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The Troubles

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Haverty: The Troubles

THE TROUBLES

Charles Haverty

In the morning, they took a taxi from their hotel on St. Stephen's Green to a car rental agency on South Circular Road. A man in an apron was sweeping up behind the counter; otherwise, the place was deserted. The man had a wrestler's build and severe black brows under a shock of white hair. When Michael and Rachel entered, he snatched off his apron, as if he'd been caught at something shameful. He leaned the broom in a far corner, draped the apron over the broomstick, and stationed himself behind a brass nameplate that read: "J. COOGAN." When he brought their reservation up on the computer screen, his eyes brightened.

"So you're from Boston then?"

Though the question was directed at Michael, he didn't wish to speak, not in front of Rachel. Overnight, words had become another currency whose exchange rate he couldn't calculate, and he'd fallen into thrifty silence. He didn't want casual conversation to counteract this knot of fresh poison between him and his wife, not yet. He wanted to taste it, savor it, like a rotten tooth. Rachel could do the talking. He wasn't about to make this any easier for her.

"You know it?" Rachel said. She was small and dark and, except for a peripatetic nausea—what she called her "morning, noon, and night sickness"—showed no signs of pregnancy. "Boston, I mean."

"Strictly by proxy. I've got a son there—or thereabouts." Assuming a stock Boston accent, he said, "Kid's a brick-layah in Doah-chestah."

"Bravo!" She was easily delighted, easy with strangers. "Have you been over?"

"Never had the inclination. But the wedding's in August, so I suppose I haven't much choice. He's marrying an Irish girl. Three thousand miles just to marry an O'Toole." He folded his

hands on the counter in front of him. "So what brings Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly to Dublin?"

"My husband's people come from here," Rachel said, "and so we thought—"

"From Dublin?"

"Galway," Michael said.

"Is that so? Whereabouts in Galway?"

"I'm not quite sure," Michael said, but he wasn't anywhere close to sure, and the question and his answer made him feel fraudulent.

"Still, it's always exciting exploring one's roots, wouldn't you say, Mr. Donnelly?" Coogan said. "Kunta Kinte and all that."

"Actually, Ireland was *my* idea," Rachel said. "My husband here wanted to go to Venice. But we made a deal." In fact, they'd talked about Venice for as long as they'd been married; it was only with her pregnancy that she'd become taken with the sentimental impulse—a "craving," she'd called it—to come here.

"You made him an offer he couldn't refuse, eh?"

"I promised to do the driving."

"And what part of the island might *your* people come from, Mrs. Donnelly?"

"My people?" she said. "My people come from *Coney* Island—the kosher part. My people are Yids, Mr. Coogan, Russian Jews."

"Well now, I wouldn't be so sure about that." He leaned farther over the counter. "After all, you know what they say about the lost tribe of Israel."

"What *do* they say?"

"They say they ended up here. The Tribe of Dan, I believe they were called."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, I believe it is. At Ballyshannon in Donegal. So there might be a bit of the Hebrew in all of us." He winked at Michael. "And a bit of the Irish, as well."

Even Coogan's most declarative sentences curled up at the ends, interrogatively, accusatively, and though Michael knew that

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this brogue should touch some chord in him—clearly Rachel was a sucker for it—to his ears it sounded put on, played up, and he bristled at the agent's overfamiliarity.

"Which way will you be traveling then?" Coogan asked.

"South," Rachel said. "Down along the Ring of Kerry and then—"

"Well, that's pretty country all right—down to Bantry Bay and up through the cliffs and the Burren and all—but then there's the *people*, Mrs. Donnelly."

"The people?"

"Don't you know the natives in Kerry are infamous for eating their young?"

Rachel laughed, which only encouraged him.

"Really now, one can't tell the people from the sheep down there. No, you'll be wanting to go north."

"Well, I *wanted* to go north—County Down, Carrickfergus, the River Lagan—"

"Yes, yes," Coogan said blandly, "all the old songs."

"—but my husband wouldn't hear of it."

"No?" He shifted his sights to Michael. "And why's that, Mr. Donnelly?"

"I'd just as soon avoid any troubles," Michael said, making a point of the plural.

"Now don't be believing everything you read in the newspapers." A shadow passed over Coogan's face, like a cloud crossing the sun, and as he turned his attention to his paperwork, Michael saw that his hand was badly scarred, as if burned. A pale pink flush spread over the back of it and under the cuff of his shirtsleeve.

"Will the both of you be driving the vehicle?"

"Just me," Rachel said.

"Just you?"

"Just I. That was part of the deal."

"The deal?"

"The aforementioned shamrocks-for-gondolas deal."

"Ah yes, *that* deal." His black brows lifted. "The missus drives

in Ireland and the mister in Venice. Is that the deal then?"

"Something like that," Michael said.

"Then I'll be needing to see Mrs. Donnelly's driving license, if you please."

Rachel removed her wallet from her big black handbag and shuffled through it. Frowning, she returned to the handbag, laying out its contents on the countertop, item by item: her passport; an already dog-eared copy of *What to Expect When You're Expecting*; three rolls of antacids; a plastic tube of Dramamine; *Karen Brown's Ireland: Charming Inns & Itineraries*, its pages flickering with Post-its; a redundant Tampax in a weather-beaten wrapper; a plastic packet of Kleenex; two shades of lipstick; an Aer Lingus air sickness bag; a snap-shut sunglasses case covered in a red, black, and white ladybug pattern; and a half-eaten Snickers bar fuzzy with lint.

At last, she said, "I can't believe it. I must have left it at home—on the kitchen table when I was sorting out credit cards and such."

"Well, there goes the deal then, doesn't it?" Coogan said.

"Michael, I am *so* sorry."

Michael hated to drive, even on the right side of the road and the right side of the car, and the sudden prospect of motoring up and down Ireland filled him with dread. He'd heard countless horror stories about the roads, and Rachel's promise to drive had been the *sine qua non* of his agreement to come here. But he refused to give either his wife or the agent the satisfaction of showing his fear. Instead, he shrugged and said, "Just the latest in a series of betrayals," and though this was meant to wound Rachel, he found himself blushing.

"Really now, Michael," she said. "Betrayal? That's not fair, is it?" She was pushing him, daring him to take this further in the presence of this stranger. She knew he wouldn't.

"Now, now," Coogan said. "If you're in the market for a divorce, I'm afraid you've come to the wrong place."

"After all, it *is* a Catholic country," Rachel said.

"That may be." Coogan frowned. "In any case, all I do is

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hire out cars."

Now Rachel blushed. "Oh, I didn't mean—"

"Unless you'll be requiring separate vehicles," he said, brightening, "in which case I'm your man."



"So, are you going to give me the silent treatment the entire trip?" Rachel asked.

Michael didn't answer, but his quiet had taken on a different quality. Steering the little white rent-a-car through the outskirts of Dublin required his total attention, and for the moment his survival instinct displaced Rachel's confession of the night before. He felt paralyzed behind the wheel, while the brightly painted doors of the row houses streaked along his peripheral vision.

"It's a long, long way to Tipperary," she said.

"Tipperary's not on the itinerary."

"It's an even longer way to Galway."

"I have to concentrate," he said. "I can't take my eyes off the road."

"I wasn't asking for eye contact," she said. "Just a little conversation."

"I'd have thought you'd be all talked out after J. Coogan," he said.

"Wasn't he a character?"

"You heard that Kunta Kinte business?"

"I heard it but I didn't get it."

"Come on, you remember," he said. "Kunta Kinte? *Roots*?"

"Oh, now I get it. *Roots*. He was talking about *your* roots."

"But with the accent on *Kunt*."

"Oh really now, Michael," she said. "You've got to put a leash on your paranoia."

"My paranoia?"

"All right then, your anger. You've been hyper-defensive since we got here. After all, these *are* your people."

His people. His parents' parents were the children of

Irishmen. Anything worth remembering about Ireland had been left behind, or forgotten, a piece at a time, generation after generation, until all he remembered were small hours spent among small people in small, stale rooms. The smell of trapped gas, the odor of disappointment, the gravity of grudges. He thought of his grandfather's hungry eyes under brows as black as Coogan's, the network of ruptured capillaries stitched across the old man's cheeks and nose, ice cubes melting in the whiskey glass. He felt no connection to any of this, to any of them. He had no people.

They left Dublin and traveled down through Arklow, to Waterford, where they took a quick tour of the crystal factory and bought a set of wineglasses. But the roads grew narrower and narrower after Waterford, edged with stone walls or thickets concealing stone walls, and time and again he had to pull the car over to allow some bus or truck or tractor to pass ahead or behind him.

Finally, Rachel said, "You can't pull over every time another car comes along."

"Two solid objects can't occupy the same space at the same time," Michael said. "There's a lesson in Irish history for you, Mrs. Donnelly."

"There are two lanes, Michael. You're driving like an old lady. At this rate, we'll never get to Galway."

"I'd say you left your right to criticize my driving back in Boston—somewhere on the kitchen table with your driver's license."

"Can't you just let that go?" she said. "Please? I said I was sorry. I *am* sorry. Are you going to hold this over my head all the way to Galway?"

"You bet I will."

After a pause, she said, "Don't think I don't know what you're doing."

"What am I doing?"

"This is all about Brian, isn't it? You're using this driving business as a way of punishing me for Brian."

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"What are you talking about?"

"This is your chickenshit way of talking *around* the issue because you're afraid to talk *about* it."

"I'm not afraid to talk about it," he said. "It just makes me *sick* to talk about it." When this failed to draw blood, he said, "I remember him now."

"Do you?"

"He was there at Thanksgiving."

"I told you that," she said. "I told you that last night."

"He kept calling the pumpkin pie 'pudding.'"

"That's what they call it in England. Dessert, I mean. He wasn't being affectatious, he was just being British. He can't help that."

"No, I'm sure he can't," Michael said. He wasn't sure how far he wanted to go with this. "We played charades."

"That's right."

"He was on my team. I can't believe it. He was on *my* team."

"He liked you," she said. "He likes you a lot."

"Only, he pronounced it '*charahds*.'"

"That's how they—"

"Yes, he's British. We've established that. He insisted that *The Importance of Being Earnest* was spelled without the 'a,' as in Ernest Hemingway or Ernest Borgnine or—"

"So what?"

"So it got to be embarrassing after a while," he said. "Like that pudding business. Very insistent, your Brian."

"You know, he insisted on pulling the plug as soon as I told him I was pregnant. *He* did."

"Well, that was awfully cricket of him, eh what?"

"When I kissed him goodbye, he didn't—" Her voice dropped. "—he wouldn't even kiss back."

"I think it might be better if we didn't talk right now."

"He told me to tell you," she said. "About him, I mean. About us."

"No, I'd really rather you didn't share anymore, thank you."

"He told me to come clean."

"Not just now," he said.

"There are worse things, Michael. There really *are* worse things."

"Please."

"I mean, look at us. Here we are, tooling around the old country, with a backseat full of crystal and a bun in the oven. My oven, your bun."

"But how do you know—"

"Because I know."

"Yes, but *how* do you know?"

"Because we were careful," she said. "Ridiculously careful. He used a condom. I used a diaphragm. We even timed things to my—"

"I don't need to hear all this."

"It's *your* baby, Michael. *Our* baby. I can tell you the moment of conception." As if the idea had just come to her, she asked, "Shall I tell you the moment of conception?" She put her hand on his arm, but he shook it off.

"I'm trying to drive here."

"It was the night I wore the Chinese dress, after Pei and Andy's wedding. Remember? After the reception?" He felt her eyes on him. "You'll have to trust me."

He turned his head just long enough to register his skepticism, then slowed to let an orange tour bus growl past them, impossibly close.

"On this," she said. "You'll have to trust me on this. If you can't trust me on this, then—well, then we can't do this."

"What does that mean?" he said, accelerating. "What does that mean, we can't *do* this? Do what?" He shifted his weight in the seat and sat even more upright. "If that *is* my child in there, you're not going to *do* a goddamned thing."

"What I mean is that we can't do this *together*. I'm going to have this baby, with or without you. Either you're coming along or you're getting off. But if you *are* getting off, you're getting off right here. *Capiche?*"

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"I'm getting off? Who's doing the fucking driving here?"

"Watch the mouth," she said. "And enough about the driving already. I'm pregnant, for Christ's sake. Be a mensch." She swept her hand across the windshield, taking in the countryside on the other side of the glass. "You can't turn all of this into a hell. You can't. I won't let you—for your own sake. I mean, just *look* at it, Michael. Isn't it gorgeous?"

"How would I know?" he said. "I can't take my eyes off this fucking road."



They stayed the night at a bed and breakfast in Youghal, on the southern coast, and got back on the road early the next morning. Rachel was sick and Michael had to pull the car over every half hour or so. When she wasn't throwing up, she was sleeping. The fields were full of sheep and a splash of red flashed in the corner of his vision, first, a single sheep, its fleecy haunches stained with what looked like blood, then whole flocks, similarly stained. What was this? Michael wondered. Something menstrual or ritualistic? Rachel could explain. She was a scientist, a biologist, and as he considered her compulsion to talk about her Brian, to spill her guts whether he liked it or not, it occurred to him that the affair had been another of her experiments and that she was, by nature and training, eager to share the results—hypothesis, protocol, and all that raw data, from which, together, they might draw whatever conclusion—as if, all along, it had been their joint venture, Rachel and Michael's. Over seven years of marriage, most of their adventures, erotic or otherwise, had been her doing. It was this sense of adventure that he'd first loved in her, that filled some missing part of him. Yet this same spirit of curiosity had led to her Englishman's bed and now took the two of them down these impossible Irish roads. He wanted to hate her, but he couldn't. She was his only guide through this hostile landscape, moving as easily among "his people" as her own, and as she slept beside him in the passenger's seat, he felt

closed in by such loneliness and panic that, in spite of himself, he blurted, "Rachel."

She opened her eyes. "What's the deal with the sheep?" she said, and went back to sleep.

They ate lunch in Bantry, under a black and white wedding portrait of John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara from *The Quiet Man*, and then they drove north, past flocks and flocks of red-rumped sheep, and checked into an inn in Dingle. Michael was happy and relieved to be out from behind the wheel, and it pleased him to watch Rachel dress for dinner. She put on a celebratory red dress with little pearl buttons down the back. A sun-shaped earring dangled gold above her right shoulder, a silver crescent moon over her left. In the restaurant downstairs from their room, a ruddy-faced young waiter took their orders, and as he turned to walk away, Rachel stopped him.

"I have a question for you, my good man."

"Ma'am?"

"What's the story with the sheep around here?" she said. "The rosy hindquarters, I mean."

Blushing, the boy backed away and retreated to the kitchen.

"Now you've done it," Michael said, and soon a middle-aged woman—the hostess who'd seated them—appeared.

"My son informs me that the lady has a question?"

"Listen," Rachel said, "I didn't mean anything—"

"No, no, no," the hostess said earnestly. "You're just a city girl with a healthy curiosity. There's nothing dirty about it, dear, nothing shameful. It's nature, is all." She slid onto the bench beside Michael. "You see, they go into heat, the ladies do, the ewes, and it's important to keep track of this—for the success of the flock, you know. One way is by marking them. And so the man—the ram—he wears a sort of bib, you see, and when he mounts the lady, the bib marks her behind with that red paint you've been wondering about." As she laid out the mechanics of conception, her tale took on the cadence of a bedtime story, and Michael was lulled by the lilt of her voice and fell a little in

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love with her, though he could see by Rachel's dark blush that she wished she'd never asked the question. On and on she went, until her son returned with their meals, whereupon she got up from the bench, laid her hand upon Rachel's, and asked in a conspiratorial hush, "You're expecting, aren't you?"

When they got back to their room, Rachel turned to Michael and said, "Let's make love." It sounded unlike her, a self-conscious and quaint corrective to the nut-and-bolts bluntness of their hostess. She turned her back to him to him, dropping her arms to her sides. "Undo me, Mr. Donnelly, and then do me."

But as he worked at her buttons, he thought of her Brian, and a red stain spread across his vision, over Rachel and the bed and the room.

"Had you already slept with him?" he asked.

"What?"

"At Thanksgiving. Were you already sleeping with him?"

He felt the slow, deep intake of her breath under his fingertips. "We only did it a couple times," she said. "Three or four times really."

"That wasn't the question."

"No actual intercourse," she said, "not yet, not at that point. We'd fooled around some, but—"

"All right, enough."

"You asked."

"It was a yes-or-no question," he said. "I don't want to know all this."

She turned to face him. "That's the thing, isn't it? You don't want to know anything, not a goddamned thing." She began to pace the planked floor. "I mean, the fact that you didn't even *know* I was using a diaphragm—"

"That I didn't *know*?"

"That you couldn't tell, that you couldn't smell it or taste it."

"*Taste* it?"

"That you couldn't taste the whatchamacallit. That stuff." With the bed between them, she began to act out the mystery

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word in a frantic pantomime, scooping at the air like some dancing Shiva. "You know, the spermicidal jelly."

"What are you?" he said. "Are you crazy?"

"Brian could taste it. He said it made his tongue numb."

"Christ, you're worse than crazy. You're obscene. You really are."

"It wasn't just about fucking, Michael."

"Don't talk like a whore."

"Don't get ugly," she said. "I won't let you make this ugly."

"But it *is* ugly. It's seedy and vile and—"

"For a few lousy weeks I felt beautiful," she said. "I *was* beautiful. Of course, you couldn't see it, but for a whole month I wasn't invisible."

"You're not invisible," he said. "I can see his mark on you, his stain, his spray."

"Here then. Let's even things up." She grabbed her handbag and turned it upside down on the dressing table. From her wallet, she extracted one Euro note after another, wadding them in her fists and flinging them across the bed. "Go on out there among your people and fuck one of them. It's on me."

"They're not my people."

"Go forth." She chucked a fistful of change at him. "With my blessing."

"I don't need your blessing." His voice broke, followed by the rest of him. He wept like a child, and like a mother, she comforted him. They made love among the coins and soggy bills, and afterward they fell asleep in each other's arms and slept close all through the night, as the room was cold and the mattress sank toward the middle.



The roads got even worse after Dingle, winding up through the hills and closed in on either side by stone walls and high hedgerows, so that Michael was able to see only a short distance in front of him. Rachel was cheery and chatty, but he

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couldn't speak. He had to keep his eyes glued to the road—an accident waited around every curve—and again he resented her cheerfulness, her absence of contrition, of remorse. They passed flock after flock of ruddy-haunched sheep without comment.

After a while she found a radio station that played American pop songs of the nineteen-sixties. A Beach Boys song came on—"Do It Again"—and though she didn't know the lyrics, she sang along anyway, making up words, scatting over its swells and dips and crests.

Michael said, "I've always heard this as a rather sad song."

"Sad?" She laughed. "It's the Beach Boys."

"I know it's the Beach Boys, but it's *late* Beach Boys. Nervous breakdown-drugged-out-Maharishi-Manson Family-locked-in-the-bedroom Beach Boys. It's the Beach Boys *doing* the Beach Boys."

"So where do you get sad?"

"Because what he's saying—what the guy in the song is *really* saying—is that he *can't* do it again. You know: California girls and surfin' safaris and all that fun fun fun stuff—that's all gone gone gone. That's all behind this Beach Boy."

"So what you're saying is that it's a song about loss," she said. "Is that what you're saying?"

"That's *exactly* what I'm saying. Profound, acute, irreparable loss." Rachel went silent, but Michael was on a roll. "See, he's thinking that he'd *like* to do it again, but he knows there ain't no *way* he could do it again. Because it can never be the same, ever again. Never ever."

Now Dionne Warwick was singing "Do You Know the Way to San Jose?" and though Rachel loved this song, loved to sing along with all those *whoa-whoa-whoas*, she kept quiet, until the instrumental break, when, in a flat, dead voice, she told him to pull over.

"Why?"

"Pull over," she repeated.

"Are you sick? Are you going to throw up?"

"Just do it."

She was out of the car before he'd put it in park and walked across a field that sloped up a hill. He got out of the car and followed her.

"Rachel," he said when he'd caught up with her.

"You've never surfed in your entire fucking life," she said and walked on.

He didn't know what to say. Leaning against a lichened boulder, he felt suffocated by the same fear that had seized him in the car the day before, that same claustrophobia of self. He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, "Who are you trying to impress?"

She stopped on another knob of rock. "Who do you think?" she shouted back. "He fucked me. I fucked him. I'm sorry. But I can't unfuck him. And I can't go on like this."

As she continued up the hillside, he watched the shape of her body under her heavy sweater—still her shape, still her body—and he remembered her in her Chinese dress, a trimester ago and an ocean away, somehow more naked in that dress than when she'd taken it off, and it struck him now that it was she who didn't belong here, who needed shepherding. She was the stranger here, a great-granddaughter of the Saint Petersburg ghetto lost in the hills of Kerry. No, it couldn't be undone, she couldn't be unfucked; but yes, there *were* worse things, and yes, he believed her: it was his child all right, his son, his daughter, held hostage in the plush prison of her womb, as he too was her hostage. She had biology on her side; he had two thousand years of Roman Catholicism on his. It wasn't a fight that either could win. A political solution was the best he could hope for.

"A truce?" he called up the hill.

She stopped and stayed put as he closed the space between them.

"A truce?" she echoed, softly now, civilized. "*Another* truce?"

"You want me to sign something?" he said. "I'll sign it. Only get back in the car? Please? We'll never get to Galway at this rate."

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Rachel was sick on the ferry across the Shannon, vomiting over the side of the boat, and Michael held her as she stood shivering at the rail.

"I must reek," she said. "Do I reek?"

"No, you don't reek, not at all." He kissed her mouth. "You're lovely."

"Liar." She pressed his hand. "Oh, Michael. Could childbirth be any worse than this?"

"You just need some solid land under you, is all" he said. "And some solid food inside you."

But when they stopped for lunch in Kilrush, she hardly ate a bite. It was his grandmothers' cooking, the same overdone roast and chalky potatoes, only laid out cafeteria-style. A mist of gravy hung in the air. But these bland tastes and smells stirred something in him, as if their chemical constituents stimulated some sleeping region of his brain, and he went back for second helpings, for thirds.

On their way up the western coast, they stopped at the windy Cliffs of Moher. They left the car in a vast parking lot and followed the crowds to the cliffs. Far below them, on a broad shelf of rock, a man in an ice cream suit waddled vertiginously close to the edge, his red necktie scribbled on the wind. When Michael pointed him out to Rachel, she refused to look. "I can't," she said and pleaded to return to the car. A cloud's shadow rolled across the land and then out over the water. They started back toward the parking lot.

On the other side of a field, people were gathered, dressed in various shades of formality—a wedding. As Michael and Rachel neared the group, there was a shout and, looking up, he saw the bride's veil blow across the field behind him, tumbling toward the cliffs. He chased the veil right up to the cliff's edge, and snatching up the white lace, he heard Rachel's scream, followed by the splash of applause. He brought the veil back to the bare-shouldered bride. Lightly, the bride took the veil from him.

"My hero," she said and kissed Michael's cheek, and coloring, she turned to Rachel and kissed her, too. Her blush and black brows turned her eyes a bluer blue.

Someone said, "The blushing bride," and all of them laughed. The groom insisted on rewarding Michael.

"'Twas nothing," Michael said, waving toward the cliffs dismissively. "A whisper of lace, a seven-hundred foot drop—"

"No," the groom said with maudlin urgency. "Somehow we've got to repay you."

"Then let them eat cake," another man said, and gestured toward the wedding cake spread upon a folding table.

"I'm afraid we'll have to take it with us," Rachel said. "We're supposed to be in Galway before sunset." Michael felt a twinge of regret, a sense of belonging that carried over from Kilrush, a recognition of something familiar and familial in these faces and voices. He'd wanted to stay at least a little while longer.

The wedding cake was baked in the shape of the continental United States. The bride explained that they'd soon be emigrating to the States, where a teaching position waited for her husband at a Catholic college in Adamant, Vermont. Counterintuitively, they'd started cutting on the west coast and worked their way east, getting as far as the Mississippi River. The groom invited Michael to pick a state and he chose Massachusetts.

"Don't be a pig," Rachel said. "The east coast's still untouched. Missouri will taste just as good as Massachusetts."

But the groom picked up a knife and carved out the boxy scorpion shape of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and carefully placed it in a white cardboard box. Rachel tore a flap off the lid and scribbled out their address and telephone number. She pressed it into the bride's palm and told her look them up once they were settled in Vermont. Then she and Michael walked back to the parking lot. Behind them, a boozy chorus of male voices bellowed "Leaving on a Jet Plane."

Once they were out of the parking lot and back on the road, Rachel said, "You shouldn't have done that, Michael."

"What?" he said. "The cake?"

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"No, not the cake, you idiot—the cliff. For a moment there I thought—"

"What?" he said. "And make that baby an orphan?"

"I'm not joking. For one terrible moment—" She began to cry.

"Oh, come on now," he said. "That'll be enough of that."

"But you *were* a hero out there on the cliffs."

"Aw shucks, Mrs. Donnelly."

"Oh, shut up," she said. "You were. And you were my hero on the ferry. I could see how you'll be when the baby comes. I thought about this the whole time I was throwing up—no joke. I could see you in Lamaze class and driving me to the hospital and mopping my brow in the birthing room and talking me through it all. You'll be a good father, Michael."

"You think so?"

"I know you will. You'll be *such* a good father."

After a while she said, "It's almost suppertime."

"Hungry?"

"Ravenous. I lost everything in the Shannon, and then Kilrush—" She shuddered. "Ugh, Kilrush. Now there's a name for you, Mr. Donnelly."

"So eat."

"I don't want to stop."

"Eat some cake then."

She retrieved the box of cake from the backseat, broke off the tip of the scorpion's tail, and brought it to her mouth.

"Oh, I think there's rum in it," she said.

"Are you sure you should be eating that?" he said. "What with the baby and all?"

"Do you think there's that much? Rum, I mean."

"Enough that I can smell it."

"Howsabout I only eat Cape Cod then?"

"I'd say that was a reasonable compromise," he said.

"I promise to stop at the Sagamore Bridge."

"Promise?"

"Cross my heart." She took a bite. "Oh, my God, it's *delicious*."

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"I don't believe they say 'delicious' hereabouts."

"No? Then what *do* they say?"

"I believe they'd say it was 'gorgeous,'" he said. "A gorgeous cake."

"Well, I'm eating Provincetown, and it's absolutely gorgeous." She broke off another piece. "You eat, too," she said with her mouth full. "I'll let you have the Berkshires. Open wide." She fed the piece into his mouth. "You like?"

"What's not to like?" he said.

"Then I'll let you have all the way to Worcester." She moved her fingertips to his face, traced the line of his jaw, and brought them back to his lips. Her fingers were sticky and sweet. "All the way to Plymouth Rock."

When they'd finished the cake, Rachel said, "Do you think we'll ever really see them again?"

"See who?"

"See *whom*," she said. "See the newlyweds. I like the idea of having Irish friends, of guiding them through the new world and all that. You all have that blush, that Irish blush. Something about the capillaries, some Darwinian something. Natural selection—but selected for what, I wonder."

Ahead of them, the roof of a big orange tour bus floated over the tops of the hedgerows.

"Still hungry?" he said.

"God, no," she said, "I'm stuffed."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"Good."

The bus came bullying its way around the curve, but Michael's foot didn't leave the accelerator. He wouldn't budge. The bus bore down on them, its driver's face a mask of terror. "Michael," Rachel cried, not the full-throated scream she'd let out on the cliffs, but something breathless and orgasmic, and her cry got swallowed up in the roar of the bus and his blood. It was as though a tourniquet had been loosened, and as the little white car spurted through this sudden tunnel of orange and green, the

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crystal glasses chattered and clinked in their box on the backseat and the bus's livid horn blared and faded among the hedges. Then the road opened onto a rocky landscape, swept clean by the same winds that had carved the cliffs, and Michael saw it clearly now, winding umbilically through the stony desert and up into the treeless hills and on and on toward Galway and his people.

"Now I want you to tell me everything," he said. "Every goddamned thing."