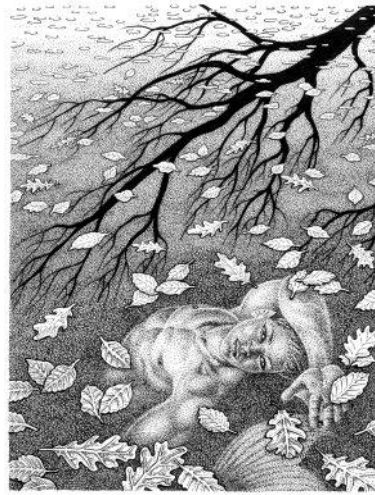


2 Floating



I am in a strange state. For months I have been floating. I am not unhappy about it, but it is a strange way of being. The events of the last six months seem remote and unreal, and the future is so distant that I cannot put my mind to it. There is only the floating present, here and now in the woods and streams at Liscannor and with Adam.

My 'floating' state began with my final day at school last summer. I think we all felt it – all of us from the same year and the same class. When the last day of term finally came it was as if a carpet was pulled from under our feet. It was a day I had longed for. I couldn't wait for school to finish. But when it finally came it took me by surprise and it left me floating.

Afterwards I went travelling with Chris. I was flying for a while and then I was falling. And when I came back to England I was half outside of myself, like a man watching himself from outside. Then there was my short time in Cambridge and my illness, and then there was the long stay in Rainer's apartment – all I remembered from the time were the long conversations with Rainer, evening after evening: sitting together in gathering twilight, talking together through the night. I suppose I owe my life to Rainer.

And then Adam arrived one day at Rainer's flat and life began again. It was like being plugged back into existence. A magical switch was thrown and I could breathe again. I felt like a swimmer under water who suddenly reaches the surface and finds a world of air and light that he had forgotten.

'I have to go back soon,' says Adam one afternoon. Yes, I know he has to go back soon. He has to go back to London and to his job and his apprenticeship. He has taken the maximum number of days leave – he has taken his entire Summer holiday in the Spring. It is hard, where we are now, to keep a track of time. But I have marked one day in the calendar: the end of April is Adam's birthday. He will be seventeen.

'You are a Taurus,' I read aloud. 'Your planetary sign is Venus, your star-stone is Emerald, and your Significant Colour is pink.'

'And what does that make me?'

‘Your planetary sign is Venus – which means you are extremely lustful and sexy. Your Colour is pink, which means you are queer.’

‘We know all that. Tell me about my star-stone.’

‘Your star-stone is Emerald – which means you belong here, with me, in Ireland, which is the “Emerald Isle”. Which means you should forget about going home. In fact, you couldn’t leave even if you wanted to, because these woods are enchanted – no-one who enters the woods of Liscannor ever comes out again.’

Adam rolls over on his back. He is looking up into the trees – into the filigree of branches and leaves and bright diamonds of sky. ‘I never noticed this green before,’ he says after a while. ‘I never noticed a green like this.’

I know what he means. It is the green of the Irish Spring and it is all around us. It is quite unlike the solid green of Summer. It is a shimmering green that hovers on the boundary between this world and another world. You never see this green in cities, and you rarely see it even in paintings – for it is the hardest colour to catch.

The shadows of leaf and branch brush lightly to and fro across Adam’s body. It is a study of soft creams and pinks, and of greens and browns where shadows are.

‘What are you thinking?’

‘I am thinking of the colours I would need to mix if I painted you.’

Adam wrinkles his brow.

‘Which colours would you need?’

I place my hand on his chest and I run my fingers down the cliff of his ribs and across his flat tummy. ‘Creams and browns and umber, mostly. And highlights of Chinese White, and touches of Malachite Green.’

‘No pink?’

‘Pink for the nipples maybe, and a mix of pink and umber for this interesting area around them.’ – I circle a nipple with my finger tip. Then I run my hand under his side. ‘And here it is all umber and ochre and weed green and patches of black.’

‘And anywhere else?’

I stroke his tummy and gather the hair of the pubis and stretch it between my fingers. I scoop his balls in the palm of my hand and let them tumble back slowly. ‘Henna’, I think, ‘for hair, and flecks of gold. And the occasional touch of blue for a vein.’

‘Blue?’

‘Yes, blue – here, and here – shadowy rivers of blue under your skin where the skin is thin and see-through.’

Adam props himself up on his elbows and examines himself.

‘You’re right,’ he says after a while. ‘I never noticed.’

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I took one journal from the godown the day that I visited Owen Duane together with Adam. It was one of my Grandfather’s early journals. It consisted mostly of sketches and drawings, and the margins were crowded with detailed notes, all of them written in his distinctive handwriting, and meticulously dated. He seems to have placed great importance on making notes of the date and location of everything he observed.

My Grandfather often told me he was not artistically inclined, but I saw that he had formidable skills as a draftsman. What impressed me most strongly were his anatomical drawings, which reminded me of the notebooks of Leonardo. He drew the human body with unflinching attention to detail. There was one series of drawings that I particularly loved: they were studies of a naked boy of about fourteen years. It was clearly the same boy that he drew over and over. There were often several drawings to a page. Most often there was a full figure drawing as centrepiece, with details of head or hands or limbs crowded into the corners. There were also occasional lines of poetry. I didn’t recognise them, so I supposed they were original. They surprised me, because my Grandfather never mentioned that he wrote poetry. In my mind he was a scientist, and his drawings were attempts to record precisely what he saw. But that was perhaps why they had such a powerful effect on me: they made the world objective. They swept away all the social and cultural clutter that stands between us and the world. Yet for all their objectivity his drawings – especially the studies of the boy I have mentioned – showed extraordinary care. To be able to observe the world so closely is only possible if you care for it in the deepest sense. It is a care that has nothing to do with sentimental feelings about nature. It is a care that comes from a total involvement with what you observe.

Adam borrows the journal. He becomes totally absorbed in it. He spends the whole evening flicking back and forth between the pages by the light of the oil-lamp.

‘Who was the boy?’ he asks.

I don’t know. No name is mentioned in the journal, though it is unquestionably the same boy that he drew again and again. It must be significant that there is no name. He must have had a reason to keep it hidden.

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It is in the early morning hours that the sense of time returns. For Adam it brings tension. We don’t talk about it, but we are aware that our time is coming to an end. What seems so eternal during the day is slowly vanishing. I hear him muttering in his sleep. I snuggle close to him and hug him and he grows quiet. Without opening his eyes he slips his arms round my waist and pulls me closer still. He raises his knees and grips me, and he locks his feet behind my back. He presses his mouth against mine. Dreamily, unthinkingly, I wriggle between his thighs. I hold his hips and push him down on me, and slowly, miraculously it happens. What was once difficult and painful has become as easy as breathing. He lets out a little gasp and he bites my lip. We stay

this way, unable to be closer than we are. There is no need to move. We hold ourselves deliberately still. And it happens. It is like a warm trickle that slowly fills each of us together until it reaches the point of overflowing. We hold our breath, willing to make the moment last. And it goes on and on. It lasts so much longer than expected. But we are poised on the point of a knife, and we know that the slightest tremor will send us over the edge. And eventually it comes. It comes like a dam breaking, and I yield to it and I thrust wildly, viciously as we tumble together, turning over and over as we fall.

Aubade

(for Adam)

In the dawn half waking face to face
we carelessly embrace
and part of me starts probing for that place
that secret subtle entrance of your soul
that opens magically and draws me in
and deeper ever deeper draws me in
as easy and as effortless as sin
till we are whole

behind my sides
I feel the boy-firm fleshness of your thighs
that close and hold me in a vise
boy calves that cross so tighteningly
that weave their strange geometry
holding me and clutching me
and all the distance meltingly
that once divided you from me

and
 how
 I
 long
 to
 hold
 this
 moment
 for
 all
 time

and so I hold my breath and try
to hold it all inside me killing time
balanced like a knife upon an edge
above the high unfathomed ledge
down which we are about to plunge

but something stirs unbidden
and gathers and becomes
one flickering and final lunge

and in its moment gushingly
it pours from me

do you I wonder feel as I
this sudden blessing of internal rain
that washes us into the sky?