

*For Tjakko*

# Doon Island Dummies

**Robert CLUTIER**

*'During the years when our story plays out, then, just as in the years since, and in the years to come, the eternal oppositions remain: to live challenging lives that don't grind us down with their pace and pressure. To sample the best of the "simple things" while enjoying the benefits of a complex and sophisticated society. To exult in the beauty of wild places yet not destroy them through use. To embrace the wisdom of our parents and grandparents while adapting to new situations and passing on new wisdom to our children.'*

On an Irish Island

**Robert Kanigel**

# LOOPS

(1937 - 1942 and 1973)

*'From the moment this war began, there was, for this state, only one policy possible, neutrality.'*

**Éamon DE VALERA**

Taoiseach Eire 1937 - 1948

## December 1937 - the 'Eccles' Hotel' - Andriff

*Diaries are for girls, they say, but for me it will help to keep things in perspective - keep me on the right track. Because all this is not for the short haul, I must document what I think and how I want to move forward. I feel this is important for later.*

I sit at one of the grandiose fireplaces in the lobby of The Eccles' in Andriff and I have just made up my mind to change my nationality. I will be an Eireman soon - if they accept me. I am on my way to Dublin, their capital, to advocate my solicitation personally and to make sure that the right people understand why such an unusual request should be entertained with enthusiasm! It is a cold winter night. They say it may still snow tonight, and I am not sure if I can travel on tomorrow. Am I in a hurry?

*My story starts in 1915 with two important events: my brother Jonathan drowns in the Lusitania disaster and three days later, I was born. My father, returning from America with Jonathan, where he had tried to salvage some money he had disastrously put in a fake mining exercise, got saved. He would never forgive himself that he had let the baby kid stay with one of the nannies in a nursery deep down below in the ship, whilst he on the upper deck lounge had started to play whist, one of the first games of the day, and as it turned out, the last of the voyage.*

*Dad was landed on shore in Queenstown, having been fished out of the ice cold Atlantic waters after many long hours. He rented the biggest rescue vessel he could get his hands - and money - on. He stayed awake on the arctic temperature seas for three days and nights, outside, without sleep. The crew brought him back, half-mad from sleep deprivation and hypothermia,*

*moreover suffering from the first stages of a serious pneumonia that would nearly kill him. He was brought back. But not his little torpedoed kid.*

*I was born while my mother, who had just heard about the sinking, had been assured that father and son were perfectly safe. The medical and domestic staff had lied deliberately, in order not to disrupt the birthing-process, which had started, well, actually around the time that the German torpedo had hit the large Albion steamer. She learned about the true events only days later. It was therefore a small surprise that I was called 'Bernhard' and not 'Lusitanius'...*

*When I grew up with her alone, my mother told me often that I wanted to be a writer and that my main childhood interests were reading, reading and even more reading; any subject would do, but history, preferably maritime history was my main interest. Was that also the doing of the German torpedoes driving into the hull of the Lusitania?*

The barman left his bar and brought me the ordered triple brandy, almost a full glass. He put two more enormous wood logs and three peat briquettes on the dying, but still hot fire and turned again to me to say that it had started to snow. Snow in West Slane; it sure was a special night indeed. I should perhaps stay here, not journey any further, just return to the island tomorrow and forget about all these ideas. Stay where I were and stay who I am. Would that combination be possible?

*I think now it must have also been my mother who pushed me to read technical studies. Couldn't have come from my Dad. The only activity my father undertook seriously during his short and unsuccessful life was writing a novel, which remained unpublished. He combined that with so much drink for inspiration, that the sight alone of somebody writing as much as a shopping list on a piece of scrap paper was already enough to make my mother instinctively start clearing out any bottles and glasses present. I do not recall*

*any formal strong push in the direction of engineering, but I still feel now that she would have never allowed me to read something like law, or history, which at that stage would have been more appealing to me. That also meant, no Cambridge or Oxford for me, which would have saddened my Dad, as he was very much himself of that league. He would have loved nothing more than to boast about in his dreary personal story than the relative burden-free years he spent at King's College in Cambridge - him still being then a promise and not an embarrassment.*

*So I did not end up on one of these toff fancy 'grand' colleges, to which I would have had a natural birthright. The money had simply run out, it just wasn't there anymore - Mother's technical preference was not the genuine reason...*

*Instead, I enrolled at one of the first Polytechnics as they were being called, a novelty in fact, the 'City of London' one, as it was London to where we had moved, after Dad died. The old manor in the country had been rented out at first, then sold away at a bargain price to some new money made in the War - to provide for all the old debts that kept on popping up unexpectedly.*

*Hence, I specialised as an electrical engineer. Electricity, especially the industrial uses were still a relative modern development and true widespread applications were few. Although it never stole my heart, as history would likely have done, I thoroughly enjoyed the physical principles behind electricity, and especially its generation.*

*When I graduated, there were no jobs. The industrial world and most businesses were basically still in the 1929 crash-induced depression - or just recovering from it. Mother could no longer maintain me; what was left of the once vast supply of money was needed now for Timothy, my younger brother's studies. I needed to find a way out. Myself, that was.*

*Military recruiters came to our classes the last few weeks before the exams. I made it very clear I was not interested at all. My entire family - as far as I could trace back - had a history of staying as far away as possible from*

*warfare, drafts and uniforms; the very reason why my ancestors had fled from Germany to Albion in the late seventeen hundreds. The fact that I was so openly disinterested backfired - it made one of the recruiters wait specifically for me in the pouring rain, after a heavy math class in preparation for the next day's exam. Unsolicited, he walked up with me, invited me to a pub where he fixed me up with some heavy drink and dear food.*

*He was from the Albion Navy, the 'Technical Intelligence Department' as he called it. Like every young man, I of course liked spy stories, and I have to admit to this day, he did a fabulous job explaining what his work was about. He poured me another stout, a pint of Eirish porter this time, into my greedy and thirsty body and said that he had state-of-the-art technical spy work waiting for me, in a foreign country, mind you! Long story short, I saw him back the next day, and for three more days in a row, and then I signed up. Not realising then, that he was not interested in me at all, as a technical person, but rather in an old exotic name on his trophy list. Further on, (and me not realising either) that apparently Eire was considered already, pre-maturely, a true foreign territory, having decisively drifted away from the old Albion.*

## *The next day*

Never had I seen so much snow. Not even in my native Albion! Public life came to a complete standstill. There will be no coaches, motorcars or boats, us Eccles' guests were formally told just now. I am back in my chair by the fire from the last few days. There is another barman - Leo, the one from yesterday, had been called home to cater to the horses his relatives groom for their absentee landlord. His caretaker-father down with influenza... As for the rest, it is unsurprisingly all the same. The large fire makes me sleepy and I have great difficulty in forcing myself to keep my thoughts clear and to write them down on this stale parchment. I start to feel even stronger that I need to - no: want to! - to write this all up to provide, if ever necessary, a documented rationale for the change, my conversion.

## Spring 1936 - to Doon Island

As we were not part of the regular Albion contingent on the island, and not enough in numbers (we were in total only a few going this route) to justify a direct naval shipment from Liverpool, we had to travel twice overland to and in Eire. Not fully by sea, as would oblige the Navy. After landing on Eire's shores, we transported by train to Mundy, and then the two of us transferred to the local steamer 'Princess Beara', which happened to leave that day from Mundy on her way to all towns south of Beara. We stopped in Andriff - the same town where I am now - and we stayed on land for two hours, after which the Princess Beara set steam to the next stop. Brodrick's Cove. Doon Island.

We were instructed to travel in civilian clothes, as we did not want to draw attention or even suspicion to our mission and had therefore forfeited to wear our easily recognisable special Navy uniforms. We looked like eccentric, Albion and obviously rich tourists - because who other than that category would travel to Beara and Doon Island (anyhow very unlikely, even if the Military would have given permission...).

As we were both officers, we slept in large individual luxurious rooms above the officers mess. I got a large room at the front with a view over Brodrick's Cove. Day and night, tenders from the large Navy ships came back and forth, shuttling people, delivering bunker coal, hauling supplies. I didn't sleep that well, due to all the excitement of the travel - my first time out of Albion, apparently on foreign soil, but in transit to an island that still belonged to the Crown. I spent quite some time sitting in the low rattan chair by the open window, smoking many cigarettes.

The Cove and the Doonhaven Bay were, later in the night, lit by a half moon. Pretty sight, actually.



## *The next day*

We had a good breakfast, as only the Eirish can make, and made our mess boy (well, 'boy'... actually a local male middle-aged potbellied islander called Paddy, obviously a naughty nick name we, Albions had given him) proud of his culinary achievements. Best compliment for a cook: we ate like wolves. I had only slept a few hours, no more than a total of three or four, but I felt good and strong and looked forward to today's proceedings and hopefully, discoveries. We both smoked a few cigarettes on the large open wooden deck outside while we waited for the announced transportation. We knew that we were going to have some 'confidential' assignments; they had hinted at that back in Albion, but we did not know the exact nature of it.

We were collected in a camouflaged tarpaulin-covered pick-up truck. We sat on wooden benches along the cargo space in the back, Paul opposite to me. We had no knowledge of the geographical magnitude of this island, and what our journey would encompass, so we sat back against the stiff tarpaulin fabric, relaxed and continued smoking, drawing cigarettes from Paul's endless supply packs. Never fancied smoking very much, but since I joined the Military, it gave me something to do in idle moments (which were many), moreover it gave me a kind of mature manly pose. Besides, just about everybody else smoked, as observed in the training weeks. Quite a many soldier's wage got immediately converted into tobacco products. We had prepared for a bit of a ride, but not even at a third of the latest cigarette, we stopped. We were asked, rather instructed, through a muffled voice coming from the steering wheel in front, to get out. We were at the Navy camp, the voice informed us, the Head Quarters of the Albion Navy stationed here at Fort Doonhaven. The first thing I noticed (and which got imprinted on my retina), was a truly gigantic Albion Jack flag blown

straight and flat in the strong south westerly sea wind - high on the Fort on a very tall mast. The Fort itself was hacked out of rock towering over the rest of the eastern part of the island. Must have great strategic and defensive views from up there. With our booted feet we extinguished the half-smoked cigarettes. We were at an Albion Navy camp in the middle of Eire. Home and abroad. We were ready for duty.

We followed the driver, who was surprisingly, higher in rank than us, but had not introduced himself. Why would a superior drive us...? He led us away from the Fort into the barracks area on the left side of the road, opposite the old Fort redoubt with the guns. Most of the barracks (bare bricks, corrugated iron, all painted military green) were windowless. We proceeded to the last building, across an exercise area and were then asked to enter a building that did have windows. It had an open atmosphere, rather inviting, and also quite a nice view over a large part of the eastern island. We eventually stepped into what looked like a small classroom and sat down on the tables - a temporary position, awaiting proceedings. Paul now wanted to offer another round of puff, his cigarette holder shook in his outstretched hand, but was halted by the driving officer who said:

“Please don’t. The Commander doesn’t smoke, he doesn’t understand it and he doesn’t like it when others do. Smoking I mean, not the understanding.”

With that cryptic advice, he left us without any further word or good-bye.

The commander introduced himself to us as Captain, well also as Commander Trevor-Smith. He was small, but looked friendly and had those immediately recognisable aristocratic looks. A rather tiny man in an immaculate uniform - without any hint of decoration or rank. He smiled at us, genuinely. Paul and I exchanged a quick glance. We both felt good having got this VIP treatment.

“At ease gentlemen please! A warm welcome to Albion in Eire! Although we, as it looks, will have to part ways with this beautiful rocky spot soon forever from our Crown and Empire, we still have, as you know, the good fortune and privilege to possess it for now; with a few other strategic areas, still firmly under our control. Ports we kept in our treaty with the insecure Celts. Fort Doonhaven is one of them. Welcome hence in Fort Doonhaven. You are in Albion, at home, gentlemen, therefore: at ease please.”

He took two military-style steps in our direction and proceeded with shaking our hands formally, sidestepping from Paul to me. Individually greeting us with his rank and name again. We offered ours. It looked like we were being decorated - honoured in advance for a dangerous, suicidal mission yet to start. Then he took two pompous steps back and continued:

“Before you both start working on your important communication assignments today, I insist on briefing you concisely on the history and importance of the collection of rocks you stand on, to our Empire, King and Country.

“The exact date when this greater glorious Emerald Isle joined our empire is not known and actually not of great importance. The Romans - that’s now a generally accepted fact - visited regularly, with their splendid explorative and structural minds. They were not interested – and only now we start to grasp why. Centuries later, the only human interaction was still merely simple coastal trading, intertwined with some lucrative piracy and slavery raids. Yes! What do you expect with Norsemen, Vikings and Gauls freely roaming the waters? Only after Oliver Cromwell - a hero to us Albions, a genocidal villain to the Eirish - the green islands became an official part of our great country.

“In ‘22 we had to yield Eire to the Eirish - who by then had since long stopped being pure Eirish. What do you think the influence has been of our first true wave of benevolent colonisation, Cromwell’s soldiers being rewarded with estates and land? We did not merely bring development, but

also genes, hereditary will-power to persist, to further develop, to think positive... What to make of the fact that the Eirish were only interested in leaving? To their master's country Albion, or to Albion's America to join their cousins, or in convicts' chains to Australia? No sense of reality? Escapism? *Politique de l'autruche?*"

Paul and I, in unison, had started to swing on our legs, not only due to the time we had been standing, but also because we anticipated now a much longer monologue than only a quick and formal welcome briefing.

"But do please sit down gentlemen," Trevor-Smith suggested smilingly, when he understood our hint and he himself adopted now our earlier casual position sitting on a corner of one of the tables in front. We pulled two chairs from under a table on the front row and sat ourselves down like two well-behaved school children, eagerly ready for an hour class.

"Why are we Albions still Lord and Master over this piece of land? This rock formation called Doon? A series of historical events took place near and even on this island. And in many cases Doon Island played a crucial role. Not only a geographical coincidence, if you ask me now. Who has ever heard of the Battle of Doonboy?"

We looked at each other for an answer - which we of course didn't have. (We also craved for a cigarette).

"The French, always the French... Our allies now, then our enemies for eternity, the French then, in their bad taste, had lined up with Eirish insurgents, officially to de-stabilise our increasing power over Europe, but their endeavour was of course not without their own proper colonialist intent.

"With the Eirish terrorist, Wolf Tone on their side, they tried to invade Eire through Mundy Bay - one of the various French invasion attempts, this one in 1796, but they suffered loss and shipwreck through bizarre meteorological conditions. Heavy storms and gales from the east. Eastern wind directions are very rare here. They were then and still are now. They

got blown out of the Bay, tried to regroup for awhile on and near Doon Island. The Albion lords, in their vision, with their power, and with the winds of their god of course on their side, pushed them back into the Atlantic - so they could limp home to their sorry place on the Continent. A remake of the Spanish Armada...

“Doon Island had taken the dubious role as host, hide-out and centre of attack for Eire-predators! By the early 1800’s, we had realised that our vulnerability was not only from internal treason, but threats also started to impose from the Atlantic. We needed a thorough defence structure along our coasts and more particular in this area. The first works were swiftly executed with ample money coming in from the powerful Albions: Martello towers, cannon-proof round bastions with high precision weaponry, but also more specifically signal towers, a Napoleonic invention, which could signal with flags and signs, complicated messages fast and secure over long stretches of coast line. The French boasted at that time that they could convey a message from Dunkirk to Marseille in twenty minutes! They always exaggerate, our eternal friends, then and even now... anyhow, gentlemen, after these constructions along our Eirish coast, no more Gaul niceties. It worked!

“Then, not that much later, a more technological development created another need. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, most of the Albion Naval fleet had converted from wind and sail to steam as the main and often only power supply. Steam became state-of-the art. Steam made these ships invincible. However, with all their firepower, speed and armour, the great battleships of the time were as exposed and vulnerable as newborn babies as soon as the coal fires went out under their pressure vessels. Once off the steam, they would not be able to manoeuvre, to get away; they would not be able to fire, not able to turn the turrets and guns. Totally dependant on steam. Every ship had to go off-steam on a regular basis, to do repairs, maintenance, clean, bunker up, renew equipment; not having to go

back to the naval yards in Albion, but stay close to the action, stay close to where the action might happen...

“Consequently, the Albion Navy needed a well-protected and guarded harbour to service their ships temporarily. The large natural harbour shaped by the bay between the smooth north side of Doon Island and the rocky shores of south Beara turned out to be the perfect location! It was deep enough to have any vessel come in and it was still shallow and sandy enough to create good anchorage. The bay between the island and the mainland became known as ‘Doonhaven’: the home base for Albion’s operational Atlantic Fleet. And a true haven it would be. On and near the earlier built anti-French invasion fortifications more guns and cannons were placed. Small gun nests were built closer to the water. The fleet - resting or recovering, as pampered dependent babies - was fully protected! Around the turn of the century all works and weapons, again, were modernised. No effort was spared to protect Albion with Eire as first buffer.

“Now, lads, I will be pretty much disappointed if you would have not learnt this already at grade school: this eastern part of Doon Island is one hundred percent Albion! As Albion as are Devon, Manchester or London. Our Albion Jack is flying here,” (without looking he pointed behind him stretching his arm in the direction of where the flag was flying on the Fort - just 45 degrees off - we chuckled) “although we don’t know for how long... When Mickey Collins - with his personal negotiation mandate from his reckless peer Eire freedom fighters - went to see the Albion government in December 1921, for a Free Eire state treaty, we made him swallow the deal. The Albion-loyal North would remain with us, non-negotiable anyhow, and plus, here it comes - also the three most important strategic Albion Navy spots: Lough Swilly, the wild fjord in the north, great for hiding, Queenstown near Slane, a major supply port and, yes... you got it... Doonhaven! Our gateway to the Atlantic, protected by Doon Island. The Treaty Ports were born and ever since known by that name. We kept the

east part of Doon firmly under Albion flag... from where we have undisturbed access to the overall island.”

He produced, rather impromptu, a small rolled-up map of the island, taking it out of a drawer from the teachers’ desk he was now standing at, unfolded it and hung it over the blackboard. The shape of the island was perfectly clear, but the small prints on the map were illegible to us.

“Look gents, we operate guns now on two major sites. Here” (he pointed with a pencil to the map, towards the east side), “are the newest installations, one at Loneport and one near Roerring - two six inch monsters that can cover the entire Mundy Bay entrance. Don’t ever forget, the French lesson, we are really most vulnerable from the east. One wouldn’t say with the entire ocean threatening from the west of course, but not even the simplest stupidest maritime nitwit would ever think of coming in from the west. The island is high there and the channel leading to Doonhaven, is called ‘Bull Sound’, and within shooting range even with the simplest of rifles. Still... never take your eye off the Atlantic - that’s a vast place...”

He looked at us intensely - kind of probing our brains. We did not fully comprehend why. When he continued I quickly looked at Paul, who - bloody hell you wouldn’t believe - was clearly dozing away! I had always assumed he had more motivation than me to execute these orders. His slightly obese long body started to slump over... but Trevor-Smith did not register it, or he simply pretended to ignore.

“In any case, we also have weaponry on the west side - canons and a lot of smaller guns, which protect the entrance to Doonhaven. The smaller guns are actually quite close to the water and manned twenty-four hours a day. That saves us, even from the smallest attacks, from foreign or local sources. I dare say that not even a low-flying seagull with wrong intentions could pass that channel.”

As I expected he chuckled: he liked his own joke. He became aware now that Paul had fallen asleep completely. I had not expected a brilliant sense of humour of this diminutive man, but I admit he approached the situation creatively and remained master of his narrative.

“We are faced with a totally different challenge today, gentlemen, but very much still like the sneaky French at Wolf Tone’s time. Any ideas?”

He stepped towards Paul and pulled hard at his left uniform jacket sleeve.

“Do you know what I am talking about?” he shouted in his ear. Paul however didn’t wake up, he even started to snore after this intervention.

He brought his mouth very close to Paul’s left ear and tried a different approach:

“What do you call a boat that sails under water?”

He repeated the question, winking at me to solicit my cooperation in the embarrassment. Paul moved. He looked instinctively for a better position to continue his sleep and then rather awkwardly slumped-over into one.

“What’s a boat under water called?” He pulled very hard again at Paul’s sleeve.

Paul woke up with a childish shriek, looked around, at Trevor-Smith, then at me, and shouted, almost relieved: “A wreck, Sir. Sir, a wreck!”

Trevor-Smith and I laughed hard. We could not suppress it. Paul attempted a smile. A strange, but bonding moment among the three of us. Trevor-Smith, back at the map, playing with the pencil in his hands, repeated the original question, looking at Paul.

“Ah...,” said Paul, “You probably mean a submarine, Sir.”

“Absolutely, yes, that is what I mean indeed,” Trevor-Smith said gloriously, stiff upper lip, “yes that’s what they are called, submarines, submarines: gentlemen, the intestinal parasites of international warfare, of deceit, cowardly attacks, the fluke worms of all coming naval battles. They are weapons of terror and hence terrorism, remember the Lusitania!



Uncontrollable, unreliable and therefore never to be trusted. Weapons of mass destruction... politically unstable, worse than the French from a hundred and fifty years ago... And that is also why we are here - and” (He pointed at us, two indexes, each for one of us) “why you are here! We must hurry though. Time is ticking.

“As a starter, the Eirish want us to simply get the hell out of here, and for two reasons; firstly, they don’t want any Albions anymore, anywhere. Full stop! They puke on us. We are incompatible genetic material. Obviously, aggravating the nationalistic emotions, all Eirishmen do now realise they made a silly, no,wait: a plain wrong deal with sending Mick on his kind of one-man-show in 1921... finally Free Eire, but without the cherished and affluent North, and even worse allowing us perfidious Albions to keep the beautiful Treaty Ports... leaving Doonhaven and the strategic east part of Doon Island firmly in alien hands - I personally still naively hope for eternity - although I think I know better.

“Secondly - and more importantly - like everybody, even our Eirish friends understand that at some stage international conflict in Europe is inevitable now. The expansion of Germany and all that, chaps – I trust your daily paper reading is up to speed... Eire feels that when one of the greater powers in the larger conflict has lined up with them in some sort of alliance - as in fact our use of Doon Island could be very well conceived - it will be extremely difficult for Eire to keep a neutral stand. Difficult when one of the major parties in global conflict rents an island off your neutral coast... wouldn’t you agree? It might upset and challenge another major party. Catch my drift, lads? Hence, our days on Doon Island are numbered; we have no time to lose. One of these days the Paddies just might kick our asses out! Or, to remain in island terms, they might kick us off! No time to waste.”

Paul sat straight up again and listened. Something had changed in his attitude. But, still, it looked like Trevor-Smith’s words - as the saying goes -

went in one ear and out the other, undigested. Who was this Paul? Or what was Paul..? For sure, a good looking guy; I had seen women flocking to him like flies to stale pancake syrup on an empty plate. Was he indeed inert, disinterested, lazy, or just plain thick?

Trevor-Smith had intensified his monologue, untied his hobby-horse and started riding his apparent favourite tune: “What we develop now around Doonhaven will, for a very long time, have a strategic meaning for all our wet bastions. Do me a favour though and see this as a pilot run, a well prepared and well executed experiment, gentlemen, and forget where you are. We will bring it back to Albion and our remaining colonies and use it forever after, wherever and whenever we feel that we need it. If we ever leave this rock, we will take it with us. The learning, the manual, this defence tool for the country, for the Empire.

“Now, Bernhard, I nominate you as the electrical engineer in charge of the overall aspects of this project, meaning the cables, the measurements, the calibrations. With all the scientific stuff, all this will of course depend on your calculations and applications as to whether the whole bloody thing actually works or not! Paul, you will be responsible for the management of all the physical support we require: design and construction of the few buildings we need, all the ships, goods, personnel, power generation and needless to say - security.”

I could not entirely comprehend the last information and task repartitions, but my first thought was that Paul’s announced important new role would lead to trouble. As friendly a fellow as he was in the mess during bar hours, I did not rate his managerial traits very highly. But first, cables...? What the heck is this all about?

“Before I call in Captain Dr Simon Flowers, the naval Chief Engineer for maritime works, and hand you lads over to him, who – no surprise gents: happens to be on the island as well... what a coincidence indeed, hahaha – I would like to ask one more thing of you...”

Not to smoke anymore, we must have both thought simultaneously. We were by now, dying for a cigarette. But it was not that.

“And that is to refer to the project solely with the name DUMMY. Code name DUMMY. There are not a lot of people that know about it. This is the DUMMY project. Can we all agree? We want to leave the impression that we are developing a trial, a trial for an experiment for something else later. Oh yes, and uniforms not necessary, salutations, ranks not that important - wouldn't mind if the locals thought you were just some specialist technicians helping out with something or other, some electrical stuff, phone lines or so, no big secret project stuff et cetera. Get me?”

We nodded and whispered subserviently 'yes'. We now really needed a smoke. Now!

“Great chaps, excellent! I will then indeed call in Flowers now. Would you by the way perhaps like to have a smoke outside boys? You, youngsters all smoke don't you? But please do me a favour comrades, and never let me see you smoking anywhere inside. Scared that the business might blow up, all these explosives you know. It takes one ill-attended cigarette butt, you know, but do take a break outside if in need, now, please.”

We walked outside, into a rather warm, damp air. We lit up and told each other that we were apparently lucky to be here, a piece of Albion in Eire, assigned to work on an interesting new project. Our first Navy assignments could quite well have been as very junior engineers, deep in the belly of an old rusty tropical battleship, four months in the engine rooms with no daylight... passing time in a world of grease, steam, heat and seasickness. Paul did not talk a lot, laughed a bit sheepishly and launched his burning half-smoked cigarette with his middle finger from his thumb in the direction of the barracks without windows, where it landed just near the brick wall. I presumed barracks with no windows were for supplies, not people. Supplies such as ammunition...

“It is a pleasure gentlemen, welcome, but we will not embark straightaway on a sophisticated overview of war machinery. I’d like you both to revisit your academic years, let’s talk a bit about physics, let me take you back to some basic electro-physics. Need a piece of chalk? Here we go.” Flowers was in civilian clothes, dressed like us, strange for his rank. He was slim and tall, the opposite of Trevor-Smith. He spoke common, in fact accent-free Albion, not the century old craft-fully created toff tune that Trevor-Smith wanted to display on us - to let us know that he was from a very different league. Flowers was a regular guy. Perhaps had married well and made a good career in the Navy. Or just plain clever. Happens also.

“Do we all remember how electricity is created? I see confusion in our eyes... doubt on our knowledge. Let’s not take any chances and let’s make sure we all get down to fundamental knowledge again. Let us go through it again, ok? Hahaha. Now, if we take a loop of copper wire and move a rod-shaped magnet, or even a plain iron rod through it back and forth, what will happen?”

He had formed a circle with his left index finger and thumb and pushed his right index finger back and forth through the loop. I was sure it was not only me that got some awkward thoughts - even the slow-thinking Paul would have picked up the naughty association faster than I did. And indeed - a demonic smile materialised on his face. He had woken up at last.

“Yes, gentlemen, I can read from your elated looks, that you indeed remember: the particles in the copper wire change with every movement of the rod, their electro-magnetic orientation and this results in an electron movement through the wire - basically generating an electric current. In fact electricity! Now, if we scale this up and we create large spools of copper wire and have industrial-size magnet rods running at high speed through that spool, back and forth, we will be able to create electricity that can be used to light lamps and drive machines. Machines, engines, yes, in fact, just the other way round, remember: the same amount of power driven through the

copper spool-magnet set-up will make the rod move... We have created an electro-engine! Or a power generator, a dynamo – depends on how you see it and how you move it! Any questions?”

Yes, obviously, we both had the same question: where was he driving us? Where will this lead to? We were not shipped, more or less under cover, to this remote spot to refresh our basic high school simple electro-physics, were we?”

“All right, now, let’s take a step aside, no, rather a step forward. We talk about magnets and copper wire, as they are the materials that were found to be the most powerful and efficient in creating electrical current, or the other way round. But basically all metals with the power to react to magnetic forces - and most ferric metals can! - can be used in this equation. If I would use” (oh my... Same embarrassing finger and circle movement; Paul could not suppress a rather girlish giggle) “for example plain iron wire and a plain simple iron body, I would get the same effect, only the electricity current created would be too weak to drive any electrical appliances, but with a sensitive gauge it could still be measured. Keep that in mind, guys, electricity can always be measured, to see if it exists, however weak it may be. If your instruments are the right ones and well calibrated - but we will come to that. That’s enough working knowledge. For now, we are in the business of measuring electric currents.

“Step ahead: then, it does not always need to be the finger-in-circle concept...” (Paul behaved - poker face. Strange, I thought, nothing really excites him, but the coincidental sign language Flowers used woke him to great interest).

“I could leave a flat round loop on a surface and move my metal object just over it. Imagine it as a two-dimensional world. This movement, not commonly known, will also create a weak, but measurable electron movement through the loop and can hence, be measured even over large

distances. Now, this principle works in air as it does in water, water or seawater at that, that's an important thing to remember for DUMMY."

An open friendly smile appeared on his face.

"Still guessing where we are going?"

He didn't take any questions, good for us, as we didn't have any. We knew where this was going. Had Trevor-Smith still left a choice between battling the French and submarines, Flowers did not leave any guesses. We got it.

That was about all we would see from the classroom. The rest, as Flowers and Trevor-Smith had implied, was going to be just practice, on-the-job training - and running against the clock. If we can't do it here, we can't do it anywhere. It's now or never. I suddenly felt very motivated and proud to be part of this. As for Paul... I was not so sure.

That very afternoon, I started with Flowers and Paul. We drove in the same old open-back camouflaged truck to the ship, which had transported the cables to Doon. They had been shipped all the way from Singapore to Plymouth by the Royal Navy, and then on the high seas transferred to this stealthy limping little cargo coaster, which, next to a noisy and very smoky steam engine, still had a mast and sail. Wasn't the twentieth century supposed to be modern? Perhaps the sail-impression would shield it from torpedo attacks... This tiny coaster now was at the Roerring Navy quay, in Brodrick's Cove, waiting to have its enigmatic cargo off-loaded.

"The success of the cable technology," Flowers explained, while he puffed pedantically away at a pipe - safe and far away from the base camp and tobacco-phobic Trevor-Smith, "is heavily dictated not by the correct type of metal and the layers within the cable, well, that was critical too of course, but rather by how the metal layers were protected within the cable against each other and how they could be protected against long-time corrosive force of the seawater. Let's have a look at that. Crucial to grasp that, lads."

We stepped on board the small vessel and looked into the cargo holds the crew were just opening, where three immense rolls of cable were lying, like three giant turds - as Paul had expressed, trying to be funny. (Flowers coughed and looked the other way, but I suspected he smiled). Flowers called up to one of the officers from the vessel and explained to him that he wanted to have from either end from any of the cables, a couple of inches sawn off. As he wanted to demonstrate the configuration and the vulnerability of the technical cable design. We went into the cabin of the coaster and had ourselves some tea offered, damned good tea actually; still available apparently. Flowers happily kept puffing away on his pipe; Paul and I had therefore no qualms joining him with our own tobacco-burning rituals.

It was a nice flat disc they came back with. The unshaven officer put it on the table of the cabin. Flowers, Paul and I bowed over it and we saw clearly the different layers of metal, very easy to discern. However, we hardly noticed the sudden heavy rain that had started clattering on the steel roof of the cabin.

“The outside cover, funny enough, that technology is quite old,” Flowers said philosophically. He drew heavy smoke from his pipe. “This is special rubber from Malaya, they found out this particular stuff could last for ages in the sea. All earlier transatlantic morse and telegram cables were coated with it. That’s how we know it and that’s how we learnt.” Suddenly, he pushed it off the table. He poked at it with his foot and tried to flatten it hard on the wooden floor. It looked sturdy and strong. All layers remained firmly and nicely in place. He picked it up and laid it on the charts table again.

“You see guys, doesn’t move at all. Your cables will last until the year 2000,” he said. “And most likely beyond...”

Looking back later: that was actually the first and the last day that there was a bit of time for reflection, philosophy and expertise exchange, humour

even. We started the next day in a far more serious and hard-working mode. We were assured that the clock was against us; we started also reminding others that time was running out. The work would not stop after Paul disappeared from the island - and it should have continued even after I had left. But I am going too fast now.

First, we rolled out all three cables over the road from Roerring to Bullkill, the hamlet with the church, all over the High Road; a herculean task with two mainland-provided independent-acting unruly Eire cob horses that pulled the large wooden reels, driven by an unreliable, mostly inebriated horse driver, also a mainlander. Two cables, unrolled, were more or less the length of Roerring-Bullkill, but a third was about double the length and had to be rolled out, back with the second half all the way back to Roerring.

Paul and I inspected all three cables personally. Flowers joined for only a few hours during the first days, and only with the short ones. He backed out pretty fast... We had to look at any visible or suspected cracks that could let water in through the robust rubber outer skin and into the interior and more importantly, for any signs of the cable having been twitched, which would mean that the inner copper and metal shields might have shoved into each other, thereby creating short circuit and rendering the cable potentially useless - not for power transmission, but definitely for weak, sensitive, current measurement. This all according to Prof Flowers, the 'Cable Professor', as Paul and I had started calling him. (He had looked a jovial, easy-going chap at first, but with stress of the mounting work, he turned out to be a first-class very detailed manager who wanted to know everything and did not trust anything... Especially annoying seen the fact that he did not hands-on participate in the field work of inspection at all. A royal pain-in-the-ass). We found some minor damages at the ends of all three cables, probably to do with the hauling onto the big reels, needed for the sea transportation. We cut these ends off beyond their affected parts and



decided to use the loose parts for further smaller experiments, study and of course, very secret display.

The rolled-out cable inspection took us nearly three days. Another two were needed to reel the cables up again - not at all easy with the free-spirited horses and the full-of-spirit horseman, who could hardly manage his unstable gait, let alone his four-legged live equipment. Then, we had to load the reels again on a ship, unto a well-maintained steam cutter this time, which the Navy had destined for this operation - a clean aft deck ship clearly tailored for the roll-out cable operations to come. The Navy engineers had fitted it out with a tailor-made reel holder, a strikingly simple but sturdy device that would let the cable slip off smoothly from their revolving wooden holders.

We now directed our focus to more general phases and components of DUMMY buildings. Paul was, as agreed earlier, the support and buildings man. I appreciated to keep my attention very close to the crux of our existence: the cables, the eventual loops, the measurements. We thus divided our supervisory roles: Paul would remain with the 'main building', a bit ambitiously named for a rather diminutive construction building where all electrical measurement data would be collected and where necessary, findings would be signalled through to the mainland. In this main building we would also erect our offices, and install archives and administration. We identified further the need for three reception huts, one on the north and one on the south side of the island, and one in the west. I would keep an eye on the construction of these measuring cabins - as their functioning was crucial for the success of the cable experiments. We built all new dwellings in the style that the Military had practiced here since they started to use Doon Island seriously: like non-commissioned officers houses; they would give the impression that more staff would locate to the island and would not give our experimental secretive electrical intentions away. Anyhow, they needed to be like real places to live in, as we would have long and even

twenty-four hours shifts - people needed to sleep, eat, relax and bath there. Not only potentiometers and tables for scribes. They were basically small one-room houses, with a small kitchen and a water closet. In the large room there would be a table to work on, an easy chair to sit in for long shifts – with a reading light fixed to the wall – and even a bed, for duty sleep-overs when true closeness to the gauges was required. One wall, the wall parallel to the shore where the loop would come in, would be the fixing point for all instruments. Finally, the houses had their own small kitchens, and two small bedrooms. A living room with chairs, yes, to smoke in and to read the odd magazine or newspaper. No rooms or windows on the island side - no need for peeping locals, but of course on the Doonhaven and Mundy Bay sides there were larger than normal glass windows, to enable measurements to be linked with visual observations - or rather perhaps the lack of those.

That was the entire idea - nice clear indisputable readings on the gauges, but nothing on the water? We got you submarine! However, whether it was going to work all along that simple way, we had at that stage not a single clue. Events, as we would call them later, would take over... But for now, we were getting very well prepared indeed.

Even Paul was serious.

## The last day of the year 1937 - Crookstown, Slane

*The last day of the year normally leads to introspection and this one is no different from the others I had experienced. I am still convinced I should continue with the Eire naturalisation process. It is the reason for my journey. My journey through troubled youth, over land and sea, brought me to this weird hotel, the journey of my life perhaps. I am lying in a majestically large bed, overlooking the very wintry Crookstown harbour. The bed is white, so white it pains my tired eyes. The harbour - a collage of sky, water, quay buildings, ships - is grey and dirty. The rotten brackish smells come through the supposedly tightly closed windows and doors. This outside now begs for me, trying to convince me to continue. No rest. No rest even on the last day of the year. Earlier, over the abundant breakfast, I have decided that if I still feel the same about everything tomorrow morning, I will persevere and indeed continue the naturalisation process. I would like to party tonight, after all it's New Year's Eve, but I prefer to stay in this comfortable large bed. Perhaps I will look for a book from the hotel library downstairs, but it should not have too many pages, as I will travel early tomorrow morning through to Dublin by train. Not sure if I can finish an entire long novel before that. Bring it along secretly and send it back? Or just keep it? Along my journey...*

It took us about a month to put the cables on the seafloor. We had no prior experience with it. Plus: it needed to be done secretly. We didn't want the Eire-men to know too much about it. You don't cancel six hundred years of mistrust overnight, do you? Well, we couldn't of course keep it a full secret, as the entire island - and quite a few of them had made some handsome bucks in helping out - had seen us cautiously handling and

inspecting the materials. What we wanted to avoid was that they knew what we were going to do with these cables. We had indeed purposely rumoured that they were for a special telephone line, dummy experiment to the mainland. To both sides: two up north to Beara, one down south to Sheep's Head. State-of-the-art technology, we said. Swore everybody to secrecy, so we were sure this false information would make the rounds fast. Still, we thought it better to roll them out rather covertly, preferably in starless, stormy, moonless nights.

We started with the smallest stretch, from the fortifications at the small entrance to Doonhaven, Bull Sound, on the west side of the island, crossing over to the mainland near Doonboy Castle, at the edge of Castletowndoon. It turned out to be so deep there, that it took us four times of trying to place the cable correctly on the seafloor, hauling it completely up and putting it down again and again. We could simply not create a clear loop on the bottom; both sides slipped together in one - an undesired double close parallel cable configuration. Only after we decided to sail out a much larger loop in true O-shape over the water in the small converted tugboat helping us, we were able to get it placed more or less the way we wanted. We could never probe how it was really lying on the sea bottom. That combined with the main question: 'would it be working?', could only be answered by a detectable electrical current. If ever...? Eventually, this loop worked the best so we never thought of it anymore. The true art was in the rolling out of the cables in a large real circle shape. How they would end up on the bottom was of less importance. Learning on the job!

The next stretch was, although longer than the cross-over to Castletowndoon, much easier, as it went flat over a relatively shallow, very stable and flat sandy bottom, from the measuring hut on the north side of Brodrick's Cove to the foot of Mount Appetite, near Bank Harbour, on the other side. That one took us just one night.

Looking back, and if it would have been up to me, I would have now paused to see whether the theory and practice would rhyme and if we could get the electrical signals we wanted out of the cables. But the Navy brass was in such a hurry... Time was running short they kept telling us. All loops must be rolled out - they felt the hot breath of Eirish neutrality on the back of their necks. The sinking of the cables first, effectiveness second.

It was after the second loop that the rumours started to gain ground. The persistent rumours about the Treaty Ports handover. Churchill had played his cards too high... Obviously the Eirish now wanted their entire country back - they had most of it, except that big chunk in the North and of course these Ports, of which Doon Island was a very visible part. Although we had accepted that at some stage the island would revert to Eire, we needed these cables at any cost. We wanted to learn the technology and were even convinced that, once we mastered it, it would be a great argument to keep the Eirish on our side. As, in a way if you like, we developed it together with them. On their territory, we must stand together in the international conflict that was brewing.

We were pressured so much that we did the third and last cable pretty much out in the open - from Roerring's south seaside to the other side of Mundy Bay, to the tip of the Sheep's Head peninsula, about two miles away - no longer under cover of bad weather or in the full darkness of a new moon. We put out the tugboat, with a large tender behind it, on which the much larger cable roll stood, in that windless, moon-lit night in August. I will never forget the beautiful stillness of the water that night. The cable slipped off the tender like a prehistoric monster seeking its origins back in the history of the sea. We were all there for the occasion, with our teachers and buddies from the first days: Flowers, Trevor-Smith, Paul and I. We sat in Navy-issued camouflage folding chairs on the aft deck of the tugboat; smoking and drinking coffee from a big dented thermos - coffee supplemented with ample local whiskey. We smoked and nobody objected.

It was like a holiday cruise; only the girls were missing... that aside it was really perfect. I remember we sang on the way back, silly Navy and Army songs and Flowers was indeed much more cheeky and naughty than we had thought over the tense last few weeks. I think we all realised already at that stage that our vision was great, our technology unbeatable - and our days on Doon numbered.

The cables were connected fast and without trouble and we ran successfully shore-generated currents through them that could be easily measured. The electricity we put in on the island side through the loops, came squarely and unscathed back out in the gauge cabins. Apparently the cables were all intact.

We received the potentiometers from London, strange enough from some government seismological institute; it might have been a decoy to fool the eavesdropping locals. They were smaller than I had anticipated, also very sensitive and I was instructed that they needed to be handled with the utmost proper care. It took us nearly as much time to get the measuring equipment properly installed in the three island cabins as it took us to loop the cables over the sea bottom!

The work progressed now in real secret and we had code terms for everything. The cables were referred to as our 'parents' (Are your parents in the west doing well? How are your parents overseas?), the potentiometers, not without irony, as 'the girls'. 'One of the girls is upset, she wants to be readjusted.' Silly simple humour of lonely, but dedicated men. Obviously Paul loved the metaphors.

The night before we had planned our first real ship's experiment, Flowers joined us in the officers mess overlooking The Cove, with a bottle of local Powers whiskey. He told us we could continue smoking and asked who would like to have a 'shot', as he called it, rather vulgarly waving the bottle over his head. We both raised our hands agreeing to join him. We

were fast becoming alcoholics - was it boredom, excitement, or the stress of secrecy that made us drink?

“It might take at the most another year,” Flowers stated, “but we better get prepared to get out of here soon. Coz’ Paddy wants to have his island back.” (I initially thought he referred to our mess boy and cook, but realised straight away that he of course meant Paddy, the generic Eirishman, named Patrick, after St Patrick, the Emerald Isle’s patron saint). While we sipped the surprisingly good liquor, he briefed us unusually candidly on the situation on the Continent: Albion and France, watching from the sidelines, could of course not approve of the course Germany was sailing, currently violating most, if not all gentlemen’s agreements of Versailles, taking back Allied-occupied pieces of land in the middle of Europe. Look what happened in the Rhineland...

“Think a bit ahead lads, let me repeat: if Eire insists on staying neutral, they could not tolerate to have a major war party on its very territory! Their North looked lost forever to them, but the Albion Ports could be easily demanded back - in case they were serious about neutrality. Neutrality as a pretext to send the Albions home.”

“When?” Paul asked.

“Depends what Herr Hitler is going to do really. Perhaps we can appease him; I heard somebody saying that we should reach out to him before it is too late. The Krauts are ferocious soldiers, but deep inside also very much cultured people, they will not be deaf to reason; Hitler or no Hitler. But, if it comes to war, we will be out of here soon.”

Flowers stayed with us until the bottle was empty. His personal consumption was a substantial contribution to that development, as he took care of that nearly single-handedly.

All in all, the cables were technically a huge success. We commenced our measurements with the short one on the west tip of the island, looping the gap with the harbour of Castletowndoon. We found already some signal

with the normal small boat traffic, though nothing with a wooden sailing ship of course, but the odd steel trawler or local cargo peddler, even wooden hulls with a large enough engine made the 'girls' go nicely.

We recruited all the pure steel Navy ships that were currently stationed in Doonhaven, lined them up according to tonnage, volume and length and paraded them - smaller ones first - over the loop, in a slow moving line. It worked really well, the readings were clear and appeared proportional. We were even able to set some simple calibrations on the potentiometers - signal versus ship size.

The second cable, on the east side between the island and Mount Appetite, yielded yet more obvious readings, as it was less deep there. This cable had sunk almost perfectly and we knew it was lying very straight over the flat sandy sea bottom. We then calibrated the equipment again and moved on to the long stretch, the double mile to Sheep's Head. As anticipated with the knowledge we were fast developing, signals were indeed weaker there, for this cable was the longest and especially the deepest - and we had no insight on how it was stretched out over the rocky bottom. Small vessels were hardly detected. We could see a slight change in reading - but only when we knew a boat was going over, as we could track it visually. Without this confirmation of a boat passing over, it would be very improbable to detect any clear ship movement on the meter alone.

We depended much on the cooperation of His Majesty's Royal Navy to test the system to its true extent. I had by now figured out - also thanks to Flowers' many whispered suggestions - that the 'loops system' (or as we casually referred to it: The Loops) was slightly controversial in governmental and high military channels and that it was driven very much by some of Churchill's personal inner circle. Which made it a political project... Would they be interested to get a free, fully functional highly sophisticated system being offered, at the last stage, on a platter - in other words would they wait until we were finished with DUMMY or would they



not give a damn? Would it then add clout and value to our presence on Doon or would it be an even simpler argument to kick us all out...? Flowers speculated openly, triggered by our questions, and now more often than not assisted by the bottle, that George, our King, had developed interest himself (perhaps also influenced by Winston), as suddenly and completely unannounced a very modern Albion submarine showed, visible to all on the surface of the water, just outside Brodrick's Cove. Flowers went on board, stayed away all day and returned only late that night, when we were just planning to retire from the mess. He called us three together, made us raise glasses and briefed us in a conspiring tone that 'formal submarine validation trials would start at seven in the morning'.

The next day, Flowers was most probably again the invitee of the enigmatic submarine crew; we did not even see him at breakfast at six. (Paddy was late and smelled of booze when he finally showed. The cranky bastard spoiled our eggs upon breaking them and eventually decided to manufacture only one big lousy omelet, which we had to cut through with a heavy knife, as it was burnt, thick like leather, and which we had to share, not really a comfortable Albion thing to do, I would say).

We divided the work. Not that there was a lot to do, but the need presented itself to be very sharp and focused; we could not afford to make mistakes with this high-level presence. Moreover, that vessel would never stay longer than a few days, as the Albions were obviously not really welcome in these waters with their state-of-the-art submarine technology. I, staying behind in the main measuring cabin, would be monitoring all meters, reading, interpreting and making extrapolation proposals, while Paul would be the liaison officer between the submarine and us. The submarine would surface every hour on the hour, at a point between Sheep's Head and the island, at the Atlantic side, give a signal with lights and flags to tell us at which depth they would be crossing the long loop again. Paul would collect the visuals and walk to us to hand me the data, so

we could note them down together and relate them to possible meter readings. Paul would note down all subsequent data, I would interpret on the spot.

It took us all day, eighteen long hours, from dark to dark, and Paul swore incessantly: he would never do errand jobs anymore (it rained all day and he got soaked to the skin). I asked myself for the umpteenth time whether Paul had enough motivation for the cause. Getting wet was for him more disastrous than a potential failure of DUMMY.

But clearly, no failure whatsoever: these trials were also truly a huge and complete success. Of course, very close to the sea bottom and just some feet over the cable system, the potentiometers nearly went over their scale; that was expected. But having nice and easily identifiable results of the sub passing over the detection loop at periscope depth, near the surface that is, even in deep waters, was an excellent result. Better than expected. Because that was the threat: submarines hiding and sneaking in at periscope level, just under the surface of the sea. We were all jubilant and had a celebratory boozy night - with the anonymous Albion submarine officers now openly joining us as well. (They drank like fish and were jolly folk, but extremely cautious in what they said. They must have had an extra and heavy security briefing before surfacing at Doon. We could have been Eirish or German spies... In their indoctrinated suspicious eyes no difference...).

We wanted to start with repeating some of the depths the next day. But we had a delay of two hours, as most of us suffered from a severe hangover. Paddy was not even late - just nowhere to be seen. Absent without leave, AWOL. Unreliable folks. We cooked our own breakfast. Decent scrambled eggs with some bacon this time, nothing burnt or overcooked, individual portions. We smoked our cigarettes outside until Flowers (who again had shown his human face also the night before by getting completely 'smashed' - as he called it colloquially this morning) picked us up. We walked to our

stations, I changed posts with Paul. Today, I was the runner. It was a cold, clear, but beautiful morning. I hoped it would not rain like the other day.

Instead of a depths repetition, it was decided that we were going to do different speeds today. It was obviously rather easy to get detected over an electrostatic cable loop through sheer clear movement, but we had no idea what would happen if a submarine, or any steel vessel for that matter, would glide extremely slowly over the circle. Like a hundred meters in half an hour. Theoretical models had it that if the speed of the steel mass was very slow, the meter would not give any discernible reading.

We learnt that a sub needs a kind of minimum speed, to keep level and to be navigable, in other words that they can still steer where they want and decide on their own course and depth. It is one thing to be blind in the deep, but quite another to be lame, as one of the sub officers had explained to me the other 'boozy' night. Nightmare of any sub crew - lose velocity, hence agility. So there would have to be some speed. Very low speed would only be possible on the surface, but not in the deep.

We had reached a kind of consensus with the crew of two nautical miles per hour as the absolute minimum speed for a fully loaded and crewed submarine under war conditions. We had her slide through and on the waters at that speed and even once at lower than that. The normal tidal currents in Mundy Bay would anyhow always be faster. The readings were less spectacular, but they were still obvious, even at periscope depth. Our girls did not lie. It showed clearly that the potential for sneaking slowly into the Bay on the surface was limited - at night only, rainy weather, perhaps only under a dark new moon, flat surface: no waves, no tide...

Paul looked sunburnt (we suspected he had spent more time outside of the cabin than inside at the meters...) and appeared, as the only one of us, completely healed from his hangover. All of us were sitting, in the chairs, on the bed, smoking and chatting. Flowers joined. As we relaxed in the little meter cabin and congratulated ourselves, we had indeed been successful in

pioneering the submarine detection loops system, soon a standard issue in the arsenal of the Royal Navy, DUMMY installed. We were the first. The Germans had no inkling of its existence, they had no clue.

After half an hour of loops-small-talk, Flowers got serious and after swearing us suddenly and unexpectedly to complete secrecy (I committed straight away, but Paul tried to be funny and said something silly - what is wrong with that guy - why is he never serious? Always other thoughts on his mind...), he told us that, after this successful Doon experiment phase, they would make the system fully operational here on the island. Moreover, the Royal Navy had requested for an urgent installation in Singapore, under heavy pressure by hostile Japanese threat, and - not surprisingly - for some loops across the sea-mouth of the Thames and, a bit further from home, the harbours of Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland. Would any of us be interested in going there and help set it up? Paul and I, without consulting each other both nodded instinctively. We volunteered on the spot. It was clearly not the right moment to refuse or buy time. Honestly, I did not know exactly what I wanted. I kind of liked this island, and enjoyed the simple camaraderie in the military settlement here; was also seriously in love with the loops, but I could not make up my mind on this question. Flowers did not press further. He actually never came back to this idea. He had left Doon Island and Eire long before his other international loops would have been due.

The euphoria should have been complete - after those glorious days where Albion technology had claimed such an obvious victory - when my new identity arrived! One of the cleaning guys had left it on my bed, on the top pillow. An official-looking envelope, my name written in a trained hand in black ink. A letter from the government. Not the Albion government. The Eirish... I instantly knew what type of information would be inside the envelope, but was still surprised with its verdict: 'Request approved'. Upon rendering my Albion passport, at a time of my choice within six months,

and with a personal visit to a Slane County Office all would be formalised. All discreetly done. Although I normally slept well on Doon - with the abundance of activity and labour in the healthy outside, the ever present sea air, the relatively good grub and the ample supply of spirits - I did not catch my normal nocturnal rest for a few days in a row. Did I really want to change now? The basics of the loops working, system in place, lots to fine-tune though - an opportunity to go further abroad... Did I want to go abroad? It was time, I felt, to reconcile with my family - I did not miss them that much anymore, but something told me we needed to simply get together again. Now or never. Were the loops, our experiences rather, transferable? I liked it here. On the third night, I decided that the decision point would be with the island. A handover soon of Doonhaven, or not, and its protecting island of rocks, would decide for me.

Then, not long after all these climactic developments, to top it up, another 'event' took place that rocked my existence... the Paul-story. That undoubtedly contributed also in Flower's vanishing interest in our tandem. Not that I had any part in it, but I was somehow guilty by association.

We lost Paul. Along with so many other things happening in those messy times, I did not care a lot. I had liked the guy as a companion, but had started to develop serious doubts about his general attitude. Was he with us, or was he with something else? We had been colleagues, peers, but never true friends. I think that only on the train to Mundy, on our way to our enigmatic assignment on an island called Doon, we exchanged some thoughts that had a certain emotional value: about our families, background and the like. But I do recall also that Paul kept on talking about his girlfriend in Poole, in the south of Albion, even tried to capture my attention longer than modesty would have dictated: with her anatomical details, revealing physical actions and habits. Rather quite embarrassing for a first meeting, actually...

In short, Paul was a conqueror, a ladies-man, and womaniser. Whenever I saw him staring away out of the train window - and later to non-existing objects on the horizon of the seas surrounding the island, I was sure he was fantasising about girl play, servicing or being served.

It started quite classically with Paul skipping a watch duty. Another colleague who had joined the surface visuals station had briefed me. Paul had brought a girl, well a woman rather, from Castletowndoon with him to the island. She was dressed as a man in soldiers' uniform, under a shelter of very heavy rain - and he was to later 'ride' her publicly in the enlisted men's dormitory, with an interested audience of ten soldiers, who were rudely awakened by the noise and sounds of the impromptu coupling! The woman was a very distant relative of the Donovans, an island dynasty. She was a rumoured nymphomaniac, who went with men from all backgrounds, most of the time for free and for fun, and sometimes for money, if the household budget ran short at the end of the month... She loved to be with (very) young men, sometimes several at the same time it was further gossiped.

Paul subsequently skipped a few other service obligations, then disappeared altogether for an entire week. Nobody had a clue of his whereabouts. At a certain point in time he actually stopped functioning completely. Funny enough, I ran into him often in the enlisted men mess - unshaven and smelling of booze and cigarettes - but we had stopped talking by now. I kept on wondering why the higher officers kept him in the system, on the island. Was he part of an important secretive movement - he could not be afforded to be lost out of the service? Important family links? OxCam material? A spy for Albion?

Just before the war threat took off in earnest and just a few months before Treaty Port and Fort Doonhaven were handed 'back' to the Eirish, he ran into serious trouble. His horniness, in combination with his incredible nonchalance, his profound arrogance in fact, pushed him into a

ginger haired fate. She was no more than seventeen, with milk white skin, a pretty scalp abundant with red hair, a virgin - but not for long, as Paul made her open her legs...: with his look, stare rather, his trusted baritone voice full of attractive Scottish accent, his long hands, his tongue and all other relevant parts of his good-looking young man's body.

In all fairness, he did a correct short week of walking around hand-in-hand, with a pretension of being in love, sweet kisses on deserted island pebble beaches. Subsequently, he took her bloodily on the side of the High Road, coming from the west towards the village of Roerring.

The Methuselah-old Sean Donovan, who happened to walk by, thought initially that he was dreaming and even managed to get some kind of arousal for the first time in twenty years - was to spend the next three months in Morty's Bar loudly painting the pastoral road scene to whatever audience he could find. Nobody believed the old randy fool - but that changed very rapidly when little Fanny started to show an ever growing little belly.

What Paul had overlooked in his haze of hurried hormones, were the hidden royal roots of wee Fanny. Fanny Donovan descended through the Donovans who had run the east end of the island, even now, when the Albions had sequestered it from the rest of the island, with a historic entitlement. It would be rather standard than exception to hear a Donovan in Morty's Bar boast about the rich lineage that had given them the power to run the rock they lived on. They would go easily back to Viking settlers, rough and ruthless Danes, later mixed with powerful Normans and other knights pushed out of the boiling-over Albion and Europe continent. The Donovans were not only proud, they were also in charge and beyond and above any law that did not originate from their island, their heritage.

They came for Paul, in the pouring rain, in the middle of a very cold night. The Eirish loved a good old fashioned lynch-party, preferably after getting collectively drunk and courageous. Paul slept an unburdened sleep, when they literally tore him - blanket and all - from his elevated bunk bed

(he preferred sleeping in the enlisted mens dorms, as he could sneak in and out undetected) onto the cold floor, and from there on through the dormitories and hallways, over doorsills and steps out into the open. During this journey he alternated between receiving damage to his head and trying to dance on knees, hips, back and elbows. They kept on walking - his head jumping from stone to stone on the Fort's roads. When they finally dumped him on the exact spot where he had impregnated little Fanny, he had lost consciousness. The eight heroes who had abducted him, urinated all over him - fresh liquids from the earlier numerous courage pints - and left him there to rot. Ironically, he was found the next morning by the same old Sean Donovan, he, who had launched the scandal. The skin on Paul's hands was gone, tendons torn open and protruding, some small bones visible - infections had started.

Sean made him wash under the pump of his bachelor cottage nearby and told him simply to leave the island as soon as he could. Otherwise, he was sure, new measures would be introduced. Paul left like a wounded bird, a bundle of misery smelling of unwashed civilian clothes that Sean had produced - on the last ferry of the day, under cover in the twilight of the evening.

The red-haired angel was freed of her embryo by three old mainland women, who had experience with the routine. In spite of predictions and warnings, she recovered in a couple of days. Bleeding and infection stayed absent, and fertility intact: later in life, she would produce eight very healthy children for her cousin she married. A Donovan, not surprisingly.



## **August 1940 - a rainy night at the officers mess**

I am all alone in the mess, the only officer left at the camp. They have all left for 'more strategic locations' - as they call it. I don't want to move. Well, perhaps I wouldn't mind, but nobody asked. But then, they need somebody to keep an eye on the day to day business here, to guard the loops, don't they. Well, do they?

We had five signals over the last month alone. None of those could be confirmed at the surface. I have no idea what they mean. I duly reported all signals, but did not get any response (questions or confirmation...) back from headquarters in Dublin. Looks like they have other things on their mind. Or just not interested at all: a loop signal? Loops? Not invented by us, so why should we care...

## *Next day, another evening alone at the mess*

The man was back in O’Keeffe’s today. He is Eirish, he had told me upfront, but had lived in Albion for a while, he told me the second time round. This was the third time I had met him. Major challenge to determine his accent. Never heard it before. Could even be Australian, New Zealand, Canadian... We took a few pints together, he gave me a cigar, good pre-war stuff, and then we followed the same protocol. I went for a leak, while he paid and left the pub. Then, I sat for another four-five minutes at our table in the front near the grocery counter, took my last sips, put my coat on, to leave. He told me he would always leave turning left out of the door, so I took a right. I then crossed the deserted town square, avoiding the dung the cattle had left this morning after the weekly livestock fair, and hurried to the quay. He would wait for me in the ferry bus shelter, near the water. That shelter would be empty; the old folks were gone by five o’clock. No more buses after that hour. The aged who would use the shelter for passing their day time would definitely be gone. It was now half past six and I had exactly half an hour before the Navy shuttle would fetch me at the crossing ramp for my personal transport back to Roerring.

He sat on the small, half-rotten wooden bench in the shelter. I still did not know his full name, only his first name: Rick. He was in his late forties he said and that he was an Eirish patriot, with contacts in London and Canada (Was that the accent?). Never understood what the Canada-thing had to do with it but at the time, I found it thrilling to hear. The first meeting we had, had I think had truly been a coincidence, we just happened to sit next to each other at O’Keeffe’s Bar in Castletowndoon on a stormy night, when I came back from Mundy and could not cross over to the island anymore. I sat waiting for information whether a tender would still be able to pick me up. He (never did I have any inkling of where he stayed) had

become very much interested in the island, he said, and the military works, he himself being a military man, as he stated more than once that evening. During the loops construction with the Albions, we had once had a special briefing by Trevor-Smith on 'the enemy and its spy tactics' and how they might be after intelligence on our DUMMY project - although later, I found that the Eirish didn't give a damn about spying or being spied upon. As for DUMMY, I had no clue anymore what was common knowledge, what was inside military secrets and what was not to be shared with anybody.

He paid for all the drinks - he seemed to have a lot of money. He was a horse trader, for the rich, Albion-based toffs, he said and was exploring some 'new sources' away from the traditional breeding grounds. There was time to do some good research now, he said, as the Emergency had stalled all normal recreational horse business. The east of Eire was locked, he said, no transportation to or from Albion was possible. Sea transport for horses now more likely from the south or even the wilder west Atlantic side. I knew nothing about horses.

He quickly became quite intrusive in his questioning. I sensed that he was kind of aware that it was in fact me alone that ran the loops, and that he knew I could do what I liked with them.

The trust in the man came from my realisation that we had both such an enormous Albion background and were also, or still, Eirish - even me, convinced by now. First he had been keenly interested in the loops as a system and only later, and to be honest, much to my prompting, did he develop an interest in the results, the ships traffic if you like. Looking back later, I think he played it really well.

He lit two fresh cigarettes now in his mouth, and handed me one, again good prewar stuff and we sat back on the wooden bench while the cold and humid evening fell over the stretch of water in front of us - which the

Albions, when they still owned it, called Doonhaven. A very safe haven indeed.

We talked again about horses. He was glowing, he loved the subject. He had bought a breeding stallion for a price that would have been impossible in normal times, he said. Now with all the international travel restrictions, values had plummeted. I said that I would love to visit his farm. He did not react to that, instead inhaled deep from his cigarette. We were silent for a while. It was indeed excellent tobacco.

“Any movements?” Rick asked suddenly. I was surprised. He had never before inquired so bluntly about the results of my work. But I knew instinctively that he would go at some stage in this direction. I asked him why he was interested, so out-of-the-blue. Because it is a great technology, he said, we Eirish should be more proud of it. And develop it more. After the Emergency, he said if there was ever going to be an ‘after-the-war’, he would try to re-apply with the military and see if he could be assigned to the Eire Navy Technology Department. There was still so much to do for the country! I decided to tell him about the five signals we had got over the last few weeks. His face lit up again, now even more than when we talked about horses. He leaned back and looked happy, but he was not relaxed. He just kept on firing questions, one after the other. He gave the impression to be very well prepared for this talk.

During the ensuing talk, or interrogation rather (now that it was dark and we had no reason anymore to stay on that bench there, with a very humid storm coming up - he kept on talking and asking though), I started to realise that freely giving out all this information could be rather inappropriate. Somewhere, somehow, to be fair however, I didn’t give a damn: nobody, except Trevor-Smith maybe, had actually restricted me in sharing information. My fellow-Eirish they didn’t give a hoot either, it seemed. They were too busy staying out of the whole mess... or too busy manipulating themselves into a new post-war role opposite the Albions, if

indeed there ever was going to be a post-war, to copy Rick's thoughts. And let's not forget, it had not been very motivating for me that nobody showed interest in my loops: I felt pretty much on my own, hiding an explosive secret that I didn't own. I wanted to talk about it freely and proudly. The loops had kept me here; they had me have my passport changed. Thirdly, I needed to get clarity on my findings, there was so much that I did not understand. Well, to keep it short, I had in fact an enormous need and urge to talk about it. Rick came at the right time! I only realised to the fullest much later that he was most probably indeed a vulgar spy; a classical thief of information.

I took another cigarette out of the open packet he had left just between us and lit it with the stump of the earlier one. It felt it was soon going to rain heavily, but I didn't see anything coming down just yet. The first signal, I explained to Rick, came in the middle of the night, around two in the morning and had been registered by the new writing devices we had installed as part of the potentiometers, just before the Emergency started. The signal was on the long Mundy Bay loop. There was no question about it that something had passed. There were no surface observations though, while it had been a relatively clear half-moon night. To be frank, I do not remember if there had been a watch on duty, as all motivated and qualified people had left. A very similar signal - this time, I was present in the Bay loop cabin myself - came up on the meters around sixteen hours later, six o'clock in the evening. No surface sightings here, I checked myself. There were no doubts.

"They came back," said Rick, staring blankly in the night. I think by then it had indeed started to rain.

"What?"

He coughed, inhaled again. What?

"Mundy Bay is not that long. They are going to check out Mundy town, from Sheep's Head to Mundy is about twenty miles, right? Average speed

of a subsurface submarine is seven knots. Got it? It took around three hours to get to Mundy harbour, they staid overnight at periscope depth, checked out the movements, noted the number of vessels, Navy and civilians in town, perhaps landed a spy, whatever... stayed let's say twelve hours, then moved back submerged at the same periscope depth, over your highly sensitive looped cables. Out to the ocean again. Not to be seen again...? Who knows?"

I suddenly felt depressed, in that moment. The rain added insult to injury. Never had I gone that far yet, to attach real conclusions to my electrical readings. I felt very technical, limited and useless. Of course, this is what it is all about, I now saw, that is why we made this; this is why I am here!

"What do you think?" Rick asked, enveloping himself in a huge wet cloud of exhaled smoke. No cough. He stared in the dark rain in front of him. What did I think? I felt quiet. My brain raced for answers. What does he mean? German? Albion? American? I said I didn't know.

Rick relaxed a bit. He looked at me. Then spoke: "Albions would come in and out fast, but they would never stay. They had been kicked out of here after all. They are persona non grata. Politically highly sensitive to challenge Eirish coastal waters. Americans... well I don't think they are interested in us Eirish, why would they be? We are neutral, kind of on the American side, but not on the Albion side, well, what can I say, they wouldn't go so slow either, I would say, and not stay that long. Must be the Germans! Got it, good old Bernhard? Got it? We need to assume, to interpret, to conclude, to extrapolate... otherwise technology is just technology... So, it must have been the Germans, our Kraut friends was what they were. But, what the feck are the Krauts looking for in Mundy Bay...?"

I finished my cigarette and threw it in the rain that was now pouring down fast and massively. The heavy glowing end of the sump sizzled out in

a second when it hit the soaked grass in front of us. I was getting cold. Wanted to go back to the pub. Get drunk. Forget. Sleep. Get out of here.

We were quiet for a short while. Before I realised what I said, I offered another solution. What if it was another one? The first one didn't come back, stayed where it was. Possible, Rick laughed, but then they are stupid idiots. How long can you stay in Mundy Bay? On a clear, quiet, sunny day even a boy shepherd could see them from above, from a hill position, through the water. But you know what, it is not impossible. Especially when they rest on the bottom... Good thinking!

That night, I didn't tell Rick about the three other signals. Three, that would mean one in-and-out, plus one staying in. Or: three coming in, none coming out? I was confused; needed to measure more and better and I needed to think a bit more as well. No more readings without conclusion... From now on.

## May 1941 - Doonhaven

*I write this while I am on duty in the main cabin myself. As I am most of the time. Self-imposed duty. Nothing else to do.*

There were so many movements lately - basically starting when spring took over from the long wet winter that I decided to take most readings, if possible, by myself. The other guys, they are OK, but sometimes I suspect they sleep and switch the recorders off. If they found out there had been a reading, they would be required the next day to make a report. With 'interpretation' as I now requested as routine. So simply disabling the reading was a great advantage. They would rather play golf on the nine holes that the Albions left on the other side on the mainland, next to the Navy coal bunker station.

Rick had also come to Doon. Unannounced of course. He stayed in The White House on the Low Road. He used another name on the island, he said because of a heritage question for which he was being looked for in his hometown on the mainland (he never told me which one that was). He even spent a night in the hut with me, but did not sleep at all, and made notes and copied the readings, including the unclear ones. Told me not to tell anybody. He was just interested in the technique. He admired my system very much, that was all. It was all in the pure interest of the 'Eire-of-the-future'...

My god, what a winter it had been. Storm after storm crept in from the Atlantic. Tens of vessels at the time stayed for days, sometimes weeks in Doonhaven, and if they were not Eirish, then they were sequestered by Eirish from each other - and prohibited to disembark on the mainland. Crews were only allowed to land under Navy supervision. Formally the duty of the Eirish authorities, it was often still the omni-present Albion



ships that supervised and managed the anchoring. The old colonisation and the perception of a shared enemy blurred the lines of duty.

How - with this continuous bad weather - could this land, this big green wet island have been the preferred habitat for so many people during long prehistoric years? Can one believe that civilisation was parked here, as some say, for centuries, on remote islands, not like here on Doon, this is not a remote island, it just lacks a bridge to the mainland, no I mean real remote islands...? Islands only visible on a clear sunny day.

## *Two days later*

*Tonight is warm and beautiful. A glorious night. That's why I am perhaps in this writing mood. Before the last few days, I hadn't put pen to paper for at least four to five months. Who is ever going to read these memoirs? They are dangerous and I should not even keep them.*

Rick only showed at night. He never took a ride with any of the Navy vessels, or with any of the islanders it seemed. Would he have his own boat to get to the island? He always came strictly by foot to the huts. Never before twelve midnight and never after four in the morning. As toddlers are afraid of the dark, he was afraid of the light. I took on more and more nightshifts myself, as signals were more likely to be had in the middle of the night rather than during the day. Although we did get them at daytime as well, I have to say, the recorders actually increased the number of observations in the dark.

There was one disciplinary imperfection in Rick's stealthy life style, and that was his incessant cigarette smoking. I had developed an extra sense for knowing that Rick was on his way to the hut: I could smell his smoke from about a mile away, unless the wind blew it the other way. I instantly recognised his weird, unusual expensive brand of tobacco.

About a week ago he came to the hut, just when the high barometric pressure field laid itself out over our eastern part of the Atlantic and the heat spell began. In his tobacco halo, he entered the hut without knocking and closed the door carefully behind him, just stopping short of actually locking it behind him with the key, which I had kept stuck in on the inside. He did feel very much at home in my domain by then and frankly, I did not care. Although I had still no clear idea of what his true mission was in his current life - well, spying obviously, but for whom? - I trusted him. I often

found him too inquisitive, and I realised it annoyed me, but I felt all my information was safe with him. Like it stopped with him, for a personal greater goal. At that night, Rick brought information himself - unprompted, not asked for. That very insight suddenly gave my work and beliefs a new lease on life and handed me the professional and personal attention that my Eirish compatriots were withholding from me. Well, anyhow, no active withholding... they most likely had simply just forgotten about me and my loops.

Rick wasted no time.

“Did they come out?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, “they came out the day before yesterday.”

“Confirmed Albion, correct?”

“Yes,” I said, “their speed was clearly Albion.” (We had calibrated our understanding and had become good at it).

“Nothing coming in, I guess?” asked Rick. He smiled at me, but he didn’t look at ease. He took a many-folded, discoloured piece of paper out of his long coat. He unfolded it. It was the same hand-drawn map he had laid out on the cabin table the last time he was here. I got curious again. I could learn.

The chart was now fully unfolded and stretched over the entire chart table depicting the North Atlantic. Albion and Eire and a part of France were on the right side, North America, Canada, some Greenland and Iceland were on the other side. The part of the chart that was ocean carried lots of lines. Rick had briefly explained it to me the last time. There were two grids on the chart: one the official internationally agreed naval grid, which followed the traditional meridians and parallels; the other was – and he had had a weird enigmatic look on his face when he told me – the secret German naval grid, much thicker manually drawn lines, a completely different artificially drawn-up system that enabled the German navy to apply an alternate code for their coordinates system. I had never heard

about it and when he tried to explain, I did not understand the finesse of the difference. And I never understood if it was really that secret when Rick could work with it - and share its origins and principles openly with me.

Rick had been working on the map since the last time. There were now different colours, round spots in groups on both sides of the ocean. They were black, red or blue. Then there were bright bars, green and larger than the dots. Also circles, squares, triangles - all in different colours.

Hand-drawn and coloured.

He drew a chair close by and sat at the table. I sat next to the meters and looked at him. He expected me to sit at the table as well: I could see that from his demanding, near-military expression...

“The Battle for the Atlantic is going into its final phase, Bernhard,” he proclaimed. “The Allies are not scared anymore and the Germans are definitely also no longer intimidated. The Albions understand all German strategy and tactics - and the Germans still consider themselves to be the strongest. We have two over-confident, strong parties, eager for a good fight. The ‘knowing-all’ against the ‘best-in-the-game’. They are sucked towards each other. On a collision course literally, they are going head-on. Something’s gotta give... Someone is going to need to win. And as a logical result, somebody’s gonna lose.”

He took a deep breath.

“Here,” he said, and pointed to the large concentrations of stars on the American side.

“American shipping. They are now launching convoys, nearly every week, every four to five days. They are so sure, with their improved convoy system. Zig-zag tactics, ample destroyers around them all the time, even seaplanes and regular air cover, now much farther than what was possible only last year. You know, Bernhard, you can see subs very well from above. At periscope depth there is nowhere to hide. Big whales, looking to breath, nowhere to hide.”

“I know,” I said and now decided indeed to join him at the table. But I did not sit down. Something made me slightly uncomfortable tonight in Rick’s demeanour. I thought: that’s why they go over my loop at night. In the midst-of-the-dark-night, exactly at the hours when you are walking to my hut, I thought, but did not say it. Nighttime seemed the solution for everybody in this conflict.

But the Germans (he had explained me once that he refused to call the subs Nazis as most of the German navy, and especially the submarine officer force was led by splendid young captains, free-spirits, non-conformist intelligent men often still in their twenties - who knew that they had to do their war duty, but found no intellectual or emotional support in the Nazi message... And the crews were just drafted, no volunteering or other hidden heroism; poor city boys and young farmhands, most likely very scared of water, drawn by cruel lottery into the cramped forward quarters of a U-Boot) had finally found their true fighting spirit in the ‘wolf pack’ tactics. They had spread out long lines - along the secret German grid - of hidden and waiting subs, all over the Atlantic. Each one of them hoped to spot one of the rewarding convoys. When one of them indeed did see the tens of full bounty ships in their defensive yet eager grouping, they would call-signal urgently in to Berlin. All the rest of the pack nearby would be hurried subsequently - coordinated by Berlin! - to the lucky spotter’s coordinates. In a true wolf pack they would then attack the convoy, drive them crazy, chase them to exhaustion, kill those left behind. Sometimes they were actively hunting, sometimes they were grouping together in an ambush configuration - waiting for the right moment for the kill, the jugular, the murder. The days of letting survivors get away in lifeboats with donated provisions, gallantly waved-off to a nearby coastline, were over. Deck mounted machine guns administered the last rites now.

He just continued without soliciting feedback and gave me his perspective on how the Battle of the Atlantic would develop. The wolf

packs could still strike it lucky and tip the balance. If they could seriously damage at least five convoys per month, the Allies would be forced to rethink their novel Atlantic crossing principles. He gave figures in tonnage and said that more than ten percent increase in Allied ships' sinking would turn the war into the Germans' favour. I had no idea what he was talking about. He was going too fast for me; I couldn't keep track of these calculations. Never been good at mental calculation really. I just wanted to spot signals and help the Albions defeat the Germans. And of course keep our technology alive for the Eirish, if they should ever show interest. I think that were the only motivations, I had at that stage. This game was too sophisticated for me. Rick knew a lot about it; that was clear. What was his role? Were the Eirish handing over this information? Through the likes of Rick...?

Next to his nicotine habit, there was something else I detested in Rick. He started to call me 'little brother' or 'little buddy'. It was nice of him to be a bit more friendly and personal, but I did not like to be reminded all the time that I was perhaps too young, for the decisions I had been making and for the work I was doing. Then, it made me think of my own little brother - who was safe in America. Well, 'little' - he was nearly grown up now. I missed my entire family actually. Hadn't heard anything, seen them for years. Would they be missing me? Would they still be there?

At that very moment - Rick sitting, his head bowed over the chart, me standing next to him, looking literally over his shoulder - a signal like an explosion came through. Rick saw it first. We both stood up and took the two steps to the wall with the meters. The signal went off the charts. It was as clear as could be. Very fast and large, dipping, then coming up again. Never seen such a large and fast one though. But it could be a normal surface ship! I phoned to the south Bay loop cabin and got very unexpectedly an awake watch duty staff on the line. Nothing on the

surface. Visibility excellent, Sir. Nope, no ships, Sir. No. Nothing. We talked about the split signal. Up, down, and up again.

“There is two of them,” said Rick, interrupting, sounding firm and convinced. “The first tows the second. A wounded brother, a wounded wolf from the pack. I can smell the blood, the gore from here...” As if to underline the aromatic statement, he produced yet again another cigarette, sat on the chart table and looked at me with an intensity which was new to me. Rick had entered the game himself, it looked. Did they move in or out of the Bay? Did Rick know something that I did not?

## February 1942 - Doonhaven

*Over the entire last year honestly again no time to write in this stupid journal. Been more on the water than in any of the measuring cabins lately. Rick's gone! No idea where he is, where he went. Who he was. He might be dead - it's war after all. Feels like everybody's gone. All deserted the war, the effort, the Emergency. Deserted me. Gone. All have vanished.*

Basically, the numbers didn't tally. Very simple, and that's how it further started. Eventually, there were always three not coming out! I recalculated all sightings and signals, took me a full day. Reconciled them from time to time. Three remained in Mundy Bay; no other explanation possible. Recalculated and rechecked - went through all observations, I had made since the loops were made, including all my notes taken during the long conversations with Rick. Only in the very beginning the loops were sometimes off, no longer than a couple of hours, and that was before we had started routine and disciplined administrating plus counting. Anyhow, three signals were missing. Sure as hell, one hundred percent sure! The fact that it was an odd figure and not an even one, gave better proof. I was very confident about it.

No real clear way though to guess when exactly the boats that hadn't come out, went in; but I was sure it must have been the last two-three weeks. Before, we never had a sub, or a positive signal unaccounted for, for longer than a week. Three subs hence: the maximum three weeks. Schoolboy math. All obvious and clear - but what was actually going on? I had no idea! It was always the same, but still it didn't make any sense.

And finally, there was no more Rick to guide me. He would have encouraged me to do what I eventually did. To start with, I entrusted one of the good local guys with the new information, because I needed help:



I could never do this alone. There was an island boy, Denny Donovan, a very smart kid. He had just finished high school at the pre-seminary in Bandon. After, he had drifted back to the island, not because he did not want to continue his studies, but because his fishing-farming-shop-keeping parents had no money, and worse: no vision of a what to do with an intelligent kid that did not really want to become a priest but saw no other way to develop himself. He was instructed to help his father, fishing for a couple of years; then possibly seek out a job with the Mail or with the shop. If times would change, there might be money for a short-track schoolteacher's curriculum in Mundy. After that, he could take a job as an assistant schoolteacher, ending up on another poor island or in the slums of Sligo, Slane or Dublin. (Brains were obviously not always seen as a blessing on Doon Island. It provided unwelcome challenges for which there were no immediate, let alone affordable solutions...).

I picked Denny for three reasons. Firstly, he had already worked with me on the cables, and also during the initial loop trials. I had evidence that he had kept his mouth shut on what had transpired on the meters in the waters surrounding his island. Secondly, he was indeed un-island-like clever. Last, but not least his father owned two boats, a large trawler with which he made day trips for shrimp and lobster and a much smaller one, without a cabin, but with a strong new diesel engine, which he used for small trade between the island and the mainland. Denny drove that smaller boat regularly. He could take it out whenever he felt like it, no questions asked. He got fuel from the Navy; that was perhaps why I offered him the job alongside me. All islanders who in some way provided service to the Navy, got fuel - which was becoming more and more scarce at the time. Clearly Denny entered the picture here.

I assumed that the subs had to come up regularly to refresh the air inside and to enable the diesels to run and to keep the batteries charged. Also to give the men a break - to smoke and walk around on the deck. I had read

about the subs in that earlier Great War: some had snorkels, and could breathe permanently when just under the surface - that was however for the diesel engines only, they did not do a lot for the overall air inside. They really had to come up once in a while, whether they liked it or not. And this I needed to know. Coz' my observations needed to tally. Three is an odd number. Always observations in 'three', for more than a year now...

Coming up at night would be the best, from their hiding point of view, especially during a dark new moon or during bad weather. Bad weather being rain or fog, not storms, as the tiny submarine hulls and the movements they would incur would make any human aeration exercise quite uncomfortable, if not plain impossible. The rocking would render the men simply seasick - even outside in nice fresh air - no such a problem under water - there are no waves, no rocking when comfortably submerged...

I had to take the lead here. Show some initiative. So - plain gambling on a chance encounter - we went out with the first new moon. Leaving at around eight in the evening from the little pier in Roerring, it looked like we were just going to make a routine crossing to Castletowndoon. Denny (and I had not asked him for that; it simply showed the boy's intelligence) had put some empty fishing crates in front of the engine, similar crates as his father would use to get supplies onto the island from the mainland. We had clothed ourselves for a normal short crossing of Doonhaven Bay to town and did not bring any extra gear, suggestive of a longer trip. He had not been briefed on the true intent - but he understood, I guessed. We looked like we were going for simple supplies or a fishing run - only the hour on the clock was suspect.

When we left the small dock and took the wide bent right around The Rock in front of the harbour, I felt like we were not going to be lucky tonight: there was no moon and it was a dark somber night, there was hardly any wind. Where did I base this sortie on? Could it all be based on misunderstanding? Wrong extrapolation?

No moon, no stars, it looked like it was going to be a pitch-dark night. No waves, no sound. No wind. Ghostly silent. At least it was dry. Deeper into Mundy Bay it would probably be so quiet that we could hear the stale swell from the Atlantic, originating from some old far-away storm, smashing into the furthest island rock, right under the light house.

We followed for about twenty minutes the normal expected crossing bearings, then tuned down the engine and crept onto the southern rocky mainland shores, following its illogical curves eastwards, into true Mundy Bay. That took us nearly an hour, as we did not go fast anymore. We had no lights; we both sat low on the wooden boards in the open cockpit of our boat. We did not even smoke: even a tiny little glowing cigarette-end might give us away, we thought. Or the smell of smoke would. Denny stopped the engine twice; once when he saw a man on a donkey on the seaside road, very close to where we were and a second time when a person on the rocks, working on an upside-down-turned rowing boat, again close to the road, called out something loud out to us. Well, we thought it was to us. We stopped the engine. We floated on the ebb tide now; moved slowly out of Mundy Bay back to the ocean, rounding the eastern tip of Doon Island. The now invisible rowing boat guy yelled a few times more, but our impression was he had shouted towards the land and not to us - he actually sounded drunk now, and then his voice disappeared all together. I realised at that moment that it would be even more difficult for a submarine boat to surface here and remain undetected - definitely in these windless conditions. Far too close to humanity.

I had studied the charts carefully for this trip and tried to memorise all relevant data. Depth and distance to shore would be the key factors for a submarine's undetected survival in the bay. As a rule of thumb I had accepted that depth should be at the very minimum a hundred feet and distance from shore at least a half to a full mile. That would bring them possibly only at a straight angle from Ardgoal, indeed about a mile out;

there were not a lot of other location opportunities... Further out east in the Bay would of course qualify too, but that would float them too close to the urban settlements near Mundy and the odd possibility of detection by smaller vessels, local traders, smugglers, fishing and lobster trapping boats and all kinds of dinghies - going out at any hour, their clocks driven by the tide. And the unpredictable illegal closing time of the pubs...

The light of the Beacon on Roancarrigmore, the lonely rock island was off, for more than a year already; shipping was not welcome anymore along the Bay. It took us nearly a full hour along the shore before Denny set course to the central spot of the Bay, at the ninety degree angle with Ardgoal - where I assumed the subs could be hanging out. The night had now grown indeed at its darkest and I was amazed at how limited the view had become. I thought we had left under a clear sky, but there were no stars or perhaps they would come up later? Couldn't imagine that though.

I temporarily took the helm from Denny, who first peeped over the stern and then lit a cigarette with matches, squatting and hiding behind the engine chest. I was getting seriously cold now. We sailed purely on the compass, which we now lighted up every four to five minutes with the large torchlight that Denny had confiscated from his father's fishing boat. Denny kept looking around, at the same time that I peeped regularly at the compass.

Without any warning, he suddenly killed the engine and let the boat drift without further steering. He came to sit next to me in front of the boat and asked me for another cigarette. I had given up any submarine hope - he could smoke his heart out as far as I was concerned. We were quiet though, indeed smoked, looked around and listened. As expected, we heard, next to some very late (or were they early?) birds, only the water splashing against the rather thin wooden hull of our vessel. Very faintly, from another faraway land, we discerned the anticipated sounds of the old ocean against the old rocks. It was eerily quiet.

Denny, like during the long night shifts in the measuring cabins during the trials, did not speak. This was pure duty for him, talking would not contribute to the task at hand. That was good, because I could normally barely keep quiet for extended periods - with a talkative partner I would have long conversations. His taciturn character also prevented me from wasting my time talking. He smiled back, smoked and looked up, without a clear visual focus. He was listening. Well, more active: he listened.

Denny woke me with a mean painful poke in the side of my body. I lifted my head, but was so sleepy, that my head sagged back. He lifted my head up and whispered: "Listen up Bennie! Do you hear that?" At that moment I became aware of a long hissing sound. It got stronger, and then with some splashing it disappeared. It had a movement this sound, it had a speed, and then there was another one, same, but with a shorter hiss. Then another, and another, four, five, more? I reckoned it passed about twenty to thirty feet from our little boat. I tried to stand up to see what was passing by, whether it was in actuality a sub. Denny pulled me down before I could even stretch my knees to a more natural position. I bumped back on the wooden floor and I hurt myself. Before I could speak Denny let out a 'ssshhhh' and put a stretched finger over his lips, staring seriously at me. Quiet now, there were subs! I leaned back with my head against the inner side core of the boat and thought how lucky we were. Only the first night out and all our theories, the loops, the small electrical currents, the measurements, the meters, the recorders, the long nights at the cabins, my new identity... it had all not been in vain... Subs!

When I smelt it, Denny jumped up and laughed. He laughed so loud and hard that it pained my ears. This smell was absolutely awful. Rotten fish, rotten proteins... Dead bodies, I could not describe it differently. Denny pointed at them. There were two of them pretty close to the boat and although we did not see any of the enormous frames, I saw part of a tail

fluke moving like a very powerfully pulled plough through the perfectly flat water surrounding us.

Denny trotted back and forth in the boat; he was excited to see the large animals. He shouted at them like they were horses and for a while it looked like they hissed back at him, while they were at the surface passing us by. Then suddenly, they were gone. Deep down again. We heard nothing anymore. The quiet re-encapsulated us. It was a dream. The dark, the quiet, the water closed over our memory.

A long week later we went again. At night of course. There was some moon now - until about one in the morning. We left, under cover of a light persistent drizzling rain, around half ten. Denny came straight from Morty's Bar and was slightly drunk. He smelt of the local heavy malt beer and he had to piss twice over the small boat railing, even before we had turned around The Rock and lost sight of the small Roerring harbour. The rain turned a bit heavier when we cruised along the mainland shore again, and at one moment we had to slow down, as Denny seemed to have lost his way. It was less dark than last time, but the rain curtain blurred the visibility and made our vision thick and unreliable. Whenever he saw rocks, or even heard rocks, Denny knew where he was and could continue. He truly navigated on sounds, the different sounds of the different waves crashing on different boulder material. We sailed faster than last time to our waypoint opposite Ardgool, where we would tack at ninety degrees again to the centre of Mundy Bay. To the theoretical, presumed submarine hiding spot. We now chain-smoked - lighting cigarette after cigarette with the earlier cigarette - as it was difficult to ignite cigarettes in the rain with a flame, but when we reached our point, faster than last time, the last cigarette stumps flamed out in the now pure vertical rain. There was a bit of wind, but not a lot. A very long, low ocean swell moved through the Bay and our boat moved synchronically. We had put on our oilskins straight after departure, but we did not want to sit down, fearing that the wet would

still get through the material and soak us. Strange enough it was not cold at all for a February night. Sometimes it even felt warm: some small gusts of the southwestern breeze brought a humid hot streak of air. It made our faces glow.

About an hour after we had stopped the engine, the sky grew a bit darker, indicating that the fresh small moon had left us. We leaned with our backs opposite of each other against the bulwark insides. Denny had managed to get a cigarette running again, so we kept on smoking. Happy to be sitting, I had got pretty tired of the standing up, but I was not sleepy. We did not talk, which still pained me a bit, but it became the standard whenever I was on patrol with Denny. I just wondered what he had been contributing to the drinking conversation in the pub earlier?

Non-communicative Eirish are a rare sight in their watering holes.

The rain subsided. I was dozing away - now while standing up. Only horses can sleep standing up, they say. Therefore, I first thought that I was dreaming, or rather, I did not pay focused, eager attention to the voices as they came up as somehow completely normal in the no-man's-land towards the twilight sleep that I had entered. But eventually they did wake me. Not Denny, who was still sound asleep. He had finally sat down on the wet floor against the engine board and had slumped towards the side of the steering wheel. A young animal fast asleep.

The voices were from young men and they sounded cheerful, happy, playing. It was not really close, I could not discern any differences, languages or meaning in the vocal sounds. I turned my head and ears in a better-focused direction: heard laughing and loud splashing. Water fun noise.

I bent down and woke Denny, who stood up immediately and in a reflex wanted to start the engine and started to turn around the helm. I stopped him before he could make any noise and - copying now his very own

instructions from the last time - I produced a vertical finger over my lips and ensured him to be quiet. He nodded submissively - he listened.

We both caught the wet sounds now very loud and clear. I perceived we were drifting in the direction of where the sounds originated. It did not go fast enough for Denny: he took a large oar and put it in the brass oar holder at the stern and started to scull us through the water. Soon enough he had created a nice boat speed.

Instinctively, I went to the front of the boat and posted myself as the watch. We produced no discernible sound. The voices became slightly louder and more distinct. More personal. Now I could clearly hear it was not Albion that was spoken and I could separate a few serious old voices from the louder and more cheerful younger ones.

And then very suddenly I saw it. A large black steel fin on a low stretched dark platform, which rocked rhythmically and slowly on the bay-swell. We were perhaps fifty-sixty feet away. I called Denny, who had only looked back to follow the directions of the scull oar, and he looked up to the front and immediately started to turn the boat around. That was his instinct - surely he had not even had time to think about what he was going to actively do. Fear-flight-flee.

Now with the scene changing before our eyes, it looked like there were about ten men on the hull, three were in long raincoats, they carried formal caps, their ears covered. The rest, mainly young guys, some of them boys really, were in various states of nakedness, gliding off the hull, or climbing up again, using a collection of intertwined old ropes that were fixed as a kind of small stepping ladder at the back of the fin, the tower. Until they had noticed us, they were jolly, loud and all having a good time. What I did not understand: some were holding each other, in couples, giggling, high pitched voices - very happy. The old long coated men instructed the younger ones and these then jumped in under their commands, provoking laughter in all the others. How can they swim in this cold? - I thought, they



must be freezing! I did not reflect on the otherwise exciting discovery of sub, did not wonder if they were Albions, Yanks or Jerries. Naked men in an ice-cold sea. I just thought of the cold.

Then they saw us! One boy who had incidentally swam out far, saw our boat frantically trying to get away from their scene and started to shout back to his base, his head twisted for effectiveness of the cry, but with his eyes still firmly on us. He threaded water, he was not afraid at all. He did not swim back to his sub. He shouted more words, although we couldn't understand what he was trying to convey.

A lower, more mature, voice now shouted in our direction, and we saw all the men in the water moving back to the sub. Those who were on the hull started to quickly put on their clothes; the swimmers frantically tried to climb back on the hull, flocking around the impromptu rope ladder. Most hull men then disappeared fast in the fin-tower, climbing up, then fast dropping in. The low voice shouted again, clearly at us, and I saw him - could not believe my eyes! - pulling a handgun from his waist. He aimed at us and shot. Without any qualm, without any reflections. He shot. We were being shot at!

I could not figure out what direction he had now taken, but I shouted at Denny to stop sculling. Denny stopped and looked frozen at the strange tableau developing. The officer shouted again at us and Denny raised his hands. His revolver was not aimed at us anymore. He had lowered it, while he dialogued frantically with the other long coats behind him on the deck. It had remained pretty busy now on the shiny black hull of the submarine.

I still thought of making a smooth escape. Denny however, looked immobilised by fear - a tiny forest deer in the headlights of a car - and without him it would not be possible. The gathering on the sub turned more relaxed and I perceived voices laughing about the frozen idiot fear-fixed stature that Denny had adapted. I wanted to say something to him, but then I realised that his fear looked so damn real that it would

explain to the submariners that we had really run into them by chance. Night-fishermen bumping into unexpected bay guests. Surreal.

There was new activity at the base of the black fin. They produced a small black rubber dinghy, which they lowered fast off the hull in the flat water. One swimmer and one long coat had themselves descended into it and they pushed off from the sub. The long coat sat in the back on the wobbly floorboard with his legs crossed, while the swimmer, now in long pants and a woolen pull-over, sat on his knees with his back to us and rowed the tiny inflatable in our direction. When they were near I observed the officer holding a gun in his right hand, not a revolver anymore, but something bigger.

Denny had in spite of his fear and my warning, started to scull again, very smoothly and quietly. Of course the dinghy caught up with us fast. The officer started shouting something at us, which sounded like Albion. Denny stopped and looked at them. He froze in his earlier position and raised his arms ridiculously high up. The first thing the officer asked when he put his left hand on the side of our boat, fixing our position next to the dinghy, was: "Eirish?"

We nodded submissively. What else could we do? He was still young, much younger than I thought he would be. He had a stubble beard of at least a few weeks, and, well, he had quite a friendly face, actually. He gave the gun to the rower who aimed it straight away at Denny (who closed his eyes for a moment when he saw that - preparing his final prayers most likely) and climbed aboard our vessel. He stood right up, smiled at Denny - who had simply stopped watching - and then at me. I tried to smile back. Then he produced his right hand and wanted to shake mine. I shook his hand.

"We have engine trouble," he said in heavily accented foreign Albion, "we are stuck in your bay."

“I see,” I said, and nodded my head again. Would he pick up my Albion accent?

“You are Eirish?” He asked it again. Suspicious indeed.

“Yes,” I said, “we are Eirish.”

“Then I can trust you,” the officer said.

“My name is Helmut. We are running out of food. We need milk, meat, eggs, bread and water. If there were beer, the men would be incredibly happy. We can pay. With cigarettes of course, although we are running low. Rather pay with Albion pounds, American dollars. Silver, bars and coins. We are honest, we are German submariners. Sailors, like yourself. We are not Nazis.”

I kept quiet - thoughts raced. There were two that stuck: first, how can I get the information on this ‘find’ as fast as possible to my contacts in Dublin, hoping it would find its way to Albion intelligence and second: am I ‘yes’ or ‘no’ going to link up with them here, getting them their food, their beer... They are after all enemies, potential invaders, an occupying force with world-domination ambition, right?

I tried to return a smile as natural as possible. I answered, trying to bring a local accent in my voice: “Yes, we are friends, we can do that. I need some money up front,” (I thought that would sound professional and serious) “and beer for your entire crew I cannot promise, but the rest I think should not be a problem. Cigarettes I am not sure also, at least not good ones. Where you coming from Helmut? How’s the battle going?”

Couldn’t believe I said that. It just came out. This was a wrong, stupid turn. Of course Helmut did not take the bait of a casual conversation. He turned to his waiting crew in the dinghy and shouted something to him in German. The sailor pushed the dinghy off and then rowed it the stern to the side of our boat.

Helmut kicked Denny with the side of his foot. Denny froze again, but lowered his arms.

“In the dinghy, now, please,” Helmut said sternly. The initial warm ambience had changed into chilled.

Oh my god, I thought, of course, they are not stupid, oh my god, I should have anticipated this. These guys talk business... They are businessmen, pirates, outlaws, renegades, kidnappers, slavers...

Denny started talking to me, rather nonsensical, sounded like begging, but Helmut told him to shut up. He pushed him in the dinghy, and then he instructed the sailor - as far as I understood their German - to row Denny to the sub.

Helmut sat down on the engine chest, dug a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. Lit the cigarette with a very large lighter that he zipped over his pants and then opened and threw a large flame - and inhaled deeply. I noted that the cigarettes were Albion-made. They looked like a good brand; they had them also once in awhile in Castletowndoon.

I honestly struggled now in deciding what to say or do. Denny was clearly being kidnapped! Where was I going? My initial fear and excitement was taken over fast now by the cold of the night. I knew it was going to be even colder in a couple of hours. I leaned back to the bulwark - and I decided, again on a whim - sometimes I really do not think about my actions - to ask Helmut for a cigarette. Apparently his good mood was back - he handed me a cigarette - I lighted it up using the glowing stump of his. That tasted good, these were good old-fashioned genuine tobacco cigarettes. We looked at each other, every other inhale, and I remember I reflected that Helmut was a well-composed cool person. I had read about the heroism of the U-Boot captains and I envisaged here a genuine stereotype, a true captain. I wanted to strike up a conversation again, less intrusive this time, by asking if he was indeed the commanding officer, but the dinghy with the sailor was suddenly back to fetch him. Helmut took the courtesy of shaking my hand again, and said: “Tomorrow night you must come back. If the weather is bad, then the night after that, if bad again, the night after that,

with all the supplies, for forty men for two weeks, you calculate yourself. There is enough money. If you want to see your little brother back...” He smiled and showed perfect white teeth. He gave me a sticky fat bundle of banknotes, which I - without looking at it - stuffed in my coat pocket. Then he lowered himself in the dinghy and they were off. Or was I off? The odd thing was, they rowed in a straight line back to their mother vessel, although I couldn’t even see it anymore. They might get lost, like me. What was their homing signal?

Initially, I wanted to wait until daylight, but realised that that was going to be quite some time. I started the engine the way Denny did, and I was lucky that it started straight away on the first crank. Put the engine in gear, tossed the stump of my cigarette overboard and increased the speed on the throttle. I took the helm and sat down on the small wooden steering bench. I had become my own Denny now.

I remembered the wind had come from the southwest when we left and I chose therefore my course straight in the wind. Straight back to Doon looked better to me now than following the shore course. Coming back is less suspicious than going out. A new factor had entered the story; I decided however that explaining Denny’s disappearance would be of later order - there were other riddles to solve first.

Most of the way back - trying to keep my eyes sharply focused on the limited visibility, looking for last-moment fatal rocks, listening to last minute sounds of breaking water – I got lost in the cigarette riddle: Helmut smoked an Albion brand, which tasted good and fresh. Suppose he had not had it purchased one way or another in Castletowndoon nearby, he would have brought it from their homeport, presuming Germans had access to Albion cigarette stock. Possible! Would they go on shore in Albion? Also - disruptive thought - what about this weirdly large lighter... functioning even in the thick drizzle. Wasn’t that American? Seen it in some movie... For

cigarettes, he was undoubtedly now asking in fact for a new supply, meaning he was running low.

Now, let's put the supply per person at the moment of departure on two sleeves, each with twenty packs, which would give them – with twenty cigarettes per pack – eight hundred cigarettes. The officers had access to the outside when the sub was surfaced - they surfaced very regularly apparently; let's say they - the officers, each - smoked two to five cigarettes of their personal ration a day. Would this mean they were out of port anywhere between roughly a hundred and fifty and four hundred days... More than a year? The cigarette I smoked tasted quite fresh, not dry, acrid or tarry, the real stuff. Were they on a hand-to-mouth regimen, supplied from the Eirish coast? Was I the only one falling in their sea trap? How would they get supplies otherwise? Dirty tricks to get stuff on board through naive and stupid seamen they encountered by chance, perhaps?

The sky cleared dramatically in the commencing morning. It got lighter around me and could easily see half a mile. The rain had now completely subsided. I was very close to the small guns post near the water on the east point of Doon - it resembled in my tired, sleep-deprived hallucinatory mind a submarine tower! Made me chuckle... - and could even discern the large guns, higher on the hill at Loneport. I decreased the engine pace and dropped the fishing lines with the large but empty hooks overboard and started trawling, stopping once in awhile, getting the lines in and out, navigating large vain circles. Hope I wouldn't catch any fish there, but it would be nice if somebody would see me fishing. I just wanted to sleep.

Entering the small Roerring harbour, just when I came around The Rock that closed The Cove off from the bay, I thought of something else Helmut had said. 'Your little brother'. He thought of Denny as my true little brother. Did he really think that Denny was my brother, or was it an Albion translation of a casual friendly German remark; little brother, like 'little buddy'? Then, Rick had also called me this. And still, I didn't like it. I

was nobody's little brother and the only 'little' brother I had was in America, far away from these threatening waters. Before the start of the Emergency he had left with my mother for America, Dad's country of lost opportunities - but also of safety, rest and future. What a vision and what courage...

Once in bed, thoughts of my family filled my head - before I passed out. Would they be surprised to hear from me, what I was doing and for whom? Pleasantly surprised by my ideas, gust, new loyalties; vision yes... Or would they not see it, not grasp it?

Helmut's stalled submarine had crept into my life now as part of a normal and expected evolution. After the first shocks were over, it did not excite me anymore, I had always known that the loops were working. What did surprise me, honestly, was that nobody knocked on my work cabins since I was back, to enquire about the whereabouts of Denny. Denny had disappeared. Nobody cared! Where was his father? Out to sea himself? Nobody had seen me disembark in the still rather obscure morning and I would stick to the story that he had come back with me, perhaps had gone to the backdoor of the pub and found some buddies to get drunk with into the early hours, nothing unusual. None of my problems. Denny was gone.

Left again early in the evening, with Denny's boat. I had brought more fuel from the Navy camp and had filled up the tank to the rim. Took my time in the boat to make sure that the sight of me alone preparing for another nightly fishing trip became part of the normal harbour-scape. I crossed straight over to the mainland shore, copying Denny's navigational route and headed for the hamlet of Ardgoal. Mary's shop there would be open until nine or something; even if it would be closed I could wake Mary, I had been there on several other occasions, during nightly military exercises. We had always been entertained with bread, beer and snacks. The military was one of her most stable customers. She would open any time for us!

I tied the boat with double moorings - the high tide was now reached - at the old concrete landing pier. Nobody in sight, pretty fine with me. I walked up the winding unpaved road to the main road and descended onto the bend where Mary's shop was. The pub next door had some lights on behind the windows, but otherwise it all looked very quiet.

Although the place was dark, the door was not locked and Mary, surprisingly, was there herself. She stood on a small wooden stool. She was working on one of the shelves, putting things in order, aided by a tiny flame oil lamp next to her. Saving on power, most likely.

She was not surprised to see a client coming in and started talking to me straight away, about the weather of course, the safe opening act in any Eirish conversation. I came though fast to my wish list, which I knew by heart, and she was not even surprised with the sheer amount of goods ordered. She knew that the Navy had a poor planning record and that, if it were not plain running out of money, they lacked the leadership and the vision to get crucial supply prepared well in time. Large military shopping lists and procurement parties could materialise at any time.

Beer and cigarettes were all possible, she told me, but it would 'bloody hell' deplete her of her entire stock, so she needed to ask more money for that. I missed out on that economical rationale, but agreed. Milk, eggs, no problem - meat she didn't have, at least not fresh, there was canned meat, corned beef from Argentina. We started to fill old used jute potato bags and she handed me two large galvanised dented iron pails - which she needed back, she said. The cigarettes, I thought, would be quite crucial, so I examined them a bit more in detail. Lit one, they were Spanish, a brand that I didn't know, but they smoked at least as if they were made of genuine tobacco. You could hardly tell nowadays. Not really fresh, a bit dry rather, but better than coming back empty-handed to my officers on deck duty - five per day smokers.



Before I left, I thought of asking for Mary's discretion about this large, unforeseen and nightly purchase. So as not to disturb the locals in these uncertain and uneasy times with the knowledge that the Navy camp on the island had purchased such ample means for egotistical survival, which they never shared with the locals, the bastards. But I decided against that. Asking for discretion here was an open solicitation to public sharing. If I were lucky, Mary would have forgotten about it by morning. Double lucky, with all the fresh money, she would see the pub early, get easily stone drunk and would wipe it clean of her memory slate anyhow. She did not even look at the amount of money I gave her, after she mentioned the price. Second time nobody counted the stack... She would find out in the pub that it was Albion money... Would they care? Money is money. What's going on in this country?

I eventually walked three supply trips to the boat. Even if I could have gotten Mary's or anybody else's assistance, I did not want any help. I stowed all goods in the bow and covered it with a tarpaulin I had found abandoned on the Roerring dock earlier. When I left again, I had the impression that the wind had somehow picked up, quite substantially actually. This was confirmed by impressive waves when I came out of the small Ardgoal bay. I turned left for a short while, and then started to cross into the larger body of Mundy Bay. The now routine trip into the waters that housed Denny and his newly discovered friends.

The waves started to roll pretty badly and as the course of my boat was exactly on a ninety degrees angle with their stretch, it made the last part of the trip incredibly uncomfortable and awkward. I was a Navy man, true, but not a sailor. I think due to sheer excitement I pushed away any upcoming seasickness symptoms. I started to feel a bit weak. Sign of dehydration, we had learnt. Drank some more water, felt immediately better. I timed the crossing on my wristwatch, the same way as Denny had done and after twenty minutes I thought I had reached the spot of

rendezvous, so I put the engine lower and stuck it in neutral gear. I did not switch it off, as I was not completely confident of being able to get it running again - especially if the seas would get rougher. I could not see clearly on my watch (the torchlight I had stupidly stowed somewhere under the shopping stuff, deep buried under the tarpaulin) but I guessed it was around eleven, perhaps already around midnight. We had not agreed on a specific hour, so I just tried to copy the conditions of the night before, hoping that they would do the same. It was all a shot in the dark, really. I paced through the now heavily rocking small boat for about half an hour, ate something from the sandwiches I had stuffed – wrapped in packing paper - in my oilskin pockets, then thought it wiser to sit down. I sat myself against the shopped victuals in the front of the boat, covered myself with a free-hanging part of the tarpaulin against the bags of potatoes and, incredibly, fell almost immediately asleep. Only later, I realised that I must have been at that stage of sheer exhaustion, not so much physically, being a young man, but rather emotionally: where was this all going? Who was I to trust? Where were my loyalties to be allocated? Who made me play these games? All this excitement and insecurity was pretty much draining, really. Only the drone of the engine gave me some frame of ease, peace and comfort.

I woke up half an hour later, with a slight headache starting. I drank more water from the large bumped military metal canteen. I didn't hear or see anything else than the black and wavy seas surrounding me, but I sensed something was near. It was like that feeling when you assume you are alone, but you know instinctively that somebody is watching you... It got later and later. I killed time with making rounds around the engine hub in the middle of the boat, counting them, like a prison exercise.

Pfffff... the sub emerged so close to my boat, that I could nearly touch it. It came up quietly, like an enormous whale, with some animal-like hissing and splashing sounds. Of course it scared me, but as I had somehow

expected it to happen, I felt as well some kind of relief. I stood back in the boat and waited. Two people climbed out of the black fin, the tower, they stood motionless on the deck, then two more came out, with the familiar sight of the black rubber dinghy lowered onto the sea. No Denny! I had drifted away a bit, and wondered if I should have steered my boat towards the sub. I saw however one man in the dinghy rowing fast toward me. He pulled a rope from the deck of the submarine behind him. He tied Denny's, well, my boat now, to the sub. We were connected again. Tethered.

He smiled artificially at me. He remained sitting in the dinghy. I did not recognise his face. I uncovered the foodstuffs and stuffed the tarpaulin elsewhere. I lifted the first metal bin to the dinghy and the sailor carefully laid it down on the shaky floor of his small vessel. He looked in my boat and gestured that he could handle a few more bags. With his dinghy full, he pulled himself along the long rope and brought the first instalment over. I saw my metal bin disappearing inside, then it came up again through the tower and one of the officers (at least that was what I guessed, as he was wearing a familiar long coat) had it placed in front of him and kicked it professionally in the sea. Some explaining to do to Mary, I thought. Not very helpful this unnecessary rude action. Assholes. The dinghy came back. I told the sailor that I needed to have Denny safe and well on board before he would get any more. He smiled again, produced a revolver from under his dark life vest and waved with it to the rest of the goods. The second metal basket left and most of the other bags. I shouted again at him: "Where is Denny?" He shrugged his shoulders and pulled away. My second bin went swimming, like the first, after a well-aimed football shot. In spite of the situation it was so absurd, it nearly made me laugh.

The crew of the dinghy then changed. A long coat now had taken to the oars. It was a different man. Well-shaven, younger than the captain I had met the other day. This one looked a real poster-German. Perhaps he was a fanatical Nazi. Hard as steel. We finally found one... exciting!

He untied the knot of the rope that connected me with the sub. He didn't care about me. When the knot was loose, he tied the rope onto the dinghy on an oar support.

I said again "Where is Denny?" trying my Eirish accent.

He laughed, took the oars and turned to me: "You'll be back here in five days. Same time, same spot. Give me the rest."

I handed over the last two bags - they were the cigarettes and the rest of the beer. Should have used that better in the Denny-bargain. He disappeared pulling on his line, landed at the side of the sub, goods got sucked through many hands into the tower. The submarine and its people folded up just as fast as they had showed. In three minutes there was nothing left of the spectacle anymore. As if I had nothing to do with it. Whales in a fresh dream. A clear spot that remained on the surface amidst the waves.

I put then the still running engine in forward gear, checked the fuel through the thick indicator glass at the back of the engine hub and posted myself again at the rear with the helm in both hands. I turned towards the wind. Routine. Back to the island; the rock in the centre of my clandestine activities. Only my activities?

I was plain depressed when I arrived back in Roerring. Denny's gone, my intended hard bargain completely lost. Funny enough, Mary's lost old crappy metal bins bothered me the most. These overconfident Germans ran the show, that was clear, not me! I should have had Rick around to help me to strategise. Something was not going well.

What got me even more down, although it should have revived and assured me of doing the right thing to keep all secret, was that nobody knew or seemed to care what I was doing. There was a complete indifference on the side of the Doon Islanders. If only they knew what was going on, my lord, they would not sleep anymore.

I was instructed by the submarine to be heading back to the same spot after five days - with new supplies. The night I was planning to go heading out (first to Mary's in Ardgoal, then to the rendezvous location), I saw Denny suddenly in the village! He came out of the Roerring post office-cum-shop - and I am still convinced he saw me as well. He was going to talk to somebody who was entering the shop, but he changed his mind and went for it. He had a bicycle with him, a vehicle type rare to the island, it looked like a brand new one. He jumped on it and rushed away onto the low hill that separated the village from the Fort and the further east side. That was not where he lived, I thought. His parents' place was squarely the other way. I was too far away to shout for his attention.

*I can no longer find it, but I recall, I did write a very short entry in my hardly touched diaries in those very strange months. 'What happened to Denny?' - was the only question that I couldn't shake off after the Emergency. It bothered me for many years after. I did inquire, with the very few local people I trusted, and even tried to get the answer out of the secret officers that were so interested in me, after the Emergency had ended. Their consistent answer to my desperate search was a chuckle, or a smile, or a deep cigarette smoke inhalation, always with all eyes towards the ceiling. I knew they knew! Was Denny involved in some kind of conspiracy? Then the entire island must have been - which I couldn't believe. Was Denny sent? He was as capricious as Rick... Had he volunteered to have me do the dirty work? Me, an Eirish foreigner?*

I remember I found it all so strange and confusing, but there was not a single thought however that suggested that I abandon the path that had been taken now. Duty, it still felt. Also, the night exercises had become quite a rewarding routine - I had started to like them and was attracted to the excitement, finding the attention I craved. As the islanders did not care

(their lack of emotion must have been my motivation), I did not even consider avoiding taking Denny's father's boat, unasked, again. I had it now openly fueled by the military guys and I had stuffed quite openly most of the items of the new shopping list in the boat during the last two days in broad daylight. I had even started to purchase openly submarine supplies from the island shop. No questions asked. Nobody gave a damn it seemed. Or would they all know? This was hardly clandestine anymore. Were they all involved? It would at least explain Denny's re-surfacing and behaviour...

Now I don't even remember in detail what the weather and especially the wind was like that night; it had become such a standard operation by now. No more being secretive - it was quite exciting in the plain open. I know there was of course some swell and there were always waves, but I don't think it ever rained. I did not even take the exact time anymore from my wristwatch once I started my rectangular course off the mainland shoreline into the submarine centre of the Bay. I knew where to go and where to stop. I now had no problem with killing the engine and drifting idly along the bay. I understood the tide, which would always run me back to Doon Island and I was confident the engine would run again once I wanted it to run. Navigating on feeling, not on a compass.

The sub came on the surface, but not so close as last times. Hatches opened, people came out and they blew up and laid out the dinghy and waited. The submarine used its electric engine to navigate in my direction. It stopped about sixty feet away, and then the dinghy was lowered. A trivial event by now. Two men rowed in my direction, filling the dinghy to a dangerous low floating level in the water. One wrong move and they would topple over. When they were nearly alongside my boat, I saw that there was something wrong, no, I felt that there was something not like the last time.

Hey, this was not the same sub that I had seen the other two times! This one was bigger and had a gun not only on the front deck, but also on the aft. The colour of the entire vessel looked more grey than the other one,

which was blacker. Or perhaps the paint had faded? The two sailors in the dinghy, one with a gun, held both their left hands on the side of my (well, Denny's) boat. The one with the oars, produced a small handgun from under his bulky life-vest and told me to come with him. Before I could object or discuss the fate of Denny's boat, the sailor in the back of the dinghy had jumped on board and had bent himself over the engine panel and studied the systems the old wooden vessel had. I lowered myself into the wobbly dinghy and before I had settled on the cracked wet wooden floorboard, the sailor at the oars had pushed off. I was on my way to yet another Nazi submarine. Denny's boat, now with a new skipper, followed us.

"It is not at all important how many we are," Captain said, "it is important how many we are left to fight. It is now or never. You get that, I guess?"

I looked at the man, young as they all were. Maybe just a few more years than I had. But they looked old, my lord, they were pale, unshaven, underfed, smelled of diesel, wet socks, shit, piss and - of course - smoke. I sat between the Captain, and an older guy - at least over forty I guessed - who had shaken my hand and said that his name was Gerard and that he was only on a holiday trip with the sub. He was too old to be a regular crew, he said and laughed until his laugh disappeared in an endless, rough smokers cough.

Captain kept on re-filling my glass with French red wine, and a very good one at that. I had not drunk that for years, last time at least a few Christmases ago, when I was still in Albion. I could still tell a good one from a not so good one.

"You Eirish at least seem to understand," said the Captain who had introduced himself as Hans-Juergen, "that there will be a new Europe. Having kicked out these fucking" (he pronounced that as 'focking', which made me nearly laugh out loud) "Albions, for you guys it is time as well to

think of the future, of truly free people and no borders. Go where you like. We always knew that we could count on you people, in times of dire need,” he continued (drinking too) and showed his dirty teeth, smiling benevolently around the tiny table.

While we spoke, I saw all my new shopping going through the narrow corridor, brought to the forward quarters by a small chain of sailors, young boys - much younger than their officers.

“You heard about us,” Hans-Juergen continued, “we are the only ones in the Fuehrer’s force that are allowed to say what we like, if we don’t do it at least in public. I know we have a Nazi spy on board” (he slapped Gerard jovially on the back) “but I don’t give a flying fock. He is a good man; he is from my hometown, but I can tell you - listen Gerard and take out your notebook! - that as far as I am concerned they can kill Onkel Adolf tomorrow. The guy is nuts. His original ideas were good, don’t get me wrong. Open up that stinking congested hellhole of what is old Europe. Get the people moving; let them settle freely where they like, where the air is clean... A nice farm with a bit of space, a bit of a future, you know. Clean air, clean spirits. We will help everybody, Poles, Russians. The Nazis are crazy, but they will be helpful in cleaning up the old act. You will see, thanks to us, in twenty-thirty years we will have a united Europe; how otherwise will we be able to balance out the Yanks? So what’s the problem if we Germans take the lead? Do the dirty work? Not only the Eirish are grateful... hahaha.”

Now he slapped me hard on the back. I hardly felt being in the lion’s den. I nearly started to believe in the cause myself. Maybe he was right; all these national sensitivities should become something of the past.

We suddenly went through a new shopping list - the guys around me got pretty serious again - and the top of the list had now become booze: whiskey and beer. I didn’t dare to enquire but that pointed to the fact that the subs



were probably not moving. Stayed stationary in Mundy Bay. They needed spirits to keep the spirits alive.

Captain was called away for something, which I did not understand and I remained sitting at the table with Gerard. I did not feel the slight rocking of the sub anymore and was getting very cozy in the moist heat of the sub. I was even getting accustomed to the terrible smell.

“How many subs are here in the bay,” I asked, happy that I could still express myself. Question was on my lips for months. Now was the time.

Gerard smiled.

“Three at the moment, well Germans at least,” he said with a wicked smile. (Ha! I thought. Ha! Three!). “One will be ready to go again in a couple of days, the other and this one is one of those two, they will stay perhaps a week more. Then a fresh convoy will get close to Eire and we will flock out. We need better data,” he said, while he leaned back in a tired way to the cushions behind him which were fixed to the wall, “our own wolf packs are so busy destroying Allies, that they sometimes forget to tell the others where they are and what’s coming up. They don’t share!” I kind of liked this Gerard-guy and it was good to talk to him. He had been all over the seven seas he told me, even as far as the American Gulf, trying to get up the Mississippi river. He was supposed to keep the true Nazi doctrines alive on the subs, but he saw himself, he said rather as a counsellor to the men. He intervened in quarrels and fights: “I am the only Nazi who cares for the mental well-being of the submariners.”

He smiled and laid an arm around my shoulder. (Which I did not like, but I just let it go. What could I do anyway?).

“Even Doenitz listened to me.”

He had been on so many U-Boote, he had not kept up with the count. Who is Doenitz?

While Captain was still away Gerard produced another bottle of wine from under the table. I found it strange that the label had been removed -

like a knife had scraped it off, tediously. Were the crew not even allowed to see where the supplies were coming from? Or was it safer to discard them in the sea once emptied?

He had been to Eire in the twenties with his wife, on a kind of belated honeymoon, they had already had their first child. He always dreamed of buying an old farm there and retire some day. Retire in-the-land he said, please no seas around, but a little lake would do. Pike instead of cod. The Midlands, vanish in the green. He slumped further down on the uneasy bench and into my side. I tried to wrestle myself free from his shoulder embrace, but he did not let his arm go. What could I do?

Hans-Juergen came back and opened yet another bottle. There was no real hardship on U-Boote, I thought, they just hang around in nameless bays, kidnap local boys and extort goods from the indigenous peoples, written down on extensive and detailed shopping lists. Get drunk and smoke their lungs out. Waiting for the things that would or would not come. Not their problem.

I had so many questions on my mind that I wanted them to clarify on, what happened to Denny? How many subs had totally passed, come in and gone out, what was the reason for hanging around in Mundy Bay? but the more wine I drank – they filled my glass continuously – the less interested I became in the Emergency around us and the more I wanted to hear from Gerard's stories. He had now started on how he had landed the U-Boote job. A sixteen-year old farm labourer, at the end of the other War, called to Kiel for the compulsory submarine service. He was all over me, traveling to Kiel.

I was still stone drunk when they pushed me off in Denny's boat. I had fallen asleep more or less in Gerard's arms (one around my neck, the other in my lap), who had also passed out prematurely. Captain woke us up five minutes before he had scheduled to go down again to lie on the rocky bottom of the Bay, during the day. I waved unstably goodbye to them from

Denny's boat as if they were friends. My big whale, the only animal still listening to me. Still loved me. My new friends, my new loyalty. I sat down for a moment on the bench near the helm and wondered what else was there to do. My hangover was going to be terrible. Fock!

Arriving in Roerring's tiny harbour in plain daylight, I got some attention from the locals. They stepped to the ridge of the small quay and watched me mooring the boat with long lines - now that the tide was low. They asked questions, for the first time: "Where have you been Bernhard, anything on the naked hooks? Any German patrol boats around, hahaha."

"Beat the shit out of the bastards, Bernie-boy hahaha? Where is Denny? Drunk again hahaha?"

How did they have the guts - would Denny have...?

The next days I was utterly confused. I called in sick – meaning, I left a message with the cook at the officers mess, since nobody else from the officers' force was there and surely nobody was interested. I stayed in my room for three days. I think I developed a small fever too, as I had the strangest dreams: about drifting on the ocean for months, hungry sea monsters around me, clean eaten human skeletons floating around my raft. Skeletons that float? They were absolutely weird nightmares. Even after my short illness, after I felt physically better, a feeling of endless doom kept hanging over me - like a hangover elicits guilt. And guilty I felt, I circled in endless thoughts about my loyalties. I had changed my nationality to continue to be helpful in the war against the Germans, to fight the Nazi beast with a supreme technology. Now I was supplying nearly every other day a boatful of consumables to German submarines. The enemy, remember? They treated me as theirs, for better or for worse if you like, I felt like one of them, I liked it on board their cramped vessels, they treated me fair, they trusted me. I knew I was looking forward to going back. Wanted to drink more good wine, hear more stories from Gerard, sit in the warm human climate of human smells, human closeness. These Germans

had more feeling for camaraderie than the distant and tightly-closed islander Eirish. I felt attracted to the German ambiance, their motivation, their sense of duty and focus. It all worried the hell out of me.

I left my bed and went back to the main measuring cabin after four days. Upon entering, I saw that - although I had left a clear service scheme - there had been no duties whatsoever done since I had left the last time; nobody had done any watch, there had been no readings; the writing meters had actually been switched off - some even plainly disconnected from their batteries...! My reflexes wanted to activate the entire system straight away - but I had other matters to attend to first.

I heated up the cabin with a fresh peat fire, made good lights around the table and spread a blank paper sheet out on the charts table. I started to write.

*Dear Rick,*

*I do not know if this letter will reach you in good shape, as I do not know your exact whereabouts. I do not know either if it is very clever to send this letter to you, in the first place. I don't remember any instructions you may have left to that effect.*

*This is what is going on. I have been out on Mundy Bay a couple of times to see if the numbers were correct and if I could see any subs. Since then, I have been aboard two out of three submarines now, two of them might have been the same, but the last one was much bigger and with a different hull colour, perhaps a bit older. They have coaxed me in getting supplies to them. They do pay, very well actually, that's not the problem, they have all kinds of currencies on board in ample quantities American, German, Eirish, even Albion, but they had taken Denny (were you still here when I hired him?) as a kind of hostage I guess, to make sure I would return with the supplies. They never exchanged him with the goods. But I saw Denny before my third*

*trip back in the village as if nothing had happened! He avoids talking to me. I am still using his father's boat and nobody seems to give a damn about that. Navy fills up the diesel tank. What's Denny's role? Do you know him? The situation hence is not clear.*

*They are up to something. I can't get that information, but it is important that you realise that they are indeed up to something. There is nothing wrong with their boats, it seems they are just waiting for something big.*

*I need your urgent advice Rick. I will keep the contact going as required although it looks like we stopped.*

*Please get back to me as soon as possible. Rick, I might try to contact the Navy as well. I feel we need to strategise our next steps.*

*Bernhard*

The letter I addressed to:

Mr Rick  
Horse Stables of Lord LUMLEY  
Near Westport  
County MAYO

I glued the back of the envelope closed and signed it several times over the closure, so that Rick could immediately see if somebody had opened it and whether the information would have been possibly compromised. I only realised now that I never obtained Rick's family name. Rick. No name. Was Rick even his real name?

## September 1973 - Beara Peninsula

It went all too fast, life. And in spite of all misery it also went very much by itself, all very as a matter-of-fact. Natural evolutions.

I sit at the large kitchen table - everyone has gone to bed. It was a pretty busy day - last guests left this afternoon for Slane and to be fair, I do not expect anyone anymore before the Christmas week... A little break please. Tomorrow is my birthday - I will be fifty-eight!

I strongly believe you have to ask yourself a few questions when reaching that age, like "Am I happy?" Or: "Did I have a good life?" "Did I do the right things?"

I pull the bottle of Paddy's towards me. Paddy, the only loyal friend I had my entire Eirish life. Paddy has always been there for me - through the good times and bad. Best in a normal glass, no fooling around with ice or water. Turned into a real Eirishman finally...

Life is good. Simple and plain. Pauline and I run this Bed and Breakfast for almost twenty years now. Ever more guests from the Continent and from America, Australia even, knock on our brightly painted door. Old Eirish, removed generations from their roots - they all come back at some stage.

It is a simple life. We never have had or will have any substantial money. We eat well though. We just bought a colour-TV from this season's left-overs; Revenue does not need to know everything.

These last years of the Emergency, on Doon Island, they were bizarre times. The letter I wrote to Rick - then the news I got about my relatives in USA.

Frankly, the arrest was in fact the most surreal and still haunts me - though sheer pointless. Two months in solitary confinement in a police cell in Castletowndoon. The Emergency had ended, the Germans came openly

into port and partied for the last time. But I was locked up, suspected of espionage and treason. They walked drunk over the grills separating my deep basement cell from the road and pissed - unconsciously - over my air inlets. German urine streamed over my paint-less walls into my confinement...

Of course there was no case and eventually they admitted that it was all about Rick - they wanted Rick. Whom they never found. Whenever I think of Rick, I now wonder whether he really existed. My thoughts about Rick - in the oh so lonely years after the Emergency - were so intense that I forgot everything about the man: how he looked, his way of speaking, the cigarettes he smoked, what he wanted to know, what he wanted from my company. Therefore I could not be of any help to the police and the secret service - and I became the bogeyman. Me, an ex-Albion... Which half-idiot would change his more than decent nationality into Eirish... Talking about doing something really suspicious - can you go further? Deeper?

No punishment, no court, no process. They just released me. I wanted to go back to Albion and asked for my Albion passport to be returned. Zero result. Letters, weekly trips to the consulate in Slane. No! No! No! We are not a revolving door, the prickly Albion consul said, further, you were suspected of collaboration with the Germans. Better you stay put, Sir. You are plain Eirish for us. Next please!

Pauline, an Albion citizen, worked at the consulate, at the front desk. She empathised with me, tried to help me get through the mill. We went out together, I learned about her parentless youth, her artistic aspirations - water colour, landscape, seascapes, nature... I never got my passport, but I did get Pauline! I honestly thought she understood me - she fell head over heels in love with me, I was too confused still to answer those feelings then.

Only after Joanna's birth - we called her Jojo - Cupid hit me and I started to feel genuine love and affection for Pauline. I worked in construction in Castletowndoon's surroundings, had a stable salary, but there was not a lot

of money after the Emergency. We lived in rented shambles in town and decided to look for a farm to lease. We kept cows and sheep, and we started to make good money - the Continent started to spend money again - on our wool and goat cheese. These things became fashionable again after years of total austerity. The calf beef was an even better money maker! It sounds so stale and corny but I truly think those were our golden years, we had no electricity, we read to each other by oil lamp and candlelight. Winters were staged in front of the large fireplace, fueled by wood from the farm and peat from the field. A tableau vivant with a crawling, later walking, mumbling, talking, chatting, cuddling Jojo before the wild and energetic flames. We counted on more children, but they simply did not materialise. We could live with that then. No endless tests, fertility clinic visits, lab results. We were very happy with the hand we got dealt.

All the disturbances put on me by my personal challenges and the Emergency changes - of which the effects lasted much longer than the immediate aftermath years - were compensated in the most natural way by Pauline. She did not think in black-or-white systems, villains or heroes, right or wrong. She was out of the circular loop of western life philosophy, which had to declare developments in cycles of events, adjustment, learning and - eventually - repeating the same mistakes. She lived along a horizontal line - matters happen, we move on. A completely different way of living than I had been brought up with. Everything coming on Pauline's path was always new, induced by positivism and, even more striking for her cultural background and nationality: immaterial. She enjoyed a dramatic sunset, like I enjoyed a few glasses of my local whiskey. From Pauline, I therefore also learned not to look back, not to judge people by their passport, or their imperfections. The horizontal line was old, long, and for us rolling along without asking opinions. On that line, never ending, we would be free.

Another consequential trait I learned from her and which I could soon not live without, was her understanding of and patience with all living



species. I honestly think she saw no difference between a baby calf and a neighbour kid - from both she understood, she felt, the needs and motives. In both she would encourage the primitive lust for life, but also the matter-of-factness of simply being alive. Pauline taught me to drift with the flow. Of the recurrent tides of daily life, but also the rivers swollen with sudden unforeseen rainfall. My life with Pauline became an ocean ride on the most agreeable swell, a rhythm that cut out my negative thoughts, my insecurity of my background, my shaky choices, my life before we met. It explained the unconditional love I had developed for her. It was most exciting to see all beautiful character features back in Joanna...

When Jojo had to report to school, Pauline and I decided to look for a bit more sustainable and conventional business. We bought the centuries-old inn in Castletowndoon with help from the bank and converted it into a small hotel. Foreign, good money tourism was starting to pick up. We did pretty well then, if I look back at it.

Now I fill my days with a simple daily routine, I greet the incoming breakfast staff and supervise the guests' right start of the day. Around ten, I will go out and look for the newspaper at the shop-and-post office. Then I will have my fresh dark strong coffee at the 'Purple Heather', sometimes with an early glass of red port. Strolling back home to sort mail and bills, just delivered by the mailman. Following lunch, a small nap on my coach in my private room in the attic. The early afternoon is for a walk on the Doonhaven shore with Flash - the old boy is waiting for that treat the entire morning already. Back around four - if there are any, I will drink a glass or two with the guests and tell them about the history of the land. We never talk about Doon Island, never do I get any questions about that troubled past, my nationality change, my experiences in the Emergency. I feel more and more often that it wasn't me in those years, but a total different somebody else. We can change, can't we?

Jojo made acquaintance with Ron (I think he is formally a 'Ronald'), when she was sixteen and he was twenty-three. Ron was with a group of German Sea-scouts in Mundy Bay, in some kind of European exchange program. The Germans are back in Mundy Bay, I thought when Jojo told me later and could hardly suppress a humorous thought, and this time it is for good - they will stay. Because they are sleeping with my daughter...

They now live in Albion. Ron initially aspired to be an actor - but traded interests with aviation. He fell in love suddenly with helicopters and wanted to make flying his career. The last time they were here together, - Jojo very much in love with her German international beau - he, after my inquiry, told me that his now old father had been an officer in the submarine force (I felt like I slipped out of my chair when he told me this). Had been all over the world, even far up the Mississippi in America in combat boats, later he was posted with supply services, diesel fuel, food, on a different type of U-Boot, the 'milking cows' - slower, bigger and much more vulnerable. His father wanted to be proud of what they did at the time, but he lost his pride when he found out that nobody was interested in the successes they had pulled off. He thought that wrong, but he also accepted it as a new fact of life - the world had moved on. We always invited Paddy of course to this conversation and in the end Ron admitted that he liked me as a father-in-law, as he could - without shame or second thoughts - inquire about our Emergency. The War that had made Ron also.

I can hardly imagine that only now Albion has joined our European club. After years of doubt and debate. There was no such paralysing doubt in the old days. And still a few years ago - no single spark of doubt when they refused my passport change for so many times. And no respectful debate either - they simply did not listen to me. Rejected again!

In Germany it is a mess again, with all the terrorist attacks. It looks like our own North. Ron claims - only after Paddy has joined the conversation - that all those bombs have a decent side also. According to him the Germans

have gone from one extreme to another: from simple Nazism to a fascist form of capitalism - which will even actually curtail individual freedom even more than the Nazis did. I did not take the bait and suggested Paddy intermediate in this difficult exchange. And Paddy solved it.

I love Jojo, my only child, so much, that I actually don't care what Ron is trying to say. As I love her, I love him. I am still the same weak, non-engaged type of a non-descript asshole. No opinion on anything. I don't make the future or the past. They make me. I am now moving on the long line. Drift with the flow.

After weeks of loneliness, this Albion officer visited me in my penal space: he interrogated me for hours, only to tell me just before he left for the darkening evening, that my brother Timmy had died, along with my mother. Torpedoed, like so many, on their way home, leaving America for Europe in a considered-safe large convoy. In the middle of the German-Allied War - it might have been sometime 1942 or so. The convoy got massacred... Torpedoes, just like our baby brother earlier. A true family tradition. Only I am left now. What made them go back at that stage? Leaving safe America for messy Europe? No time and intention to do research, but I heard that their ship sank not that far from here - on this Eirish coast; close to me and close to home. Sunk by German submarine torpedoes.

I am going to bed now. Will very quietly position myself besides my love Pauline - fast asleep in undisturbed slumber. Sleep well. *Bonne nuit. Gute Nacht.* Thanks Paddy, good old buddy. You never let me down, the only true friend who is forever. Nothing will change much after this.

Tomorrow is my birthday. Fifty eight, a complete hollow, empty number...

A whole life still to go.

# HIDDEN

(2012 - 2013 and 2024)

*'It's hard to understand other people, to know what's hidden in their hearts, and without the assistance of alcohol it might never be done at all.'*

Submission ('Soumission')

**Michel Houellebecq**

## Socialist seventies and empty eighties

I hated the name 'Giles' from the moment I understood it was my name. Because it could not be nicknamed. I was Giles. Short, long: Giles. My little brother was Nicholas, but we - and everybody around us - called him Nick. My father Willem was Wim (actually often the other way round) and my mother Eleanor was Lea. Nicknames galore! Even our cat Penelope was Penny. It was hopeless. Without a nickname you would stand out. Also, Giles was a very poorly used and understood Albion name; much associated with aspiring middle-class people wanting to belong to some higher social circles. Understandably, it did not make it easy, socially, at kindergarten, school, college, university. And at all the job interviews...

My father Willem was from the Netherlands, or Holland as everybody now calls it - although Holland is actually but a small part of that already tiny country. He was a sculptor and a painter, more in mind than in practice. Never successful in his studies at some obscure small art academy in the south of his country, even less so in his first 'formative' years in Amsterdam - trying to get into the crowd that set the scene - wasting his time on marijuana, beer and Dutch *genever* - and girls of course - instead of building his future with some brilliant youth works that would cement his name for eternity.

At twenty-six he had in fact already crashed out - no work, no commissions, not a single good painting, let alone a sculpture (hard work!) delivered, he had taken a part-time job as skipper of a tourist canal cruising boat. He spent three years driving one of those low long glassy boats through the Amsterdam historic canals. Six days a week; he made good money, could buy decent clothes and smoke decent cigarettes instead of rolling his own, Dutch style. He built a bit of a name as the historically and culturally most knowledgeable of all skippers and started to get the more

intellectual groups from the travel agencies. Styles of baroque building, the historical continuous expansion of the canal system, the large and also small history of the town and its many unknown niches. His art came back to him in showing others professionally how the city he had started to love had turned itself from a swampy fishing village into the country's small, but vibrant capital. Amsterdam looked old, but was a newcomer on the world stage. And Willem made it sound that it indeed belonged there.

He met our mother Eleanor de Verthamon on one of his specialty tours. *Contesse de Verthamon*, an art history student - who (before being sent to Paris to study) had never really left the countryside of her native France - not even for a holiday. In holiday periods, she never escaped from her birth area near the village of Verthamon and in fact had skipped two earlier summer invitations to go to Amsterdam - as compulsory art excursions for her studies. The first year she had claimed that she needed to stay with her ailing mother - and spent the entire long summer break with the ageing lady near the newly dug swimming pool at the back end of their *manoir* property (the castle had been demolished after the Revolution) - France experiencing a beautiful warm summer that would make the local wine price soar and de Verthamons suddenly well-off again, as all was exported to Albion. The second year she feigned sickness and made - after being confronted by a suspicious dean - suggestions in the direction of being pregnant, being in fact still a virgin, waiting for Willem's powerful sculpting hammer to start up her statue.

The third year, finally and inevitably, she celebrated her twenty-first birthday in Amsterdam. She was drunk on cheap sweet German white river wine. She did not like to drink, but in order to lower her anxiety of being away from home, she needed to hit the bottle once in a while. She stumbled on board, twisted her foot on the lower step of the rather short and hidden stairs coming on board Willem's vessel (wrongly spelled) *Rembrand* and fell literally in the skipper's arms. Not to leave those until she died in the very

same arms in France, in the by then neglected *Manoir de Verthamon* in 2008. Aged sixty-eight, dying from lung cancer after having smoked approximately four hundred thousand cigarettes in her short life.

Together, they played the perfect complementary parts. Willem suddenly hard working in his fresh de-Verthamon-family-rented studio in a tiny village north of Amsterdam, making statue after statue, but not having any sales, name, publicity. Eleanor, with her academically formed intellect, cracked the secret in Willem's work and started to sell his work as a naturalist, a more cubistic revival of Claudel.

The couple in fact gathered some fame: Willem became a bit of a local eccentric countryside celebrity - perhaps still more in the many village pubs than in the art programs on television or in the glossy magazines. They got us - the two brothers always fighting when we were young - quickly one after the other. Eleanor had to take a regular job as breadwinner in the wine trade, while Willem, late thirties, was 'continuously developing his talent'. 'Still developing' rather - because that was what it was. I am now of the opinion that he had no real talent.

## 2012 or 2013 or so - Brotherly hate and love

They purchased - an impulse buy - a wrecked farm on an island in Eire. It was still paid in Eirish *punts*, pounds, and came down to the sum of ten thousand. Not a big amount for a ten-hectare real estate in that country, but basically draining all the sorry savings the artist couple had. Eleanor's parents were not able to help; they had had to sell big chunks of their manoir-land to cover their own debts, long before they expired. (The French nobility, what was left after the Revolution guillotines, died out in the twentieth century by self-inflicted economic means. Most had no idea how to make a living for themselves, that talent had disappeared from their DNA long, long ago).

The farm became fast Willem's natural habitat - here, on an island in a remote part of the Republic, nobody would know him and nobody would remind him of his failures. Eleanor finally had her butterfly garden, a waterfront, small pebbly paths to make morning walks - and, most importantly, a surrounding sea to talk to. Willem worked hard on the house, the most impressive labour he had ever displayed. In half a year he had restored the old cottage, connected it creatively to the barn. Their paradise was ready. Isolated. Insular. Away from already away.

We were given the choice to relocate with our parents to Eire. We could have easily and cheaply enrolled in the University of Slane, board there, travel the weekends to the island countryside, but Nick and I remained in the Netherlands, finishing our studies. I read French Language and Literature at the University of Utrecht; Nick followed a Master of Business Administration curriculum at a private college near Amsterdam. (Wim and Lea could in fact not afford his choice, but he had entered a scholarship contest and had manipulated the jury and selection committee so cleverly that he studied for free and had become the poster child for free enterprise,



a concept that those schools were pushing hard in the Empty Eighties, as a reaction still on the Socialist Seventies).

As for island visits, it eventually came down to Christmases, as year-end Utrecht and Amsterdam did not have a lot to offer - with the libraries shut and even the student drinking holes covered up for at least three weeks. In summers, after a failed trip together to Germany, we split our ways in Europe, Nick and I. Nick going for some Hard Fun at the French Riviera with some fancy French friends (co-students at his Amsterdam college); me normally trekking through watery Friesland, the Dutch Lake District in the North, in our old open sailing day cruiser, sleeping under the hood, on an impromptu bed made of an air mattress - with the sails as blankets. Nick had no money but a lot of guts. I had no money and no guts at all. Nick drove in fancy clothes with a gorgeous Albion girl in her open MG to the South - like in the Marianne Faithfull song - while I hitchhiked un-shaven to Sneek, staying within my own country's borders.

The fact that we were thrown together when our parents left us, divided us. I can still say now, even after all that transpired later on Doon Island, that we were never really brothers then. We did not love each other blindly, as young brothers should. We were extremely conscious of each other's limitations and bad habits, looking for imperfection that could be used in lifting one's own self-esteem. Not an un-known observation between siblings. A crab mentality. A little bit of that is normal I guess, but we overdid it.

So, every Christmas, we met on Doon Island. Looking back they were not such bad holidays. Good food, long cooking on an old cast iron AGA stove, lots of good wines, gin and whiskeys. With Willem it was never *eb*, low tide in his native Dutch. And we actually had damn good conversations. It was the only familiar ground where - when together with Nick - I felt I got the attention due to me, which he normally usurped in company. Lea loved contemporary French literature and we read novellas

aloud in the barn near the gigantic fireplace, while Wim and Nick were outside, setting lobster traps under the rocks, or splitting wood for the ever-hungry fires, inside and outside. One only realises one was in Shangri-la once Happy Valley had been sold on to history.

Nick got headhunted while still at college and disappeared in a fancy trainee program in New York City for one of the USA's top business management consultancy firms. He made his first annual wage of over a hundred thousand dollars two years after graduating. As for me, I graduated two years late, being stuck on my end-thesis that I could not finish for some reason (contemporary French literature, what do you want... put too much reference to *Céline* in it, I realise now), and remained stuck in a small attic room for five years after. I did some translation work for a text bureau, just enough to keep me alive and keep me off the dole. Nick and I had grown more apart than we ever were, or thought we would be. No contact, no sign of life. And no more Christmases together.

I visited my parents, as I saw them growing older, at least once per year, and started to favour the summer a bit more over the dark and sometimes gloomy stormy and wet winter. I had commenced living with a lady teacher, a few years my senior, who had lost her husband through suicide and took me in, in her grandiose large house in a rich village near Utrecht; now I think just to keep her company. We knew each other from the *Alliance Française*, where I did some side-teaching to make a few bucks and where her sadness and beauty struck me. After three years, her psychiatric treatments, mood-improving medications and my five-times-per-week hard work sex attention, she felt apparently that she could face it all alone again. I had never brought her to the island. That's why I do not mention even a name here. Because it is not important. Sexually and romantically, I was on the streets again.

During the last months of my mother's life, before she suddenly wanted to go back to France to die, and after that, during the first years of my

father's time in a care home, back in the Netherlands, I kept on visiting Doon Island and 'East End' (as the locals had baptised the farm generations ago) regularly. I had taken it upon myself to keep the property in reasonably good shape. Spent longer and longer periods there. I had inherited from my father his complete uselessness in capitalist society, but also his incredible handiness - I could, like him, work with my hands, and I found great joy, reward and relaxation in cement, bricks, wood, saws, dirt, power cables, leaky plumbing and broken furniture. Nothing kept me in the Netherlands other than twice-per-year visits to the un-employment office of the local authorities - to prove that I was still without income and had not been able to generate a real job with a real salary for myself. By that time I hadn't seen Nick for at least ten to fifteen years. He was CEO of a medium sized energy company (they had started to avoid the word 'oil'), his portrait was displayed on the cover of magazines like 'Forbes' and fast becoming a very rich man. Capitalist celebrity. Genuine success story.

In 2012, 2013 or so, his lawyer wrote to me that as he had decided to become a US citizen, he wanted for 'reasons of simplicity' to get rid of any possessions in Europe. Our parents had never owned any real estate in the Netherlands, they hopped from cheap rented lodgings to the other every few years. The only place we had as a family was East End in Eire. Nick's henchman wrote further that Father Willem was open to sign away the property to us, so we could sell it. A solicitor had been appointed already in Slane and if I could please sign the attached documents, near the red crosses, here, here and here. Thank you!

For the first time in my non-relationship with my brother, I showed (I think now), some guts. "Propose to meet on Doon Island to inspect the property and the goods and then we will discuss," I e-mailed to him. No reply. His lawyer answered back that the coming Thanksgiving weekend should be fine for the meeting, as Nick had no plans. Just as I, he had no family.

We lived for ourselves, it looked like.

# **November 2013 - Light House walk screenplay - Bull Sound**

## ***Setting***

November, an early afternoon - a storm has just passed. The Atlantic is pretty wild still. Waves splash high up to the rocks, even in the Sound. A large, brand new car, rather a jeep, drives to a derelict two-car parking space near a cattle gate, to which some rusty walking signs are attached. Two middle-aged men disembark. One wears old jeans, a scratched and wrinkled dark oiled coat and discoloured rubber boots, a tweed cap, the other a professional hiker's outfit, with under-legs covered in waterproof pants, complemented by strong and green coloured hiking boots, his upper body covered with a branded windbreaker with a screaming logo.

## ***Introduction***

They are brothers, siblings, from a French-Dutch nest. Their parents were hippies, owned a farm on this island. They are coming back to prevent a potential inheritance dispute. They spoke in Albion. One of them does not master the family languages anymore, he says. Albion it is for today!

## ***Dialogue***

Nick: That's not it, I do not need the money, simply said.

Giles: Why do you want to get rid of it, then?

Nick: Hassle, plain hassle. I am tax liable for the property taxes. I have to declare this. I want to be completely US based. No tax obligations in Europe. US law mistrusts foreign possessions. Off shore financial constructions, tax havens... This is an island, you see, hahaha.

Giles: You have political aspirations, I read. USA only, no dirty foreign meddling.

Nick: You got it. Pretty sharp Giles!

Giles: Mayor? State Attorney General? Governor of New York State?

Nick: Why not?

Giles: Eirish links would be interesting...

Nick: Absolutely, but don't forget... Pa and Ma were hippies - Willem grew grass in the greenhouse! I want none of it.

They laugh - the situation had just got a bit less tense.

Nick: (continued) Suppose a hard-nosed journalist goes digging here... Also, Willem screwed anything he could get his artist's hands on. Anything that was alive.

Giles: Not really up to speed on that one.

Nick: I would need a much better connection with the island. In fact, I would love to keep the place, for later maybe, kids, family, reunions, you know. But for now, it's not gonna work.

Giles: You will never marry. You are in a very tense and unforgiving relationship with money.

Nick: (manages to laugh again) Yeah... and I love it...

Giles: At least there is love somewhere.

Nick: You Giles?

Giles: In your world I am a failure. I feel my best years are yet to come. Started writing more. Got published last year. Small fry, but still.

Nick: In French that is?

Giles: In French, yes, amazing that this turns out to be just a mother tongue like Dutch. The two most complicated languages in the world.

Nick: Lea always spoke French with me too - But I can't do a word of that language anymore. Alien.

Giles: In America you are quite suspect if you would be fluent in French. They might think you are a 'liberal'.

Nick: (Chuckles) Still I need to do some more culture in my profile. NYC thinks of itself as the cultural capital of the civilised world. French would do well, but it could indeed well be a double-edged sword also...

The non-conclusive conversation slips into money, airlines, trips. How their father is doing, that kind of stuff. They move slowly up the stony cart track, still closer to the water of Bull Sound than close to the Lighthouse.

(Giles is panting and suffering from his overweight. Nick looks like an Everest-climbing CEO and stays continuously and purposely ahead of his brother).

The next shots see them climbing, talking, finally laughing freely and slapping each other on the back. They cross the final small pass, hewed out of rock, that separated them from the Light. The camera now takes them in from behind the Lighthouse and sees them coming down on the last steep track descending to the whitewashed bulky tower on the edge of the ocean. They stand overlooking the Atlantic. Both are tired - it was after all a two hour walk on undulating terrain.

The conversation resumes:

Giles: There is New York, Nick! You could swim from here to there.

Nick: I should - that would give me finally my name and celebrity.

Giles: (Suddenly) Nick, I wanna keep East End. We can easily disinherit you; I pay you for it, your name will disappear from any deed, any document. We can un-trace you.

Nick: I'd also rather keep it, but then it must bring me something useful.

The story skips an hour. They drive along the high full-hedged roads of Doon Island. Giles, on Nick's suggestion, is driving the expensive brand-new scratch free rental Range Rover car. The car colour is blood-red,



nearly fluorescent - incredibly visible in the island-scape. Nick rolls a cigarette from Giles' pouch. Smokes, coughs, laughs. They stop suddenly.

Giles: Get out, I want to show you something.

Nick: Yes, why?

They both descend from the glossy car. They walk to a nicely painted fence. They overlook a well-trimmed garden. The view shifts over their shoulder to a large, nearly a mansion-type, of house. It is immaculately whitewashed. The white colour pains the lens.

Giles: This is where he lived. 'The White House' they call it, quite obviously.

Nick: Who?

Giles: The French writer I told you about.

Nick: 'Welcome', 'well-being'? What was his name again? I know yes, you mentioned it, but hey, I forgot! Overload of useless information, sorry.

Giles: Wellebeek. Funny, but it is a Dutch name originally.

Nick: Wellebeek it is. Got it. You told me, yes.

Giles: Lived here from 2000 until 2005. Until the militants in France had other targets. He hid here. From his creditors. His religious creditors.

Nick: Can we do something with him?

Giles: He has disappeared. Publicity-shy. He writes still but nowhere to be found. The guy is scared for his life. Might be in Eire still, though. Or in the USA, France, Jesus he could be in Holland even, really.

Nick: Did he write about the island? Anything we can use? Anything that links me, an island orphan, with French contemporary literature. My god, I can see the New York Times headlines already. 'Nick saves Europe from cultural and literary starvation.'

Giles: He never wrote about Doon Island. As far as we know...

Nick: If we can find something, I might keep East End a bit longer.

Of course, it had started to rain heavily now. Splashes and drips on the lens. Beautiful shot - Eire at its best... The camera follows them, the brothers, driving off in a heavy Atlantic shower, rain coming from the back - horizontally, pushing them ruthlessly on their way to their parents' old hide-away from society, the East End.

## December 2013 - Dilemma

Nick had left a week earlier and in fact a week early also - he claimed to have been called back for a take-over of 'an interesting target'. I now had East End fully to myself again and could not imagine my luck. I was so extremely relaxed, like on drugs; slept well, made long walks, drank much less than normal, ate well from the old stove (cooked for myself...!) and was simply happy. 'Well in my skin', as the saying goes.

It had to do with the (hmmm, in principle) continuity decision just made on East End. I was very relieved our family site was protected now, enabling further family use. I realised however that it would be on my shoulders to physically manage the place, and I was actually looking forward to it. The money might come from Nick, but my ideas would keep the property floating. A great compromise, it felt good. A warm and thankful feeling about being with Nick. Never experienced before. To be honest, what I struggled with a little now though, was the emotional commitment I had made to Nick to bring 'value' to our intention to remain on the island, to remain linked with the island. Value he could use politically, and what if it could bring me some money? I broke my mind over thoughts about how to fulfill the promises to my little brother: to find something worthwhile that would justify - for the both of us, for the perhaps expanding family later and for the island - my, wait perhaps even, our, regular presence in this remote place.

I hit on an idea. Parts of it came to me already when we drove off The White House, in the hours-long downpour that followed our successful reconciliation walk to the Light. The rest floated in during these most relaxed weeks of my life.

Preparation needed to be careful. The ferryman on the westside, in exchange for a few packs of cigarettes - now rare in Eire - gave me exact

information on Wellebeek's movements. He browsed with his nicotine stained fingers through an old greasy ferry log which he had pulled from under the steering wheel stand, and gave me a date around three years earlier - and confirmed that he had not booked a pick up (he always asked for a private trip, going to the mainland or coming back to his refuge - he could not really afford to be in the open public eye), so it was not sure whether he would be coming back or not. I had expected he would have left for good in 2005, as I had told Nick, perhaps one or two years later. Wellebeek still used Doon Island to be away from the threats of the real world. Hey! New information - basically openly available in a handwritten meticulously kept ferry log. I felt my luck swelling.

I started to check on The White House and the neighbour - whom, I had found out, was taking care of the garden, the lawn, overgrowth of weeds on the car track. He also inspected the house every other week for window breakage or leaks, especially in the Atlantic winter season. Early one night, I parked the car on a field nearby, quite out of sight from the Low Road, and made my way furtively to the backside of the house. A true Eirishman would never use the formal front door, unless - as the local saying goes - leaving in a coffin, accompanied by priests and mourning relatives. And, as I anticipated, the house was unoccupied and the back door, leading to a mudroom and then kitchen, was unlocked. Like every backdoor on the entire island.

This meant I could now start preparing my initial discovery trip in earnest. My commitment to Nick. My commitment to East End. My credibility, my future!

After that, it was a matter of simply waiting for a true storm to hit. The entire island population would then stay inside for days in a row. When such a night arrived, I left East End around eleven in an early December Atlantic depression. I closed my gate carefully behind me - it would look like I was cuddling up nicely in my own place. I drove through Roerring on

pure gravity: I had the engine on idle with minimum noise; further I had switched off all lights and proceeded like a thief through my nocturnal environment. I did not encounter any other vehicle on my way to the target. This time one of my wild ideas was gonna succeed! For me, for Nick, for East End - it became a mantra - I could hum it, part of my system.

I parked the car even further away than last time - under a lot of heavy sycamore growth on an abandoned sheep's field. It was like a natural garage, I had seen the odd tractor there once in a while. Nobody, even when looking hard, would be able to see my car from the road. No tracks, no nothing. No traces.

The backdoor of course was still open. Even in a hurricane nobody locks their house. I changed shoes into soft sneakers, which I had brought in my large watertight backpack, anticipating a large loot. My torch light shone into the kitchen and to my great satisfaction I saw that all curtains were drawn tight, probably to avoid moisture build up in the wet season, and to provide some heat insulation for when the caretaker would light the large stove to expel that inevitable dampness, awaiting a potential arrival of The Writer at any time. I moved to the living quarters, next to the kitchen on the front side of the house; here also the heavy curtains were drawn closed. The place was meticulously clean! Had a quick look at some kind of working table in the corner, not far from the fireplace. Nothing on it, empty. If there was anything of value - my value that is - it must be somewhere else. The ferryman could not recall that Wellebeek had left with a lot of luggage, not if there had been an extra transport for household, or worse: archives. So, there had to be something upstairs to my liking...

After ticking off two bedrooms, without indication of any writer's work, I hit indeed on what looked like a 'study'. A large room, with a glorious view north over Doonhaven Bay, strange enough the only room where the curtains were not being drawn closed! I untied them from the sides and drew them across the two wide windows. Closed, hence free to operate with

my torch light, careful not to shine it directly on the curtains - although thick and velvet, they could always let some light through and give my burglary away. Yes, burglary, because I was prepared and ready to commit major theft.

Opposite the right window there was a table, just a plain table, not a desk or something elaborate. Just a table with a stand for a small computer screen, but without such on it. On the left side was a stack of notebooks, three, four or five - likely more. I browsed quickly through one of them, torch light in mouth. Illegible notes, most to do with money and household I gathered, rent and all kinds of mundane things. Tabulated numbers, no text, no words. Drawings of furniture, house maps with allocation of space, measurements. No writing. On the right top side of the table was a tiny stack of folders, the thin type of coloured plain paper folders, in fact a large coloured sheet folded in two. They still use them all over the place in France, very old-fashioned (Lea had all her paperwork in it), but that's how they are, our French co-humans.

First one on the top held numerous newspaper clippings, in French but also in Albion, and print-outs of reviews of his last book, 'Flat Poem', controversial and racist - as everybody thought at the time. All very interesting, but had no time to read through them. Second folder, empty, although somebody (he? Wellebeek?) had written on the cover part: '*Neuf*'. New. That might be what we are looking for, yes. Third, nothing written on top, like the first one, full of small notes, in French, scribbled ideas, on torn pieces of paper, some beer coasters (he was never seen in the pub on Doon...? Where the heck would this hermit procure his coasters...?). I guessed they were ideas for stories but again, I could hardly decipher the handwriting. I hurried through the coloured folders.

The fifth or sixth or whatever, seventh folder, was marked: 'Doon Island Dummy' and in French this time! Inside were two small newspaper clippings, marked on the sides with dates and origin and one GlobWeb-page

print, on a piece of paper which had been folded various times it appeared, and a bit dirty, no, rather: used. Like having been sitting in a wallet, folded, for some time. Carried around. Shown around?

I decided to write out these texts in my notebook I had brought. I sat at the table. Positioned the torch light shining stably on my work with the aid of a stack of books, I lifted from the case at the side of the room. I now started to copy. I transferred from simple burglar into thief. Word-thief, ideas-thief, identity-thief. From reader to writer; I had become Wellebeek! This is what I scribbled down, writing from his desk:

Newspaper article one (just the last part, a bit rephrased by my hand):

*The Mayor of Westport, Eire, confirmed that the band of fake priests had no permission for a demonstration nor for a gathering on Clare Island. He admitted though that the only pub of the island turned out to be very happy with the customers, as the visitors stayed until the early morning. He regretted and apologised though again for the aberrant behaviour that the (fake) Fathers Ted reunion-ists had displayed on their track from the ferry landing to their hotel near the island village. He realised that half of the island had been woken up involuntarily and the disturbances should not have happened. He was glad though that people were able to complain freely and that's how democracy works. The Fathers Ted had not responded. The newspaper had difficulty in contacting them as they were not a formal organisation.*

Newspaper article two (in French originally, translated now by me on the spot - not covering the entire piece):

*The Court dismissed the claim as legally valid that the religious foundation of the Club was based on safety and identity reasons. Haslins do not have to be afraid in this country, the upper Magistrate told the gathered*

*media after the Court's judges' consensus (and unanimous) ruling was left out in the open. As for the cited religious reason, it was simply illegal in France to base leisure activities, like amateur sports, on faith-based beliefs. The spokesperson of the aspiring Brittany sailing club that had asked for a 'derogation' to that rule (to form a Haslin sailing club in Brest), said that he was obviously very disappointed, but would of course abide with the law, while contemplating protests on the water in the upcoming summer season. To prime the larger audience on the cultural necessity of identity friendly sports gatherings.*



## The year 2024 - intermission

I think now, it was, after all, still right to have actively hunted for and well let's say, 'discovered' the manuscript. Hindsight, of course. All reliable judgment, is wisdom is by hindsight, isn't it?

Nick had indeed reversed his decision to sell East End. We had begun to spend, even sometimes together, many happy summers there. He had 'adopted' a Latino family - married a single mother with already two kids of her own. The Latino vote tipped him clearly over to the mayorship. Not in NYC, that proved too big for him, but he took comfort in the consolation prize of Albuquerque, after he had settled in New Mexico to escape the brand of defeat that had been put on him in the failed New York exercises. Interstate memory, like all memory in the USA, was short.

Although there was limited Eirish diaspora and even less French descendant material in Albuquerque, he became known as a culturally responsible man, the abundantly present affluent sophisticated retirees loved him, and was all for saving the power of free speech, even if it was French or located on an impossible Eirish island.

Nick put nice money in East End. It created more open space, walls that could disappear were indeed taken down, more fireplaces were now also installed in the loft and in the kitchen. The place got attractive, while remaining in splendid isolation.

I spent more and more time there, working full time as a translator and text editor for a Dutch-French copy-writing bureau. With GlobWeb now truly everywhere - with free signals from literally every streetlight pole in Europe, America and all the big Asian cities - there was no more need to be physically present anywhere. We met for work through perfect real-time visual teleconferences and once in a while I flew from Kerry or Slane to Rotterdam, Amsterdam or even Paris for a few days of networking, physical

meetings, preventative social damage control and to safeguard my financial retainer and bonus structure. Thank god, the French were still not willing to adopt any other language than their own - there would be work for ages, eternity... I never felt more secure - in all aspects of life.

Nearly ten years now after Wellebeek's manuscript had been discovered and published, I received a request, through an e-mail forwarded by the Amsterdam bureau, for an interview with a French-German TV, podcast and radio station called: *Ars*. (Wellebeek, I fantasised, would have said that word was derived from the Albion 'arse' - asshole, not donkey - but for decency's sake we will stick to the common knowledge that it comes from the Latin word for 'art').

We phone-video-exchanged through GlobWeb and agreed on a physical meeting on Doon. The journalist announced that there would be a small camera team with her, plus an art director. I might also be contacted by an independent research journalist in advance for some further background work. Whatever that meant.

I should have smelt a rat by then. There was at the time of publication, (in the year 2016 or was it later?) an extreme eagerness to talk about Wellebeek's 'The Impossible Island', while global interest since then had waned to a near non-existence. Further, Wellebeek had not produced anything else afterwards. He supposedly lived from his now vast fortune derived from earlier un-worldly book sales, somewhere in the Caribbean on a francophone tiny island, yes, an island! - as we were told through the minority part of the French press that still had some feeling for this great author. He had no more scandals, court cases, racist and genderist-sexist, ageist accusations, or suspicion of sex with minors.

The 'Whereabouts of Wellebeek' might have been lacking meaning, but it gave me the literary liberty I craved. Wellebeek was dead for global literature, for French literature - for the world, for the island and for me. He

had never reacted to the finding of ‘Tax-haven’, as I had named the novella (well... short-story rather). He had left it in my hands without a title - unusual for a headline addict. He had become a non-entity. His mysterious disappearance, no... elusiveness rather, rendered my Doon Island Wellebeek-incarnation perfectly legitimate. He wasn’t there to see me being there.

The thoroughness with which the research journalist did her work (it had struck me already that literature in the Western world had very much become a female territory) should have woken me up. But it did not, until only later, when we started to do the actual island shoots.

She sent me the ‘rolling questionnaire’ (as she called it), which she wanted - with a time deadline for return to her - to be filled in with as much detail and photographic material attached as possible. Weird, I thought, most of it had been in the press all over, those years ago, but she was looking for new angles perhaps. Or she was simply not aware or more likely too lazy to do decent GlobWeb research herself?

Here it was, the ‘rolling questionnaire’:

- Please provide details on where, when and how you found the manuscript?
- Any witnesses?
- Was it typed or handwritten?
- How did you recognise it as Wellebeek’s?
- Did you have it verified or authenticated?
- Did you contact Wellebeek yourself?
- Who or which organisation finally endorsed it as genuine?
- Who claimed the copyright? Who got the royalties?
- Did it change your life and if yes, how?

- Is there a possibility that it is a fake, a hoax, a stunt, a joke played on you or the literature community at large? Without you even knowing it?

I prepared a document with answers to her questions, well most of her questions. Of course, I debunked all suspicion raised. Then heard nothing for weeks. Suddenly, on a spring Friday, I was instructed to 'report for the interview' (bossy style!) - time and exact location to follow. But it would surely be on Doon Island, that was confirmed. And most likely in the coming week. Remain stand by, please *Monsieur* Giles.

I feared they wanted to interview me in East End. I was not prepared to cater to that suggestion. Nick would also freak out - this was the only place he had on the world where he could hide from the public eye. Nice to have a cultural association with literature, but please not on his doorstep!

When the journalist and her crew were on the first ferry in the morning of the next Monday, she called me and instructed me to be on location at eleven am sharp. 'I have very limited time,' she said. Great, what about mine, I thought...

I decided to walk to The White House, needed exercise anyhow and the fresh air and movement would relax me. I was a bit tense - there was a certain unpredictability in this interview coming up.

They had set up shop on the lawn in front of The White House. The current owner, an absentee landlord, Albion banker with Eirish roots based in Dubai, was very excited to be able to host this media event. I had met him once in Morty's in Roerring, and I wondered if he had ever read a book in his life, let alone knew who Wellebeek was. He, overly eager, had given permission even before having been asked formally.

They had planted an old and rather used-looking large wooden garden bench on the lawn. I would be sitting there with the lady journalist and answering her questions. We did some trials with light and sound, but

without her, as she had not arrived yet. It looked like the dry weather was going to hold up. Clear skies. I remained on the right side of the bench and read through the paper copy, I had made of the questionnaire list, with my answers.

While I was mentally rehearsing potential oral answers to the same written questions, a large luxury people carrier van with blinded side windows pulled up at the garden gate. A rather large, obese woman in a brightly red coloured dress stepped out, was handed a microphone set and asked to speak a few words, which was checked by the sound men. The crew with the camera approached with their equipment, one large camera on a tripod type of installation, the other on the shoulder of a mobile cameraman. A young unshaven fellow instructed me to go sit on the other side of the bench. He spoke Albion with a heavy French accent. 'She is a left-hander you see.' I saw. Without any ado, no introduction, handshakes or welcome words, we were suddenly right into the take. She started, not unexpected, with a bit of suspicious introduction as her first question was:

*Why did you fake the manuscript?*

While I gave my rehearsed and sent-in answers, on autopilot, as I heard myself talking, I suddenly got a vision of an incredible opportunity. This could yield yet another interesting game. I decided to change tack. But we needed to go slowly. This is what I threw, stone-faced, into the world:

'Well, he could have written it. If I would have had sent it to him, he would unscrupulously had put his name under it.'

What the heck - this story was dead for nearly ten years or so - if I could wring a nice revival out of it, a court case, publicity...

*Why has Wellebeek then never reacted?*

'Because he doesn't care - if you read his works, if you know the man, he doesn't care.'

*Does it surprise you if I show you here and now a written affidavit from Wellebeek that HE has NOT written the manuscript?*

‘It doesn’t surprise me, as Wellebeek has on several earlier occasions denied being the author of anonymous works. Remember ‘Untergang’? He doesn’t do anything to generate publicity - his publicity generates itself.’ (‘Untergang’ had surfaced in German about a new hidden fascist organization taking over all levels of government without being elected. Against immigrants. Quite a Wellebeek theme. But eventually he wrote in favour of the far left that was able to turn the tide. A pure Wellebeek plot! And he denied it also. And then suddenly he accepted it, as it came with a substantial monetary literary prize. Don’t forget for Wellebeek all is politics, from seducing the fourteen year old daughter of his neighbour’s Tunisian housekeeper until upsetting European governments).’

I became belligerent. Rush of negative energy - still energy. I did not like this interview, the interrogation type of conversation, the reporter - she was a witch hunter. Looking for trouble, twisting words, driving to pre-mature conclusions. ‘I have some proof that Wellebeek has written it,’ I now tried, slow, blank, unconvincingly.

She was silent then. Tired. Or angry? Looked at the camera crew and told them in an unfriendly tone to cut it: we take a break.

She put the microphone down and came a bit closer to me. It made me nearly burst out in loud laughter when I discovered we had the same idea. Independently developed on an obscure lawn in front of a potentially famous house on an obscure island in Eire.

‘Giles, we can do anything we like with the footage I have now. If you don’t decide, I will decide. Think twice - there is a golden opportunity here. This window is wide open now - but not forever though. Revisit Van

Meegeren - he became more famous than the painters whose work he forged! Do I need to say more?’

She snapped her fingers and like trained doggies, the crew got into their battle stations and the interview continued:

*Is there, at least a theoretical possibility, that you have faked it?*

I started laughing, that was real.

‘Of course, I have faked it. The text is completely mine.’

Hahaha. She was so right. It was now or never. If I could establish myself as a literary fraud, my future would be made and my fortune endless.

Friendship with Nick firm. East End safe for eternity.

What is literary, common ownership? Language is for us all, it is shared. Humanity owns Shakespeare, not his descendants or the Albion state...

## The hidden manuscript - Tax-haven

*What follows here is the so far unknown and by Giles discovered Wellebeek manuscript: 'Tax-haven'.*

At first, I thought this must be fun. I read it in a few days old newspaper. I had just spent two days in my ground-floor bedroom, as far away from my wife as I could be, to avoid triggering World War III; also to sleep away a colossal hangover, a result of a 24/7 drinking week I had practiced - to be oblivious of the last, but heaviest of the winter storms of the season. In other words, in short, I hate this island. It has a spelling mistake in its name: it should be called Doom, with an M. Bored. Bored. Bored stiff.

Louisa, my wife, never throws away a newspaper. When, in France, years ago, when we were still a half-way regular couple, she would buy a fish in *Bretagne* (alright, yes, yes, I can hear the protests already: that's not France), wrapped in a newspaper, she would inquire if I still wanted to read it before asking me to toss it in the fire. Well, she was pretty fucked up, then already, yes.

This was what it read:

'The Doon Island tax-haven concept has been given a green light by the Republic of Eire and by its associates in the European League. Starting January 2023, Doon Island will join six other islands in the League as an income tax-haven. The other islands are one in Denmark, two in France, one in the Netherlands and two, rather large ones, in Greece. The idea and first implementation started in France with two small Brittany islands, which were under threat of complete human desertion, becoming uncontrollable and criminal in turn. Then a new rule was introduced: the existing but also newly settling inhabitants were fully exempt from income tax. The authorities hoped wealthy people from League countries would



come living on the island, and spend their tax savings on the local economy. The concept was a big success.’

Now you should take good note of this you government pricks - I bloody hell moved to this god-forsaken island to be away from it all! Eire has a short memory. Through diplomatic efforts - finally these nerdy cultural embassy attaches were good for something - Eire agreed to take me in, no, as they said, to provide me with ‘shelter’. On a remote island where people were only leaving. An intellectual and cultural desert where nobody would look for me. Especially not with my new identity. My new Haslin friends would never find me here. Secret police on the ferry, rubber zodiac dinghies around my house, staffed up with French elite Navy Seals. Tax-haven my ass! I don’t want any new arrivals!

My name had become Jean-Luc Delhaize and I had been recycled into an early-retired Belgian, a Wallonian businessman - who understood and spoke unfortunately and through strange education not a single word of Flemish, but only French. And to my great embarrassment, this is what I saw happening to my vision after the tax deal was introduced on my island prison Doon:

The Arab guys, especially those who had Albion passports, were funny lads. They loved their houses and their sea views and were happy like little children to show off with their fireplaces. A good cold rainy shit season would make their day. They would sit around their fireplaces like they would have sat in their tents in the Saudi deserts in the sweltering heat two generations ago. The price of firewood, measured in weight, exceeded soon the price of gin - which they drank also in great amounts. Nobody cared.

So, what was funny about these gents? They were so bored that they tried to corner every indoor activity they could get their hands on. Their women stayed equally inside, but these girls now wanted to do the outdoor things – the outdoors would give a false sense of liberty. They could not find enough excuses to be outside. Some of them bought horses and were

riding them through rain, wind and shine, all over the island. They were talking about, I later heard, getting a few racing camels to the island. That could perhaps get their unhealthy husbands outside joining them.

Then two independent island pastimes came together. At least they looked independent at first - you never know what was the chicken or the egg, like in all political situations.

One of the younger rich Pakis (his name was Iqbal), was an avid sailor, there were rumours he had been delegated in his youth - when he was in the Pakistan Navy - to participate in some regional Games where he had won bronze in the Laser dinghy class. As he was neither a horseback nor a rock-climbing enthusiast, he had a few dinghies discreetly delivered to the island. A special ferry ride with four brand-new small boats on shiny metal trailers - spotless covers, proudly showing his personal initials on every part of the material. Money was not one of his issues.

He parked the boats near the high tide water line on his private pebble beach and started sailing in one of them on a regular basis, but only when the normally too strong northwest breeze would give in a bit. The other men did not show any interest. Where they came from, sailing was for dirt poor foreign crew on Gulf vessels, or for despicable infidel Westerners, spending the Holy Days on the water with their promiscuous women and illicit alcohol.

Now here was the other development: on the west side of the island, where most of the American-with-Eirish-roots tax refugees lived, there was a club of bored 60-something-plus gentlemen that had struck a love for old television series. Like Iqbal's tribe, they had apparently nothing else to do either. They gathered regularly in the now-tuned up old 'Horizon' restaurant, at the west end harbour, and brought with them videos, disks, memory sticks, even books, posters, all about or containing TV shows from late last century: sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties. They drank beer and were jolly and laughed too loud and stupidly about the sexual naive

innuendo, the stale word jokes of the eighties, immature relational context and early signs of plain racism. It was in fact bloody pathetic. They now had all the time and money in the world to civilise themselves and read and discuss the great World Books of Universal Literature. Instead they were watching British soaps from 50 years ago - 'Fawlty Towers', 'Are You Being Served', 'On The Buses' and all kinds of other shit. I once sat in the corner of that canteen (as I can hardly call that joint a 'restaurant' - the smell of overused deep-fry kitchen fat crashes in your face when you walk in from the clean ocean air outside), when they were starting yet another show. It had the appearance of the first episode showing as they (well, there were only three, one American guy he used to own a casino - he was half Native American I thought, an Albion guy with which I recall some stupid carefully artificially constructed double-barreled name like Thompson-Dick or Jones-Cuntt or something like that. These names used alone on itself would indicate working class descent, link two up with a hyphen and we talk aspiring bourgeois class, faking nobility. Yuck. Puke. Fuck nobility. What twits these Albions are. Plus an Australian who had followed his immensely rich wife - who had made, unbelievably, a fortune with GlobWeb quasi-intellectual cross-words and cryptogram puzzles and magazines) were sitting around the curved flat screen monitor. Like silly six-year olds giggling already at the opening credits. Anticipating the clown arriving at the birthday party.

They hadn't even seen me coming in. And they saw me even less when I left, half an hour later, having absorbed the sheer stupidity of the show they were playing now. About a priest on an Eirish island, played by an actor who could impossibly impersonate a priest and therefore completely failed at it, seconded by an apprentice young priest, played by a very good actor, and a retired one, played by a well-known Shakespearian actor - which the apprentice and the main priest took care of - as was custom also in my country. Nests of homosexuality. Despicable system. Ha!

The west end retirees laughed, rolling off their chairs. I found it poor acting, on the screen, in the audience. It was just not funny, not humouristic. Nothing thought through, shallow as the Doon Island ferry harbour here west was at low tide. It was a late nineties easy and gratuitous attack on a then already Crumbling Church. Of course, I had always hated the Catholic Church with its pagan rites and their demagogue undemocratic beliefs and let's not forget: rules! The Holy Trinity, the Marian cult, the Saints and their Angels. A Christmas fairy tale for the entire year, for all ages in eternal Disney multicolour. But now that they had begun to develop an underdog position, I could not suppress a feeling of empathy, sometimes sympathy even. Should I become religious and convert to Papism, the Cult of the Holy Father?

This Father Ted series was about these three priests on a fictional island off the Eirish Atlantic coast. I watched it secretly at home, poor image quality, through some free streaming services on GlobWeb.

(Father) Ted, the main lead, half-way sharp, tries to direct the budding career of the young freshly ordained priest thrown into his protection - Father Dougal. They both look after an Alzheimer suffering old retired confrere, amazingly full of life and energy, Father Jack, whose vocabulary is limited to three main battle cries for his long-suppressed longings, now coming to the surface: 'Feck', 'Drink' and 'Girls'. No other text. Wait, sometimes also: 'Arse'.

In the first episodes it is clear that cast and directors are looking for a common thread, a tune, a culture to link with the audience. They struggle, as it is not yet that funny at all. Later, once they have established themselves in the fictitious and obscure but very island-like community of imaginary Craggy Island, it becomes slightly more entertaining, but then only a bit, really, even I could see that. But isn't it a bit simple to tear the Catholic Church apart in the nineties? While the first cracks had been firmly established, with all kinds of movements present after the War and after the

Sixties? A bit pathetic. Unwarranted. Boring. Or is 'gratuitous' the word? So, the original parody tone of the series changed fast into pure absurdity - with the Church and their loyal Fathers on Craggy Island - the nearly innocent, naive background. Any other religion would have not accepted this - would have gone on the streets to protest such blasphemous work. Making fun of our clerics! Can you imagine the Haslin outrage if this would happen to them?

Now let's go back to the first developments in our tax-haven, sailing. Iqbal could not get his man-buddies to join him on the water. They smoked their water pipes, watched American television or were partying in Amsterdam. Flying to and from Doon Island (they had the Gaelic football pitch converted into an aviation pad), on privately hired helicopters, back and forth to Slane airport. He therefore started to look at the female Arab presence on the island. The veiled ladies were dying to get out of their houses. On the first invitation they joined Iqbal with ten of them. They went out on a clear September day, most likely one of the last good days of the season and by doing so, staying on the waters, learning to sail, head-veils on, they in fact generated what would soon become the Doon Island Haslinic Sailing Club. In the winter months that came and went, Iqbal went back to his native Pakistan and had - for good memory as he would later claim - life vests made, with a water-resistant veil fixed to them, so that they could be safely worn by the female participants. (Apparently, I learned later, their original head veils with the loose ends were prone to get stuck into the main sheets, blocks and pulleys). He then bought from the old Navy leftover real estate collection on the island, a cute small barracks building near the water on the edge of the harbour - which they called on the island 'The Cove'. Iqbal hung it full with paintings and pictures of famous Arab seafarers. One modern map depicted how the Haslin ancestors had, in their view, conquered, over sea, large chunks of Europe. Already in

the Middle Ages. A poster of bright coloured lines and impressive arrows over a simplified map of the then-Western world of Europe.

In the spring, summer and early autumn of the year in which my apocalyptic story plays, the Haslinic sailing became very popular on Doon Island.

They went out, now in six to seven boats (In the meantime, Iqbal had purchased a few bigger ones), nearly every Sunday - the Friday and Saturday of course for their religion being off-limits. Iqbal had hired a sailing instructor of the same right faith (freshly flown in from Karachi) who came early every Sunday morning and was picked up by one of Iqbal's handymen from the mainland in the large fast rigid inflatable he owned, as the ferry would not run 'till ten o'clock on Sunday mornings. It was therefore not strange that their sailing movement based on belief was recognised, soon in the European Haslin diaspora, later by press, news stations and podcast broadcasters, from basically all over the world. Reporters were invited to sail along, females obviously had to cover their hair, but males could sail as they liked. The Club brought quite some attention to the island. It even brought more tax-free settlers from the richer countries other than Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, even from where income taxes were practically non-existent. Lebanese, Tunisian and Libyan ladies joined, still without their maritime men. The Club was blooming. 'Sailing was back on the island', some old local fart told me. No clue what he meant with that, back?

But non-Haslins were politely refused entry to The Cove Clubhouse (as it was now called) barrack and, obviously, denied membership to the Club. Not that the Dooners really cared...

What I had not realised, in my academic naïveté and in my general disinterest in affairs going on, on this stupid island, was that this Father Ted business was more popular than everybody like me realised. I might give the story away now, but almost every year, even with the series gone and the main character dead for nearly thirty-five years now, a group of fun-loving,

half-assed, self-styled cultural freaks organised an event to commemorate the ‘thoughts and works’ of Father Ted. The television series had long since ended, but the main character was as popular as ever. Needless to say, this needed to be organised on an island, and as there was no real Craggy Island - although it seems that an island off the Clare coast on the Atlantic West had given its location as the basis - the organising Father Ted committee chose each year an Eire off-shore island as a location to hold their fun reunion. An important component for their ridiculous exercise (how Westerners have become non-serious, playful and hedonic at the same time) was the annual Father Ted Contest - which individual looked the most like, could talk like, in short: could impersonate Father Ted the best? It is very much similar to what those brain-dead Americans do with their Papa Hemingway contests in the Florida Keys. Have a beard, are fat, can hold your drink? Culture!

The contest was structured like a beauty pageant. Participants had to show off their priestly dress, whilst they walked down the aisle in procession and recited the most common Catholic prayers and of course answered questions on the TV series (very detailed) and without so many words. How religious they were and most importantly, how good they were at mocking the Mother Church. It was not cultural, not intellectual, not about heritage, it was just plain moronic. Fucking stupid - no other words. Just as the Haslinic-only sailing was stupid. Sign of the times - stupidity. Nobody wanted to go deep, so stay superficial. Show that you think you know what you stand for, get very excited about it, shout your identity out loud, but don't go deep. Please: don't ever go deep! Don't do it!

The days picked for the Father Ted reunion on my Doon Island safe-haven, were on the last of a spring holiday weekend in Eire. A ‘Bank Holiday’. Nobody knew the religious origin of these weekends anymore, but a day off was always welcome; the banks were closed hence their name.

This Sunday started as a truly beautiful day, warm, sunny and without a lot of wind - days like that were hard to come by on the edge of the Atlantic:

shit weather used to keep assholes away from here. The weeks and days before had been so bad, rainy, stormy with hurricane forces of wind even forcing a large military vessel to seek shelter in Doonhaven Bay, anchored just off Roerring, not far from The Cove. It was an Eirish naval Coast Guard cutter, named after a long-dead pompous obese Eirish writer (what does this say about fighting spirit when one names their military vessels after artists...), but it had a large contingent of American troops on board (Reasons unknown - joint exercises? Drug or weapon smuggling hunt? These guys are everywhere, the cockroaches of the world. In a way, to have thirty pumped-up-male-macho US Marines around a pristine rural area is not without expectation of escalation, in other words we could have seen this entire kind of thing coming... Asking for trouble).

In Castletowndoon meanwhile, the Fathers Ted assembled. They were sitting in O’Keeffe’s Pub, which had opened unusually early to accommodate the thirty-odd group, primarily males - of which the majority were in some kind of priestly outfit. Most wore a normal black suit, with a white priest collar, a large rosary at hand or around their necks. Others wore, not completely true to the original TV series, a monk’s habit. There were two in full bishop’s regalia, impressive show work, but they would certainly disqualify on the catwalk, one of the first trials of the contest. What they had in common was that they were all drinking their fake religious brains out. At half nine in the morning they had all had at least three to four pints of Murphy’s or Guinness, as breakfast, a moral liquid beacon for those competing in the contest, to ease their nerves and to provide them with eloquence. They forgot to eat, as they were busy drinking and talking. Laughing. Nothing was serious in this group of Church-bashers. There was no tomorrow.

For Roerring, on Doon Island, the Sunday was a quiet affair. The non-wealthy aboriginal islanders, as generations before them, were preparing for church and dressed up in good suits, although more and more



of them showed up for their god service in plain jeans and sweaters. They walked to their cars (battered non-license-plates illegal vehicles), and drove themselves, their partners or, already in the minority: their families, to St Patrick's church in the old settlement of Bullkilla.

When they shuffled slowly through the church gate doors and found their pews, the Haslinic Sailing Club swung, equally very slowly, into action. Their Holy Days being over, Sunday was the start of the week. Iqbal's younger brother Naveen, who was handy with boats (as it turned out, he got attracted by the rich female hunting ground at the Club. He had never worked a day in his life before, but found it useful now to show off his mechanical boating skills), opened the Club's barracks around ten, and started to get gear outside: the veiled life vests, sails, helmets for the beginners, fenders, an anchor and finally an outboard engine for the coaches accompanying boat.

The first-of-the-morning ferry took all Tedders in - no questions asked - drunk, half-drunk and sober - strictly no discrimination on the level of imbibing; liberty of the land. Staying outside, they occupied all the space on the limited car deck, which could carry a maximum of four cars, but now hosted only, a Navy vehicle, with inside - but unknown to the crowd outside, due to the heavily tinted glass of the windows - one older Eirish sergeant, driving four American Marines (indeed, from the anchored vessel). The main group of dressed fake Fathers stood at the halfway pulled up steel ramp. And actually, yes of course, femininity saw parody as a legitimate way to claim headway into the mainstream of world developments: there were nuns too, three or four of them. Whilst, in the TV series there were no nuns, only a docile and sometimes a bit of a cheeky female housekeeper. They all faced the sea, the entrance to The Cove, and they all sang in harmony a very Catholic hymn, directed by a monk sporting a wig, undoubtedly from a Halloween shop, that created a fake bold Benedictine head with a half ring of growth around it, mimicking hair,

orange in colour. They now drank lukewarm half litre cans of lager from a large stack of non-chilled twenty-four pack trays, strategically located on the central car deck. The rest of the crowd, supporting the singing Teds and Monks, Cardinals and Sisters, mumbled along, some made slight dancing movements on the easy rocking of the ferry. They had a great day ahead.

The Haslinic sailing was at that moment in time with six boats on their way out of The Cove. Iqbal had joined now with his brother, they were both quite occupied with instructing, on different boats, the further female-only crew of pupils of around twenty uniformed girls and a few young middle-aged women, all protected from the waves with their life vests and from the unfaithful with their waterproof veils.

It was going to be indeed a glorious day, a soft early summer morning with easy winds, no big waves. They planned to sail slowly to the mainland and have a picnic lunch across Doonhaven Bay in the small lobster port, Bank Harbour, on the grass there near the small car park, then sail back enabling Iqbal and his little brother Naveen to be back on time for daily afternoon prayers in the small home mosque they had near their estate. They were humming religious songs, softly and respectful, when they caught sight of the ferry: intimidating with its loud diesel engine and rather boisterous with its human inebriated cargo coming around the corner of The Cove.

Then nature stepped in. That's why Haslinic and Catholic gods invented nature: to step in, when life becomes too predictable. The winds, already not very strong, which they usually are around Doon Island, dropped completely. Iqbal's fleet was just coming around the small rock island, in The Cove where in the old days the old village fuel oil reservoir was stored, appropriately named The Rock, when the doldrums hit. The ferry, unaware of any changing wind conditions, ploughed diligently and seriously on through the still waters. The Fathers, Sisters and Brothers popped another one loudly open, gathered around the half open lowered ferry bow and

continued their obnoxious howling, singing and shouting. They had become an Albion soccer match audience. Holy hooligans.

In later investigations, it became an important point to establish whether the ferryman was under the influence or not. It was never proven, but pictures of him even in the international press were circulating, where he seemed to drool out of his half open mouth, while wearing a white priest collar that he had appropriated from an equally suspected drunk Tedder. The ferry driver was probably inebriated indeed. Anyhow it had become an irrelevant decision as he was not from the island. So guilty, yes, but no party to the guilt of the party...

The Haslinic convoy, hearing and then seeing the ferry coming around the corner, suddenly became aware of the impending conflict, without any movement and wind power at all, now suddenly feared a major collision and started to yell, standing up in their wobbly dinghies, trying to catch the attention of the impending impact with the blue icebreaker. They shouted, waved their arms, the girls began to yell. Initially nothing happened, until the ferry driver (had in some way woken up from his bullshit conversation with too many illegally present people on his bridge) by some of the shrill shouting by the Haslin girls - suddenly grasped the seriousness of the potentially impending collision. He reversed the engine abruptly, just before the first of Iqbal's boats hit the thick steel, half lowered, boarding ramp. Driver-man then blew the foghorn, seconds long - most distressing to all who heard it. Most of the Tedders stopped partying and tried to look over the front bow ramp to see what was going on.

At that moment the sailing boats started to getting crushed under the ferry's bow; the occupants of the dinghies abandoned ship. They made a tiny little mistake though: they changed their conventional girlish screaming in a bit more formal howling that, - and I can imagine the effect this had - sounded much more like a battle cry than a distress signal... more like an uproar from an Arab city in mortal distress. Climbing first on board the

ferry were the youngest ones: agile, slim teenage girls. They went over for two reasons, the first innocent and explainable: they were scared to be overrun in the water, the second unnecessary and exaggerated: they thought they were being attacked and wanted to launch a pre-emptive strike. That Naveen shouted at them - the moment they went over - that Allah was in fact great, in case they didn't know, did not help to suppress the second intention. They started to hit out at the Tedders, with materials they had brought from the boats, fenders, paddles, oars, small spars and stretches of anchor chains. A second boat and then a third, full of aggressive female sailor-fighters boarded the ferry - which had by now its engine on idle and floated aimlessly towards The Rock.

The taking of the ferry by the fourth dinghy, with Iqbal on board as instructor, cemented the fear in the Fathers and their supporters. As Iqbal's party had drifted along the ferry to its higher sides, they saw no other means, but to also enter the developing battlefield by throwing their small anchor over the steel fence and pulling themselves through the rope and chain onto the ferry deck.

'Fecking pirates,' shouted an old Hemingway-bearded Father, who briefly thought that it was an entertainment ploy by the islanders, as a kind of welcome party. It became a true pub brawl, the tiny veiled maritime girls hitting at obese pensioners in Halloween costumes. It didn't take long before all rolled over each other, the foghorn continuously howling, the ferry like a wounded animal crying for attention, now scratching its hull on the invisible under-water parts of The Rock.

All the time during the taking of the ferry, the Americans stayed in their jeep. But then suddenly quite fast, their Eirish driver and accompanying sergeant had gotten out and joined the fight on the deck. They would rather join than be ambushed like sitting ducks in their vehicle. The Americans stayed in and were now all alone, fearing for their own safety - although that emotion quickly faded as they became aware that the fight in front of their

eyes was only a hand fight, no knives or guns to be seen. They ducked and tried to be invisible, wanting to weather out the apparently pure local pastime, until a rather young girl opened the door at the backside and peeped in (who was stupid enough not to lock those doors during an unfortunate episode like this...?!). The girl, too young or too overtaken by the events, could not suppress a loud shout when she saw the fully combat armed Marines, faces with camouflage make-up and in genuine commando fatigues. Nobody, except the other members from the Haslinic Sailing Club, understood a word of what she was shouting, except for the word, heavily accented: ‘American... American.’

The American mini-platoon leader, funny enough a young man carrying the family name Murphy, decided that the time to hide was past them and he ordered his other three Seals out. They jumped out from the back off the jeep, and following his example they started shooting live bullets into the air, while manhandling any Fathers Ted or Haslinic Sailors they could get their hands on. Two of the soldiers wrestled the amok-makers to the ground and tied their hands with black plastic zip-ties behind their backs, the prisoners lying on their bellies. Two of them kept shooting in the air, and drove the herd - which had now stopped fighting - to the other military colleagues, including now the Eirish sergeant and the driver, who arranged the prisoners in neat rows along the painted (but today empty) car tracks on the ferry, by pure coincidence, but something that would be played up big time later in the press and the media, always a Tedder alternating with a Haslinic Sailor. The Marine Seals carried zip-ties as a standard issue and now they proved for the first time extremely useful. (Perhaps it is time to make the point here and now: diplomats, presidents, bullshitters all get the Nobel Prize for Peace, but the people who truly deserve to receive it are the inventors of the zip-ties, the microwave cooking oven, the disposable baby diaper - they have done far more for world peace than all the political crap that proved obsolete, so soon in all cases... Now, don't get me going...!).

To end a long story of a long and heavy morning - what the world remembered soon of the 'Ted Brawl' (as it was called ever since, and not only locally) was the lines of priests lying on the ferry deck, in fact participants in a religious mockery, brotherly and sisterly, alternating next to members of a non-violent identity sailing club, based on a Middle-Eastern, exogenous faith. What nobody, except the islanders, the Dooners, who came out after their local cult radio broadcasted the event, or came out after hearing the loud popping of the machine guns, saw what was the incredible result of the bonding process between the prisoners. Already while tied up on the ferry they started to talk to each other - explaining what they had been doing and, 'where they came from'. The Tedders were fast sobering up and the agitated girls were fast getting out of their group-induced aggression. They turned their common goal - in fact 'having fun on Doon Island', towards the foreign captivators. They went into a large group discussion, bound on the deck, impossible to follow by the Marines, who were back in their jeep, nervously smoking Marlboro cigarettes.

Now that the ferry - which had resumed quietly its course to the concrete slip near the village - had landed, the two Eirish soldiers (without consulting the Americans) started to cut the zip-ties of the wrists of the prisoners and let them walk freely to the village.

The group had completely mixed. The Fathers and the Monks were happily chatting with the veiled Haslinic Sisters and the Mothers and the Sisters were joking with Captain Iqbal and First Mate Naveen. Within ten minutes they had all gathered outside Morty's (formally 'Morty Donovan's Bar'), and occupied the long wooden drinking tables outside. Morty offered the Fathers, the Mothers, the Sisters large pints of lager and stout beer, even Iqbal took one and the Sailing Sisters, now with their veils safely propped away in the life vests (which they had all dumped on one big heap in the alley next to the pub), all drank tea, Coke or Fanta - while a later rumour

had it that also they would freely sample from the large amount of fermented malt beverages served. The Eirish sergeant and his driver were sitting among them, they exchanged cigarettes with both girls and Tedders, and they all laughed loud and uninhibitedly. Wasn't it all a big joke, after all? The only serious ones, of course, were the Americans. They stayed in their jeep - still nervously smoking, frustrated and wondering what to do. At a complete loss to... grasp what was going on.

They have no direction, these Americans, do they?

*Then the manuscript ends abruptly.*

# INSULATED

(1994 – 1995 and 2015)

*“Will you marry me, Fanny-Rosa?” he said.*

*She smiled, she pushed away his hands, and settled herself once more on the  
bottom boards of the boat.*

*“You will be swamping the boat if you don’t look after it,” she said.*

*He seized the tiller and the sheet, and headed the boat again towards Doon  
Island.*

*“Will you not answer my question?” he asked her.*

*“I am only twenty-one,” she said. “I hardly think I want to marry yet  
awhile and settle down. There are still so many things that are amusing to  
do.”*

*“What sort of things do you mean?”*

*“I like to travel. I like to go on the Continent. I like to do as I please.”*

Hungry Hill

**Daphne du Maurier**



## Willem's barn - in the end - The Now

I was sinking away in one of the large beanbag cushions that these old hippies had filled their messy living room with. It was not sleep that had overcome me - it was communion with all that went on around me, here in this cheap artists' barn: the years before, on the island, in the future, Rupert.

Had he drugged me, Willem, this chubby, bearded teddy bear? He looked so innocent though. If I couldn't trust Willem anymore, who could I trust?

I think Ron's demise, the earlier and casual announcement, was the true introduction - Willem now took centre stage, literally took two steps up on the impressive rough stone staircase and started to stare at and act towards me. However, he took two steps ahead in the narrative also, as by now I had somewhat lost the storyline. Ron dead and gone! Jesus... and what a way to go. But what did Ron have to do with all this?

Can you imagine the scene? Willem smoked-belched out his next monologue: "There have not been so many moments of glory in this island nation. They let the Anglo-Saxons in, a clear minus point; then they let the Albions cultivate their shores, less bonus points again. Internal squabbling between clans, regions, religions, never created that required nationalistic front. Cromwell, that's Oliver, not the other one, put the house in order; at least that is how he saw it. Hero in Albion; devil-incarnate in Eire. We were losing it, sorry they were losing it. Then the same, old story that every school kid learns here... Wolf Tone, hey, he nearly got Doon Island, that's my guy! - he tried with the help of the French to get this place sorted out once and for all. Organised a huge fleet of rebels and soldiers, the right minds for a free country. He would have succeeded if not for the strong easterly winds that kept him literally 'at bay', only a few salty feet away from

Doon Island, here, he wrote 'he could see the shore' - here it is Joanna! Here on Doon Island, the stepping stone to liberty for the French Wolf Tone fleet. Never, well there are hardly ever any eastern winds here. But then, for days, eastern gales and storms, freezing and un-sailable. Is that a word, un-sailable?"

I contributed something like: 'Who needs French support on this island, it is complicated enough', trying to be humorous and he almost laughed, tried to laugh, but instead he puffed on his cigarette, inhaled far too deep, coughed, choked and got very red in the face.

"It remained a big mess, factions who liked the Albions, factions who must fight for full independence from Albion, factions who hated each other. Still not much different now, if you ask me."

I wanted to sleep desperately – I was sure Willem had slipped something into my drinks. My eyelids felt so heavy. I started to doze off. Only half-heard his last diatribe. But was it his last?

"The only national high point comes at a time from where we don't know the exact date. Deep in the early middle ages, when the whole of Europe is on the run, just like now, no borders, everybody goes where they think the pot of gold may be buried for them, with or without a rainbow. The place, a huge mess, no leadership, no common goals, no discipline."

I listened to Willem babbling on and on, but it was as if I had heard Rupert again. Rupert the philosopher, orator, scholar, the dreamer, the publicist, the businessman, the communicator, and also most probably? the spy... Rupert trying to seek acceptance for one of his theories, his stories, for a book, for a movie, for a play, for a lecture at a prestigious institution. Anything. He promoted the belief that the inhabitants of this island Eire, and its most remote islands, played an important role in the survival of the post-classic European world. 'Imagine (Rupert would tell his audience passionately - I just saw him doing so in my fantasy) 'all of the continent is in the biggest survival mess it has ever been. The famous hordes from the

East are overriding the civilised world. There was a bit of Roman civilisation left in pre-Albion; Patrick, a Roman rich kid - he later got promoted to Saint - got kidnapped by a powerful Eirish heathen people trafficking gang and sold into slavery in Eire. Patrick understood that what he represented with his classical Roman Albion upbringing would soon come to an end and he started with Eire - he kind of single-handedly converted Eire to Christian-value civilisation - as they then saw Christendom as civilisation. Hahaha. Therefore, Eire stayed out of touch of - and with! - the barbarians, the Huns and the cultural cannibals. Then later, the Eirish monks were sent back to Europe to help with keeping the place safe, re-installing the religion based on classical Roman influence.'

That 'saving the future for others' had never really been questioned or challenged, but I was convinced Rupert wanted to redo the experiment.

The Willem's barn night then breaks up in memory. Drugs, wine or whiskey, or all three? Now strange enough, here comes the pre-finale back as a memory - I am not yet fully asleep, hahaha, Willem came awfully close to me. He had come down from his 'stair stage' - I smelt his horrible tobacco breath, cheap Dutch tobacco smoked in a pipe, his breath curling around my head.

"Don't you really see it? What did Rupert tell you? Nothing! The story is in your mind. This is what Rupert wants - islands like Doon 'saving civilisation'. Now you were thrown in his lap... Like others before you. Don't trust Rupert! You hear me? You can't save civilisation... It is impossible. Don't trust Rupert!"

I must have been stupefied. By his story, the developments, the booze. My brain digging through all recent experiences, conversations, knowledge... what did Willem and I tell each other when we got to see the Tapes? What did Rupert and I discuss when I came to see him in Slane? Why did he disappear? Did he really disappear...? One needs to be somewhere before one can disappear, correct? One needs to be in splendid

isolation before conquering the world - or is it the other way round? Can one only afford to be isolated before saving the world, when one has the means?

## 2015 - Handwritten note - The New

It was Rupert's obituary in my daily GlobWeb electronic newspaper that triggered my interest again in that very personal experience from more than twenty years ago:

*It is with deepest regret that we have to announce the very sad news that one of our loyal soldiers passed away last Saturday.*

*After a very distinguished career of more than a quarter of a century within various departments across our Albion Foreign Service, Dr Rupert MURPHY, an Eirish native, but an Albion passport holder, retired early (with honours) in 1997, right after a very successful covert but important cultural operation in his native Eire.*

*Dr Rupert Murphy was very successful in his younger years as an independent businessman; showing a great and personal interest in many social movements. He was one of the pioneers in the roll-out of GlobWeb, and – at that time - the iconic GlobBox.*

*Dr Murphy does not leave any descendants.*

*He will be greatly missed by the Service and the many colleagues who looked up to him as a true mentor, one of the last 'uomo universale' and*

I stopped reading. Shit! Couldn't really take much more of that type of stuff these days. The picture that came with the obituary, I would never have recognised the person as Rupert, not without the accompanying text. An old anonymous lived-out face.

Anything that could be made up, Rupert made up. No, rather: what needed to be made up. Rupert with the many faces. Soldier, Dr apparently so. Universal scholar. Global being.

So many faces. Even in death.

But it still took me a few days to digest this news. Then, surprisingly enough, as I had never thought that I would do this: write a letter to a TV show, well actually the new GlobFix movie channel show. TV does not exist anymore – already gone for many years - all is transmitted now over and through GlobWeb. Five years ago, GlobFix did not even exist.

Ten years ago, I would have rather jumped off a bridge in winter into an ice-cold unforgiving river than consider writing a letter to a TV show...! I always knew what I wanted, but was shy. Not shy as in not daring, but shy in the sense of wanting to solve my own problems. Not wanting to bother anyone about my life, my problems. My history. A result of conservative upbringing.

Ron is long dead and gone, so long I cannot even remember his face. I need old photographs to help jog my memory. Patrick is in LA now, for years already, and will never come back. He is angry with all and everything - even with the way I spell his Eirish name, *Padraig*. That was how he was baptised and registered. Not the right spelling, he says.

Louise, ah my lovely little Louise, little Loulou. She is now grossly overweight, a single mother of two equally fat children of different fathers - two obnoxious boys that do nothing but eat, no not eat: devour, ravish... Coke and chips - around the clock - in fact the perfect (and cheap!) vegan diet... She works part-time and illegally, cash in hand - next to my (and her dole) money - in a smudgy Polish supermarket - and is happy. Happy she lives around the corner. And happy I am still alive and hence there for her. She is not bright. That makes it easier to be happy I guess. Just simply happy.

I actually had no clue I could still write, I mean with a hand and a pen. On paper! Who still does that? I smiled at the thought of secretaries (do they still have those?), opening a letter delivered, not even through DHL, but by normal standard post that had come in. As this was in America they probably suspected it to contain a hidden device, perhaps a letter bomb, or maybe even an envelope full of anthrax powder. Maybe they would simply toss it, unopened into the bin. I could just imagine the look of surprise on their faces upon seeing the enclosed letter, written on lined paper, in black ink. Handwritten! By a live human being - handwritten! Now!

*“Dear Producers of ‘Dark Glass’ - please find herewith a proposal for an episode for your now (I am sure still being prepared) seventh series. It is called ‘Insulated’. The setting: an island off the Eire Atlantic West Coast. Not too far from the mainland, but still a twenty minute irregularly scheduled ferry ride away (well, when there were still ferries, I thought when I wrote it - but decided to keep it in, anyway). On the island there are one hundred and twenty humans, one hundred and twenty cattle, one hundred and twenty mutton sheep and a mere twenty dogs. The year is 1995. We live the story through spring, then summer, later late autumn.*

*Here we go; this is my synopsis - for your consideration:*

*Joanna lives on isolated Doon Island with her husband Ron - who is a cargo-handling crewman on the old American-built helicopter, which is based on the opposite mainland and regularly services the island. Their two children, a boy and a girl, go to school on the island with eleven other children, which is run by two volunteer teachers, one Albion, and the other German. Most original Eirish have left the island over the recent years. Whilst it was still possible. Moreover still allowed!*

*Now, here is the start of the story: The school has a hamster, which gets allocated for safekeeping and care, each weekend to a different family.*

*On the very first weekend of the new school year, Joanna and her family host the animal, but it dies unexpectedly from acute stress, after being violently attacked by their old demented dog. Joanna commissions Ron to find a replacement hamster (which they plan to swap secretly with the dead one), from a faraway pet shop on the forbidden main land. Ron is one of the few islanders with a permanent pass allowed to occasionally leave the island: haha guess what? He does not come back - and does not reply to messages sent to him inquiring about his whereabouts.*

*Then, next episode: Joanna and Rupert. But, first this: an older Australian couple are able to vanish from the island - the husband terminally ill. The house they leave behind - a small, but modern manor - called 'The Cape', is not emptied. Joanna helps with clearing out the house of the last forgotten items and follows the transition of the mini-manor. Much to her surprise, within a month of the couple having left, a fresh, non-island dweller turns up looking to occupy the place: Rupert, a single, very contemporary witty Albion guy (Eirish origin). Rupert rents The Cape.*

*The inevitable happens of course - Rupert and Joanna find each other entwined in a sphere of mental and physical enlightenment, initially on the island, but later on the magical mainland, where Joanna cannot be. Scenes follow of playing gramophones, CDs, cassette tapes, wine and cooking - and then Rupert suddenly disappears just as enigmatically as he had popped up. Joanna digs further, through the house. There are no cameras, files, photographs, paperwork, nothing where she can trace Rupert's origin or what had proceeded. Until she hits the box with the Betamax tapes and clippings - in various European languages.*

*She manages to locate a Betamax player with a senior neighbour. She starts to watch and has to stop after a few minutes, well rather seconds. It is unbearable to watch. And even more unbearable not to continue watching."*



Nah, really, no way! I cannot send this – I cannot even write more, now. It will take me weeks to edit this chapter into a sendable, sellable format. Also, strangely enough, I am not able to get the real story on paper. I thought I could still write everything down, but I can't. It's too weird for words. And it is actually not a very nice story.

I will toss it in the bin – for now. So the secretaries don't have to do this. All this never happened, I guess...

## Autumn 1994 - Hamster - The Now

Although the arrangement had not been explained in great detail, it was basically fine with me. Two children were now waiting under the concrete bus stop sheltering from the rain; their school bags on the uneven wet concrete floor. Patrick carrying the cage with a kitchen towel draped over it, Loulou peeping under it. The school hamster - taken out by them, well imposed upon us for the weekend. The kids hadn't told me earlier, but apparently some kind of roster had been devised, together with the entire class, for families weekend duty for the hamster. As they explained to me later in the short drive home, hamsters, and especially these miniature ones, have a very sensitive metabolism and need to be fed and watered every few hours, otherwise they would die. Oscar was barely eight weeks old, a mere juvenile and needed therefore top attention.

I liked it that Patrick was so enthusiastic about the hamster-weekend project. He hated school, he hated all ten co-pupils except his little sister (of course), and both its teachers. He was bullied and was kept out of things. Anything 'school' that he perceived as positive was a gain. Even a fecking hamster...

It happened to us, later that ominous October on that Friday evening: as it was getting dark, a still, quiet, pretty evening, but with the promise of an enormous storm brewing, dark blue and black skies, with only a few stars peeping through some scarce holes. Ron was on the noisy helicopter somewhere over the Eirish mainland and I decided - as the de facto head of the resident family - that we should go for a walk. We left Oscar in his cage on the floor and Muffy, the old crippled senile boxer also at home. That turned out to be a huge mistake. Leaving things unattended. It set a lot in motion.

Let's move a little ahead: Saturday. Ron was already on his early-morning first flight of the day. I didn't even know whether he had slept here or on the mainland. Home late, gone early, always the same. We hadn't slept together for years, he slept on the couch. I brought a note to the 'Horizon' café next to the helipad, for when he would return to the island for a short while - having his morning coffee there. He had a 'mainland day' today - a long day as they went in the weekends - so I was not at all sure if he could pull off my request. And it was a Saturday after all. Those types of shops would be closed?

Long story short - Ron did get my note, I am still sure about that, worked all day on the chopper as Fergus the 'Horizon' publican told me later - but he did not take the last chopper back. A violation of all agreements! Long story even shorter: Ron disappeared - before the hamster game was played out - and I have not see him ever since. The hamster thing did him in. We heard later that he had formally given his termination for the island and for the cargo job and had traveled, with a one-way ticket, to his sister who lived in Slane. From there, the rumour had it, he flew on (or should I say fled?) to Manchester, where his two brothers, their families and his ageing mother lived.

A hamster chasing a grown man from his cage. Well, to be more precise, an expired hamster.

I was reduced to being a single parent. Two crying kids around the damp autumn house, no breadwinner bringing home the money. No future no-direction anymore. And, more urgent for Monday: no hamster. Ron, with his helicopter, his orange boiler suit, his promise of stability... had not delivered...

On Monday we were supposed to bring the hamster back to school. The hamster was very dead. That day, I realised I was much better at lying, than I had previously given myself credit for, even in a large group setting, better than my own children. They were angels with the truth...

Monday... I followed the kids back into the small school, into the corridor that divided the primary room (three other kids) from the secondary (five kids). We brought only the cage back. Oscar was in a nameless grave, one spade deep, far out in the donkey's field. Normally Ron would have done that type of thing, but this time I did the honours myself. No sermons.

All that was present saw that there was something wrong - the cage was empty, no towel draped over it, the feed and water contraptions were stored inside, empty, cleaned and lying on their sides, not attached to the grilled cage-frames - it was a true empty concept.

The Albion teacher, in fact almost a girl still, was sad but understanding when I told her in front of the newly gathered class that wee Oscar had died unexpectedly during the first night and that we had found the small animal lying on its back. In the morning. Cold and beyond repair. There was nothing we could have done...

Miss Flory asked Patrick to take the stand and asked if he had seen anything unusual.

"No," Patrick replied, "but we should have left the cage on the table and not on the floor."

I could feel myself getting warmer and suddenly felt very uncomfortable in the company of my own children.

"Why," asked Miss Flory, who now had a very serious, asking face.

"Coz' then Muffy would not have touched and bumped the cage."

"Who is Muffy?"

"That's the boxer," replied Patrick. Confident and as-a-matter-of-fact. Kind of surprised she wouldn't know... Lou grabbed my hand - something she never did, only at the doctor's or at the dentist's. She started to cry to complement the picture of the upcoming drama.

"What happened then, Pat?" (Oh my god. Miss Flory – with a fake smile. We were on 'Pat' terms... no more Patrick).

“I saw him bumping into the cage, like a hundred times really hard with his head, his face and then his lower jaw.”

“Is that true, Louise?” (Miss Flory asks Loulou). The ambiance had fast become serious and slightly threatening. The class had turned dead-quiet. Island history was in the making.

My face turned redder than it had ever been - never before had I felt so thoroughly embarrassed. Caught in cross-examination. Miss Flory tried to laugh it off.

“Yes, dogs cannot control themselves. They must hunt. Thanks for sharing honestly, Pat. Well class, let’s learn from this.”

Yes, I thought later - when I returned from the dramatic Monday morning school and whilst sitting at our large uncleaned dining table in our large messy island kitchen, looking outside and seeing the first shower of the day come rolling in over the dark low mountains behind Castletowndoon - let’s learn from this. I had poured myself a large glass of red wine from the bottle I opened last night before going to bed. I took an enormous gulp, swallowed without tasting, and felt the alcohol going straight into my veins, my heart, my brains, all on this fresh Monday morning - my rest of the long week. Yes, we must indeed learn from this.

There are two realities, I realised. I create my own, the one that suits me. My kids still live in the real world, and that’s the other one. On an island. We live in parallel universes. Yes. Let’s learn from this indeed. Heaven and hamster heaven. Realities are just as real as they are perceived. Why should the truth always prevail as the perceived natural sequence of events...?

I thought a lot about the hamster. The poor creature had taught me a life lesson. Got to know myself - again - better.

Sometime later I found out that hamsters, especially miniature ones, actually do not live very long, a year, fourteen months maximum. Was the school hamster at the end of its life? Bought in a wicked deal from an

unreliable pet shop owner? Dumping nearly expired life on an island - closed off from the real world?

I realised, I knew nothing about anything. I had to learn. Coming from a privileged, protected upbringing straight into a wild Atlantic supposedly romantic life. A gamble. Now was the time to catch up with reality - my reality. I was far from 'nearly-expired'. Whatever would come along - I would jump on it. Learn reality - without perception! My kids are fine in their world; I had to match mine with what existed apparently elsewhere. In other words, so far: I lie, and they tell the truth. What is real for me, is not real for anybody else. Who is to judge what happens, who is to later judge what really happened?

## Spring cleaning 1995 (April) - The Cape - East End - The Now

I can hardly keep up with cleaning my own place - with what Patrick and Lou produce everyday. (Yes, every single bloody day - even when they have a full school day they manage to convert the living room, kitchen, their bedrooms in an ad random horizontal exposition of contemporary children's Toys & Technology department store, 'T&T' as I have started calling it. In five minutes they manage to clean out an organised cupboard and have it in its entirety transported to other rooms! - but wait this is not about me, this time...). So, I listened with a surrealistic feeling to myself, when I said farewell to Rupert near the old and rather unused ferry slip where he had organised his secret pick-up heading for the mainland, exceptionally by a private ferry trip (not really on the slip - but on the side of the road, near an overgrown hedge, not interested in having the whole island know...); promising him I would clean out The Cape after he left, and prepare for his next visit. Whenever that might be.

Rupert said good-bye and committed to be back. Was Ron really open with me when he left? As he never did return? You can't trust male return tickets.

I aired The Cape for a full day that April, three days after his last departure - when Patrick and Lou were on a day-long retreat at the Doon Island Heritage Centre, with teachers from the mainland, doing some weird written tests with them, and they would not be back until later in the day. No lunch. No Mummy waiting at the low unpainted school-gate, made up of cheap hollow cement blocks.

He had not told me, but Rupert had left the heating on, it was lovely in the house. Dry; absent of the common mouldy island house smells. The big

cast-iron AGA oven hummed very quietly, slurping litres of diesel fuel away (Rupert had money to waste). It was cozy, the cooking odours of the late dark weeks after Christmas somehow still lingered in the house - or perhaps in my imagination. In the aromas I recognised some of my recipes and smiled. At least I had taught him how to cook.

He had left like a real man - nothing had been done to prepare the house for a long absence. He had just walked out. (Funnily enough, Ron was not like that at all - he would meticulously clean, would mark foods with dates in the fridge and freezer, stack wood near the fireplace for when we would be back. Pity we never left the island anymore... He was a great home organiser).

Cleaning: like all conservatively-brought up girls would do, I started with the most explosive scenes: the sink, where black, white and green mould had started to grow over the remnants of the Last Supper; the small garbage cans where an ominous odour materialised while handling them; the Warholian setting of empty bottles with colourful and loud exotic labels - Scottish, Eirish, French, Argentinian, New Zealand, Californian. The trip to the large garbage container outside the village would be a herculean task - but I would do it for Rupert. With lots of affection. Anything for Rupert - relocating empty bottles into my new reality.

It took me more than an hour to get the large kitchen-cum-living clear. I worked there with love, the place had yielded such great moments and the good vibes flowed again through my veins - while I emptied the remaining washing-up liquid into the small sink. After I had done the kitchen and the great dining table in that splendid room, I went into the hexagonal sun-view-room, to absorb the workload awaiting me there. Not much. Better have a look downstairs first.

The bedrooms were rather clean, but the beds were not stripped off. The two bathrooms were definitely up to standard, strangely enough - meaning he had either cleaned them before leaving or had hardly used them since I



had last cleaned them when he was still there. This riddle made me happy. He pissed outside! His life is not all that slick after all, I thought, he lives it as it comes, as he likes. Screw the neighbours. Easy, particularly when there are no neighbours... Clean things as he would see fit. He peed outside; as all men would prefer. No obligations, conventions really. Clean when necessary, not when expected.

Further, the library wall between the two bedrooms was disorganised, paintings hanging askew, I noticed one picture I did not even recall to have seen before. He must have started to sort things... Some three or four neatly closed garbage bags, those sturdy, large grey plastic ones - with that particular stinging plastic chemical smell - stood open, half full with unknown treasures. They called out to me, those ugly bags: I suddenly felt drawn to them, something had been prepared, organised here - it felt as if Rupert wanted me to look in them!

Although the goodies presented themselves as rubbish in those bags, it looked like he had indeed somehow done some kind of sorting. But where had it all come from? There was no real order to the bags, they only contained very specific items per bag. One was full of computer memory disks, floppy disks, the old large ones that you can bend, plus the rigid small ones - never seen so many before. Not sure how he got them on the island, weren't we supposed to not have those here? Did they not check on Rupert? Or had they been on the island already...? Had I overlooked it after the Ozzies' cleaning job? Another bag full of paper and documents, bound by spiral plastic binders. In strange languages, some with their own alphabet and characters, Russian? Dutch? French... Number three, the least filled, held four standing stacks of tapes, three of them VHS, the common type we use - well we used to - before the island got shut off, and one stack of the larger old American ones, what's the name again, ah yes, 'Betamax' if I am not mistaken. Those are old, hahahahaha. Fourth bag - some twenty, thirty shirts, all the same but different sizes. Black, with a simple white printed

logo of a kind of Celtic or German iron cross, then on back and front with the same text, small on the front with the picture but large on the back: 'Going back - what's wrong with that?' Mystery. Hidden past. Left there deliberately for me to recover - I fantasised. He wants me to discover it! Or: just unfinished. He left them in a hurry... On the run?

It's a lead back to him! It's like a movie. A clue, into Rupert's interior. Into the real Rupert.

Rain started rattling on the slated roof. I love the dulling sound of rain, especially if it is experienced in a nice warm dwelling. I would do the bedrooms now and then that library mess could wait for another time. Might just bring those bags up...

I looked in the kitchen for a bottle of wine and found a nice white New Zealand Hawke's Bay in the fridge (that he had of course also left 'on'). Unscrewed the metal cap and poured myself a well deserved Wednesday morning shot of relaxation, in a large long-drink glass, so I did not have to come back anytime soon to the frigidaire.

Because I was going to sit for quite a while in that sunroom and enjoy my view.

I switched on the radio (an old ghetto-blaster type) to the classical music channel it was programmed to and sank in one of the bag chairs that I had drawn away from the fireplace. I positioned bag and myself behind the panorama view window. I saw the shower hitting us hard, but I also perceived new sunlight behind the rain shower on Mount Appetite, the stern colossus straight opposite on the mainland.

Time for Joanna, I thought. Time for Joanna. Oh yes, Joanna time, so much Joanna, that's me! Joanna, Joanna. Joanna...

I sank away in the rain and the pompous, rhythmic baroque music of unknown origin. Wine in the morning... Nothing beats wine in the morning. Time to revisit the Joanna-and-Rupert experience.

Ron first told me he had met him in Castletowndoon, in a small battered moving van. With an officer of Island Affairs. He got it immediately, very clearly he was going to settle on the island.

His name is Rupert and he talks like a posh Albion, like you, Ron said, thereby unintentionally linking me up with him straight away. He needs advice on supplies, Ron said. (“Supplies!” I thought, unfocused, the stale Chinese surprise joke...). He will drop by, I am sure. Supplies!

He never dropped by. Rupert - ha! Rupert dropping by... People go to Rupert. Rupert absorbs, Rupert radiates, but Rupert receives, and doesn't do visits. He comes and goes. But no visits. At best he entertains.

Much earlier, on a lost February morning that year (Ron had disappeared a few months by then), kids stably at school, I had to bring a magazine back to Eleanor, Willem's wife, to their house called 'East End', she had lent it to me after I saw her reading it stealthily in the Cake House Café in Roerring. A 'hot' magazine, as it was not stamped by Island Affairs; so this item needed personal attention and transportation. Eleanor was not home, she was probably chasing after their fancy small Dexter cows, which always escaped - as they could often go under the gates. On the way to East End and thinking of unruly cows, I saw that the road gate of the track leading to The Cape was open. So, this Mr Rupert either was in and forgot to close it, or Mr Rupert was out and forgot to close it. Not an islander, clear; he wouldn't know that this is how cows get lost and why swearing and cursing islanders spent hours in their written-off dented licence plate-less Japanese jeeps chasing them half-drunk - all over the Manhattan-size island in inhospitable darker-than-dark winter nights. A cow gone, lost on somebody else's land is a day's work. A waste of good drinking time.

Without an active decision, I was drawn onto The Cape track - hey, I had cleaned the bloody place for the Ozzies, I could go there now whenever I liked, right? - and continued to the second gate, which was closed, but not

locked - in some strange logic this told me he must have been home and had not just driven off leaving them both open. Leaving, he would have left this one open and the road-one closed. Gates don't lie.

I saw his rented posh Land Rover in the also left-open garage, drove on and parked my small car opposite the large ship's plank bridge that led to the front door of the part of the The Cape house that once had been an old cottage.

Before I could step out of the car, Rupert came out onto the bridge, looking puzzled. But not un-welcoming - had the loneliness of the island reached him yet?

I knew the house from when it was built, as Ron - when still fully based on the island - had worked on-and-off on the site when they needed extra construction hands, erecting the large glass panels for the hexagonal sun-room (was that really almost ten years ago? Does time work the same on this insulated location...?) - I had been so many times, in and out of the place (to bring him food, and yes, in those times also stack-loads of beer), but had never been inside after it had been completed, furnished, lived in. The original occupants, the McDermotts, were people-shy. They were retired Eirish-roots hermits from Australia; he a wealthy editor-business type, an always immaculately clean shaven short man, she his equally petite, much younger spouse, apparently famous in socialite circles in Australia. I was on 'wave-terms' with them (people waved at each other while crossing from opposite directions on the narrow island roads, in the time when we were still doing normal ferries, daily mainland trips, long drinking sessions in O'Keeffe's Pub in Castletowndoon), but actually never really spoke to these Ozzies. They left suddenly when we were formally 'insulated'. Rumour had it Mr McDermott had caught an aggressive cancer. Maybe IA, Island Affairs, pushed them off. They never sold the The Cape, as they had called it, but rented it on to lone, equal artsy spirits - as a philanthropic

gesture. Of which Rupert was the latest version apparently. How did he end up on Doon Island - did IA put him there?

Rupert - come on... let's stay on Rupert for a while. That's nice. Yeah, Rupert. Mmmmm. Like wine in the morning. My Rupert.

My Rupert invited me in, without enquiring after the purpose of my unannounced visit; sat me down at the large dinner table in the extended kitchen. I looked over the vast fields of the property, the waving sycamores and the stiff McDermott-planted Japanese pines. He asked if I preferred wine over coffee - correct question, it was after all only half past eleven in the morning. That decision was an easy one. So we drank wine, a small glass of an old Bordeaux, opened only the night before, kept under vacuum. It was lovely, followed by another one. Of course. Rupert and wine. Wine and Rupert. Yin and yang. Left and right. What else does one need except perfect balance?

We of course first exchanged banalities, the island, my family, The Cape, Rupert's male 'all-about-me monologue' (actually he was shy, fun, sparkling eyes, and he did listen when I asked questions! - but he liked to talk as well, yes, he liked to hear himself talking) went like this: Rupert Murphy, Eirish name yes, but good old Liverpool stock. Grew up in a public, foreign service, albeit in a non-ambitious family. Father was a comptroller of embassies - would never make it to ambassador. Never got the glory, only the scandals and the forever-missing money in the discrepant accounts.

Rupert must have learnt quite a few things from his Diplomat Dad: the money game, the figures, the tallying of the books, the love for increasing funds, the flow of cash through hands. As well as, the smokescreens when money went missing, or came in late, or, most often, not at all... He seldom spoke about his mother - he was from that generation of males that don't realise they even have a mother. Her influence on Rupert on everything 'history', preferably international, was obvious - he once told me (I think it was the only time he spoke about his mother) that she read him bedtime

stories about the Romans, the Middle Ages, the Norman French coming to Albion, leaving an undebatable mark on the old ways. Also, but in a way he was too stiff upper lip to admit - I am convinced he was bored with his parents. The international moving around he took for granted, what all moving kids do – but the loyal civil servant ambience in which he grew up must have choked him... As an adventurous type of person: he was from a very young age ‘on his own’.

Rupert, on his own: born in Liverpool, grew up in London until the age of eight, later Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Canberra. Rupert studied law in USA, an obscure and cheap university in the fly-over-state of Kansas. (Dad had run out of his government lump-sum pension money by then, I guess!). Then went backpacking in Asia. Other continents. Travel writing - for travel guides like the Lonely Planet, free-lancer (that’s what he made me believe at least, never found a trace later of his contributions - perhaps he wrote under a nom de plume?).

Unsurprisingly, his story went astray- as I would later find out, chronologically incorrect, when I eventually did find the time to put this puzzle together. Rupert had some characteristics of being a compulsive liar - no, not correct: to accuse somebody of being a liar would imply that the person who is being lied to knows the truth. With Rupert there was no truth, never. He just didn’t do truth. Truth was such an irrelevant concept. Stories were based on perceptions, wide ranging. Rupert told a story, more often than not made up on the spot, or as a standard version answer on earlier encountered queries. So, a liar - no, he had personal parallel universes readily available, depending on the situation and the opponent, counterpart, or partner - in love or in business. I started to understand why I was attracted to him. It had to do with perception and reality: the two universes I could also easily relate to.

What I gathered while he was on the island, but definitely more intense later, was that after ‘his studies’ the story becomes blurred, to say the least. He actually did not go backpacking though Asia. Or other continents. I never found anything of his hand in the travel guides, I later concluded when I was finally off the island. He entered the dark world of the Occult, covert and hidden. He sometimes hinted at it, vaguely describing his younger-years employer as his ‘guardian angel’, the institution that had kept him on track. What was it?

He also became filthy rich in those years, through his business successes after the studies and during his long dive into the hidden world of government service. The real enigma though, the riddle, the missing piece in Rupert’s jigsaw puzzle was the only question that I, Joanna could think of. What the hell was he doing on Doon Island...?

More mundanely, and for now more importantly, I did not like his beard. I did not like his self-assuredness, his cockiness, his evasion of straight private questions, his matter-of-fact being on our weird island, his... I hated many things about him; still this morning wine had set me forever on the Rupert track. I found out I liked this Rupert a lot. Overall, the full Rupert package very attractive, but not a single trait in particular.

Could not confide in many people about our affair, however, I did trust The Cape’s neighbours: Eleanor, and more so her husband, (or partner, I don’t think they were married - were they?) a Dutchman, a failed sculptor, who had emigrated in the late sixties to come farming on Doon Island, but instead ended up again an artist (reed sculptures, garden rock rearrangements), yoga teacher, locally-grown illegal weed dealer and, as sweet as they come, in general a ‘that’s the one to talk to person’ on many subjects. Willem, was as much part of the island fabric as he was not. He looked biblical and scary with his long white-greyish beard, but, then and again, he was not. A grumbling, soft teddy bear.

I waited until a Thursday morning when I knew Eleanor would give piano lessons to some of the school children, at the Island Affairs Heritage Centre, as that was the only place where the island kept (was allowed to keep?) a piano. They lived not so far from The Cape, in a now beautifully restored large cottage near the east end, hence not surprisingly baptised East End - and rather close to the sea. In the movie-set style old barn Willem had his man-cave; in the cottage Eleanor tried to keep up a civil life of some standing - a bit of a challenge on the currently locked-up Doon Island.

When I approached the backdoor (formal front doors, although present, had no meaning on the island), their dogs started barking. Through the window next to the door I saw Willem looking up from his newspaper. (From the front page I could see that that paper was a week old. Properly IA stamped - big fat logo over every other page. Willem was island-compliant - wasn't he? Except for the pot he grew and perhaps smoked).

Willem poured me a coffee - Dutch style - from a kettle that had most likely been on the stove from at least the early morning. Bitter, thick, black and strong. It opened my cloudy wine brain.

"Yes," (Willem), "it's nice to be home alone once in a while. What brings you here, Joanna?"

I liked his directness. Always had.

"Willem, remember this guy Rupert who rented The Cape from the Ozzies, the city guys that left - he left a lot of junk there that I am supposed to sort." (Was I?)

"Good luck," mumbled Willem, stirring his coffee and lighting another cigarette he picked from an old fashioned silver cigarette box in front of him. Nicotunist Willem. I loved the smell of his *Gauloises Bleues*. Where the hell did he procure those? Acrid, but real smoke, black tobacco for those who love it - and know they will eventually die of it.

"Now," I said, "there is a large garbage bag with video tapes he apparently wants me to throw away."



“Aha,” coughed Willem. “We are not allowed videotapes on the island, Joanna.”

“I know, of course, but these are different.”

I had taken one with me in my bag and produced it, placed it ceremoniously in front of his cigarette box. He took it in his hands and held it high.

“Ahhhh, my god,” Willem said, “Betamax!”

I heard worship in his voice.

“Yes,” I said, “that’s what I thought, Betamax.”

“Take another coffee,” said Willem and stood his fat body up. “I have to look for something. Joanna, Betamax is not just tapes, it is cult.”

He left the cottage. I poured another cup as suggested and used up all the remaining milk from the table to compensate for the acidity and sour darkness.

Willem came back with a smudgy carton box, struggling with the size, went through the backdoor and then straight up the small cottage staircase to the upper landing.

“Gimme a sec,” Willem shouted from above.

He had found a Betamax machine! You wouldn’t believe it. I heard him rummaging through stuff, most likely this attic was full of old shit, furniture, fishing nets, failed paintings and art, electronic and other equipment in disuse. After a minute or two he called.

“Hey, Joanna, it works, come on up. Bring the tape.”

He had made a seat for both of us on two up-side down plastic fish boxes, those that regularly wash overboard from the trawlers and have the text ‘STOLEN FROM’ marked on them, followed by the port of origin - everybody uses them and never returns them. Great additions to island life: planters, toolboxes, impromptu garden seats. I know they are damn expensive.

An old TV, a rounded screen embedded in fake wooden casing, was placed on the Betamax machine. They both produced small lights, green and red to show they were powered on.

I handed the tape to Willem who shoved it in the video player - a tip of cigarette ash fell on his sleeve, but he did not notice it. He was focused on this back-in-time technology feat.

The tape spluttered to life, crackling sounds and test images, then suddenly clearer images in black and white - was that the screen input or were they filmed in B&W? We watched no longer than two, three minutes.

From the first scenes on, both Willem and I wondered who was going to be the first to call for immediate closure of the session. It was me, eventually. I stood up and walked, stooped to avoid the low ceiling and the wood, back to the large access ladder.

Stop it please Willem. This can't be true.

“You better burn that garbage bag full of shit or sink it in Mundy Bay,” Willem said. He pulled the tape out of the machine and in one go he switched off both the TV monitor and the player. He was not really shocked - he was a sixties' child. A flower in your hair type, an open soul. I felt as though he cared more about my reaction.

And I was gutted. I couldn't care less that Willem was a witness. I did not know how to process these images.

This was not Rupert. Well, it was Rupert, but it was not Rupert. Why did he so obviously want me to see this? Why did everybody, everything, people, the island, want to drag me in their version of reality?

## **Spring 1995 - the Bed of the Boat - Rupert - The Now**

It was an afternoon where snow still fell abundantly on the Alpine slopes of European mountains, while here in Eire, on the edge of the North Atlantic - sharing the air with the New World - birds had already started singing – the colours, lights and sounds messaged-in spring. It was for the season uncharacteristically mild, warm, yes, a bit humid. I drove up past the first gate, left the jeep halfway along the rough driveway, invisible from house and island road and walked to the second gate - the entry to Rupert's New World: The Cape. I noticed the soft regular humming the tho of an engine, very likely a motorcycle, in slow neutral gear. Too much hassle opening the gate, with the ropes wrapped several times around the closing pole, I climbed very unladylike over it. (Had always liked that about living in the country and being on farms, with animals - climbing over gates and fences - it brought out the tomboy in me...).

Rupert stood next to his off-the-road dirt bike - which leaned very steep on its side standard; careful it might topple over! Rupert, a quintessential small man, with indeed a bit of the related syndrome. Jeans, suede high boots full of mud and grease, a dark lumberjack shirt, a vain handkerchief tied around his neck, unshaven for at least a week, small cigar between his teeth. Attractive in fact. The moment I walked towards him I knew exactly where this would end – and after all, Joanna that's exactly how you wanted it after all, girl.

He swung himself over the long buddy-seat of the bike, lifted the picnic basket that stood at his feet onto the gas tank in front of him and waved with his left hand over the remaining seat space behind him. Upon this clear

invitation, I mounted the steel horse. No words were spoken yet. Hmmmm. All the signs were there.

“It is not far, it is at the creek, the Bed of the Boat, as it is called in Eirish,” he said, turning his head back to me, “but it is good fun on the bike!”

I had expected that he would - just to impress me - roar away with full throttle, but he didn't. He navigated the gravelled tracks through the meadows carefully and mindfully, with just enough speed not to fall over and still more than enough to cruise over the stony path without discomfort.

The tracks ended some five minutes later at the creek on the seafront.

I could see he had been here earlier today, he had 'prepared'. Folding chairs, overlooking the small private pebble beach in the creek, stood at the edge of a large picnic blanket, a black farm pail full of ice, with two easily recognisable bottlenecks peeping out on the corner.

It was March, but it was in fact a genuine late spring day. As it was warm we started drinking straight away. The start of our afternoon was as traditional as the final outcome was inevitable. The wind disappeared, the sun came out. We saw a seal, bored with chasing fish, coming to the surface chasing the light instead, watching us cheekily. We moved from the chairs to the blanket. One bottle followed by the other and suddenly Rupert wanted me to drive on the motorbike. Playtime. I fell, no damage, we laughed. Not for a single moment was Ron on my mind, anymore. Had he ever been, honestly?

I left Rupert, his soft bed, his long intense cigar kisses and his endless flow of cool white bubbly wine, in the late evening. The night was already dark but the warmth of the precocious spring hung over the land. A sleepy welcoming blanket.

I had seriously neglected the kids! I rushed back. Spells of guilt rushed through me. They were with Laur... she opened the door of her sorry

ill-maintained cottage. I considered her as my friend, at least a friendly neighbour, but this characteristic was surprisingly not showing on her face.

Laur or Laura (what did the Eirish have with those stupid nicknames all over the place, why spoil a beautiful name like Laura with an abbreviation that sounded more like 'lorry' than that it made you think of a pretty Eire girl) was one of the few people that came to the island after we were insulated. There were a few others on the south side, but those you never saw. Rumour had it they were 'special monitoring' cases for the IA and were brought their life supplies to their homes. They were not allowed to go to the east or west end of the island. They did not work; they did nothing. Except being monitored.

Laur came from Dublin. A city-girl. She once told me she was not allowed to talk about it, but she was contacted through some police, or at least 'law-enforcement' agency - after she had been convicted to a prison term of one year for illicit drug (marihuana) possession and use. She had just had her third child and dreaded the thought of being in penal confinement - as she feared she would not survive it physically. Let alone mentally. The police - if ever they were police - plain clothes with weird, very Albion accents, proposed to her - instead of the prison term - a relocation to an island off the Atlantic coast, for at least five years. The terms were, she would be fully paid a simple stipend, but could not go off, her kids would be schooled there, she would have to abide with the sometimes unusual requirements for living on the island and of course, officers would check on her once-in-a-while to see how her alternative punishment and adaptation to a new society was working out...

Good Laur... She was all I was not. This was her second chance - a new lease on life. Earlier, Eirish convicts were sent to Australia, now to Doon Island. She took her new life seriously, to the brink of unliveable. No more drugs, no more booze. She cut all ties with the three fathers of her three

kids. They gave her an old cottage, refused to restore it into something halfway liveable - 'part of your attitude Laura, lets see how you tune it up yourself, let us know what materials you need' - but the poor thing could never crawl out of the baby and kids' mess. Now with the added bonus of my children. Laur was rough, unfriendly sometimes, but also incredibly supportive, with a social compass that always pointed to help and assistance. I had never been disappointed in her helping me out. We were, with Ron an absentee landlord and absentee father, basically in the same rescue boat like her - rowing against the tide towards something better. A new reality. I invited her over a few times for dinner, with her kids of course, hoping we would drink bottles of wine, laugh and girl talk non-sense. She had always declined, not wanting to be a burden - or she feared the booze, as part of her agreement had been to stay on-the-wagon for as long she was on the island. Laur wanted to live very much on her own, wanted to develop her interest in rural art, sculpturing with reed and wood. Living a simple life. Get decent, get sober, forget the old life. And now she had me to take care of... An inebriated, amorous neighbour travelling between two worlds, acting like a mood-swung teenager.

Ah, there you are, her eyes said, you are late and irresponsible. I took care of your kids, you failed mother, feck you. She smelled the booze and I guess she must have smelt the sex too.

"Hello Laura," I said cheerily and walked in, "sorry something came up - sorry about this."

Sorry, sorry, sorry - jeezzzz, why can't you just understand... we are girls after all together, aren't we?

"Come on guys," I shouted to Patrick and Loulou, sitting with an enormous bottle of Coke and an even bigger bag of potato crisps amicably with Laur's three boys at the IA-allowed telly set. Watching the only channel available, the rather amateurishly directed IA-controlled channel.

Cartoons and Albion soaps from the seventies: ‘Are you being served?’ ‘On the Buses’.

The bargaining started the moment I raised the thought of going home.

“No,” I said, getting angry, as the alcohol had started to wear off, “we are going home. Mama was late, sorry, let’s go guys.”

They walked home, now equally angry and disappointed. I drove behind them in the car, island style, as if bringing cattle to another field after they had usurped the grass.

Although I had kept going abundantly with the red, I could not sleep. Well, I slept a bit, half awake, hearing the kids fight, cry, then snore, I stayed annoyingly present in the land of the living. When I woke up out of that tricky no-man’s-land alcohol slumber, I noticed I had not closed the curtains. It was pitch dark outside, no wind, no sound, no sea.

I only heard Rupert continue to talk, soft murmuring against me, a sweet, trusted monologue. This afternoon I was not listening, but now I tried to piece things together. My god, what was it all about?

Suddenly I now stood next to the bed, hesitating to go in again, or go down, make a cuppa or something, went down and set up the kettle. Sat myself at the kitchen table and waited until the steam would hiss me awake again - towards the kettle and my cup. I tried to piece his *post coitum* monologues together.

It started soft, Rupert lying next to me, playing with my hands, stroking my back as if I were his old pet dog. Why was he telling me all this weird stuff? Was I in the mood for all that? Some men take sex so seriously...

(Rupert. How much had he drunk?) “Not really suddenly, but in its numbers still rather unpredictably, the hordes of uncivilised people ran over Europe. Not after, but while - and as a result - the Roman Empire collapsed. Yes, the Romans had also been here, in Eire - no documentation however, but generally understood - but they found it to be a damp and dreary place - nothing to steal, to ravage, to suck empty and ship home. No ex-centurions

wanting, for their old day, to appropriate any land gained in battle elsewhere from the local chieftains - who they feared big time. And rain, after storm, showers after floods... Rain all the fucking time. For a Roman hard-working retiring romantic quite a shitty place, *n'est-ce pas?*”

He stopped stroking me and sat up on the edge of the large bed, with his back towards me. This man was trying to tell me something. And why all this? He either was not sure about his story, was lying, or... was not supposed to tell me. Was he practicing on me?

(Rupert continued:) “Eire, hence, remained in its own destiny - its own many and petty wars, quarrels, simple carnages on a small scale. They stayed out of the Continent-abusers, with millions of people on the run, on the way to a better life in the fourth, fifth, sixth centuries.

“Long story short, Joanna,” (he had stood up now and walked towards the table at the foot side of the bed, I guess because his cigarettes were stacked there), “some way or another, all important church documents, artefacts, art, early writings, let’s say an important part of the church, which was then of course only the one and only Catholic Church.”

He stopped and turned around and looked at me: “Are you a Catholic Joanna? I am, not surprising for a Murphy, for a starter.”

“Yes,” I said, “I am too, but I forgot everything.”

When I grew up in Eire, at the public school with the nuns it had all been hammered in decently. Later, with Ron, a free child of the seventies, I had as much been pulled out again.

Rupert lit a new cigarette, a soft smelling Marlboro filter - I did not like them, they smelled artificial, not as tobacco should smell.

(Rupert, smiled, a bit stupidly) “The Catholic Church has elevated, through the concept of sin, any carnal activities out of wedlock in fact, into the most desirable acts in a human life.”

He inhaled, contemplated his statement for a few seconds, then sat on the bed again. Was I again supposed to communicate with his back? Was



this the effect of sex on Rupert? Academic bed chatter? Nobody else to talk to...? I was a bit taken aback. Why does he think I - Joanna of Doon Island - would be interested in this?

“The islands of Eire in fact saved civilisation - a big chunk of the church’s lease on life was stored in far-away, unreachable monasteries, on further uninhabited islands, as far off the coast as possible. The Skelligs, Bory Island, many others, hahaha Doon Island...! Splendid isolation.”

He inhaled deep, contemplating. I hated this intermezzo, but in all fairness to Rupert - he was a storyteller, I could not help but get dragged into his narrative.

“When things started to quiet down on the European mainland, the Eirish monks got instructed to bring the gospel back to where it had once flourished. They reconstructed the Church, the belief, the power, the concept of sin.”

He chuckled and blew out, softly coughing, smoke from his cigarette.

“Yes, the concept of sin. The Eire concept of sin.”

“On a handful of tiny islands, rocks in a stormy sea, Eirish monks had protected themselves from history-being-built elsewhere. They weathered the storm and brought sense back later. Time capsules if you like, *avant la lettre*. Yeah, time capsules, that’s a great comparison. I like it. Keep that one, yes.” Hey, was he still talking to me?

I sat next to him on the side of the bed and drew from his cigarette - hated smoking, but now was the right moment to try it again. Smoking together is nice, I remembered. After the love, the smoke. Smoke after love. This was Rupert at his best, the cockiness evaporated in boyish scholarly shyness. He knew he was right, but charmingly, his body language and the tone of his voice, asked for endorsement. Wish all men were like this... Telling a story, even if I had no idea why he was giving me this lecture. Ron? Hahahahaha... forget about it - unpoetic bastard. Ron couldn’t even

read you an article out of a newspaper - perhaps if it was on the subject of horses he would get excited. Horses he had bet on.

He must have felt that I was waiting for some apotheosis - I had a right to know why we had halted our love-making, hadn't I?

(Rupert) "So, late six hundreds, early seven hundreds the sturdy monks spread back out all over the Continent again, St Columbus, St Boniface, St Malo, St Whoever, and re-installed the old regimen, the old culture, the old set of Christian values and beliefs. The good farmer keeps from every harvest a bit of the seeds, not for use in times of hunger and need, but for sowing in the next season. He stores them in a secret place, where his neighbours cannot steal them, cherishes them, cleans them, keeps them dry. He keeps his harvests, isolated and kept from others, going into eternity."

What did I, or we have to do with this? I thought. I needed more love, not mere words.

(Reading minds) "What is going on now? Outside, at the gate, Joanna, it is the same." He lit another fag. "We need to preserve the old way of thinking. Living will change, you can't disinvent technology, we all know this, but it's the way of thinking. The way we have wired ourselves to solve problems. Culture is how we solve day to day problems. Wired in our brains, not wired on the telephone net. That is called culture. We need to preserve the old one in some way. Keep it safe for later, we need to try this. Now."

In my Now-kitchen, the kettle had started to whistle loud.

I had wanted more sex but had for whatever reason received an amateur history lesson... Why did he pick me? Because I would never leave the island anymore? A loyalist by character? A law abiding conservative girl? Would he have turned others off also with these stories? Or couldn't he find anybody else? The tea was ready, I poured it into a cup, steaming hot, got some milk from the fridge. Walked to the kitchen window - looked like it

was getting light, but it was far too early in the night - would there be a moon coming out?

There was something else that had puzzled me:

“I am an addict.” (Rupert). “An addict of The Old. I know what I’m talking about; I have helped to shipwreck The Old.” He stumped out his cigarette on the small saucer on the bedside table. Lied down back on the bed, pushed me away in the movement. “I now help the islands stay on course. You cannot station enforcement officers here - you need people like me. Artists, philosophers, businessmen, writers - not plumbers or uniformed psychologists. We will keep the terror of GlobWeb away from here. We stay pure. Save The Old. No GlobWeb contamination.”

## **Spring 1995 - Heritage Centre briefing - Ron's letter - The Now**

There was a newish mainland car driving around with loudspeakers on the roof. With a message. It stopped at all spots where there were a few houses together. I heard the message a few times. The voice spoke good Albion, but was not Eirish and definitely not pure Albion either – could be a French accent I realised, or a very toff Dublin version. The speakers told us all that there would be a special session on island development from the Department of Island Affairs, this morning at eleven in the Heritage Centre. (First grade memories from boarding school came back to me: sports and youth activities in the town where my posh school was located, were also announced through those loudspeaker cars - long American station wagons, with excessively large megaphone bullhorn speakers, one facing forward, the other facing backward. Phalluses placed opposite. A guy driving and an older person, nearly always males they were, with a microphone in the hand, first reading from a piece of paper, later by heart or improvising. We followed these cars for hours on our small kid bicycles... But now it is the first time I'm seeing them on the island. Yet another innovative way of communicating - tapping from The Old? Reintroducing The Old?).

We hardly got any mail. Only bills, plus Ron's mainland bank statements - salary from the helicopter company - whoever they were. Not a lot else got through. An envelope therefore with my name handwritten on it was exceptional. What was not exceptional was that it was in an envelope from IA. Those we got enough of, too many perhaps. But they have never had a personalised name on them. Inside was a typewritten note, with a tick-off

‘V’ in front of reasons that were part of a larger choice of possibilities: ‘tried to send directly’ - ‘intercepted’:

‘Dear Mrs Flowers,

We are in receipt of a (un-recent) handwritten letter, or rather note, from Mr Flowers, who we presume is your husband, R. Flowers (‘Ron’). For island-confidentiality reasons we have condensed out only the personal part of your husband’s message. We feel confident that this is the communication your husband had in mind for you while writing his note:’

*‘The island is no longer the place for me to live on. You and family are still first Jojo but I need to move on I will not come back to the island anymore so long as I cannot live there.*

*It is a choice and a hard one but I am willing to make this choice.*

*Not being on the island gives me more opportunities.*

*I have gone back to horses and socialising.’*

‘That is the note. We have retyped the relevant part. If at any stage you feel the need to talk to any of our officers, or when your friends or neighbours suggest you do - feel free to reach out to us through the dedicated and free IA phones that are located on your island. The nearest phone for you is based (handwritten here) NEAR THE SCHOOL.’

I hesitated between laughing out loud and crying the ceiling down. The IA had intercepted a very personal letter from Ron to me and boiled it down to a few bullet points. This was my life. I started to lose control. I am really - I now realise - on an island. Insulated.

Was it therefore a coincidence, or was it carefully planned, that the quarterly ‘island briefing’ was also today? To coincide with me losing Ron to the other world? I never went to those gatherings. They were still voluntary and I didn’t know of anybody else who would be going either. It was carefully slotted during school hours so adults only (as everybody would bring their kids along on the island to any other event whenever they were not held hostage by the foreign IA educators).

There was another car at the Heritage Centre and definitely not an island car. A large black Mercedes. One of those that you use with a uniformed driver. We had a mainland VIP visitor!

Inside the Heritage Centre: it was surreal. There were audience chairs lined up in expecting rows, like twenty, thirty. I was the only real islander present though.

I settled for the back row and looked into the shaven thick neck of a man in a striped suit, sitting on the front row, positioned in an angle of fourty five degrees from the small lectern. I coughed, artificially, to draw attention, and he looked back. He tried a friendly nod - not successful. He looked at me like he would stare down at an adolescent, disobedient dog. The look of a professional, hence false politician.

Martin, our softy island social worker (courtesy IA), came in from the side, from the kitchen, with a large coffee mug in his right hand, a roll of papers in his left. He sat next to the stripes and looked at his watch. He did not acknowledge me. He actually looked kind of nervous.

On the minute sharp, Martin, cup still in hand, trying to look casual, stood up, nodded apologetically to the suit and took his place behind the lecturing stand. It was hilarious, a formal speech anticipated for a non-existing island audience - if I had not shown up there would have merely been the striped visitor.

“Good afternoon everybody,” (does a crowd of two qualify for ‘everybody?’) “and a special welcome to Mr John O’Donahue from the

Ministry of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, department of Island Affairs.”

Hello Joanna, he nodded at me as if I were his domestic staff. IA... We were in IA territory. I wish I had not come.

(Martin) “Today’s program is an introduction of new island measures and a get-to-know with John, our new Director.”

Not a single reference to the fact that we had a non-existing crowd, a complete denial of complete island disinterest. They were doing what they were paid to do, irrespective of the process, the result or the interest. Was this my reality, or theirs?

“John, if you wouldn’t mind taking the stand, waiting a few seconds, and I will run the camera.”

Aha, that was the thing! He was here to tape some useful election footage. They would dub the laughter, applause and fake audience from another setting later.

O’Donahue stood up and walked to the lectern. Martin disappeared to the shady backside of the room, where indeed rested an enormous VHS camera recorder, as I discerned now, on a heavy tripod. I remember those cameras, they had apparently not changed. Maybe it was an old original island one. Those rested on your shoulder like a bazooka, if you wanted to walk around with them.

I now clearly remember the weirdest fragments from this sorry event: ‘Current State of World Affairs’. Not about how good the island is going but compared to how bad the outside is doing... ‘The volunteer program will raise it’s stipends. You will all receive more for, well, just being on the island. Basically you don’t have to work anymore (do away with this terrible global work addiction, hahahaha). As indeed for the rest of the world: Charles and Diana are heading towards divorce, that much is now clear. Furthermore, we have Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. Mad Cow

Disease - unique opportunity to keep this off the island. DVDs are launched - ten million users on GlobWeb worldwide and there is the GlobBox, evidently taking over the world. We are hiding nothing from you. Mobile cinema would bring three days of free movies to the island, new stuff, digital, whatever that means. Course in handwriting. Course in storytelling. Course in...'

What the hell do they want us to do?

"If there are any questions, I am willing to take them now, or shall we just have a coffee, Joanna?"

Laughs, chuckles. Where did stripes get the guts from to talk to me like that? First names! I didn't know this guy. Never met this Mr Thick-Neck-Feck O'Donahue.

Martin had again gone to the kitchen in the back, his evasion territory, opened the door and fixed it on the floor with a plastic stopper to remain open. Came back with a big carton stand; I could only see the backside, but it was clear that it was manufactured to stand up - as there was another piece of carton perpendicularly attached to the bottom part. In the middle was a rough and rather wide crease so apparently it could be folded - to fit in a big campaign car boot I guess. Now, the top part was interesting, looking like the upper part of a medieval castle with ramparts and the silhouette of a small corner tower.

"Thanks a million Martin," coughed John, while Martin turned the stand around. I was right, it was a photo composition, the lower part rather vast and filled with a scary looking legion of barbaric fighters fielding at a lonely group of holy looking monks, carrying books and tools under their arms. The top was indeed a kind of a small castle sitting on an elevated rock in the sea, large splashing waves of water around the lower building elements. Across the board, in top layers, the text 'EIRE SAVED THE OLD' was printed, in large upper case yellow shade letters. It was ugly but effective.



John saw that I could not suppress chuckling. I had nowhere to hide in the empty audience seating.

“Joanna?”

“Sorry John, nice to meet you by the way, but it makes me laugh... we saved civilisation to see our own current one go down the flush?”

“I beg your pardon Joanna?”

I laughed it away and stood up. My question was more of a remark, a comment. No need for a reply, please - I just wanted to get out of here, thank you.

After O'Donahue had completed his task - visibly relieved that his unusual duty had come to an end - Martin stood up from the first row and looked me straight in the eye and repeated if there would be any formal questions from the audience. Yes, I was their audience. Always thought Martin had a sense of humour. John also looked at me, a strange look in his eyes, more shy than comfortable. Dogs who look like that will surely bite. He wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. He was apparently the type of man still carrying a personal 'hanky', most likely with his initials embroidered on it - in my world he qualified as a mama's boy...

There being no questions (I had a lot of questions, but no way putting them out now, they were my own, my own dear questions - not for a government video, beware!), Martin walked to John and they started a conversation, deliberately at low conspiring voices. The camera was stopped. I was supposed to leave, clear.

It was not raining outside. What I had felt clearly existed. It materialised before my eyes.

There was somebody else accompanying the suit-stripes from the large governmental car. A kind of driver guy. Not really wearing a uniform, but still also in a formal suit, not striped, but dark grey, wrinkled, not well kept, not used for real office work. Yes, he was the driver, I decided. He stood next to his vehicle, smoking a cigarette while eating a sandwich, out of a

used newspaper. A driver, but looked more like a bodyguard. A bulky man with no neck, wearing a very tiny earring in his right ear.

He thought he was alone, he had not seen me coming out of the Centre, and dropped the newspaper, crumbled into a large ball-shape onto the ground - it blew in my direction while I was walking towards my island vehicle.

The good old environmentalist-me picked up the paper sphere and brought it back to the man, who saw me coming and tried a smile.

“Sir, your newspaper,” I said trying to sound light. He laughed.

“You can keep it,” he said, drawing heavily on his cigarette.

I quickly looked at the printed paper and thought: actually, that is not a bad idea. No IA stamps on this one. I pushed the paper ball into my bag. Driver-boy offered me a cigarette. I took it, why not, Marlboro filter. Hmmm. Bad smell, great taste. I had started smoking again. Thanks to Rupert.

“Live here?” he asked.

I nodded and drew smoke and inhaled.

“Well, if you ask me, never seen such a fecking backward mess. You guys no GlobWeb here I hear, holy jesus. What do you do? On an island! Feck!”

Now it was my turn to beg a pardon. We smoked in silence digesting his island judgment. No more conversation.

He looked long and disapprovingly of me, his swearing had cut short his intended small talk conversation. He wiped his hands along the top part of his trouser leg and disappeared behind the wheel of the black limousine. Closed the door - I heard him turning on the radio, but he only hit the IA-scrambled stations. Noise yes - music, no.

The way the driver sought refuge in his automobile universe, unable to stand my presence close to him, made me suspicious - the car attracted me strongly. I took a few steps back at first, not to alert the driver, then walked to the other left side and approached the limousine through the dead spot

of the driver's outside rear view mirror. Reached stealthily the right back door and peeped, low and undetected, through the lightly tinted window.

It was as if I had expected it: Rupert lying on the rear coach, obviously sleeping. I saw his torso slowly inhaling and exhaling. His head lay on his arm - creating a pillow. His hair was unkempt. He was also wearing a suit.

I concluded he was stone drunk.

After finding my Rupert, in the morning, sleeping and intoxicated, in a suit, in an IA car, I knew instinctively there were gonna be more surprises today. Of course there would be... Enigmatic Rupert, away from his safe-house The Cape.

There also turned out to be something with the newspaper. Unfolded on the kitchen table, page three produced a big greasy smiling face. He was also drunk, I saw that immediately. He had won the lottery. Islander In Isolation something with 'P... Didn't get the word play.

No! He had won at the Slane Horse Races, betting on the right horse. A nearly life size picture of my husband Ron on page three of the Southern Mail - 'Gazette for Slane-men, Kerry-men and their Counties'! His face was swollen, like in the island drinking days, before we got split off from the world. I do recall that docile stare - sporting that look telling me he would be going to imbibe for at least a week: no information of his whereabouts, frantic calls from the construction sites, later the helicopter where the feck he was, not showing up for work... me not sleeping for a week. The good old days. Crying kids and crying mum.

So he was back. Into booze and horses. Welcome back Ron... you made it off our island. You made it off me. Off it all.

## Joanna 2015 - Slane - The New; Spring 1995 - The Now

Waiting for Loulou and her kids, in the time I have started calling 'The New'. It hasn't rained for a few days. The wind is up again from the north, it is freezing. We are going to McDonald's for lunch, they just opened yet a new store, now close to us in our neighbourhood. Courageous, as there is no money here at all. I guess I will pay from my meagre IA stipend which I still receive after all these years on top of my government old folks' pittance: the hush money of democratic capitalism. Hahahaha.

*I do think a lot of the early days, 'The Old' - but only recently. It is a shame really what happened then. After Rupert left the island... And then, in spite of his promises to me and commitment to his cause, he never came back. After they wrapped the island even more than before - leaving us in the dark, in isolation. I did not see it then, but now, obviously, our entire mini-society was based on the developments they wanted to keep away from us. To see how we would survive... Save 'The Old'.*

*Bastards! Assholes.*

After that ominous Heritage Centre day, it all accelerated. I was waiting for the dreams to come back again. It had been many months. I needed them back, but secretly I hoped they would never visit me again.

Those dreams then, in those weeks, months, came back nearly every night. I was very troubled by it in the beginning, after a few weeks it kind of became normal and I was surprised, nearly taken aback if I would have a night without the experience, or even weirder - if the dream would materialise, but I would not have a role in it - my role which was normally

prominent. The message was clear, I had to get out of this addiction; this strange undesired, though accommodating isolation. Out of The Old dream. Out of the dreams. Plural.

I therefore wanted to talk to Willem (who else? He was the only one on the island who had seen the footage!) and on a rare sober Monday morning when I felt the week was going to be right for action (one of those few weeks us humans have but once a year, in fact), I drove to his barn estate, only to find his arty old hippy-spouse Eleanor present. Never hit it off with her - posh royalty material, French - what do you want...? She thought the island was hers.

“Willem is off the island,” she said in her thick froggy accent. “He will be back in a few weeks.”

She stayed at the door, did not invite me in. Very unusual on Doon Island.

They all get to go ‘off the island’! And I don’t, I thought. Some come back, most don’t. Willem would come back, surely, his lady friend (or common-law wife?) was very sure about this, apparently. But why was Willem allowed ‘off the island’? And why did he go ‘off the island’? Why not, ‘he is not on the island’... No, ‘off’! And most importantly: would he actually be coming back? Something fishy about this story. Weird.

It needed to be done. Physical logistics were gonna be easy, that would not be the issue. Except perhaps for housing the kids for a few days. I knew Laur was going to give in, even after the bad experiences she had had with me the last few months, but if I would tell her it as ‘to go after Ron’ and to see if we could save our marriage (the entire secluded island knew about it by now - I knew), she would most likely tear up and give in straight away. And that was what happened. She was so emotional about it that, instead of being physically present, she left me a written note that it was OK to park

the kids with her, and she left it on the kitchen table, under a half empty bottle of stale beer, when I was out with the dog.

So, that night, as it had to be a night, I walked poor Patrick and Loulou with their overnight bags again to neighbour Aunty Laur's place. Her kids were sitting at the dinner table, the girl was painting, the boy was trying to get some Lego thing, or some iron construction game together. Laur was not there - I was not going to ask about that. In her stables with her goats, rabbits, wild mice. The island radio played. Tunes selected and put together in a government building in Dublin, for our Doon Island. Wondered if these kiddos would understand where we were and who looked after us.

"You stay with John and Bea," I instructed my two, pointing at Laura's overweight kids.

"Mama will be gone for a couple of days," I prepared them.

"Are you going to see Daddy?" Patrick had asked - that boy is not stupid - nope, he could smell a rat from a mile away. How could I tell him that I needed to wash myself out of that rat-smell indeed, that weird dream, out of Rupert's fantasies - mirrored back to me - out of the island spell, leave The Old for a while? I couldn't care less about Ron, honestly. If I would meet him along the way, why not, we could have a great booze night for old times' sake. No hard feelings - just no more love please. Ron is OK. Ron is just not for me.

Patrick and Lou got absorbed straight away in the games the kids were playing and sat well behaved with them at the table. I scribbled a few words for Laura on a piece of paper I tore off the note block lying on the low small fridge.

'Thanks a million Laur - back Monday latest. Sorry this needs to happen. Sometimes things need to happen. I know you understand. Love J.'

It was now Thursday - three days available. Three days to get out of a dream. Somebody else's dream. The Old.

Most original islanders, and most of the blow-ins (as we were called, non-local settlers) were basically scared of the water surrounding and isolating them, the sea, scared of the dark - and double scared of the combination of it. A scare tripled by storm.

I was lucky, hence. Nobody around. I drove to Roerring village on the east end, not so far from Willem's residence, and parked my island car among the battered and rusty wrecks waiting for scrap collection from the mainland. Hope they won't take my car away the coming days by mistake. Shall I put a note behind the windscreen... no - that would give it all away. Then I walked through the darkness to the Marina. Took the steep road right up through the high and (now in the upcoming storm) soon noisy pine trees. The great Admiral's House where the Marina people lived, was dark, not a soul in sight. Not even any barking of their old dog Susie - had they left? What...? Had they also left? Unimaginable..., but could easily be the case. People even left their businesses. Never came back. I walked onto the floating docks and saw to my amazement that the place was, yes, again, also near empty. No more overwintering yachts, they were all gone! Where is everybody? Only some local small open boats, lobster pot carrying wooden vessels with large Japanese outboards were bobbing loosely at the dock. Were they still allowed out?

Hadn't seen the Zodiac dinghy since Ron had left (well, he was basically the sole user), and saw to my delight that he had put a strong garbage bag over the top part of the engine - the last weeks of rain could surely have spoiled the engine.

I bailed the dinghy dry, bailed myself of heavy thoughts too. I am going to the mainland, was the only thought I entertained - what would I expect there? Would everybody know everything? How far had this GlobWeb put our island affairs to the world's examining light...? Would I find out who and what was all behind this?

Half an hour later I was riding the ridiculously high short punchy waves of Doonhaven Bay - shallow waters, with apparently tidal currents against the wind, driving up crazy mid-bay surfs everywhere, even in the real middle of the deeper passage. I got wet to the bone, had forgotten to put some oilskin sailor clothes on - where would we keep those anyhow? Ron was in charge of all that!

I navigated towards the green light of The Pontoon entrance - the ferry ramp at the mainland side. Thank god that light was on! Without it I would not know where to steer, where to go. Would get lost three miles from home, never to be found again. Not the first to disappear in these waters - within sight of a sheltered port.

The small mooring on the other side, was as full as I had ever seen, mostly island boats that could not leave the mainland anymore I guessed; some I could even recognise as such. They didn't look over-used. Most had bags over their engines, also - a sign of mothballing - not in action - we are gone... Once here, never back.

I changed my dripping wet crossing clothes in the small waiting cabin behind the car park, left the wet jeans and pullover to dry over a steel bar at the backdoor, rusted stuck in place and unmovable, and would probably find them hanging there, hopefully dry by then, in a couple of days. Would collect them when back. No people traffic here at all. Nobody allowed 'off the island', but definitely nobody alien allowed going onto the island. I put on a decent pair of jeans, new shirt and a pullover and felt refreshed - like dressing up nice and warm after a cold shower. I was ready for the world, The Now.

Are you ready for my world, Rupert?

*Now, in The New, in the just-opened McDonald's store I saw a man, a grandparent like me, with a small child, eating and watching the other kids play in the indoor playground, in the small fake swimming pool with the*



*coloured balls. He looked like Rupert. Maybe it was Rupert. He also glanced at me , but there was no mutual click of recognition, no spark, no nothing. You know what, I wanted to think it was Rupert indeed, and I couldn't care less if he actually were. We are now where we are. What can we change? Do we want to change?*

*Too many things have changed.*

## Spring 1995 - Three rides from The Pontoon to Slane - The Now

### *'Truck'*

"I go to Andriff; you can drive with me up to Andriff."

I climbed in the truck cabin and should have done it like we see, sorry saw, in old movies - after acceptance of the ride: first throw in very professionally your backpack, then hoist yourself in one macho swing holding on the high hand bar onto the wide seat next to the driver. It took me however half-a-minute of stupid girl hassle to get in. Trying to look cool. Next time I would have to do this better... Practice more.

This driver was not the common stereotype, the fat unshaven, bald headed, smelling-of-fast-food neckless guy in his late thirties. This was a clean, nicely dressed (OK, is a lumberjack shirt still nice? I think only Rupert looks good in those), rather thin good-looking male in his early fifties.

"Good it is dry for a while." (Clearly he wanted to chat. I was fine with that).

"Thank god yes, I came in completely drenched. Lots of waves and wind."

"From the island?"

"Yes."

He chuckled. For no other reason other than me coming from the island.

"Early on the road then. Are you allowed off?"

"Going to visit an old friend." (Nothing untrue about that one, only... would the old friend still be there, would I find him, would he be willing to see me? Would he turn out to be a friend indeed?).

“They will cross-dock most of my fish in Andriff on a truck going to Tralee, the rest of the fish will stay in Andriff. If you are lucky, there might be a van going to Mundy.”

“Need to go to Slane actually.” (He looked at his watch).

“There is a bus from Andriff going to Slane coming from Denmare,” I said and I thought: it was not about the money, had enough for the trip, but the less people who saw me on the road the better - hitchhiking perhaps not clever, but better to be driven by individual strangers, than travelling in a bus full of gossipy geriatric Castletowndoon folk. Well, in short, I had not really thought about it - needed to get to Slane the fastest way - only three days booked, reserved for Rupert

“I don’t have a lot of money,” I lied. “In addition, hitching a ride goes faster. If you are lucky.”

We were quiet; the driver fiddled around on the radio controls and settled on a station that played light classical music. Muzak for lounges. Music for rainy Rupert-hangover days. This day started to give its light and I started to get sleepy. It was nice and warm in the cabin, the road had flattened out and we were not that far from our driver’s destination. We stopped at a new big gas station a mile or so out of Andriff. Never seen it before. Wow, when was indeed the last time I had left the island, traveled so far?

“Want a coffee?”

Yes, I would love a coffee. Craving for a coffee. He had read my mind.

We got out on our own sides of the cabin and slammed the doors well shut. I had left my backpack in the cabin. Felt safe with this person. ‘Truck’ (as I had started calling him in my mind) carried a newspaper under his right armpit and in the hand of the other arm he brought what looked like a small computer monitor, a small TV set it looked actually, rather whitish in colour, almost beige. We walked into the abundantly and superfluously lit

shop-part of the station and Truck asked the cashier straight away for directions.

“Where’s the GlobWeb room?”

The attendant, a chubby girl in a too tight red and black coloured plastic fabric company uniform - her name MAEBH prominently displayed on her chest on a very large metal name tag - pointed her arm from behind her large pay counter to a nondescript door, next to two other identical doors with male and female toilet signs. Truck (never got to know his real name) walked briskly over there and looked at me expressing an invitation. Wanna join? I must have given him an encouraging look back as he walked in. Well, sure he had me baited.

He asked over his shoulder, directed at the attendant: “Bring us two coffees please? Cream and sugar.”

I was not consulted - on my cream and sugar habits.

The door was actually marked with some kind of small logo, one I had not seen before; an earth globe with a kind of styled spider web, not scary, but nice, over it. A spider web covering, spanning, caressing the world.

In the room - rather cheap looking, with lots of tables and with a bit more luxury fake leather office chairs, was only one other person, looking attentively to a similar device that Truck had just carried in, and was now occupied with installing it. He rolled a cable from the back, slid this in a hole somewhere at the front of the table where he had landed and plugged a power cable plug into another plughole, all handily located at the surface at the front of the tables. Apparently these tables were made for purpose – the first time I’d seen such a handy set-up. He sat down and tapped paternalistically on the chair next to him. As if to invite me to join the session. Which I did.

I knew about computers, Apple, Macintosh and the trouble governments, schools, people had with them; to fund them, to purchase them, to get them into their environments, and, frankly to figure out the

true need to have and use them. Everybody wanted one; nobody knew what to do with it. Supply yes, demand no.

Truck unfolded a lid from the TV-like device, the front part facing him, and a keyboard, like from a small typewriter, in white plastic, came down, fixed with hidden hinges to the overall contraption. The screen lit up simultaneously with the keyboard coming down - in bright orange- and brownish colours on a pitch black background. It sparked my interest. Of course, we didn't have this on the island. No computers, no telly stations, no phone lines to the mainland - that was the deal.

Never seen this before? Truck spotted my interest. Actually, no, heard about it. I Lied .

“This baby here is called a GlobBox” (he stroked it with his hand like it was a pet) “and what we are using it for is GlobWeb,” he said.

“Connected with the entire world just through phone lines. No radio, no special wavelengths, no secrets. I am going to see whether they changed my route for the fish. They can give me special messages. You know sometimes the prices change and it is better to keep the fish in Eire for a short while and not ship it out to Spain or Holland straight away. A bit of hedging, you know, still difficult with fish. Quick decision making needed, spoils fast...”

He concentrated on the screen, typed in a few words and tapped the space bar continuously and professionally - it looked like browsing pages. He scribbled a few notes on a piece of already nearly full paper that he had produced from his shirt breast pocket from under his brown old pullover.

“It can book tickets, sell goods, buy goods, you can talk to people through text messages and you can see the news. Last month they introduced visuals, pictures and movies, brand new technology, you need a better full colour screen for that and a special fast phone connection - and these machines don't come cheap, I tell you - or a device at home to connect to your TV. All through the normal telephone cables, isn't it fantastic?

Soon I can see what my wife is doing at home in the kitchen while I am on the road.”

I was quiet, absorbed it all. Our coffee came and he paid, the girl said that with the GlobWeb time it was three pounds - quite some money frankly...

He then contained his sales talk: “Everything will eventually be included in this system, you can see your kids’ school ratings, the schedules of their soccer club, the ferry timetables. And there will be no more paper mail, we would simply send each other small electronic messages, that you could store in electronic memory, no more stacks of smelly archives, anywhere. Phonebooks, businesses, people, you can always find somebody.”

“Wait,” I said, having the first bright brain-flash of the day, apparently the coffee helped me here: “can you open the phone book? How does that work? Can you find Rupert for me? Rupert Murphy? In Slane?”

He laughed.

“Murphys are all over the place here, my good island girl. However, let us try. Slane you said?”

He found three listed in his wonder box in Slane. One a greengrocer, rather looking like a business than a private residence, another Rupert Murphy - listed in an area that Truck said had been demolished two years ago - the records were not updated most likely. Then the last, ‘Rupert Murphy, teacher’. Yeah - no other way - that must be him. Rupert the Teacher. We got him.

I asked Truck for a piece of paper, which he produced absent-mindedly. He was still very much glued to his screen. Three other men in the room were also - as far away from each other as possible; funny I thought, connecting globally, but keeping personal activity as discreet as possible - fixed to their little screens, rolling texts down as if they were medieval scrolls - mesmerising, addictive holy texts. Scribbling personal notes, confidentially - insulated from the world around them.

## *'Nun'*

She picked up blindly another cigarette from the door side-pocket and lit it with the electric car lighter she had pushed in a quarter of a minute earlier. Inhaled deep, but nothing came back out from her lungs. Only a razor-sharp dry small cough.

Outside, it was fully daylight now, and although the sky was overcast and grey, it looked further like it was going to be a dry day.

“To your question, my girl, no. I normally do not identify myself as a person-of-religion. Formally, Eire is known as the only civilised country in the world without a priest-pastor shortage but that is simply not true. One of the many lies the Mothership beams to Workplace Earth. I am heading a parish in North-Dublin, the African priest we had suddenly disappeared, was maybe not even a priest. I was born there. Nobody has an issue with a girl running a church. Do they like it? No of course, not, it goes against everything that the Board of Directors in Rome preach. However, hey, we are in Eire remember, we created our own world!

“My man, we, he and I are not married; he is part of the deal - he helps out on stage when needed. Visits the needy, drives old folks from the parish to the hospital, and delivers the Holy Communion at home, with a very serious look on his face - innovative huh? Like me, he believes in the social, not in the religious.”

She looked at me with a sarcastic grimace. Although I had kind of started it, I was now too tired to chime back into the conversation. Instead, I smiled back and nodded encouragingly. My mind had re-focused on the question how long it was going to take before I was going to puke my guts out. Her

driving, the heat in the car, her smoke! It reminded me of my morning sicknesses.

This was only a short trip, and at the end she simply provided: “Good-bye Brigid, bye bye Brigitte,” she said and I heard her cough-laughing her cynical smokers’ cackle.

“Do not forget, I am not the first one in this country. Neither are you. Ever heard of St Brigid? Be a Brigid girl - you deserve it...”

The kids had learned of course about St Brigid, at school. They had celebrated her day by weaving her cross with rushes. They had brought the crosses home and we had talked about her. A logical St Patrick female counterpart: founder, abbess of many religious settlements, a Christian personification of an earlier Celtic heathen goddess, keeper of the faith - had she really existed, lived...? Or was she just another pusher of The Old...?

Hmmm, was my thought (as I walked over the deserted pavement, away from the car where she was steeping over the wheel, undoubtedly lighting another fag, or perhaps coughing her brains out): how did she know my middle name, given in Eire, still on the mainland then, by my social-environment-sensitive parents, was ‘Brigitte’... after the French actress with the last name Bardot?

## ***‘Nurse’***

He was the oh so happy type - those people that wake up with a twinkle in their eye and go to bed smiling, if not plain giggling. Happy, happy, happy - it often gets so annoying joie-de-vivre...

Why do men immediately talk to their female hitchhikers? They open up their floodgates of ill-managed feelings to complete strangers, often within the first minute. He wore a medical type of uniform; something green-ish



with red lines, an embroidered logo with a snake through it; private-clinic-type-of-thing.

“I worked with addicts, the traditional stuff yes, booze, drugs, and that is a bit of a list, you know it used to be only marijuana, alcohol, heroine, some cocaine. Now it’s like, basically any condition any psychiatrist can design into the field of addiction. Designer-drugs, playing on our weak mental fields. Cocaine is for the rich, don’t know why I don’t see that with us folks - they kick off by themselves or don’t have enough of a stimulating life, but to look for other distractions? Maybe AIDS is doing them in. Cocaine is a sex addiction, basically.”

He laughed loud and, almost irritatingly happy. My god he was happy. Humming while turning the steering wheel – would he also be on medication – so happy? Snacking from the medicine cabinets?

“You can heal anybody from any addiction. If they cooperate. But, to keep somebody from even trying it, getting hooked later, is simply keeping them away from it. That is the best approach. The only approach. A hundred percent. Isolation. Nothing else works.”

Frankly, I had no idea what he was talking about. His train of thoughts ran too fast for me, in my landscape of fatigue. Another male yapping away.

“I have an older colleague. He does not drink. We talk alcohol. This in a country where we go every day after work for a few pints to the pub on the corner; come home half-pissed and then drain a bottle of wine on an ordinary Tuesday - foregoing a decent conversation with the family. So that is not easy not to conform to, hahahaha. Now here is the funny bit. As a kid, he, I mean that colleague, grew up on an island, near Schull, here in County Slane, south side, and they were on that island with only two families farming the island. Think it is called Long Island. For obvious reasons, hahaha, because it is hahaha... quite long! Both fathers of both families loved their pints of course, but there was simply no booze on the island. The kids spent a few days per week on a neighbouring, larger island

where their school was located. No pub, no booze there either, mornings school in, afternoon school out - back on the open motor launch to their two-farm hub. They were not ever exposed to drink. When the fathers went to the mainland town though, selling cattle, buying supplies, often together, they indulged in five days of sacred around-the-clock drunkenness and then had enough for five months. The kids never saw the pleasure, the need, the noise, the misery, the vulgarity, the commonness of alcohol. It never became part of their cognitive landscape. Therefore, he is not the quintessential, violent, hard-objecting non-drinker, the convert after a life of hangovers and puke - oh, he honestly does not give a damn, he has no opinion on alcohol. No hard or soft feelings towards the bottle. Never drinks it - perhaps a glass of champagne, a few sips at a wedding that is. Fits in perfectly on any social occasion, doesn't even shy the pub, is very social (guess he learned that on his island too - to be social, there was nobody other than the neighbours, and they were relatives in fact - being social was survival) drank his tea, coffee, a glass of orange juice - and then only when he was thirsty."

We stopped at a traffic light. Red. No other traffic to be seen. Why is everybody talking to me all the time... freely, uninhibited...? Do I look like a trusted talk-show host? Well, I am not.

"Addiction can express itself in many strange ways. I know a near-perfect person who can't live without being stuck at traffic lights in the morning and to swear at the red, especially, like here, when nobody else would require you to wait... he would really work himself up and get very ugly, nearly violent, a bout of a few minutes perhaps to be repeated at a few other crossings - and he loves it! He is like a purring pussycat all day after that, the endorphins have done their work. Red-traffic-light swearing addiction... Like sex and then rest.

"Then, what is habit and what is addiction? Gambling is more serious and nobody understands it - corruption that's another one, wait, had a

patient once, well he came in through his drinking, they never suffer from one thing alone, these addicts... He was completely addicted to corruption - he took and gave bribes, little kickbacks, even couldn't resist stuffing money in us nurses trouser pockets. Power - it is not about money it is about being able to manipulate, to deregulate others' lives with deliberate illegal action. Showing who is in charge. Very addictive, power.

"Hahaha, yeah, you are right, they all talk GlobWeb - fun in a way that we adapt to all this. It is all sex eventually. The free phone lines that were not free - the civil band radio, remember that one? - the television pirates... all new technology gets through the sex curve first. Like the only thing that makes money straight away is sex. GlobWeb will soon be all sex, mark my words. GlobWeb, after USA and France, are trying it out in Eire, first country outside their own - let alone a few islands I hear, so they can compare. What is this? You really don't know?"

He looked at me, questioning my dull, deliberate ignoramus facial expression. I explained that I was on an island where this GlobWeb had no connection. Where we wanted to be free of all this, where we had pledged, were asked to pledge not to go for it.

"But aren't you guys supposed to not leave your island, correct? We read about it every week, your islands. Doon and Bory. Two islands. Are you legally on-the-loose? Hahaha."

GlobWeb I thought. GlobWeb it is. GlobWeb. We are miserable without it. Aren't we supposed to be very miserable without it?

But are we?

## 2015 Slane (rain) - The New; Spring 1995 Rupert (rain) - The Now

I still have the notes and moreover, the story is fresh in my mind, even after all these years - Rupert's years until he came back to his personal playground Eire; my years since I was with Rupert that warm, rainy spring month. Now I do think once in a while this entire story was just another one made up, fantasies of a frustrated male - we have so many of them. Men and their stories.

*However, GlobWeb is a historical fact. The old monitors might have disappeared and been recycled (replaced by state-of-the-art new equipment, phones are even working on it I read), and collecting dust in dirty attics - just like Betamax tapes... GlobWeb changed the world. Yes, also my world. In spite of Rupert, who was there, undeniably. Rupert and GlobWeb are 'one' for me. Same face on two stories.*

I walked straight to Truck's GlobWeb phonebook quarters, upon the detailed advice of the last hitchhike driver, a milkman on his way to delivery - we still had them in those days. Milk on your doorstep. Electronic messages on your doorstep, unsolicited in your house, skipping the doorstep, that's what it is now. Electronic talking has no doorstep.

It rained and the pavements were slippery. I had learned as a kid that this would mean that it had been dry before. Slippery comes with wet after longtime dry. Who knows these types of things now?

Rupert opened his door for me at the fourth floor of the apartment building, immediately after my first ringing. As if he was expecting me. He nodded good morning and walked me in, showing me his back, dressed in a

bathrobe, sat me at the kitchen table and went to the part of the kitchen on the isle side and came back with a large pot of tea, cups, scones, marmalade, all the paraphernalia a true Eirishman needs to get his mid-morning-persona started. We talked small talk, long-time-no-see, how-was-your-trip. Same routines whether here or on Doon... It would start soon enough, I thought, smiling internally.

For the time I stayed that short week anonymously in Slane, this is how he told me the story. I scribbled the notes down on small pieces of paper, whatever I could find. They are still in my GlobWeb notes shoebox. Did not go out for a week. It was on my list to buy paper notebooks et cetera, but it had not come to that. We stayed in. The apartment had a fireplace like the one in the house he stayed in on Doon Island - a mini-The Cape. I felt immediately at home. It was warm, it was cozy, I was in excellent company and it was not of this planet. A promise of a robust future hung in the air.

There were seven years lost in Rupert's life. What I pieced together from the boozy bed-dialogues was the following:

Rupert, and for that matter his parents, never thought of Rupert as the academic type. When he turned nineteen his father was assigned to Canberra, Australia and that's where he finished high school - American curriculum at the American International School. His parents had no clue how to move on with him, but Rupert wasn't shy in taking his future into his own hands. Like European kids - still traveling on *paquet* boats in The late Old - would come to Australia to do their 'tour', he embarked instead for the local outback and later for New Zealand. He stayed out of touch with his parents, who at some stage had gotten so worried that they registered him as a missing person. Rupert saw a small article about himself in an Australian newspaper in Nelson, New Zealand - where he was a deckhand on a holiday fishing day-trawler. He phoned them and all was good.

“Are you ever coming back?” was obviously the main and only question that his parents asked.

“I see no reason. Not now at least,” was Rupert’s standard reply. “I am not ready yet.”

He would never be ready. And what was ‘back’? Where was ‘back’?

He leased and later owned, a small bar in Taupo, a tourist town on the North Island of New Zealand, and made a small fortune with dodging the drinking laws, catering to bored kiwi long-haired hippie teenagers who were not allowed to drink anywhere. He bribed the local police with fine free meals and free drinks, day in day out. Bought another bar. He became a ruler in the small town’s nightlife. The ‘King of Taupo’ was born. Bar after bar fell into his empire. Success was automatic. People followed his lead and were proud of him. The kiwis liked the Eirish - even if they were in fact Albion.

Being a kiwi dollar millionaire at just twenty-four years old, Rupert got seriously bored. His first solo retreats started then. Fly fishing alone for two weeks on the same North Island, nothing else but the non-powered cabin, no phone lines, no radio signal, no nothing. Time for thinking how the world should be run. The world run by Rupert The First, the King of Taupo.

Rupert was ready for Europe - back to his roots, ready for his ideas - developed in the wilderness of the parallel universe of Oceania. And Europe was ready for Rupert, as I condensed out of his fragmented story telling. But there were parts missing. One or two years missing. He was in Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands. Places he apparently returned to on a regular basis. He did not hint at any business, he hinted at friendship, love, passion. He saw himself as a success and a leader. My notes here are blurry, if not plain non-existent. I am afraid the narrative got often difficult to follow, as it was snowed under by unplanned, but inevitable sex.

Also, of course, in his youthful hyperactivity, he got bored. Second big time around. Seriously bored. Time to change continents again. Seven years after leaving high school, Rupert had finally found the academic itch...

Here, I started to discover serious discrepancies with earlier stories, the ones he floated on Doon Island. What I learned now however, seemed most reasonable.

He had already settled on a small town in the north of the East Coast of the USA, without even knowing the study subject of his choice. I think he just wanted to disappear - a behaviour that would come back again and again. He checked into a guesthouse where the faculty had allocated him. They gave him a rather spartan room and he spent two days sleeping off his enormous jet lag. Then, on a Tuesday, a week before his first term would start, he went to see his allocated advisor in the small but stately academic main building by the river. The counsellor kept him waiting for half an hour, then came out, in rolled-up sleeves, cigarette in his left hand and shaking his hands with his right. It was the students' counsellor, Brian Morgana. One of the triumvirate that would soon change the world.

“It is quite unusual to have somebody your age to sign up for college. Well (more smoke out of his mouth) not that unusual to see them at college, but to see them at THIS college. Even more unusual and this combination is actually completely new to me, is to see a worn-out tramp like you show up, at the first week of the semester, having paid full fees, with all the extras and voluntary charity contributions, no questions asked - not knowing which subject to go studying! Sitting with wide dog eyes opposite his counsellor asking for advice and guidance!”

With yet more smoke filling the interview room, Rupert decided he liked this Brian. They laughed, bonded. Big mouth, big brains. Just like him - same misplaced intellect - indeed just like him! And what he could not see behind the face of the angry young middle-aged man, but would find out

soon enough, was that there was money there too - lots of money also waiting to conquer the world. Like his!

They had been called by Jim (messages on scrap paper left in rooms, phone calls) to the bar room of the Students Union Library - a place one could write off for a function and have it privately for a small group, for oneself even. Contrary to the expectation the name implied, the bar was just a physical furniture facility - it was not stocked with booze. Students were not allowed to drink here as most of them were well under twenty-one (the drinking age limit in the State they were in), but Brian had procured ten bottles of locally brewed beer, two mega-bottles Coke and a large bottle (one of those glass ones with a carrying handle!) of Jack Daniels. Half a gallon, most likely. Black Jack night. Rupert wondered when Brian (by far the wealthiest of all) would ask him stingily to pay his equal share for the booze.

Jim had made a fire. They settled on the large cards playing table in the corner, not far from the flames. Rupert had been here before, the people would normally keep their outdoor clothes on and hang around the dry bar, but the fire had made it so hot, that they hung their coats over the chairs.

“Gimme a sec,” said Jim and left the room.

He came back with a carton box and stood up before Brian and Rupert and started to act as if he was on stage in a corporate presentation, a kick-off.

“Here,” he lifted something with a handle on top out of the carton box, “here, he said again, here is the answer to our silence on the world (Rupert had no idea what he meant by this), our answer to people not talking anymore, our answer to... well basically anything that is wrong with the planet.”

He pulled the cover off the contraption he had lifted out of the box, which hung in the fingers of his right hand by a handle, with some thin plastic bag draped still over and around it.



“The GlobWeb Box, short: the GlobBox,” he announced, and mimicked a trumpeted ‘tatata-taaaah’. Brian and Rupert clapped loud and shouted. A mass event with three participants.

They refilled their glasses, toasted, cheered and sat back. Brian looked happy, kind of relieved, kind of having won a race. Rupert still had so many questions.

“Are you gonna tell us what it is?” he asked, “now that all my money is spent?”

“My money, you mean,” Brian interferred with less of a smile than before.

“And... nothing spent yet – wait ‘till we really get going.”

They were quiet, anticipating Jim’s story. The fire crackled at that point and outside, the first gusts of the announced late autumn Atlantic storm became audible. Here they called them hurricanes. The GlobWeb Box was out of the box. GlobWeb was out of the box, GlobWeb had been born. Let the GlobBox roll, go Globbies!

“Everybody has a phone nowadays,” Jim said. “There are lines and points in every house, every street, every corner, every land and every island.

“Look what I made and listen to my idea. I can plug this box to any phone outlet in the world. Plugs are not the same but phone lines basically are. Not a lot of alternative technology. Ever since we started laying intercontinental cables on the ocean floors. All a matter of letting electrons in on one side, and pushing them electrons out on the other side. Current. Sound. Data. Electronic configurations. Power! You can connect a personal computer to another personal computer and if you have designed a simple program, you can make them talk to each other. However, that’s where it stops. I want to be able to talk from my holiday home in Cape Cod to you in your home in Eire, Murph. Where was that again?”

“No phone lines there, only local bush radio, tam-tam, smoke signals... we don’t need, we have our pubs for instant communication,” Rupert quipped.

“Murph!” They all laughed.

“I’ll pay for that one, mate.” Jim was unstoppable. “Will fix you up with a line.”

“Now it is only text and black-and-white like on the good old IBM, remember, but in a couple-a-months’ time, I’ll have that fixed. GlobBox goes on the market right before Thanksgiving, the phone companies are signing the orders and contracts now and I just need to produce at least ten thousand Globbies in the next two months in Taiwan. And get them shipped here, let’s not forget.”

Only the fire spoke.

“In addition, I need some fresh money of course.”

He poured new drinks. Very quiet, then they suddenly burst out in unworldly laughter.

Brian said: “Let me do the legal stuff and the sales. Count on me. What would you reckon there?”

“Half a million,” Jim said, not even blinking an eye.

“I do the Boxes,” Rupert volunteered. “How much. Hundred-fifty a box - retail four hundred-ninety-nine bucks on Thanksgiving Black Friday. A festive price. We will not make a lot on that, but hey, it is market share. In addition, it is us alone remember!”

“A million and a half.” Rupert looked straight in Jim’s eyes, then in Brian’s.

“Consider it done. But... I am not going to Taiwan.”

“I will,” Jim said. Rupert now knew he was in. And worse, he could no longer get out .

They put new wood on the fire and drank much, much more that night. But they hardly spoke about the business they were embarking upon. They laughed, were drunk and talked about fishing in Cape Cod, Massachusetts USA and fishing in the southwest of Eire, County Slane, it was quite a

magical place there it seems, that Rupert knew - Doon Island, well, he had heard about it.

## Spring 1995 - Slane at night - The Now

I stayed, well overstayed rather, a week in Rupert's apartment and most of that time in his arms. Sounds tacky, but that was how the week simply panned out. Moreover, obviously, as I see it now, it was exactly how he had planned it. I was away from my personal insulated island to another quarantined place. Rupert's flat was an island. A museum to his own life. The King of Taupo only lived on islands.

Nevertheless, one night, night four or five, I could not sleep. Rupert had sunk into a stupors' state after having downed more than two bottles of expensive red wine while we watched a movie, called 'Ryan's Daughter', a kind of moving postcard of the Kerry Atlantic sea and landscapes. How boring can a movie be if you realise that you live your daily life kind of in that same movie? I moved very quietly out of the room, left lights and all on, but switched off the TV to avoid him waking up from a post-emission noisy screen. I pulled my coat from the rack and took a large golf umbrella with me.

It was still warm; the sea with its enrobing gulf stream can keep this large island unlimitedly pleasant. I was going to take a stroll along Slane, I wanted to go to the river. It did not take me long. The smell of the river brought me back to my island, although I knew I was in the big city (Slane a big city... well would New Yorkers see Slane as a 'big city'?). The flow of the water looked flat, but there were some visible undercurrents fighting to get to the surface. Like the waters around my island. All smooth but something lurking under the surface.

This early midnight stroll convinced me that the world was silently - but visibly and clearly - entering a major change. Sub-currents all over the place. Billboards, for any product, service, travel, electronics, washing machines, they had in some way a reference to Rupert: 'Now on GlobWeb', 'Order

through your GlobBox', or just 'With GlobWeb'. GlobWeb. GlobBox. 'Connected' it all meant, ready to order, ready to get. Instant gratification. One series of posters along the road particularly got my attention, photographs of traditional telephone sets, with a GlobBox 'GlobWeb Carrier' device next to it, very clearly linked to a thick green electrical cable saying 'Place your calls through GlobWeb - you can talk to anybody you want, from Iceland to Argentina, for free. Think out of your GlobBox!'

Straying off-course from the river, into town again, I bumped into a jolly set of young people, students most likely; cheap clothes, loud and drunk, having a great night, either happily going home after a night in the pub, or going from home after a happy night eating and drinking at a cheap table in cheap accommodation to their favourite watering hole to get further inebriated. Two males, three females. Two couples were hooked up by the arms. The lonely, single guy carried a GlobBox, casually, as if it was a handbag. Around his neck, he had draped a long electric cable, kind of what I just saw on the billboard, but red in colour. Like a doctor's stethoscope. A sign of professional status. My mother had taught me as a kid never to hang loose cables, wires, ropes around my or other kids' necks, but this warning, simple common sense actually, had apparently disappeared.

Just before I came back to the apartment, a young man left his car parked at the roadside, walked to the entrance of the flats opposite of Rupert's, then halfway during his crossing, he had a second thought, walked back to his car and also produced a GlobBox, not from the boot, but from the passenger seat. It had been sitting next to him on his ride. His respected passenger. He carried it with him again to the other side of the street and disappeared in the by now dark building. It looked like everybody slept. Or: were they crouching over their Globbies - looking at the other side of the world?

I walked back and opened the apartment front door. Took the two stairs up to Rupert's landing. Started to feel there was something wrong. Could

not get my head around that anticipation - what could be wrong? Didn't I have that feeling continuously, for months now? Or did the doom just simply come back because I hadn't had it for weeks? Rupert would still be sitting in his inherited nobility chair, an old rebel Anglo-Irish blue-blooded hero, slightly slumped over, as a shot movie villain in his blood-stained robe... The man behind the crashing world. Rupert Murphy. GlobWeb financier. Unlocking the world's potential. Future Nobel-prize winner. All for the greater good - all for a society that moves... The Mother Theresa of global connection. But except all that, he wasn't sitting as a saint in that chair. Two faces he had, Rupert. A spy and a businessman, and a professional disappearance act.

Although anticipated, I saw no strip of light coming from under his apartment door. Also, that door wasn't locked, while I had locked it carefully behind me with the key I took from the inside when I went out. I walked into an open, but dark home. But I had left all the lights on, as they were on when I woke up.

He had lured me to his place, only to disappear as soon as I had left for a few minutes to get some fresh air, my fresh air. To get my private island smells. To have a look at the surface and appreciate the undercurrents. After he knew my story - after I knew his story.

He had disappeared. I waited a day, mostly sitting in his old student stained leather chair, not even changing from my pyjamas, now covered by a noble waxed gentleman-farmer's country coat, as if this would help with bringing him back to me. It did not help of course. He had gone. He had disappeared for good.

To the next stage of Rupert's special project called 'life'?

## 1995 (Spring) - back on Doon - The Now

I half-recall taking the bus - I do not have any firm recollection of taking lifts, anyhow I must not have been in a hurry. These first days, also wearing off the alcohol, were a bit of a foggy existence in my memory. Was I shocked? Shell-shocked, self-shocked?

But I do remember walking onto The Pontoon in the dark and some fishermen were laughing at me when I bailed the rubber dinghy clear. There was no guard on The Pontoon - they would have otherwise checked my paperwork. Anyhow, the insulation deal was in the islanders' benefit - if islanders would break the agreement they would be sent off to an insecure future. No more government money. I therefore knew I would take an enormous risk of talking openly about my trip back to Doon. As far as I can see it now I was ready to break, ready to be sent off, not been allowed into my house again, break with my family, my dream, my kids. Anyhow, irrelevant. No guard, no checks, no talking openly, no enforcement of voluntary separation.

Special treatment for the ladies. Hey Joanna, you had a good ball in Slane? The fishermen all laughed. Hey Joanna, seen Ron again? Made up? Hahahaha. More laughter. What did they know?

As much as I loved Doon Island, I hated the original islanders, especially those who had skipped the new deal and had chosen to live on the mainland. I lived on their island because I wanted to live on that island; bringing my kids up in an island community... the islanders just lived on... well, just on an island. Most of us, the sequestered islanders could not care less about the restrictions, the hassle, the cut-off, the control. We just wanted to drive our cattle together once a week, to shepherd them to another piece of wet land, talk about our best guess of what was going on, on the mainland, helping out on the odd supply ferry, carrying farm goods

back to the mainland and stowing the supplies that the ferryman had brought for us. Ron had been their island handyman, farming colleague before the helicopter snatched him away - they must have known more of what had been going on with him. I was not in any mood to acknowledge their gossip.

Back on Doon, I walked from the ferry slip where I moored the Zodiac (not to the Marina, I would rather leave it stand-by. How would the Rupert situation develop?) to my house, not really a short distance, and, of course, it had started to rain...

It was now five in some afternoon and of some week day (kind of lost count but the fact there were IA-approved non-islanders working on the Roerring slip indicated it must have been a normal working day), so at this time of the day the kids would be back from school. Without checking on the house, I walked straight to Laura's place and I saw all was all right - when I went around the corner, plowing through their and our land on the shortcut path the sheep would normally use. I saw them playing on the swings, in the rain. My island children. Kids all well; they didn't seem to miss me as they were like all kids: so very happy in other kids' company. They waved at me and shouted, kind of rather politely than excited, 'hello Mommy are you back-type' while not looking up, and continued their swing activities.

I wanted to open the door of Laura's cottage but found it locked. The only door on the island in a lived-house with the door locked. I rang the doorbell.

She did not ask me in - something must have changed. I considered her my confidante and an island friend!

"Yeah, welcome back Joanna, the kids have been truly great, let me get them and get their things. Well, why don't you just go home all together and I will bring the stuff later." (She would actually leave all, unwashed, unsorted in two large plastic garbage bags in front of the black door,



without any sign, knock or note. I was to be avoided, obviously bringing contamination from the mainland...).

I walked back with Loulou's little hand in mine. I had expected her to be chatty, but she looked and acted rather tired. Patrick ditto, behind us, carrying a plastic gun that surely had never been given by me, as I don't believe in any guns, toy or real, but never mind - you can't win them all. I got them out of their smelly clothes, fed them, showered them and put them to bed early. They had only been playing outside, I gathered from the spare information they volunteered. No reading, no talking together, playing and fighting outside. Well, good for them. Mommy had also been playing outside, albeit inside, and not a lot of talking either - the true fight with my kids, I then supposed, still had to come.

Island life settled all around us again. We sank into it like in a welcoming hot bath. Nobody referred to my too-long week of absence. Laura and I spoke to each other again, but only when we crossed our cars on a narrow stretch on the island and opened our windows to chat. Talks that got shorter every time we met like this. About nothing really. We were drifting apart.

And more and more people disappeared. Sounds dreary but that is how it was. Not that I had real friends on the island - Laura was probably the only one that came close, until recently that is, but I still knew some people.

Left. They just left. No moving trucks, no farewell parties, no stealthy knock on the door to say 'bye-bye'. Houses were suddenly dark at night. Some got a wired fence erected around it. No 'for sale' signs, like in the economic crisis years ago. The island emptied, inexplicably. Three school children left. I heard from the teacher (there was only the German girl now - she was weird anyway) that their two families had found jobs on the mainland - if ever some information or something seeped through, it was about 'no future on the island', work only being available on the mainland,

or kids or parents having developed a special need that couldn't be catered for on Doon Island. It sounded most of the time a bit rehearsed, frankly.

Then I heard from Laura during a car-chat that Willem had also left! So, not 'off' this time, but gone... This in some way triggered unrest in me. Firstly, I did not want to believe it. Secondly, I thought it created freedom and opportunity to see if I could find more information on the mysterious Rupert, his life and works. In all fairness, it had all started at Willem's with the divine apparition of a Betamax player. Shocking. Changing the entire tune. With Willem gone, nobody knew about what we had seen on the tapes.

I waited a week, but went a few nights out on a family car ride, with the kids, to check out on the status of the Willem household (I did not even know his last name at that stage; privately I called him 'Willem the Seafarer', as he looked like an old seafarer, painted by some Dutch master). Their house remained empty as far as I could see. First time I drove up to the house, opening and closing their last gate only in the act, no further than that, not driving in, but the last few times I saw that some weed had started to grow over the gate side posts, on a part that was supposed to be moveable - and which Willem would have cleaned meticulously, daily most likely - and I decided to conclude that indeed no person lived there anymore, nor went in or out, on or off their property. Ran it through Laura on a road-car-hedge-talk, who confirmed that she had heard indeed that first his wife had left, then he himself. With only an old-fashioned scratched brown carton suitcase. On a special passenger ferry in the night.

"Always the romantic old fool," she added, quite unnecessarily.

Good, I thought immediately, then everything would still be in his house. Or would there be more in The Cape...?

'Mormons' I called them. They were always males, two of them, well-clothed, clean-shaven, young, tireless and ambitious - and they went

ruthlessly from house to house, like indeed Latter Day Saints. That is, to the houses where people still lived. The houses with the full lights on at night. Always in pairs, one doing all the conversation work, the other making notes, operating a hand-held tape recorder and most intrusively, making pictures, inside, outside, without asking upfront permission to do so. Apparently we had signed for that to be allowed. When the Mormons arrived - and when they came closer and closer to our group of dwellings - I thought it was time to check on the leftovers in The Cape and in East End, Willem's place. I felt I had to be prepared, but did not know what to look for exactly...

There was actually something that did not really make them qualify as Mormons - they brought booze, cigarettes, sometimes magazines and, what I did not like at all, sweets for the children - OK, they were healthy snacks supposedly - but I did not like the concept of strangers, adults especially, in my very presence, trying to bribe my kids. Because bribes they were - they were aimed at making one talk.

I think I had gotten so lonely by then - Laura did not even stop anymore on the road for me for a car chit-chat; she mistrusted me I guess - only signalled with her headlights that she recognised me - that I started to look forward to their (mostly planned but often unannounced) visits. We started the first session rather formally in the living room - looking out over the sheltered bay, Doonhaven, from which Castletowndoon had received its 'haven' part, in its formal spelling, Castletowndoonhaven.

They left after each session a few bottles of wine, sometimes whiskey, the cheap local Paddy's (how appropriate, that brand name, I would later think) in full litre bottles - a bit weird as the Eirish stores only sold the slightly smaller three-quarter litre ones. It reeked of organised central purchasing. Duty free bottle formats. But at that stage, I couldn't care less where they procured their kickbacks. They could hear from me anything they liked, as far as I was concerned. I had nothing to hide. I had only

questions. A list so big that I could not keep them as mental notes anymore and had started to note them down, on a piece of paper that I stuck with a thumb tag on the pine plank wall in the small office that Ron had constructed for me once. And that I had never seriously used.

One night they got me talking about, jeezzzz, my whole life in fact. The note taking was frantic, the camera guy acted like he was in a Vogue photo shoot. All around and over me. I felt like a celebrity. I drank at least a full bottle of very nice sweet French white wine, it made me feel guilty like having eaten a full bag of sweets under the blanket after parents-induced lights-out. When they left I felt empty, disappointed with myself. My spoiled youth in Eirish private schools, the rush to adulthood at seventeen, meeting the mature Ron, the slightly elder guy who would teach me islands, sailing, living far away, love in all its aspects, being myself. In addition: we traveled, wandered around, Mediterranean islands, Channel Islands, eventually Doon Island as a compromise. We wanted kids.

It was all a mistake. I do not do looking back I always said, regrets have no creative value, but here I had to admit - I should have started a normal life, for Ron, Lou and Patrick, and why not myself... at some stage it was clear - a normal life would have been better. The addiction to an island was not good for me. One can't live a normal life on any island.

I opened the second bottle of liquid candy - real French cognac, I now guess it must have been - and sat down near the idle and empty fireplace.

I tried to start the car later, but I knew the battery must have been dead. So, it started to look like a foreign country C-movie, when I finally - drunk - after having put the kids to bed, mounted Ron's island off-the-road motorbike and hurried to Willem's place East End - the 'Treasure Cove' as I had started calling it as well. Surprised the bike still started at the first kick...

What really struck me now was the sheer emptiness of Doon Island. There was not a light to be seen. No road lights - all extinguished. All the

houses, the well-kept, the near-derelict, the squatted ones - they were nearly all without people. The island had left itself. An island without people is no island. By definition, you cannot live on an uninhabited island. You live on an island and therefore the island is inhabited.

I went through my mental list of people who were still there, the 'non-connected' as we called ourselves, and I came to a handful of families like mine, quite a few old lonely shepherds and cows men, a few hippie artists that didn't mingle, perhaps all-in-all twenty, twenty five people..., kids included, on an island that had a thriving year-round community of three hundred before they locked us up, closed us down, made us sign for free money for an un-free shielded existence.

The bike sounded like a delayed thunder roll through the blacked out village of Roerring - only some lights at the Donovans' place - they would never leave on, although at the same time it looked like they were also not there. Just kept the lights on for good measure, on a time switch perhaps? Looks like 'we are there'. Even when we are not there?

## At Willem's - The Now

The gate to Willem's driveway was now firmly locked. Double-locked in fact. A simple padlock on the lever sliding in the wooden pole, then a huge impressive bicycle, rather motorcycle, chain-lock around the pole and the touching part of the swinging gate. A very clear message: this place is locked, there is nobody home. Couldn't think of a more inviting sign to trespassers and burglars. Who doesn't want to touch a shiny green wooden bench in the public park with a loud sign 'wet' hanging on it?

Strangely enough the front door to the Treasure Cove was open. And even more strangely I could smell tobacco, but not really cigarette smoke, or old acrid after-party-smoke-smells, no: it was definitely fresh. I looked one more time around me before I went in with the torchlight I had quickly grabbed from Patrick's outdoor toy-box just before I left on this unplanned excursion.

The moon, which had only been a sliver of its full profile, had disappeared behind the thin moist clouds. There was hardly any light from the starting night sky, but it didn't look dark. I could clearly see the mainland table-shaped contours of Mount Appetite. It did not feel dark. Feeling dark. It was all 'feeling' by now. It was not feeling dark: I was feeling dark.

I knew it would happen, because it was part of that dark feeling - and the smoke smells, the fresh smoke smells had given it away - I went through the entire house, trying to flip on light switches. Of course, the cheap Dutchman as he was (wait, his wife French... Are they cheap-skates also...?) he had turned off the undoubtedly hidden power main to avoid others using his account and money. I had come through the main front door; like a commando soldier I quickly checked the kitchen, leaned in and out, looked left and right, then walked to the main living quarters: no sign of

anybody. I looked up the broad and wide staircase going to the artist's loft, part of their overall living area if you like, shining my light over the stairs. Nothing. Then I heard a suppressed cough from the kitchen and somebody stumbling, followed by a white light, a moving light being switched on and being swayed all over.

"Willem," I shouted, "is that you there?"

"Yeah, yeah," said Willem, like a kid that had been caught early on in its hide-and-seek game. You got me, no decent time to hide.

"Yes, I am coming out." He tried to laugh.

"Hey Willem, sorry," I said, walking into the kitchen now and shining backwards with the torch on my own face, avoiding my eyes, so he could see whom he was dealing with.

"It is only me, only Joanna, only me," I said, "what is going on Willem, hey man, what's going on?"

Half an hour later it looked like we were having an intimate after-dinner conversation after hours of merrymaking, eating, drinking - like knowing each other intimately for years. Willem had gone out to his pump shed and had switched on the secret main - we were having light again all over the place. The very abandoned place had changed into a cozy, well-lived-in modern artist barn. Wood was crackling in the fireplace.

We drank a lot: Willem kept on producing wines and brandies and red port wines and whiskey - and as always talked a lot. I listened a lot, I started to float on some mix of resignation, excited discovery and plain tiredness. The tiredness that comes just before a conclusion has been made, before things are achieved, closed down; over and out. A dangerous feeling, as in fact nothing had been concluded. Willem in the meantime jumped up and down. Like a six year old that couldn't wait to tell his story to his gathered aunties and uncles - who in fact, are not interested at all. How long had Willem been in hiding?

He was now at the stage of Ron's death...: Ron died in an accident - he had never left Eire... He was unloading two pallets from a delivery truck to an unforeseen ferry going to an island - no not our island. I think it was for one of the Aran Islands. He was first half-crushed by the first pallet of goods that slipped off the sloped hind deck of the truck; you know that moving part you can lower to bring your pallets to floor level. Then while he was lying under that weight, the forklift driver who wanted to see what he could salvage from the toppled over-pallet, he drove the fork of his machine into the mess on the ground and hit Ron with it - he then died, on the spot, instantaneously. The second pallet then slipped off and crashed over the entire scene - it took half an hour to dig out and expose the body afterwards.

I do not know what Willem expected, but I remained completely composed, perhaps because I was drifting along in that comfortable state of utter mental exhaustion. He was waiting for some reaction, but I drank and smiled - uncharacteristically me. Being quiet...

“What you should know, or perhaps NOT know,” he said, “is that these two pallets were containing boxes full of GlobWeb terminals. GlobBoxes. I think they call them Globbies. For that island, free of charge, from your Albion Rupert and from the Eirish government.”

He paused. Filled up his pipe again and put fire into it. He coughed when the smoke filled his system. Always wondered why the most avid pipe-smokers never mastered their craft. They were great at handling all paraphernalia and knew all about it but when it came to real smoking they were nowhere... hey... where had his hand-rolled cigarettes gone? His pipe?

Half asleep, waking up - Willem gone - front door wide open - electric lights off, but the morning glare of dawn coming in from everywhere. The new day. The last island day.

I heard myself asking, loud through an empty house. Somebody else's house. Why Rupert, why these tapes, why this drive, why this



abandonment, this island, this me? Why do I hit on this Rupert, on his crap?

I hear Willem talking, no, lecturing, and drilling: “This island has grown over your head, my dear lady. You cannot see mainland from island, dream from reality. People have abandoned you. You will be soon the last to live here. The nightmare of the government. Gangs will take over. They will come and go, not settle, they will use the island as a pirate’s nest, a store for victuals, for fuel, for slaves to trade, for drugs cocaine, heroin, marihuana - for money and gold to stash away. Maybe that’s the entire idea about it - a brave new world...”

“You cannot be alone and yet stay connected! You cannot be disconnected and then be alone and then still crave for company. This is not what they have in mind with you!”

Let me elaborate on this developing story - in scenes from a movie. Picture me in what really happened. The girl and her love are on the island and the mainland - they miss each other but don’t want to be with each other. The simple version: there is a Girl on an island, a young lady deprived of love. Her man is never there, he flies as a modern unreachable Prince in a silver helicopter between her island and the mainland - continuously between two loyalties. Something happens that nobody understands. The King - from the mainland that is, as there is no ruler on the island - shuts off the island. Puts restrictions on people, goods, news, books, magazines, radio and television reception. Letters are being read by tele-knights. The island is deprived of interaction with the mainland: a jealous husband who wants his freedom, chains his wife. Our Girl is surprised that her movements are being curtailed. But at the same time she likes it - the island becomes hers, more and more. Everybody leaves, leaving the fiefdom to her.

Then a brand New Prince arrives, not on a white horse, nor in a silver flying machine, but with a history, with a past - which is both unclear and

highly attractive. Her original love for the Flying Prince passes to the New Prince, who of course suddenly vanishes, like they are supposed to do. In battle, in the night, in the falling winter... over the horizon.

The Girl chases and locates the New Prince - they elope, of course, it is nobody's business, they marry in secret, but it is for a short while only. He goes to war to fight the enemy, charging with much better weaponry. But alas, already in the first battle he gets killed, dismembered, and then... disappears again - now for good. He only leaves his memory, his voice, his arms, his kiss, his smooth pillow talk. It is like he never existed, except in her dreams. Except on the island.

Still - or again - drunk, I really don't know and don't care anymore - I drove off on the noisy bike. Everybody, well: everybody that had remained, would hear where I had been. The island was empty, clean, it had survived the GlobWeb onslaught. It was now documented.

I had the fecking island to myself. I was free but at the same time a hostage of the mainland. A hostage to myself. A dead hamster in a cage.

Buy a new hamster and let it live again to its premature death.

Save your civilisation. Your own private civilisation.

## **At Willem's again - Betamax - The Now**

It was amazing how well the final 'tape night' got engraved in my now failing memory. That night was with Willem too. A real-time Willem. It had to be done, really. Those tapes showed all the same pattern. First, they were not traditional home movies - they looked very natural and were made in, mostly, single shots, but it became clear that they had been edited, no, not the right word: doctored. They were no longer raw footage, they were clearly put in order, smooth transitions, even with some history timeline.

Tape ONE - aptly named on the carton sheet in which these Betamax's were kept at the time: The figure '1' played straight into the title shot:

PARIS 1968

A very young Rupert, he must have been a teenager. Shots of Rupert walking through the crowded streets of Paris - suddenly he is in some kind of uniform - a pattern that would continue in all the other tapes: first in civilian, then straight into battle dress. He is now in a group of five or six young males, all clad in black, with some kind of police caps -also black but with a white sun visor (what is this?) and the camera, very professionally follows them onto a large group of people blocking a street. They produce what look like truncheons and start indiscriminately hitting the barricade of people in the faces. Some fall down, some try to fight back. The movies are without sound, but they are in colour. This must have been an original Super 8 put on tape, I think while watching the carnage. This is disgusting. I move the tape on and at around thirty-five minutes, I put the screen back on and see an ending shot of a grimacing, smiling, cigarette smoking Rupert. A close up of half an hour.

Tape TWO - is titled, on the screen, WALES 1971. Same story plays out in fact. Rupert, in blue overalls and with a fire fighting helmet, in a group of more than ten males I guess going into a group of middle-aged strikers in a

dreadful rainy wet village. The movie is in colour, but here the experience is very much black and white. Only the blood on the hit faces turn true red. The rest is without colour.

Tape THREE - AMSTERDAM 1980 - Ten years later! Big jump. what happened in between? Crazy footage - all about Rupert, quite fat here, puffy faced, but with the same mischievous look in his pre-battle eyes. The camera follows them - with a police squad, they are working together! Clearly, Rupert is seen chatting with an officer and laughing – they all enter a narrow canal-house stair after stair until they hit a very disorganised group of long-haired squatters, which they begin hitting in their faces with their bare hands, and also with truncheons.

Tape FOUR - Looks like one of the last ones... BERLIN 1988. Same story all over. My god he is happy with the violence. It is there for him! Also, his team seems to wear a kind of fascist uniform. They look organised, disciplined and ruthless.

Tape FIVE - Yes, this is really the last one - no more in the bag. No location, no date. This one gives sound suddenly, refreshing. Rupert on a stage with his nondescript group of shady friends, being honoured for something. Long boring shots of Rupert, close up and from afar. Raw material indeed for history. A late-middle aged male in an expensive suit pins a medal on Rupert and his friends. Followed by an outburst of applause. Do I see Heritage-Centre-Striped-John on the front row? The expensive suit walks to the microphone and starts talking. The tape stops.

Immediate first thought: this was material that Rupert had carried along with him, in case anybody at some stage needed material to advance a political career. Spy. Agent. Provocateur. Ladies' man. James anti-Bond. Blood on his hands.

I forgot to ask Willem later, but I am sure that these tapes do now not exist anymore. Or: they found their way back to Rupert, for another next

type of pressing dummy exercise. I can also envisage Willem, having seen all tape this time, throwing them somewhere at the side of the long gravel road, dousing them with gasoline out of the lawn-mower gasoline jerry can. Ugly thick smoke going up; ugly thick smoke from ugly old tapes.

Would they now still sit with Rupert, the one from McDonald's in The New, in the same old Chiquita banana half open box, wrapped in the same eighties American newspapers, in his basement storage that came with his dole-funded one room anonymous apartment in Crookstown? Soon there are no more Betamax machines to play them on, except in museums. Where can he go with them? Where did Willem's machine go?

Each Betamax tape had only one run, one story on each tape. The rest of each tape was blank, never registered something. It gave the impression the hidden editing was well thought through. Like some modern visual art using lights, movements, same background... in some weird way even as if the human players were only complimentary to the obliging sequence of the scenes. All was in bright light. All tapes were clearly directed and edited, and very much by the same hand, it appeared, but there were - except for at the start of each episode - no titles, transitions, credits or anything else filmy.

What was he trying to do with this? What was he trying to say with this? Passing something on, spreading something as old as the world through time... was it art or was this history? Could they have been faked? History rewritten?

Then, if ever there was a substantiation of the feeling that is commonly called 'a mixed feeling', this was its zenith! I instinctively detested and abhorred the acts, the visuals, the fact that this was all on tape. Detested Rupert's casualness now that it had come to street fights, blood and gore, existential hate, but at the same time, and with a similar heaviness, I wanted, really wanted to be part of it! My secluded, rich upbringing with the nuns in Eire, Catholic and narrow-minded, fought with my newfound island

power and maturity, my eagerness to explore and, well plainly: curiosity into new experiences. What was this Rupert up to? What has he been? Is he with the government then? And what could it bring for me? One falls in love normally not only with the body, the person, but rather with all what the person stands for - what the person brings to the party.

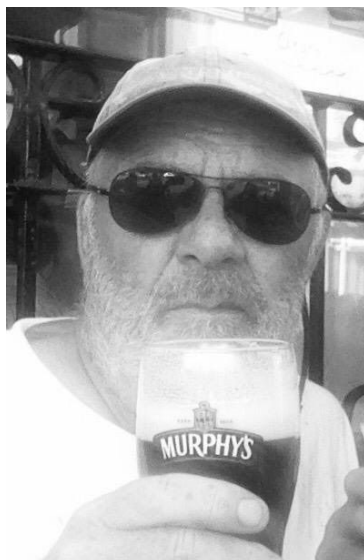
Rupert had a party waiting, apparently.

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