



The Cold Wind and the Warm, Ray Bradbury

## The Cold Wind and the Warm

“Good god in heaven, what’s that?”

“What’s what?”

“Are you blind, man, look!”

And Garrity, elevator operator, looked out to see what the hall porter was staring at.

And in out of the Dublin morn, sweeping through the front doors of the Royal Hibernian Hotel, along the entryway and to the registry was a tall willowy man of some forty years followed by five short willowy youths of some twenty years, a burst of bird song, their hands flapping all about on the air as they passed, their eyes squinching, batting, and flickering, their mouths pursed, their brows enlightened and then dark, their color flushed and then pale, or was it both?, their voices now flawless piccolo, now flute, now melodious oboe but always tuneful.

Carrying six monologues, all sprayed forth upon each other at once, in a veritable cloud of self-commiseration, peeping and twitting the discouragements of travel and the ardors of weather, the corps de ballet as it were flew, cascaded, flowed eloquently in a greater bloom of cologne by astonished hall porter and transfixed elevator man.

They collided deliciously to a halt at the desk where the manager glanced up to be swarmed over by their music. His eyes made nice round o’s with no centers in them.

“What,” whispered Garrity, “was that?”

“You may well ask,” said the porter.

At which point the elevator lights flashed and the buzzer buzzed. Garrity had to tear his eyes off the summery crowd and heft himself skyward.

“We,” said the tall slender man with a touch of gray at the temples, “should like a room, please.”

The manager remembered where he was and heard himself say, “Do you have reservations, sir?”

“Dear me, no,” said the older man as the others giggled. “We flew in unexpectedly from Taormina,” the tall man with the chiseled features and the moist flower mouth continued. “We were getting so awfully bored, after a long summer, and someone said, Let’s have a complete change, let’s do something wild. What? I said. Well, where’s the most improbable place in the world? Let’s name it and go there.

Somebody said the North Pole, but that was silly. Then I cried, Ireland! Everyone fell down. When the pandemonium ceased we just scrambled for the airport. Now sunshine and Sicilian shorelines are like yesterday’s lime sherbet to us, all melted to nothing. And here we are to do . . . something mysterious!”

“Mysterious?” asked the manager.

“We don’t know what it is,” said the tall man. “But we shall know it when we see it, or it happens, or perhaps we shall have to make it happen, right, cohorts?”

The cohorts responded with something vaguely like tee-hee.

“Perhaps,” said the manager, with good grace, “if you gave me some idea what you’re looking for in Ireland, I could point out—”

“Goodness, no,” said the tall man. “We shall just plummet forth with our intuitions scarved about our necks, taking the wind as ’twere and see what we shall tune in on. When we solve the mystery and find what we came to find, you will know of our discovery by the ululations and cries of awe and wonder emanating from our small tourist group.”

“You can say that again,” said the hall porter, under his breath.

“Well, comrades, let us sign in.”

The leader of the encampment reached for a scratchy hotel pen, found it filthy, and flourished forth his own absolutely pure 14-carat solid gold

pen with which in an obscure but rather pretty cerise calligraphy he inscribed the name DAVID followed by SNELL followed by dash and ending with ORKNEY. Beneath, he added “and friends.”

The manager watched the pen, fascinated, and once more recalled his position in all this. “But, sir, I haven’t said if we have space—”

“Oh, surely you must, for six miserable wanderers in sore need of respite from overfriendly airline stewardesses—one room would do it!”

“One?” said the manager, aghast.

“We wouldn’t mind the crowd, would we, chums?” asked the older man, not looking at his friends.

No, they wouldn’t mind.

“Well,” said the manager, uneasily fumbling at the registry. “We just happen to have two adjoining—”

“Perfecto!” cried David Snell-Orkney.

And the registration finished, the manager behind the desk and the visitors from a far place stood regarding each other in a prolonged silence. At last the manager blurted, “Porter! Front! Take these gentlemen’s luggage—”

But just then the hall porter ran over to look at the floor. Where there was no luggage.

“No, no, none.” David Snell-Orkney airily waved his hand. “We travel light. We’re here only for twenty-four hours, or perhaps only twelve, with a change of underwear stuffed in our overcoats. Then back to Sicily and warm twilights. If you want me to pay in advance—”

“That won’t be necessary,” said the manager, handing the keys to the hall porter. “Forty-six and forty-seven, please.”

“It’s done,” said the porter.

And like a collie dog silently nipping the hooves of some woolly long-haired, bleating, dumbly smiling sheep, he herded the lovely bunch toward the elevator which wafted down just at that precise moment.

At the desk, the manager's wife came up, steel-eyed behind him. "Are you mad?" she whispered, wildly. "Why? Why?"

"All my life," said the manager, half to himself, "I have wished to see not one Communist but ten close by, not two Nigerians but twenty in their skins, not three cowboy Americans but a gross fresh from the saddle. So when six hothouse roses come in a bouquet, I could not resist potting them. The Dublin winter is long, Meg; this may be the only lit fuse in the whole year. Stand by for the lovely concussion."

"Fool," she said.

As they watched, the elevator, freighted with hardly more than the fluff from a blown dandelion, whisked up the shaft, away.

It was exactly at high noon that a series of coincidences occurred that tottered and swerved toward the miraculous.

Now the Royal Hibernian Hotel lies half between Trinity College, if you'll excuse the mention, and St. Stephen's Green, which is more like it, and around behind is Grafton Street, where you can buy silver, glass, and linen, or pink hacking coats, boots, and caps to ride off to the goddamned hounds, or better still duck in to Heeber Finn's pub for a proper proportion of drink and talk—an hour of drink to two hours of talk is about the best prescription.

Now the boys most often seen in Finn's are these: Nolan, you know Nolan; Timulty, who could forget Timulty; Mike MaGuire, surely everyone's friend; then there's Hannahan, Flaherty, Kilpatrick, and, on occasion, when God seems a bit untidy and Job comes to mind, Father Liam Leary himself, who strides in like Justice and glides forth like Mercy.

Well, that's the lot, and it's high noon, and out of the Hibernian Hotel front who should come now but Snell-Orkney and his canary five.

Which resulted in the first of a dumbfounding series of confrontations. For passing below, sore torn between the sweet shops and Heeber Finn's, was Timulty himself.

Timulty, as you recall, when Blight, Famine, Starvation, and other mean Horsemen drive him, works a day here or there at the post office. Now, idling along between dread employments, he smelled a smell as if the gates of Eden had swung wide again and him invited back in after a hundred million years.

So Timulty looked up to see what made the wind blow out of the Garden.

And the wind, of course, was in tumult about Snell-Orkney and his uncaged pets.

"I tell you," said Timulty, years later, "I felt my eyes start as if I'd been given a good bash on the skull. A new part ran down the center of my hair."

Timulty, frozen to the spot, watched the Snell-Orkney delegation flow down the steps and around the corner. At which point he decided on sweeter things than candy and rushed the long way to Finn's.

At that instant, rounding the corner, Mr. David Snell-Orkney-plus-five passed a beggar-lady playing a harp in the street. And there, with nothing else to do but dance the time away, was Mike MaGuire himself, flinging his feet about in a self-involved rigadon to "Lightly o'er the Lea." Dancing, Mike MaGuire heard a sound that was like the passing by of warm weather from the Hebrides.

It was not quite a twittering nor a whirr, and it was not unlike a pet shop when the bell tinkles as you step in and a chorus of parakeets and doves start up in coos and light shrieks. But hear he did, above the sound of his own shoes and the pringle of harp. He froze in mid-jig.

As David Snell-Orkney-plus-five swept by all tropic smiled and gave him a wave.

Before he knew what he was doing, Mike waved back, then stopped and seized his wounded hand to his breast. "What the hell am I waving for?" he cried to no one. "I don't know them, do I?" "Ask God for strength!" said the harpist to her harp and flung her fingers down the strings.

Drawn as by some strange new vacuum cleaner that swept all before it, Mike followed the Team down the street. Which takes care of two senses now, the sense of smell and the use of the ears.

It was at the next corner that Nolan, leaving Finn's pub because of an argument with Finn himself, came around the bend fast and ran bang into David Snell-Orkney. Both swayed and grabbed each other for support.

"Top of the afternoon!" said David Snell-Orkney. "The Back Side of Something!" replied Nolan, and fell away, gaping to let the circus by. He had a terrible urge to rush back to Finn's. His fight with the owner of the pub was obliterated. He wished now to report upon this fell encounter with a feather duster, a Siamese cat, a spoiled Pekingese, and three others gone ghastly frail from undereating and overwashing.

The six stopped outside the pub looking up at the sign.

Ah, God, thought Nolan. They're going in. What will come of it? Who do I warn first? Them? Or Finn?

Then, the door opened. Finn himself looked out. Damn, thought Nolan, that spoils it! Now we won't be allowed to describe this adventure. It will be Finn this, Finn that, and shut up to us all! There was a long moment when Snell-Orkney and his cohorts looked at Finn. Finn's eyes

did not fasten on them. He looked above. He looked over. He looked beyond.

But he had seen them, this Nolan knew. For now a lovely thing happened.

All the color went out of Finn's face.  
Then an even lovelier thing happened.  
All the color rushed back into Finn's face.  
Why, cried Nolan to himself, he's . . . blushing!

But still Finn refused to look anywhere save the sky, the lamps, the street, until Snell-Orkney trilled, "Sir, which way to St. Stephen's Green?"

"Jesus," said Finn and turned away. "Who knows where they put it, this week!" and slammed the door.

The six went on up the street, all smiles and delight, and Nolan was all for heaving himself through the door when a worse thing happened.

Garrity, the elevator operator from the Royal Hibernian Hotel, whipped across the sidewalk from nowhere. His face ablaze with excitement, he ran first into Finn's to spread the word.

By the time Nolan was inside, and Timulty rushing in next, Garrity was all up and down the length of the bar while Finn stood behind it suffering concussions from which he had not as yet recovered.

"It's a shame you missed it!" cried Garrity to all. "I mean it was the next thing to one of them fiction-and-science fillums they show at the Gayety Cinema!"

"How do you mean?" asked Finn, shaken out of his trance.

"Nothing they weigh!" Garrity told them. "Lifting them in the elevator was throwing a handful of chaff up a chimney! And you should have heard. They're here in Ireland for . . ." He lowered his voice and squinched his eyes. ". . . for mysterious reasons!"



“Mysterious!” Everyone leaned in at him.

“They’ll put no name to it, but, mark my declaration, they’re up to no good! Have you ever seen the like?”

“Not since the great fire at the convent,” said Finn. “I—”

But the word “convent” seemed one more magic touch. The doors sprang wide at this. Father Leary entered in reverse. That is to say he backed into the pub one hand to his cheek as if the Fates had dealt him a proper blow unbewares.

Reading the look of his spine, the men shoved their noses in their drinks until such time as the father had put a bit of the brew into himself, still staring as if the door were the gates of Hell ajar.

“Beyond,” said the father, at last, “not two minutes gone, I saw a sight as would be hard to credit. In all the days of her collecting up the grievances of the world, has Ireland indeed gone mad?”

Finn refilled the priest’s glass. “Was you standing in the blast of The Invaders from the Planet Venus, Father?”

“Have you seen them, then, Finn?” the father said.

“Yes, and do you guess them bad, your Holiness?”

“It’s not so much bad or good as strange and outré, Finn, and words like rococo, I should guess, and baroque if you go with my drift?”

“I lie easy in the tide, sir.”

“When last seen, where heading?” asked Timulty.

“On the edge of the Green,” said the priest. “You don’t imagine there’ll be a bacchanal in the park now?”

“The weather won’t allow, beg your pardon, Father,” said Nolan, “but it strikes me, instead of standing with the gab in our mouth we should be out on the spy—”

“You move against my ethics,” said the priest.

“A drowning man clutches at anything,” said Nolan, “and ethics may drown with him if that’s what he grabs instead of a lifebelt.”

“Off the Mount, Nolan,” said the priest, “and enough of the Sermon. What’s your point?”

“The point is, Father, we have had no such influx of honorary Sicilians since the mind boggles to remember. For all we know, at this moment, they may be reading aloud to Mrs. Murphy, Miss Clancy, or Mrs. O’Hanlan in the midst of the park. And reading aloud from what, I ask you?”

“The Ballad of Reading Gaol?” asked Finn.

“You have rammed the target and sunk the ship,” said Nolan, mildly irritated the point had been plucked from him. “How do we know these imps out of bottles are not selling real-estate tracts in a place called Fire Island? Have you heard of it, Father?”

“The American gazettes come often to my table, man.”

“Well, do you remember the great hurricane of nineteen-and-fifty-six when the waves washed over Fire Island there in New York? An uncle of mine, God save his sanity and sight, was with the Coast Guard there which evacuated the entirety of the population of Fire Island.

It was worse than the twice-a-year showing at Fennelly’s dressworks, he said. It was more terrible than a Baptist Convention. Ten thousand men came rushing down to the stormy shore carrying bolts of drape material, cages full of parakeets, tomato-and-tangerine-colored sport coats, and lime-colored shoes.

It was the most tumultuous scene since Hieronymus Bosch laid down his palette after he painted Hell for all generations to come. You do not easily evacuate ten thousand Venetian-glass boyos with their great blinky cow-eyes and their phonograph symphonic records in their hands and their rings in their ears, without tearing down the middle. My uncle, soon after, took to the heavy drink.”

“Tell us more about that night,” said Kilpatrick, entranced.

“More, hell,” said the priest. “Out, I say. Surround the park. Keep your eyes peeled. And meet me back here in an hour.”

“That’s more like it,” cried Kelly. “Let’s really see what dread thing they’re up to!”

The doors banged wide.

On the sidewalk, the priest gave directions. “Kelly, Murphy, you around the north side of the park. Timulty, you to the south. Nolan and Garrity, the east; Moran, MaGuire, and Kilpatrick, the west.

Git!” But somehow or other in all the ruction, Kelly and Murphy wound up at the Four Shamrocks pub halfway to the Green and fortified themselves for the chase, and Nolan and Moran each met their wives on the street and had to run the other way, and MaGuire and Kilpatrick, passing the Elite Cinema and hearing Lawrence Tibbett singing inside, cadged their way in for a few half-used cigarettes.

So it wound up with just two, Garrity on the east and Timulty on the south side of the park, looking in at the visitors from another world.

After half an hour of freezing weather, Garrity stomped up to Timulty and said, “What’s wrong with the fiends? They’re just standing there in the midst of the park. They haven’t moved half the afternoon. And it’s cut to the bone is my toes. I’ll nip around to the hotel, warm up, and rush back to stand guard with you, Tim.”

“Take your time,” called Timulty in a strange sad wandering, philosophical voice as the other charged away.

Left alone, Timulty walked in and sat for a full hour watching the six men who, as before, did not move. You might almost have thought to see Timulty there, with his eyes brooding, and, his mouth gone into a tragic crease, that he was some Irish neighbor of Kant or Schopenhauer, or had just read something by a poet or thought of a song that declined his spirits.

And when at last the hour was up and he had gathered his thoughts like a handful of cold pebbles, he turned and made his way out of the park. Garrity was there, pounding his feet and swinging his hands but before he could explode with questions, Timulty pointed in and said, "Go sit. Look. Think. Then you tell me."

Everyone at Finn's looked up sheepishly when Timulty made his entrance. The priest was still off on errands around the city, and after a few walks about the Green to assuage their consciences, all had returned, nonplussed, to intelligence headquarters. "Timulty!" they cried. "Tell us! What? What?"

Timulty took his time walking to the bar and sipping his drink. Silently, he observed his own image remotely buried beneath the lunar ice of the barroom mirror. He turned the subject this way. He twisted it inside out. He put it back wrong-side-to. Then he shut his eyes and said: "It strikes me as how—" Yes, said all silently, about him.

"From a lifetime of travel and thought, it comes to the top of my mind," Timulty went on, "there is a strange resemblance between the likes of them and the likes of us."

There was such a gasp as changed the scintillation, the goings and comings of light in the prisms of the little chandeliers over the bar. When the schools of fish-light had stopped swarming at this exhalation, Nolan cried, "Do you mind putting your hat on so I can knock it off!?"

"Consider," Timulty calmly said. "Are we or are we not great ones for the poem and the song?"

Another kind of gasp went through the crowd. There was a warm burst of approval. "Oh, sure, we're that!" "My God, is that all you're up to?" "We were afraid—" "Hold it!" Timulty raised a hand, eyes still closed. And all shut up.

“If we’re not singing the songs, we’re writing them, and if not writing, dancing them, and aren’t they fond admirers of the song and the writing of same and the dancing out the whole? Well, just now, I heard them at a distance reciting poems and singing, to themselves, in the Green.”

Timulty had something there. Everyone had to paw everybody and admit it.

“Do you find any other resemblances?” asked Finn, heavily, glowering.

“I do,” said Timulty, with a judge’s manner.

There was a still more fascinated indraw of breath and the crowd drew nearer.

“They do not mind a drink now and then,” said Timulty.

“By God, he’s right!” cried Murphy.

“Also,” intoned Timulty, “they do not marry until very late, if ever at all! And—”

But here the tumult was such he had to wait for it to subside before he could finish:

“And they—ah—have very little to do with women.”

After that there was a great clamor, a yelling and shoving about and ordering of drinks and someone invited Timulty outside. But Timulty wouldn’t even lift one eyelid, and the brawler was held off and when everyone had a new drink in them and the near-fistfights had drained away, one loud clear voice, Finn’s, declared:

“Now would you mind explaining the criminal comparison you have just made in the clean air of my honorable pub?”

Timulty sipped his drink slowly and then at last opened his eyes and looked at Finn steadily, and said, with a clear bell-trumpet tone and wondrous enunciation:

“Where in all of Ireland can a man lie down with a woman?”

He let that sink in.

“Three hundred twenty-nine days a damn year it rains. The rest it’s so wet there’s no dry piece, no bit of land you would dare trip a woman out flat on for fear of her taking root and coming up in leaves, do you deny that?”

The silence did not deny.

“So when it comes to places to do sinful evils and perform outrageous acts of the flesh, it’s to Arabia the poor damn fool Irishman must take himself. It’s Arabian dreams we have, of warm nights, dry land, and a decent place not just to sit down but to lie down on, and not just lie down on but to roister joyfully about on in clinches and clenches of outrageous delight.”

“Ah, Jaisus,” said Flynn, “you can say that again.”

“Ah, Jaisus,” said everyone, nodding.

“That’s number one.” Timulty ticked it off on his fingers. “Place is lacking. Then, second, time and circumstances. For say you should sweet talk a fair girl into the field, eh? in her rainboots and slicker and her shawl over her head and her umbrella over that and you making noises like a stuck pig half over the sty gate, which means you’ve got one hand in her bosom and the other wrestling with her boots, which is as far as you’ll damn well get, for who’s standing there behind you, and you feel his sweet spearmint breath on your neck?”

“The father from the local parish?” offered Garrity.

“The father from the local parish,” said everyone, in despair.

“There’s nails number two and three in the cross on which all Ireland’s males hang crucified,” said Timulty.

“Go on, Timulty, go on.”

“Those fellows visiting here from Sicily run in teams. We run in teams. Here we are, the gang, in Finn’s, are we not?”

“Be damned and we are!”

“They look sad and are melancholy half the time and then spitting like happy demons the rest, either up or down, never in between, and who does that remind you of?”

Everyone looked in the mirror and nodded.

“If we had the choice,” said Timulty, “to go home to the dire wife and the dread mother-in-law and the old-maid sister all sour sweats and terrors, or stay here in Finn’s for one more song or one more drink or one more story, which would all of us men choose?”

Silence.

“Think on that,” said Timulty. “Answer the truth. Resemblances. Similarities. The long list of them runs off one hand and up the other arm. And well worth the mulling over before we leap about crying Jaisus and Mary and summoning the Guard.”

Silence.

“I,” said someone, after a long while, strangely, curiously, “would like . . . to see them closer.”

“I think you’ll get your wish. Hist!”

All froze in a tableau.

And far off they heard a faint and fragile sound. It was like the wondrous morning you wake and lie in bed and know by a special feel that the first fall of snow is in the air, on its way down, tickling the sky, making the silence to stir aside and fall back in on nothing.

“Ah, God,” said Finn, at last, “it’s the first day of spring . . .”

And it was that, too. First the dainty snowfall of feet drifting on the cobbles, and then a choir of bird song.

And along the sidewalk and down the street and outside the pub came the sounds that were winter and spring. The doors sprang wide. The men reeled back from the impact of the meeting to come. They steeled their nerves.

They balled their fists. They geared their teeth in their anxious mouths, and into the pub like children come into a Christmas place and everything a bauble or a toy, a special gift or color, there stood the tall thin older man who looked young and the small thin younger men who had old things in their eyes. The sound of snowfall stopped. The sound of spring birds ceased.

The strange children herded by the strange shepherd found themselves suddenly stranded as if they sensed a pulling away of a tide of people, even though the men at the bar had flinched but the merest hair.

The children of a warm isle regarded the short child-size and runty full-grown men of this cold land and the full-grown men looked back in mutual assize.

Timulty and the men at the bar breathed long and slow. You could smell the terrible clean smell of the children way over here. There was too much spring in it.

Snell-Orkney and his young-old boy-men breathed swiftly as the heartbeats of birds trapped in a cruel pair of fists. You could smell the dusty, impacted, prolonged, and dark-clothed smell of the little men way over here. There was too much winter in it.

Each might have commented upon the other's choice of scent, but— At this moment the double doors at the side banged wide and Garrity charged in full-blown, crying the alarm:

“Jesus, I’ve seen everything! Do you know where they are now, and what doing?”

Every hand at the bar flew up to shush him.

By the startled look in their eyes, the intruders knew they were being shouted about.

“They’re still at St. Stephen’s Green!” Garrity, on the move, saw naught that was before him. “I stopped by the hotel to spread the news. Now it’s your turn. Those fellows—”

“Those fellows,” said David Snell-Orkney, “are here in—” He hesitated.



“Heeber Finn’s pub,” said Heeber Finn, looking at his shoes.

“Heeber Finn’s,” said the tall man, nodding his thanks.

“Where,” said Garrity, gone miserable, “we will all be having a drink instantly.”

He flung himself at the bar.

But the six intruders were moving, also. They made a small parade to either side of Garrity and just by being amiably there made him hunch three inches smaller.

“Good afternoon,” said Snell-Orkney.

“It is and it isn’t,” said Finn, carefully, waiting.

“It seems,” said the tall man surrounded by the little boy-men, “there is much talk about what we are doing in Ireland.”

“That would be putting the mildest interpretation on it,” said Finn.

“Allow me to explain,” said the stranger.

“Have you ever,” continued Mr. David Snell-Orkney, “heard of the Snow Queen and the Summer King?”

Several jaws trapped wide down.

Someone gasped as if booted in the stomach.

Finn, after a moment in which he considered just where a blow might have landed upon him, poured himself a long slow drink with scowling precision. He took a stiff snort of the stuff and with the fire in his mouth, replied, carefully, letting the warm breath out over his tongue: “Ah . . . what Queen is that again, and the King?”

“Well,” said the tall pale man, “there was this Queen who lived in Iceland who had never seen summer, and this King who lived in the Isles of Sun who had never seen winter. The people under the King almost died of heat in the summers, and the people under the Snow Queen almost died of ice in the winters. But the people of both countries were saved from their terrible weathers.

The Snow Queen and the Sun King met and fell in love and every summer when the sun killed people in the islands they moved North to

the lands of ice and lived temperately. And every winter when the snow killed people in the North, all of the Snow Queen's people moved South and lived in the mild island sun. So there were no longer two nations, two peoples, but one race which commuted from land to land with the strange weathers and wild seasons. The end."

There was a round of applause, not from the canary boys, but from the men lined up at the bar who had been spelled. Finn saw his own hands out clapping on the air, and put them down. The others saw their own hands and dropped them.

But Timulty summed it up, "God, if you only had a brogue! What a teller of tales you would make."

"Many thanks, many thanks," said David Snell-Orkney.

"All of which brings us around to the point of the story," Finn said. "I mean, well, about that Queen and the King and all."

"The point is," said Snell-Orkney, "that we have not seen a leaf fall in five years. We hardly know a cloud when we see it. We have not felt snow in ten years, or hardly a drop of rain. Our story is the reverse. We must have rain or we'll perish, right, chums?"

"Oh, yes, right," said all five, in a sweet chirruping.

"We have followed summer around the world for six or seven years. We have lived in Jamaica and Nassau and Port-au-Prince and Calcutta, and Madagascar and Bali and Taormina but finally just today we said we must go north, we must have cold again. We didn't quite know what we were looking for, but we found it in St. Stephen's Green."

"The mysterious thing?" Nolan burst out. "I mean—"

"Your friend here will tell you," said the tall man.

"Our friend? You mean—Garrity?"

Everyone looked at Garrity.

"As I was going to say," said Garrity, "when I came in the door. They was in the park standing there . . . watching the leaves turn colors."

“Is that all?” said Nolan, dismayed.

“It seemed sufficient unto the moment,” said Snell-Orkney.

“Are the leaves changing color up at St. Stephen’s?” asked Kilpatrick.

“Do you know,” said Timulty numbly, “it’s been twenty years since I looked.”

“The most beautiful sight in all the world,” said David Snell-Orkney, “lies up in the midst of St. Stephen’s this very hour.”

“He speaks deep,” murmured Nolan.

“The drinks are on me,” said David Snell-Orkney.

“He’s touched bottom,” said MaGuire.

“Champagne all around!”

“Don’t mind if I do!” said everyone.

And not ten minutes later they were all up at the park, together.

And well now, as Timulty said years after, did you ever see as many damned leaves on a tree as there was on the first tree just inside the gate at St. Stephen’s Green? No! cried all. And what, though, about the second tree? Well, that had a billion leaves on it.

And the more they looked the more they saw it was a wonder. And Nolan went around craning his neck so hard he fell over on his back and had to be helped up by two or three others, and there were general exhalations of awe and proclamations of devout inspiration as to the fact that as far as they could remember there had never been any goddamn leaves on the trees to begin with, but now they were there!

Or if they had been there they had never had any color, or if they had had color, well, it was so long ago . . . Ah, what the hell, shut up, said everyone, and look!

Which is exactly what Nolan and Timulty and Kelly and Kilpatrick and Garrity and Snell-Orkney and his friends did for the rest of the declining afternoon. For a fact, autumn had taken the country, and the bright flags were out by the millions through the park.

Which is exactly where Father Leary found them.

But before he could say anything, three out of the six summer invaders asked him if he would hear their confessions.

And next thing you know with a look of great pain and alarm the father was taking Snell-Orkney & Co. back to see the stained glass at the church and the way the apse was put together by a master architect, and they liked his church so much and said so out loud again and again that he cut way down on their Hail Marys and the rigamaroles that went with.

But the top of the entire day was when one of the young-old boy-men back at the pub asked what would it be? Should he sing “Mother Machree” or “My Buddy”?

Arguments followed, and with polls taken and results announced, he sang both.

He had a dear voice, all said, eyes melting bright. A sweet high clear voice.

And as Nolan put it, “He wouldn’t make much of a son. But there’s a great daughter there somewhere!”

And all said “aye” to that.

And suddenly it was time to leave.

“But great God!” said Finn, “you just arrived!”

“We found what we came for, there’s no need to stay,” announced the tall sad happy old young man. “It’s back to the hothouse with the flowers . . . or they wilt overnight. We never stay. We are always flying and jumping and running. We are always on the move.”

The airport being fogged-in, there was nothing for it but the birds cage themselves on the Dun Laoghaire boat bound for England, and there was nothing for it but the inhabitants of Finn’s should be down at the dock to watch them pull away in the middle of the evening. There they stood, all six, on the top deck, waving their thin hands down, and there

stood Timulty and Nolan and Garrity and the rest waving their thick hands up.

And as the boat hooted and pulled away the keeper-of-the-birds nodded once, and winged his right hand on the air and all sang forth: "As I was walking through Dublin City, about the hour of twelve at night, I saw a maid, so fair was she... combing her hair by candlelight."

"Jesus," said Timulty, "do you hear?"

"Sopranos, every one of them!" cried Nolan.

"Not Irish sopranos, but real real sopranos," said Kelly.

"Damn, why didn't they say? If we'd known, we'd have had a good hour of that out of them before the boat."

Timulty nodded and added, listening to the music float over the waters.

"Strange. Strange. I hate to see them go. Think. Think. For a hundred years or more people have said we had none. But now they have returned, if but for a little time."

"We had none of what?" asked Garrity. "And what returned?"

"Why," said Timulty, "the fairies, of course, the fairies that once lived in Ireland, and live here no more, but who came this day and changed our weather, and there they go again, who once stayed all the while."

"Ah, shut up!" cried Kilpatrick. "And listen!"

And listen they did, nine men on the end of a dock as the boat sailed out and the voices sang and the fog came in and they did not move for a long time until the boat was far gone and the voices faded like a scent of papaya on the mist.

By the time they walked back to Finn's it had begun to rain.

The End