I felt regarding Rory, as a character overall, demanded further exploration.

3.9.1-Rory in a Larger Context; Ahab's Whale

My supervisors' feelings about Rory were not solitary. In fact, their concerns about the 'humanness' of Rory were echoed by a friend who was viewing periodic progress during the first draft and two other readers of the completed first draft. It is important to note that the Rory I am writing of in this section is not the Rory who appears in the final draft included in this submission. The final version emerged after a great deal of (at times quite contentious) discussion in supervision. What is crucial is that the character of
Rory was, in a very significant way, shaped by supervision. This section addresses the vital role supervision played in coming to a resolution I believe satisfied my desire to keep Rory transcendent and my supervisors’ desires to have him be less of a ‘spirit’ and more of a human being.

Upon completing the second draft, I searched myself for some form of explanation; an answer to the question, ‘Why does Rory do this to people?’ Despite my efforts, I came up empty, tired and frustrated. Thus, I felt it necessary to look to outside sources to shed light on why this uneasiness was experienced by the reader. I also studied the question itself, ‘Why does Rory do this to people?’ That is not the question I needed to ask to find an answer. As Booth claimed, the reader’s emotions were being evoked (Booth 1961, p. 129). In order to find out how, the ‘new’ question I investigated was ‘What is in the reader that gets triggered by Rory?’ It was only by re-structuring the question, that I was able to conduct an inquiry.

In this section, I throw a rather large issue onto the page for consideration. In no manner do I put forth the proposition that my answer is complete or unequivocal. Therefore, I am writing not from an authoritarian or despotic stance. What I am merely proposing is that it is possible that Rory’s initial manifestation on the page was a trigger for an unconscious neurosis which plagues our materialistic, (and as a result) confused society. As Kasser reports, ‘materialism, although promising happiness, actually creates strain and stress’ (Kasser 2002, p. xi).

In a gripping essay on the influence of television on fiction writers, Wallace introduces a startling, yet I believe, absolute truth about the state of Western society: ‘culture’s central tension has always set the nobility of individualism on one side against the warmth of communal belonging on the other’ (Wallace 1993, p. 174). I take a moment to give my interpretation of what I believe to be the message Wallace is trying to convey.

In our post-modern (and media-driven) existence, it is extremely difficult for any person to develop an individual sense of identity that is not shaped by comparison to others, society-at-large. (In this, I would argue that Kenny Murphy’s psychology is an example of ‘most of us’.) I am not saying we want it that way. I simply believe that that is the way it is. Now, ‘Why are
we that way?’ is an excellent question. To explain, I invoke a single line from Lacan’s vast body of work on desire and demand. Lacan stated that for the unconditional element of the demand, desire substitutes the ‘absolute’ condition (Lacan 1977, p. 287). Later in this discussion, ‘wanting’ is used in place of ‘desire’. According to Lacan, the notion of ‘Otherness’, comes before the sense of self. Klages interprets this as the sense of self being built on the idea of Otherness (Klages 2006, pp. 81-82). This explanation of Lacan, while simplistic, illustrates a salient, specific point. Taking Lacan’s statement and applying it to the reader’s response to the earliest versions of Rory, what I believe was getting triggered is the inner conflict within the reader. Another way of saying this is that we, as humans, are in a perennial state of ‘wanting’ (desiring) and that this state is triggered when we encounter an ‘Other’ who possesses material goods, relationships or, in the case of Rory, personality traits which we crave. However, being rational (and rationalizing) beings, the delusion is that our desire, our wanting, can somehow be fulfilled. What we fail to recognise is that wanting of itself, is an abstract state; there is no end point. If conditioned to want, we will always feel lacking; the wanting of the next thing will disrupt any sense of contentment. To interpret Lacan’s statement so as to be framed for my argument requires an example.

It is next to impossible for me, a forty six year old man to know how I’m doing, without another forty six year-old man handy, so I can compare myself. Only through comparison of another, or in Lacan’s case an ‘other’, do I come to an understanding of how I am doing; (physically, emotionally, intellectually, materially, etc.). Let us assume that I want to stop living in a manner of constant comparison. Being a person prone to rationalizing, rather than shift to an opposite stance, I will want it both ways, as Wallace suggests. I want to live an existence whereby I can express myself freely, live under conditions dictated by me, enjoy autonomy and experience a true sense of liberty, however, and here’s where it gets tricky (and why people may react to Rory the way they do), while wanting all of this liberation, I simultaneously want to enjoy the cosy sensation of being snuggled up in the blanket of belonging. And this is the desire Rory was free from. He had, and still has, no desire to conform/belong. The fact that I, as a sentient being,
recognise this to be true liberation sparks something in me. I (like Rory) also want this, but would have to give up my surrender to desire as a consequence, which is something I can’t do. This is quintessential inner conflict. And, this may be the nerve that was getting touched when the reader was exposed to a character who is living outside the laws of conformity, for it was a nerve touched by all three readers of the first draft.

Thus, it is in Rory’s state of independence where the reader found discomfort. Rory exemplifies an aspect of the self which is highly enviable, but also desperately elusive. True liberation is an incredibly alluring state. However, reading about it sparks the nagging reminder of how ‘trapped’ we are, reminding us of the demanding, radical change which, although aware of, we can’t undergo.

I state again, that Rory underwent major transformations as a direct result of the process of supervision and I was satisfied that while he took on a more human stance, he maintained the integrity of a character living on a higher plane of consciousness. Supervision was the process and forum that produced a more accessible character. In concluding this section, I freely admit four conditions.

1-This argument only scratches the surface of an enormous issue regarding myriad aspects of modern life; individuality v. conformity, materialism v. spirituality et al. I add that future writing will address these issues on a deeper level.
2-My proposal is nothing more than an informed opinion.
3-My proposal offers an explanation that I, the author, find satisfaction with.
4-To bring closure to the issue (Rory as a character) I must choose a final stance and in doing so, I side with Booth and Nabokov. ‘The true poet writes to express [him]self’ (Booth 1961, p. 89), [and] ‘to get rid of the book’ (Nabokov, 1956, p. 313, brackets added).

3.10-Conclusion
In this chapter I have investigated the structure of the creation of the accompanying novel. I have explained why I chose a specific title and how I
transformed index cards into a three-act structure though employment of an outline. This became the ‘skeleton’ I used to begin actual writing of the text. I have acknowledged the biggest crisis I encountered in the writing of the novel, have deconstructed the resolution of that crisis and articulated a step-by-step process of that resolution, which provided previously uninspected cognitive processes. In addition, I have cast both personal and instructional light on the character of Rory. This has been done through recognised text and theories, honest insights and the utilization of outside sources to better explain him. I have illustrated the vital role that supervision played in the evolution of him as a character.

I now move on to discuss the creation of the novel, through the lens of landscape.
Chapter 4-Landscape

Landscape is tension...It is the tension between proximity and distance, body and mind, sensuous immersion and detached observation. Is landscape the world we are living in, or a scene we are looking at, from afar?—John Wylie

4.1-Introduction

In this chapter, I define what landscape is, predicated on the lens through which I was/am viewing. In other words, landscape, be it a country as a whole, a specific location or my experience of a place is scrutinized for the effect that it had on my writing. How landscape informs both the content and the narrative of the accompanying novel is investigated. To accomplish this, I wear different hats, all of which will be explained.

Dictionaries state that landscape is ‘scenery’—any view or picture (Macquarie, 2003, 1686). That single definition is inadequate for the broad spectrum I am investigating. Wylie states a ‘landscape is thus not just the land itself, but the land as seen from a particular point of view or perspective’ (Wylie 2007, p. 7). I wanted to examine the way landscape circulates as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity (Mitchell 1994). For my purposes, by a medium of exchange I am referring to a place where events occur and where those events affect both visitor and inhabitant, either simultaneously or individually. As a site of visual appropriation, I am inferring both natural beauty and industrial skyline. As a focus for the formation of identity I am relating to the how historical, socio-economic, ethnic and geographic position affect my own sense of identity. Identity is explored in depth later in this chapter, but as I learned, identity is not a fixed state. As Klages reminds us, identity is not something essential or innate, it is socially constructed (Klages 2006, p. 88). My ‘self’ is changed by my setting; be it geographical, cultural, political or linguistic, to name a few factors.

Certain parameters must be set. As an outcome (a painting, a garden, a poem), or in my case, a novel, landscape may initially be an environment. But as Wylie suggests; ‘what is crucial, what is essential, are the specificities
of the way of seeing which constitute any landscape’s meaning’ (Wylie 2007, p. 91). For my investigation, the ways of seeing were predicated on which role I found myself in. Those roles will be defined shortly. I note here that I have reviewed the ‘data’, meaning my experiences within the landscape, as a whole, for the purposes of this chapter. However, individual findings and experiences were either recorded in my journal, or appear as text in the novel. Thus, while my review of the data is done post-completion of the first draft, some of my findings were recorded and used to inform the novel in real time. My intention was to inspect Landscape through the lenses of ethnographer, cultural geographer, and psychologist-as-witness, meaning, how do I engage a Witness within myself, who can objectively articulate what I am experiencing?

With this in mind, I propose to answer the following questions:

1-As a psychotherapist, living, working and beginning this project in Singapore, how was my writing informed by that specific landscape?

2-What is the landscape of Ireland through the lens of observer, in the role of ‘the nephew who visits regularly’?

3-How is the landscape of Ireland changed by my role as ‘inhabitant’?

4-How is the landscape of Ireland expressed as a character in Saoradh and how is that character reflected in the human players?

These questions will be addressed in that order, with an appropriate subheading notifying the reader. Thus, I begin with Question One.

4.2-From Singapore To Ireland; Stormy Seas To Calm Bays

With its topography of concrete and steel and its densely populated, hyperactive atmosphere, the city/state of Singapore proved to be a challenging environment to engage with creativity, that is, ‘to be in harmony (with) the work, so it is the only voice I hear’ (Kolodny 2000, pp. 90-91). As data, however, this struggle was itself, fertile. An entry from my Personal (not
Second Order) Journal from Wednesday, November 12, 2008 underlines this point:

[As I try to enter the summer Kenny and Charles are spending in the lavish but tranquil setting of Marblehead (Chapter 6), my mind is distracted by the beeping horns of taxis, the low hum of my air conditioning and the nagging reality that tomorrow I must return to my office and a full day of patients.]

As a person, I was part of the expatriate population in Singapore. In that role (a single, Caucasian, independently employed male) I was already a ‘minority’, struggling for any sense of connectedness with a place I found so unfamiliar. Despite the fact that I lived, worked and studied there for nearly nine years, I was always in the stance of visitor rather than resident. This left me with an underlying, and unresolved, tension regarding the landscape and my place in it; while I was physically present, the owner of a business and in possession of a materially fruitful life, I never fully engaged with the place. Inspecting this through an ethnographic lens, I uncovered the fact that my life in Singapore reflected the confounding contradiction that is Singapore itself. I could identify with Crary, who believed that ‘looking at the landscape intently did not lead to a fuller and more inclusive grasp of its presence. Rather it led to its perceptual disintegration and loss’ (Crary 2000, p. 288). To clarify, I was perennially in the landscape of Singapore, but never of it. To the tourist, Singapore appears very much a thriving, capitalist, Western society and on the surface, it is. But residing under that layer lies a culture steeped in the traditional Chinese way of life; a culture grounded in filial piety, the importance of ‘saving face’ and a single-party government which dictates the citizens’ way of life in an extremely deft and subtle manner. It is also, as a country not yet fifty years old, a tiny nation which struggles to define itself in any way other than materially. This left me with an underlying, and unresolved, tension regarding the landscape and my place in it.
The novel began in America, but it’s emotional heart was Ireland and although Singapore could provide plenty of fodder for another novel, it was minimally helpful for Saoradh.

The effect of my inner struggle with this paradoxical landscape manifested itself in my early writing of the first draft. The tension, both real and a product of my own expectations left me feeling that I was ‘strangling the life out of my novel’ (Mailer 2003). Physically, the act of writing was a forced process and the result of that writing read accordingly. Mentally, it was tiring work. The prose was jagged. The story wasn’t ‘flowing’. I offer an extract from the opening of Chapter Four to highlight what I felt was rushed and compressed prose. This first excerpt is from the first draft. I then compare the refined tone of the same excerpt in the final draft to illustrate this early tension and its resolution:

Charles Collins, I’d like to introduce you to Kenny Murphy. Kenny, this is Charles, the fine gent I was talking about earlier.” Within “the Fellowship” Gordon Standish was the young man everyone wanted to get close to, and he relished his role as leader, networker, host and big Man on Campus. The lineage of Standish was impeccable as he was a direct descendent of the legendary Pilgrim Miles Standish, a passenger on The Mayflower and the second man to step foot in the The New Land when he leapt onto Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620 (Banagan 2008 First Draft).

Now, the same excerpt from the final draft, having been revised twice, once I had relocated to my uncle’s cottage in rural Ireland:

Leaning against the bar, Charles was chatting with one of the other members of the Harvard Tennis Team when he felt someone grip his elbow.

“Charles, come here a moment,” said Gordon Standish. “I’d like to introduce you to Kenny Murphy. Kenny, this is Charles.” Kenny had learned quickly at Harvard that getting into “The Fellowship” was crucial. He’d also learned that Gordon Standish was the young man everyone wanted to get close to, as Standish relished his role as leader, networker, host and Big Man on Campus. The lineage of Standish was impeccable as he was a direct descendent of the legendary
Pilgrim Miles Standish, a passenger on The Mayflower and the second man to step foot in The New Land when he leapt onto Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620. Kenny had worked for two years to first gain Standish’s confidence, then to be accepted into “The Fellowship.” (Banagan 2009, Second Draft).

The evolution of this particular extract, from hurried and dictated to more visual, physical and relaxed reflects how the landscape of Singapore induced a fast-paced narrative, while later, the more relaxed setting and drastic change in lifestyle produced a slower-paced narrative, which, I believe, breathes a bit more. However, as much as Singapore ‘rushed’ me, it was also quite helpful in setting the tone of the first few chapters.

The early part of the book takes place in America in the early twentieth century, a time in that nation’s history of significant growth and frenetic activity. The strict, progressive movement of the narrative reflected my perception of the period of history. However, the narrative itself was unconsciously being informed by my own experiential immersion in Singapore and therefore, was a direct result of living in a landscape where I always felt pressed for time. The pace of my life, combined with the pressure I was putting on myself to write, moved the story forward in a direct manner; chapters began to emerge, one after another. The quality of feeling I was reflecting on led me to fully understand the emotional investment I was making (Wylie 2007). How my emotional investment impacted the work was through diligent tracking of the creative process. Due solely to my reflective methodological practice, I could understand the ‘what’ that I was writing through the ‘what’ that I was feeling and, outside of my awareness, the two were interacting in a productive way, producing a narrative which captured the atmosphere of the time and place I was writing about.

In this section I have discussed the impact of being immersed in the landscape of Singapore on the initial writing of the novel. That theme, ‘the influence of landscape on writing’ will be investigated again in the next sections. However, what is focused on more intently now is the role(s) I was in upon leaving Singapore and moving to Ireland. This introduces issues of identity, observer and participant.

Fiction writers as a species tend to be oglers...because human situations are writer’s food.—David Foster Wallace

Before entering a discussion on the perspectives mentioned in the title of this section, it is important for the reader to gain a better understanding of the individual doing the observing. The following is relayed solely for the purpose of clarity. Although I was born and raised in the United States of America, my mother was born in Ireland and sent to America, against her will, in her late teens, and my father’s family is also from Ireland. This left me with dual citizenship; I was American by birth, but a citizen of Ireland as a sovereign right as the child of an Irish national. This fact left me with some far-reaching questions about identity. By identity, I mean ‘the distinguishing character or personality of an individual’ (Macquarie, 2003, p. 944). Thus, I am operating from the starting point of, ‘What distinguishes my character?’ For the purposes of shaping me as the writer of Saoradh, my identity, as such, was imprinted on me by the circumstances I was brought up in and by the people of influence in my early life. With a young mother who was separated from friends and family in a new country, a great deal of my worldview was shaped by Irish tradition, even though I was expected to function as an American. Metaphorically, I felt like ‘a fish out of water’. By this, I mean specifically, what Wisker refers to as ‘a sense of dislocation and confusion rather than hybridity’ (Wisker 2007, p. 27). Klages’s theory of ‘transnationalism’ sheds more light, whereby ‘identity may not be determined by national (or) geographical boundaries’ (Klages 2006, p. 159). The Irish tradition I was raised in (outside of Ireland) was one shaped by an often baffling relationship with the Catholic Church and a parental unit which functioned in a punitive manner. I can personally connect with Floyd Collins’s description of Irish poet Seamus Haney’s as a sceptical, defensive, displaced poet, torn by conflicting dogma and troubled by the nightmare of history (Collins 2003, p. 26). This is not to portray myself as a victim. Rather, it is to place my ‘identity’ in the proper context so as to specifically describe the
different ‘roles’ I have both been placed in, and placed myself in, with regards to the landscape of Ireland. For both the emigrants and the Irish who stayed, Gavin (2001) points to socio-historic power relations and attendant features of control, subjugation and domination which inform not only how the individual relates to the other, but also how the self is experienced. In my writing, I can understand the argument of Maxwell regarding postcolonial literature offering an exploration of the entwining of self and place. He suggests that our sense of self is eroded by dislocation, whether physical or emotional (Maxwell 1965, p.87). This phenomenon is represented quite clearly in the emotional make-up of Kenny in Saoradh.

I fully acknowledge the portrayal of the Irishman and the Irish-American, both in real life and in fiction, as everything from a witty rogue, a captain of industry, a sentimental storyteller or a brooding, mean-spirited alcoholic. Roddy Doyle’s *The Van* (1991) and *The Ginger Man* by J.P. Donleavy (1955) provide excellent examples of these portrayals. However, their descriptions have no use here. Thus, for the purpose of this discussion, being Irish in Ireland or America means to be in tune with the inherent melancholy which is so intricately woven into the fabric of the place itself for Ireland has a colonial past from which Greenslade (1992), has suggested, it has never recovered. This brief discussion has given the reader a working knowledge of the author, as person, for a point of reference. I now move on to the author, as professional.

In my first career, as a journalist, my observation skills were honed through years of experience. Tom Wolfe describes these skills as the capacity to incorporate the extensive use of dialogue and the ability to record the minutia of people’s lives, providing details of the verbal and nonverbal symbols that represent a character’s lifestyle (Bainbridge, Goc & Tynan 2008, p. 280). The purpose of this is to ‘create a representation of a person’s status life’ (Bainbridge, Goc & Tynan 2008, p. 280). These skills prepared me to step into an observational stance, collecting data throughout my adulthood which would ultimately be called upon to inform the novel.
Being ‘The Journalist’ prepared me for a deeper connection with Ireland in the second of my roles. For years, I was ‘the nephew who visited regularly’, while visiting Ireland. I absorbed detailed histories of local landmarks pointed out to me by my uncle, a farmer who has remained in Ireland his entire life. Through purposeful observation I sought out phrases, symbols and ceremonies which connected me further to my ‘Irishness’, for because of my mother’s nationality, throughout my childhood, a strong link had been formed between myself and the country. I was viewed as a curiosity by both the locals and my uncle’s neighbors; ‘the fine young man who stays in touch with his roots by visiting us’. Yet, this distance between us, left me in the position of being an Irishman through biology and an Irishman in spirit, but also being cast as an outsider due to my American accent.

What is important to highlight here is that without this distance, my curiosity would not have been ignited, meaning that had I been born in Ireland, the Irish accent, Irish folklore and symbolism and an interest in Irishness would, in all likelihood, have not been present, for I would have been an inhabitant of the landscape, thereby making this knowledge tacit. It is only through the writing of the exegesis that this acquired knowledge is extracted and explained as information which translated directly into the novel. Thus, it is from that distanced observer perspective, where landscape, through field observation, became, for me, ‘a history of those who have lived and died in it’ (Muir 2001), a collection of valuable raw material was initially gathered. The title of the novel is, obviously, an Irish word. However, many activities, items, local histories and experiences relayed in the novel are direct results of these visits and observations.

How this comes across on the page and informs the novel is layered, in three separate and distinct ways. Firstly, there are the physical and historical elements. For example, the *slean*, the tool used to cut peat, is an actual object and all references to it are authentic. In Chapter Twenty-Eight, Kenny gives Charles a *shillelagh*, and this is of note for two reasons. The story Kenny tells about the history of the *shillelagh* is factually correct as is
the meaning behind the presentation of the *shillelagh*. For the reader, the gift of a *shillelagh* from one man to another is additionally symbolic of the link between the two men, through incorporating the vehicle of a uniquely Irish tradition: the ‘handing over’ of the stick, which signifies the step from youth to manhood, for Charles will become a father soon. While Kenny’s overt actions are manipulative, in his own Irish psyche, this moment is an exquisitely thoughtful ceremony. Also, all references to moments in Irish history (for example, the ambush recalled in Chapter Seventeen) are thoroughly researched, documented and factually correct.

Secondly, the experiences which the characters express are informed directly by my role as ‘the nephew who visits regularly’. Charles and Elizabeth’s experiences of first setting sight on Ireland at the end of Chapter Nineteen, then on the train ride from Cork City to Bantry in Chapter Twenty One are direct, experiential recollections from my own early visits to my uncle’s farm. I refer to a personal journal entry from a visit in 1996:

[She is the most breathtaking woman I’ve ever seen, with her proud, protective mountains insulating the gentle, lush pastures from the harsh Atlantic winds. She is my history. She is home.], Personal Journal entry, 10 July, 1996.

In fact, this journal entry informs the novel in Chapter Twenty Seven, with Kenny and Charles enjoying the view from their table at the Eccles Hotel, over lunch:

The tall, intimidating mountains of the Beara Peninsula oozed a combination of protection and harshness; barren and wild, with jagged edges and peaks. The mountains seemed to have jumped out of the core of the earth to offer their shelter from the merciless attack of the Atlantic winds; like a daunting, broad-shouldered father might stand over a vulnerable child, reminding any threat that it had better think twice before even contemplating an attempt at harming his offspring (p. 79).

Finally, my role as outsider left me with an ear for the accent and dialogue unique to the landscape of West Cork. Observing interactions
between my uncle and neighbors, or among other relatives with each other at family gatherings, I picked up on the rhythm of speech, pronunciation and use of words specific to the region, what Wylie calls ‘a landscape which suggests a vernacular people’s history’, (Wylie 2007, p. 97).

I note here that while I did my best to convey the accent and use of distinct words in various exchanges between characters, some are less successful than others. Two outstanding examples of accomplishing this to near perfection are Trainspotting by Irvine Welsh (1993) and How Late It Was, How Late, by James Kelman (1994). Both of these works are written entirely in phonetic Scottish accents and are masterpieces of that genre. For this novel, however, intermittent use of phonetic accent, when appropriate, was all I was seeking.

In this section I have demonstrated three ‘roles’ I have inhabited in my relationship with Ireland’s landscape; ‘The Journalist’, ‘The Nephew Who Visits Regularly’ and ‘The Outsider’. I now move on to the third question of inquiry, whereby I am no longer ‘outside’ the landscape, but immersed in it, as an inhabitant.

4.4-Landscape Phenomenology; Ireland Through the Lens of Inhabitant

In this section I answer question three of my inquiry, highlighting how the landscape of Ireland changed, due to my taking up the role of inhabitant. In May of 2009, I left Singapore to move to Ireland to accomplish two distinct (and separate) goals. The first goal was to complete the first draft of the novel. The second was to renovate the stone farmhouse on my uncle’s land, which he had given to me, his closest relative. My ownership of the house, and working on renovating that house, which has been in my mother’s side of the family for three centuries, galvanized what has always been a very strong identification with ‘being Irish’, and the accompanying psychic wounds. For example:

[As I demolish the West wall to start building the addition, I am struck with a strong sense of guilt as I think of the tremendous amount of labor my ancestors had exerted…back in the 1600’s, to construct that
wall, stone by stone, with nothing but bare hands, crude picks and shovels, and immense determination], Journal Entry, 20 June, 2009.

My Second Order Journal was, as ever, employed to track, both in real time and through reflective practice, how my change in status (from ‘nephew who visits’ to ‘homeowner and resident’) would inform the novel. I reiterate what Schon reported as our knowing being ‘ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing with...It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action’ (Schon 1996, p. 29). What Schon meant for me was that my knowing and my action would be unified, and therefore unexamined, if I didn’t make note of it. My status had changed in the community, but if I didn’t keep track of its effects, I would lose valuable data. Without a usable methodology, I would ‘take for granted’ my change in status, and as such remain ignorant of its influence on the novel.

I point out that my repositioning, from ‘the nephew who visits’ to ‘one of us’ was an event of which I was not an active participant. It was a decision made by my uncle’s friends and neighbors and the community itself but, by becoming ‘one of us’ to the people of West Cork, my own experience of Ireland was altered. Ingold (2000) wrote that dwelling re-visions the human being in a way that is transformative (Wylie 2007, p. 158). The human being dwelling is ‘immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with constituents of the dwelt-in world’ (Ingold 2000, p.41). This ontology of dwelling, Ingold contends, ‘provides us with a better way of coming to grips with the nature of human existence than does the alternative, Western ontology whose point of departure is that of a mind detached from the world’ (Ingold 2000, p. 42).

My interpretation of Ingold was that my perspective changed the moment I became an inhabitant. I was no longer ‘outside looking in’.

This change in status (to ‘one of us’) had a startling impact on the novel, as my new experiences led directly to the creation of the characters of Eamonn and Phyllis, allowing them to take on physical shape, develop traits and ways of expression, mannerisms and a psychology all a product of this
more intimate interaction with the community. I observed then recorded/reported findings in the Second Order Journal, where it sat as usable data to be called upon as Eamonn and Phyllis appeared.

Eamonn reflects both my observations of and experiences with the farmers of West Cork. Here I separate those terms, observation and experience, and address them individually, in an effort to answer the question, ‘Does the landscape have just one plot, or is it composed of many overlapping and competing story lines?’ (Wylie 2007, p. 71).

Answering these questions unearths a dichotomy. My observations of the farmers and their families kept me in the state of being whereby I was the ‘detached observer’, in essence, consciously remaining in the stance of outsider in order to collect information and facts. My experiences of the farmers’ lives was permissive, whereby I was granted permission to access their world and their worldview(s); meaning their moral code(s), method(s) of function, and belief(s). With these two ways of seeing (Wylie 2007, p. 42) in operation simultaneously, I would flip from one stance to another repeatedly, given the circumstances.

Visits to their homes (by invitation) and their dropping by to check on my progress with the renovation of the house, gave me a deeply personal understanding of the farmers’ way of life. My long history with the Irish farmer has almost always been one whereby I witness a man of immense physical strength, but that strength is brought into balance with an inherent tenderness, due largely to the responsibility of caring for their livestock. To answer Wylie’s question, ‘Does the landscape have just one plot, or is it composed of many overlapping and competing storylines?’ I would suggest that by viewing the landscape through competing lenses, I began to understand and interpret that it did in fact, have multiple overlapping and competing story lines, and at the center of these competing storylines was the multitude of roles I was (cast) in. An example of an observation appears in my Second Order Journal:
[I don’t know where he (a neighbor) gets his energy from. I watch him at work on the horizon. He is there tending his cattle long before I emerge from the house in the morning, and he is repairing a fence late into the evening, long after my own day of labor is finished],


Observations such as these extricate the experience of my existence in Ireland where I resided in the landscape as a subject both immersed in and separated from the community, described by Hetherington as a (person) ‘perceiving beings at the interface between subject and object’, (Hetherington 2003, p. 938, Emphasis added). By standing at the interface, inhabiting what Victor Turner termed ‘liminal space’ I was in two worlds (cited in Ashley 1990, p. 58). I was both an observer and an inhabitant, and in that space my intimacy with the landscape heightened. From that liminal space, paragraphs from the Second Order Journal migrated almost directly into the novel. The above journal entry is an example of this phenomenon. It glides into the introduction of Eamonn, in Chapter Seventeen:

Eamonn had watched countless neighbors and members of his own family, including his beloved sister Bridey, flee the quiet yet demanding life of farming in the Irish countryside to pursue opportunities in America, Wales and England, but he was a Bantry man, through and through. He had no interest in chasing dreams of fortune in a foreign land, nor would he have known what to do with a fortune had it been granted him. Everything his heart yearned for he found in the tending of his cattle and sheep, the cutting of peat for the fire, cooking over the open flame beneath the hearth at the north end of the house (p. 54).

Happening concurrently with observing, my role as ‘one of us’ informs the novel as well, thanks to the permission that came with being ‘one of us’. This informs the writing explicitly in the last paragraph of Chapter 25, where, just hours after arriving in Ireland, Eamonn takes Charles to the local pub:

The only other men in the pub, two old-timers sitting at the far end of the eight-stool bar, and Niall, behind the counter, all whipped their heads towards the American. Seeing the alarm in Charles’s face, Eamonn looked over his shoulder at
the three and bellowed, “Now relax, boys. He might have been born and reared in America, but he’s one of us, mind. He’s a Collins, from out near Skibbereen.”

The two old-timers beamed and raised their glasses towards Charles, while Niall tossed his bar towel over his shoulder and harkened back, “Aye, fella. Feel free to say whatever ye like in my place here.” Then, after a short pause he added, “And welcome to Ireland, boy!” Charles giggled like a child. Part of his good humor was directed at himself for his own foolish behaviour, but more deeply, Charles felt a returning calm (p. 73).

This paragraph is almost autobiographical, as it captures what I myself was feeling at the time, in terms of integration into the community. I was aware that I was affected by this acceptance, but only in investigating the narrative, do I see how my feelings spilled directly onto the page. At the same time, it is important to note that the above passage also hints at a subtle distance which was still intact. That distance comes across in the phonetic writing of the spoken accent prevalent in West Cork. This underlines the existence of Turner’s aforementioned ‘liminal space’, and the vacillating from one role to another, in ways I was not previously aware of.

Where the character Phyllis emerges from the landscape is less overt, as she is an accepting presence as much as a human form. For the purpose of demonstration, the following excerpt brings awareness to yet another very subtle shift in my own state of mind, which translates onto the page in the finished work. From Chapter Twenty Six:

Elizabeth had grown up conditioned to rush to judgment, especially of other women. However, despite her conditioning, and as a result, her rush to judgment of the woman quietly cleaning up in the kitchen, Elizabeth was overwhelmed with a completely foreign feeling. Although she was in a strange country surrounded by people she had barely met, this setting, the little cottage by the sea and, more importantly, the character of her newfound friend allowed her, for the first time in her young life, to feel truly safe. Closing her eyes, the feeling of being protected sank into her very core and lying so contentedly in the velvety comfort of the soft bed, she drifted into a blissful state, as if the most frail, brittle
part of her Soul was being held by the strong arms of a soothing, loving Presence (p. 76).

Elizabeth’s comfort with Phyllis reflects my own feelings of closeness to my uncle, who had given me the old house. Like Elizabeth, I felt a safety and protection in my uncle’s presence that I had never experienced with my own father. Thus, while the genders are different in the novel, the feeling of ‘safety’ I felt with my uncle carried directly into the novel, informing the narrative unequivocally.

These two pieces of writing emerged specifically as mirrors of what I, the writer, was experiencing. Where previously I had friendly, but superficial relationships with neighbours and the community itself, I now had a bond.

Before closing this section, I note the crucial role the employment of skills acquired in my training and practice as a psychotherapist played in both the ‘field work’ and the extrication of data necessary to this section.

In my psychotherapeutic work, it was imperative that I be competent to observe from three separate perspectives, simultaneously. First, I had to observe what was happening with the patient in front of me, on a moment by moment basis. Second, I had to observe what was happening within myself as a result of what the patient was expressing, verbally and non-verbally and third, I had to develop and utilise a ‘third-eye’ which was capable of observing that intangible ‘space between the two of us’ (Yalom 2002, p. 23). I was constantly evaluating and interpreting what was occurring in the six feet of empty space that separated the patient and me. At any given moment there could be variant swings between arcs of tension, deep understanding and empathy, compassion, and/or negative transference.

While my interactions with the rural community, neighbors and relatives were never of a ‘clinical’ nature, these skills were employed as observational techniques to extract and examine data. In fact, were it not for the presence of these tools, a meaningful investigation of my own process and experience, from varying perspectives would have proved difficult, if not impossible.
In this section I have investigated the effects that my role as inhabitant, as opposed to visitor, had on the novel. I now investigate the fourth and final question of this inquiry.

4.5-The Landscape of Ireland as Character, and its Effect on ‘The Players’

In this, the final section on Landscape, I will summarize an investigation of the deconstruction of Wylie’s statement: ‘Nature plus Culture equals landscape’ (Wylie 2007, p. 8). To paraphrase; the land plus the people in it equals landscape. The question I put forth is, ‘What is the role of the land as a character? I interpret both the symbolic and real relationships between place and character by asking, ‘How does the landscape inform the human character?’

4.5.1-Ireland Expressed As Character

As Wylie stated, ‘Nature plus Culture equals landscape.’ I equate this to ‘setting’ as ‘character’, meaning that from the perspective of Landscape, the setting becomes character and therefore informs surrounding characters. Here, I borrow from the rich description offered by Denis Donoghue in Jay Ellis’s No Place For Home (2008), a critical analysis of the writing of Cormac McCarthy. Donoghue writes of McCarthy’s employment of what he calls, high passages, McCarthy’s written descriptions of the topography, and it is these high passages which, Donoghue claims, ‘speak up for values the characters could not express; for regions, places, landscapes, vistas…and for times not of our time’ (Ellis 2008, p. 2). This description articulates how I hoped the country of Ireland itself would make its presence felt in the novel, existing both as a ‘setting’ and also, as a sublime character in the story; a character alone and a character influencing and informing human players. Frank McCourt employs this same notion with tremendous skill in his award-winning autobiography Angela’s Ashes: A Memoir (1996), but I mention that his intention and result are in opposition to my own in Saoradh. As such, the following is for example only, to illustrate comprehension.
McCourt’s Ireland, and more specifically the city of Limerick, is both ‘setting’ and ‘character’ for a horrific and bleak tale of an impoverished childhood. *Ireland the landscape* is harsh, rigid and punitive. It is only in the dialogue and action of McCourt’s *human* characters, where suffering can turn into laughter. Thus, McCourt’s human characters are essential to offset the physical and emotional torture inflicted by *Ireland the character*.

In Saoradh, I wished to employ the same methodology, meaning the presentation of Ireland both as a setting and as a character, but a setting and character possessing traits opposed to the Ireland of McCourt. Rather, my interpretation of Ireland was to be framed by the Greek philosophical definition of The Earth as ‘Gaia’; the living mother, the nurturer and protector, possessing traits of dignity and resilience, enduring and surviving a life of pain, which has endured as a theme from Antiquity to the twenty-first century.

I framed these traits in the first two paragraphs of Chapter Seventeen, where ‘Ireland as character’ is first introduced, through a brief telling of Eamonn’s family’s story:

The family history of Eamonn Mahoney was inextricably intertwined with the very essence of the nation of Ireland itself. For as long as records had been kept, Mahoneys had farmed the same plot of land on the vast hill overlooking the town of Bantry and the sanctity of Bantry Bay. For hundreds of years, Mahoneys had tilled the land, grown the simplest of crops and had kept a variety of farm animals under their care for use in trade and for sustenance, primarily cows and sheep. For centuries, the Mahoneys and millions of families like them had been little more than glorified slaves to their British masters, for the land of Ireland itself did not belong to the Irish, rather, it was leased to them by British land owners, the actual owners of the deeds to property. Generations of Mahoneys were, quintessentially, the very definition of “guests in their own country.”

Each month, farmers would form a long line outside the manor of the local land baron, in the Mahoney’s case it was the vast and opulent estate that has been known throughout history as Blackrock, Seafield and ultimately, Bantry House.
After suffering the humiliation of trudging into its lavish entrance, they would pay their monthly rent for the land they farmed. Severe penalties awaited those who were either unable to pay, or were late with payment and over the centuries, countless brokenhearted Irish families were thrown off the land their ancestors had farmed for decades. However, Eamonn’s father and his uncles were to play a large role in changing the entire face of the nation (p. 53).

This introduction, while containing an overt human element, also contains what I wanted to be the sublime feel of ‘Ireland as character’ through the subtle insertion of mood and action in the text. There are dignified qualities in the introduction of Eamonn which are accentuated and intertwined with Ireland’s history. Both Eamonn and Ireland are presented as strong presences which I believed would off-set some of the weak traits of both Kenny and Charles.

There is nothing subtle about Rory’s existence as regards Landscape. He is intertwined with the elements. His is a state of continuous communion with the land, and he is, as a person, essentially ‘of the land’. Phyllis is also of the land, literally, as the origin of her name is ‘green bough’.

As noted earlier, landscape is changed by its inhabitants and as Kenny, Charles and Elizabeth integrate with Ireland, Ireland’s character is mirrored through their experience of the land. For Elizabeth, Ireland is the ‘protective mother’ whose arms she rushes to in a time of crisis. For Charles, Ireland is the equivalent of Kenny’s older sister Katherine, introduced in Chapter Thirty Four; the stronger sibling who insulates him from the tragedy of his circumstances. Charles is naïve, in much the way Kenny would have been before being sent to America. In this way, Ireland insulates him from his own simple-mindedness, providing him with distractions, both physical and human, to keep him from facing the magnitude of his situation. With Elizabeth and Charles, what is illustrated is what Ireland does for them.

For Kenny, ‘Ireland the character’ is a much more complex entity, as his relationship with the landscape is filled with paradox. Ireland is his symbolic ‘mother’ as Gaia, in a much more nostalgic manner than the
disturbing relationship with his birth mother, as described in his unsettling visit to his family in Chapter Thirty Four. His relationship with ‘Ireland the character’ has two, distinct moments of poignancy. The first is in Chapter Nineteen, when Kenny first sets eyes on Ireland, after a sixteen-year absence:

As the Queen Mary glided by the first sights of land, Kenny felt a strange sensation in the pit of his stomach; a glowing warmth, a pleasant nausea almost. The wind blew strong in his face, but he doubted its presence was responsible for the single tear than ran down his left cheek. In the emergence of this wild landscape before him he experienced something he hadn't known his entire life; he was home. The feeling unsettled him (p. 60).

This passage is directly linked to the last three lines of the novel, in the Epilogue:

I ponder a life spent struggling to prove my existence mattered, only to find my worst fear realized. I am shunned, irrelevant. I stare out over the haunting waters of Bantry Bay and my heart turns grey with regret, as I imagine what might have been, (p. 237).

In these two excerpts, I invoke ‘Ireland the character’ to serve as the vehicle to elicit Kenny’s (unresolved) inner torment and pain. In Kenny’s existence, Ireland the character is the majestic scenery (and non-judgmental mother) cradling his broken spirit. However, Ireland the character has no soothing answer for him. He will never know ‘what might have been’. I note here that the shifts from both first person to third person in the text, and changes in tense are addressed in the chapter on Narrative.

In this section, I have described the role of ‘setting as character’ and invoked illustrations to answer the first part of the final question of my inquiry of landscape. I now move to the second part of the question: ‘How is Ireland the character reflected in the human players?’
4.5.2-Ireland Expressed Through Character

Due to my work as a psychotherapist, the first draft of the novel was heavily laden with psychological terms and jargon, and I was urged by my supervisors to revise and remove technical terms from the narrative. In revision, I sought to find a balance between an out-and-out description of the characters’ inner dialogue or ‘inner weather’. My desire was to impart equity between authoritatively telling the reader what was going on in the characters’ heads, and, through diligent construction, efficiently showing the reader the characters’ emotions and psychological make-up, employing the landscape of Ireland (as character) to draw their feelings out (Booth 1961, pp 3, 12). The challenge of telling v. showing proved to be one of the most significant confrontations I faced in revision.

I again refer to Donoghue in Ellis (2008) in the writing of Cormac McCarthy, as he describes McCarthy’s characters through the metaphor of ‘inner weather’:

McCarthy(‘s) characters do experience ‘inner weather’, even if we seldom receive any direct sense of that weather…McCarthy’s descriptive modes therefore enable the inference of psychology in a style that refuses (usually) to indulge in standard psychological techniques, such as first person, interior monologue, free direct discourse, or even direct indication of psychology from the narrator, (Ellis 2008, pp. 1-2).

An example of this technique is illustrated in this excerpt from McCarthy’s prize-winning novel The Road (2006).

With the first gray light he rose and left the boy sleeping and walked out to the road and squatted and studied the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless. He thought the month was October but he wasn’t sure. He hadn’t kept a calendar for years. They were moving south. There’d be no surviving another winter here, (McCarthy 2006, p. 2).
Here, McCarthy links the landscape to the mood and disposition of the character without overtly telling or showing what the character feels. I understand what the character experiences through what the landscape projects. The landscape itself is bleak, however, by linking that with the character’s not being sure about the month, I can sense desperation in the character himself. McCarthy has neither stated nor shown that the character is, in fact, desperate. He utilises the landscape to do it for him.

To address this in my own work, I again invoked the notion of ‘Ireland as character’ and used it to extract emotion in a more subtle manner. I also hoped to ‘paint a picture’ of each player using ‘Ireland as character’ as the brush and palette. I employed the same psychotherapeutic diagram I use in my practice (and employed in Chapter One). The diagram is the tool for deconstructing the effect of ‘Ireland the character’ on each human character. To give the reader a visual image, I return to a metaphor involving the fisherman. Each character is a fish. I am the fisherman. Ireland is the sea. Once caught, each ‘fish’ is inspected using the diagram to discover the effect of the sea on the fish.

Unlike in Chapter One, where the focus was on the Critic Ego State, here the emphasis is on the Child, Adult and Higher Self. For the reader’s convenience, I reinsert Fig 1.2, my psychotherapeutic diagram, to more easily interpret which Ego State is informed and affected by Ireland the character, and how that is translated onto the written page.
Offered now is a synopsis of the characters in Saoradh, after the ‘fishing experiment’ has been performed. The results illustrate how each human character (or fish) has been affected by the sea (Ireland the character), thereby symbolically representing unique, specific states of being, traits and aspects of ‘Ireland the character’. Note that the character’s birthplace is not the issue here. The players are presented in the order of the impact Ireland has on them.

**Rory**

Rory is the ‘Earth Spirit’ of Ireland, born of her womb. He is the Higher Self of Ireland, the Enlightened Ireland, the ‘Individuated’ Ireland. He is the untainted purity of experience, the ephemeral mist that hovers over the fields of Ireland. He is Ireland’s unspoiled beauty and unflappable temperament. He is Ireland as it might have been, stripped of oppression. He is the transcendent Ireland of autonomy and independence. But he is more. He is the vast, immeasurable, infinite, unknowable and unrealized potential of Ireland (and humankind).
Eamonn

Eamonn is the backbone of Ireland. He is the grounded, mature Adult; a balance of Emotion and Intellect. He is the accommodating host. He absorbs the earthy intelligence and wisdom of 'Ireland as knowing mother'. He is Ireland's thoughtfulness and its collective spirit:

He could predict bad weather days in advance. He knew the exact night each of his cows would give birth months before they calved. So sharp was his insight and so fair was his character than he was called upon often to settle various disputes which, in another time, would have ended in violence, reprisals or lawsuits (p. 54).

Phyllis

Phyllis is the embodiment of the Adult female Ireland, as dutiful caretaker and caregiver. She is also the proud, resilient Ireland, working through her Emotional pain, overcoming personal adversity and suffering (being barren) with grace and dignity:

It would have brought great comfort to Elizabeth to know that Phyllis hadn’t the slightest interest in interrogating her about her appearance in Ireland; the reasons for it, the timing of it, or any other matter at all. For Phyllis was a woman unlike any other Elizabeth had known before. The farmer’s wife was perfectly content to mind her own business (p. 75).

Kenny

Kenny is the abused Child of Ireland, who experiences Ireland the character as punitive, deeply confusing and unsettling. He is uncomfortable in its presence. He sits between Emotional damage and Physical awkwardness, perennially in the Child Ego State. He uses his Intellect to overcome his (acknowledged but repressed) feelings of inadequacy. In much the same way that a (real) child is forever seeking praise and affirmation from his/her parent(s), Kenny turns his ‘abuse’ (in the form of rejection) into action, driven by a lonely, desperate but defiant voice that cries out, 'I'll show them!' He seeks validation from Ireland the character (his roots) and, although
misguided, his motives and subsequent actions are grounded in that quest for redemption, recognition and affirmation by Ireland the character.

**Mr. Daly**

Mr. Daly is the brotherhood of Ireland, offering Adult assistance and strength in difficult times. He is the expressive and thoughtful Adult of Ireland. He also embraces the harsh life of Ireland’s farmer with grace.

**Jimmy**

Jimmy is the playful Child of Ireland. He is the subject of amusing stories. He is the wit and carefree fatalism of Ireland.

**The Patriarch**

The Patriarch is the ungrateful Child of Ireland. Sent to America, his Intellect and aspirations bring him wealth (but not contentment), and his reflections on Ireland are full of spite and dismissal.

*The Patriarch never saw himself as “one of them.”* He sniggered at the drunks, made light of the deaths and cursed the maimed for their carelessness, always quick with an explanation which exculpated him of any part in the countless mishaps. In his criticism of his countrymen, he was merciless and brutal (p. 4).

**Elizabeth**

Elizabeth is at first the confused, bewildered Child of Ireland, vacillating wildly between contrary feelings of being safe and abandoned. She is the ‘forgotten Ireland’ of history; the geographical isolation of Ireland from Continental Europe and the emotional isolation of Ireland as the friendless defender of its own shores. She defends her shores well, and in the end, emerges as an autonomous Adult (Independent Ireland), through diligence. Ultimately, she wrests back control, determined to oversee her own destiny.
Charles

Charles is the helpless Child and immature Adult of Ireland. As the helpless Child, he is emotionally frozen, thus occupying himself by engaging physically with Ireland the character, as a method of diversion. As the immature Adult, he is the wide-eyed tourist who appreciates the natural beauty of Ireland, but develops no authentic relationship with the landscape, its people or the culture. He ‘admires the view’, but leaves no impact on the landscape whatsoever. He is the footprint on the shore of Ireland, to be washed away and forgotten immediately upon his exit.

Roy

Roy is the forgotten Child of Ireland, whose very existence was formed through the immaturity and carelessness of his parents. He is Emotionally stunted, feeling worthless and irrelevant.

4.6-Conclusion

In this chapter I have borrowed practical methods from disparate fields in order to interrogate the role that landscape plays in four specific aspects of the accompanying novel, Saoradh. In doing so, I have been able to accurately convey how, as regards my relationships with Singapore, America and Ireland and, concurrently, the roles I was either cast in or cast myself in, produced specific data which directly informs the novel. I have also used my own psychotherapeutic model to deconstruct the influence of the landscape on human character(s) or ‘players’.

I move now to discuss the narrative process at work in the creation of the novel.
Chapter 5-Narration; Ahoy!

Writers aren't exactly people...they're a whole bunch of people trying to be one person—F. Scott Fitzgerald

5.1-Introduction

In this chapter I explain the four main narrative techniques employed in the telling of the story which is the novel, Saoradh; the confession, the external focalizer, the omniscient narrator and the reporter. As is the convention in scholarship, terms are used to highlight the inspection of the novel. I make two statements here which are necessary. These terms are not my own. They are borrowed from various authors’ articles or books on ‘narrative’, ‘voice’, ‘point of view’ and ‘writing’. The terms selected are inserted for one purpose only; each term accurately defines what I was doing with the narration of the novel. Secondly, as these terms existed prior to my using them, each term’s history is rich. For example, I could write exhaustively on the use of confessional; its history and implementation as instrument, beginning with Saint Augustine. I believe that that is another thesis entirely. My intention is to give the reader a clear understanding of the different narrators of the novel.

To assist with the clarification of the terms employed in light of this project, I offer a comparison of how these same techniques of narration are employed by J.M. Coetzee in the novel Youth (2000). However, I also highlight how these same techniques differ from the narration of Saoradh, in style. This is done to offer comparison and contrast, and to demonstrate understanding.

In conducting this investigation, the individual voices which speak to the reader throughout the novel are brought into light for inspection. Invoking a variety of forms of narration was done for three reasons: to tell the story in a way which held the reader’s attention, to evoke emotional reactions from the reader and to lead the story to a reasonable conclusion.
Abbott claimed that the narrator is variously described as an instrument, a construction, or a device wielded by the author (Abbot 2002, p. 63). What this chapter answers is a series of fundamental questions.

1-Who (specifically, at a precise moment) is narrating the story?

2-Does the narrator change?

3-How many narrators are there in this book?

4-How do these perspectives come together in a coherent way?

5.2-Focalization

As Bakhtin suggested, a novel is a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised (Bakhtin 1991, p. 280). Although an awkward word, for the purposes of this chapter, focalization refers specifically to the lens through which we see characters and events of the narrative (Abbott 2002, p. 66). I favor the term focalization over voice, as I believe ‘point of view’ is a clearer way to present my findings. A discussion of ‘voice’ will quickly become convoluted and difficult to follow, as previous efforts have shown me. A brief example is that the novel is narrated by a voice; the repentant Kenny. However, the writer is the creator of that voice. At other times, the voice speaking to the reader is a voice giving facts and illustrating scenes. To jump in and out of these voices became difficult to track without losing their potency and overall clarity.

Thus, focalization sets the stage for an inquiry of the narration of the novel. I highlight at the outset that in Saoradh, focalization is not unilateral. However, by invoking focalization, I answer questions one and two simultaneously. An answer to “Who is telling the story?” leads the reader directly to a clear understanding that there are multiple narrators of the novel. The answer to question two, “Does the storyteller change?” is “Yes”, but the different storytellers are revealed through this chapter, segment by segment. There is not a single, fixed perspective which narrates the story to the reader from beginning to end. Importantly, although the narrator may change, the
reader is aware of the shift and therefore, aware that the story is 'being told' to her. The following three sections illustrate this point.

5.3-The Confessional

After killing the red-haired man, I took myself off to Quinn’s for an oyster supper—Michael Cox.

The above opening line to The Meaning of Night (2006) grabbed my attention the instant I read it. I was immediately ‘hooked’ into the story. Booth states that we react to all narrators as persons (Booth 1961, p. 271). As my original outline dictated, Saoradh would open with a first-person admission by a narrator, in this case, ‘a person’ who is admitting the futility of his life.

This methodology was chosen for three reasons. First and foremost, I believed that it would create suspense. A confessional of the sort written in the Prologue can only occur as the result of reflection on the part of the person confessing. To ‘confess’ hints that the confessor has done something questionable enough to warrant a confession. I believed this method would hook the reader, for it provided an overt opportunity for the reader’s imagination to take over (Frey 2000, p. 16). I present the opening two sentences of the novel.

I shall not insult the reader by attempting to deceive her into believing that what follows is anything more than what is intended. This is not an act of contrition by a man who is seeking absolution, for no penance could be served which would suit the offenses committed (p. 1).

As Cox had done with me, I hoped that the reader’s imagination would be engaged, and as such, simultaneously, her curiosity would be piqued. The second reason for employing the confessional is if the reader’s imagination is engaged, she might start to ask questions: ‘What did he (the confessor) do?’ followed by ‘Who (meaning which character) is confessing?’ This second question, ‘Who is confessing?’ is one which each of the three readers who read the first draft asked me throughout their reading of the novel. Interestingly, at various stages, their perception of who was confessing changed as they moved deeper into the story, which suggested
to me that the confessional was useful in drawing the reader actively into the unfolding of the story, not as observer but as participant (this has been highlighted in Chapter Three). With the confessional beginning at the start of the novel, the reader is drawn in as if, Boulter claims, they were a close friend, privy to the secret thoughts and feelings of this character (Boulter 2007, p. 151).

I state here that thirdly, with the confessional my intention was also to set an understanding in place whereby all subsequent narration would be relayed by a ‘reliable’ narrator (Booth 1961, p. 75). In accomplishing this, an unspoken contract was reached by author and reader. By beginning the novel with a confessional, subsequent narrative(s) would be reliable, for as Booth stated, ‘they are dictated in accordance with the norms of the work’ (Booth 1961, p. 158). By starting the novel with a statement which implied total honesty, the reader would be more willing to believe the subsequent story was truthful and factually correct. For the sake of history, St. Augustine (1992 [397]) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1904 [1782]) are oft-cited originators of this method. I point out that Augustine’s ‘confessions’ were of his experiences of the presence of God, while Rousseau’s was a painfully honest account of his own life, told by him.

With my own employment of the confessional as narrative technique demonstrated, I now offer a comparison to another work, J.M. Coetzee’s Youth (2000).

5.3.1-Coetzee as Confessor

In his novel Youth, Coetzee (2000) invokes a confessional narrative in a manner unlike the method used in Saoradh. Coetzee’s protagonist, a young South African emigrant, finds himself lost and wanting in the strange and alienating landscape of London in the 1960’s. The ‘confessions’ of the protagonist reveal a haunted young man, John, who highlights his own deficiencies and in doing so, separates himself from all other characters in a narrative full of loneliness, confusion and desperation. Unlike my own confessional, written in the first person, Coetzee successfully accomplishes
the undertaking of writing a confessional utilizing the third person, with remarkable effect. To emphasize the protagonist’s isolation, Coetzee introduces characters who have ‘more’ than John, as in the following excerpt:

He and Paul walk down to the beach, swim, come back, play chess. Then he catches a train home. It is his first glimpse of Paul’s home life, and he is full of envy. Why can he not have a nice, normal relationship with his own mother? He wishes his mother were like Paul’s..., (p. 18).

The final sentence of the excerpt, ‘He wishes...’ conveys the confession of John’s feelings of longing and despair, but Coetzee creates this intimacy while employing the third person. This confessional style carries on throughout the one hundred sixty nine pages, without ever becoming repetitive. Coetzee skilfully maintains a confessional narrative style without once deviating from the unorthodox ‘he’. In Saoradh, Kenny’s first person confessional is overt. Coetzee’s/John’s is far more subtle.

As we will see, Coetzee steps out of the confessional and employs other narrative techniques as well. However, in this demonstration, it is highlighted to show how Coetzee invokes the same technique, the confessional, for the same purpose, to create emotional intimacy with the reader. He does this for the same reasons I employed the confessional in Saoradh. However, in using the third person, Coetzee employs a method I had not entertained until this study of his text.

5.4-Distance and the External Focalizer

Returning back to Saoradh, I move on to the second narrative technique for inspection and explanation. With the confessional starting off the novel, I felt it was critical to persevere with and sustain the intimacy it created. As such, I wanted to keep the characters emotionally close to the reader (Boulter 2007, p. 150). I had no intention of writing the body of the novel in the first person. However, it was necessary to invite the reader into the private worlds of specific characters at key points, particularly early in the story when the characters are being introduced. To accomplish this, the reader would have to access the private world of each character, in order to understand their
psychology. In other words, my measure of success would be how effectively the reader could comprehend and more importantly accept, why each character spoke and acted in the manner they did. Genette invoked the term focalization in saying that narrative mood is dependent on the ‘distance’ and ‘perspective’ of the narrator (Genette 1980, p. 163). Bal has coined this prospect as engaging an ‘external focalizer’ (Bal 1985, p. 106), meaning a narrator who informs the reader of intimate (and for my purposes, psychological) details about the character(s) through inclusion. In doing so, this ‘external focalizer’ is the author himself and never is the voice of a character in the novel (Herman & Vervaeck 2005, p. 121). An example of this follows. In Chapter Two, the reader is introduced to the feebleness of Charles in a way that Charles himself would not know. In doing so, Charles psychological makeup takes shape for the reader and expectations of behaviour are set:

Thanks solely to his surname, Junior was recruited into the most elite of the secret societies on campus and remained a member throughout his inauspicious academic career. By rubbing shoulders with the sons of some of the richest and most influential men in America, Junior absorbed an identity he had never quite managed to forge on his own (p. 6).

This description is a peek into the inner world of Charles, but it is ‘told’ to the reader by an ‘external focalizer’; the author’s voice, and not through the voice of a character residing in the novel. Although Kenny does in fact go on to exploit Charles’s pervasive weakness, it is the authorial voice and not Kenny the character himself, who sets Charles up as a feeble person. This ‘external focalizer’ is used to reveal inner truths about Elizabeth, Eamonn and Phyllis as well.

Reverting back to Booth’s proposition that we react to all narrators as persons (Booth 1961, p. 271), I note that Goodman goes on to say that in novels we identify with the omniscient narrator (Goodman 1954, p. 153), the ‘person’ who knows all. With that in mind, it is only fair to say that in the description of the predominant characters’ inner world(s) (or in revealing their deepest secrets) the ‘external focalizer’ and the ‘omniscient narrator’, as
 personas, are entwined. Both are utilised by the author as instruments, to heighten intimacy between reader and character. By engaging these specific perspectives; the confessional, the external focalizer and the omniscient narrator, I felt I was able to maintain the closeness and thereby minimize the distance between reader and character.

I now reintroduce Coetzee into the discussion, to illustrate his own use of the omniscient narrator in *Youth* (2000).

**5.4.1-Coetzee as Omniscient Narrator**

As pointed out earlier, Coetzee does not use the first person when employing a confessional technique. In fact, all of *Youth* is written in the third person. When Coetzee draws the reader into the world of John using the omniscient narrator, meaning a narrator who informs the reader of intimate details about John, he does so through inclusion. The way he does this is not by telling what’s going on in John’s head. Coetzee shows the reader John’s feelings about himself in the form of self-questioning. The reader ‘sees’ things from John’s perspective through *invitation*; essentially, the reader is peeking inside John’s head. This evokes sympathy for him in a very profound way, as illustrated in the following excerpt, where John, having been abandoned by a sexual partner who suffers from mental illness, ponders his abilities to live the life he has dreamed, as a successful poet:

> Is that the kind of person he must descend to being before he can be an artist? And anyway, whether mad or miserable, how can one write when tiredness is like a gloved hand gripping one’s brain and squeezing? Or is what he likes to call tiredness in fact a test, a disguised test, a test he is moreover failing? After tiredness, are there further tests to come, as many as there are circles in Dante’s Hell? (p. 66).

Coetzee repeatedly steps into the role of omniscient narrator to bring us deeper inside John’s private world. Coetzee illustrates John’s self-doubt with questions asked of John, *by* John. In doing so with such ease, Coetzee never needs to ‘tell’ the reader that John is tired, miserable or lonely; John’s questions of himself do this for Coetzee the author. The reader never asks
how we get this insight into John’s inner workings. By employing the technique so adroitly, the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief is never uncomfortably interrupted.

5.4.2-Pirating Coetzee

Coetzee’s approach of self-questioning, where the character reveals his inner thoughts, doubts and desperation is borrowed in specific moments in my own novel. In particular, the early stages of Kenny’s ill-fated romance with Penelope. Mixing ‘telling’ with self questioning, my aim was to highlight Kenny’s awkwardness.

“Oh, Kenny. You are such a dear.”
Kenny balked, not knowing what to do. Should he lean over and kiss her? Should he not? (p. 134-5).

I note here that in Youth, nearly all revelation of John’s inner world is addressed through an omniscient author employing the technique of self-questioning. In Saoradh, self-questioning is sporadic, while ‘telling is more present. A major reason for this difference is that John is an extremely isolated character, who dominates the pages of the novel. I believe that having a single character so omnipresent lends itself to continually using self-questioning without the technique exhausting itself. I believed that using the technique for all characters in Saoradh would have lessened its effectiveness with Kenny.

Having now answered question three of my inquiry, ‘How many storytellers are there in this book?’ by demonstrating the three previously discussed; the confessional, the external focalizer and the omniscient narrator, a fourth and final narrator is inspected in the next section.

5.5-The Reporter

I now step away from the intimacy of the engagement of the reader with the individual characters and inspect the text as a whole, in order to answer the final question; ‘How do these perspectives come together in a coherent way?’
I introduce three new terms; report, slant and filter, to accomplish the
task of bringing this inspection of narrative to a conclusion.

The body of the story contained in Saoradh is reported, meaning that
it is told by what Chatman defined as a narrator ‘who is not observing it
through involvement’ (Chatman 1978, p. 160). This reporter is in fact, Kenny,
however it is not the Kenny who appears in the bulk of the text as a
character, it is a Kenny who is reflecting on his failed life and reporting the
story of that failed life to the reader. Kenny’s narration occurs after his fall
from grace. Kenny does so through engaging what Chatman termed slant
(Chatman 1990, p. 140), which, for my purposes, refers to Kenny’s
‘ideological attitude(s)’, (Chatman 1990, p. 140). Kenny’s slant has been
altered, through failure. He can only report his story in the way he does by
acknowledging the futility of his life. Thus, the confessional is necessary to
put forth the proposition that his reporting is accurate. He sets himself from
the start as a reliable narrator through the confession.

Chatman also used the term filter to describe the ‘thing’ which
mediates the function of a character’s consciousness (Chatman 1990, p.
148). Rory’s actions, discovered by Kenny in Rory’s personal journals (and
first proposed in the Prologue) are the ‘filter’ which changes Kenny’s
perception of his life. The journals alter his consciousness from one of self-
absorption and narcissism to a perspective filled with purposeful reflection on
his own actions. He could not ‘tell the truth’ about his life, and thus could not
‘narrate’ the novel in the way he does, without the ‘filter’ Rory provides.
Kenny reports the story of himself, Charles and Elizabeth, but his slant is
reflective and Rory’s filter has provided his change in perspective.

However, there are passages of the novel which are not reported by
Kenny. For example, when Elizabeth and Charles have their confrontation,
Kenny is in London. This event is reported by the omniscient narrator, not by
Kenny the reporter.
5.5.1-Coetzee as The Reporter

Coetzee also invokes a reporter in Youth, but there is a fundamental difference in his use. If there is an increase in ‘distance’ between the reader and John, it occurs when Coetzee fills in the blanks by ‘reporting’ the events of John’s life. For this, he steps out of John’s own perception of himself and allows a third party to ‘inspect’ him for flaws. An example of this occurs at the beginning of Chapter Nine:

In England girls pay no attention to him, perhaps because there still lingers about his person an air of colonial gaucherie, perhaps simply because his clothes are not right (p. 71).

In this excerpt, it is an unnamed ‘citizen of England’ who reports England’s perception of John. This reporter’s slant is one of a native Briton. The filter of the reporter is John’s physical appearance; an appearance which doesn’t lend itself to ‘fitting in’ with other Britons like the reporter. This reporting is always a fleeting entry, used for underlining John’s sad plight. It is dipped into for no more than two sentences, then Coetzee slips back into either the confessor or the omniscient narrator.

I highlight here, that I was/am not nearly as adept at intermittent use of the reporter as Coetzee. In Saoradh, there are large sections whereby the ‘reporter’ is employed to ‘tell’ events or move the plot forward. Part of this has to do with the role that Landscape played in the novel. However, part of it also has to do with the fact that Coetzee is a true master, whose virtuosity and command of the art is something merely to draw inspiration from. Having read a great deal of his work, there are many lessons on narration to be learned. I have highlighted only three here.
5.6-Conclusion

In this chapter, I have invoked several terms used in literary criticism to demonstrate narrative methods employed in the construction of the novel. I have interrogated narrative as an entity unto itself and dissected my own methodology and usage(s). I have also put forth, for the sake of comparison, another author’s work. I acknowledge the fields of narratology (Jahn 2005) and semiotics (Eco 1976) for their contributions, but for the purpose of this thesis, it was important for me to use terminology which I believed would demonstrate specific techniques employed, in the clearest and most concise manner. This chapter has outlined my comprehension and understanding of the terms I have highlighted and demonstrated alternatives to invoke and utilise those same theories.

I now move on to investigate creative process.
Chapter 6-The Process of Processing Processes; Navigating Icebergs, Fog Banks and the Quantum Field

We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection—Anais Nin

If there is a special Hell for writers it would be in the forced contemplation of their own works—John Dos Passos

6.1-Introduction

Although further inspections would follow in subsequent drafts, this chapter is written from the perspective of having interrogated the novel after the third draft. This chapter offers an informed expression of the process of examining and explaining my creative process. These are two separate issues. On the one hand is the creative process itself; an abstract phenomenon. On the other is an explanation of that process. Thus, what is proposed is an inspection that is ultimately singular; to accurately describe the phenomenon of the space where unconscious messages which appear in the story were created. I was looking for ideas (or ideals) which existed beneath the surface of the novel without my knowing about them at the time of writing, for the purpose of then inspecting them to try to uncover and assert where, meaning from what ‘place’, they came from. Booth terms this as ‘the new style search for the meaning which the work communicates or symbolises’ (Booth 1961, p. 73). In essence, I was investigating the scenes, one by one, to answer two questions, ‘Are there sub-textual suggestions woven into the novel completely outside of my awareness?’ Only an answer to this first question would lead me to an answer to the second, and much more important question; if so, how does this phenomenon occur?’

My interests lay exclusively with the interaction between what has been known as the ‘conscious’ and the ‘unconscious’ (Freud 1923, 1940). By unconscious, I mean notions which were occurring in the text, but were not overtly placed there to move the story forward or convey meaning. Therefore, the content uncovered is not the issue. This chapter is put forth for Creative Writers to use as a guideline to examine their own text to answer the questions, ‘What else is going on here?’ and ‘How did this happen?’ I
return to a familiar metaphor, only this time, I am the fisherman and the novel is the sea. By once again taking out my fishing pole, I am dropping several different lures in the water to see which one is best to ‘catch’ answers about the process of writing.

The findings presented are a middle ground between the quotes which begin this chapter. I wanted to ‘taste in retrospection’ and voluntarily underwent a ‘forced contemplation’. In doing so, what is being put forth are the techniques for a writer to inspect his or her own work, to gain further insight into the creative process.

6.2-Phenomenology in Writing

To frame my goals properly, I point out that I cannot define what the unconscious is. I can only report a discovery of its existence, as a phenomenon, due to my own experience with discovering it at work in the novel. I begin with background information and specify and define terminology accordingly.

It is helpful to understand the model of subjectivity put forth by Freud (1933). Freud’s concept is described in terms of an iceberg. The part of the iceberg that can be seen above the water is the tiny part available to consciousness; below the water is the vast domain of the Id; unconscious, unseen and powerful (Blasko 1999). Freud (1933) stated that if anyone speaks of consciousness, we know immediately and from our own most personal experience what is meant by it. For example, I am conscious of the fact that at this moment I am typing on a computer keyboard. Freud went on to say that what is conscious is conscious only for the moment (1940). So, while I was typing the previous sentence, I was not conscious of my typing, for I was focused on referencing Freud. I was only conscious of being conscious while typing the line about being conscious of typing. I point this out to emphasize that my experience during the act of sitting in a chair, writing the novel, was in large part a phenomenon; my fingers were transcribing action, detailing description or transcribing dialogue. Simultaneously, I was breathing regularly, my heart was beating, my muscles
adjusted my posture periodically, for comfort. All of this ‘stuff’ was going on, but what I was conscious of was only the computer screen in front of me; the letters emerging one by one. In Freudian terms, what I am interested in uncovering is the exchange occurring between the bottom of the iceberg and the top. I add that this will be a subject for further study, as it is a proposition beyond the scope of this exegesis to fully encapsulate. Every scene that was produced as a series of typed letters in the alphabet was ‘happening’ somewhere. As stated in Chapter Three, I was writing a ‘movie that was playing in my head’, but there was no literal movie screen I was looking at. This interplay between conscious and unconscious is what fascinates me, and what I wish to articulate.

Although Freud formulated the concept well before, he first used the term ‘unconscious’ in 1896 (Freud 1923). Much has happened since then, but despite advances in cognitive science, the debate over a physical ‘space’ where the unconscious, as an independent entity, resides in the brain, remains. Thus, the unconscious in Creative Writing has been a hot topic. Is the unconscious a (hidden) vault, a ‘store of ideas’ which can be ‘tapped into’? (Burroway 2007, p. 245). Is it, as Gardner proposed, an interplay between writer and reader, a ‘fictional dream’ which ‘the writer must evoke in the mind of the reader, and which begins in his own mind’ (Gardner 1991, p. 139). This latter description is what I am focusing on. I write, then I read back what is written. What is being examined the space where that activity; the to and fro between the conscious and the unconscious, happens. I align myself with Bargh and Morsella whereby ‘unconscious processes are defined in terms of their unintentional nature and the inherent lack of awareness’ (Bargh & Morsella 2008, p. 78). What I aim to do is to become aware of the unconscious processes at work.

Jung (1946) moved past Freud’s iceberg, to view existence not as a series of interacting internal systems, but as the individual interfacing with a collective unconscious, meaning a common field of unconscious shared by all humans. This can be explained as a sea we all dip a toe in and out of. Thus, individual systems (me) collude with other systems (the sea) to create
experience. Krippner and Combs explain the human personality in Jungian terms by stating that the human personality is a complex system in which process structures such as the ego, persona and self interact with the individual and the collective unconscious (Krippner & Combs 1998, p. 81).

To conduct this study, it was important to inhabit the role of conceptual theorist, defined by Krippner and Combs as ‘a scientist who constructs bridges between paradigms, believing that nature must be treated holistically and conceptually’ (Krippner & Combs 1998, p. 84). Conceptual Theorists engage in divergent thinking, drawing on ideas from across disciplines and fields of inquiry to reach a deeper understanding of the world and one’s place in it (Guilford and Hoepfner 1971, pp. 469-479). This study also draws upon the work of Guildord (1959) and Pibram (1981), whose efforts focused on examining the brain to suggest how it works.

6.3-A Quantum Perspective

Goswami and Goswami (1999) hold the view that creative insight is literally a quantum leap in the mechanisms of our brains and minds. These leaps are harvested from quantum wave-like proliferations of thought which consist of unconscious process and complimentary conscious preparation, which interface with attention and the effort involved in striving toward the creative act. To simplify, this is to say that while engaged in the task of writing a novel, somewhere (out there, so to speak) the finished novel exists. In bringing Freud back into the discussion, the ‘bottom of the iceberg’ would not be a part of the individual. Rather, it would be a field of interaction existing outside the individual (McTaggart 2001, p. vii). The conscious aspect of the writer typing away at the keyboard is engaged in an exchange with this field; wrestling with it, navigating or surfing it and ultimately finding resolution to creative problems in it.

I can offer an example of this lifting a passage from the novel to further clarify. In Chapter Thirty Five, Rory experiences an exchange with the field, resulting in his moment of transcendence.
The rhythm of the shears neatly slicing through the wet grass happens automatically as a feeling of complete unity overwhelms his senses. There is no separation between grass and blade, no disconnection between his fingers and the shears’ handles, no pressure on the balls of the feet which support his weight. In fact, he feels no distance whatsoever between himself, the earth, the stone, the air. Rather, he experiences a tremendous feeling of oneness with the moment, but yet more, for there is no moment at all. Time converges and collapses in on itself and in doing so, ceases to exist...With it, a unity with all that was, all that is and all that will ever be permeates his mind, and yet a deeper part of his being hovers above him, observing, as if to witness this experience. Although seemingly apart from him, this witness remains attached to him, connected by the tenderest and most delicate of bonds. The witness peers directly into his mind and observes what Rory could only define as a form of transmission, a transmission of light, particles and data all at once. The witness guides the transmission through layers of subtle sheaths of his being, navigating first through his physical being, then deeper, through intellect and emotion, knowledge, through reason, through existence to a subtle, fragile sheath of pure bliss. As this happens, Rory feels a taste sweeter than anything he’s ever known fill his mouth and in that moment, he surrenders all; in that moment he becomes One (p. 122-3).

This excerpt gives the reader an example of the interplay between a subject (Rory) and the field. In acknowledging that this is a fictitious creation, my desire is to give the reader a clear understanding of what is being discussed. Now, stepping back into the present-day, I re-introduce the techniques employed to engage in this dance for the purpose of providing a practical example.

To do so, I would be utilizing the conceptual theorist’s two realms of inspection. First, I would be operating under the domain of Intuition (Fig. 1.1), which led me to believe that there was, in fact, something going on in the pages of the novel I was not previously aware of. Upon finding anything, I would then engage Thinking, thoughtfully inspecting the ‘what’ that my intuition had found. These two psychological functions, Intuition and
Thinking, are the domain of the conceptual theorist (Krippner & Combs, 1998, p. 83).

Before analysing what was found I must first report how I discovered unconscious processes at work. I now put forth the technique I used to conduct this first investigation; the search for sub-textual messages.

6.4-Juxtaposing as Fishing Lure

Intuition was my initial guide. I had a belief that there might be things happening in the novel I was not overtly aware of. Possessing an interest in uncovering it/them for the purpose of locating a specific entry point into the study of my own creative process, I employed Smith’s ‘literary collage’, where the technique is juxtaposition...: [two] ‘unconnected texts can be put side by side in such a way that a relationship between them is forged [and] meanings interact with each other in multiple ways’ (Smith 2005, p. 67). The ‘unconnected texts’ I put next to the novel were a series of literary analyses of various other authors’ works. One in particular was of Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (1962). I note here that I selected many analyses of many works, but highlight this one only, as it serves the purpose of this section. All analyses were selected due to my appreciation of the novels themselves. The analyses were on a website I frequent, for their analyses are quite astute; novelexplorer.com. The authors of the analyses are not cited. What is important to highlight, however, is that the analyses I have studied were done by individuals other than the authors of the novels themselves. My aim for this chapter was to apply the same lens a third party would apply to my own work. Unlike a third party analysis, I would conduct my own analysis. By reading third-party analyses of other works, my purpose was to see if anything occurring in other texts was occurring in my own, without me ‘knowing’ it, meaning without me being consciously aware of it. I add here that I felt that my experience as an ‘observer’ within the clinical environment of psychotherapy qualified me to achieve a neutral perspective and inspect the novel from the angle of curious observer, as I had done so for years with patients and clients.
6.4.1-Caveats to Findings

First, I wish to note that the initial discovery I reveal here may evoke a negative response from or within the reader, due to its contents. However, I want to be clear that I have no intention to either offend or provoke. Rather, I feel it of utmost importance to remove any moral debate from this discussion. Therefore, the purpose of disclosing my findings should be made clear:

1-To give an honest account of the results of my investigation in order to share with other writers a useful technique by which to interrogate their writing to detect (any) subtext(s) in their own work.

2-To extract and articulate what has been until now, undiscovered knowledge; to ‘fish’ my own unconscious.

I add that the initial findings are to be taken ‘as they are’, meaning the findings are merely findings, and that they are further explained in sections 6.6 onwards. While I acknowledge Derrida’s (1972) belief that the text might determine the psyche even as the psyche determines the text, I once again state that I am inspecting the phenomenon of Creative Writing.

6.5-What Starts as Emasculation is Transformed by Thinking

In the analysis I read of One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, the message of emasculation (the word used in the analysis) leapt to the foreground. Kesey’s protagonist, Randle Patrick McMurphy, has avoided incarceration on a prison work farm by manipulating a judge. In exchange for hard labor, he is ordered to enter to a psychiatric facility, to serve his sentence. The narrator, Chief Bromden tells the story of McMurphy’s ‘war’ with the woman in charge of the ward, Big Nurse. It is in the analysis of Big Nurse’s methods to control where illumination on my own novel was received. In order for Big Nurse to maintain control of the ward, she must demolish the patient’s individuality and, to a large extent, their humanity, by demeaning them through emasculation: She deprives them of strength, vigor or spirit (Macquarie, 2003, p.615). I note here that Big Nurse’s acts create for the patients the Freudian ‘castration anxiety’, castration as a symbolic act (Freud 1924).
Through the method of *juxtaposing* (Smith 2005, p. 67)) the analysis of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* with the novel, the behaviour of two female characters leapt to the foreground.

At the end of Chapter Thirty Eight, Elizabeth has her first confrontation with Charles. This happens in Kenny’s absence. Left without Kenny’s support, Charles’s perceived inadequacy as a supportive mate comes fully into view:

“Come on, darling. What do you want from me?” he pleaded in a tone that only irritated Elizabeth further.

“Don’t give me that shit,” she hissed. Charles winced. He’d never heard her swear before, and hearing it now only heightened his humiliation. Elizabeth shuffled forward, shaking her finger at him.

“You go out and play in the fields like some fucking little boy on a vacation from school. You leave me here to fend for myself and you never bother to ask how I’m doing because you’re terrified of me telling you the truth.” She put her hands squarely on her hips and jerked her chin up at his face.

“You know what, Charles? You’re hopeless.” In a flash, Charles saw her as she really was; both a wounded child and a vicious beast. Half of him wanted to cradle her in his arms and half of him wanted to slap her senseless, but the whole of him knew she was right. He clenched his fists in his pockets.

“Look at you! You’re pathetic. Ever since Kenny left, it’s like I don’t even matter. You’re perfectly content to while away the time while I have to sit in this cottage and watch myself get fat. I didn’t sign on for this.” Charles wriggled. (p. 137).

In this passage, Elizabeth belittles Charles in a way which forever changes their relationship. Now, I revert back to what my *conscious* plan was for them as a couple, meaning what I had determined was to be the playing out of their relationship. A transition (and disintegration) of their relationship was planned. What deviated through the act of typing the story was the critical moment which doomed their relationship. At the inception of creating
the story, I was of the belief that they would ‘drift apart’ as Charles’s primary focus shifted from his marriage to his political career, firmly supplanting the marriage as his priority. This did not happen. Although the characters themselves were my own creations, outside of my awareness, Elizabeth’s frustration with Charles manifested itself on the page with an emasculating confrontation. Unconsciously, the sub-textual message ‘the female as emasculator’ was at work. It is this confrontation which instigates the failure of their relationship. From the moment of the confrontation on, their relationship suffers a series of catastrophes. My discovery of this was quite shocking, to say the least. Nevertheless, the message of ‘the female as emasculator’ appears again, very shortly after it first presents itself. In Chapter Forty Eight, in a completely different scene involving two other characters, Kenny falls victim to a confidence scheme orchestrated by Penelope. Unlike Charles, who ‘wriggles’, Kenny turns his emasculation into a vow of vengeance through the vehicle of material success:

The door he had allowed Penelope to enter, the access he had given her to that vulnerable part of himself was slammed shut, forever. Righteous indignation would be his weapon and his motivator. He promised himself that he would take revenge by succeeding in everything he attempted, by staying away from women and by doing whatever was necessary to get what he felt he deserved. “Fuck ‘em all,” became his mantra. He would have his day in the sun, of that he was sure. (p. 168-9).

Thus, outside of any overt intention, two of the main characters had suffered emasculation at the hands of a woman. Both were made to feel ‘small’.

However, I state here that this initial finding was superficial. Intuition had served me well as far as discovery was concerned. However, I had sailed into a dense bank of fog. I was immensely confused by this discovery and it was mandatory that I shift my way of working to critical thinking (Krippner and Combs, 1998, pp. 81-91). My primary aim was to gain some entry so as to articulate what happens in the process of writing. A shift in
perspective would help me clarify the deeper agenda myself, the writer, was conveying using those two isolated incidents involving the female characters.

6.6-Individual Power; Charles and Kenny Lost at Sea

I flipped my perspective to that of the female characters for an alternative view, in order to try to figure out the real message. By changing my point of inspection, I discovered that emasculation was not a sub-textual message at all. Emasculation was a vehicle, a tool to emphasize a larger and much more significant issue. Elizabeth’s lashing out and Penelope’s pre-meditated scam were necessary scenes to heighten Charles’s and Kenny’s debilitation. In stepping back and looking at the ‘big picture’, the novel itself was, to put it simply ‘Kenny versus Rory, a tale of two lives’. In order for Rory to attain power in the reader’s eyes, he must be consistently noble. He is. However, to heighten his nobility, his counterparts, Charles and Kenny must be feeble. My final stance was that Elizabeth was less a person than an object, and Penelope not a person but an agent. Their purpose was purely to serve as vehicles which delivered Charles and Kenny to their respective outcomes. The outcomes were easier to achieve by having Elizabeth and Penelope highlight Charles’s and Kenny’s individual incompetence.

At the moment of the argument with Elizabeth, Charles has an opportunity to ‘step up’. In fact, Elizabeth pleads with him to do so. His incompetence will not allow this. When Kenny is conned, he too has options. He could search for Penelope, or at least confront Jennings. He intentionally avoids both of these options. His avoidance underscores his incompetence. I point out here that incompetence and emasculation are not interchangeable terms. For this study, emasculation was the necessary entry point, leading me deeper to uncover incompetence. I now investigate the transaction between conscious and unconscious processes to demonstrate final findings.
6.7-Quantum Activity in Writing

The previous section attempts to bring light a phenomenon which occurred in to me. The discoveries in this chapter are only available through diligent, purposeful reflective practice. Asking questions I believed to be correct was the key issue. A complete adjustment to the position of interrogation was also compulsory for me to find the correct answer. However, I highlight that this investigation was performed after the fact. What was inspected was already written. 'How did it get there?'

Csikszentmihalyi proposed that an intellectual problem is not restricted to a particular domain (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, p. 88). I searched outside the literature on Creative Writing for an answer. In his book, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, Doidge asks the question, ‘What if Aristotle was wrong?’ (Doidge 2007, p. 5) What he is referring to is the proposition that human beings have at their disposal, *more* than the five senses Aristotle defined. The speculation made by Doidge is that over millennia, potential 'higher senses' have atrophied due to lack of use. What is offered is an example of the possibility of 'higher senses' in action during creative practice.

I now take the reader back to the discussion of the process of writing, where there are many different mental, physical and emotional occurrences happening simultaneously. The heart beats, the eyes blink, the lung expand and collapse. However, for the writer in a state of flow, all that seems to exists in those moments is the conscious act of writing itself. That is the singular, absolute focus of the writer. If I place myself in the moment just before writing the scene where Elizabeth lashes out at Charles, what I observe is a logical conclusion. The scene itself is requisite. It is absolute and fundamental to the story. However, it does not yet exist. Hameroff and Pemrose offer that we must come to terms with the physics of space-time, as is described by Einstein's general theory of relativity, and its relation to the fundamental theory of matter, as described by quantum theory (Hameroff & Pemrose 1996, p. 36). What I witness now, in hindsight, is myself in that moment already ‘knowing’ what must be written for the necessary outcome.
to be achieved. In essence, I ‘see’ the finished scene before I write it and it ‘unfolds’ before me, becoming a task that is completed by my fingertips tapping on a keyboard. In between these two fixed states, beginning and completion, Jackiw and Shimony see the finished scene existing as a ‘wave of possibility’ (Jackiw & Shimony 2002, p. 78). In essence, the completed scene is ‘out there’ waiting for the writer (in this case, me) to connect with it. I propose that this ‘quantum leap’ occurs in the exchange between four specific entities; consciousness, the physical act of writing, the focused attention of the writer, and the quantum field. The phenomenon of creativity does not occur internally, in an exchange between an internal consciousness and unconsciousness, but rather as a dance between the internal concentration of the brain and the omnipresent quantum field. It is only after the fact that the phenomenon can be articulated, for as Goswami and Todd claim, ‘consciousness then identifies itself with the manifest subject of the experience’ (Goswami & Todd 1997, p. 134). What they are referring to is that I cannot explain the phenomenon until the scene is written. Richard Feynman wrote in The Character of Physical Law (1965) that our imagination is stretched to the utmost, not…to imagine things which are not really there, but just to comprehend those things which are. Machery (1966) adds that the ‘various theories of creation all ignore the process of working; they omit an account of production’ (Machery 1966, p. 66). Through intense inspection and recounting of the process, insights can be and are found.

6.8-Conclusion

In this chapter I have inspected the third draft of the novel for the purpose of discovering the conscious and the unconscious at work in unison. I have explained and articulated to the reader a process which allows Creative Writers to gain further insight into their own practice. Borrowing from disparate fields, I have presented specific techniques which can be employed to further examine the process of creative practice, in the form of writing a novel. Through reflective practice, concise insights were discovered and brought forth. By enlisting the technique of juxtaposition with another text, insights that would not have been gained were brought into light. By
engaging in the methods of the Conceptual theorist, Intuition and Thinking were employed to deconstruct specific scenes of the novel and concrete findings were made. Quantum Theory was introduced to provide one possible explanation for the resolution of tension between conception of a scene and its completion, then employed to articulate that process.
Conclusion: or Dropping Anchor

One thing about a creative work is that it is never done (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, p. 106). This thesis has presented two works which serve as contributions to knowledge in the discipline of Creative Writing. The artefact, a novel, stands as a demonstration of writing ability designated to the realm of ‘original work’. However, the exegesis also is ‘original’ and perhaps even more so, for it has forced me to expose myself (and aspects of my Self). This exposure contributes knowledge as it provides the reader with methods and a methodology with which to investigate, interpret and account for their creative process, by extracting experiential knowledge acquired outside of one’s awareness. Given that every writer has specific ways of working, what I have offered is a first person account of my own subjective experience. What I have contributed is an analysis which has captured and articulated the methods I employed to create the novel.

I firmly acknowledge that there are limitations to this specific project. It is an investigation by the creator and as such, is bound to contain an unavoidable level of individual bias. I would argue that an additional work, ‘an exegesis on the exegesis’ would be a logical, though at this moment frightful undertaking, to further examine both texts as a whole.

I also state clearly that the chapters included in the exegesis are only an example of perspectives from which to examine the novel. Other perspectives I have examined which are not part of this submission include ‘voice’ (O’Neill 1994), ‘masculinity’ (Bal 2004), ‘aspects of femininity’ (Grosz 1990), narratology and semiotics. Post-colonial theory (Green & LeBihan 1996) is another entry point as the characters are products of Diaspora. And Feminist theory (Tuttle 1986) would provide an excellent framework to inspect the novel, given the minimal roles offered to women in the novel. I would argue that no ‘examination’ of the novel will ever be complete, which is to say that I am resigned that I will never fully know every single thing there is to know about the novel. This notion fills me with excitement. How thrilling the prospect is that the work of an author lends itself to interpretation by
every individual reader; that the author can learn about himself from the interpretation of his words by another?

When structuring the exegesis, the five points of inspection were chosen carefully, so as to give the reader insights into ways of working. In formatting the exegesis, the disparate parts I call skill (being task-oriented) and craft (being emotion-driven) have been investigated and articulated. The creation, development and implementation of both character and plot, and the explanation of the structure employed in the formatting of the novel focused on the skill of writing. Landscape and Narrative placed the emphasis on craft. Investigating the process of creation interrogated the phenomenology of the unconscious at work in the act of writing.

The novel focused primarily on psychological aspects of the human condition. I acknowledge that the novel would have been an entirely different proposition had any character possessed a physical deformity or challenge. Additionally, to tell the same story through Charles’s (or any other character’s) interpretation or perspective of events, would have been to tell another, separate story.

I am of the belief that writing is not a gift. It is a proactive undertaking which must be honed continuously over time; with effort, self-discipline, attention, concentration, and above all, respect. What this project has done is put my writing under the microscope for evaluation and inspection. In doing so, my writing has and will continue to improve for, as stated in the introduction, this is the first time I have inspected my creative process. The scrutiny with which my writing has undergone has revealed explicitly how the novel came to be. I now know why there now is something (the novel), where there was nothing. I have succeeded with what I set out to do with the exegesis, which is to honestly and accurately recount the process of creating a novel ‘from the ether’.

My creative process is no longer a mystery to me. I see very clear cognitive processes at work, which I did not have any comprehension of before this undertaking. From this moment forward, I understand how I have
I have a much better understanding of where my work sits against others, I have a clear interpretation of the differences between tacit, rote, experiential and acquired knowledge. I acknowledge the impact of reading on my writing and more importantly, why I am drawn to specific novels, writers and genres.

My ambition for this project was to produce a thesis which would be of benefit to others in my field. I believe that the angst-ridden novelist, the struggling poet, the biographer wrestling with errors of fact can all engage in the methods put forth, and the explanation of those methods, contained in this submission. This, the virginal examination of my writing practice, has revealed to me numerous aspects of my way of working which will in future shape and mould my writing.

The artefact/exegesis model has offered something uncommon, but essential for the scholar. Through employing the novel/exegesis methodology, what future participants will discover is not how their work compares to others. What they will discover is not a theory or set of theories which explains their method(s) of workings. What they will discover is their own, individual, complex and completely unique practice. We are all connected through language, but we all possess select, exclusive aspects, insights, experiences and cells of knowledge which separate us from others. By exploring these aspects, the field of creative writing can greatly benefit.

However, the individual who gains the most from this experience is, of course, this writer. My next novel is already in outline form, incubating in that sacred space of the brain reserved for such endeavours. I can approach it without fear, for I now have my map. I can sail again, with confidence and conviction.
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**Spiritual/Metaphysical Literature**


**Quantum Theory**


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**Psychology/Psychotherapy/Reference**


**Psychotherapy/Case Studies**


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