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It Was Raining in Oranmore

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It Was Raining in Oranmore

Author Bio

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It Was Raining in Oranmore

Brendan Raleigh

Mary Ellen had lived in Oranmore for her entire life and her fondness for the small, Irish village had never faltered for as long as I had known her. It rained often but lightly there, and she was fond of that, too. The rain even strengthened that fondness when it fed the grass to an emerald green and made small puddles for the children to play in and let her to wear her favorite rain boots. The rain also gave me reason to fish along the coast in the morning while she stayed home, affording us the time apart that retirement so often demanded.

And it was raining that day, as well, so I insisted that we hold the funeral outside. I knew she would not know, but it was a small and fine way to honor her and I did not mind using an umbrella. The path was soft from the rain and, as I left it, beads of dew leapt like ticks from the grass and clung to my socks and the cuffs of my pants.

Raindrops tumbled onto the canopy of pines above me, creating a soft, impassable, and persistent wall of *tapping*. The cemetery was not far from the village, but the rain managed to drown out whatever effects of the mundane might have otherwise carried over. In spite of this, it was still a bright morning through the trees and clouds.

Around the burial site, a few seats were placed and Jack Adamson was already there rehearsing his sermon, lips mouthing the words and eyes nearly closed as they scanned the soggy, holy pages.

He greeted me with a faraway nod and I sat beside Mary Ellen's sister, Isabelle, whose face was already wet from the weather, thus saving her the hassle of working up any tears. She was the only one who I considered inviting, and it seemed that she had not invited anyone, either. Or she did and none of them showed, because, aside from the two of us, only Mary Ellen's parents were in attendance, uninvited and resting in the pair of plots beside hers.

Jack began to speak a minute or two after I was seated. He recited the small passage from Second Corinthians that I had suggested earlier in the morning.

With his face buried in the soaking book, he began, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from

God.”

As he closed the book to wander down a path paved with near-heretical theories on the afterlife, I noticed that the headstone was smaller than I would have liked and looked like a gray Ghirardelli chocolate near the middle of the cemetery, where it did not stand out. The coffin was a fine piece of work though, built using thick, lacquered oak and a band of cherry wood around the center. It was simple, but I was very proud of it.

On the casket, there was a photograph of Mary Ellen in her 20s before we were married. It was a posed photo, like a school picture, but the smile in it was genuine.

And it was Mary Ellen’s, but it was not my wife’s. The curve of the smile and the glint in her eyes proved as much. Seeing her like that was like reliving a long-forgotten dream. She was another person when she smiled – one who I had not known for many years.

Jack finished his speech and I placed some of the Bernhardt peonies from her garden on the casket, knowing that, because the rain was still light, they would not be damaged. At least until the burial.

I left the site before they lowered the coffin, though, since Isabelle would have tried to talk to me if I had stayed, and I did not have the rest of the afternoon to spare.

Saint Mary Cemetery had fewer than 400 graves and, while wandering through it, I noticed how many of the names I recognized. I could hardly go a step without finding a Burke or a Carr; both families had lived in Oranmore for generations and their loyalties to it had been rewarded with half a dozen more stone blocks than anyone else.

Families like mine, which had left for America in the past hundred years, were still buried there, but most of the lettering on our graves had faded away. My father’s paternal grandparents were the closest relatives I had there and their grave, a companion memorial, was the only one that I was able to read.

“Martin and Kathleen Quinn,” I read aloud, tracing the knotwork motif of the tall, marble cross that sat between and unified their two square headstones.

The rain slowed to a trickle as I leaned against the memorial and, soon, the hum of a car engine managed to crawl through the sound of the rain. I looked back toward Mary Ellen’s grave and discovered a vast and interminable emptiness stretching out between us.

All that stood between my view from the cottage and the ocean was the looming silhouette of Oranmore Castle. Its rectangular tower houses split the sky where the marshy turf met the cresting waters of Galway Bay. The waves rose and fell, reaching out and grasping at a moon that had

drifted out of view. Slivers of silver shone down onto the expanse of green and blue and broke through my window, which was opaque and alight with a film of evening frost.

I wrapped my hands around the lingering heat of a cup of Earl Grey tea.

Several minutes passed before Jack crushed the remains of his cigarette into the ashtray, breaking the silence with a soft, papery crackle and the creak of his chair as he lurched forward.

“So... will I see you at O’Donovan’s tonight?”

“You that eager to start up another tab?”

He smirked. “No. Just trying to gauge where you are.”

“Well, at the moment I’m trying to decide what to do with all of her things.”

He arched his eyebrows. “Well, you sure are moving through it quickly, then.”

The house was filled with cardboard boxes now and not much else – just tables, chairs, a bed, and so on. It looked like I was moving away. “I think I’ll keep most of it in the attic.”

Jack leaned back in his chair and sighed.

“I’m expecting a visit from the in-law soon. Don’t want to reward the vultures for being vultures.”

“If that’s really all that’s on your mind,” Jack said, standing up and grabbing his coat from the back of his chair. “I don’t know why I even bothered.” He stopped halfway across the room. “You know that *not one of us* knew that she was dying? Not one. And if your handling of that is any indication as to how your marriage was going, then you were *damn* lucky to have had anyone who was willing to put up with your bullshit for so many years.”

I wrapped my fingers tighter around the cup and saw that, outside, the moon had drifted so that its beams drew a thin, silvery outline along the castle’s western side.

“She wanted to see the castle.”

Jack paused again as his hand reached the doorknob.

“Toward the end there, I didn’t think there was anything I could do. But she always wanted me to take her to the castle, and I never did.”

He sat down beside me again. “Then I think that you should, Arthur.”

It was early and the morning sunlight filtered through a grey, misty haze before falling down onto the castle and the bay. The fifteenth century castle was still in remarkable condition, considering that it had not been renovated or restored in my lifetime.

A long, narrow, low-lying path led up to the entrance causeway. I followed it as small waves beached themselves over and over, occasionally tumbling over the small hills and brushing against my feet. The waves combed through the tall grasses like fingers through hair, carrying small fish and clumps of dirt over with them. Mounted on both sides of the small trail, the green grew taller as I progressed and soon all that was in site was the tall, stone, still grandeur of the castle. From the entrance's garden, vines and patches of moss climbed up the sides of the walls, coloring half the grey castle green.

I took my first step into the courtyard and felt, on my bare arm, a single drop of cool rain. As I continued my journey upward, ascending the stairs of the tower house, I smiled at our last rain together in Oranmore.