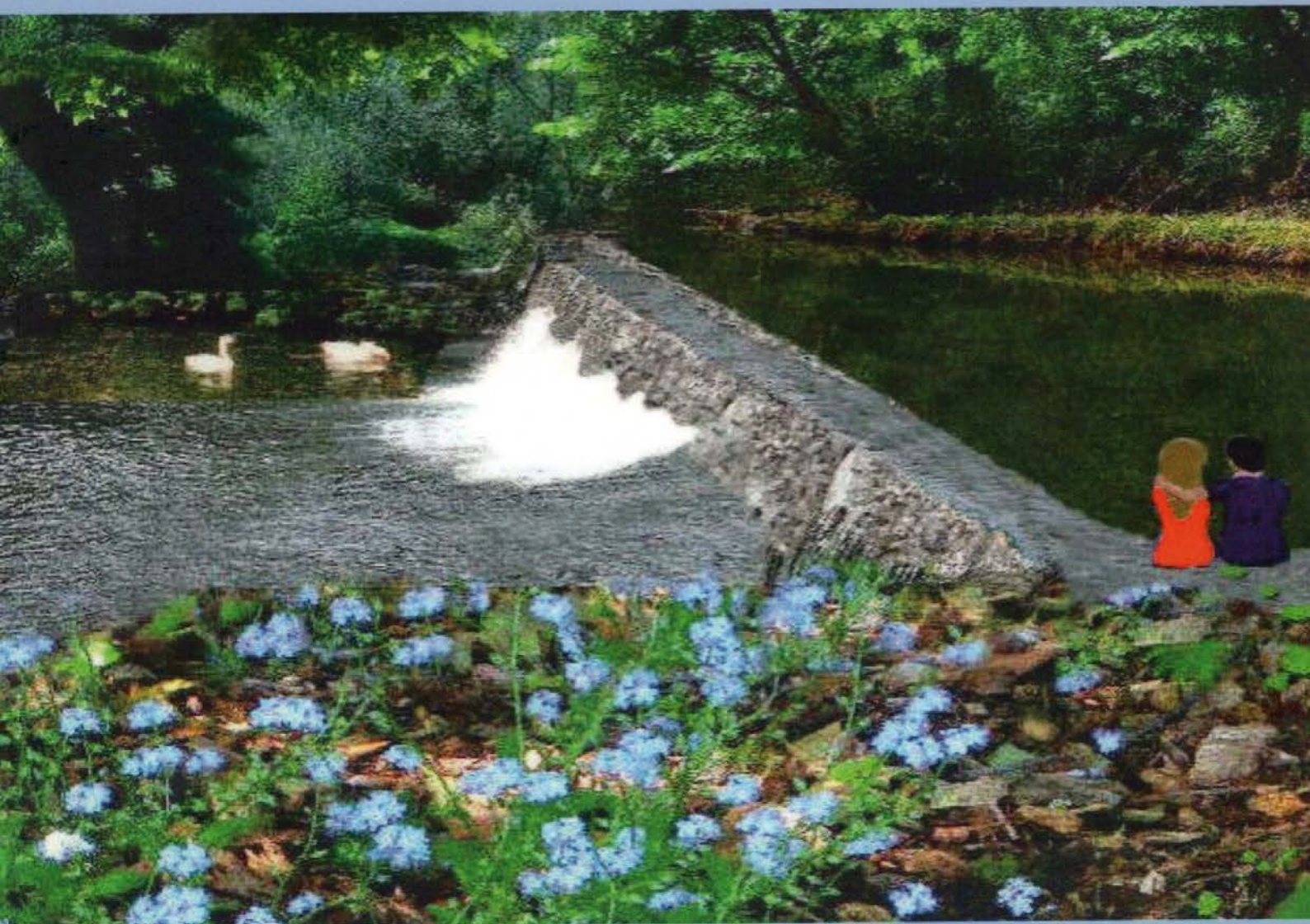

EYES SO BLUE

BY MARTIN COLEMAN



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by
Martin Coleman

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To my family

*Why does azure deck the sky?
 'Tis to be like thy looks of blue.
Why is red the rose's dye?
 Because it is thy blushes' hue.
All that's fair, by Love's decree,
Has been made resembling thee!*

*Why is falling snow so white,
 But to be like thy bosom fair?
Why are solar beams so bright?
 That they may seem thy golden hair!
All that's bright, by Love's decree,
Has been made resembling thee!*

*Why are Nature's beauties felt?
 Oh! 'tis thine in her we see!
Why has music power to melt?
 Oh! Because it speaks like thee.
All that's sweet, by Love's decree,
Has been made resembling thee!*

From The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore (1779 – 1852)

Preface

Frank O'Connor was born and raised on a farm in the West of Ireland. His childhood was carefree, intuitive and indeed extraordinary. Later, while at college, he met and fell in love with a very beautiful and exceptionally talented young lady. Her parents were leading professionals very involved in research among other things. They received Frank with open arms and were very understanding and supportive. With comprehensive plans in place to enable Frank to achieve his goals in life, the unexpected and seemingly inexplicable occurred. This changed his life forever and even more so the lives of those who meant so much to him. The challenges were many and diverse as indeed were the achievements. The secret forces colluding against him despite his efforts to counter them led to a life as incredible as the cause itself. The extraordinary, the suspenseful, the tragic and the beautiful carry the story to its intriguing conclusion.

Table of Contents

Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	11
Chapter Three	17
Chapter Four	21
Chapter Five	26
Chapter Six	31
Chapter Seven	38
Chapter Eight	48
Chapter Nine	54
Chapter Ten	60
Chapter Eleven	65
Chapter Twelve	68
Chapter Thirteen	71
Chapter Fourteen	76
Chapter Fifteen	82
Chapter Sixteen	88
Chapter Seventeen	94
Chapter Eighteen	97
Chapter Nineteen	101
Chapter Twenty	105

Chapter Twenty-One	111
Chapter Twenty-Two	115
Chapter Twenty-Three	120
Chapter Twenty-Four	123
Chapter Twenty-Five	127
Chapter Twenty-Six	132
Chapter Twenty-Seven	135

Chapter 1

It was mid-morning on the M5 and Frank could hear the latest traffic report over the memories occupying his mind as he drove south away from Sydney to visit a former colleague and good friend in Campbelltown. Next afternoon, he was leaving what had been his adopted city and home for the last thirty nine years. Again he wondered whether his story would ever be told and was starting to feel that time wasn't on his side anymore. He would never forget the news that awaited him upon returning to college in Cork in the January of 1954 with just six months to go to his final certificate. It had been a picture perfect Christmas and New Year with lots of snow everywhere. The long nights with family and friends in front of large open fires and with lighted candles in all windows of the house had made this Christmas a folk-tale one. His life was carefree and full of promise as he enjoyed the ongoing challenges of college life with its wonderfully new horizons in education, relationships and sport. While he looked forward to meeting his classmates, he was ever so eager to meet whom he saw as his adopted family, the Cliffords, who lived a short distance from his college just outside Carrignavar, a small town twelve kilometres north of Cork city. As he parked his car, he recalled the nightmare that had begun with that first day back at college and the sheer hopelessness of the situation in which he had so abruptly and inconsolably found himself. He had for what seemed years drifted alone in a very silent sea of pensive faces.

For over fifty years now, he had remained quiet about the sights and visions he experienced throughout his life. So much had been written and screened on the paranormal in his lifetime, with most of it out of America. There was nothing though in print to date that could explain his experiences. His grandparents, he was sure, and perhaps even his parents, having lived through troubled times, would

understand. In his teenage years, he was beginning to realise that neither science nor religion had all the answers.

His childhood on the farm in the west of Ireland held for him so many memories. And though born perhaps one generation too late to fully understand back then what it was that his mother spoke about so regularly, the feelings he experienced during those times had never left him. Life was carefree, simple and uncomplicated, at least on the surface. Visitors from America and elsewhere were always captivated by its uniquely charming and easy-going nature and returned home feeling better for the experience. Real life, however, whether below the surface or out there somewhere, but certainly in the souls and veins of the locals was hidden from them. It was this that Frank and his generation had inherited from their parents and grandparents as well as from the local community itself, and it was this that had made those extraordinary situations as well as the ones he encountered later during his college years in Cork and thereafter easier to accept and live with back then.

From a very young age, he had regularly accompanied his mother on her visits to her parents' home in Corribglen which was over an hour's walk from their home in the village of Cahermar. As the name itself suggests, it is the townland or glen by the Corrib, one of the largest lakes in Ireland. Frank loved his Grandparents' beautiful thatched cottage with its wonderful garden of evergreen hedges and, depending on the time of the year, the very attractively organised beds of roses, tulips and daffodils, and so many other varieties that this colourful and fragrant garden was always a source of much fascination and wonder. To him it was the best place in the world to visit and, if lucky enough as sometimes happened, to stay for the weekend. He had never forgotten the special appeal for him of its tranquillity and natural beauty. Though it took over an hour to get there on foot, he enjoyed every second of it and the many haunting stories that his

mother told along the way of her childhood and growing up in Corribglen. She was an intelligent woman with a good sense of humour. The fields they crossed and passed as well as those families who worked them were often the source of much of her inspiration and Frank was receptive to every detail as no storyteller, as far as he was concerned, could have told them better.

He loved the mischievous and humorous way his mother told such stories as the Padeen Dooley story and so many other stories about the people and the homes they passed.

“Padeen was left a fine holdin’ by his Dad an’ I’ll tell you now no one could work like him,” said his mother, Sara. “He kept to himself an sure wasn’t he married a few months to a lady from outside before anyone knew about it. They thought she was some sort of relation who was staying there to look after the house for him until one day at the fair in Headford – ah, he had the finest of lambs for miles around – when she mentioned it to Tomeen Biggins, a cousin of your own. Didn’t everyone know it by the end of the fair. She was a nice person alright and young enough to be his daughter. But the local lads couldn’t leave them alone after hearing about it without playing a practical joke on them.”

“What was their reason for that?” enquired Frank. “Were they annoyed because it happened without their getting to know about it?”

“I suppose they felt put out alright. Sure what should they do but talk a gypsy woman into visiting them. People used to say she could tell anyone’s fortune she was so good. Anyway, there was a rumour that herself was expecting and they had paid the gypsy woman what to say. That February was the worst ever with snow and sleet every day, and morning after morning sure poor Padeen could be seen making his way to church through all that snow and themselves having the time of their lives taking the mickey out of him whenever they met. If

Padeen an' herself weren't in bed by nine o'clock every night, they took turns God save us at making queer keening sounds outside the house where they couldn't be seen and the nights were so dark. An awful lot of that sort of blackguarding went on alright. Something was happening all the time.

"He's a littleen queer indeed that man at the end of the road before you reach Corribglen. You know the man I mean, that Paddy Horan the place we walk fast past when we come to it. Didn't the crature come home one night to find the ass and cart in the kitchen."

"The ass and cart in the kitchen?"

"Well didn't they put it there and there it was anyway. Sure 'twas no wonder he went a bit quare an all!"

The road they travelled between Cahermar and Corribglen had its share of ruins of stone dwellings, churches and unmarked graves from the Great Famine and post Famine years. Though overgrown with some barely recognisable at first, they were all quietly extended a very special reverence as monuments to times so terrible that to even talk quietly about them was to desecrate them it seemed in some way. Though they told their many stories through people like his mother, most people found a way to avoid talking about them. As Frank was to realise later, when it came to certain events in his country's history like the Great Famine and the Penal Laws, there existed a conspiracy of silence like none other that was both leaderless and unplanned. It was as if some esoteric influence was causing his people to erase from the national memory all knowledge of those events that were watersheds in his country's long history.

On their way to Corribglen one day in early spring, Frank felt that he had to ask his mother why she walked with head bowed quietly and hurriedly past certain ruins. "What would you be doing now asking a

question like that for? God knows, sure you're better off not knowin'. The one we're approaching", whispered his mother after a brief pause, "was, God save us, the scene of a dreadful tragedy during the Black and Tans." He had heard his parents talk about the Black and Tans and knew that his father had fought with the Old IRA against the Tans. One day on his way home from school he had asked one of the villagers, Pete O'Brien, about the Black and Tans. Pete knew everything and paid great attention to detail particularly when it came to events involving locals and the soldiers. "The parents were murdered and the children abused and thrown into the well just above the house," continued his mother. "Their cries can be heard coming from the well to this day. Remember Christmas time when you asked me if I could hear the cries of babies just up the road there. That was it then and didn't it happen often enough. Weren't their poor parents tied to the back of the truck and dragged along the road. Himself is often seen walking along the side of the road looking and searching for something and some say they have seen herself weeping into the well and have told the priest about it. God forgive us for talking like this! It's hearing us now they are and who knows what can happen!"

By now, Frank was aware that every place and family along the way was a living monument to the history of times so horrible that the lush green meadows and crops of wheat, oats and barley, so protected now by their stone walls and rambling hedges, indeed the very glen itself, could not hide that lingering melancholia that pervaded still this quiet countryside. It rose like the mist from the glen to be ever present in the memory of those who inhabit still a place whose beauty, in a clearly haunting sort of way, leads the visitor to marvel at the Creator's touch. The presence and indeed the prevalence of something akin to the paranormal were so obvious to Frank that back then it was the normal. There didn't seem to be any real divide

between the spirit world and his own nor did he contemplate that it should have been otherwise. After all, this was the only life he knew.

Just past Dooleys' home, a rather large field had been prepared for planting but a section in the far right corner, punctuated by tufts of grass, was left untouched. His mother was reluctant to talk about it at first and it was only after Frank had said he felt a sadness and loneliness in the place that she explained how the children who died from hunger and Famine fever were buried there. As deaths were highest among children under five during the Great Famine and the other famines that followed, there were hundreds of similar plots all over the countryside. Pete O'Brien had already told him about the ruins of a small stone home overgrown with ivy and briars on the hillside next to the Corribglen Road. It was seen closed and deserted one day during the Famine. When a villager went to investigate, he found what he had feared, the family of five lying together in the darkest corner. It appeared that the father had died last and had closed the door to prevent passers-by seeing them. Though this was the only example close by, such family scenes according to Pete were quite common back then and the little home was pulled down upon them for a grave.

It was clear to him that all the people's pain and suffering, their tears and blood had sored the soil. He could like his mother feel it in everything about him that was part of this soul-sapping environment, and like his mother he carried something of the collective memory of times past that was rarely apparent to the visitor. Now he could see why so many exhortations and prayers before, during and at the end of Mass ended with the plea: "May they rest in peace, Lord".

Back then, though only in primary school at the time, Frank thought the *De Profundis* was an essential part of the Mass that was binding on all Catholics the world over. It was only later when in

college that he learned its true significance as a special prayer peculiar to Ireland or so he believed. "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee O Lord; Lord, hear my voice" Around his area in Mayo at least, it was seen as an earnest plea to the Lord to set the spirit world at rest, a world that seemed to be leaning so heavily on the natural world of everyday. It was as if the two worlds needed to be separated from each other for the eventual well-being and peace of mind of the living and the resting in peace of the departed. Frank felt that ironically his people generally shared a deep feeling of guilt and embarrassment for the persecutions and horrors perpetrated upon them in the past, and that this accounted for the conspiracy of silence in relation to these matters as ones best left forgotten. All this perhaps came about, he felt, because deep down they were troubled by their own failure to set the spirit world at rest and the irreconcilable thought that deeds so horribly inhuman could possibly be committed by fellow human beings. The *De Profundis* he felt had a special cleansing effect that eased the pain and gave the people some comfort and hope.

A little further along the road and just outside the stone wall that encircled the ruins of the old church lay another children's burial ground where, according to his mother, children not baptised were buried. What happened here on Frank's twelfth birthday during a visit to his grandparents' with his mother, Sara, would concern him for the rest of his life. Leaving the low wooden gate ajar, he proceeded to count the sixty or so small flag stones, some standing and others lying flat covering the graves. His mother had told him during an earlier visit to her parents that children who had died before baptism or were still-born were buried here in unconsecrated ground. The sight or mention of those places moved something deep within Frank. It all seemed so unfair and very wrong both morally and spiritually. And what about baptism by desire that he had learned about at school? Wouldn't all their parents have desired baptism for their children and so why

weren't they buried in consecrated ground? His mother also found it most unfair, indeed so terribly wrong and unkind. As she slowly tiptoed past the gate and along by the old church towards him, he noticed a bright fog-like mist descend upon her like some delicate membrane expanding to also envelop him when close to his mother. Dumbfounded and very frightened, neither could begin to think of what was happening before being overcome by the strangest of feelings that they were not alone. Slowly form after form appeared as if to meet and make themselves known to them. Though not a word was spoken, communication was everywhere. The fear and confusion Frank and Sara shared, however, disappeared quickly and was replaced by an ever increasing sense of calm and quiet into which entered an outpouring of mutual love that was at once uplifting and very beautiful. The joy and the happiness of this world were palpable like energies that were part of all the many entities that seemed so busy. This enriched ever so beautifully their communication with one another. This was a world of great form and beauty like nothing else. Frank and his mother now captivated by their new experiences were drawn among their hosts whose interaction with one another would seem part of some marvellous plan. The synergy of sound and colour and joy and beauty was the outpouring communication of love between all those angels and other entities as they went so completely about their being. Frank and Sara's sensory awareness had never been so taxed, acute to the new details flooding their perception in a visualisation or world that was nothing like their world. Though without hills or sky or sun or moon or lakes or sound or animals or anything else that is part of the real world, this was a world that was far more sensuously and spiritually engaging in its depth and richness. In silence, Frank and Sara shared each other's thoughts and were aware of each other's responses to a very different world from their own. Love was so much part of the extraordinary colour all about them and

the very source of communication. Just as it had descended upon them or as they had entered this world, it lifted and they found themselves in that same spot between the gate and the old church. So much had happened it was like a great reservoir of sensations, experiences and emotions, the product of lifetimes. The instant awareness of each other's presence and the realization of what had happened was too much for them, particularly for Sara who kept repeating nervously and apologetically over and over her own mother's advice and warning to leave those places alone for one's own good. Yet there was something in the way his mother had said this that made Frank feel that she didn't really mean it. They were unsure of how long they had been away as time didn't feature in anything. No, it was not part of the world from which they had returned.

Back on their bicycles and heading for Corribglen, Sara warned Frank not to say anything to his grandparents about what had happened. She knew only too well what her mother's reaction would have been and wanted to explain this to Frank. It wasn't easy as he mulled and mulled over so many things that were pressing on his young mind. His grandmother was delighted to see them and was already trying to persuade them to stay the night but Sara told her about the Stations at Burke's place early next morning, putting an end to their chances of staying the night. Grandfather was out in the field down by the turlough raking the new hay into cocks. This was like music to Frank's ears and seizing the moment he took a rake from the shed and headed off to help for an hour or so before his grandmother called them in for dinner. Michael Murphy was thrilled to have some help with the hay, and they raked and talked and talked and raked catching up on all the family and village news to their mutual satisfaction. Back in the house, Sara was busy helping her mother with dinner after the customary teary session, something that always fascinated Frank as it prefaced just about every meeting between his

mother and his grandmother and indeed between his mother and her sister whenever they visited her in Keekill, a farming village by Lough Corrib about a forty five minute cycle ride away. Whatever the reason, it led to lots of talking and laughter a short time later and so it must have been necessary in some way.

Chapter 2

Sara always planned to leave her parents' place on time in order to get home before dark. On this occasion, however, she was cutting it rather fine but Frank wasn't too worried as both bikes were fitted with flash lamps. For the first mile or so until they had passed the burial ground, they talked about their visit and the latest family news of cousins and friends. Their experience earlier that morning could wait no longer. Who were all those entities? Where did they come from and how and why did all this happen? Should they tell others about it? How could they contain it? Has it happened before? The questions went on and on. "Some would believe us alright sure enough, but I'm afraid quare and mad is what others would say, and sure God help us altogether if Fr Kelly or one of the other priests hear about it," whispered Sara. "It's putting on they are', they would say, and trying to get people bothered and talking." Frank wanted to know who all the angels were and if the other entities were ghosts. "No, I don't think so," was Sara's response and then after some reflection added, "cause there was nothing haunting about them, they're so loving and beautiful like souls or spirits of the poor babies who were buried there and elsewhere, and they were all so different."

"So we call them spirits then?" Frank felt good about this but was still wondering how and why it had happened. "People pass through that same gate quite regularly", exclaimed Frank, "the farmer and other members of the family to whom it belonged. Could it have happened to one of them?"

Sara wasn't sure but believed that Frank and she had somehow stumbled across their world, the spirit world but was unable to say why. Just then Sara jumped off her bike as the rim of the back wheel was running on the road. To their disappointment, the tyre was flat and would need to be repaired quickly as darkness was descending.

This occurred as they were about to climb the hill before Gortjordan Primary School. They made it a habit to always carry a repair kit and so Frank set about mending the tyre. Sara held the flash light while he located the puncture but by now it was getting dark quite quickly and Frank could sense that his mother was worried as the light began to shake a little. She didn't much like being out after dark and so all his attention was focused on finishing the repair and pumping the tyre so that they could be on their way.

As the hill ahead was quite steep, they put off getting back on their bikes until they reached the crest. Frank thought this a good time to raise the subject of other worlds and perhaps try to understand more about what occurred that morning. He never really heard Sara talk about other worlds – apparitions yes but not other worlds, and he didn't fancy his chances of her talking right now or even sometime soon given that she shared her own mother's attitude of leaving such things be for one's own good. Sara was happy enough it seemed to generalise about the existence of other worlds but not really to probe that morning's happening other than to softly mention that she thought she recognised one of the angels as her cousin who had died shortly after birth. On reaching the crest of the hill, they mounted their bikes and in silence headed for home through Gortjordan and Ardmoran. There was something very reassuring about the lights in the homesteads along the way.

Frank was looking for answers and felt that farmer Pete O'Brien who lived a few homesteads down the village would be able to help him arrive at a better understanding once he had an opportunity to explain the situation to him. His family worked as herdsman in the townland of Cahermar for Lord Kilmaine long before it became a farming village during the First World War. Pete knew the intimate history of everyone who settled or grew up in the village. Frank got to know him well and had worked for him on the farm on a regular basis

during his school years. Pete was well read, very intelligent, an extraordinary comic and storyteller and always good humoured. Frank never met anyone who could see and exploit the bright side of life as well as he could and find humour in the most adverse or trying situations. He was one of those people who when they laughed moved more of their body than most. In his case, the arms and shoulders did most of the laughing. Frank looked forward to their working together on the farm after school and enjoying Pete's stories and jokes, including those stories and yarns about the predicaments the locals got themselves into.

With school behind him for the day and the previous morning fresh in his mind, Frank made steady headway across the fields before crossing the double stone wall to join Pete who had just begun to bind into sheaves the crop of oats he had cut earlier that day. Nothing would please Pete better than to hear about Frank and Sara's special encounter the previous day and Frank knew this.

"Now isn't that an extraordinary thing. My solemn oath, they say they're other worlds alright, not just here in Ireland but our abroad as well. Sure haven't I read and thought about them often enough meself.

"Wouldn't the old fellow be in his element if he were here right now? He would want to know everything that happened – every little detail and drive you crazy with his questions. Sure you remember him well and he's only gone less than two years. They used to say alright that he had great respect for everyone and everything and treated them all the same. Often enough, he would explain to us as we were growing up and right up till he passed away how everything in nature, plants and animals and people, communicate in some way through some unknown common or shared medium. Boy, what he would have given to know what it was and although as a vet he had worked

closely with animals all his life, he always said that there was something in certain plants and grasses which when treated in a certain way made one aware of and even gave them access to this unknown common medium. It was nothing to hear him talk to the plants in the garden and to the animals as well. Of course most people talk to animals but not the way he did – it was so different with him. By Jove, wasn't St Francis himself seen preach to the birds and the animals!

They tied sheaf after sheaf and built them into stooks making great progress as the hours went by with Pete explaining all about layers of existences and different dimensions, things and the likes Frank had never heard about. For him until now anyway, it was just Heaven, Hell and purgatory but already his imagination was beginning to show no bounds. On a clear patch of soil close to the headland, Pete took time to draw a number of lines in order to illustrate how dimensions when they cross one another create breaches or types of gaps that are ever so slight but breaches nonetheless. "I have read of reports," said Pete, "from out abroad in America that claim burial grounds are sometimes placed unintentionally next to or on them as part of some great unknown plan. A few of the reports claim that this is necessary in order to provide for those people who die before their time and cross over unexpectedly. It allows them to come and go until their spirit is ready to settle in its new home as it were. That's what they say anyway and isn't it the same here anyway? Your and Sara's is very strange indeed. I heard my mother say that something like that happened to her friend's cousin but I always felt that it was putting on a bit she was. Maybe it did happen alright."

The days were long at this time of the year and Frank arrived home well before sunset giving himself enough time to get his homework done for school next day. The afternoon had helped to ease his mind at least for now. Pete wasn't the only neighbour Frank,

who belonged to a large family, had assisted during his school years. Lacey's farm was the next one down the village from Pete's. It was worked by Mrs Lacey and her son, John, who was in his mid twenties. Only a few weeks back, Mrs Lacey had asked if Frank could help out for a couple of afternoons a week while her son was in hospital. Frank would stay the night and go to school from there. Her home was a two storey one with the bedrooms on the first floor and Frank's was right at the top of the stairs. The kitchen extended at right angles from the main building and had a door in the centre that opened into a yard that led to the long barn that stored and housed a number of things including a few cows in winter. After supper, Mrs Lacey waited until Frank had done his homework before showing him to his room where everything was very neatly arranged from the bowl of water and hand towel to the single bed and wardrobe like the room at his grandparents' place in Corribglen. Next to the head of the bed was a fairly large window that gave Frank views of the cobblestone yard below. Her sheep dog had already selected where he was going to sleep at the top of the stairs on the mat just outside Frank's bedroom door. Frank liked the idea as this was the first time he had stayed here and the dog and he got on very well together. Feeling rather tired after a long day, he fell into a deep sleep almost immediately.

The dog's growling and movements outside his door woke him up just after midnight and he got out of bed to check on the dog. The moment he opened the door, the dog timidly entered the room and going to the window, placed his paws on the sill to look into the yard. Frank followed and on this very calm and moon-drenched night was able to see clearly right across the yard. There was nothing there except cobblestones that shone in the moonlight. It was all so serene and pretty that Frank began to open the window but not before the dog, as if in protest, backed away and cowered to a position behind the door. Not wanting to upset the dog, he closed the window and

returned to his bed. Just then, the dog crossed the room and crawled under the bed close to the bed head. Frank sensing that the dog was getting quite nervous began to speak softly to it in as soothing a tone as possible. In the hush of the moment, the dog raised his head appearing to listen. Frank slowly moved to the window to check. He couldn't believe what he saw – three figures in single file walking towards the door from the yard to the kitchen. Paralysed with fear and arms glued to the window sill, he watched in consternation as one by one they disappeared in flash-like movements through the door which didn't seem to move. At that moment, Mrs Lacey called out as she approached reassuring him that he had nothing to fear. This happened every now and then, she explained, as the house was obviously built across an ancient pathway that is still used from time to time by people of another time. They are harmless and always mind their own business. By now the dog had regained his composure and was happy to return to the mat outside Frank's door. Thereafter, whenever Frank helped Mrs Lacey with her farm work after school, he always slept in his own bed that night.

Chapter 3

Now in his sixties and over thirty nine years in his adopted country, Frank often thinks of his birthplace and the family home in the West of Ireland. His was a farming neighbourhood with its own style of mixed farming which was labour intensive and involved everyone in the household. He grew up in a time when all the people he knew lived so much closer to the land as their ancestors had done for thousands of years. It was their very existence and everything in it they prized and revered as a natural extension of their being. They talked about it and its many faces throughout the seasons and the crops and animals and people who were all part of those many faces. Its history and rich folklore have always fascinated him because through them he was able to link with his roots and experience that feeling of family as well as that special bond with nature. Back then the form and complexion of the countryside and its ever changing patchwork design spoke of the different seasons and made one aware of nature's ability to just be itself in so many diverse and wonderful ways. This patchwork design was made all the more apparent by the large number of small fields with different crops, flora and fauna that were constantly changing in both form and colour with the seasons. On his way to and from school, Frank watched excitedly the new crops and meadows sway to the movements of the wind and the songs of the skylark and corncrake. Often almost overnight, the appearance of newly planted fields was transformed to a lush green. Observing nature quietly at work in this way was an uplifting and enjoyable experience. There was something especially soothing about the smell of newly cut hay. These were really great times especially during the long summer days.

Across the road from the family home a sloping ridge about thirty metres high ran south through the farm for a few hundred metres before dropping gently to the strath and lake beyond. For most of

spring and summer, part of the strath was host to thousands of very tall golden daffodils, home to rich wildlife. Beyond them and a short distance into the lake, there was a small island, part of the family property, where to one side stood a ring of trees and briars about four metres in diameter. The lake was a busy wildlife home welcoming and farewelling daily flocks of swans, geese, ducks, curlews, and more that crossed and crisscrossed the family farm, flights that were more audibly noticeable in the crisp winter months. All the farms in view from this ridge appeared framed by the horizon in this saucer-like physical formation. To the east a lovely ancient wood of hazel, alder, aspen, blackthorn and hawthorn trees extended for over a kilometre along the margin of the lake. Half way along this ancient wood, a short distance from the road and on a low hill stood the ruins of an old Franciscan friary which, according to Frank's father, became too small for the number of friars and was vacated in the first half of the fourteenth century for the bigger friary four miles south of there at Ross Errilly. Other reminders of times and civilisations past in the form of cairns and stone circles from the Neolithic and Bronze Age Periods, raths or ring-forts from the Early Iron Age, crannógs from Neolithic times right up to the Middle ages, as well as stone abbeys and castles from the early Medieval Period and later, were scattered across this intriguing landscape.

There was so much to love about Frank's childhood environment and the haunts that aroused his curiosity and shaped his life. The island in the lake was one of his favourites, especially the ring of trees. It reminded him of a rath or ring fort but there was something different about it. It was only later when he learnt about crannogs or lake dwellings that he realised what it was. Such dwellings provided a safe habitation for a family. To Frank it was a place so old and so beautiful, the most peaceful and calm to exist anywhere in the world. Wading across the ford to the island from the strath was quite a challenge

because of the peaty surface but the clumps of rushes aided his crossing. He would sit on the grass in the centre of the ring surrounded by trees of crab apple, alder, blackthorn, hawthorn and hazel that were joined together by a solid growth of greenbrier. Wild strawberries grew among the mosses and grasses surrounding the slabs of stone at the base of the trees and briers. There were bird nests everywhere. At one time he counted as many as 35 nests among the trees and briers including the beautifully crafted globe-shaped wren ones. Here he watched the birds build their nests, picked blackberries, sloes, haws, crab apples and strawberries. The sweet taste of the leaves of a spinach-like plant growing close by, called 'féarmilis' (sweetgrass), made the sour sloes quite palatable. He would lie back on the grass and watch the young birds take their first flight until the relaxing things he saw and dreamt lulled him to sleep during which time he experienced what he believed were the most extraordinary visions ever that conveyed him past portals to worlds unimaginable. There were nights throughout his childhood and early teenage years when Frank relived those dreams before falling asleep but had not considered discussing them with anyone as finding the words to do so was beyond him. No descriptions of his could offer the comparisons that would enable the listener to grasp a reasonable understanding of these worlds. "One day," thought Frank, aged eleven and on his way home from the Island, "I'm sure I'll be able to convey to people a feeling and sense of these extraordinary places."

The presence of the two farm dogs, his regular companions on his visits to the island and elsewhere, had to his surprise little or no effect on the behaviour of the birds and other wild life. The story, however, was different during their trips to the ancient wood where the presence of rabbits and hares as well as foxes and badgers and their system of burrows and dens and setts appealed to the dogs' hunting instinct giving them a field day. Strange though was the sudden change in

their behaviour which became noticeably subdued on approaching those areas that enclosed the ivy-hidden monks' cells and old abbey as well as the stone slab-covered burial sites close to the lake. It was called 'Kill' locally from the Irish 'Cille' meaning church.

Neighbour Pete and he had talked about the behaviour of the dogs in the wood and Pete's explanation made a lot of sense to him. According to Pete, people and dogs had the same three senses of sight, hearing and smelling but differed in the way they used them to communicate and perceive things. People communicated by hearing, seeing and then smelling while dogs communicated by smelling, seeing and hearing even though a dog's sense of hearing was significantly greater than that of people and could detect sounds that people could not. Pete also believed, having read reports in his father's possession, that dogs had a fourth sense which enabled them to sense the feelings and emotions of other beings around them. So according to Pete, it wasn't so much their being close to the monks' cells and grave sites as their sensing Frank's own feelings of respect and reverence that caused the change in their behaviour. They responded out of a sense of duty and love as his close companions. Frank thought about this and felt he was able to use this explanation for the dogs' behaviour in a number of other situations when he was accompanied by one or both of his parents.

Chapter 4

About a month into the school term after the summer vacation, the school had a visit from a representative of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, a religious order dedicated to the preparation of priests to work in New Guinea and Transvaal in Africa. His name was Father Clarkson and his mission on this occasion was to canvass support for his religious order by getting students to attend its preparatory college in Cork City. He arrived with a short list of likely candidates, one that was obviously supplied by the school principal, and Frank was one of four students interviewed and had no recollection of similar school visits by the order in the past. Neither Frank nor any of the other three students was aware of the visit and so didn't know what to expect. Father arrived accompanied by the local parish priest and, after spending some time with the principal, addressed the year 6 class before calling out the names of the four students he was going to interview. It was then that the nerves kicked in and even more so in Frank's case as he was shier than most and the first to be interviewed. Father could see this and took time to make him feel at ease by talking about school and his family and what work he did on the farm. Father's approach appealed to Frank because, in addition to the educational opportunity it provided, it gave him the chance to help his large family in a tangible way. He was presented one-to-one with a detailed description of student life at the college. He was given pictures of just about all aspects of life there, the impressive buildings themselves, the large classrooms, the dormitories, the comfortable study rooms and recreational halls, the spacious library and chapel as well as the playing fields and gardens. There were photographs of students at dinner in the refectory, at study and at play in the recreational halls and playing fields. This was all so new to Frank who until now had not thought of school beyond his local country national

school of four small classrooms and two tiny play yards, one for the girls and one for the boys. Father explained that they had two colleges, one in Cork City for first and second year students, and one in Carrignavar, seven miles north of the city, which took students through to the Leaving Certificate. It was located on a large farm of about five hundred acres. He knew this would appeal to Frank and while it didn't have a wood or an island, it had lots of trees, a large orchard and beautiful gardens as well as a long creek with dense vegetation along its banks and a fairly large weir alongside the bridge across the creek and the ruins of an old castle. Frank, so much a part of country life since birth, could readily identify with this and couldn't wait to tell his parents about the meeting.

Frank's interview concluded with a discussion of daily routines and weekend activities. He was given an information folder to take home to his parents as well as a letter from Father Clarkson which concluded by indicating when he was calling to see them to discuss those matters raised in the letter. Frank realised that his family would be as surprised as he and during the long walk home across the fields and along the road tried to work out how he would break the news of the interview to his parents. Uppermost in his mind were the likely costs involved should he decide to enrol and the impact this would have on his family of ten. He knew of no rich families in his community and few who might be able to afford such costs. He dearly wished that Father had disclosed them and he could have made up his mind there and then, but for some reason it was information Father Clarkson wanted to bring to his meeting with the family.

Frank's mother, Sara, was home alone with younger members of the family when he arrived in from school. His father was down the farm checking on crops that were about due for harvesting. Handing the folder to his mother, he went on to tell her about the priest's visit to his class and describe the interview in some detail taking time to

respond to her questions and address her concerns. Sara was very interested and keen to hear everything. “Cork is such a long way away and all, and what if you were to get hurt or sick and the family nowhere about? It’s not like at home with your own family. Sure we’ll wait till your father comes in. I know how it will bother them in Corribglen.”

Sara was referring to the loss of her two young sisters. Both girls, very bright students and talented violinists, joined an English order of nuns at fifteen years of age after a visit to their school by a representative of the order. The demands of a very harsh and rigorous convent life quickly took their toll on ones so young. Within a couple of years they had contracted tuberculosis and were asked by their superior to leave the convent. Their parents realising the inevitable were heartbroken. Their father, Michael, who had his misgivings about their joining the order in the first place, travelled alone to England to bring his daughters home. It was the saddest of journeys, according to Sara, and despite the best medical attention available, both sisters succumbed to the disease within a few years. “I’ll tell you now they are not going to like it. To this day, they have blamed themselves for allowing it in the first place. Wouldn’t this, and of that I’m certain, be the last thing they want to hear now reviving all that sadness and heartache?”

Sara assisted by one of Frank’s sisters was busy getting the table ready for the family evening meal when Pat arrived home. “Now he will tell you himself what happened at school today and all those papers and letter to us from the priest. Isn’t it calling he is to see us himself in a few weeks.”

Frank handed the folder and letter to his father as he sat down at the head of the table. After holding them up in front of him in a gesture of weighing up their significance, Pat opened the letter and began

reading it, pausing a couple of times to raise his eyes as he pondered its contents. Then placing the letter on the table, he looked at both Sara and Frank before saying calmly and softly, “I wasn’t expecting this at all and won’t he want to know how we feel about it when he calls. It does give us a few weeks to talk about it, if this is what you would like to do, Frank. I’ll say this now – don’t let anyone talk you into it if it’s not what you want. For myself, I’ll not be the one to stand in your way and you’ll have my blessing no matter what.” There was a warm smile on his face to which both Frank and his mother responded in kind.

When it came around to the meeting three weeks later, Frank and his parents had agreed on the information they needed from Father Clarkson. It was a very cordial occasion, very family in its concerns and sincerity. Frank’s concern about fees and other costs was allayed early in the peace when Father explained that his order would pay all costs involved but expected the family to cover clothing costs and train fares to and from the college at the beginning and end of the school terms. More than once throughout the meeting, Father reassured Frank’s parents that he would be well cared for and given every help and opportunity to enjoy his time there. He would contact Frank and his parents in a couple of weeks for their decision, when a number of processes would be put in place if by then Frank had decided to enrol.

June and the summer school vacation were rapidly approaching. Frank was assured of his parents’ support whatever his decision, although their understanding of his options was quite different from his own. They were happy to see him stay at home and attend like his brother the local secondary college in Ballinrobe but as the burden of the extra costs to the family, among them Frank’s attending the local secondary college, was aired more than once by Sara during the previous months, foremost in Frank’s mind was how best to help his

big family. His decision was an easy one – he would enrol in the college in Cork City.

In the week that followed, Sara raised the matter more than once of how they should break the news to his Grandparents in Corribglen. Frank could see that it worried her and agreed that they should visit Corribglen on the weekend, preferably on Sunday, and he would inform his Grandparents during his response to their greeting him on arrival. Sara was more than happy to leave it to Frank who intended to show his excitement about attending the college early in September and about the opportunity to be able to tell his Grandparents all about it. He would write to them regularly and looked forward to hearing from them.

Her parents' reaction to the news came as a great relief to Sara. She could see that, despite whatever else they were thinking, they did show their excitement and congratulated her son on his decision and very much looked forward to his progress in the years ahead. During the course of the afternoon, Frank shared the information and photos in the folder he was given by Fr Clarkson with his Grandparents and it was clear to them that it wasn't a decision reached hurriedly or under any sort of pressure from others. Sara enjoyed the trip back home considerably more than the other one earlier in the day.

Chapter 5

By the time Frank became a student at the College in Cork City, he had experienced most of the phenomena talked about by his mother. Over the next two years he was to find that while a few of the other students had similar experiences to his own none were comfortable talking about them. It was like trying to talk to the villagers back home. There was, however, a student from west County Cork, Tim Collins, who was different. He was particularly interested in Frank's story about the local parish curate. Frank explained how he had accompanied his father to the fair in Ballinrobe, a market town about ten kilometres away. He was eleven at the time and he had never forgotten the incident. He had looked forward to this day for weeks now ever since his father had said he would be taking a few bullocks to the August fair. This meant leaving the farm on foot shortly after two in the morning for the six-mile trip ahead of them. Some other farmers would be using the same road through Fountain Hill and past the parish church in Kilmaine. It was a calm moonlight night that quietly cast their shadows like giants in slow pursuit. The going was good and Speed their dog knew exactly what he had to do to keep the bullocks moving but all this changed in a flash as they drew close to the parish church. The bullocks were suddenly mere pillars by the roadside as Speed cowered like a frightened child behind Frank.

“Speed, go move the cattle!” ordered Frank as his father tried to get the bullocks going again but there was no response from the animals. Pat went ahead to see what might have made the bullocks as well as Speed to stop dead in their tracks. Frank stepped onto a rather large rock by the wall to watch, and as his Dad approached the church, Frank could see another figure standing there outside the main gate. This thought Frank surely wouldn't have worried the animals.

“What’s up, Dad?”

“It’ll be fine soon. We’ll just wait here for a while – they need a bit of a break anyway.” His father leaned on the stone wall raising his head every so often to stare in the direction of the church. Then as if on cue, the cattle sprang forward accompanied by Speed. They rushed past the Church as fast as their legs could carry them. Frank and Pat had trouble trying to keep up. As they passed the small graveyard next to the church, Frank noticed a person in black standing there talking to a small group of people close to him.

“Did you see that, Dad?”

“That I did an I’m glad it’s not just me seein’ it. There must be something troubling him alright. They say they come back if they have unfinished work like masses to be said for people particularly for the dead.” He knew how the villagers were shocked by the sudden death of the curate but it was the matter-of-fact and accepting nature of his father’s response that had further left Frank believing that this was part of the normal. He was puzzled, however, by the behaviour of the animals as neither Speed nor the bullocks could have seen the curate before stopping and refusing to budge. “Ah”, said Pat, “sure animals can sense those things and know about their presence long before humans can. They react to the sound.”

“What sound? I didn’t hear any sound. In fact, everything was so quiet and still at the time.”

“They say only the animals can hear it then and aren’t they much better at hearin’ than us an’ I know that for certain, more so dogs. Sure my own parents used to swear by it. It’s quare isn’t it that you know about these things and yet feel a biteen uncomfortable.”

“But what about the other people with the curate?” asks Frank.
“Where did they come from?”

“From the same place I suppose.”

“But what brought them back and in different dress? They looked nothing like us.”

“They’re probably from a long time ago an’ wanted to accompany him back, the first time anyway. They’re probably used to comin’ an goin’,” remarked his father.

Frank had often thought about this comment and had discussed it with Tim who had heard of similar occurrences from his uncle and who had never seen them as really extraordinary any more than Frank himself.

Sunday afternoon from half past two until five was free library time. The library was a popular part of the college and was well stocked with books on many subjects. As their English teacher, Father Murphy, had arranged for them to attend a stage production of Shakespeare’s “As You Like It”, Frank planned to spend part of this time reading the play and getting to know the characters. This was his very first Shakespearean play and though the language seemed strange he found the plot straightforward enough. Having selected a comfortable corner of the room that overlooked the oval and Lee River, he was hoping to finish it on time in order to check out a book Tim had referred to the previous afternoon in their conversation on other worlds. Tim and Frank agreed that this was a different thing altogether from what most people mean when they refer to an afterlife as, for example, when Father Nolan talked about life everlasting after death. It was in fact more like what his father and he had talked about at length on that long trip from Mayo to Cork City back on the 9th September 1950. It came into their conversation when Frank said that he would miss being able to attend the fairs anymore. His father was happier to talk about it now. The presence of the parish curate outside the church and minutes later in the graveyard in the company of others

was just one of the many happenings they talked about that clearly pointed to the existence of at least another world if not other worlds.

There were lots of things about the trip that would stay with Frank for the rest of his life. While his father and he talked about the Fear Gorta (Man or Phantom of Hunger), Frank wondered how many of the fields they were passing on their trip south had it. Whenever he was on his way home with his mother from his grandparents' place in Corribglen, she used to point out those fields along the way said to have it and how other fields now free of it could get it at any time. If in crossing them you were to get the Fear Gorta, you would get so terribly hungry that you could hardly move. This explained why his mother, Sara, carried some bread in her bag to fight the Fear Gorta should it strike. Having seen what happened to them both once when hit by it while crossing Ted Murphy's long field on their way home from Corribglen was more than enough to convince him of its existence. To have been so instantaneously gripped by hunger was something he would never forget. Any doubts he had about the Fear Gorta were certainly put to rest by this experience. According to his father, its explanation was somewhere to be found in the memory, genetic or otherwise, of the Great Famine and the other famines to ravish the country.

It was a long trip and who better thought Frank to have with him to explain things than his father. Though in his sixties now, Frank can still recall the occasion as if it were yesterday. It was 9.30 in the morning on the 9 September 1950, and Frank was due to take his first train ride ever from Hollymount Railway Station all the way south to Cork City. Their first stop was Claremorris where they changed trains for Limerick going through stations like Tuam, Athenry, Gort and Ennis. In Limerick, they changed again for Cork City stopping at such stations as Patrick's Well, Croom, Charleville, Mallow and Blarney. There were in fact thirty two stations in all and everything associated

with them was new to Frank. This strange and exciting world of chuffing trains, and all those people coming and going not to mention the activity associated with the loading and unloading of tons of produce and other goods at station after station certainly took him by surprise, but it was in marked contrast to another world equally new whose images have traced themselves on his memory never to be erased. He has never forgotten the sadness associated with just about every platform and station along the way. Everyone seemed to be dressed in black as if it wasn't sombre enough thought Frank with parents and other family members trying to touch for the last time their teenage daughters and sons and young brothers and sisters as the train pulled away from the platform for the long trip south to Cove, the last port of call before the Americas. Frank can still read those faces and the story is still the same, the desperation, the sense of hopelessness, the severing and indeed the loss.

Chapter 6

As Frank and his class boarded the bus to attend the Abbey Players' presentation of "As You Like It" at the Palace Theatre, he never expected the occasion to have such lasting effects on his life. Frank was glad he had taken the time to read the play beforehand and was curious to see what it was like on stage. He knew very little about Shakespeare or any other playwright for that matter but had enjoyed the plays he had attended at his local school back in Mayo, as well as his class's recent production of a one act play in which he had played a part. Every aspect of this romantic comedy fascinated him from the beautiful Rosalind and Phebe to the colourful Forest of Arden. It was so different from the plays he had attended with his family at the local primary school during the long winter nights. He was a fan of Shakespeare for life and that was that, but there were other forces at work that afternoon precipitated by a chance meeting with another student attending the production. There was something captivating about her manner and the confident way she spoke about the play. In the months that followed, he recalled more than once their meeting and thought how nice it would have been if they had more time together.

The College in Western Road was beautifully located in the angle created by the division of the Lee River. Across the road were the impressive Mardyke Sports and Recreational Grounds stretching for more than a kilometre along the banks of the Lee River. Frank's dormitory looked across the River Lee to the City Baths and the Capuchin Friary, a strict and autonomous branch of the Franciscan Order. Two things about the Friars are etched on the memory of surely every student to have slept in that dormitory. On the dot every quarter of an hour throughout the twenty four hours of every day seven days a

week, the Friary bell tolled loudly and mercilessly ensuring an ongoing state of wakefulness in all for miles around. This was a far cry from the peace and quiet of the Mayo countryside. Then on the dot of eight morning after morning, a procession of friars in their distinctive hooded garb and buckled sandals filed past in pairs along Western Road that for precision could only be matched by a disciplined unit of the best marines. They were on their way to University College Cork and come hail, rain or snow the picture was always the same. If numbers meant anything, pondered Frank, they certainly had them to be a force within the university.

No sports carnivals were conducted at Western Road. Instead, the students were transported by bus to the Carrignavar College, about twelve kilometres north of the city, once a year for the big event. This was where the shy and rather sensitive Frank wanted to be and September 1952 couldn't come fast enough. Set among trees and surrounded by beautiful gardens and creeks as well as the ruins of an old castle, the college was located on a five hundred acre property that seemed to have everything. Its land was equal to the best in Europe and worked accordingly by an experienced farm staff. For those like Frank born and reared on a farm, they couldn't have wished for a better or more idyllic place with a variety of walks along lanes to different parts of the farm, plenty of animals, creeks and ponds and lots of colour and excellent playing fields.

There was something very charming about the old building with its winding wooden staircases and wide corridors and large wooden doors and spacious rooms. It whispered the grandeur and elegance of times past and whenever Frank or one of his classmates moved between rooms, it seemed right and proper to do so slowly and quietly and to acknowledge the approach of a fellow student with a nod of the head. It was, however, a very different story in the recreational

quarters where the variety of games available was matched only by the interests and competitiveness of the participants.

All students were expected to participate in team sports and, for a small college, its record in county competitions was second to none. The same could also be said for athletics. As a matter of fact, Frank was the leading athlete in both the Junior and Senior Colleges. It was during their first athletics carnival after moving to Carrignavar in 1952 that Frank, to his pleasant surprise, met once again the young lady he had met briefly at “As You Like It” the previous year in Cork. This time she was accompanied by her parents. The family lived locally and like other families from the district had come along to spend a few hours at the carnival. Aoife introduced Frank to her parents as if she had known him for years, explaining how they had met and that he was a farmer’s son from County Mayo. Frank’s was amazed at how she had recalled, among others things, the name of his local town of Shrule. From the start, Frank felt comfortable in their presence and it was immediately obvious to him why Aoife possessed such a very warm and friendly personality. With a rather cute air of authority and lots of confidence, she reminded her father that Frank was probably a descendent of Turlough Mor O’Conor, King of Connacht and High King of Ireland in the twelfth century. It seemed so easy and indeed pleasant to be able to share their company. Before long, however, he was accepting her parents’ invitation to join the family the following Sunday for dinner. Mr Clifford would pick him up before noon after calling and arranging it with the Director of Studies.

For Frank, Sunday couldn’t come fast enough and he was amazed at how much he looked forward to joining the Clifford family for dinner. His fellow students, particularly those from his part of the country, said how lucky he was to be invited out as it was rare to be visited by either family or friends from so far away. Those students from Cork and the surrounding counties were luckier in this regard. He

wanted to write and tell his own parents about it but he would wait until after Sunday.

Mr Clifford or Rob, as he preferred to be called, arrived on the dot of eleven in his new Chevrolet. To Frank it was the most beautiful of cars gliding over the surface of the road like some magical machine across calm waters. Rob could sense Frank's excitement and suggested that they should go for a drive, perhaps as far as Blarney, later in the afternoon. To Frank this was a great idea as he didn't have to report back until 8.00pm. Mr Clifford was interested in the college and they talked about many aspects of life there from the curriculum to sport, fitness and relaxation. He had met from time to time, a number of Frank's teachers all of whom were missionaries of the Sacred Heart Religious Order. Frank was beginning to relax and feel quite comfortable as they appeared to have more and more in common than was obvious at their first meeting where Aoife was doing most of the talking. Frank wondered if Aoife had any sisters and brothers and was about to enquire but his attention took another shift as the car moved slowly along a tree-flanked driveway so cathedral-like in appearance that its self-induced silence allowed one to savour the moment. The college had its share of beautiful avenues that held a certain fascination for him but this one was different. Its beauty was at once both haunting and rather sacred accentuated by the more thoughtful movement towards the unknown. Frank could feel the quiet of the moment as the majestic building ahead drew closer and closer. He had seen some buildings like it before but none so beautiful and so well attended to except castles like the one at Cong back home in Mayo. Surely it was the residence of a member of the landed gentry thought Frank. He had seen and heard about such eighteen century homes with their large rooms and wonderful gardens.

No sooner had he opened the door of the car than he was ever so warmly greeted and welcomed by Aoife and her mother. It was almost

too much for Frank to comprehend and amid the excitement, but not before expressing his joy at being there, Frank remarked on the quality of the evergreen hedge to the right with its sculptured forms that seemed to stand guard to what lay within.

“Well, perhaps we should all take a stroll in the garden,” exclaimed Mrs Clifford. I can’t think of a more pleasant moment in this brilliant sunshine.”

As they were about to walk through the arched entrance to the garden, Mr Clifford stepped back saying that he would arrange for refreshments to be brought out to the Ballylee. Mrs Clifford thought it was a lovely idea and thanked him before continuing through the entrance accompanied by Aoife and Frank who was trying to recall where he had heard the name Ballylee before. For now though there was just so much to see as Aoife explained how the garden itself comprised a number of smaller gardens each created around a theme from Irish literature and folklore. The senses were immediately arrested by an abundance of appeal from an explosion of colour and gently evocative aromas to babbling streams, sparkling waterfalls and nestling ponds. All this was so wonderful. Until now, Frank had no idea what to expect beyond a visit to a country home. He had already met the Clifford family and felt comfortable with them. He was experiencing and enjoying that same feeling now as they strolled through the garden. Aoife and her mother enjoyed pointing out and explaining many of the garden’s features and the part they played in their design. Frank was already convinced that the Cliffords were among the loveliest people that he had the pleasure of meeting. They all got on well together and were obviously very talented. The next statue to come into view enjoyed a special place of prominence in its sun-drenched bower. It was the statue of Cuchulainn and his hound which prompted Aoife to remind Frank that her mother was named Eimear after the wife of this legendary Gaelic hero. Both Aoife and

Mrs Clifford were delighted if not somewhat surprised to hear Frank explain his interest in Irish folklore and how it was one of his main interests. From that moment, Mrs Clifford insisted that Frank call her Eimear as it was less formal, she remarked, and more homely.

A number of the shrubs and trees except the giant oak and elm trees were cleverly presented as sculptures of local fauna with a pair of giant bloodhounds standing silently at the entrance to each garden. As they made their way slowly from garden to garden, there was an ever increasing suffusion of colour and sound from sinuous streams and babbling waterfalls that flowed into pond after pond alive with the ducking and dashing of duckling to the amusement of a pair of swans that seemed more tame than wild. Frank was thinking of how he had never been in a garden to equal this one, not even the Botanical Gardens in Cork City a short distance along the Mardyke from their college there. As Frank's reckoning would have it, they were now about to enter garden number six which Aoife called the Island. The lush ivy-bedecked enclosed stone bridge beckoned their way. This was Ballylee and here sat Mr Clifford with refreshments as planned in the shade of a miniature Norman tower with cottage attached alongside a stream and close to the bridge. Suddenly, it clicked. Frank had seen photos of the real Thoor Ballylee in County Galway which had been the summer home of William Butler Yeats and his family for a number of years earlier in the century. This one was modelled on it and like the other garden features was equally impressive in its attention to detail. There they rested chatting about the garden and how it was conceived as the rolling waters from the bridge gently passed them by.

The Ballylee was only a short distance from the house. Without Frank's realising it, they had come nearly full circle in their stroll through the garden. The large trees across the stream had hidden the home from view. In response to Frank's curiosity, the family spoke

freely about the garden and their own efforts as well as those of a small army of artisans in its development. Aoife who had taken leave a little earlier returned to announce that dinner was ready and so the party in tune with the surroundings slowly retired from this pleasure retreat.

Chapter 7

At the top of the steps to the portico, they paused briefly to take in the view across the creek up to the woods some two kilometres away. Rob had walked ahead in order to open the two large oak doors that gave way to a large, long hallway with a number of side doors and works of art both traditional and new. Towards the end of the hallway, they walked through a doorway on the right that led to the dining room. Frank had no reason to believe that today's dinner should be any different from that of other Sundays. Yet he couldn't help thinking how he had never experienced anything like it before, not even at Christmas time. This was elaborate dining by any standards and the occasion a very cheerful and chatty one. Sport, schooling, courses and syllabi and entertainment, all featured and Frank was convinced that both Rob and Eimear knew a lot more about these things than most parents their age. By the end of dinner, the Clifford family was quite well acquainted with Frank's background and family. He had spoken enthusiastically about his family and school years back home as well as how he had come to be a student in Cork. It wasn't so much to questions or promptings from his hosts but to general remarks and comments on such topics of conversation as farming, sport, schools and so on. It all seemed so natural in the circumstances and Frank was enjoying the relaxed atmosphere of the occasion. Appreciating Frank's interest in games, Rob recommended they visit the games room and try their hand at a couple of games of snooker but not before adjourning to the sitting room for coffee or, as in Frank's case, tea. Eimear said she had a few things to attend to and would join them a little later.

The sitting room presented Frank with a plethora of discussion pieces. Special paintings and family portraits were all there as part of

the visual history of this obviously very important family. There were paintings of the Clifford family home at Leap in West Cork and of Eimear's Costello family home just outside the township of Youghal in East Cork. Frank could see that the Cliffords were middle class farmers used to living in large homes on big holdings, one of few no doubt in West Cork. The Costello home though impressive was more modest. Eimear's people were successful importers with centres in Youghal and Cork City. On the west wall hung three portraits of Rob's family, his parents and his uncle. Across the room on the other wall were ones of Eimear and Rob and a recent one of Aoife. There were quite a few photos of the three of them together and a number of individual ones of Aoife. Frank was now satisfied that she was their only issue.

Realising that her father had turned his attention to the Sunday papers on the coffee table, Aoife invited Frank to her favourite room in the house, the family library. It was located at the end of the hallway and commanded spectacular views of the countryside. Not until now had Frank seen so many books and maps in the one room. It was easy to see why Aoife had made it her favourite part of the house because, apart from the lore of knowledge it housed like some extraordinary brain, it was spacious and bright and comfortably furnished making it very cosy. Frank was thinking that if he had a room like this, it too would be his favourite. The graduation photos and certificates in one corner of the library took Frank's attention. Alongside were some special citations and trophies. Whatever information he was unable to glean from them was supplied by Aoife. Frank felt her parents were important people but didn't realise until now how important. Rob was a mathematician at University College Cork. He had graduated with first class honours from Trinity College Dublin and held a doctorate from Yale which Aoife explained was a big university in America. He had received a special citation, which looked

extremely impressive to Frank, for his contribution to science where according to Aoife he had worked on a special project with leading scientists from around the world. The two golfing trophies were from his days at Yale. Eimear had also graduated from Trinity where she and Rob had met as undergraduates and now worked as a neurologist and psychiatrist in Cork City. She was still a keen sportsperson as her tennis trophies showed and was a member of the North Mon, a fashionable tennis club in the city. Aoife seemed to know a lot about the club and had already begun to stake her claim to this part of the library. Next to the other trophies were a couple belonging to Aoife as a junior member of the tennis club.

As the minutes passed, Frank, though not really aware of it at the time, was being given insights into the Clifford family that would occupy his attention in the years ahead and much of it in a rather perplexing sort of way. The longer Frank and Aoife's visit to the library became, the more extraordinary to Frank was Aoife's knowledge as she referred to different subjects, and it was a lot more than could be expected from the usual familiarity one gains from constant access to the family library. Though Frank was not without intelligence himself and his interests could be said to encompass a broad spectrum of subjects, he could be excused in the circumstances for feeling somewhat inadequate but this was not so. As they moved slowly from one part of the library to the next, it was the matter of fact way in which Aoife spoke about even complex topics that made Frank feel good to be part of it. He was enjoying his visit and particularly so Aoife's company.

"We'll catch up on the snooker another day," said Rob as Frank expressed his gratitude for their kind hospitality and very pleasant late afternoon drive to Blarney. As he made his way up the stairs to the College study, he was thinking of what to say to his classmates about his outing with the Cliffords and as he approached the door made up

his mind not to describe it as anything different from an outing with any other family. In this way he thought to himself, they would be less curious about his future visits there. While he was not too keen on the 'Silence at All Times' rule applying in the study, this was one occasion when he sure appreciated it. After a casual wave to some of his friends, he sat down at his desk and commenced reviewing preparations for upcoming classes. If only he had some inkling of what this outing had set in motion where the rest of his life was concerned!

There were six other students in the dormitory with Frank and they were all eager to hear about the outing as they called it. Frank talked briefly about the family and where they worked always referring to Rob and Eimear as Mr and Mrs Clifford. His description of the garden interested them and they wanted to hear all about it as well as what Aoife and he talked about when together. Frank lay awake thinking about the afternoon long after the others had gone asleep and asking himself over and over again the same question, 'How did Aoife acquire such knowledge?' With little knowledge of physics as it was not one of the subjects in the College curriculum, it all seemed so advanced to him particularly her comments on the achievements of renowned quantum physicists as well as her explanation of her mother's work as a neurologist and psychiatrist. There was nothing in Aoife's demeanour to suggest that she was trying to impress. With all this occupying his mind, it was some time before he slowly surrendered to sleep.

His second visit to the Cliffords was at the beginning of November and was organised as usual to ensure Frank had met his commitments to both his studies and sport as most competition fixtures took place on Sunday. It had just turned twelve noon when Eimear and Aoife drove up to the College entrance where Frank had been waiting briefly. Although he had tried to hide it, Aoife could sense that Frank

was surprised to see them and so wasted no time in telling him that her father was attending a scientific convention in Boston. They both knew a lot about the convention including the names of many of the scientists attending and the institutions they represented. Rob would be away for another five weeks as he had a number of meetings to attend among them one at Yale. There was something very engaging about Eimear and Aoife in both the manner of their speech and the way they greeted him. Their attitude towards each other and towards life generally was to Frank uplifting and refreshing and he felt good to be with them.

In marked contrast to his other outing there, it was cold and wet with no prospect of outdoor activities. The big open fire in the sitting room took care of that, however, as they relaxed to its warmth while they chatted about some of the latest developments in home entertainment triggered by Frank's curiosity in a box-like object perched on a stand to the side of the fireplace. Gramophones and radios he knew about but the idea of television was totally foreign to him. As they moved to the dining room half an hour later, Frank was quietly grappling with this new invention and the concepts explained to him so much so that the excitement carried over to the dinner table. Here too was something different – a large impressive landscape painting above the marble mantelpiece. Frank was interested in art and took an instant liking to this painting. He loved the subject as well as the arresting blend of colours and light and believed it beautifully complemented the ethos of this fine home and its surroundings. It was no real surprise as it seemed so much in character to learn that it was one of a couple of landscapes finished by Eimear a few weeks earlier. Eimear agreed to Aoife's suggestion of a visit to her mother's gallery on the first floor after dinner but not before enjoying a fresh cup of tea in the sitting room.

It was indeed an afternoon of surprises that had begun with Eimear and Aoife's turning up at the college to take Frank to their home for the afternoon. Eimear's gallery spoke so wonderfully of the beauty of the creative spirit that had captured life in its fullness and essence. Frank recalled how he had enjoyed the art appreciation course that was part of his second year curriculum but his knowledge of art was limited to an introduction to the different art forms and masters. If Yeats and Hopkins were his favourite poets, Eimear Clifford was now his favourite artist, and if Yeats and Hopkins stood where he now stood, they too would have been so moved and inspired by all that life and beauty and colour. Frank was so captivated by Eimear's art that he worried he might talk about it when he was back among his classmates. As they were leaving the gallery to visit, on Eimear's suggestion, Aoife's study further along the corridor, Aoife pointed out the three paintings that were being collected by the National Art Gallery in Dublin the following day.

It was a study of rare design and sorts that evoked moods and feelings that were themselves so rare if not unique. Frank couldn't believe his eyes or comprehend what it was they tried to convey to him. How could anyone as young as Aoife have obtained a Bachelor of Science Degree with Honours? Yet the certificate and photos there in front of him told their own story as he gazed again and again at the photos of Aoife in academic dress standing between her proud parents on graduation day. Noticing Frank's preoccupation with the certificates and photos, Eimear explained that come June Aoife would be completing her Arts Degree and part of her Masters in Science.

"How can this be so?" enquired Frank. "Aoife is only seventeen!" He had neither read nor heard where this had ever occurred to anyone.

Eimear seemed to pause briefly before responding. “Our daughter is a very special young lady blessed with extraordinary ability”, she said almost in a whisper. Then went on to add, “I’m sure Aoife would like to talk to you about it and how she made it all happen for her.”

It all just didn’t add up for Frank. Education as far as he was concerned consisted of a specified number of years in primary school, followed by a specified number of years in secondary school or college, as in his case, not to mention the years it would take to qualify for a degree at university. Thinking almost aloud to himself, he moved towards the other end of the room where Aoife, who had emerged from an alcove to the left of the room, had begun to rearrange some paintings that were obviously not her mother’s thought Frank though equally captivating and striking in their exuberant use of colour. Aoife was interested to hear what Frank made of the paintings as she canvassed his immediate reaction to them. Frank tried to explain that while there was little in the style or the subject, for that matter, that he could identify with, he was still drawn to the paintings by their evocative quality that for him at this stage had to do with ideas and feelings that were both deep and bold. As if to save Frank from having to explain further, Aoife remarked, “This is what I had expected. You’re a sensitive person more interested than most in finding out the reasons behind events and happenings. It is not so much curiosity as a desire to find the logic in things as well as the true reason for their being. In this, Frank, you and I have a lot in common.”

Aoife’s remark had taken Frank by surprise as he had disclosed very little about himself or even intimated his interests or hobbies other than sport and folklore. This brief description fitted Frank’s character and he knew it; and so for the first time he began to feel rather uncomfortable, though not for long as Aoife addressed his concerns as if, thought Frank, she knew what he was thinking and introduced him

to a number of her companions as she called them. There were books everywhere spilling out from the alcove to tables and shelves and bookcases around the room. Frank had never seen so many books on such subjects as science, mathematics, history and philosophy. Mathematics and history were among his favourite subjects and for the first time he now regretted that his college didn't offer science as a subject. But before he had time to convey his feeling to Aoife, she again surprised him with her explanation that the college mission as a clerical college determined the curriculum offered to its students which in his case was classically based. With that Aoife invited Frank to browse through the new books on her desk while she retired briefly to the kitchen to prepare some afternoon refreshments as their cook had been given the day off to visit her parents in Cork City.

As Aoife left the room, Frank's attention was taken by a rather large and very colourfully covered book on her desk. Alongside the book rested what Aoife later called a spray can with a press button and valve. Out of curiosity, Frank pressed the button a few times releasing some spray that had a mild and pleasant odour to it before sitting down at the desk. He pushed the can aside and began to browse this book first. Its subject matter concerned the many constellations in the heavens, a subject that had always fascinated him. What he would give to have a book like this. Then to a gentle tapping on his shoulder, he was again aware of Aoife's presence and her friendly smile and look of reassurance.

"I must have fallen asleep," apologised Frank "and into this deep dream that seemed to last forever."

"There's no need to apologise as I know what you mean," whispered Aoife.

"But how could she know," thought Frank to himself. "It was just like back home on the island". Looking straight at Aoife, he exclaims,

“Extraordinary is the only way I can describe it – an extraordinary place so hard to describe and all those unusual sounds and colours. What a strange thing to dream!”

Aoife looked at the spray can briefly and, as if about to say something, reached out and returned it to the cabinet behind her desk. Frank hadn't seen a can like it before and compared it to the much larger spray tank used by his father when spraying potato crops against blight, a spray tank that was operated by a manual pump. Aoife explained that the can was called a spray or aerosol can and was pressurised by liquefied gas which gave the can propellant features that forced its payload of liquid through a valve thereby creating an aerosol mist of liquid particles whenever the valve was opened. This can, she added, belonged to her mother.

Again, she expressed her interest in his dream and suggested that he record the experience in as much detail as possible and they would discuss it on his next visit. She then invited him to accompany her to the living room for afternoon refreshments with her mother. At first, Frank thought that this was Aoife's way of dismissing it and he felt sorry if not rather silly for mentioning it. Then he had second thoughts about how he felt. He convinced himself that she was way above this sort of behaviour and anyway possessed the curiosity to want to know. Yes, he believed she meant it and so he would do what she had suggested.

Chapter 8

For days after returning to the college, Frank thought and mused about his time in Aoife's study. By now his mind was so full of what happened that he had little room for anything else. Every so often, he added to his description amazed that he had experienced so much in the short while that Aoife was in the kitchen. It was all so real and clear like his island dreams back home and unlike his other dreams that seemed to fade away shortly after waking. He thought again of what Aoife had said and wondered what she meant by "I know what you mean". How could she know what he meant without his providing the details or could she perhaps? After all, she is a very bright person clever beyond her years as everything about him suggests. Who knows what she can do or think or even see? At that moment a thought entered his mind. He would spend part of his Sunday afternoon in the library reading up on any reported cases of very bright young people. As there was next to nothing on the subject, later that day in the Study, he decided to broach this topic with Tim who suggested he approach big Father Jim, their English teacher, who also lectured in Philosophy at University College Cork. Father Jim was a bigger than life character, always very cheerful and approachable. In no time at all, things began to fall into place. On Wednesday afternoon, sports afternoon at the College, Father Jim lectured at the university. The coming Wednesday, he would take Frank with him to the university where he could spend a few hours in the library researching this fascinating subject. Frank was thrilled at the idea and Wednesday couldn't come fast enough.

The drive to the university took about three quarters of an hour. Fr Jim was as interesting as ever as he recounted the history of places along the way. His students liked him and very much appreciated his kindness and understanding. He had also met the Clifford family at

College functions and as he indicated to Frank was aware of their connection with the university. Frank felt that he could talk to him in confidence about the Cliffords and could already detect Fr Jim's interest in what he was researching. As they entered the library, Frank stood to the side as Fr Jim spoke to one of the librarians on duty. Minutes later, Frank was introduced to Hanna, the assistant librarian, who escorted him to the reference section where they both selected a number of titles for Frank to record before fetching them from the shelves. All of his references were in the Psychology Section and this was one subject that until now was outside his field of learning. Consequently, he collected a few more books from the shelves than planned as books on the elements of psychology and the meaning of dreams had suggested their usefulness to his inquiry. Frank had acquired effective research skills that were at once intuitive and perceptive as well as being aided by keenness of intellect. Though rather quiet and reserved by nature, he was confidently communicative when warranted. On their way to the university, he had articulated his plan for the afternoon to Fr Jim who was so impressed that he had already decided to lend his support where possible. When he was rejoined by Fr Jim in the library a few hours later, he was well on his way to some of the answers. His enthusiasm was obvious as he expressed his gratitude to Fr for offering to borrow a few of the books stacked next to him on the desk. As he had already noted the main elements of psychology with more copious notes on 'Intelligence (The Measurement of Intelligence and Mental Abilities)' and 'Perception', he selected for further investigation Hollingworth's "Children above 180 IQ, Stanford Binet", Terman and Cox's "Genetic Studies of Genius: The Early Mental Traits of 300 Geniuses" and Freud's "The Interpretation of Dreams". On the way home to Carrignavar, he talked about the ideas in his notes with Fr Jim whose comments he found very helpful. He also explained why he had borrowed Sigmund

Freud's book on dreams and offered to share his research with Fr Jim whose comments he welcomed and appreciated.

Christmas had come and gone since Frank last visit and Lent wasn't very far away. His parents were very happy for him and were aware of how much it all meant to him to have such an interesting family as the Cliffords in his life. His few weeks at home in Mayo for Christmas had given him all the time he needed to talk to his family about the Cliffords, to describe their home, the farmstead and gardens, as well as their interests and professions. His descriptions lacked nothing in enthusiasm and detail and it meant a lot to him to see his own family so interested and so happy for him to have met such a wonderful family.

It would be almost nine weeks till Frank's met the Cliffords again in January 1953 as the family was away overseas for most of this period. This had given him time to do a lot more reading and gather his ideas. He accessed the latest information on the characteristics of highly intelligent and gifted people and familiarised himself with the development and use of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test and Intelligence Quotient or IQ. His research led to his developing a set of twelve characteristics for the purpose of describing comparatively one's ability. These characteristics he tabulated giving each four levels or degrees that corresponded to average, superior, very superior and exceptional. For a time then, his study room became his laboratory while he profiled each of his classmates according to this set of characteristics and levels. The student who was given, for example, six average levels, five superior and one very superior was deemed superior or the student who was given six average and six superior was deemed superior, and so on. Fr Jim was more than happy to supervise the project and offered his opinion whenever Frank had doubts about the level to use for a particular classmate. When finally completed, Fr Jim who had an opportunity to study it closely

was very impressed and heaped praise on Frank for what he called a very notable body of profiles. They discussed at some length a few of the profiles and agreed that it would be a very interesting exercise to see how the profiles stood up against the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test. Fr knew a couple of the lecturers in the Education Department at the University and would invite them to the college to administer the IQ test. Frank, who for days was wondering how he might bring this about, returned to his study brimming with excitement.

Those were great days for Frank. He was into something very challenging and interesting and wasn't going to let go. All the time in the back of his mind was the question of Aoife and her achievements. He was hoping that those nine weeks would help him in this regard enabling him to understand and indeed fully appreciate one so bright. Occasionally, he would review his description of the dream he had in Aoife's study and there was always something he had forgotten to include. He found nothing in Freud's book on dreams that might shed some light on his dream and now realised how much he was going to enjoy discussing it with Aoife when they next met.

Fr Jim arrived for the 3 o'clock English lesson on Thursday afternoon accompanied by two lecturers from the university who were going to administer the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test. After the prescribed explanation and description, the class completed the test and, when the visitors had left, spent the last part of the lesson chatting about it and discussing it with Fr Jim. It was obvious that the novelty of this type of test held a certain fascination for many of the students. Frank, however, was very excited about the prospect of doing a comparison or correlation between the profiles and test scores and was hoping to be able to achieve this before his next meeting with the Cliffords. Later that afternoon Fr Jim called him in to explain his undertaking to the test administrators and the reasons for this. The IQ results for the class would be made available to Fr Jim but were not to

be copied or passed on to anyone else. They were not to be disclosed to the class as a group or discussed with the class. Those students who wished to discuss their results would need to make an appointment with Fr Jim who was advised to use general comments such as 'scored well' or 'scored very well' without disclosing the actual results as this was against test protocol. When Fr finished, Frank expressed his satisfaction with this arrangement and couldn't see how it should be otherwise. He was delighted when Fr offered to do the correlation between the results and the profiles by his indicating the number of students in each category and whether in fact those students were the same or close to those so profiled by Frank. On this basis he would determine the correlation between the two descriptors – the profile and the test. Frank was hoping to have the results before the Easter break but that was not to be as Fr Jim was away in Brussels attending the European Convention of the MSC Order. On the first Sunday of the term after Easter, Fr visited Frank in the library with his notes on correlation between the two descriptors. They retired to the music room adjacent to the library to discuss the correlation and both were surprised at how high it was. If they were hoping for an excellent result, this was it and the best in fact. Frank was beside himself with joy and satisfaction with the rewards of all that reading and research over the previous months. Fr too was excited and generous in his praise of Frank's enthusiasm and the manner in which he handled the project. He was delighted to have been involved and would now pass the results on to the men from the university. Frank was very happy with this idea and with Fr Jim for making it all happen. They both agreed that Fr should retain ownership of this information; after all, he was the director of studies at the college.

Chapter 9

Returning to his set of characteristics for the highly intelligent and gifted, and given the high correlation where his own class was concerned, Frank now felt confident about developing an accurate profile of Aoife. He thought a lot about it as he relived and analysed his earlier meetings with the family. Irrespective of how he applied his observations to this set of characteristics, Aoife was there and there comfortably within the highest level. He was certain that she was gifted and indeed exceptionally so. He told himself that he would no longer worry about what she said or how she said it because it was obviously her way of seeing things that set her apart. With only two days to go before his next outing, and his feeling that somehow he knew her better, he began to believe that it would end up being even more meaningful and satisfying. He was excited as before but this time for different reasons that cast him in a state of mind that was a lot more receptive to what he saw and heard.

When Frank met Aoife and her parents at the end of January, Eimear had organised an afternoon out in the city. The drive took longer than usual because the weather was stormy and bitterly cold but they had so much to talk about. Frank's visit home to Mayo for Christmas and their own trip overseas occupied most of the drive. Among other things, Aoife and Frank discussed their studies. Both had important exams in a matter of months, Aoife's a couple of weeks before Frank's. They welcomed the warmth of the open fire during lunch before attending a matinee screening of the musical romantic comedy "Singin' in the Rain" at a cinema close by. Since hearing Eimear's plans for the afternoon, Frank was excited and curious to know what the film was all about. It sounded appropriate for this type of afternoon and he would have so much to tell his classmates. It was a genre he had not previously experienced and he loved it. Aoife and

her parents agreed that it was easily the best they had ever seen and would love to see it again. Eimear had acquired a copy of the programme which she handed Frank to take with him. This was going to be a great help with his classmates. Before parting, they arranged to meet again on the second Sunday in March.

His classmates were all in the study with the class Prefect in charge. A couple of the students asked the Prefect if they could chat quietly with Frank about his afternoon out. The college rule of silence applied at all times to the study and in order to avoid too much movement about the room and also to enable others to have this opportunity, the Prefect gave permission for Frank to quietly chat to them about the afternoon. With "Singin' in the Rain" foremost in his mind and programme in hand, he began by saying that he had just attended the most entertaining film he had ever seen. Holding up the programme, he showed photos of the actors and actresses while briefly explaining their roles in the film and indeed the audience's reactions to them. By the time he finished, they all knew it was a fantastically funny story told by great characters through entertaining narrative, wonderful music and songs and spectacular dancing. They all wanted to see it and see it they did after convincing Fr Jim that he should take the class to see it. There was no one more pleased than Frank when Fr Jim informed the class of the arrangements.

The second Sunday in March 1953 had arrived and the slow and leisurely drive along the narrow winding road to the avenue leading up to their stately home as well as the warmth and welcome of Rob's greeting set the mood for a very enjoyable afternoon. He was greeted and welcomed by Eimear and Aoife like a treasured and loved member of the family as they made their way to the living room. During the course of enjoying specially prepared refreshments, they talked about so many things, including his progress at the college. Frank also wanted to know what they had been up to since they last

spoke, taking them somewhat by surprise, but appreciated nonetheless, and they quickly warmed to it. There was a maturity, a curiosity and a confidence in Frank's manner that they liked. He was a lot surer of himself now and of his opinions and judgements. They liked what they saw.

Aoife and Frank took a stroll in the garden before dinner. Spring was everywhere with new foliage dressing the trees and shrubs all around and daffodils in full bloom along their path. Across the way, the local farmers had tilled the fields and there was a freshness and vitality in the air, and they both shared in the exuberance. Aoife's hair was longer now and softly flowed in the gentle breeze among the trees with her bright floral dress in harmony with the mood of spring. This was the first time he had touched and held her hand in this way as they walked towards the bower feeling very happy to be together again and enjoying this moment alone. Aoife hadn't forgotten Frank's dream, as he called it, but would wait until they were together after dinner before making any reference to it. For now, she was content to chat about what had happened in their lives in the period they were apart.

Back inside, Aoife introduced Frank to her aunt from Kinsale as they were about to take their place at the table for what was one of the most sumptuous and delightful dinners Frank had experienced. It was a very animated and cheerful occasion from the start. Rob had read in the local paper of the college's successes in the recent Cork City Festival and was keen to hear about them from Frank. Eimear's sister, Aideen, was a national school teacher whose students had also performed at the festival. Frank had attended local festivals back home in Mayo but this one was different. As part of a cycle involving a number of cities, it was considerably more inclusive and comprehensive, taking place over a two week period. The college choir, comprising Frank's class and the senior class, took out two

awards in the religious and folk divisions of the choral section. This being the first time that they had performed publicly in competition with a number of larger colleges, they were delighted with the outcome and proud of their achievement. “But that wasn’t our only success,” explained Frank. A number of students including Frank himself participated in the speech and drama section. All up, they won four other awards. Frank did a reading for one of them from one of his favourite books, “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”, the very humorous and satirical “Hamlet’s Soliloquy” in chapter twenty one. Not unlike Huck who had learned it while the Duke was prancing up and down the raft learning to be king, he had learned it while preparing the reading for the competition and recited it to the great amusement of the party.

Having retired to Aoife’s study after tea in the sitting room, Frank was eager to hear what she had to say after reading his notes on the dream he had when there previously. Her immediate response wasn’t what he had expected. “Just about as I would have done it myself!” she exclaimed, and reaching into a drawer in the side of her desk, she withdrew a couple of pages and handed them to Frank. He couldn’t believe his eyes as he continued to read, realising now what Aoife meant by “I know exactly what you mean” when he first told her about his dream. With his hands rather more extended now and body moving inquisitively, his amazement was all too obvious. His eyes slowly turned from the text to Aoife, and he whispered, “How come? How can this be?” The reassuring look and smile seemed to say to him that there was an answer and he was about to hear it. He couldn’t wait but tried hard to maintain his composure. “You feel you crossed over to....” and before she had time to finish, Frank voiced, “Not again but this was very different!” She continued and he listened acknowledging quietly to himself that her explanation was different from that of his neighbour, Pete O’Brien, and very technical. They

talked at length about his earlier experiences with his father, about his mother and their trips together to Corribglen and about Pete O'Brien and Mrs Lacey. Frank had begun to feel that the riddle was unwinding at last, and was eager for the discussion and explanations to continue except that they had been in the study for nearly three hours. Now it was time to join the rest of the family for some refreshments before being driven back to the college. The discussion he was assured would not end here and he was very happy to hear Aoife's suggestion that they must meet again soon and perhaps he could stay with the family for a few days at the end of the term before returning home to Mayo for the long summer vacation. There was so much to talk about and so much to learn thought Frank and who better to help him acquire this knowledge than Aoife.

Eimear and Aoife drove Frank back to the college and as he was thanking them for a lovely afternoon, Eimear handed him two rather large cardboard boxes from the boot of the car. She had been busy baking with the help of the family cook and had added some chocolates that he could share with his classmates. Frank was ever so surprised and grateful saying how much this would be appreciated by the students. Cakes and chocolates, and for that matter such delights as sweets and fruits, were not part of the college menu and so all this would come as a real treat. There were four large fruit cakes and a wonderful assortment of chocolates. He gave the cakes to the kitchen staff to cut up and place on the dining room tables during tea the following evening. In that way, all forty two students would be able to enjoy them. The chocolates he would distribute himself when all were together in the study after sport on Wednesday afternoon. It was a good feeling being able to do this for his fellow students. He would drop the Cliffords a letter to say how much they all had enjoyed the cakes and chocolates and to express their sincere thanks and add that

the students wanted him to tell Mrs Clifford that she must be a great cook.

Chapter 10

By the time Frank had delivered the cakes to the kitchen and placed the chocolates in the compartment under his desk in the study, it was 5.30 and time to join the other students in the college chapel for evening prayers which were followed by supper in the refectory just across the hallway. A recreational period followed until 7 o'clock at which time the students returned to the study to work on assignments or attend to private study. Frank's mind was working feverishly going over and over again his time with Aoife and how it had already changed his perspective on life. Things would never be the same again as she had handed him the key to much of his past. He was very excited but tried hard to conceal it by engaging instead in mock study or as a poem he had recently studied in class put it: “.. mine eye / Fixed with mock study on my swimming book”. The sound of the low bell at 9.30 was their call to night prayer, and ten minutes later Frank was slowly climbing the stairs to his dormitory to retire for the night.

Sleep did not come easily. Though Aoife had made difficult concepts and theories easy to follow and understand, Frank went over and over in his mind their discussion of his experiences, including the last one, in the context of the most recent papers and theories on other dimensions, parallel universes and quantum mechanics. He could appreciate the difference between parallel universes in the quantum mechanical sense and other dimensions. Their laws of nature as we know them are different as are time itself and the speeds of sound and light. They are seen as parallel because as reported there is no way of reaching them or so he thought, but most other dimensions are not parallel. He was determined, however, to hold on to as many of the concepts as possible and revised them many times in his mind trying to visualise them as best he could. He thought about the description

he gave Aoife that matched her own of a world where the only forms were sounds and colours and the pace so fast as to border on the frenetic. The larger forms moved in pulsating circles and the others in all shapes imaginable. The energy was palpable. The order was significant. Like arrows, the circles released sounds and shafts of colours that came together to form new shapes that took their place in a zigzag array of activity, all within the realms of what resembled a kaleidoscopic landscape. The only resemblance, according to Frank, between this and his world of every day was space and plenty of it.

Frank had read many books on the lives of the saints and was familiar, where some of them were concerned, with reports of their miraculous bilocation or their ability to be present in two different places simultaneously. He had previously wondered if there were any similarities between that state and what he had experienced. He now knew this not to be the case as his mind revisited the finer points of Aoife's explanations and responses to his questions. She accepted his neighbour Pete's description of other dimensions and how they cross one another but not his idea of breaches or cross-overs to another dimension or world as such. As she pointed out, Frank didn't leave the desk he was sitting at in her study and what he experienced was like some great dream. The confidence and familiarity with which she conveyed her ideas made them seem statements of fact rather than theories. Everyone, she maintained and explained, has a second state of consciousness within their general consciousness. "Think of it this way," she continued. "Take a perfectly formed avocado and there in the centre is a large seed. Think of the fruit as one consciousness and the seed as another. Now this set of two, an outer and inner consciousness, is not something that people are aware of but it can come into play in certain circumstances. As Frank thought about those circumstances, he became convinced of the importance of situation in creating or providing an atmosphere that was at once

conducive to the inner consciousness moving outside into another dimension and new experience. In most instances, the action was quite instantaneous but certainly not always. The same thing could occur in the rarest of cases by a self-induced state of acute awareness which allowed the inner consciousness to travel outside its own world.

Aoife explained how it was in fact the situation and not a particular location that was conducive to the inner consciousness exploring other dimensions and parallel worlds. She rejected Pete O'Brien's idea of breaches and cross-overs. On a number of occasions, her inner consciousness when mentally predisposed had explored other dimensions without her leaving, for example, her study. "All are unique, Frank, and as different from one another as the one you experienced is from our world. As you said yourself, the only thing they had in common was space, but I feel we should perhaps add movement, sound and colour though these qualities are apparent within a different form of conceptualisation. In other circumstances, however, it could be argued that it was the nature of these qualities that helped to set them apart from our world and from one another."

This all made sense to Frank and he began to discuss what it was that might have predisposed his mind leading his inner consciousness travelling outside to explore in part this other dimension. Aoife, recalling that she had invited him to browse through the books on her desk while she prepared some refreshments in the kitchen, asked what it was that he was doing not forgetting his releasing some spray from the can on the desk. He was, he said, very impressed by all the new books but one in particular because of its size and very colourful cover, grabbed his attention and so he decided to sit and browse this one first. He remembered feeling very relaxed and contented. Then the big surprise when he opened the book to realise it was about the many constellations in the heavens, something that had always fascinated him. As he wondered what it would be like to have a book

like this, his mind set its own course through the pages and beyond until he was awoken or so he thought by Aoife's gently tapping on his shoulder. Both Aoife and Frank were satisfied that the circumstances had come about in this situation to create the necessary predisposition of mind and consciousness. Aoife then added that the spray had played a role in the process but would wait until she had discussed it with her mother before explaining to Frank.

As they retired from Aoife's study, Frank was wondering why the consciousness left behind, as it were, didn't maintain awareness of its surroundings while the other consciousness was visiting another world. In other words, why wasn't he aware that he was in her study during the course of his dreaming or visiting another universe? Aoife's explanation was both logical and simple. "The situation really determines which consciousness is dominant at any particular time," she commented. "This I will explain in some detail later but suffice it to say for now that the membrane receptor protein in the nerve cells in the brain is activated by a neurotransmitter and this allows cells to communicate with one another through chemical signals. The type of communication taking place at any one time determines which consciousness is dominant. Under normal circumstances, our general consciousness is nearly always the dominant one."

He remembered how he had believed what had taken place in the children's burial place alongside the ruins of the old church to be somehow different until Aoife pointed out otherwise. She had explained how, as his mother and he walked along the road together, the state of mind they shared because of their deep feelings on the subject of those children as they approached the children's cemetery created, through chemical changes in the brain, the situation ideal for the inner consciousness to become dominant and travel outside to explore the relevant dimension or parallel world. This in terms of how it happened was no different from his experience in her study except

that in the study the spray he inhaled had caused the chemical changes required. As the inner consciousness leaves to travel outside, a moment of awareness of its entering another world can occur and this explains how he had come to see that bright fog-like mist descend upon his mother like some delicate membrane expanding to also include him. His experience at Lacey's, she had explained, was different. People who have died and are now part of another existence or world that's more dimensional than ours visit our world quite frequently for whatever reason. Unlike us, they are not bound by our laws of nature and this explains why the figures he saw at Lacey's had passed through the locked door and opposite wall.

There was a lot for Frank to reason, and while he still held a number of concerns, particularly in relation to his visits to the family island in the lake, he was glad to have relived an important part of his afternoon with Aoife and so slowly slipped away into a deep and timely sleep.

Chapter 11

The signs of spring were everywhere and nowhere better than on the College farm from the beautiful gardens to the large enclosed orchard along the main laneway and further still to the acres of tulips cultivated by Hajo, a native of East Frisia. Hajo had leased a few acres from the College where he cultivated different types of flowers throughout the year, using large glasshouses during the colder months. These were very cosy places to visit with their large stoves fuelled day and night to maintain the ideal temperature for the flowers. Frank and his friend, Colm, got to know Hajo well and would visit him from time to time during their after-supper walks along the laneway that led to the northern end of the farm. As they stepped over the stile, the field of tulips appeared at their feet like a gigantic stippled canvas at the same time as the babbling brook chattered more loudly on its merry way along the eastern side of the orchard and past the ruins of the old McCarthy castle to the right of the College. They had been given permission by Fr Jim to extend their break by half an hour on those occasions when Hajo was very busy. More often than not, he was working in his packaging shed and they were able to help out by preparing and arranging the boxes. He was quick to show his appreciation as well as a hearty welcome whenever they called. The longer evenings of spring and early summer were ideal for those leisurely walks and so they got to visit Hajo more often. He was always very busy at this time of the year and looked forward to both their company and help. When it was about time for them to return to the College, he would insist on sharing a bottle of pink lemonade and some cakes or chocolates. He could see how much they both enjoyed this and had more than once thanked Fr Jim, the Director

of Studies at the College, for allowing them to help with the packaging.

Frank and Colm had been friends since first meeting at the College nearly three years earlier and really enjoyed their chats during those walks. They were both excellent students and sportsmen and as Frank well knew Colm was the brightest in the class. His own student profile had placed Colm in the very superior level and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test had, he was sure, confirmed this. While they had talked in a general way about his outings with the Cliffords, Frank now felt they should discuss in some detail his recent meeting with Aoife. He knew that Colm would be very interested and that he could confide in him. He had already discussed it with Fr Jim who, though very understanding and keeping an open mind on such things, still maintained that the answers were perhaps more straightforward and less complicated. Their discussions were always very frank and Fr believed that Frank was more than capable of coping with the situation but felt that if the Provincial was to hear about it he might advise against any further meetings out of concern for Frank's welfare. Frank thought about this and was pleased that Fr Jim had no problem with it. In fact during their meeting, Fr had remarked that Frank was uniquely suited to observing and studying such occurrences because of his past experiences, his level-headedness and willingness to look into them further. This added to his confidence as he prepared to confide in Colm who, as they slowly walked along the laneway, listened intently as Frank related the events of the previous Sunday afternoon. Over the next few days, he heard all about the Cliffords from their training, interests, professions and travels to their special achievements. He was very impressed and considered Frank very lucky to have made their acquaintances. Aoife's rapid progress through her studies fascinated him and he

wanted to know how it had come about. He thought long and hard about her theories, accepting that extraordinary things occur and that sometime in the future how and why they occur will be worked out and known but for now they remain a mystery. Frank was glad to hear him say this and explained how he wanted to find out more about Aoife's world in the hope of gaining insight into how she saw her world and thought about life generally.

Frank's reading and research skills were improving by the day. This was apparent in the way he went about his studies. In fact, his whole attitude and approach to learning underwent a significant change. There was a lot more structure and purpose to it that led to greater efficiency through better recall and comprehension. He found he had more time to engage in those studies that really interested him that were not part of the College curriculum. Learning was foremost in his mind. He loved it and seized every opportunity to advance it. The processes involved in learning were of great interest to him. He set his mind on reading extensively in psychology, philosophy and logic. He was intent on learning about the brain and the nervous system and all those factors impacting on them. As it so happened, Fr Jim had come to a special arrangement with the University Library where it agreed to become a lending library to the College. Catalogues of available books were set up in the College library to the delight of the students and to none more so than Frank.

Chapter 12

With less than a couple of months to the Intermediate Certificate, Frank and a few of the other students were spending more of their free time in the library attending to their studies. It was a very relaxing and comfortable centre overlooking the old McCarthy stone castle and the large fields rising up from the brook beyond. The centre was shared by both students and staff and so it was not unusual to see the Provincial Superior or the Director of Studies there. Apart from the main section with its five metre high ceiling and large windows emphasising natural light and large spaces, there were a few side reading rooms which proved ideal for private study or, as quite often was the case, whenever Seamus MacSweeney, a local garda, called to entertain the students with his readings and recitations. Seamus had a great love of literature and the students looked forward to his visits as they enjoyed his readings and recitations especially those from his own and from Brendan Behan's plays.

To Frank and his friend, Tom Gannon, also from the West, Mayo was so remote how could anyone expect a visitor from so far away. So you can imagine Frank's surprise when the librarian whispered, "Your Dad is waiting to see you in the front reading room." That look of disbelief on Frank's face - surely he had mistaken him for somebody else! That was all he could think about as he made his way to the room, instantly giving way to a great rush of excitement on seeing his father. They embraced in silence before any greetings were uttered and then sat together at a small table in the centre of the room where they chatted for about half an hour before the invitation arrived to afternoon tea in the visitors' room. The recent good weather had led to earlier than expected completion of tasks back on the farm and so Frank's mother, Sara, had suggested to her husband to take a few

days off to visit their son in Carrignavar. Pat seized the opportunity knowing that it would probably be his only chance ever to see their son in his new college.

On their way to the visitors' room, they met Fr Jim who was delighted to meet Frank's father having heard so many wonderful things about him. But the feeling was mutual where Pat was concerned as he felt that they had already met through Frank's letters. They walked together to the visitors' room while Fr Jim in his praises made Pat ever so proud of his son. It was one of the happiest moments in Frank's college life and one he would revisit many times in the years that followed. Upon approaching the room, Fr Jim took his leave but not before responding to Frank's request to ask Tom Gannon to join them. Fr promised to see them again later that afternoon. For now, they were left alone to enjoy their afternoon tea together as they talked, among other things, about their families and other folk back home. Frank and Tom had come from different national schools in the same parish but their families were acquainted. They were excited to see that the two large parcels on the side table were presents from their families and were happy that the other students would be able to share in some small way in their good fortune.

Frank's father was staying at Carraig House in the village until Monday morning when he would return to Cork's Glanmire Road Station to catch a train back to the West. This gave them the best part of two days together, and indeed time to call on the Clifford family. Sara had packed a special piece of Castlebar crystal for the occasion. It was, she felt, the least she could do in return for their kindness to her son. Fr Jim returned with the news that he had already arranged for Frank to phone the Clifford family at 4.00 before taking his father on a tour of the college, its gardens and as much of the outer grounds as time permitted before dark. The magnificence of this eighteenth century mansion with its impressive wooden staircases, and wide

corridors and splendid hallways transported Pat back to his childhood and an era of country estates long gone. After walking the College avenues and across many of its cultivated fields and pastures that grazed large herds of cattle, Pat, himself a good judge of land, was very impressed as again he looked forward to experiencing on the following day all that another eighteenth century country mansion had in store for him.

Chapter 13

Frank's father was very friendly and quietly spoken. Strangers warmed to him so readily and his infectious and compelling good nature. Frank hasn't ever forgotten Pat's remarks to both Aoife and her father, Rob, as they all settled into their seats for the drive to the Clifford home. "Aoife – there sure isn't that a lovely name, and a fine young lady you are with it for sure too!" And turning towards Rob continued, "And you're a fine looking man yourself and what a fine car you have 'n' all." Before they had time to pass through the outer gates of the college, they were all like the best of friends meeting after a long absence. Frank was delighted and couldn't imagine it any different.

Eimear and Pat hit it off from the start. Just about everything Pat saw and heard drew a comparison from his experiences back home in Mayo. As they were about to complete their tour of the gardens, Pat in raising his gaze from a very colourful rose bed asks, "Did you happen to meet Brannock himself at all from Kilkeeran? Well he had the finest of gardens – some say the best in Mayo if not all Ireland. Sure fine they were right enough now but I say this and I mean it – they wouldn't be a patch on your gardens, Mrs. Sure Brannock himself if he was here right now would agree. Ah, he was a real decent man and herself was indeed a lovely, quiet woman. That he was and a major in the Old IRA too, and later still in charge of our Blue Shirt battalion in Cong itself which included my own company. Sure they're lovely indeed, Mrs, and isn't it glad I am right enough to have seen them with you."

It was easy to see that the Clifford family were enjoying the company of this man from the West. Lunch proved a pleasantly long, enthusiastic and enjoyable occasion as they visited Cork's special place in their country's struggle for freedom. One of Cork's favourite sons, Michael Collins, was Pat's favourite hero and patriot and he took

great joy and satisfaction from their shared stories and comments. Pat himself was second to none when it came to storytelling as his life from early childhood was one of deeds and stories of family, neighbours and friends in the history of the West. His gregarious nature determined the tempo of his stories and even the more serious parts always had their humorous side. Rob, lacking nothing in storytelling himself, was certainly enjoying the occasion and a short time after lunch invited Pat on a stroll of the estate. Frank was expecting to accompany Aoife to her study or perhaps the garden but she had other plans. They would spend the time Pat and Rob were away in the family laboratory which she said was in the basement directly below her study. It was set up by her mother some four years earlier as an essential part of her research program. Aoife was glad to hear earlier that morning when they were discussing the visit that her mother would accompany them.

Frank didn't know what to expect as he had never really seen a laboratory, something Aoife would have already realised. To him, laboratories were scientific centres where very qualified people carried out research through test regimes. The walk to the laboratory took them through a large oak door at the top of the stairs. Aoife unlocked and then relocked the door after them before continuing down the stairs to a short corridor that took them to a similar door secured by two large locks. By now, Frank's initial curiosity had become fuelled by suspense as he listened to Eimear's comments on the need for security. The door was unlocked and Frank stepped aside in order to follow Aoife and Eimear into the laboratory. It was like nothing he had ever imagined and could be likened to entering a big colourful chamber all fitted out with things new and strange to him. This thought Frank was his Aladdin's cave. Bright and colourful charts and detailed diagrams decorated the walls. On stands close to certain charts stood a couple of full-body, life-size skeleton models facing a

large cabinet with glass doors behind which stood among other things five skeletons of the brain. These skeletons varied in size and had colour coded markings and lines all over them. An adjoining cabinet displayed skeletons of different sections of the brain and other parts of the body. Spaced along the room as far as the office at the other end were what Aoife called four work stations each with its own desk, filing cabinet, bench and special equipment. Frank could see that Aoife enjoyed explaining the parts and function of the equipment located in the work stations and elsewhere in the laboratory. Here were small glass cabinets with equipment such as thermometres, crucibles, an assortment of clamps, funnels, masks, goggles, flasks, vials, small scales, forceps and many more, and indeed enough for Frank to be able to remember for now.

Along the wall across the room from each work station was a large bench. On one stood what reminded Frank of the milk separating machine back on the family farm. It was the latest centrifuge as explained by Eimear, and while there are similarities between the two machines, this one was more sophisticated as apparent from her description. It was when they came to the next machines on the bench that Frank regretted not having formally studied science and in particular chemistry. He listened with great interest as Aoife explained how fibre analysis machines cover a range of analytical processes. "They are used to determine the properties of products such as chemical composition, colour, morphology, and so on. Animal feed, for example, can be analysed for nutrients and key minerals, our food for its digestible and non-digestible components. For example, too much fibre in our food can cause digestive problems and not enough can cause irregularities." Moving to the next machine, Eimear remarked, "This one is the latest available and is mainly used for protein and nitrogen measurements. Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins and nitrogen is an essential component of all living

things. The fertilisers used by farmers like your father and others across this country contain nitrogen, and components of nitrogen like TNT are used in explosives.”

It was then that Frank noticed a number of boxes with markings that indicated they had come from either Peru or Brazil. The box, alongside a machine Aoife called an extractor, was open and full of vines and plant fibres. Frank wanted to know what the imported material was used for and so Eimear commented that the substance or liquid extracted from this material was used in her research to further her understanding of the brain and human mind. When they had more time, she would be more than happy to talk about her research with him. Perhaps he would like to spend a week with them before he returned to Mayo for the summer vacation. This all sounded great to Frank and he would raise it with his father.

On the other benches and as pointed out by Aoife, were a couple of microscopes bigger than the ones at two of the workstations, a heating stand and a small furnace, a fume hood, graduated cylinders, scales and sets of weights, and an autoclave. Between two of the benches were two large gas cylinders and a refrigerator and to the left of the door to the office a large bookcase with a collection of reference books on the sciences. Aoife took a few moments to point out the latest additions to the collection briefly referring to their content before Eimear suggested that they should start making their way back to the sitting room. On the way, Frank conveyed how much the visit meant to him and how he understood the obvious need for confidentiality in all matters to do with the laboratory, as Aoife had told him of her family’s involvement in research for a an important organisation.

Chapter 14

Carraig House was a short distance from the college. After the farewells, it was to here that Rob drove Pat and Frank where he joined them for a glass of ale while they arranged how best Frank could travel home after his week with the Cliffords. Frank knew that his father was glad to have spent some time with the family and could be relied upon to tell Sara all about it the moment he arrived back home. After Rob had left, Pat and Frank moved to a private corner of the lounge as they had so much to talk about, including that first train journey south together almost three years earlier that seemed to take on more and more significance with time itself. Later in the evening, they strolled back to the college, quietly aware of how much the weekend had meant to them. Tom Gannon had arranged to meet them in the waiting room and was keen to hear about their outing to the Clifford homestead. Frank could see how much Tom was enjoying Pat's description which wasn't without its moments of exaggeration. Then they met Fr Jim briefly who in his usual kind way accompanied Frank to the Study to join the other students after he had farewelled his father who was catching the train at Cork's Glanmire Road Station first thing in the morning.

The unexpected visit by his father as well as his meeting the Cliffords was the loveliest surprise ever and engaged more than a fair share of Frank's time in the coming days. With the Intermediate Certificate exams fast approaching, he realised the need to focus his attention more and more on his studies. There was no way he would allow his other interests and diversions to be seen to have any impact on his studies and exam results; and so he vowed to study hard and be in the best possible position to achieve the results he desired. He wouldn't be seeing the Cliffords again until after his exams which were

due to conclude at the end of the third week in June. Tom and he had always travelled home to Mayo together but had the company of other classmates as far as Tuam in County Galway. This train trip together was something they both enjoyed and would miss not being together on this occasion. He must now waste no time in telling Tom of his upcoming stay with the Cliffords.

A couple of days before the exams were due to commence, the students were transferred to the college in Western Road by the River Lee in Cork City as its First and Second Year students had already gone home for the summer vacation. It was within walking distance of the examination centre at the North Mon (Monastery) as it was called. It was a lovely time of the year with the long and warm sunny days. All the gardens were in full bloom and Frank and his classmates were looking forward to their walks to and from the centre along the Mardyke playing facilities and past the botanical gardens. They set off together in pairs at 8.30 every morning and returned most days at 4 in the afternoon. On the weekend, they took time off to travel down town to the shops along Patrick's Street and attend a screening of "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms" at the Capitol Cinema. Occasionally, Frank would think about the train trip home to the West with Tom and the other students and how he was going to miss not being with them this time.

With the exams behind them, they all enjoyed the party-like atmosphere of their get-together on the Sunday evening for dinner before heading home next morning for the summer vacation. It was all in marked contrast to their meeting for dinner during the year when silence was maintained for most of the time. Some of the students, as well as most of their teachers present were the recipients of very apt and good-natured awards created by the students themselves and always accompanied by entertaining and very humorous comments.

All this as well as the group singing and individual performances on the piano guaranteed a very enjoyable end to the school year.

It was early but the sun was already high in the sky as the days were long so close to the equinox. Frank, who had earlier in the morning written to his parents to tell them that he would be catching the morning train to the west the following Monday, saw most of the other students off before Rob arrived to take him back to the Clifford residence which was going to be his home for the next seven days. Clearly, they were both excited and after a very warm handshake and welcome Rob wasted no time in telling him how much they were all looking forward to his stay. Frank was feeling really good about it all and whatever apprehension he felt earlier was quickly dissipating. He hadn't felt as free and relaxed since back home on the farm and settled back to enjoy the drive through the city and out into countryside to Carrignavar. They discussed the exams and a number of other subjects with lively interest which Frank later put down to Rob's ability to quietly inspire enthusiasm in others. Aoife and her mother Eimear couldn't have been more welcoming and were delighted to see him again. They would all have a wonderful week together but for now Eimear and Rob had work commitments in the city, Eimear at both her medical practice and the university and Rob at the university.

The days were warm and sunny for a few weeks now but this was the loveliest yet and Aoife had planned a picnic for herself and Frank. With the help of her mother, she had already packed the picnic basket before Frank arrived and had selected a rather remote and sheltered location down by the creek on the northern end of the property, known to the family for its number of willows and rich variety of tall rhododendrons which should be in full bloom at this time of the year. It was her favourite location on the property and felt that Frank would like it too. They set off just before noon, Frank carrying the basket and Aoife the rug which her mother had bought earlier in the year on her

visit to Dublin. Its rich colours and flowing designs had appealed to her. The sounds of early summer were all around them as they casually strolled along the narrow laneway that led past the family orchard to a large meadow. The tall colourful hedges punctuated by the wild honeysuckle randomly rising above them flowed along the laneway in a tangle of lush growth emitting a stream of sound from the insect world above which could be heard the mating calls of the corncrake interposed among the flute-like calls of the cuckoo and the sharp joyful songs of the skylark. They crossed the meadow feeling the gentle waves rolling across the whispering grasses and paused to enjoy the wildflowers along the headland that took them to wide open spaces where grazed a large herd of cattle. Their world of sound was now joined by the distant sounds of rushing waters and the sweet smells and songs of summer were everywhere. All the way down to the creek was a garden of wild daisies and golden cowslips and purple freesias and buttercups and more. In this soothing and joyful atmosphere of colours and sweet aromas, they paused to pick some daisies which they carefully made into a chain by passing each flower through a hole in the stalk until its head came to the opening and all were joined together to form a beautiful and delicate necklace which Frank gently placed around Aoife's neck. At that moment, a deer that had emerged from the trees to graze at the edge of the meadow raised its head to look at them before retreating silently to look out through the trees as they walked hand in hand towards the creek.

The rhododendrons and alders, as well as the willows and aspens that partly shaded the opposite side of the creek and its sparkling pool, were all in their most splendid summer beauty. Aoife was delighted and began to unroll the rug over the soft grass at the foot of a large body of rhododendrons and next to where Frank, savouring the great energy and joy of the moment, had rested the basket. As they lay together under the warm blue sky with its silky clouds drifting slowly

by, they felt in harmony with the freedom and beauty about them connecting with nature as never before. It was like being alone together in the garden of the Palace of Peace and adding to the loveliness of this world was the special meaning of their first picnic luncheon together. The splashing water from the stream that dropped into the pool from between the alders attracted their presence and soon they were feeling the freshness of its coolness on their skin. They felt drawn more and more together by the beautiful forces around them. This would be their special initiation, their new summer in life's long journey. Every now and then, they rested against a large branch that lay across the end of the pool, one that had dropped from the alder on the sloping embankment. In a mood without equal, created by the meeting of true love and the excitement of its joy and wonder, they returned to the rug which they closely wrapped as one around them delighting in the tranquillity and tenderness of their new summer. It was an afternoon together like none other.

Arm in arm, their walk back to the house was clothed in the beauty of the afternoon, all so carefree and wonderful as if the laneway itself was rising up so joyfully to meet them. It was such a special time in their lives and both Aoife and Frank were quietly aware of this, the harmony and beauty and love of the occasion like a sacred garment woven about them as if in acknowledgement of their presence at this moment in time.

Eimear and Rob arrived home a little later than expected and had just enough time to freshen up for dinner. Frank, who was busy reading the daily newspaper in the living room while Aoife liaised with the cook, was joined by Aoife and her parents just before dinner, all sharing the excitement of being together again. Eimear and Rob were now on summer vacation from the university for some ten weeks but Eimear would be returning to her medical practice in three weeks. For now, both were keen to hear about the picnic and how they had

enjoyed their time together by the creek. Frank had not ever seen Aoife like this with so much joy and excitement in her description of the afternoon and this would certainly have been the case with her parents. They had seen their daughter get excited about things before from moments in her studies to ones in sport but never like this. Here nature and the richness of its beauty that surrounded her only a short time before found a voice that was so compelling and indeed enchanting to the great excitement of her parents, all making for a very enjoyable dinner together.

Chapter 15

Next morning after breakfast, Aoife and Frank joined Eimear in the laboratory where she had been for some time with a number of tests already in progress. To Frank's surprise, Aoife, as if on cue, instantly became involved like clockwork with the progress of the experiments. Eimear and she were now busy observing, adjusting and noting results while communicating in what seemed like another language as they added details to the documents spaced out neatly on two of the workstations, among them worksheets and tables that already contained lots of data and comments. Frank was very much the observer noting the changes in the laboratory since his previous visit. The boxes of twigs and plant fibres were no longer in view and he wondered if Eimear would recall her promise to talk about their use in her research into matters of the human mind. Just then, the skeletons of the brain in the glass cabinet seemed to beckon him but before he had time to reach the cabinet, he was invited by Aoife to join her to discuss what she was doing in the tests and why. He was able to observe the steps and processes involved and discuss their outcomes with both Aoife and her mother so much so that as they finalised the current set of tests, he was now aware of the nature and extent of Eimear's contractual agreements with regards to animal feed and in particular to cow feed.

A session in the lab rarely exceeded three hours and commenced as soon as possible after breakfast particularly during vacation breaks. At other times, it had to fit in with Eimear's medical practice and university commitments. Like a student anxiously awaiting exam results, Frank watched every move Eimear made as they packed the equipment and data away in the hope that she would make some reference to her other research and the role the material from South America played in it. He didn't have to wait very long before she

directed his attention to three small bottle and a couple of aerosol cans securely locked away in a small white cupboard in the office at the end of the lab and to a small wooden box alongside the cupboard. This she explained was the product of the material he had seen in the boxes from South America during his last visit and which had raised his curiosity, given they had come from so far away.

“The material in the boxes you saw”, Eimear remarked, “came from the Amazon Rainforest. Some of the boxes were packed with the stem of a particular plant known as the ayahausca vine. The other boxes contained leaves from the chacruna plant. Both are local names from the Quechua language of the local Indian people.

“These plants are collected from the jungle by the native religious priests and boiled to create a potent drink which plays a very important role in the traditional spiritual medicine of that part of the world. This medicine is called ayahuasca and is different from other sacred medicines in that it’s made from two plants and drunk only by the priests in healing ceremonies among the natives of the Amazon basin. In the Upper Peruvian Amazon, the Shipibo culture is committed to maintaining not only its art and sacred plant medicine but also its traditional language. In fact, its ayahuasca healers are said to be the most highly skilled in the Upper Amazon.”

Frank was keen to know why it was drunk by only the priests and thought initially that it must have been some type of alcoholic beverage and a very strong one at that. He had little or no knowledge of drugs. Back home on the farm, an illness, physical or mental, was left to time to heal and when time alone was finding it a challenge, there were plenty of home-made remedies to come to its support. The word ‘hallucination’ he had come across but not the word ‘hallucinogen’ until Aoife explained that it was a drug that caused hallucinations and changed brain functions. “Ayahuasca when drunk by the Indian priests

of the Amazon basin gave their inner consciousness access to the worlds beyond their imagination, ones external to their own, worlds of spirits, spiritual advisers and healers as well as the most amazing visions, thoughts and feelings the likes they could not ever experience otherwise. Such drinks or substances are today called psychoactive drugs or hallucinogens.”

Eimear continued, “I had better explain a few things about this extraordinary brew before saying what use is made of it by the Indian medicine men or priests. I say extraordinary because there are tens of thousands of plant species in the Amazon Rainforest and how the priests learned to combine these two plants to produce this very special brew is a mystery. It contains the very powerful hallucinogen called dimethyltryptamine or DMT for short. Of the two plants involved, it is the chacruna plant that contains DMT but by itself it remains inactive when drunk because of an enzyme in the stomach called monoamine oxidase or MAO. Now where the ayahuasca plant becomes important is in its chemical properties. It contains inhibitors to the stomach enzyme MAO thereby allowing DMT to become active. Ayahuasca when drunk is carried by the blood to the brain, where it triggers powerful visionary experiences and enables access to other dimensions or worlds and their wisdom. It is not drunk by the patients. It is limited to the chief medicine men or priests who in their religious and healing ceremonies use it as a diagnostic tool to determine the causes of their patients’ illnesses or troubles and prescribe treatment by directing other plant-spirit healers to administer the relevant plant remedies. It is also used to ask the spirit advisers in those alien worlds for advice on all types of problems both personal and tribal.”

Eimear went on to explain how DMT is to be found just about everywhere. “It exists throughout the plant and animal kingdoms and is part of the makeup of humans and other mammals as well marine animals, plants and grasses and so on. Though potent, it is

chemically a simple and rather small molecule which of course is the simplest unit of a chemical compound that can exist, consisting of two or more atoms held together by what we call chemical bonds.”

“How is it”, asks Frank, “that our DMT doesn’t have the same effect on our inner consciousness as that drunk by the Indian healers?”

“That’s because it’s inactive or should I say mainly inactive as a few of us think some is produced by the pineal gland in the centre of the brain where it quite possibly becomes the vehicle of our dreams and nightmares.

“As you know, I’m a neurologist or at least that’s how I began my professional career, and neurology is the study of anatomy, physiology and diseases of the nervous system such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and sciatica. Though I share a practice in the city, most of my time is spent leading and coordinating two small teams of scientists with one researching treatments of diseases of the nervous system and the other treatments of mental disorders, health conditions that change one’s behaviour, the way one thinks, feels and acts so that one has difficulty in functioning. This is where we are hoping that ayahuasca may be of assistance in effecting beneficial changes in behaviour as it is non-addictive and appears to have no adverse side effects. I have patients who suffer from severe trauma that haunts them daily. I have one very young man who was injured in the Korean War in December 1950 and who is having terrible problems. We are hoping that ayahuasca will unlock, as it were, his subconscious allowing us to bring the traumatic experiences that have caused his problems into the conscious mind so that we have a chance to neutralise them. For over ten years now, most of my work is in brain disorders which include mental illnesses and nervous system diseases like epilepsy and multiple sclerosis that are also brain disorders,

though neurological rather than mental. So that explains the number of brain skeletons here in the cupboards as well as the bottles and cans of DMT.”

“What’s the difference between the two forms?” enquired Frank.

“The DMT in the bottles is injected directly into the system whereas that in the cans has been synthesised into crystalline form and can be inhaled. We are currently organising our first test which will use this form of ingestion; but now it’s time for lunch and afterwards some more relaxing activities before dinner.”

Frank could hardly contain himself. “This is all so interesting and exciting! I’m so grateful and so glad you invited me to stay; I can’t thank you all enough.

“I have learnt quite a lot about the brain and the glandular and nervous systems from diagrams and commentaries in the psychology books borrowed as part of the college’s arrangements with the University. You mention the pineal gland – I have come across a few brief references to it, mainly historical including the seventeenth century French philosopher René Descartes’ thoughts on it.”

As they made their way along the corridor, Aoife, gently leaning her hand on his shoulder, whispered, “It’s a beautiful afternoon for a stroll down by the creek after lunch and plenty of sunshine for a game of tennis later this evening?”

“That sounds grand,” responded Frank, “but I’m afraid it will be a case of the teacher and student in the tennis as my first game was less than a year ago, the time we moved to Carrignavar. It’s a great game and I’m really looking forward to it”

In his moments alone before lunch, he thought about his experience of flashbacks to times on the island back home on the farm

during Eimear's story and explanation of ayahuasca. What could have caused the flashbacks and could there possibly be a connection? The more he milled the whole situation around in his head, the more his focus was drawn to DMT and what he ate on the island. The realisation that this was possibly the connection excited him but he would wait until he was alone with Aoife in her study before raising it.

Chapter 16

Their stroll to the creek followed a different path this time along the southern end of a large vegetable garden that reminded Frank of the family one back home. This was a special garden prepared and planted towards the end of winter and early spring to provide vegetables for spring and summer. Supplies for autumn and winter were planted later in fields elsewhere on the farm. Frank was keen to visit the garden which was well secured from the hares and the rabbits whose burrows dotted the embankments down by the creek. It was like an exciting rush of richness to the opening of the gate. Here all was in abundance, the horn of plenty, with a pump that supplied fresh spring water to the home, drills of new potatoes, carrots, parsnips, turnips and beetroot and large beds of cabbages, lettuce, onions, scallions, strawberries and tomatoes. It was all so satisfying to observe, so natural and productive that they could not leave without showing their appreciation in comment and action and so after helping themselves to their favourites, Aoife picked some carrots and lettuce to place by the burrows down by the creek. Both believed that those early vegetables possessed a lovely fresh and tasteful quality that made them stand alone.

Frank and Aoife enjoyed each other's company and were looking forward to being alone once again among the best of what Mother Nature had on offer. With the gate secured, they were once again, arm in arm, on their way. Frank hadn't been to this part of the creek before but what mattered now was being with Aoife on this lovely warm sunny afternoon. The closer they came to the creek the louder became the sound of rushing water, much louder thought Frank than during their picnic the previous day. Then suddenly he realised it wasn't coming from that part of the creek closest to them. For now

though, his attention was drawn to the beauty of the scene before them. He had always admired Aoife's beautiful blue eyes and paused captivated and fascinated as they now seemed to sparkle even more clearly in the presence of the many wild sweet forget-me-nots getting caught up in the swirling and chattering brook that joined the waters of the creek. They spread out a little further along into a brilliant azure blue garment reaching up from the other side of the creek across the embankment and down into the dell beyond. The trees and shrubs were in full bloom as were the many flowers and rambling vines among the ferns, all so green, aromatic, colourful and alive to the buzz of busy bees and the songs of finches, blue tits and brightly coloured kingfishers. This was Frank and Aoife's Forest of Arden.

Slowly making their way along the creek, they arrived at the source of the loud sound of rushing water and a sturdy rock weir. Behind the weir was a large pool with water so clear that the small pebbles covering the bottom were readily visible. Among the trees along the banks were two large willows that reached down to the pool. They would rest here for a time before leisurely making their way back. Having collected a handful of pebbles, they sat together on the weir, their legs dangled over the side, and tossed pebbles across the water during pauses in their romantic embraces. Her last pebble had no sooner touched the bottom than Aoife placed her clothing at the end of the weir and dived into the pool emerging at the far end. Frank was inclined at first to resist the urge to follow but feeling so alive and free as the flowing water jumped in and joined Aoife at the other end. It was indeed their Forest of Arden.

Rob and Eimear were already on the tennis court when Frank and Aoife returned and so they decided to join them for a set of doubles. Not having played with such experienced players before, Frank came away quite happy with his game to the compliments of Aoife and her parents. In between games, Eimear mentioned that they were having

guests for dinner, a couple of friends from America who had worked with Rob in New Haven. “Yale”, whispered Aoife. Dinner was always a very happy and interesting family occasion and this was no exception. Frank was delighted to hear them talk about Yale and found Rob’s friends, Anne and Simon, Professors in the School of Science, very interesting and friendly and very much at home with the Clifford family. He was curious about the meaning of ‘Ivy League’ in the description “private Ivy League university.’ ‘Ivy-covered walls’ as well as ideas of excellence and selectivity were fair enough but the idea of elitism didn’t sit comfortably with him but he was careful not to show this as Simon continued to talk about the university. It must have been a wonderful place to study thought Frank and an equally wonderful and challenging place to teach.

As they all made their way to the sitting room for after-dinner drinks, Aoife learnt that Anne and Simon had a number of matters they were looking forward to discussing with her parents. They were staying the night and would leave next day after breakfast to attend an early-afternoon appointment in Dublin. Eimear had arranged breakfast for 8.30 to give them all an opportunity to meet again before it came time for their guests to leave.

Back in her study with Frank a short time later, Aoife could see that he was keen to discuss a number of issues arising either directly or indirectly from their discussion in the lab earlier in the day. On the desk, he had placed a piece of paper that listed the types of things he ate on the island back home, things he now believed gave his inner consciousness access to other worlds in the same way that ayahuasca gave the Indian priests of the Amazon access to worlds beyond their own. The names of the five wild fruits and one plant were on the list and he was confident that with Aoife’s help he would be able to determine the one that contained the DMT and the one that contained the inhibitors to the stomach enzyme MAO.

Other subjects that engaged Frank for some time came to the fore after Aoife explained how her parents and she believed the pineal gland controlled our inner consciousness and was in all probability its seat in much the same way that parliament is the seat of government. Frank's reaction was to recite the lines "O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed...." from one of Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnets and this set the general parameters for the discussion that followed, one that lasted well into the night. They began with a comprehensive examination of the brain using a skeleton borrowed from the lab as well as detailed diagrams of both the glandular and nervous systems. This examination included historical perspectives where the general view expressed was that the brain controlled all bodily functions by interpreting all information received through the senses and delivering messages through the nervous and glandular systems to cells and organs of the body that make us who and what we are.

Aoife's likening the thalamus to a distribution centre from which messages travelled out to different parts of the body caused Frank to question the meaning of certain processes of the brain. "What exactly did Hopkins mean by 'mind'? Was he referring to the human brain or the human consciousness or the human memory or to a human faculty that was the product of the brain? And is this product a material or immaterial one? For that matter, what is the soul? Are spirit and soul one and the same or could the soul be the seat or house of the spirit or vice versa? What is intelligence? What is meant by the human will and free will and are all these human faculties biologically based and controlled and housed by the brain?"

"There are so many different answers to all of these questions depending on whether we look at science, history or religion or the many variant combination of all three. I think we're going to have an

interesting and busy few days before you head home,” remarks Aoife. Frank smiled and nodded in agreement.

“This here is the pineal gland,” pointed Aoife, “about which little is known. As a student of Latin, you know its derivation from the Latin ‘pineus’, the adjectival form of ‘pinus’ which means ‘pine’. So called, no doubt, because this tiny organ is shaped like a pine cone. While you see references to it in the writings of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and Herophilus, it was Gallan, a Greek doctor who spent most of his life in Rome, who wrote about it in some detail, concluding that it was a gland with the same function as the other bodily glands in their support of the blood vessels.”

“Not bad for that period, I suppose,” commented Frank. “Has much been learnt about it since then?”

“No, not really. Unlike other brain structures, it is unpaired; there is only one – no left and right forms. The position it occupies near the centre of the brain gives it, I believe, a special significance. As you can see, it’s located in the upper Epithalamus between the two hemispheres of the brain and seated in a groove where the two halves of the Thalamus join, making it unique and something of a curiosity down the centuries. In the lab, you mentioned René Descartes, the French seventeenth century mathematician and philosopher. He saw it as playing an essential role in the expression of the soul and proposed that it was somehow the seat of the soul where the spiritual and the physical met. In proposing this, Descartes was not restricting the limits of the spirit and soul within the body, making his views not unlike our own.”

It all sounded very plausible to Frank. After all, there had to be some process by which the body and soul interacted. “It is reasonable then to assume,” asks Frank, “that if you believe the pineal gland

controls our inner consciousness, it uses DMT or Ayahuasca to transport the inner consciousness to worlds beyond our own.”

“Yes, it is,” responded Aoife, “and in all probability your experiences on the island can be attributed to it. The things you ate while there – one or more of them - must have had similar properties to those in ayahuasca for the inner consciousness to be transported to other dimensions as described by you earlier. Only trial and error can sort it out for you. Once you get back home, you’ll be able to conduct your own tests to find the answer.”

Frank’s mind was already at work on what he had to do as he made his way to his bedroom.

Chapter 17

It was already Wednesday morning and after farewelling Anne and Simon, they sat down together to hear what Rob had organised for the rest of the week. Today they would visit Eimear's people, the Costello family in East Cork just outside the seaside town of Youghal. They would also have an opportunity to visit the town later in the afternoon before returning home. On Thursday, they would take a sightseeing trip to the historic port and fishing and sailing town of Kinsale in South Cork. This would give them the opportunity to visit Eimear's sister, Aideen. Friday was set aside for a late afternoon visit to Cork City for dinner after which they would attend the city's first production of Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman". There would be ample time for activities closer to home on Saturday and Sunday.

For someone who had rarely travelled far from his home village, those drives through the countryside to such beautiful and interesting centres were like nothing else in his life up to now. Rob's stories and the conversations and humorous comments they evoked made for very entertaining drives. Life was so carefree and in a special way quite uplifting. Frank loved every moment of it and looked forward to his evening discussions with Aoife. By the time it came round to their late afternoon visit to the city, most of the issues raised in his earlier discussions with Aoife had received their considered attention. Each night before going asleep, Frank would sit by his bed and write a summary in the form of a word-phrase recall pattern of the essence of each topic examined. There were moments when he regretted not having the exposure to science and its methodology that Aoife enjoyed but he was learning fast and intent on making the most of the situations available to him. After one such moment, he sat back on his chair by the bed, closed his eyes and reviewed how the brain

controlled all bodily functions including the mind, the consciousness, the memory, the conscience, the will and free will, all except the spirit and the soul. He accepted that if the brain died, the mind died with it and that applied to just about every other function. All these functions had both an internal (biophysical) and external (environmental) cause and all in varying degrees were part of the mind, the most complex of them all. He recalled reading in Freud that the consciousness was only a small part of mental processes. It was that part of the human mind that was aware of a person's self, environment, and mental activity. The mind received information through the nervous system which it processed and stored; it was also the process by which knowledge was acquired, including perception, intuition, and reasoning while conscience was the dictate of that reasoning deciding what was right and wrong. When it came to the question of whether the mind was material or immaterial, he agreed with René Descartes that it was immaterial. He had no problem accepting his religion's teaching on the spirit and soul. They were obviously immaterial and survived the death of the body.

As for Hopkins's "O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed...", Frank was satisfied that he was referring to only that very complex faculty of the human mind and its conscious, subconscious and unconscious elements. The excerpt had come from a poem that expressed the poet's despair at the savagery of his spiritual torment which plunged him beyond all rational comfort and religious support, something that seemed unimaginable. He was particularly fascinated by Aoife's illustration of the meaning of the mind. The simplicity and beauty of the metaphor said it all. She fetched her violin from the other end of her study and proceeded to play Beethoven's Sonata No. 3. Having finished, she pointed to the violin and said, "This is the brain - this scroll, the tuning pegs, the neck, the body, the tailpiece and chinrest. These strings are the nervous

system and I am the environment. The tune you have just heard is the mind.”

With this, he turned out the light and slipped into a deep sleep.

Chapter 18

It was Friday morning before they visited the lab again and this time Frank had begun to think of himself as a member of the team with a different perspective on things. He felt good about being involved in the tests from the start and enjoyed assisting Aoife and her mother. When their work was done, they spent some time in the office at the end of the lab talking about things they knew interested Frank. Given his clearer understanding of the mind and its influences on one's self, he now had a better appreciation of the work done by Eimear as a neurologist and the possible use of ayahuasca in the treatment of mental disorders.

Shortly after lunch, they joined Rob for their evening in the city. They gave themselves time for some sightseeing and what a surprise Rob had in store for them. St Francis Church, close to the centre of the city, had just been completed and opened to the public. While Frank had heard about it, nothing had prepared him for what he saw. Its Byzantine architecture was awe-inspiring including all the extraordinary mosaics on the walls. It all looked so right in this place – so elegant, so appropriate taking Frank and Aoife and her parents back in time. The mosaic, with all its beautiful rich colours and attention to detail, set behind the central altar was the largest in Europe outside of Rome. They all agreed that it was one of the most interesting churches in the country and they were still talking about it as they sat down to dinner in a small restaurant overlooking the River Lee.

None of them had read the play they came to attend but Aoife had read reviews of its New York production and wasn't prepared to give anything away other than to say that they could expect something

different. So there was a great sense of anticipation as they took their seats.

They were as keen as everyone else in the theatre to be part of one of the loudest and longest ovations ever given to a play as the curtain came down to signal interval. With Eimear leading the way, they were well into its allegory and tragedy by the time the second part commenced. The audience's response when the final curtain came down was even more enthusiastic. No one was disappointed and the drive back to Carrignavar lacked nothing in animation and could be generally characterised as Eimear and the play's psychology, Rob its philosophy, Aoife and Frank its characterisation, its delusions and its contradictions. Their individual responses to this drama highlighted its richness and levels of meaning that cemented together to make "Death of a Salesman" a powerful statement on life and survival in America.

Frank was up bright and early next morning and, with an hour to go before meeting the family for breakfast, decided to take a walk in the garden. It was the loveliest of summer mornings and he was looking forward to tennis later with Aoife before they both caught the bus to Blarney Castle to attend the festival there. He loved his home in the west and everything it stood for but right now he was hoping that this week here with the Cliffords would never end. He thought of all those young people he had seen travelling south to the port of Cove and of his aunts and uncles and cousins who had gone this way before them and how they must be missing their families, the friends they grew up with and their homeland. All around him, the countryside, the people, the villages and towns, possessed such grandeur and beauty why should all those young people have to leave for the Americas and elsewhere which seemed so far away. He recalls his father once saying how it was bleeding the country white but that it was unavoidable.

As he made his way to breakfast, he remembered how Rob had spent some time in America and since then had visited there quite regularly. He would ask him about it during breakfast. Frank was aware that the stream of young people leaving the country was something that had gone on for not just decades but centuries since before the Great Famine of the 1840's. According to Rob, the answer was found in the current forced trade agreements with England as well as the ruthlessness with which Ireland's trade and industries were wiped out by England over many centuries. He referred Frank to a book in the family library by Seumas MacManus and in particular Chapter 55 for the answer. He added that the loss of so many young people was an accepted part of life in Ireland making it all the more difficult for the country to recover as well as the current trade practices where if Ireland entered trade agreements with other countries, England would renege on her agreements making it very difficult for Ireland to survive. It was nothing short of economic and political blackmail according to Rob and this added to what Frank had already perceived as very tragic in the perpetuation of an attitude which caused the country much agony when under the control of England. Chapter 55 said it all: the deliberate suppression of Irish trade and countless new industries for hundreds of years. As a form of reassurance, Rob explained how the Irish in America were involved in all aspects of life there and were indeed a credit to their country of birth. He also explained how Ireland was currently pushing for the establishment of a European Economic Community or Common Market and that this would give Ireland the opportunities to develop economically and establish beneficial trade relationships with other countries. So Frank was happy to hear that things were looking a lot more positive and glad he had raised the subject with Rob.

Chapter 19

More than once during the week, Frank had thought about life with the Clifford family and what it already had meant to him. He felt that Aoife and her parents had a significant impact on his life that had endowed him with a richer and more enquiring outlook. There was a natural easiness in the way they spoke about life in all its complexity that captured its beauty and wonder. He now almost yearned to be part of it and felt more secure than ever before in his friendship with the family. With less than a couple of days to go before returning home, he was beginning to miss Aoife and her parents already. What was it going to be like not being able to see them for over ten weeks? On their way in the bus to Blarney castle and the festival, they talked about being apart and not meeting again until after the beginning of the new school year in September. Things were different now and they would certainly miss not being together or meeting up with each other. They would write often until they met again.

As well as enjoying the festival or a game of tennis or a swim in the creek, there was time to talk about other matters that interested them. They discussed his reading in Philosophy, Logic and Psychology as a way of arriving at a better understanding of cognition or the mental act of acquiring knowledge, including perception, intuition and reasoning. He had found the work that they had done together on the brain and nervous system so helpful. Aoife had realised this and set about elaborating on it further. Later, she took time to introduce him to a couple of books, one provided by Eimear on anatomy and the nervous system and the other by Aoife on aspects of biology. These books were his to take home with him and keep as they would prove very useful aids in his reading in psychology. He was so thrilled with the books and the fact that both Aoife and Eimear

had taken such interest in his reading that he wasted no time in conveying this and his thanks to both of them.

They were all up bright and early on the Sunday to attend church in the village after which they joined other families from the neighbourhood for refreshments at Carraig House. All the families knew one another and so it was like one big happy family get-together, a custom Frank was used to back home. While Rob and Eimear shared a glass of ale with a few of the locals, Aoife and he enjoyed a glass of pink lemonade which was popular among the young. Sunday was a day of rest but not before partaking of the customary Sunday lunch after which Aoife and Frank relaxed in the garden. It would be their last afternoon together for at least a couple of months and despite being together for a week, they still had lots of things to talk about. There was little, however, that had prepared Frank for what he was about to hear but in hindsight it all started to make sense. In the bower where they were sitting, Aoife stood and moved to sit opposite Frank. She then asked him to think of three things or ideas in succession. Pausing briefly, she proceeded to describe exactly the three things he was thinking. They then tried colours and numbers and rhymes and the results were the same. There was no hesitancy or doubt about it – Aoife could easily tell what he was thinking and feeling and indeed planning. She turned her back to him and asked him to draw three symbols. When he had finished, she called out the symbols. Again, she turned her back to him and asked him to think of a symbol he was going to draw. Then she told him to draw the symbol. Turning towards him, she called out the symbol saying that it was not the one he had intended to draw and that he had changed his mind from fork to scythe. It was then that she explained how she had persuaded him to change it to scythe. In other words, she had telepathically influenced his mind controlling his thinking and actions.

Frank had read about telepathy and the concept of extra sensory perception and recalled reading about a month back how a couple of dogs in California had detected landmines through ESP, a statement he dismissed outright, attributing instead their ability to detect the mines to their sense of smell. Aoife agreed going on to say that next to nothing was known about how telepathy worked. She believed, however, that like our sensory system it was biological and it extended beyond the body and probably possessed a unique characteristic that married it somehow to the sensory systems of others by way of communicators with similarities to synapses. She had been to Harvard with her parents on three occasions where a special team sought to evaluate and decide on her level of telepathic ability. During their last visit, they were informed that her level was the highest ever encountered. She did add, however, that telepathy didn't occur without careful preparation and that clearly focused intention was an important component for the flow of thoughts and feelings to commence, particularly so when long distances were involved. This last comment reminded her of advice she was given by the team at Harvard, not to disclose her talents in this area of telepathy to anyone outside her immediate family. In fact it was not just advice; it was more a directive involving an undertaking by both Aoife and her parents. This came as a surprise to Frank and as they continued to talk about the possible reasons for the directive, he started to feel an unusual sadness well inside him as he embraced Aoife ever so tenderly. Slowly, she whispered that she had not disclosed the whole story to them. Eighteen months back, when she was looking closely at a picture her mother had taken of O'Connell Street in Dublin, the scene became alive with activity. Her immediate response was one of fright but she soon came to accept it when she realised that each time she looked at the photo, the activity was different. She now knew that the activity was always that currently in the part of the street in the

photo. In response to Frank, she agreed that she should keep this information from the team at Harvard.

What was left of the afternoon they enjoyed together, and a memorable evening with Eimear and Rob brought to a close an extraordinary week with an extraordinary family.

Chapter 20

Early Monday morning, Aoife and her parents drove Frank to Cork's Glanmire Road Railway Station, arriving with little time to spare before the train departed. Luckily, Rob had remembered to purchase his ticket when they were all in the city on the Friday. After very warm but hasty farewells, Aoife handed him a parcel that Eimear and she had put together, one they knew he would appreciate on the long journey back to Mayo. Eimear had packed an assortment of sandwiches, a couple of pieces of fruit, chocolates and pink lemonade to which Aoife had added a book of poems by W.B. Yeats, a letter and a bottle with a pumping device and valve. With his suitcase in the overhead rack and parcel on the seat, Frank opened the window to wave farewell to Aoife and her parents as the train pulled away from the platform. He could see them still waving as the train moved out of view and, as he resumed his seat, the ambivalence of the moment became all too acute with all those sad and lonely feelings of farewell mixing it with those of the excitement and happiness of the greetings that awaited him. His reading Aoife's letter a short time later gave him the lift that was needed. Its closing sentence he would not forget: "Dearest Frank, for us there are no goodbyes. Wherever you are, you will always be in my heart."

The parcel was a cardboard box in two sections. He read the letter again before picking up the book of poems, not knowing what lay beneath it. When he saw the bottle with the pump, he burst into loud laughter realising that Aoife already knew one job he was certain to do before returning to college. He thought about the sweetgrass (*féarmilis*) and the wild fruits he ate on the Island and concluded that it was pointless, because of all the possible combinations involved, to conduct tests in an effort to find the correct combination if indeed a

combination was the answer. He would instead use all of them together to produce a clear liquid and who better to ask for assistance than a local involved in the distilling of poteen (poitin). This would ensure he had a pure liquid which could be vaporised easily courtesy of the apparatus in the box beside him on the seat. It was different travelling on his own but he was beginning to enjoy it. Eimear's book on anatomy and the nervous system as well as his interest in the sights and activities associated with the many stops along the way made little of the twelve-hour train trip. Before he knew it, he was surrounded by family eager to hear everything about his week with the Clifford family and his trip from Cork alone. This scene was repeated a number of times as he visited his grandparents and aunts and uncle and there was always something new to add.

It was summer and busy on the family farm. When he wasn't helping his father, he worked for Pete O'Brien or other farmers in the village who enlisted his assistance with different jobs on the farm. He was home only a few days when paid a visit by the coach and manager of the parish football association. Thereafter a couple of evenings a week, he cycled about six kilometres to football practice with his parish team or teams when it came to preparation for seven-a-side competitions and tournaments during the summer months. He loved sport, particularly football and athletics, and was the youngest member ever of the parish team. Once he got used to things, he enjoyed the camaraderie and fun of a group that surely was the most daring and mischievous and funny ever. Their coach was one of nature's gentlemen, something Frank maintained explained why the group in trying to behave just inside the law didn't stray very far outside it.

Pete O'Brien wasn't adverse to a drop of poteen and knew exactly the right person for the job after Frank had explained to him what he proposed to do with the sweetgrass and wild fruit on the

island. Frank was delighted and could see that Pete welcomed the opportunity to be involved. He also recognised that if anyone could see a humorous side to this, it would be Pete and imagined his body shaking with laughter as he related his story to a group of friends around an open fire. In fact, Pete would go along with Frank to see Liam Walsh, who lived on a property not far from the village of Cong, when Frank had collected a goodly amount to take there with them.

Bikes out and bag secured to the carrier, they were on their way to visit Liam. It was a pleasant enough afternoon, and Pete was in his usual friendly talkative mood but couldn't have been more attentive to Frank's story about ayahuasca and the Peruvian priests and its possible usefulness in the treatment of neurological diseases. Pete agreed that this might explain Frank's experiences on the island and might even explain a few strange old dreams he had himself and for all that matter even a few reported by his mother. He was joyfully confident and, as he applied more pressure to the pedals, quite elated to be able to help solve this mystery for Frank.

Liam and his wife, May, were welcoming and happy to make Frank's acquaintance whom they had not met previously. Not having met for some time, Liam and Pete had a lot to talk about as May talked to Frank about his family and where he went to school. After the customary cup of tea, Liam took them to a small well secured shed at the back of the house. Here he showed them the still and after inspecting the produce in Frank's bag and the bottles Frank had supplied, said they could collect the distilled liquid in six days, the following Saturday. He was eager to hear what use they were going to make of it, and before Frank could answer, Pete said that special doctors Frank knew might be able to use it as medicine as he pulled money from his pocket to pay Liam for a couple of bottles of poteen.

With three weeks to go before returning to college, Frank was keen to get his hands on the liquid. His plan was to take most of it back to Eimear but not before he had tested it himself and this he felt he should do on the island. The day before he was due to collect it from Liam, he was helping Pete harvest a crop of oats. About to call it a day, Pete indicated his inability to accompany Frank on the morrow but expressed his interest in hearing the result of any test conducted on the liquid. On his walk home, Frank reassured himself that everything would be fine; yet, at times began to hope that the liquid had no impact at all. He arose with the same ambivalence next morning to a very wet and windy day. He would delay his trip to Cong until the weather improved. A break came in the weather in the early afternoon and he set off but not before being joined by Pete where the inclement weather had interrupted his harvesting.

There was no response when they knocked on front door of Liam's home but they felt that he was around somewhere as the door was ajar and so they called to the shed with the still at the rear of the house. It wasn't what they had expected. There on their knees behind a small table were Liam and May fervently saying the rosary. Neither wished to interrupt them just in case they were responding in their own way to some bad news they had just received. Frank and Pete felt rather baffled and didn't feel good about having called at this time. Just as they were about to quietly retreat to assess the situation, Liam charged towards them in a state of great excitement and proceeded to tell them all about his extraordinary experience. Then May appeared only to repeat the action with slightly less gusto. They couldn't explain fast enough to Frank and Pete how their lives had changed forever. Pete, taking charge of the situation, got Liam and May to sit down, take a deep breath and relax as Frank looked on in amazement waiting for some outcome that might help him understand this rather weird behaviour. Liam more composed now took Pete and Frank into

his confidence. May looking ever so serene faced them. He had been to a wonderful place where everyone was so good and beautiful. He saw unreal sights and had met all types of very special people. It was like nothing he had ever imagined. An awe-inspiring person had talked to him so gently about his life before he returned. He hadn't always done the right thing and was now going to make up for it. With this he walked across to a cupboard and collected three bottles which he handed to Frank. The liquid was as clear as fresh spring water making it hard for Frank to see at first that one of the bottles wasn't quite full. Throwing the doors of the cupboard wide open in an excited manner, Liam pulled from the shelf a box containing the last bottles of poteen he would ever distil.

When they got back to their bikes with their goods, Pete took such a fit of laughter that Frank had to assist him secure the box of poteen to the carrier. "I tell you now, that was so strange," exclaimed Pete between bursts of laughter. "Sure I didn't know what to do at first. I thought it was mad they had gone and we were in danger. Whatever it was it had affected both of them alright. On their knees? Sure I have never seen either of them pray let alone go down on their knees Saturday or Sunday or any other day. I tell you this – if they turn up at church tomorrow, the regulars will think the end of the world is close at hand. There was poteen there and plenty of it but they were as dry as old Brown himself - hadn't touched a drop of it. They have, God bless them, left that joy to me. So there we are! Do you think they saw a vision or is it gone with the fairies they are?"

"A vision sure and many of them but not the type you have in mind," laughed Frank. "You and I have talked about this type of occurrence often before and how people visit other worlds or dimensions and return having experienced the extraordinary."

“Sure we have – that’s right, but what would those two be doing visiting other dimensions? Old Liam and May it is,” thought Pete aloud. “They can hardly manage this one and what would they be doing going to another one? Giving up the still he said. Now I tell you, I do, something terrible must have happened to them alright.”

“What if I were to tell you, Pete, that they must have sampled the liquid I have here on the carrier and haven’t realised its effects on them.”

“Well I never!” exclaimed Pete, again caught up in a fit of laughter. “That’s what it was alright. If-eh, if-eh, if-uh I had thought it could have been so powerful, I sure would have thought about it. Now just fancy that!” Then after a short pause, he continued, “Ha-ha-ha, I can think of a couple of old guys – neighbours you know yourself – who could do well with a drop of it – by japers I do an all.”

When they pulled up outside Pete’s place, they were met by his wife, Alannah, who gauged from Pete’s posture that a good story awaited her. She invited Frank in out of rain and suggested that he should stay for supper. “Why wouldn’t he stay,” remarked Pete. “What would he be doing going out in all that rain?” Frank was happy to accept their invitation and, knowing how Pete exaggerated and embellished things, sat back for an entertaining and a colourful couple of hours.

Chapter 21

Aoife received Frank's last weekly letter just over a week before he was due back to commence his final certificate year. It would take pride of place as the most humorous and indeed positive among her letters and took great pleasure in reading from it to her parents. He had a wonderful vacation with his family and friends but missed not being able to see Aoife and her parents. Aoife had already assured him that she was counting the days till they were able to get together again. He shared her feelings.

His intention all along was to wait until he visited the island on the family property before testing the liquid. He would put some of the liquid into the bottle with the pump and valve and ingest it in vaporous form. He waited two days for dry and calm weather and then proceeded with the test after recording the time and other detail. Twenty minutes later, although it seemed like weeks, he was recording the result, elated to say the least with the outcome. It had confirmed what he believed ever since learning about ayahuasca from Eimear and Aoife. While it was unlikely he would forget the details of this phenomenon, he set about recording his experiences as best he could. Task completed, he walked about the island stopping at the edge of the water to look back from about fifty metres at the ring of trees. This was indeed the crannog he had visited and the people he met were its inhabitants. Their dress and equipment were of an age past, one as long ago as perhaps the early Christian Period as some of the inhabitants wore wooden crosses. At that moment, he felt so calm and yet his mind was ever so alert, so sensitive to everything about him. He saw and heard the waterfowl in the lake and the birds in the trees with remarkable clarity. It was he felt a scene of considerable comfort and joy which he often recalls to this day.

Later that day, he called to see Pete who was removing thistles from a field next to the road. They sat down by the wall and talked about the test. Frank gave him the notes which he read with interest and, in handing them back, commented, "Well there you are now! I never expected you'd find an answer to what you called those dreams of yours. Isn't that just it? God you're a great man to be able to find out."

"I haven't told my parents yet," said Frank, "because I'm thinking about Mam. She would get all upset and frightened and worry about me. You know what she says about how it's better to leave those things alone."

"Ah, sure it's right you are. They're better off not knowin' about it atal. It would fascinate Pat alright but herself – now that another question," answers Pete. "Begorrah, I wouldn't be telling them, so I wouldn't, if I were you. I suppose you're goin' to take the liquid back with you to those people down there?"

"That's right. They will put it to good use in helping people with problems."

"Ha, I'm sure they will and by Jove if they're lucky they could end up with a lot of Liam's and May's," added Pete, causing both to break into a fit of laughter which eased into Frank's comment, "Perhaps the type of modified behaviour they hope for in their patients."

1. While discussing matters with Pete was always interesting, it was so entertaining just to sit back and listen to his stories. He had his own slant on local events that had taken place in Frank's absence and enjoyed bringing him up to-date on local affairs. As Frank stood to leave, Pete also got to his feet and leaning on his spade looked at

Frank and quietly said, “I’m sure you’ll find a way of letting them know about it before you go back.”

Every field on the family property had its own name and this was also the case with the other properties in the neighbourhood. The field always retained its name irrespective of the type of crop grown in it each year, something determined by the rotation-of-crops principle. The day following his meeting with Pete, Frank was harvesting wheat with his father in a field called the high meadow. By the time they finished collecting and building all the sheaves into stooks, Pat was in possession of all the details about the liquid, what it was produced from and why, as well as Liam and May’s reaction to it. This information might have come as a surprise but he certainly wasn’t surprised at his son’s initiative and was proud of what he had done. He got great enjoyment out of Frank’s story about Liam and May and Pete’s reaction to it. Pete was a regular visitor, and so he was determined not to miss Pete’s version of events.

After supper, Frank brought the bottles out to show Pat who explained to Sara that this was what he had made out of all that stuff he had collected on the island and that he was taking it back to Eimear who would use it as medicine. Frank told her that Eimear had liquid like it from South America and how she had planned to use it. “How do you know it works or is any good?” enquired Sara. It was then that he told her about Liam and May. Her reaction, given her sense of humour, was what Pat and he expected – uproarious laughter that occurred again and again and ended up involving them all. Just then Pete walked in and with the bottles in view on the table reacted so spontaneously without a word being uttered that the situation bounded beyond the hilarious. What an evening they had after all that, thought Frank a couple of hours later, as he securely packed the bottles away.

Chapter 22

Tom Gannon came from the same parish and was the only student Frank met during the summer vacation. They met at football training and tournaments and had talked about his week with the Cliffords. The other students to board the train along the way threw lots of questions at him but Frank's lively responses concentrated on places and people visited and days out in the city and Blarney Castle as well the play they attended. By the time they arrived in Cork's Glanmire Road Station, he had given those same responses a number of times.

Final year students arrived back at the college on Friday of the first week in September to allow them time to settle in before class commenced on the Monday. Just after lunch on the first day back, the assistant cleaner, who lived a short distance from the college, quietly handed Frank an envelope which contained a letter from Aoife. He put it away until he was back in the study a short time later because it was a college rule for all mail to go through the Director of Studies' office.

This was another occasion when the rule of silence worked in his favour. Once his classmates were back at their desks, silence was observed to minimise distraction. With books and folder open, he placed the letter on the folder and with pen in hand paid attention to every detail. It was so warm and loving and delightful, he read it again and again before carefully putting it away. With his head between his hands and as the poet Coleridge put it, “.. mine eye/Fixed with mock study on my swimming book”, he could sense exactly how she felt as her pen gave life to such beautiful feelings and sentiments, so lovely that they stirred and moved him to dream throughout the afternoon of being there by her side. Back in the study again after the evening break, he settled down once more to his books with pen in hand but now it moved fast across the page trying to keep pace with his

thoughts and feelings. His enthusiasm saw him through to the last sentence. He felt good and placing the letter in an envelope, he would await a discreet moment to give it to the cleaner. Aoife's letter he would lock away in his suitcase and add later to her other letters.

During their first week back, the Director of Studies was keen to impress upon them that there was less than one year to go before their Leaving Certificate. It was going to be their busiest year by far. Normally, students took two years after their Intermediate Certificate to complete their studies. Frank's college had reduced the time to one year with slightly longer school days during the week and four hours of class work on Saturday. The new pace of work was obvious to all from day one and the Christmas and Easter breaks were reduced by one week. Frank had thought about how the new arrangements would impact on his Sunday visits to Aoife and her parents and had already accepted some advice from Fr Jim to restrict each visit to five hours – noon to five o'clock. This would give him over three hours to study after returning to the college.

A few days into the term, Fr Jim informed Frank that Ron had arranged to pick him up at noon on the third Sunday of the month, just over a week away. This news seemed to inspire him to study even harder and to establish a routine that allowed some time to pursue his interest in the brain and nervous system. His intention was to steadily add to knowledge already acquired from his private study and from Aoife and Eimear and the books they had given him. As Sunday grew closer, he thought of ways to optimise his time with Aoife and her parents. It didn't come as a surprise to find that he wasn't the only one thinking this way. As he stepped out the door, Rob and Aoife were driving towards him. The excitement of seeing them was fast mounting inside him and carried over to their very warm and beautiful greeting. He handed Rob a couple of packages which he placed on the front seat as he took his place beside Aoife on the back seat. The

warm trembling of their hands as they touched was an expression of their elation at being together again. If only this moment could last forever.

As Rob had indicated, lunch was ready and so they went straight to the dining room and to Eimear's hearty welcome. The joy of together around the table, their conversation and laughter echoed through the corridor enveloping the cook in its exuberance and spirit. Frank took great pleasure in handing out the presents his parents and he had put together for Eimear and Rob as well as his special gift for Aoife. There were surprises all around and to Aoife something unique and very special about the pendant she had just received. She would treasure it for ever. Just then, he handed her another package marked fragile which she was to place in her study until they had time to talk about it.

Thought early autumn, the colours and richness of summer were still all around as Aoife and Frank strolled through the garden, sharing in this bounty of nature, as they became more committed to each other. They retired to Aoife's study a short time later. Before them on her desk was a box with a few books stacked on top of it. The surprise this time was all Frank's. "This is yours," declares Aoife pulling it towards him. He couldn't believe his luck when he saw that two of the books were on biology and the biggest on neurology. This would be such a time saver with no immediate need to search through the catalogue provided by the university. He couldn't believe his eyes when seeing the contents of the box. Never ever had he thought of having his own microscope. "Brand new with all the trappings," he voiced with great emotion. He was ecstatic and Aoife was so happy for him. Based on work in one of the biology books, she had set up a couple of tests which they completed together to ensure he knew how best to use it. Then she explained how he would need it to complete the experiments outlined in the biology books while Frank packed it

away in the box to take back to the college. At that moment, Eimear announced her arrival just in time to see Aoife retrieve a parcel from the compartment under her desk. Frank described briefly how the liquid was produced and the products involved. Learning of the possible usefulness of ayahuasca to Eimear in her work as a neurologist, he was hoping this liquid might be useful to her in a similar way. Both Eimear and Aoife were surprised at its clarity and listened with interest to Frank's description of its potency and his story about Liam and May as well as Pete O'Brien's reaction to the situation when they called to collect the bottles. It took them by surprise. They had heard some extraordinary stories out of the West in the past but this one more than matched them for unpredictability and humour. It was delightfully hilarious. Frank just hadn't seen them laugh so much. Eimear explained that it would be subjected to a series of tests to check everything from toxicity to potency in order to determine its suitability and possible usefulness. She should have some answers for him the next time they met. Then taking her leave, she remarked with tongue in cheek, "When the team learns how I came by this," Frank, "they'll probably want to invite you onto the team." Appreciating the comment, Frank retorted, "You can tell them I'll be ready!" It was a very happy afternoon. Frank did raise, however, the question of Aoife's telepathic ability and in particular her ability to telepathically visualise distant scenes and situations. It was a question on his mind throughout the summer vacation and, while it fascinated him, he was nonetheless quite concerned for Aoife. Her assurance that it didn't worry her gave him some comfort as they treasured together what time was left before he returned to the college.

Chapter 23

Working towards the completion of her masters in science in May, Aoife's studies like Frank's occupied most of her time. She was already planning ahead towards the next academic year and Frank was very much part of her plans. Not wanting to distract him from his studies, she would make no reference to them until their meeting before Christmas. Frank's zeal and effective study skills were paying dividends so much so that he was more than satisfied with the time he had available for his work in psychology and biology. In no time at all, he had become adept with the microscope as he worked his way through his most recent books on biology. He had two other meetings with Aoife and her parents before the end of the term – the third Sunday in November and the third Sunday in December. In the former, he learned that the liquid was a success and was on a par with ayahuasca. It was certainly potent, had no obvious side-effects and could be stored indefinitely. They were delighted with the results.

Their December meeting was on the first day of Christmas week and the day before Frank was due to return home on leave. Snow had come early and it was cold outside. Rob parked close to the steps and together with Aoife and Frank made his way to the dining room to join Eimear and her parents for a sumptuous luncheon that had all the ingredients of a delightful Christmas dinner beautifully accentuated by two candelabra. The room's warm and cosy open fire and decorations symbolising the story and celebrations of Christmas evoked a scene of joy and love and beauty. Its happiness and contentment were shared by all as they took their place at the table. It was a very special and wonderful occasion and one relived in time by Frank, particularly at Christmas, to this day.

About mid-afternoon, Aoife and Frank were alone. They talked about how much they had enjoyed the family's celebration of the first day of Christmas week and reflected on the significance to them of not being able to meet during Christmas. They talked about their studies and discussed where they planned to be at the beginning of the new academic year in September. Aoife was so happy to hear that Frank was planning to be involved in undergraduate studies but the costs to his family would ultimately be the decider. His studies up till now were in the humanities but he was hoping to transfer to the sciences at some stage but as yet had not determined how he could achieve this. It was then that Aoife introduced her plans which she had already discussed with her parents who had approved of them knowing their daughter's maturity and intelligence were well beyond her years. Her parents' old Alma Mater had offered her a position in the sciences which she would take up in September. Accommodation wasn't a problem as the family had an apartment in Dublin where she would live. Her mother had suggested that Frank should consider medical studies at University College Dublin after completing a bridging course in the sciences as she believed he would be ideally suited to this calling. He could begin by enrolling in psychology, biology and one other subject while attending to the bridging course which with Aoife's help he would complete in no time. The family would assist with his enrolment and tuition costs. Frank couldn't believe it and just didn't know what to say as he tried to get his head around it and their great generosity and interest in his future. This was the offer of a lifetime, he thought, and he was sure his parents would be delighted for him. Aoife and he sat together in the peace and love of the season as they pondered the great possibilities of the years ahead. When it came time to return to the college, they joined Eimear and Rob in the sitting room. It was a very warm and memorable meeting in which he thanked them for all they were doing for him. It was the happiest of

farewells and he looked forward to a great Christmas even though Aoife and he wouldn't be meeting again until early in the New Year. The return drive though leisurely was very cheerful and high spirited as they looked towards the coming year and beyond.

Chapter 24

The news of his plans for the new academic year came as a big surprise to his parents but certainly far from a disappointing one. Like Frank himself, they couldn't believe his good fortune; it all seemed so incredible and to them their son had grown up so fast. As he dwelt on the details of the bridging course he would undertake in order to qualify and the assistance provided by Aoife and her parents, Sara and Pat in their amazement were unable to find words good enough to express their heartfelt gratitude and admiration for the Clifford family. It was one of those lovely moments among many that Christmas with family and friends, with the welcome of lighted candles in all the windows, the hush and silence of the snow outside and the thoughts of meeting Aoife soon again, surely made this their best Christmas together.

The snow had eased and the trains were running again. Frank and his classmates had returned to college. Shortly after breakfast on their first day back, Frank, who had just taken his seat at his desk in the study, was handed a letter by the class Prefect. His heart leaped up when he saw it was from Aoife and at that moment he couldn't have wished for anything better. Immediately, its distress hit him; it was written with such perplexity, such speed and bewilderment the words seemed to stray off the page. Surely it was a nightmare. He shook his head. His heart and soul sank and sank. He wanted to scream; there was no strength. He looked again at the envelope which had Shannon Airport stamped on it and then back at the note. Certain words and phrases were jumping up to meet him: 'Shannon on way to Harvard' – 'given no option' – 'escorted' – very distressing – 'O Frank, Dearest Frank' – 'so sorry' – 'will write' – 'miss you terribly' – 'love for ever' – 'Aoife.'

“What is all this?” he whispers to himself. “A hoax perhaps?” But deep down he began to believe that his earlier uneasiness had returned to haunt him as his worst nightmare. Baffled and distressed, he approached the class Prefect for permission to see Fr Jim. He could hardly muster the energy to lift his legs, his head and body were so limp and heavy to make it along the corridor and up the stairs to his room. Fr Jim knew immediately something very serious was amiss and he moved to comfort Frank listening with great concern to his every word and ensuring that all his concerns were discussed. Fr at first thought of taking Frank back to the study while he drove out to the Clifford homestead to check but on second thought suggested they both should go.

It was an anxious time. They were hoping to drive up the avenue to the house but the entrance gate was securely locked and carried the notice that entry was not allowed by order of the Land Commission. They parked the car a short distance from the gate where it was easier to climb over the wall and headed briskly in the cold morning air for the house. Getting closer, they saw that all shutters were drawn and then as expected all entrances locked with notices that the home was under the protection of the Land Commission. Frank was shattered, his heart and spirit broken. Fr consoled him as best he could as they slowly returned to the car, assuring him that he would hear from Aoife who would provide an explanation for this strange and unexpected occurrence, one that would set his mind at rest. Fr spent the next few hours with Frank until he was ready to re-join his classmates who were very understanding towards him believing the Cliffords had moved for a period to the United States.

As he lay awake that night, all his thoughts were of them and their terrible plight. In a moment of distressful contemplation, his imagination took control triggering visions of Aoife and her parents.

Every so often, Aoife would look in his direction. He felt that she was trying to communicate with him and so he called out to her only have the vision disappear. He couldn't believe how real everything looked and decided to make a record of the scene in the morning including a sketch. For now, he wouldn't disclose this to anyone in case it was seen as a reflection of his mental state. Little did he realise that this was to recur on a regular basis for the next four years. He prayed and prayed for that letter. America was so far away and communication so slow that it took weeks for a letter to arrive from there. Eimear's parents would call to see him in the hope that he might have heard from her. They had launched their own investigation but were unable to get the government help they needed. The stock response was that the family had gone to America as they had done many times before and it was contrary to government policy to interfere in their affairs.

The days and weeks now went by so slowly. He waited and waited. There was no letter. Frank had written to a close friend in Boston, a practising attorney who might be able to look into it for him. He was expecting to hear back from him any day now. Frank not wishing to let the Leaving Certificate get away on him began to put more effort into his studies. His private work on psychology and biology suffered and had stopped for now. Frank's Boston attorney had carried out discretely exhaustive investigations in an effort to locate their whereabouts. His friends at Harvard assured him that they were not there. The same response had come in from a number of other centres. The attorney had personally visited a friend in Neurology at Harvard who had met them during one of their earlier visits but had not met them or heard about them since then. Frank was convinced that they were secluded against their will in some centre controlled by the military or secret service or both and he couldn't bear to imagine their suffering and mental agony and was convulsed with the indignity and injustice of their situation. His most recent vision was of Aoife in a

laboratory with another person. In an earlier one, she was with her parents down by the seashore. His parents had supplied him with the contact details of a cousin in New York. He would write to him and secure his support and sponsorship of his application to emigrate to America after he had completed his Leaving Certificate in June. He was quite confident that once he had time to settle in, he would be able to locate an organisation that would take up his case.

Chapter 25

Fr Jim's support never waned and was invaluable in helping him focus on his studies. It was also there to help him cope with the news from Eimear's parents that the Clifford home had been demolished. Frank was in a hurry to get to America but the weeks seemed to be going by ever so slowly and June seemed so far away. On Tuesday of Easter Week in April, he headed home to spend a week with his family. His parents had already heard from a relative who was living in New York and was more than happy to sponsor Frank. They had recently received from him all the information and documentation that Frank would need when lodging his application. Sara and Pat were very concerned for their son and were keen to do everything they could to help. They had on many occasions during the previous three months discussed what he must have been going through and were so glad that Easter had brought them together even if only for a short time. They had discussed the situation with Pete O'Brien who was a regular visitor and couldn't have been more supportive. His confidence in Frank's ability to cope and to eventually find the answers was reassuring to them.

Pete was there with the family when Frank arrived home with Pat who had gone to meet him at the railway station. Any conversation that involved Pete was invariably lively as he saw both interest and humour in all those events that were the subject of his many and varied questions whether related to the trip north to Mayo, college life, the state of the countryside or local oddities. He was out on his own when it came to putting together a string of pertinent questions and comments that sustained interesting and entertaining conversation. Frank wasn't expecting to have heard so soon from his cousin in New York and was thrilled to receive the information from his mother during

the course of the evening. He had never met his cousin, Bill, who had grown up with his father and Pete and emigrated to New York a few years before Frank was born. While they worked their way through the information received, Pete and Pat painted an admirable picture of Bill to Frank's great satisfaction that emphasised his warm disposition and charm. It was going to be a good week with the family. The following evening, he sat down with his parents to complete his application with the intention of lodging it immediately as the processing was expected to take at least a couple of months. According to Pete's reckoning, he could expect to join Bill in New York by August. Buoyed by the current situation and heartened by the support from family and friends, he spent more than a few hours each day while at home on his studies. With fewer than eight weeks to the commencement of his final exams, he returned to college on the Tuesday after Easter, feeling a lot more positive and focused.

When it came time for Frank and his class to move to the College in Western Road in Cork City a few days before the commencement of their final certificate, Fr Jim made himself available to be there with them for the duration of the examinations. He had also put together information for Frank to take away with him when leaving the College for the final time at the end of the Leaving Certificate. Included were the details of friends in both Boston and New York whom he could rely upon for their support as well as the kindest and loveliest of farewell letters that he has treasured to this day. Their final dinner together was a farewell by the College to them and their own farewell to the College and to one another. Fr Jim was there again in the morning to farewell them as they boarded the bus for the railway station. Frank would forever remember it as one of the most moving moments in his life and had promised to stay in contact.

Back home in Mayo, He was again invited by the parish football association to join its team for the summer championships and he

looked forward to both the practice sessions and the games. When not helping out on the farm, he would visit his grandparents and aunts and uncle all of whom had their own version of what had occurred in Cork. Unlike his parents, they were finding it hard to accept what had happened and they all wanted to hear how he planned to find them given the size of America. His response was always the same – that he had already worked on some strategies that could prove useful over time. For example, he would work on enlisting the support of as many as possible Irish and Irish American clubs and associations.

With his thoughts on Aoife, Frank woke up to his blackest day since her disappearance. The fourth Friday in July – what shattering news! He looked and looked again in utter disbelief at “Application declined after careful consideration of the information available to it.” He was rattled to the core, so confused and hysterical his whole family, shocked and disappointed, wept openly with him. That kind and happy world, where had it all gone? Its light had turned to darkness – to one long night of despair. The only relief now was that occasional hallucination or vision. It was nearly always of a different scene and always included Aoife. Its occurrence was unpredictable sometimes taking place during the day when least expected or at night in the form of a dream. One at the end of August was of a particularly beautiful scene with Aoife, a very young baby and Eimear and Rob.

As the weeks went by, appointments with the Immigration Office at the American Embassy were attended by Frank and his father; the support of the local member of the Dail and legal representation, all came to nothing. With harvesting over and the weather getting colder, there was little activity on the farm. When all his job applications to private organisations and government departments led to nothing, he recalled what Rob had said during one of his visits to the Cliffords that the only road open to young people in Ireland was the one leading to the pier. This he had seen for himself more than once on his trip back

to college at the end of each vacation. So after spending what became his last Christmas and New Year with his family, he bid them farewell on a very wet and wintry morning for England arriving in Birmingham during one of its worst winters with most of the city snowbound. Despite his best intentions to make a go of it, as he worked with some lovely people first at Cadbury Chocolates and later at Birmingham Corporation, the smog, the dampness and the general chaos of the city itself, still very noticeably carrying the scars of the Second World War, were too much for him. During his two years in Birmingham, he applied on two separate occasions to enter America without success. All during this time he had kept in touch with Fr Jim whose friends in America hadn't given up their search for the Cliffords.

Frank moved to London in 1957 where in his spare time he took up studies in hydraulics while he worked for the British Railways. Again, he applied to enter America and again he was refused. The visions had become a very significant part of his life and a great source of comfort as the only link to Aoife and her family. When they ceased in January 1958, he despaired of ever seeing Aoife again. One evening, less than two months later, he sat alone in his flat in Lady Margaret Road Kentish Town quietly contemplating aspects of his life when in a moment of deep meditation his inner consciousness came to the fore accessing a place or world of unmitigated bliss. He was not alone now. Radiant Aoife was also there; she had come to meet him and in serene joy they conversed and moved through the special psychic energy around them. Though it reminded Frank of what heaven could be like, it was a type of cosmos parallel to ours where normally one's known ancestors came to meet one. When it was time for him to return, there were no farewells or good byes and the joy he experienced sustained him until they met again. Since then, this phenomenon recurred timely throughout his life. He saw no need to share it with anyone except Fr Jim.

As a result of receiving in June his national service notice, he decided to settle in Australia after reading an advertisement inviting people to apply. A friend with whom he worked in London tried to talk him out of it, calling it a life sentence with Australia so far away. It took weeks to get there and communication was very slow. After a brief visit to his family in Mayo and Fr Jim in Cork, he sailed for Sydney in July 1958, a couple of weeks after his twenty-first birthday.

Chapter 26

The long voyage to Australia was a time of much reflection as Frank revisited events of 1953 and 1954, time and time again. He thought about the plans Aoife had for both of them and how things could have been so different. He thought about those four and a half years that should have been the most marvellous beginning to their life together and about what Aoife and her parents' support would have enabled him to achieve. The closer the boat was to Sydney, the more determined he had become to complete his studies as planned back then. This he felt was what Aoife would have wanted him to do. It wasn't going to be easy and would involve making sacrifices but it was achievable and achieve it he must.

The following year, he enrolled part-time in biology and psychology at the local university while also undertaking a bridging course in the sciences. Just before Christmas, he received a letter in response to one he had written to Fr Jim. It was from a young priest attached to the Order's house in England. He was involved in parish duties with Fr Jim who had transferred to England for a couple of years. The letter explained that Fr Jim had died one night in a house fire when away on parish work for the weekend. This news badly affected Frank for months. Fr Jim was one person he had expected to be around for years to come.

At the start of the next academic year, he was able to transfer to medicine. He worked at two jobs: driving a taxi at the weekend and teaching mathematics to high school students a few evenings a week. The term vacation brought a welcome respite even though he still had his studies and both jobs to manage. As the terms went by, it didn't get any easier and there were the few times when he thought of withdrawing from the course but something within him wouldn't hear of

it. Eventually, he got there and he knew it was all worth it. With internship and all other requirements behind him, he eventually became a neurology fellow at the Mater Hospital and later accepted a position as neurologist at St Vincent's Hospital in the city.

In 1977, he was invited to attend a conference in London. He planned to take some leave to spend time with his family and visit a former classmate, Tom Gannon, who now worked for a petrochemical company in New York. They had been corresponding with each other since Frank's mother included Tom's address in her letter after he had called to see her and the family on a visit from New York. Frank surprised himself at how excited he was about the upcoming trip and carefully worked out his itinerary. He had no trouble this time in acquiring a transit visa for his time in New York. He would fly to London for the two-day conference after which he would visit his parents in Mayo for two and a half weeks. It was then onto New York for five days. Tom had indicated that he would arrange a get-together of those other classmates working in New York and close by. This was indeed great news – something of old times if only for a few hours and he aimed to enjoy every moment of it.

In terms of duration, the flight to London was in marked contrast to his sailing from there to Sydney. He recalled how well he had enjoyed the voyage visiting places he had only read about till then. Suddenly, everywhere seemed so much closer now. The drive from the airport to Central London displayed a similar rather slow level of development to that in Sydney. The one very noticeable change to Central London was definitely for the better. The buildings and monuments carried little of that dark outer layer that was previously a feature of much pollution. Each evening after the conference, Frank spent a few hours visiting centres familiar to him. Overall, he saw Central London as more colourful and vibrant with a lot more night life and looked forward to spending more time there on his next visit.

Less than one hour out of London, the plane touched down in Dublin. He was excited and a little nervous wondering how well his parents looked after all this time. As he hurried from customs, there to meet him were his parents and youngest sister. He will never forget that look of beauty on their faces – happiness, love, pride and contentment all evolving into one unforgettable outburst of intense emotion. It was real and extraordinary. It was a renewal of spirit and soul heralding a new beginning. It was two and a half weeks together of great joy and happiness. He enjoyed meeting up with the villagers still around and Pete O'Brien talked and laughed about the past as if it were yesterday. It felt so strange not having his grandparents around when he visited his uncle and cousins in Corribglen. It was a place that held many happy memories for him. Night after night, his parents and he talked well into the early hour of the morning. They talked about past events, about his life in Sydney and about the future and when they were most likely to meet again. He observed the comfort the words 'in two years' gave them, and so when it came time to leave, they accompanied him to Shannon Airport where his reassurance of returning again soon made parting, though very moving, hopefully a little less sad.

Chapter 27

Tom was there, name card in hand, at Kennedy Airport to meet him. It was an exciting time for both of them. They joked about the name card, Frank asking Tom if he thought he might not have identified him after over twenty years. It was customary back in college to hail or address a fellow student by his surname. Frank had forgotten all about it until he saw the name card with just his surname. He was both amused and fascinated and what better he thought to establish immediate rapport. The walk to the car was like a stroll of old down the college avenue, chatting away oblivious to everything else. They had begun to make up for all that lost time. It was New York on a Friday afternoon and school was out, marking the end of the term and the beginning of the summer recess. It was also the moment Tom's wife and children had been waiting for and the opportunity to meet Tom's close college friend. Having heard the car arrive, they were there at the door with the warmest of welcomes. Over drinks, they chatted about his visit to Mayo and the changes that had occurred in his years away. Tom seemed surprised that he hadn't visited their old college in Cork and explained that a meeting with four of their classmates had been arranged for the following evening at the University Club at 1 West 54th Street at Fifth Avenue, a short distance away. Frank sat down with the family to a beautifully prepared dinner which, like his own childhood family meals, was a freewheeling affair with everyone contributing to the conversation and often all at the same time. The children were keen to hear about Australia and the kangaroos and Koalas and Frank didn't disappoint them. By the time he finished talking about them, they could just about read and drive, particularly the kangaroos, and were great boxers. Tom handed him the names and details of those classmates he could expect to meet next evening and said he had met them quite regularly at different

functions. Part of the details Tom provided was a brief description of their careers. Like Tom, Seamus Buckley, who lived in Boston, worked in petrochemicals but not for the same company. Colm Cassidy was a senior lecturer in mathematics at Columbia University, Adam Lynch an anchorman for CNN and Jack Keegan an administrator at City Hall.

There was no hurrying next morning. After breakfast and a look at the newspapers, Frank, Tom and his family made their way to the Rockefeller Centre to visit a few of the city's iconic landmarks, including the Museum of Modern Art, St Patrick's Cathedral and Saks flagship store before returning home in time to get ready for their meeting at 7.00pm with their former classmates. Tom, who was a member of the club, suggested they give themselves time to check out its facilities, including the largest club library in the world before their friends began to arrive. The club was founded in the autumn of 1861 by principally Yale alumni and was not affiliated with any other club. Frank's first reaction was one of amazement at its level of opulence. It reminded him of European palaces and Ashford Castle back in Mayo. He couldn't get over the size and quality of the library.

Tom had arranged for them to meet on the terrace for drinks before dinner. Colm Cassidy and Adam Lynch had already arrived when Tom and Frank got there. It was instant recognition and time itself had taken very good care of them and indeed of Seamus Buckley and Jack Keegan who joined them minutes later. They were all so excited to see Frank and wanted to hear all about his life since they were last together in Cork. Their eagerness to hear every detail meant no pausing in the very lively conversation that ensued and carried over to the dining room. It was a while before Frank had time to enquire about their individual journeys since college and was surprised to learn that all including Tom had completed their graduate and post graduate studies in New York. During the course of the evening, Colm Cassidy

took Frank aside to tell him about a young lecturer who, at the beginning of the year, had joined the Faculty of Mathematics at Columbia. During a casual meeting at his department's get-together in the university restaurant to mark the end of the semester, he mentioned that he was looking forward to meeting a former classmate at the weekend and how they hadn't met since their college years in Cork Ireland. It was when he referred to his classmate by name that she asked him about the name of the college and its location in relation to Cork city. She looked very surprised at the time. Then a short time later in the afternoon, she turned up at Colm's office asking if he could do her a special favour and give a message she had prepared to Frank. Before taking the envelope from his pocket to give to Frank, Colm suggested that Frank might put it away till later when he was alone. Frank agreed and taking the message placed it in his pocket. It was an agonising couple of hours till he got back to Tom's place before reading this message:

Dear Frank,

This afternoon, I learnt by chance of your presence here in NY. I believe you were the student who was a close friend of the Clifford family in Carrignavar County Cork in the early fifties. I dearly wish to meet you before you leave as there is much information I want to share with you. My address and contact number are on the back. I am in all day tomorrow, Sunday, and can meet you any other day before you leave at a time convenient to you.

This is a wish come true! I eagerly and gratefully await your call. What is of great importance to me now is that we meet as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Aine Clifford.

Frank before he could think what to think broke down. Tom's family had retired for the night and Tom, about to commiserate with him, was handed the note. Moments later, as Frank tried to compose himself, Tom took him by the arm quietly saying, "Wonderful news, Frank! I'm so happy for you. I can drop you off there tomorrow. Eileen will be delighted. We have talked about the Cork situation more than once over the years"

"Thanks, Tom. I feel as if a great weight has been lifted off my shoulders, and it couldn't ever have happened if you hadn't organised the reunion. I'm forever grateful to you. In fact it goes right back to the time you visited my parents asking them for my contact details. Talk about fortuity – this is my luckiest of days! My mother used to say that things happened for a reason. Perhaps she was right. I will contact Aine in the morning."

It was already past midnight but in the excitement of the moment, they relived aspects of their college years before retiring feeling all the better for the experience. Frank was awake most of the night thinking about what Aine had said in her note and could hardly wait for morning to arrive. After breakfast, he arranged to call to see her at 11.00 o'clock as she lived in West 94th Street in Upper Manhattan only a short distance from the Gannon home. As Tom dropped him off at her apartment, Frank said that he would make his own way back and that he would call him later in the day.

The door opened to the announcement of his arrival and in the blinking of an eye, there in front of him was a vision of Aoife, a picture of such unimaginable beauty and loveliness that he was instantly overwhelmed by emotion, unable to speak or move only to be tenderly comforted by the warm embrace of Aine. Tears streaming down her face, she gently led him to the sitting room where, without question or answer, words so softly spoken conveyed him through the years from

Cork to New York. In secret arrangements expedient to both the Irish government and the US military, Aoife and her parents were forcibly removed to a facility in San Diego where Aoife worked for the military. Her parents were given positions at the San Diego State University under strict military conditions. They could not be given profiles in the staff directory and were forbidden, among other things, to contact their relatives in Ireland or elsewhere. These restrictions were lifted to some degree in July 1958.

Aoife had died in 1958, on 15th January. Her parents were indescribably shattered, their lives grief-stricken to this very day. They had noticed that her health had begun to deteriorate. They were terribly worried and tried everything within their power to help her. Then when they had some reasons to feel optimistic, she passed away in her sleep. Aine was born on 8th September 1954 and was less than three and a half years of age when her mother, Aoife, passed away. "My Grandmother had said that one day soon we would meet. She was wonderful and talked to me regularly about you. I know so much and was planning to visit your family in Mayo at Christmas in my quest to find you. O dear Mom! O dear, dear Father! I'm so happy and sad right now – so, so very long to wait, to believe, to dream – for you, for me. I have loved you and longed to meet you ever since Mom and Granny told me about you. It was terribly sad how Mom died. Granny said she died of a broken heart."

It all seemed too much. To mind came the line from "Hamlet": *The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*. Like Hamlet, Frank was for now a very confused man. As the afternoon progressed, he found great comfort in Aine's story of her upbringing by her Grandparents and her successes at college and in sport as well as in the kindness and pity and love which she shared with him. Aine in anticipation had prepared her Grandparents the previous evening for this moment. She knew well how they would respond to the news and so tried hard

to maintain her composure while at the same time showing her own happiness and surprise. They couldn't believe what they were hearing and wanted to come immediately to New York. Aine suggested they wait until Frank had spoken to them on the phone. They were both retired now and lived by the ocean in Atlantic Beach North Florida.

It was a beautiful late Sunday afternoon and Aine and Frank took a walk in Central Park which was only a couple of minutes from Aine's apartment. It brought welcome relief to the tensions and anxiety of the earlier part of the day. Frank had already rung Tom to say that he wouldn't be back till late. After a relaxing time in the park, during which they talked, among other things, about their chosen careers, they sat down to dinner in one of Aine's favourite restaurants. They were both happy beyond description, so much so that they felt compelled to tell each other and talk about what it all meant to them. Their lives had changed utterly, so fast, so wonderfully, and so sublimely. They would arise on the morrow to a life imbued with new direction and design, with a new purpose and energy as well as an unshakable belief in the pursuit of good and one's own life convictions.

Back in the apartment, Frank was now ready to call Aine's Grandparents. Though it was a call they were expecting, they could not have prepared themselves for the spontaneous grip that the intense outpouring of long pent-up emotions and feelings had on them. It was a moment of ardent exhilaration punctuated by pauses of deep silence that were as compellingly meaningful as the most soulful conversation. There was great joy all around. Aine who was due to fly out the following day to join her Grandparents for the summer break would delay her flight for two days when she would accompany Frank to Atlantic Beach. Frank would postpone his return to Sydney for now in order to be with his Daughter and her Grandparents. That night Tom and his wife, Maria, listened with awe and great empathy to Frank and silently thanked God for their role in this extraordinary and

beautiful event which had a profound effect on all of them. Their next two days together were very special and featured in their conversation for months to come.

Next evening Frank and his daughter had dinner together followed by a gentle stroll in Central Park. He had already noticed Aine's great strength of character and insights into life and he tried to be as positive as possible in their discussion. During dinner he talked about the visions that ceased when Aoife passed away and the paranormal experiences that had replaced them. For the first time, his description of these experiences was a very detailed one. Aine hung on his every word and the comfort he found in this encouraged him to share with her the best possible descriptions. These revelations to Aine added another sad dimension to the family tragedy. Frank had already told her about his concerns and fears upon hearing from Aoife about her special abilities and Harvard's involvement in their assessment.

"My Grandparents have never forgiven themselves for their role in it and blame themselves for everything that happened to her including her death. Nothing anyone could say or do would alter their opinion. It's so sad. I know it has ruined their lives, and you're my Father, my Dad, and how you have suffered. It was so wrong, so immoral and so evil. Apart from my Grandparents, I have never been able to trust anyone until I met you, but there's one matter, I haven't disclosed even to my Grandparents as I know how much it would worry them. I want to tell you because I believe you know it will remain forever our secret. Dear, dear Mom! I am indeed her daughter." Frank looked down briefly before facing his daughter as he bowed and bowed ever so slowly and definitively while embracing his daughter so tenderly.

On the eve of their leaving New York, they were joined by the Gannon family for dinner. They were all so looking forward to meeting – Tom and Maria ever since hearing about Frank's daughter and Aine

because they were her Dad's friends. It was a very enjoyable and memorable happy family occasion. Aine and Tom's family promised to meet regularly once university resumed in September, something that gave Frank a lot of satisfaction. It also meant that Frank and Tom got together more often than previously expected with Frank regularly visiting his daughter in New York and her Grandparents in Florida.

On the following day, Aine and Frank flew into Jacksonville International Airport just after midday planning to catch a taxi to Atlantic Beach about twenty six miles away. Aine had told her Grandparents of their plans and so was not expecting to see them there. Meeting them face to face as the door to the arrival lounge opened stopped Frank in his tracks. It was as if his whole being had turned to jelly only to be rescued by the sheer euphoria of the moment. Eimear and Rob were so beautifully gentle and welcoming and happy beyond belief. Here stood their beloved son who had been lost to them for many years and their excitement and gratitude begged description. Yet, Frank found it hard to accept the toll the years they were apart had taken on them and deep down felt an angry sadness. Though they appeared well, they still looked old beyond their years. Where had those erect and athletic figures gone, the man of golf and the lady of tennis and so much more? The drive home to Ocean Avenue reaffirmed in so many wonderful and joyful ways that the ties that for so long bound them had now created a family that was meant to be. The reception they received on arriving home and the banquet prepared by Eimear, Rob and their neighbours were truly a declaration of the meaning and power of hope. They were together at last and all the neighbours there to share in the celebrations felt it and acknowledged with great delight their happiness.

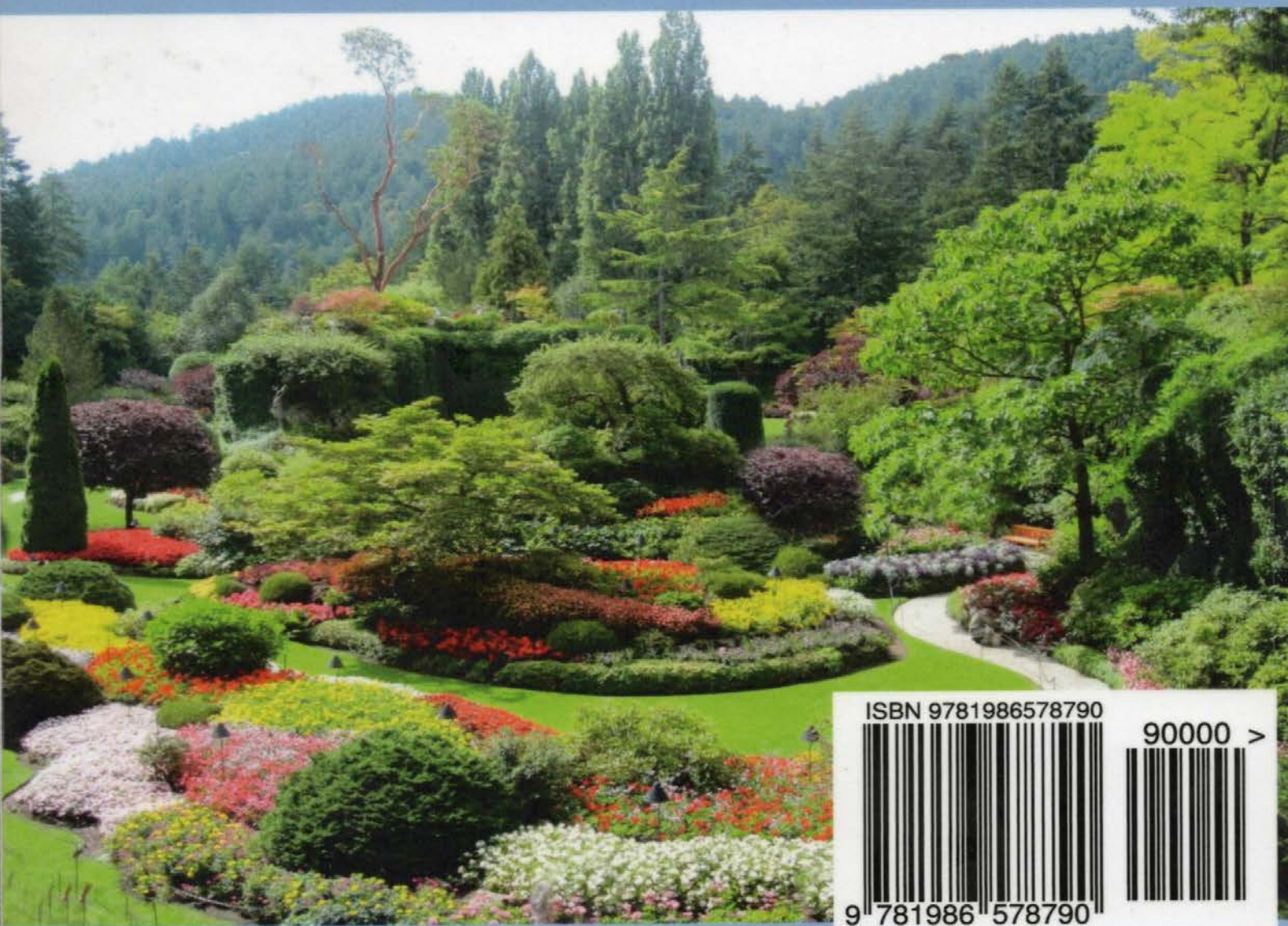
They savoured every minute of their three weeks together. Eimear had quickly organised an album of photos for Frank including a few of the family mausoleum in the Holy Cross cemetery in San Diego.

As Aine had expressed a wish to amend her birth certificate to O'Connor-Clifford, all the necessary documentation was completed to the great joy of all. As the three weeks were drawing to a close, they went with Frank to San Diego for a few days before he continued on to Sydney. The mausoleum was a fitting monument to Aoife, the only person he ever truly loved. This was a meeting never expected but one etched in memory. When it came time to leave, his daughter and in-laws accompanied him to the airport. It was so hard to leave them but he took comfort in knowing that they would be together again for Christmas.

Shortly after returning to Columbia for the start of the new college year, Aine met and fell in love with a young mathematician by the name of Paul Dwyer. They married in February 1979 in St Patrick's Cathedral and had two children, Fergus born in 1980 and Aoife born two years later. In March 1979, Aine and Paul applied for positions at Jacksonville University in order to be near her ailing Grandparents. Paul was offered a position to take effect in September 1980 at the beginning of the new college year. They both resigned from Columbia at the end of May 1980 and moved to Atlantic Beach to be near Eimear and Rob. Sadly, Eimear passed away after a short illness aged seventy four, just over a month later and three months after the birth of her great-grandson in April 1980. Rob, who had appeared in relatively good health, died suddenly in August of the same year aged seventy five.

For the next seventeen years until Frank retired in 1997 aged sixty, Aine's family and he met regularly in either Atlantic Beach or Sydney. Today twenty years later, he lives happily with Aine and Paul and regularly visits his three great-grandchildren and their parents in West Palm Beach and Atlanta.

Frank O'Connor was born and raised on a farm in the West of Ireland. His childhood was carefree, intuitive and indeed extraordinary. Later, while at college, he met and fell in love with a very beautiful and exceptionally talented young lady. Her parents were leading professionals very involved in research among other things. They received Frank with open arms and were very understanding and supportive. With comprehensive plans in place to enable Frank to achieve his goals in life, the unexpected and seemingly inexplicable occurred. This changed his life for ever and even more so the lives of those who meant so much to him. The challenges were many and diverse as indeed were the achievements. The secret forces colluding against him despite his efforts to counter them led to a life as incredible as the cause itself. The extraordinary, the suspenseful, the tragic and the beautiful carry the story to its intriguing conclusion.



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